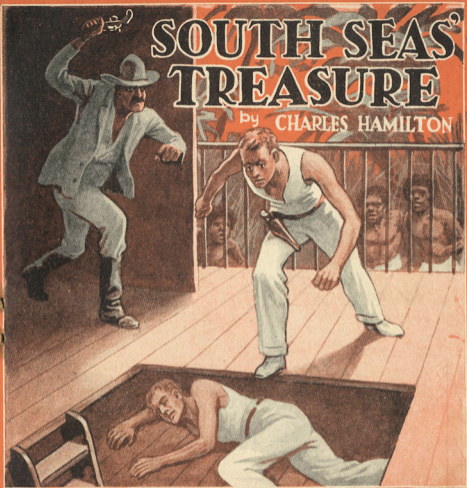


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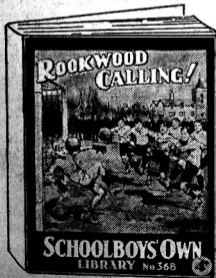
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SOUTH SEAS' TREASURE

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

CHAP. 1.—The Stranger.

"QUEER!" said King of the Islands.

"I don't get it!" said Kit Hudson, mate of the Dawn, as puzzled as his skipper.

Every eye on the Dawn was fixed on the white beach of Lalua, as the ketch glided into the lagoon from the Pacific.

Koko, the big, brown-skinned boat-swain, wrinkled his dusky brow in perplexity as he stood at the wheel. Kolulo and Tomoo, Lufu and Lompo and Danny, the cooky-boy, stared blankly.

On the beach of Lalua, circling the shining lagoon, nobody was to be seen.

Back of the beach were the groves of coconut palms which produced the copra that Lalua exported once in three months, when a ship called for cargo. Lalua was a remote island, and seldom saw a white man's ship oftener than that. But if the natives of Lalua were in the coconut groves, they were not to be seen there. Neither, on the lagoon, was a single canoe visible. Lalua had the look of a deserted island, and yet, as Ken King knew, there were not fewer than a hundred inhabitants—brown Polynesians, peaceful and light-hearted, always excited by the rare coming of a ship, crowding down to the beach, and coming out in their canoes on such occasions.

Now not a man was to be seen.

King of the Islands turned his eyes on the trader's bungalow, a low building of palm poles and pandanus thatch, standing on a coral foundation eight or nine feet high.

Sullivan, the Pacific Company's trader, should have been there, ready with his cargo of copra. Ken had expected Sullivan's red head to be one of the first objects to meet his view as he entered the lagoon. But there was no red head to be seen. The Pacific Company's trader seemed to have vanished as completely as the natives of Lalua.

"Suffering cats!" said Hudson. "I don't get this! Not blackbirders, Ken, in these days!"

Ken shook his head.

In the old days it would not have been surprising to see a small island cleared of its inhabitants, carried off by the shipload to work in the Queensland plantations. But those black old days were long past.

"Blessed if it doesn't look like it, Kit," said the boy trader. "But it can't be that. Even if some gang of sea-lawyers had been here and cleared out Lalua like Easter Island, they wouldn't have touched a white man. And where's Dan Sullivan?"

Ken shook his head hopelessly over the problem. He could not suppose that a gang of blackbirders had kidnapped the Lалуans. They must have fled to the bush—but why? The sight of a strange ship might, perhaps, have scared them into hiding, for fear of "shanghaiing" by some short-handed skipper. But the Dawn was known at Lalua. The trader's house-boy, Tototo, was from Hiva-Oa, and a relative of Danny, the cooky-boy; and Danny wore, on a cord round his fat neck, a clock that he had brought on the trip as a present for that relative. Tototo at least might have been expected to be in evidence to greet Danny.

"What name feller belong Lalua no stop?" murmured Koko.

Ken shook his head again. He could not tell the boatswain "what name" the Lалуans "no stop." The problem beat him.

"The sooner we get ashore and look into this the better, Kit!" he said. "Sullivan may be sick in his bungalow and unable to come out—but that wouldn't account for every man on the island having vanished."

The Dawn swung to her anchorage.

The cable ran out, and Ken rapped an order. The whaleboat dropped from the davits.

There was a sudden, sharp exclamation from Koko. He pointed with a brown finger.

"White feller stop!"

King of the Islands and his mate looked quickly in the direction pointed out by the boatswain, and saw a white panama hat emerging from the palm groves behind the house. The face under it was turned towards the Dawn.

"Sullivan—" began Hudson.

"No! Sullivan's short and fat," answered Ken. "Look at this fellow!"

The man who had come out of the palms was long and lean. He was clearly a white man, though his face was hardly to be distinguished at the distance.

He moved on, with long strides, and disappeared from view behind the house. Apparently he entered the bungalow by a door at the back.

"Sullivan was the only white man on Lalua," said Ken. "That looks as if the Pacific Company has sent out a new trader. But where are the natives?"

The panama hat reappeared, this time in the veranda in the front of the bungalow. The long, lean figure stood there, leaning on the rail, staring at the ketch.

Ken and Hudson stepped into the whaleboat. Lompo and Tomoo took the oars. Danny leaned over the rail.

"Me likee plenty too much see Tototo, eye belong me, sar," said the cooky-boy. "Me bling feller tick-tock along give that feller Tototo."

"You comey along boat, Danny!" answered Ken, with a smile; and the cooky-boy dropped into the whaleboat.

The Kanakas pulled to the beach, and the shipmates landed. The white man in the veranda watched them with keen eyes under the brim of the panama, as they came up the coral path from the beach, puzzled and curious to know what had happened on Lalua since Ken's last call.

"Captain King, I guess?"

The long, lean figure was lounging on the veranda rail as the shipmates of the Dawn came up the coral steps. The white man of Lalua did not step forward and greet his visitors, but he gave them a nod and addressed them in a voice that had a strong nasal accent.

His eyes, deep-set in a hard, seamed face, scanned the two shipmates with keen scrutiny as he spoke.

"Aye, aye!" answered Ken. "I expected to see Dan Sullivan here."

"Sullivan's been gone a month—ever since I came out to relieve him, I guess!" answered the long, lean white man. "You're meeting Ahab Pinner, Captain King. I guess you've called for copra?"

"The usual cargo," answered Ken.

"I reckon you've put in your call for nothing! I've got no cargo this time."

"No cargo?" repeated the boy trader blankly; while Hudson looked hard and curiously at the lean man lounging on the rail.

"None! I've had some trouble on this island. Strike of the natives," drawled Pinner.

"A strike of the natives!" said Ken, again repeating the American's words in sheer surprise.

"Yep! I guess they wanted higher pay—and I guess I wasn't throwing away the Pacific Company's money on the black trash. Not a sack of copra in the sheds!" said Pinner. "I guess I'm sorry you've had your trouble for nothing, Captain King, but there it is."

"Where are the natives?" asked Ken abruptly.

Pinner waved a lean hand towards the coconut groves.

"Cleared off to the other side of the island!" he said. "They've left me on my own."

King of the Islands stood silent.

He was utterly astonished by the news. There had never been any trouble on Lalua before. Fat, cheery Dan Sullivan had never had a word of disagreement with the natives. Most of them worked on the coconut plantations for the Pacific Company, and spent most of their earnings at the trader's store. If there had been a "strike" of native labour since the new man had taken over from Sullivan, the fault was not on the side of the happy, peaceful Lahuans. Ken was sure of that.

"Perhaps I could help!" said Ken at last. "I've been here before; I'm pretty well known to most of them. I'll speak to them if you like."

"I guess I can manage my company's business without help from a sea-going skipper, Captain King!" answered Ahab Pinner dryly.

Ken coloured with annoyance.

"They'll come round!" said Pinner.

"I guess they got to come round sooner or later. But I got my own ways with niggers."

"Your ways don't seem to have benefited the Pacific Company much so far!" said King of the Islands.

Pinner shrugged his lean shoulders.

"That's my business, and the company's!" he answered coolly. "I reckon you're sore at losing freights, Captain King, but I ain't got a cargo this trip, and that's that! I don't want any interference between me and the niggers. I'm running Lalua my own way."

"I'm not here to interfere!" said Ken. "I'm here for cargo, and if there's no cargo, the sooner I pull out the better."

Hudson, watching the lean, seamed face with intent curiosity, read the glitter that shot into the deep-set eyes at Ken's words. The mate of the Dawn saw—though he could not guess why—that the American trader was eager to see the Dawn pull out of the lagoon.

"I guess you can fix it with the company at the end of your trip, Captain King!" drawled Pinner. "They got to pay you for time, if not for freightage."

"I shall pull out as soon as I can get the hook up!" answered King of the Islands curtly. "But one of my crew is a relative of your house-boy here. I've brought him ashore to see him."

Pinner glanced at Danny. His brow wrinkled in a frown.

"I guess it can't be done!" he answered slowly. "My house-boy's sacked himself and gone off with the other niggers."

Ken bit his lip.

"The boy's keen to see his relative," he said. "You know what Kanakas are like, I suppose. Lalua's not a big island—I can give Danny time to go and see Tototo, wherever he is. Where is he?"

Pinner's lean jaw squared.

"I've told you that the niggers have gone over to the other side," he answered, "and I've told you I don't want any interference on Lalua. Take your nigger back to your ketch with you, Captain King."

"Me wantee see feller Tototo, sar!" wailed Danny. "White master belong me say me see feller Tototo, sar, along we comey along Lalua, sar."

"That's enough from you!" rapped Pinner, glaring at the dismayed cooky-boy. "You shut up mouth belong you, or I'll shut it for you!" He turned to Ken again, scowling. "Captain King, I guess you're wasting time here—my time as well as your own."

King of the Islands gave him a single look and turned away. Hudson, who had not said a word during this peculiar interview, followed him to the steps.

The shipmates walked down the coral path to the beach, Ken's brow clouded with annoyance. Danny followed slowly. The cooky-boy glanced right and left, scanning the vicinity of the bungalow as he went, as if in hope of seeing some sign of the house-boy. Suddenly he turned from the coral path and cut off at a run towards the coconut groves. Danny had made up his mind that he was going to see Tototo, wherever Tototo was.

Ken and Kit did not notice his action as Danny was behind them. But they were very quickly apprised of it by a roar from behind.

"You feller boy, you go along boat!"

The shipmates glanced round. Danny, already at a distance, was scuttling up the beach towards the palms. Ahab Pinner was roaring at him, and as Danny did not stop, he reached to his hip pocket and whipped out a revolver.

Bang!

Danny gave a yell of terror as the bullet knocked up a spout of sand hardly a yard from his racing bare feet.

"You swab!" roared King of the Islands, his eyes blazing at the trader. "Stop that! How dare you fire on my cooky-boy?"

"Keep your niggers on your ship!" roared back the trader. "I'm telling you, if that boy don't make for the boat, I'll drop him with the next shot!"

"Danny!" shouted Ken.

But the cooky-boy was already scuttling back. One warning shot was enough for him. He came back with a rush, passed the shipmates, and plunged headlong into the waiting whaleboat.

King of the Islands paused a moment or two, his eyes fixed on the flushed and enraged face of the trader. Then, with a deep breath, he went down to

the boat, and the Kanakas pulled back to the Dawn.

King of the Islands was frowning as the Dawn left her anchorage and took the reef passage to the sea.

The lean figure of the American trader was visible on the veranda there watching the Dawn go out.

"That swab's glad to get shut of us, Ken!" remarked Hudson.

"Not so glad as I am to be shut of him!" grunted King of the Islands. "I've never seen a man I'd sooner boot, Kit. He's made all the trouble there is on this island since he took over from Sullivan."

"It's a queer business!" said the mate of the Dawn slowly. "I don't get it, Ken. Why should he be so keen to get rid of white men if he's got a heap of trouble on hand with all the niggers on the island?"

"A bullying brute!" grunted Ken. "Still, we didn't come here for a row with the company's trader! I shan't be sorry to drop Lalua astern."

And Ken gave his attention to the reef passage. The Dawn glided out into the Pacific, hardly an hour after having entered the lagoon. King of the Islands had a clouded brow and a sore temper. It was irritating to have missed cargo at Lalua, after having made a special run to the remote island to pick up copra there. He was concerned, too, for the happy-go-lucky, laughter-loving Lалуans, subjected to that hard-fisted bully, after the easy reign of cheery old Dan Sullivan. Obviously it was the brawny fist of the trader, backed up by the revolver, that had caused the natives to desert their grass-houses and clear off to the other side of Lalua. Trade and industry on the island were at a standstill. And Ken, who was a very considerate skipper, was worried about Danny, who had been looking forward during a long trip to that meeting with his relative.

But there was nothing that Ken could do. It was not for a sea-going skipper to interfere with the arrangements of the Pacific Company, and of the trader they sent out to their station.

Lalua dropped into a blur on the blue sea astern. As the ketch ran on a long tack, Ken noticed that some of the Kanakas were muttering together,

and caught the name of Danny in their muttering. But he gave no special heed; and he did not notice that the cooky-boy was not visible about the ketch, as he supposed him to be in his galley. Lalua was almost out of sight when Koko came up to him.

"Danny no stop, sar!" said the boatswain.

Ken stared at him.

"Danny no stop?" he repeated. "That feller stop along galley, Koko."

"This feller Koko look along galley, sar, eye belong him," answered the boatswain. "Danny no stop along galley."

King of the Islands stood astonished for the moment. It was hardly possible that the cooky-boy could have fallen overboard in fair weather, and unnoticed either by the crew or the after-guard. And he recalled the muttering he had heard among the Kanakas.

"You savvy what name that feller Danny no stop, Koko?" he asked.

"Me no savvy, sar, me tinkee he stop along Lalua, along he wantee see feller Tototo!" answered the boatswain.

Ken breathed hard.

"You feller Tomoo!" he rapped.

The Kanaka seaman came up.

"You savvy what place Danny stop?" demanded Ken.

"Yessar," answered Tomoo. "That feller stop along Lalua, sar. He go along lagoon, sar, along he swim along beach, sar! Me see um, sar, eye belong me."

Ken compressed his lips. Danny had slipped over the side, to swim ashore before the ketch pulled out of Lalua. He had taken care that the skipper or mate or boatswain did not see him—but the crew had seen him. With the infinite capacity of Kanakas for minding their own business, they had seen it, without interfering or mentioning what they had seen, until Tomoo was questioned.

"Him wantee see feller Tototo, too much," added Tomoo. "Him wantee givee feller tick-tock along that feller, sar."

Ken gestured to him to go.

"We've lost our cooky-boy, Ken!" said the mate of the Dawn. "The best cook in the Seven Seas. The fat swab! He will be sorry for himself if that brute Pinner spots him on the island."

"We've not lost him, Kit!" said King of the Islands. "Danny's a fool—but it's Pinner's fault—why couldn't he let the boy see his relative? We're running back for him."

"We've lost time on this trip already, Ken—and we've had our run to Lalua for nothing!" said Hudson. "Still, we don't want to lose our cook. And"—he grinned—"it will be a treat to see Pinner's face when he sees us come in again after guessing and calculating that he's seen the last of us."

"Bout ship!" said King of the Islands.

King of the Islands had decided—and the ketch swung for Lalua, and ran swiftly to the island they had not expected to see again till six months had passed.

CHAP. 2.—Ordered Off.

"SEARCH me!" breathed Ahab Pinner. His lean, seamed face wrinkled with rage, in which alarm was mingled.

Standing in the veranda of Sullivan's bungalow, the long, lean American had a pair of binoculars clamped to his eyes. For some time he had been watching the sails of the Dawn sink to the sea rim. Relief and satisfaction were plainly marked in the hard face as the Dawn's sails sank to a speck on the sea—and she seemed about to disappear from view altogether.

But suddenly alarm and rage flashed into Pinner's face as the ketch, on the point of disappearing into the blue, emerged into clearer view—clearer and taller, rising from the sea. The Dawn had swung round towards the island again and was coming back.

For long, long minutes the trader of Lalua stared. He lowered the glasses—he did not need them now. The tall canvas of the Dawn was clear to the naked eye—speeding over the blue waters back to Lalua. Ahab Pinner turned from the rail and stamped down the coral steps to the beach. The rage in his face was savage and bitter, and there was a murderous glitter in his deep-set, narrow eyes.

That the trader did not want to see them at Lalua, Ken and Kit knew; but they would have been astonished had they witnessed the rage in his face as he saw their return.

The Dawn was at the reef by the time Ahab Pinner reached the lagoon. From a hollow of the coral on the shore he pulled out a canoe and slid it into the lagoon. He threw himself into it, taking a double-bladed paddle, evidently with the intention of going aboard as soon as the ketch returned to her anchorage.

Kit Hudson looked round with a grin on his sunburnt face.

"We're getting a visit this time, Ken, instead of paying one!" he remarked.

King of the Islands looked curiously at the dark, scowling face in the canoe, and he shrugged his shoulders. The trader's long, lean arms wielded the paddle swiftly, and the canoe shot towards the Dawn.

The Dawn anchored, and the hook had hardly struck the coral below when the canoe touched her hull. The trader of Lalua made fast, grasped the rail, and swung himself on board the ketch. He panted as he faced the two ship-mates, the Hiva-Oa crew watching him curiously.

"What's the game, Captain King?" spluttered Pinner. "What are you back at Lalua for? What are you spying into here, you meddling fool?"

Ken looked at him.

"Better language, Mr. Pinner!" he said quietly. "You can't talk to a skipper like that on his own deck."

"I guess I'll talk as I choose!" roared Ahab Pinner, his lean face red with rage. "I've got no cargo for you. Keep clear of my island!"

"Have you bought the island from the Pacific Company, Mr. Pinner?" asked Kit Hudson, with gentle sarcasm.

"Pack it up!" snarled Pinner. "I've got no use for backchat from a mate! I'm here to warn you off, King of the Islands! You're getting out of this lagoon, and you're getting out quick."

"Keep your temper, Mr. Pinner," said Ken, more astonished than angry at the Lalua trader's violence. "I've come back on my own business, not to butt in on yours. One of my men stayed behind, and I've come back to pick him up."

"That's a lie!" retorted Pinner. "I saw your boat's crew come back to your

ten-cent yawl and no man went ashore afterwards."

Evidently the trader of Lalua had not observed Danny swimming to the beach. No doubt the Hiva-Oa boy had taken great care not to be observed, after his experience with the bully of Lalua.

The boy trader's face flushed crimson. He made a step towards Ahab, but checked himself.

"You fool," he said contemptuously. "I tell you, you refused to let my cook-boy see his relative here and he swam for it. I came back as soon as I missed him."

Pinner gave a scornful laugh.

"Keep your lies to yourself," he said. "They're no use to me. You're going to pull out. Got that?"

Ken breathed hard.

"I shall pull out as soon as I get my cook on board!" he answered. "Most likely I shan't have to wait an hour."

"You won't wait a minute!"

"I'll put it plain, Mr. Ahab Pinner!" said the boy trader quietly. "I expect Danny to come on board as soon as he sees the ketch here—but I shall wait for him—and if he doesn't turn up, I shall land and fetch him—and the Dawn will stay at anchor exactly as long as I choose! So far as you're concerned, you don't come into the picture at all! Now get off my ship!"

"I've ordered you off this island!" breathed Pinner. "I've told you to get up your hook and clear."

Ken snapped his fingers in the angry, lean face.

"That for your orders, Mr. Pinner!" he said. "Now get back to your canoe, before I tell my Kanakas to throw you into it!"

"You're staying!" **panted** Pinner. "You're sticking in this lagoon—making out that you're waiting for a nigger cook! You spying swab!"

Ken gave him a keen look.

"What is there to spy on at Lalua?" he asked quietly. "What's going on on this island that you don't want a white man to see, Mr. Pinner?"

The American trader checked the savage words on his lips. Perhaps he realised that he had said too much already. Ken pointed to the canoe.

"Get going!" he said.

"You're staying?" muttered Pinner.

"I've told you so."

"I guess," said the trader, between his teeth, "that you got another guess coming, King of the Islands! You're pulling out, and I'm going to see you pull out before I leave this packet. You can drop me in my canoe when you make the reef! Get that hook up!"

Ken burst into a laugh of sheer amusement. He did not want trouble with the trader of Lalua, but he was not likely to jump to Pinner's orders on his own deck.

Pinner made a stride towards King of the Islands, his long, lean form towering over the boy trader.

"You pulling out?" he roared.

"I've said no!"

Pinner was rushing at him the next moment, his brawny fists in the air. King of the Islands made a swift backward leap, then he rushed in hitting out right and left. The trader's brawny fists were knocked up. Ken's right came with a crash on his bony jaw, his left with another crash on the long, sharp nose.

The trader of Lalua went staggering back till he brought up against the rail. There was a cackle of merriment from the Hiva-Oa boys. With the blood streaming from his nose, a dark bruise forming on his bony, stubbly chin, the trader of Lalua staggered, panting, against the rail.

Then his hand whipped to his hip.

But he had no time to draw the revolver. King of the Islands was on him before he could grasp the butt. A crashing blow sent the long, lean figure toppling over the rail.

There was a crash below, as the trader went headlong into his canoe. The canoe rocked, and shipped water under his weight as he crashed. Ahab Pinner sprawled in it, drenched to the skin, spluttering fury. Ken cast off the tapa cord that held the canoe to the ketch.

"Get out!" he rapped.

Ahab Pinner glared up at him. But he grasped the paddle and started for the beach. His handling on the deck of the Dawn seemed to have been enough for him. He paddled back to the beach.

dragged the canoe on the sand and tramped back to the bungalow.

"So much for friend Pinner!" chuckled Kit Hudson.

Ken cast a searching glance round the beach of Lalua. There was no sign of Danny nor any sign of the natives of Lalua. The lean figure of the trader disappeared into the bungalow.

"What on earth's the trouble here, Kit?" asked Ken. "That swab doesn't believe that we've come back for our cook. He fancies we've got our eyes on him. Why?"

"Ask me another!" said Hudson. "It's got me beat! I fancy we're through with him."

But the mate of the Dawn was mistaken.

"Oooch!" stuttered Lompo, the Hiva-Oa boy, bounding clear of the deck, clapping his hand to his head as a coral comb was suddenly torn away from his thick mop of hair.

Bang!

A second later, the report of a rifle rolled from Lalua.

"Feller along Lalua, shoot along gun, along head belong me!" gasped Lompo.

King of the Islands stared in amazement at the bungalow up the beach. Across the rail of the veranda the barrel of a rifle glimmered in the sunshine. Behind it was the trader of Lalua. Even as he stared, there came a second shot, grazing the cedar mainmast of the Dawn as it whizzed by over the deck.

With exclamations of alarm, the Hiva-Oa boys ducked for cover under the teak rail. Another and another bullet from the Winchester spattered on the Dawn.

"Up hook!" rapped Ken. "We're pulling out of rifle-range."

The anchor swung clear of the deep coral, and the Dawn moved from her anchorage and headed in the direction of the reef passage, but she did not enter it. Swinging away from the passage, the ketch glided round the inner side of the reef, and then the trader of Lalua understood.

Bang, bang, bang! roared from the bungalow as he pumped out bullets.

But the ketch was out of effective

range now and the lead flew yards wide. Far from the beach in her new anchorage the Dawn dropped anchor again. Ken turned his binoculars on the trader's bungalow, and the powerful glasses picked up the lean face of Ahab Pinner, red with rage under the Panama, as he pumped out random and futile shots. He dropped the butt of the Winchester at last and stood glaring.

"We're staying, Kit!" said King of the Islands grimly. "Time and trade can go to pot. We're not pulling out of Lalua till we know why that villain wants to get shut of us! What's going on on this island, that that swab's so desperate to keep secret?"

Hudson could only shake his head. The mystery of Lalua was too much for the shipmates of the Dawn.

CHAP. 3.—Danny's Narrow Escape.

IT was a relief to Ken when the boat-swain announced that Danny was in sight on shore.

"Where that feller Danny stop, Koko?" asked Ken.

"Stop along palm, along beach," answered Koko, lifting a brown finger to point.

The distance was considerable. But, following the direction of the pointing finger, the skipper and mate of the Dawn were able to make out the figure under the palms, which Koko's keen eyes had picked up at once.

Danny's brown face and fuzzy head looked out from the palms, and his eyes were turned watchfully towards the trader's bungalow. When he left the palms to come down to the lagoon and swim out to the ketch, the cooky-boy had to pass within sight of the trader of Lalua—and he was hesitating, evidently in a state of alarm.

The four Hiva-Oa boys on the ketch gathered, to stare. They grinned as they watched the distant uneasy face of the cooky-boy.

"That feller Danny plenty too much fright, along white feller," remarked Tomoo.

"Him tinkee white feller shoot, along gun belong him," said Kolulo. "White feller no likee Danny go along shore, see feller Tototo eye belong him."

"Danny no see feller Tototo, along Lalua!" declared Lompo.

Ken looked round at the seamen.

"You feller Lompo, what name you savvy Danny no see feller Tototo, eye belong him?" he asked.

"Savvy too much, sar," answered Lompo. "That feller Danny bling tick-tock along give Tototo. Savvy that feller no see Tototo, along tick-tock stop along neck belong him."

King of the Islands fixed his eyes on the distant figure under the palms again. A glint of the sun shone on the clock hanging on a tapa cord round the cooky-boy's neck. That clock, intended as a present for his relative, had accompanied Danny all through the trip. Evidently, as he had not parted with it, Danny had not found Tototo with the Laluan.

"Suffering cats!" exclaimed Kit Hudson. "What the dickens is going on on this island, Ken? Pinner told us that there was a strike of the natives, and that he'd had trouble with them and they'd cleared off across the island. But he said that Tototo had gone with them, and if the house-boy was with the rest, Danny would have found him."

"I can't make it out!" answered Ken. "Danny will know. He must have seen the natives, even if he hasn't seen Tototo. He will bring the news when he gets on board."

"Plenty too much fright stop along that feller Danny!" grinned Lufu.

The four Hiva-Oa boys seemed amused by Danny's predicament. Twice the cooky-boy stepped out from the palms—and scuttled back again. His fear of the trader at the bungalow was very plain.

But the cooky-boy made up his mind at last. All of a sudden he came scuttling out of the palms and down the shelving beach to the lagoon. His bare brown feet seemed hardly to touch the sand as he raced for the water.

For some moments it seemed as if Danny might escape unseen. Ahab Pinner did not know that he was on the island—he had refused to believe that Ken, after pulling out, had come back for the missing cooky-boy. He was watching the ketch, and unless he glanced round he might not see the cooky-boy as he ran from the palms.

Danny, running like a hare, was half-way down the beach when the trader stirred.

"He's seen him!" exclaimed Ken. "If he dares to pull that trigger—"

For one moment the man stared blankly at the scuttling figure of the cooky-boy. Then his rifle swung round and up to his shoulder.

Bang! The report rolled across Lalua, echoing like thunder through the palms. Danny gave a sudden bound and dropped headlong on the sand.

Ken's face whitened with rage. For the moment it looked as if the Hiva-Oa boy had gone down under the rifle-shot. If that was the case, there was a reckoning in store for the trader of Lalua. From the Hiva-Oa crew came a startled cackle.

"That feller Danny go finish, my word!" gasped Tomoo.

That impression was shared by the trader. He dropped his rifle-butt and shook a clenched fist at the Dawn and shouted. The distance was too great for his words to reach the ketch, but the shipmates could see that he was shouting savage defiance.

"Danny no go finish!" It was Koko who spoke. "That feller makee believe go finish, along him plenty too much fright."

"Oh!" gasped Ken.

He watched with anxious intentness. He detected a movement of the cooky-boy's head. Danny was watching the man in the bungalow veranda. Suddenly he leaped up and raced back to the palms.

The cooky-boy had been shamming, to delude the man at the bungalow. The bullet had knocked up the sand at his feet, but it had not touched the Hiva-Oa boy. He had shammed dead to avoid a second shot. Now, as he saw that Pinner had lowered his rifle, he made a sudden bolt for cover.

So sudden was Danny's bolt that the trader was taken quite by surprise. Danny had almost reached the palms when the rifle swung up again and another shot woke the echoes. Even as it rang, the cooky-boy bounded among the palms and disappeared.

Bang, bang, bang! roared from the

Winchester, as the enraged trader pumped bullets into the palms. But the shots were random and futile. Danny was gone, but he was not likely to make another attempt in a hurry to get back to the ketch. Whatever news Danny might have brought to his master remained untold—and the mystery of Lalua was as deep as ever to the shipmates of the Dawn.

CHAP. 4.—Shots in the Dark.

"AHOY, Captain King!"

Darkness had fallen on the island of Lalua, and the voice that called from the dark lagoon was that of the Lalua trader. Ken, leaning on the rail, peered into the gloom, but he could see nothing but the shadowed waters. Kit Hudson dropped his hand on the butt of his revolver. Although he could not be seen, it was clear that the trader of Lalua had pushed out in his canoe, and was not far from the ketch, to which he had been guided by the light that burned for Danny.

"Aho!" called back Ken.

"I guess," came the harsh, nasal voice, "I've come out to speak to you. That nigger I fired on—"

"My cooky-boy," answered Ken. "If he had been hit, I'd have come ashore to deal with you."

"I guess I'd have been glad if you had!" jeered the man in the dark. "I've warned you off this island, which is in my charge, as agent for the Pacific Company. I shall fire on any man that lands. You step ashore, Captain King, and you won't tread the deck of your packet again."

"Is that what you paddled out to tell me?" asked Ken contemptuously.

"Nope! I seen that nigger now, and I believe that you come back for a deserter, like you told me," answered Ahab Pinner. "I reckoned you was fooling, and you pushed in to meddle with another man's business—but now I seen the nigger, I allow it was straight."

"You would have known that it was straight at the start if you had not been a suspicious rascal!" snapped King of the Islands.

"Aw, cut that out!" snarled back the voice from the velvety darkness of the lagoon. "Talk sense! I allow you came back for your nigger cook, like you said, now I seen the swab. I guess a nigger cook ain't so all-fired valuable that you, a trader, want to waste time and money on him. I guess I'll take that cook off your hands—I can sure do with an extra boy, and if you name a figure, I'll pay anything in reason for the nigger. You can pick up a new cook at your next port of call I reckon."

"I'm not parting with one of my crew, Pinner," answered the boy trader. "And even if I thought of leaving Danny on the island, as he deserves for going ashore without leave, I should not pull out of Lalua now."

"What you mean?" demanded the unseen trader. "You allowed that you came back for your cook—what else you want on Lalua?"

"I'll tell you," answered Ken. "You've fired on my ship, Pinner; you've fired on my cook; you've driven every native of Lalua out of sight—we've not seen a man on the island. I'm not quite a fool, Pinner. There's some foul play going on, on Lalua, and I'm going to know what it is before I pull out."

The trader's voice was heard, muttering curses.

"But I don't want to waste time here," went on Ken. "Time's money to a trader. Keep clear while my cook gets back to his ship, and I hear what he has to tell me of the state of things on the island. If I'm satisfied with the news he brings, I'll pull out. Whatever is going on here, he will have picked it up from the natives—"

"There's nothing but a spot of trouble over pay for gathering nuts!" snarled Pinner.

"If that's all, it's no business of mine, and I'll pull out—as soon as my cooky-boy has told me what he knows."

A loud and angry oath was the answer to that.

The shipmates exchanged glances. Whatever was the strange mystery of Lalua, they had no doubt that Danny had picked up the news from the natives on the other side of the island, and they did not doubt that Pinner knew it, too. He dared not let the

cooky-boy come on board to tell what he had learned.

"I guess," came Ahab's snarling voice, at last, "you won't get your cooky-boy back. I'm watching the beach, and if he shows up, the dark won't save him—I'll fill him full of lead at sight. So if you don't want trouble, pull out!"

"You've had my answer!" retorted Ken.

"Then here's mine!" came a savage roar, and with the words came the crack of the Winchester.

The trader could see nothing but the dim outline of the ketch. He fired at the sound of Ken's voice. King of the Islands felt the wind of the bullet as it whistled by.

Crack! It was Hudson's revolver that spat out the second shot. The Australian fired at the flash in the canoe.

A yell and a crash answered. It was the crash of a rifle falling in the canoe, and the yell showed that Pinner had been touched by the bullet. There was a sound of heavy splashing as the canoe rocked, followed by the dash of a paddle.

The trader was fleeing. But from a distance his hoarse voice came shouting back:

"You can wait for your nigger, King of the Islands. I guess I'll get him, and I'll sure get you, too, if you set foot on the beach!"

The savage voice, and the dash of the paddle, died away. King of the Islands stared through the darkness with a knitted brow. Kit Hudson gave a chuckle.

"I've never seen a man so anxious to part company with us, Ken! What the deuce is it that Danny's found out from the natives?"

"Goodness knows! I can't make head or tail of it!" confessed Ken. "But one thing's clear—that man's a dangerous scoundrel, with a guilty secret to keep, and we're not pulling out till we know what it is. That swab has chosen to start the attack—now he's going to get some of his own medicine."

Hudson nodded, but his face was serious.

"He'll fire on the boat, Ken, if we pull ashore. I'm game, of course, but there's no getting out of it that he could pot the whole boat's crew like rabbits, from cover—and I fully believe that he's desperate enough."

"I've no doubt of that," said Ken. "But we're not taking a boat's crew for him to pot with his rifle, Kit."

"Then how—"

Ken waved his hand towards the dark beach.

"He's watching the beach to stop Danny if he comes. Nobody's at his bungalow while he's on the beach or the lagoon. I can swim."

Hudson whistled.

"Easy as falling off the boom, old fellow," said King of the Islands.

"The swab's as watchful as a cat, but he won't see a swimmer's head on the lagoon, even when the moon rises. He'll come back to his bungalow, sooner or later, and he'll find me there, with a gun in my hand. I'm going to secure Pinner—and he can sit and swear through his nose while we search the island and find out what his game is."

The mate of the Dawn chuckled.

"Keep a weather eye open while I'm gone," added Ken. "There'll be shooting when the moon's up to give him light."

"I'll give him as good as he sends, you bet!" said Hudson.

Crack! came echoing from the beach. It was the report of the trader's rifle. The shipmates started and listened, in dread of hearing a cry from a stricken man follow the shot. But only the rolling echoes of the rifle-shot came to their ears. Likely enough, the trader had fired at a shadow. But it showed how keenly he was on the alert to intercept the cooky-boy if he attempted to rejoin the ketch.

It showed, also, that he was at a distance from his bungalow. Either in the canoe, or ashore, he was watching the beach for Danny. Evidently it had not occurred to him that the skipper of the Dawn might take his turn at making an attack. But that was what King of the Islands was going to do, and he lost no more time. Pinner might take it into his head to return to the bungalow.

With his revolver buckled in a water-

proof case, and his shoes tied round his neck, King of the Islands slipped into the water and struck out swiftly and silently for the beach.

CHAP. 5.—Secret of the Bungalow.

KING OF THE ISLANDS drew himself, dripping, from the water and stood listening. A silvery crescent showed over the feathery palm-tops and there was a glimmer of light on the beach.

Twice during his swim he had heard the ring of the trader's rifle. Now he heard it again. But this time the report echoed across the lagoon, and it was answered by a shot from the ketch.

The direction of the firing told Ken what was happening.

The trader had landed on the outer reef close to which the Dawn was anchored. From the beach, the ketch was out of effective range—but from the reef, the range was easy; and the light was coming. Pinner was on the reef, skulking in the rugged coral, and loosing off his rifle at the Dawn as she lay at anchor.

The man was desperate—there was no doubt about that! He was going to make Lalua too hot for the shipmates if he could.

But Ken had no doubt about his mate's ability to give Ahab as good as he sent. And the fact that the trader was now on the other side of the lagoon made his own course clear. Pinner was at least a mile from his bungalow, and that gave Ken ample time to carry out his plan.

He wrung the water from his clothes, and put on his shoes. Then he tramped up the beach to the steps that led to the bungalow, raised high on a massive foundation of coral blocks.

The building was dark; Pinner had left no light there. Ken mounted the steps, crossed the coral platform to the door. It opened at his touch, and he stepped in, closing the door after him.

He stood in the densest darkness, but he knew the interior of the bungalow. Pinner had received the shipmates on the veranda when they had landed and sent them about their business as soon as he could. But this was not Ken's

first call at Lalua. Six months ago he had touched at the lonely island, when Dan Sullivan had received him in very different fashion. Sullivan, like most traders at lonely Pacific stations, had been glad to see a ship in the lagoon—as willing to welcome a visitor as his successor was unwilling.

The bungalow was not a large building. There was a hallway in the centre, on which the door opened, with a door at the back facing it. On either side was a room—one a living-room, the other a bed-room. Below was the cellar, in the coral foundation, reached by a trapdoor in the hallway. Ken remembered quite well what the interior of the building was like, and he was at no loss.

His plan was a simple one. He intended to wait in the hallway till the trader returned. As soon as Pinner put on a light he would find himself under cover of a revolver, and he was going to be made prisoner while the shipmates investigated the mystery of Lalua.

Ken groped along the hallway to get to a distance from the door and leave the way clear for Pinner when he came.

He stopped suddenly with a sharp cry of pain. In the middle of the dark hallway his shin had struck on something hard and jagged.

He groped before him in the gloom, and his amazement was beyond words as he felt the rugged outlines of a huge block of coral. It was a large and heavy mass that would have required an exertion of his strength to roll aside. It stood in the middle of the hall—for what reason it was hard to say.

For a long minute Ken King stood there in the dark, mystified, wondering. The thing was not only astonishing—it was inexplicable. Why in the name of all that was incomprehensible, had Ahab Pinner rolled that huge block of coral into the bungalow and left it there—right in his way, whenever he moved about the building?

Ken wondered for a moment whether the man was out of his senses. But that was not it. Ahab Pinner was a truculent and desperate ruffian, but he was sane enough. But if he was in his senses, why had he done this unaccountable thing?

Ken had not intended to put on a

light. But now, having groped round the hallway and shut the doors to make sure that the light would not be spotted from without, he took a match from a waterproof case and struck it.

Its glimmer showed him the walls of the hallway, the door at front and back, and the glistening mass of rugged coral. It showed him, also, the outline of the trapdoor in the floor. The coral block was standing on the trap.

Ken knew, now, that the heavy block was there to secure the trapdoor. But that only deepened the strange puzzle.

The cellar had only one entrance—by the trap in the hall, below which was a ladder. Ken, on his last visit to Lalua, had seen the trap open, and Sullivan's house-boy, Tototo going down for stores. Had there been access to it from without, it would have been comprehensible why the trap should be secured with a weight above. But there was no such access. And from above, the coral block was no security—anyone, with an exertion of strength, could have rolled it aside, leaving the trap free.

"My sainted Sam!" muttered the perplexed boy trader, as the match went out, leaving him in darkness again.

He caught his breath at the thought—the inevitable thought—that flashed into his mind. This was the secret of the trader of Lalua! Whatever was his mysterious reason for fearing white men on the lonely island, it was hidden in the cellar below the bungalow.

King of the Islands breathed hard and deep.

Startling and utterly unexpected as it was, there was only one conclusion to be drawn. There was some living being in the cellar below the building—and the coral block was there to prevent the raising of the trap! Above, a strong man could have rolled it aside—below, the strongest of men could never have pushed up the weight. It was there to keep the trap shut on a prisoner!

That, amazing as it was, was the only conceivable explanation. Never, for a moment, had Ken dreamed of anything of the kind, when he had swum ashore to enter the bungalow. But he could not doubt now.

The boy trader struck another match. By the light of the first he had noticed a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle on a shelf by the door. He lighted the candle, grasped the mass of coral, exerted his strength, and rolled it aside.

Ken lifted the trap and laid it back, wide open. Below was dense darkness. He took the bottle holding the candle, and threw the light into the cavity. Then he made out the ladder that led down, and the dim shape of casks and kegs in the cellar. But there was no sound, no movement from below.

"Aho!" called Ken.

If there was a prisoner in the deep, dark cellar in the coral foundation, he must hear, and he would answer. But no answer came but the echo of his own voice. Was he mistaken? Yet for what reason, but to secure a prisoner, could the trap have been weighted with the coral block?

As he listened with intent ears there came a faint sound from the darkness below. It might have been made by a scuttling rat. But the truth flashed into Ken's mind. If it was because he held a prisoner in that dark den that Pinner feared a white man's ship, he would not leave that prisoner free to move, free to cry out, while white men were at the island. Whoever was a prisoner in the cellar was, in all likelihood, bound and gagged. That faint rustling sound was made by a man who was desperately striving to make himself heard.

Candle in hand, King of the Islands descended the ladder. The cellar was large, extending under almost the whole space of the bungalow. Coral blocks stood at intervals, supporting the floor joists. Among them was dense darkness. Holding up the flickering candle, Ken stared round him.

"Where are you?" he called. "It's a friend calling—King of the Islands, of the ketch Dawn!"

He knew that there were living ears to hear him—and he listened for a sound. From the extreme end of the cellar, in darkness, hidden by coral supports, kegs, and boxes, came the rustling sound of a bound man stirring.

It was sufficient guide for the boy trader, and he moved along the sandy floor in the direction of the sound.

But he stopped suddenly at another sound—the throwing open of a door above, and the tramp of heavy sea-boots in the hallway over his head! Pinner had returned!

Ken spun round, whipped out his revolver, and made a desperate spring at the ladder. Even as he reached it, there came a roar of rage from the hall above, and he knew that Pinner had seen the open trap.

The next instant, Pinner appeared at the trap, closing it. Ken fired, but the shot missed, and the trap dropped.

Ken leaped up the ladder. His strong shoulders jammed against the trap, heaving.

For a moment it gave. But only for a moment. A heavy thud above told that the coral block had been rolled back into place.

With desperate strength, he heaved and drove at the trapdoor—but not by a fraction of an inch did it give to his efforts. Twice or thrice his strength could not have lifted that enormous weight. The trap was fast, and King of the Islands, like the unknown man, was a prisoner.

"What name white master no comey?" muttered Koko.

Kit Hudson did not answer. He was as perplexed and troubled as the boat-swain.

The moon was up, silver light streaming on the island and the lagoon. The beach and the palm-trees stood out clear and distinct. The trader's bungalow, on its high foundation, stood out a black mass against the nodding palms.

The firing from the reef had ceased long ago. Hudson had returned the fire, but there was ample cover on both sides, and no damage had been done. Since then, there had been no sound on Lalua save the whisper of the wind in the palms. What had happened to King of the Islands?

The four Hiva-Oa boys lay asleep on their sleeping-mats on the deck. But neither Hudson nor Koko was likely to close their eyes so long as Ken was absent. His prolonged absence and silence puzzled and alarmed his ship-mate.

On the lagoon there was no canoe to be seen—neither on the silver-lit beach was there a sign of the American trader. But Hudson had glimpsed the man tramping back to the bungalow, and since then he was sure that Ahab Pinner had not emerged. What could have happened at the trader's bungalow?

A long hour had passed. Minutes should have been enough. Ken's plan had been well laid, and he had had every opportunity to carry it out. Hudson could not doubt that he had reached the bungalow—the swim was a long one, but nothing to King of the Islands; there were no sharks in the lagoon of Lalua; and Pinner had been on the reef while Ken was swimming to the beach. He had surely reached the bungalow; and if so, he had only to wait there till Ahab returned, and carry on with his plan. Under his levelled revolver, the trader would have to give in—but if he did not, if he set his life on a cast in desperate resistance, there would be shooting—and there had been no shot!

That Ahab Pinner was at the bungalow he was doubly sure when he caught a glimmer of white in the shadowy veranda. He had no doubt that it was the trader's Panama hat. The hour was growing late; but the trader was not thinking of sleep, any more than the mate of the Dawn. In the clear, bright moonlight he was watching the ketch—watching the beach—his rifle ready.

"Me no savvy, sar," muttered Koko. "This feller no savvy altogether too much."

Hudson bit his lip.

"That swab can't have got the upper hand!" he muttered. "Ken must have been at the house well ahead of him—he must have been caught by surprise—and yet—"

It was a hopeless puzzle. Had there been a shot which he had not heard? The bungalow was shuttered at all its windows; if the door had been closed, too, a shot within would have been muffled. But Hudson shook his head at that thought. He was sure that he would have heard a shot fired in the building. It looked as if Ken had never reached the bungalow at all.

"It beats me!" grunted Hudson.

"This island seems to be packed with mysteries—and this is the deepest of the lot. Ken must have reached the beach." He shivered a little, glancing at the shining waters, with the thought that perhaps they rolled over a swimmer who had sunk in the dark.

"White master no stop along lagoon!" said Koko, reading the mate's thoughts. "He too strong-feller swimmer, sar."

Hudson nodded; he was sure of that. But if King of the Islands had landed, where was he, and what had happened to him?

Another long hour crawled by. Hudson's anxiety was too keen for longer waiting. Something had gone wrong with Ken's plan, simple and easy as it had seemed. Hudson made up his mind. To pull ashore in the whaleboat in the bright moonlight was to offer an easy target for the trader's rifle. But a swimmer would not be easy to detect at the distance, and a very difficult target to hit. To land some way along the beach and approach the bungalow through the palm-trees at the back was Hudson's plan—the only possible one, for the watchful trader's rifle covered the beach in front of the building.

The mate muttered a few words to Koko, packed his revolver, and slipped into the water, keeping the ketch between him and the beach. So far, the trader could have seen nothing. But when Hudson swam for the beach, his head showed as a dark spot on the glistening water, and he knew that a shot might come.

He had to take his chance of that. But no shot came, and with long, steady strokes he cleaved through the water till he found the sand under his feet and drew himself from the lagoon a quarter of a mile along the beach from the landing-place.

He ran quickly up the beach to the palms. In their dusky shade he was safe. Swiftly he threaded his way through the endless slanting trunks of the palm groves, drawing swiftly and silently nearer and nearer to the back of the bungalow.

All was dark and silent when he reached it and stood for a long minute watching the back of the house. The trader, he had no doubt, was still in the

veranda in the front unaware of his coming. But he was doubly cautious as he emerged from the palms, and his revolver was in his hand as he reached the steps at the back of the high coral block. Swiftly, watchfully, he ascended, and stood on the back platform behind the bungalow. A moment more, and his hand was on the door.

Hudson pushed it open, and a shaft of moonlight fell into the blackness within. For a long, tense minute he stood and listened—then stepped in, revolver in hand, finger on trigger.

The next second the mate staggered under a crashing blow that came from the darkness.

In that second, he knew that he had been deluded—that the wary desperado had held his fire, to draw him into the trap. Ahab Pinner was no longer in the veranda—he was waiting and watching, like a tiger in the dark, for exactly the move that Kit Hudson had made.

Hudson knew it in that bitter moment—but the knowledge came too late to help him. For even as the truth flashed into his mind as he reeled under that savage blow, the pistol-butt struck again, and he fell senseless at the feet of the trader of Lalua.

CHAP. 6.—The Fourth Prisoner.

KEN KING stood breathing rage, trapped in the deep cellar. Strong and sturdy as he was, he had exerted his strength in vain in a desperate effort to lift the trapdoor held in place by the enormous block of corral. He panted from the effort he had made, and he knew that it was useless to make it again.

He heard the heavy trampling of Ahab Pinner's boots on the floor above his head. The trampling died away. The trader of Lalua had gone out into the veranda in front of the bungalow—doubtless to keep watch on the Dawn.

"The swab!" muttered King of the Islands. "The swab!"

The boy trader had his finger now on the mystery of Lalua.

King of the Islands turned away from the ladder, and picked up the candle. Picking his way among the boxes and kegs that crowded the space among the

coral blocks that supported the floor-joists above, he moved in the direction of the scuffling sound that told him where the prisoner lay.

Even now, on the verge of discovering the secret of Lalua, he was more puzzled and mystified than ever.

Holding up the candle, King of the Islands stepped among the shadowy kegs and cases, peering before him as he went, till he reached the extreme end of the long wide space under the bungalow. Two figures caught his eyes then—one stretched on the floor, the other propped against the coral blocks that formed the cellar wall.

The former was a native—a brown boy of Hiva-Oa—and Ken, seeing him first, recognised him as Tototo, the house-boy.

Tototo was bound hand and foot, and a gag of tapa cloth was fastened in his mouth. His dark eyes gleamed up at King of the Islands in the flickering candlelight.

Then Ken saw the other prisoner—and stared at him blankly.

He was a white man, bound hand and foot like the native, and with a gag in his mouth. Propped against the wall of coral blocks, he was striving, bound as he was, to get on his feet.

King of the Islands gazed in astonishment at a plump face and a mop of red hair. It was old Dan Sullivan, the man he had expected to see when the Dawn sailed into the lagoon.

Ahab Pinner had stated that Sullivan was gone; that he, Pinner, had been sent out by the company to succeed him at the station. Ken had had no reason to doubt that statement, as Pinner was at the trader's bungalow, and Sullivan was not. And here was old Sullivan—bound, gagged, a prisoner, with his house-boy in the coral cellar under his own bungalow!

As he recognised the old trader, King of the Islands, in a flash, saw it all. The mystery of Lalua was a mystery no longer. This was the secret that Ahab Pinner had to keep—that he was not the agent of the Pacific Company, but a lawless freebooter who had seized on the company's station!

For a moment or two King of the Islands stood as if spellbound in astonishment.

Never for a moment had he dreamed of anything like this. The ghost of the old red-headed trader, in the shadowy store cellar, could hardly have startled him more.

But he woke to action quickly enough. Setting down the candle on a packing-case, he opened his knife and cut through the strong cords of tapa that bound the old trader. In a few minutes Sullivan was released from bonds and gag.

He leaned on the wall, panting for breath. Ken turned his attention to Tototo, and freed the house-boy in his turn.

Sullivan found his voice at last.

"It's really you, King of the Islands!" he exclaimed.

"Aye, aye!" answered Ken. "And glad to see you again, old Dan! That scoundrel Pinner told us that you had pulled out, and that the company had sent him out in your place—"

"The liar!" breathed Sullivan. He rubbed his plump limbs, aching from the cords. "You believed him—"

"What else could we believe?" asked Ken. "He was in charge here, and you were gone."

"I reckoned that would be his game, as he knew that your packet was coming," muttered the old trader. "It was the only lie that was any use to him, when you found him here. If he got through he was safe for another six months. You got no cargo here, Captain King?"

"No! He told us there was a strike of the native labourers, and no copra to be shipped!"

Sullivan gave a savage growl.

"The sheds are stacked with copra! He's waiting for his friends to run in with a craft to ship it when he can get word to them that all's clear here."

"Oh!" gasped Ken. "But—how—"

"The thief's been on the island a week!" groaned the old trader. "He came in a canoe. I had my doubts of him, but I couldn't turn him off the island. Then he found out that your packet was due, and pulled a gun on me, and drove me and my house-boy down to this cellar. He'd have shot us dead and pitched us into the lagoon almost as soon as look at us!

"We've been prisoners in this cellar for two days," went on Sullivan, "and when he raised your sail in the offing he came down and fixed us up like this, to keep us quiet till you were gone. I heard him roll a block of coral on the trap-door to keep it shut if we got loose—not that he left us much chance. I never reckoned on seeing you, King of the Islands. I fancied he would take care that you never got any information from the natives."

"He did," answered Ken. "Not a native was to be seen when we came into the lagoon, and we've not seen a man on Lalua. He told us there was a native strike, and they had cleared off to the other side."

"They're a timid lot on Lalua!" grunted Sullivan. "He got them scared. The sight of his gun was enough for them—he would have used it fast enough if they had kicked. I reckoned he'd drive them across the island, and keep them out of sight. But I don't make out how you're here, skipper. If you took it in that he was the company's new agent in charge here, and he told you there was no cargo, I reckoned you'd pull out, and never know."

"Exactly what happened," answered Ken. "You owe it to my cooky-boy that I came back to Lalua after pulling out. That lubber Danny would not go without seeing Tototo, and he deserted on the island to look for him. When I missed him, I put the ship about to run back to Lalua and pick him up again."

Tototo gave a chuckle.

"That feller Danny plenty good feller along me, sar!" he said. "Him likee this feller Tototo too much. Him bling tick-tock along givee this feller Tototo."

Ken smiled. He had mentally promised Danny a spot of lawyer-cane for taking French leave. But he was glad enough now that the fuzzy-headed cooky-boy had been so determined to see his relative Tototo. But for that, the Dawn would have been far from Lalua by this time, and Ahab Pinner left in undisputed possession of the company's station.

"Danny's still on the island," said Ken. "Pinner fired on him when he tried to get to the ketch, after we came

back. I can see now why he dared not let Danny report what he learned from the natives. They must know what has happened here."

"Every man on Lalua knows!" grunted Sullivan. "Your cooky-boy must have got the news from the first nigger he saw."

"No wonder that swab watched like a cat to see that he did not bring the news to my ketch!" said Ken. "His game would have been up as soon as we knew. No wonder he did not want white men on the island!"

"He got me!" muttered Sullivan. "Tototo's the only native here with a kick in him, and he got Tototo, too! The Lалуans were like sheep for him to handle. But he's got you, too, King of the Islands—I heard the trap shut on you—"

"He won't keep me long," said Ken. "He's got me, but he hasn't got my mate or my crew. I came here to get him—and he's got me instead. But there's Kit Hudson for him to deal with. Hudson will get us out of this!"

"He's as cunning as a tiger-shark!" muttered Sullivan. "If he puts it across your mate, as he's done with you, the Kanakas on your craft won't worry him much."

"I think Koko would," said Ken. "But he won't put it across Hudson in a hurry. Sooner or later Kit will know that something has happened to me here, and Pinner will hear from him."

"Mebbe!" muttered Sullivan.

It was plain that he had his doubts. All depended now on Kit Hudson, and if he failed the old trader had no doubt that Pinner would deal as easily with the native crew of the Dawn as he had dealt with the natives of Lalua.

The candle burned low. Tototo sorted out a box of candles from among the stores, and lighted another. Old Sullivan sat on a keg rubbing his fat limbs where the cords had been knotted. Ken waited, and listened. Once he heard the tramping feet of Pinner in the house above. Then there was silence again.

What would Hudson do? He would be puzzled when Kit failed to return and gave no sign. He could not guess what had happened—that was impossible—but he would know that something had gone amiss. Somehow, he

would deal with Pinner before the night was out. Ken thought of loosing off his revolver, as the only signal he could make, but though a shot in the bungalow above would have been heard by keen ears on the ketch, anchored across the lagoon, it was a different matter in the deep cellar, shut in by blocks of solid coral, with a solid plank floor above. No ear on the ketch could have heard it.

But Hudson would know—he must know—that some mischance had befallen his shipmate at the trader's bungalow. He would come—and the only question was, whether he or Ahab Pinner would get the upper hand. And Ken's faith in his shipmate was strong.

There was a sudden sound in the bungalow above. It sounded like a heavy fall. Ken started. There was a thud as the coral block rolled off the trapdoor.

Ken's eyes danced.

"Hudson!" he exclaimed. "He is coming—the trap is open!"

He cut along the cellar to the ladder. Something rolled down it and thudded at his feet. He heard a savage laugh above as the trapdoor slammed again and the coral block was rolled on it.

"The light!" yelled King of the Islands.

Tototo was following him with the candle. But even before the house-boy reached him, Ken knew, and his heart was as heavy as lead.

He stooped over the inert form that had rolled down the ladder.

"Kit!" breathed the boy trader.

"Your mate!" muttered Sullivan huskily.

Tototo held up the candle. The light flickered on the face of Kit Hudson, white as chalk, with a streak of blood running down from under dark hair, where a savage blow had fallen. His eyes were closed; he was stunned and senseless. Ken gazed at the insensible face in grief and rage too deep for words. He had said that Kit Hudson would come. He had come—and this was how he had come!

CHAP. 7.—One Deadly Throw.

KOKO stared across the glimmering lagoon as the sunrise brightened over Lalua, with troubled, questioning eyes.

The night, that had seemed endless to the faithful Koko, had passed. His eyes had not closed.

On the tapa sleeping-mats on the deck, the four Hiva-Oa boys lay sleeping. Lompo and Lufu, Tomoo and Kolulo, were devoted to Ken, but it was not a Kanaka's way to trouble his fuzzy head about a white master's affairs. With a cheerful indifference to what was, or might be, going on on the island, the Hiva-Oa boys slept.

But Koko, as he often said, was no common Kanaka. Koko flattered himself that he had a brain that "walked about" like a white man's. Koko did not share the unthinking indifference of the Hiva-Oa boys. All through that weary night, while the crew slept on the mats on deck, Koko watched and waited and listened, his faithful heart growing heavier.

As the sun came up over Lalua, he fixed his eyes on the bungalow on the distant shore. On the veranda he could make out Ahab Pinner. His dark eyes gleamed hate and vengeance at the white man.

What had happened ashore, Koko could not imagine. King of the Islands had gone to "get" the trader at his bungalow early in the night, and it had seemed that he could hardly fail—Pinner was far from the building when Ken reached it. He had only to wait till the ruffian returned, and put a revolver to his head as soon as he entered. Yet nothing had been seen or heard of King of the Islands afterwards, and Kit Hudson had gone to seek him. He, too, had vanished as if into space.

Koko knew that the mate had landed far from the bungalow to get at the building from behind. What had happened since Koko did not know, but he knew, from the silence, that Hudson had not succeeded. He could not know that the ruffian, lurking in the dark building, had struck down the mate, stunning him, as he entered. But he knew that Hudson must have failed, as his skipper had failed, and he dreaded to think of what might have chanced.

Koko had been left with strict orders not to quit the ketch. Troubled as he was, he did not think of disregarding those orders. But it was with a sore

and anxious heart that the bo'sun waited and watched.

As the light strengthened, and he was able to discern the trader, he shook a brown, brawny fist in his direction.

"You plenty bad feller too much!" muttered Koko, between his teeth. "S'posee white master belong me no stop any more, close-up you no stop any more altogether."

His brown hand went to the knife at his belt. His black eyes burned at the distant trader. He could not guess what had happened to his white masters, but whatever it was, it was the work of that long, lean, lantern-jawed "white feller," and Koko's thoughts ran on savage vengeance.

To Ahab Pinner, the bo'sun of the Dawn was a Kanaka—a nigger, like the rest of the crew, and like the natives of Lalua, whom he scared like sheep; and Pinner would have laughed at the idea of a "nigger" giving him serious trouble. But he was destined to learn that Koko was no common Kanaka.

Koko's mind was firmly fixed. If his white master had fallen, Ahab Pinner was going to pay life for life. But he had his orders not to leave the ketch, and he knew, too, that if he approached the bungalow, Ahab could shoot him down long before he had a chance to handle the knife.

He could see that Pinner was breakfasting. He could see no sign of anyone else in the building. If his white masters were there, they were invisible. Far away as Pinner was, he could make out the grinning satisfaction in the man's hard, seamed face, as he lighted a cigar after he had finished eating. Whatever it was that had occurred, matters had gone to the satisfaction of the white man.

Koko's eyes burned at him. He saw Pinner step out of the bungalow and, standing on the coral steps, stare across at the ketch. The ruffian examined his revolver, and thrust it back into his belt. Then he descended the coral steps to the beach.

From the palm trees, back of the white beach, a scared brown face looked out—the face of Danny, the truant cooky-boy. It was visible only for a moment. Danny dodged back and disappeared again. Pinner, if he saw him, took no heed of him. It mattered

nothing to him now whether Danny got back to the ketch or not—now that he had the skipper and mate of the Dawn safe in his hands, and only Kanakas to deal with.

Koko watched him as he tramped down the beach and pushed his canoe into the water. He stepped into it and picked up the double paddle. Then the bo'sun knew that he was coming out to the Dawn.

The Hiva-Oa boys were awake now. They lined the rail, staring at the white man paddling the canoe.

"That white feller come along this place," remarked Tomoo. He glanced round the deck. "Feller skipper no stop! Feller mate no stop! That white feller makee all samee he likee, along this ketch."

Koko gave a deep growl. "He no makee all samee he likee, along this feller Koko stop!" he snapped.

"Feller gun stop along hand belong him," said Tomoo. "You makee trouble along that feller, that feller shoot along gun belong him."

"Feller knife stop along hand belong me!" answered Koko.

"S'posee that feller see knife stop along hand belong you, that white feller kill-dead plenty too quick!" said Kolulo.

Koko knitted his brows. His hand was on the haft of the knife. But Kolulo's words were true; all the advantage was with the white man with a firearm in his hand.

"Brain belong this feller walk about, altogether too much!" said the bo'sun.

He slipped the knife out of sight inside his calico trousers. The handle was hidden by his shirt. Koko, as boat-swain, wore shirt and trousers like a white man, to show all whom it might concern that he was no common Kanaka, like the crew in their loin-cloths. Tomoo and Kolulo, Lompo and Lufu grinned, with a flash of white teeth, as the knife was hidden from sight. They had no intention, personally, of arguing with the white man's revolver; but they would have been cheerfully interested to see the knife whip suddenly into sight, at close quarters, and slice off Ahab Pinner's bony head like a ripe yam.

The splash of the paddle came to their ears. That Ahab Pinner had nothing more to fear from the skipper or mate of the Dawn was perfectly plain. He was obviously in no fear of a foe as he paddled the canoe rapidly nearer to the anchored ketch.

Koko watched him with grim eyes, the Hiva-Oa boys with careless indifference, as the canoe ran under the rail. Standing up, Pinner threw the painter to one of the crew, his revolver in his other hand.

Tomoo caught the cord and held on. The lean trader swung himself over the low freeboard of the Dawn.

Ahab Pinner glanced at the brown faces. His revolver was half-raised—a lifted hand, the glimmer of a knife, would have drawn a swift shot. But no hand was lifted—no sign of a knife was to be seen. The brown-skinned crew of the Dawn were only eyeing him with inquiring curiosity.

"You feller boy, you lower whaleboat along lagoon!" he ordered.

"Yessar!" said Tomoo.

"What name white feller King of the Islands, white feller Hudson, no comey back along this packet, sar?" asked Koko—and his voice was soft as that of the cooling dove.

Ahab laughed.

"White fellers stop along bungalow belong me," he answered. "I guess they'll stop there safe enough, too, till my packet comes in, and I maroon the whole bunch where they'll never be picked up again. But I guess I got a use for you niggers. Get into the whaleboat, the whole bunch of you!"

He made a gesture with the revolver.

The crew of the Dawn hurried to obey his order. Koko made himself as busy as the rest.

The whaleboat dropped to the lagoon under the rail. The four Hiva-Oa boys jumped into it; Koko remained on deck, as if waiting for further orders.

Ahab Pinner's seamed face was wrinkled in a satisfied grin. His plans were cut and dried.

He would have chosen, had it been possible, to see the Dawn pull out of Lalua, her captain and crew ignorant of the change of affairs on the island. That would have been the safest course for him, and that was what would have

happened, but for the antics of Danny, the cooky-boy.

But now that it had come to a struggle, all had gone in his favour. Skipper and mate were prisoners in the cellar under the bungalow—to remain there till the craft he expected to put in at Lalua for a cargo of stolen copra and pearl-shell. On that craft, he had intended to dispatch Sullivan, to be marooned on some lonely rock, where he would never be seen or heard of again. That plan was unchanged; but now Ken King and Kit Hudson would be dispatched in his company to the same fate. The Dawn, too well known in the South Seas for him to think of keeping possession of it, he was going to scuttle and sink in the deep lagoon. The Kanaka crew would stay on Lalua—as useful as the other natives for work on the plantation. He would be safe for six months—till the next caller was due to collect cargo—and then, if all went well, he would pull through an interview with the visiting skipper, and be safe for another six months—perhaps another after that! It was a daring and desperate game he was playing—but, on a remote island like Lalua, there was every chance of success, and so far, at all events, he had been successful.

"Get along boat!" he snapped, as he saw Koko lingering, and the boatswain obediently swung over the side.

Pinner chuckled. He had Ken King's crew feeding from his hand, as he had fully expected. To rifle the Dawn of anything valuable that might be on board, then to scuttle her and puff ashore in the whaleboat, that was his programme now.

The whaleboat rocked in the lagoon beside the ketch. Koko, standing up in the boat, held on to the teak rail, his brown face expressionless. Pinner glanced down over the side into the boat.

"You feller boy stop along boat, wait along this feller white master!" he said.

"Yessar!"

Ahab Pinner strode to the companion. As he did so, Koko's hand slid to the hidden knife.

The crew, in the boat, watched him breathlessly. The slightest suspicion

on Pinner's part would have drawn a shot that would have tumbled Koko over the gunwale of the whaleboat, to fall dead into the lagoon.

But Koko, when he acted, acted too swiftly for the eye to follow his movements. Pinner, as he turned towards the companion, was a dozen feet from him—but Koko was an adept at the Kanaka trick of throwing the knife. Within range of a cast, his knife was as accurate, and as deadly, as the white man's firearm.

He needed only to have the watchful eye off him for a moment—and now, for a moment, it was. His brown fingers gripped the hidden knife. With the swiftness of a lightning flash it came gleaming out, and whizzed across the deck of the Dawn.

Before the ruffian knew that it was coming, it struck, transfixing his right arm, pinning it for a moment to his ribs!

A fearful cry rang from Ahab Pinner. The revolver in his hand crashed on the deck. He staggered, shrieking, and fell.

With the bound of a tiger, Koko was on board the ketch again. One fierce leap, and he reached the sprawling, shrieking ruffian.

He grasped the handle of the knife, and dragged it from the impaled arm—the reddened blade followed by a stream of blood as it came. The keen weapon circled over the head of the trader.

Pinner raised himself on his left arm to struggle up. But he ceased to make the effort as the knife flashed before his eyes, with Koko's eyes burning over it. In sheer terror he stared at the boatswain of the Dawn.

"You plenty bad feller too much!" said Koko, between his teeth. "You makee movee finger belong you, me makee head belong you no stop, knife belong me, all samee Solomon Island feller."

Pinner gasped with pain and rage. His face whitened with the loss of blood from the terrible gash in his right arm and the cut in his ribs. He was helpless at the mercy of the boatswain of the Dawn—a Kanaka, from whom he would never have dreamed of expecting danger. Too late, he discovered that Koko was no common Kanaka!

Koko had turned the tables with a vengeance!

The Hiva-Oa boys, standing in the boat, grinned over the rail. They cackled with glee at the sight of the white man shrinking under the threatening knife in the boatswain's brown hand.

Pinner breathed a curse that changed into a groan. Koko's dark eyes glittered at him.

"S'posee little white master belong me no stop, you no stop, close-up!" he said. "Head belong you no stop along shoulder belong you, my word! You sing out, you poor white trash, what place me go findee little white master belong me."

"That feller stop along bungalow!" groaned Ahab. The terror of death was strong upon him. "That feller prisoner along bungalow."

"Me go see, eye belong me!" said Koko grimly. "S'posee he no stop, you no stop, close-up!"

He took a cord and bound the ruffian's uninjured arm down to his side. Then, with utter indifference to the wretch's shrieks of pain, he grasped him and dropped him bodily into the whaleboat.

The ruffian sprawled there, groaning and panting. Koko followed him into the boat.

"You feller boy, you washy-washy along beach along bungalow!" he said. And the Hiva-Oa boys put out the oars and pulled for the beach.

As they reached the landing-place, a fat, brown figure came scuttling down the beach from the palms. It was Danny, grinning with glee at the sight of the dreaded "white feller"—a wounded and helpless prisoner in the boat. Round the cooky-boy's neck still hung the clock—the precious "tick-tock" he had brought to Lalua as a present for his relative Tototo, and which he had as yet not been able to hand over to the house-boy.

Koko did not heed the cooky-boy. He grasped Pinner and swung him from the whaleboat to the sand.

"You go along place along white master belong me stop!" he snapped.

And Ahab Pinner, groaning at every step, led the way up the coral path to the bungalow.

CHAP. 8.—The Trap Opens.

KING OF THE ISLANDS stood staring up at the trapdoor in the deep coral cellar. It was day again on Lalua, but no gleam of daylight penetrated into the store-cellar under the trader's bungalow. The flickering light of a candle revealed the pale and harassed faces of the prisoners to one another.

Tototo, stretched on a pile of sacking, chewed betel-nut with a Kanaka's indifferent patience. Sullivan, slumped against a packing-case, looked, as he felt, hopeless in despair. Kit Hudson sat on a keg, his head bandaged. He had recovered consciousness long since, to find himself a prisoner with his shipmate. A big bruise and a headache were the extent of his damages, but, like the shipmate to whose rescue he had come, he was a helpless prisoner. Ken, his eyes fixed on the trapdoor, listened to a sound of footsteps in the hallway overhead. For a long time there had been silence, but now a tread was heard again in the trader's bungalow.

"If he should come——" he breathed.

"He won't give you the chance, old man!" muttered Hudson. "Fool—fool that I was to let him get me!"

"The game's not up yet, Kit!" said King of the Islands. "He's got us, old man, as he got Sullivan but Koko——"

"He won't have any trouble with the Kanakas on your ketch," grunted old Sullivan. "There's a hundred natives on Lalua, and he handled them like sheep. He'll handle your crew as easily."

Ken shook his head. He had faith in Koko: and to that faith he pinned his hope. It was the only hope that was left to him, for if Koko failed, as his white masters had failed, to deal with the ruffian of Lalua, all was lost.

The footsteps above stopped at the trapdoor. King of the Islands gave a start as he heard the heavy coral block rolled away. He gripped his revolver, if the ruffian was coming—if he had the ghost of a chance to meet him face to face——

The trap was flung up. Light from above glimmered down into the deep, dark store-cellar.

"White master!"

For a moment Ken hardly believed his ears as he heard the voice of the boatswain of the Dawn. Hudson leaped from the keg.

"Koko!" exclaimed Ken.

"Koko!" roared Hudson.

A brown, grinning face showed in the aperture above. Koko looked down into the store-cellar.

"White master!" he chirruped.

King of the Islands bounded up the ladder. His hope had been in the faithful Koko; but, now that it was realised, he knew how faint it had been. It seemed like a dream to him, to see the brown face, to hear the well-known voice calling him back from hopeless captivity to freedom.

"Koko!" he panted.

He leaped out of the trap. Hudson was only a second after him, then old Sullivan clambered up, followed by Tototo.

King of the Islands grasped the big brown hand of his boatswain. He wrung it hard. Kit Hudson smacked him on the brawny, brown shoulder. Koko grinned from ear to ear.

"This feller findee white master belong him!" he chuckled. "This feller no common Kanaka, sar!"

Old Sullivan's eyes fell on Ahab Pinner. He made a stride towards him with brandished fists, but stopped. The ruffian was leaning on the wall, white as a sheet, his right arm hanging like a broken reed, almost sinking to the floor.

In the doorway were the crew of the Dawn, with cheery, grinning faces, among them Danny, the cocky-boy. Danny waved a fat, brown hand to Tototo, and the house-boy cut across to his affectionate relative from Hiva-Oa. They gabbled gleefully in their own dialect, while Danny unstrung the precious "tick-tock" from his neck, the inestimable gift he had brought so far to bestow upon the happy Tototo.

King of the Islands looked round him, his face bright. A minute ago he had been an almost hopeless prisoner, at the mercy of the truculent ruffian. And now——

"How?" gasped Ken.

Koko chuckled.

"That feller Pinner comey along

ketch, sar! He no savvy knife stop along this feller. This feller get that plenty bad Melican feller, along knife beong him. Me makee that feller comey along place along white master he stop. S'pose white master no stop, he cuttee off head belong that feller, all samee Solomon Island boy."

"The thief!" said the old trader of Lalua. "We've got him!"

King of the Islands fixed his eyes on the ruffian.

"This is the end of your rascality!" he said. "Bind up his wound, Koko, and get him back to the boat. He will leave Lalua on the Dawn."

Old Dan Sullivan nodded his head in approval. He was content to let King of the Islands take care of the ruffian. All the trader wanted to do now was to gather his boys again and get back to work.

But Ahab Pinner, with a groan, sank to the floor. He was insensible when, with his wounded arm bandaged, he was taken back to the Dawn—a prisoner in his turn.

The following morning the Dawn pulled out of Lalua. She pulled out with a full cargo. Ahab Pinner was never to get word to his associates to call at Lalua for a cheap cargo—Ahab Pinner lay wounded and a prisoner in a berth on the cabin lockers, to be handed over to the law at the first white man's port.

As the Dawn made the reef passage, the beach was crowded with natives, and old Sullivan stood on his veranda, his plump face wreathed in smiles, his red head glowing in the sunshine, waving a plump hand. Behind him stood Tototo, grinning from one brown ear to the other, exchanging gesticulations with Danny, hanging over the taffrail of the Dawn. King of the Islands waved back to the old trader and, as the Dawn ran out to sea, the figures on the veranda faded from sight—the last seen of them being the old trader's red head and the gleam of the precious "tick-tock" that now hung round the neck of the happy Tototo.

CHAP. 9.—Racing for the Reef.

"DAGO feller!" said Koko.

The boatswain of the Dawn did not

think much of "dagoes." And the one who stood on the beach of Lololo, his eyes fixed on the ketch anchored in the lagoon, did not look a favourable specimen.

He was a burly man, black-eyed, black-haired, black-bearded, with a swarthy Italian face, clad in tattered calico trousers, a ragged shirt, and a big grass-hat. He looked like a beach-comber, and one in hard luck.

Ken King and his mate looked round as Koko spoke, followed his glance. The skipper and mate of the Dawn were surprised to see a man on Lololo. It was, so far as they knew, an uninhabited island.

Ken King had put into the lagoon for shelter. For a night and a morning the Pacific had been storm-tossed. Round the high outer reef, great waves had roared and thundered, while the ketch lay snugly at anchor within. The hurricane had blown itself out, but there was still a heavy swell on the sea, and Ken King did not intend to pull out till the following morning. Not for a moment had he expected to see any man, white or brown, on Lololo, and he looked curiously at the tattered figure that had emerged from the palms.

"A beachcomber—here?" said Kit Hudson.

"Shipwrecked, perhaps," said Ken. "Or—"

"Or marooned!" said the mate of the Dawn, with a shrug of the shoulders. "He looks the kind of swab a skipper might be glad to get rid of."

"More feller stop," said Koko.

"Lololo seems to have become populated all of a sudden," exclaimed Hudson.

Two more tattered figures came out of the palms. Both, like the first, were dagoes, swarthy and black-haired. They joined the first man, and all three stood staring towards the ketch, talking and gesticulating. Then the first man ran down the beach, plunged into the water, and started swimming towards the Dawn. The other two stood and watched him.

Ken King did not like the looks of any of the three, but if they were shipwrecked seamen, he could not refuse them a passage on his ketch from that

lonely island. Even if they had, as he more than half-suspected, been marooned, he did not feel that he could leave them there. But he did not like the idea of those three swarthy swabs on his ketch.

The Dawn was anchored a good cable's length from the beach. The swimmer came out with swift strokes, and was very soon under the rail. At a sign from Ken, the boatswain gave him a helping hand aboard, and he dropped lightly on the deck. He stepped towards Ken and saluted.

"Signor King of the Islands!" he said. "I knew your ship at once, signor, when I saw it."

"Aye, aye!" answered Ken. "Who are you, and how did you get on Lololo?"

"Giuseppe Giro, signor, at your service," answered the Italian seaman. "It is weeks, signor, since we were wrecked here, my friends and I, but I have not come to ask for a passage on your ship."

"Oh!" said Ken, rather relieved to hear it. "What do you want, then?"

"To ask a favour, signor, which you will grant in your kindness of heart," said Giro. "Will you permit me to use your boat, for one hour, while you lie at anchor here?"

"The whaleboat!" said Ken, in astonishment.

"Si, signor. We have no boat—not even a canoe—nothing! It is to make a trip round the island, signor, to fetch one of our friends who is hurt and cannot walk. He fell, signor, and hurt his leg, on the other side of Lololo. It is on this side that we live, signor, in a hut under the palms. To carry him across the island, that is difficult, and he is in great pain. Then I see your ship, and I say to Beppo and Felipe, this English signor will let us use his boat, for so short a time, to bring our poor friend round the island."

King of the Islands nodded at once.

"Certainly you may use the boat," he said, "and I will send a couple of Kanakas in it, to help you."

"Oh, that is not needed, signor!" said Giro quickly. "If you will but lend the boat, it is all that I ask. My friends and I, we will row—and in one hour, or less, signor, I will return your boat, with a thousand thanks!"

He turned, and waved a dusky hand at the two men on the beach. Immediately, they waded out into the lagoon and swam off towards the Dawn.

"Lower the whaleboat!" directed Ken.

The Hiva-Oa boys ran to swing the whaleboat down from the davits. Kit Hudson touched King of the Islands on the elbow.

"Go easy, old man," he murmured. "I don't trust Mister Giuseppe Giro a whole lot, on his looks. I'd send a man in the boat."

"I mean to!" answered Ken. "It sounds square enough, but if they're thinking of pinching our boat, we don't want the trouble of running them down before we pull out. Koko!"

"Yessar!"

"You will go in the boat!"

"Yessar!" said Koko, with emphasis. "Me keep eye belong me, sar, plenty too much open."

Koko dropped into the boat, and Giuseppe Giro gave him a look. Then he looked round at King of the Islands. But he did not speak. Ken was sending a man in the boat, whether Giuseppe Giro wanted him or not; and no doubt the quick-witted Italian understood that much.

The other two dagoes, Beppo and Felipe, as Giro had named them, swiftly reached the Dawn. They clambered into the whaleboat, shook the water from their tattered garments, and took up the oars at once.

Giuseppe slipped down nimbly into the whaleboat, and Koko pushed off, then sat down to steer while the Italians pulled.

Skipper and mate and crew of the Dawn followed it with their eyes. Lololo was a small island—a spot of green in the centre of the lagoon which surrounded it, and surrounded in its turn by the outer reef, beyond which the Pacific rolled and boomed. It was no more than an hour's pull round to the other side of Lololo and back again to the Dawn's anchorage. The lagoon was calm, rough as the sea was outside the barrier reef—only in one spot, where the circle was broken, the water tossed in the reef passage.

There was a lingering doubt and sus-

picion in Kit Hudson's face, and Ken glanced at him with a smile.

"You don't believe that dago, Kit?" he asked.

"No!" grunted Hudson. "I don't!"

"But why should he have lied?" said Ken. "I've no doubt they'd like to get hold of a boat—it would be useful enough to them—but they must know that we shouldn't sail without it; they could only cause us delay till we got it back."

Hudson nodded slowly.

"That's so," he admitted. "But that greasy dago was lying. I don't believe he's got a damaged shipmate on the other side of Lololo, and if they're not trying to pinch our boat, I don't know what their game is."

"Well, they won't pinch the boat, with Koko on board," said Ken, smiling. "And if they did, they couldn't keep it from us. I don't see why the man should have swum out to tell us a string of lies for nothing."

"I don't either! But——"

"My sainted Sam!" yelled King of the Islands, interrupting Hudson. Giuseppe Giro had dropped his hat, which he had kept on his black-haired head during his swim out to the Dawn, and stooped as if to pick it up. But what he picked up were the bare, brown ankles of Koko. And so suddenly was it done, that the bo'sun was tipped over the gunwale before he knew what was happening!

Koko was in no danger; he could swim like a fish. But the moment he was clear of the boat, the dagoes turned its nose in the direction of the reef passage and rowed with desperate speed.

CHAP. 10.—"We've been fooled!"

"SUFFERING cats!" gasped Kit Hudson.

There was a cackle of surprise and excitement from the native crew on the Dawn. Lompo and Lufu, Tomoo and Kolulo, and Danny, the cooky-boy, all exclaimed together, as they stared after the fleeing boat. Ken's eyes glinted with anger. Yet he was more astonished than angry.

He had been fooled. Hudson was right. There was no injured man on

the other side of Lololo to be brought round in the boat—the dagoes were making for the open sea. And they had pitched Koko out of the boat, to get rid of him for some unknown purpose of their own. But what purpose?

It was impossible to suspect that they meant to flee from the island in the whaleboat without food or water. Neither, if they had had any such frantic idea, was success possible—for the Dawn had only to get sail up and pursue, and run the fugitives down on the sea. What it all meant was beyond guessing.

But whatever it meant, King of the Islands was not the man to be fooled and flouted by a crew of dagoes. He put his hands to his mouth and shouted after the boat:

"Bring back that boat, you scum, or I'll fire on you!"

His shout, borne on the keen wind that blew across the lagoon, must have reached the whaleboat, distant as it already was. But it was not heeded by the dago crew. They pulled as if for their lives, rapidly approaching the break in the barrier reef, where the water creamed and tossed among the ridges and teeth of the coral.

Ken's eyes flashed.

"Lompo! My rifle!" he snapped.

Lompo ran up with the Winchester. King of the Islands levelled it across the teak rail. Then he shouted a last warning.

The boat flew on. Ken pulled the trigger, and the bullet whistled over the heads of the rowers. It went close enough for them to feel the wind of it, but it produced no effect. Unheeding, they pulled on, and the boat was almost nosing into the reef by that time.

"By gum!" breathed Hudson. "What on earth is their game? We shall have to get the hook up and go after them, Ken!"

"It beats me! I've half a mind to pitch lead right into them!" said Ken savagely.

He fired again, and the grass hat twirled on the dark mop of Giro's head. The Italian gave a start, but he did not cease to pull for a second.

Angry as he was, King of the Islands

could not bring himself to shoot down the swarthy rascals. There was no danger of actually losing the whale-boat—it was only a question of taking the trouble to pursue the dagoes. He would not shed blood to save that trouble. He dropped the rifle butt to the deck.

Tomoo threw a rope to Koko. The boatswain had swum back to the Dawn, and he clambered on board, drenched and dripping, his dark eyes gleaming anger from his brown face.

"That bad feller dago makee this feller stop along lagoon," he gasped. "Me likee goey along that feller, sar, along kill that feller plenty too much, along lawyer-cane."

"We shall have to pull out after them, Ken, or lose the boat!" said Hudson.

Ken nodded. His eyes fixed on the whaleboat, now in the passage of the reef, where the water was rough from the swell of the open sea.

Giuseppe, Beppo, and Felipe were pulling hard for the Pacific, and in a minute or two more they would be gone from sight. The barrier reef was high, shutting off the view of the open sea beyond; and once the boat was past the rugged masses of high-piled coral, it would be barred from view from the lagoon.

But what the three dagoes were pulling out to sea for could not be guessed. Outside the barrier reef was the rolling Pacific, still swelling heavily from the late hurricane—dangerous water for an open boat.

It was absolutely impossible to guess the meaning of this amazing trick.

And then all of a sudden the ship-mates of the Dawn knew!

"A derelict!" breathed Ken.

All round the lagoon, the high barrier reef shut off the sea from sight—save in the one spot where the reef passage opened. And across the narrow strip of sea that could be seen through the reef passage a ship drifted, rolling helplessly on the rough water. The masts were gone, and over the port side hung a tangle of dismantled spars and rigging. Not a man was to be seen on the deck, and there was no sign of a boat.

It was a deserted ship, evidently

abandoned by its crew, in the belief that it was going down. But it had lived through the hurricane that had driven the Dawn to shelter, and still floated.

Up to that moment the crew of the Dawn had seen nothing of it. Had the masts been still standing, the tops would have been visible over the barrier reef. But the masts were gone, and the dismantled schooner had drifted unseen—till it drifted past the reef passage, and thus came into view from the lagoon within.

But though it had not been seen from the Dawn, it was evident, now, that it had been seen by the dagoes—perhaps from a hill or a treetop. All was clear now—and Giro's lying tale was explained. The dagoes wanted the boat to pull out to the drifting derelict, for the first man on board a derelict claimed salvage! With cool impudence, Giro had deceived King of the Islands with a lying tale to get hold of the Dawn's boat, and be the first man on board.

No wonder that he had been in a hurry—for, from the direction of the schooner's drift, it was sure to pass the opening of the reef passage sooner or later, and thus come in sight of the anchored ketch. And then, if he was too late, his game would have been up. Salvage was to the first comer, and King of the Islands would not have lost time, after seeing how matters stood.

"A derelict!" repeated King of the Islands. He stared fixedly at the dismantled schooner, drifting helplessly on the swell of the Pacific, far beyond the reef. "So that was it!"

"That was it!" Hudson grinned. "I knew there was something—we've been fooled. If we hadn't lent that dago our boat, that would be our salvage, Ken."

Ken set his lips. "We've been fooled—but we're not beaten yet!" he said. "It's a long pull, and the sea's rough. The dago's got a start on us, Kit, with his lies—but he hasn't won the race! Up hook!"

"What-ho!" said Hudson. Immediately all was stirring haste on board the Dawn.

The anchor swung up from the coral, the boys shook out sail. King of the Islands had intended to remain at

anchor for the night, and pull out at sunrise—but the sight of the derelict changed all that.

The salvage of the schooner was likely to show more profit than drumming for copra among the islands, and this was a chance not to be lost. Giuseppe had obtained possession of a boat, but he had not, as Ken said, won the race yet!

In matters of salvage it was first come first served! Once under sail, and outside the reef, there was a healthy chance of the swift ketch beating the whaleboat. And if King of the Islands was first on board the schooner, the salvage was his. It was his own good nature, and the dago's lying, that had put a rival in his way—but he was going to beat that rival in the race, if he could.

The Dawn glided down to the passage in the barrier reef. Threading the coral passage in haste would have been at the risk of piling up the Dawn—and King of the Islands had to con the ketch carefully through the teeth of the jagged coral. But once outside, with the wind astern, the ketch would fly like a seabird—and there was still a long pull ahead of the dagoes in the whaleboat. The race was not won or lost yet!

CHAP. 11.—Beaten by Inches.

"ME savvy that feller schooner, sar!" said Koko.

King of the Islands stood with his eyes fixed ahead. The Dawn was outside the reef, the canvas bellied and boomed, the ketch surged and plunged swiftly through the heavy rollers. Far ahead, the schooner drifted at the mercy of the sea, pitching and tossing wildly, the rudder swinging and banging. Nearer was the whaleboat, the three dagoes panting and straining at the oars, putting every ounce of strength into the pull now that they saw the Dawn in pursuit, and knew that King of the Islands was their rival for salvage.

Ken glared round at Koko as he spoke. The boy trader never forgot a craft he had once seen; but the dismayed schooner was hardly in a recognisable state.

"You savvy, Koko?" he said.

"Me tinkee, sar!" said Koko. "This feller tinkee that feller schooner feller Grampus, belong Lukwe, sar."

"Black Furley's schooner!" exclaimed Kit Hudson.

Ken stared fixedly at the drifting derelict. He nodded.

"Koko's right," he said. "It's the Grampus! Black Furley of Lukwe has had bad luck, Kit."

"As good as he deserves!" grunted the mate of the Dawn.

Ken smiled.

"Jim Furley's a tough customer," he said. "They're all tough on Lukwe, and Furley's the toughest of the lot, except Dandy Peter. But I'm sorry for any skipper to be knocked out like this."

Kit Hudson nodded assent to that. What was salvage and a handsome prize to the first man to set foot on the Grampus was deadly disaster to the skipper who had lost his ship. Jim Furley of Lukwe was an owner-skipper, like King of the Islands—though little like him in other respects. Of all the rough crew on the lawless island of Lukwe, Jim Furley was one of the roughest and the toughest—smuggler, pearl-poacher, nigger-stealer, and many other things. The shipmates of the Dawn had had trouble with the black-bearded ruffian of Lukwe more than once, but that did not prevent them from sparing him a spot of sympathy now.

Black Furley had had luck—probably of a more or less questionable nature—and set up a schooner with a native crew to trade among the islands, in the place of the dingy old lugger he had once sailed. Likely enough, all he had was invested in the Grampus—and this was the end of his venture—the schooner deserted and drifting derelict, Furley himself shipwrecked, perhaps at the bottom of the Pacific. It was clear that the crew of the Grampus had gone in the boats—there was not a boat to be seen on the schooner. Furley must have supposed that his hooker was going down when he left her; but she still floated—a prize for salvage-hunters.

Now that he knew that the derelict was Furley's ship, Ken was puzzled. Jim Furley was not the man to leave his

ship—all he had in the world—so long as there was a chance of keeping her afloat. And that there had been a chance was proved by the fact that, after the storm had blown itself out, she still floated.

"Trouble with the native crew," said Kit, reading the boy trader's thoughts. "Furley had a heavy hand with niggers—but you can't punch a man out of a panic. The crew panicked, took the bit between their teeth, and he had to go."

"I suppose that would be it," assented Ken. "When the masts went, they reckoned the packet was going, and they cleared."

"Anyhow, she's derelict now."

"Aye, aye, no doubt about that! If there was a living man on board, he would be on deck, signalling for help."

"And he'd need it with that crew of dagoes bearing down on him," said Hudson, with a grin. "Giro is after salvage, but I'll bet he wouldn't let much stand in his way if he found a man left on board. I'd be willing to bet that he was marooned on Lololo for being too handy with his knife."

"More than likely," agreed Ken.

"We're gaining fast," said Hudson. "But——"

"But——" Ken watched, in doubt.

The Dawn was overhauling the boat hand over fist. Desperately, almost madly, the three dagoes strained at the oars, their swarthy faces glaring back at the Dawn as they pulled, the sweat running down their dusky cheeks. But the ketch was swooping after them like an albatross. Their only chance was that they were now near the drifting schooner, and might reach it before the ketch, swift as it was, passed them in the race.

Ken's face was fierce and eager. He would have been keen in any case, in a race for salvage; but the trick Giro had played on him made him doubly keen to beat the dago. He was hopeful, but he was in doubt as the Dawn rushed on, under her booming canvas, her sharp prow cleaving the Pacific rollers like a knife, a long, white wake streaming behind her. She sailed at least ten fathoms to the whaleboat's one, fiercely as the dagoes strained at the oars, overhauling the swarthy trio faster and faster till at length a biscuit

could have been tossed from the ketch to the whaleboat.

One more minute, and the tall sails of the Dawn would have swept onward, leaving the whaleboat rocking beaten in the rear. Had Giuseppe and his crew had a dozen more fathoms to pull, they would have been beaten to the wide.

But even as the ketch towered over the stern of the whaleboat, the boat's nose crashed into the top-hamper floating beside the dismantled schooner—a mass of broken masts, spars, torn canvas, and tangled ropes.

The dagoes drew in the oars, and held on to the wreckage. The whaleboat rocked and danced on the heavy sea, wrecked rigging of the schooner wallowing round her. Giuseppe, with the activity of a cat, threw himself from the boat, clutching at the wreckage, and clambered over it to the schooner's side—and, drenched, dripping, panting, half-drowned, rolled on board.

Ken made a sign to Koko at the helm. The ketch bore away, almost grazing the floating wreckage that pounded the schooner's side.

Ken shut his teeth hard. Hudson gave an angry grunt. On the cluttered deck of the schooner, Giuseppe Giro leaped to his feet, and his black eyes blazed triumph and defiance at the ketch. He shouted, but his words were lost in the wind.

"They win!" said King of the Islands.

"Our own fault!" grunted the mate of the Dawn. "I knew that dago was lying, and had something up his sleeve——"

"We couldn't guess what till we saw the derelict, old man," said Ken. "It's his luck, and ours is out! It was a near thing enough."

"Little white master go along feller schooner?" asked Koko. "Makee that feller dago no stop along ship belong Black Furley."

Ken laughed, and shook his head. He could not help feeling sore, for it was by trickery that Giuseppe had won to the salvage. But the law of the sea was the law of the sea. There were plenty of South Sea skippers who would have stood on little ceremony in dealing with an outcast crew of castaway dagoes.

But King of the Islands was not one of them. Giuseppe Giro was first man on board the derelict; it was his salvage. And it was not Ken's way to do any man wrong.

"It's the dago's salvage, Koko!" he said. "That feller dago stop along Grampus!"

Koko gave an angry snort.

"That feller makee this feller Koko stop along lagoon," he grunted. "Me likee plenty too much kill that feller along lawyer-cane."

Giuseppe Giro was grinning over the schooner's rail. He had won the race, and the fact that he had tricked the English skipper into lending him the means to do so probably added to his satisfaction. He shouted, in his own tongue, to his companions, and they clambered over the wreckage and joined him on the schooner's deck.

The whaleboat, left with its painter tied to the wreckage, bobbed on the rough water. Giuseppe waved a greasy, dusky hand to the ketch and pointed to the boat. He shouted again, and this time his voice came to the shipmates of the Dawn.

"You may have your boat—I have my ship! Many, many thanks, signor!"

His look and tone were full of mockery, and his two companions grinned by his side. King of the Islands did not deign to answer. He had to recover the boat, which he could have kicked himself for lending to the grinning dago. It was no easy matter to draw near the drifting derelict in the rough sea, and getting the whaleboat in meant time and trouble—and Ken gave his attention to that, and took no further notice of the dagoes. And Giuseppe Giro, still grinning, left his two companions on deck, watching the ketch, while he went below to examine his prize.

CHAP. 12.—The Man in the Cabin.

"ECCO!" gasped Giuseppe. His black eyes almost popped from his swarthy face at the burly, black-bearded man that he suddenly saw.

The schooner's cabin was wildly cluttered, everything that could move having shifted its mooring while the

Grampus was tossing in the storm. Amid the clutter, cockroaches were crawling—Black Furley's was not a clean ship. But what fixed Giuseppe's startled eyes as he came out of the companion was the burly form clambering painfully up, with a grip on the edge of the bunk.

"Il capitano!" breathed Giuseppe.

He did not know Black Furley by sight. But he knew that this must be the skipper of the drifting schooner.

Up to that moment, not a doubt had crossed his mind, any more than it had crossed Ken King's, that the schooner was deserted—a derelict! The crew had deserted her in the boats, and it seemed that the after-guard had gone with the crew—a living man on board would have been on deck on the watch for help—would, at least, have secured the helm. But as he stared at the black-bearded man, Giuseppe understood. Furley's bronzed face was a chalky hue, its pallor spotted with half-dried blood that oozed from under his stubby hair. He had been beaten senseless when the crew fled in the belief that the ship was sinking. Black Furley, perhaps, had known better than the panic-stricken Lukwe boys—but he had failed to quell the panic; authority had been broken down by terror, and they had knocked him out and left him.

Giuseppe understood—and his teeth showed in a snarl like a savage dog's.

He had tricked Ken King, had won the race to the derelict—and it was no derelict; there was no salvage! It had all gone for nothing, with a living man on board the schooner—if the man lived! Rigging a jury-mast sailing the schooner to the nearest white man's port, claiming the salvage—all was washed out now, with the captain alive on board the Grampus! Giuseppe Giro, who had been marooned with his comrades on Lololo for stabbing a man in a fore-castle shindy, was not likely to hesitate. His swarthy hand crept to the knife at the back of his belt, as he stood and stared at the skipper of the Grampus.

The Lukwe skipper had lain senseless since the black crew had fled, and even yet he was only beginning to recover. Probably it was the sound of footsteps on the deck above that had at last

recalled him to himself—and now he was slowly and painfully struggling to his feet.

For a long long moment Giuseppe stood staring, the ferocity of a wild beast in his swarthy face. Then, with a cat-like tread, he moved towards the struggling man.

The Dawn was still in the offing, and if King of the Islands learned, if he even suspected that a living man was on the schooner, he was not likely to leave him at the mercy of a gang of desperadoes. Giuseppe dared not let the man on the Grampus show his face out of the companion lest an eye from the Dawn should fall on it. He knew the reputation of King of the Islands—the boy trader was the man to stand by friend or foe in such a pass. No man on the Dawn—no man in the Pacific—was to know that Giuseppe had found a living man on the derelict.

Black Furley gave a deep groan as he heaved himself to his feet. His bruised head ached horribly. Since consciousness had begun to return, he had lain in a torpor, till the sounds above had aroused him. But as he dragged himself up, his head was aching, his senses almost spinning and he groaned with the spasm of pain that shot through his skull. But he knew that there were men on deck—whether his own crew or not, he did not know, for all was blank to him since the blacks had struck him down and left him stunned. His last recollection was a rain of mad blows that had sent him stumbling headlong down the companion to sprawl senseless on the cabin floor. Gripping the bunk, he dragged himself up. As he did so he became aware of the Italian.

His haggard eyes turned on the swarthy, savage face, the half-drawn knife, as the dago came at him. That sudden shock finished pulling Jim Furley together. His wild life had made him quick on the uptake. He saw the Italian—and, within a moment, the desperado was at him, his knife out. But in that moment the Lukwe skipper flung himself out of the dago's way and the slash of the knife missed him by a foot.

"By hokey!" panted Furley.

Giuseppe turned on him like a tiger. The skipper of the Grampus staggered

against a bulkhead, gasping with the pain in his aching head, unarmed—with the swarthy desperado springing at him like a cat. But Furley had been through many a rough house on wild Pacific beaches, and a dago with a knife was no new experience for him. His foot shot up and a heavy sea-boot crashed in the pit of the dago's stomach.

Giuseppe's slashing knife tore a deep gash in the sea-boot as he staggered, gasping and howling with pain.

"You scum!" panted Black Furley.

He advanced on Giuseppe, smashing out with his brawny fists. Giuseppe's knife went flying across the cabin, and the dago dodged and twisted to escape the fierce blows. He was almost winded by the kick from the heavy sea-boot, and he gasped and groaned for breath. Had the burly Lukwe skipper been in anything like his normal state the dago would have been knocked-out in a very few moments. But the exertion brought so terrible a pang of pain through his bruised head that Jim Furley reeled, and staggered against the bunk, half-fainting.

Giuseppe bolted up the ladder, and there came a babble of excited voices in a foreign tongue.

Jim Furley made a herculean effort to pull himself together, and drove back the deadly faintness that almost overcame him. He had to fight for his life. He staggered across to where the Italian's knife had fallen and picked it up. Then he tottered across to the companion. Three fierce, swarthy faces appeared in the sunlight on the deck above, looking down—knives were gleaming—the three were about to descend together. Fierce as a cornered tiger-shark, though he was almost sinking with pain and weakness, the Lukwe skipper, knife in hand, glared defiance.

"Come on, you scum!" he snarled.

And, without waiting to be attacked, he made a movement to drag himself up the ladder. The door at the top of the companion steps slammed shut. Black Furley, overcome by his own desperate effort, reeled away from the ladder and sank down, his senses swimming, barely retaining consciousness enough to watch for the dagoes if they came.

CHAP. 13.—Defiance of the Dagoes.

"STAND BY, Ken!" said Kit Hudson. King of the Islands stared at his shipmate.

"We're through here, Kit!" he said. "What do you mean?"

Koko had reached the whaleboat with a line, and now the Hiva-Oa boys were swinging it up to the davits. That was all that Ken had to delay for—and he was more than glad to have done with the dago crew. Giuseppe had won the race to the derelict; and Ken certainly had no thought of disputing his right. But there were other thoughts in the mind of the mate of the Dawn. His eyes were fixed on the schooner, dark and grim suspicion in his look.

He had seen Giuseppe Giro scramble panting and breathless out of the companion, and the three of them gather there, staring down. Then they had shut the companion door. Ken, busy with the whaleboat, had not heeded what was going on on the deck of the derelict. But Hudson had seen—and he wondered and suspected. Perhaps his irritation at having been taken in by the cunning dago made him prompt to suspicion. But suspicious he was.

"Black Furley's no friend of ours, Ken," he said, "but stand by, till we're sure that there's no one on that hooker. If we'd found a man on board, we'd have cried off the salvage and lent him a helping hand—do you think that crew would?"

"Hardly!" said Ken. "But there's no man aboard, Kit. I should not have reckoned Black Furley to be the man to desert his ship till she sank under his feet, but the boats are gone, the crew are gone—and Furley went with them. Why should he have kept out of sight if he was on board? He would have signalled us for help."

"Aye, aye—but—" Hudson shook his head. "There's something going on on that schooner, Ken. I don't know what, but I'd rather know before we drop her. That greasy dago swab

Ken laughed.

"You're shirty because he pulled our leg, old man! So am I, but it's his salvage and we've no right to set foot on that hooker."

"I know! But if there's one chance in a hundred, Ken, that there's a living man on that packet, you know as well as I do that he won't live after we're no longer in the offing. I tell you there's something fishy—that dago scuttled up from below like a frightened rat and they've shut the companion."

King of the Islands fixed his eyes on the drifting schooner. One of the dagoes had gone to the helm; all three were staring across at the Dawn, with intent eyes. Did that eager intentness mean that they were anxious to see the ketch glide away before the wind? Ken wondered—but Hudson did not wonder; he was sure.

"Stand by, if you like, Kit!" said King of the Islands at last.

On board the Grampus, the three dagoes held their breaths. At any time Black Furley might come rushing up on deck—and that was the last thing they wanted. Ill and bruised as he was, the tough trader was a match for the three men on deck. The native crew of the Dawn hung over the side—waiting to see what would happen.

And Giuseppe and his crew were watching, too, anxious to see the Dawn's sails fill, to see her swoop away before the wind. But they watched in vain. The ketch lay hove-to, still in the offing.

Ken was the first to break a long silence.

"Well, we can't hang about here for ever," he said impatiently. "What do you suggest we do, Kit?"

There was a long pause before the mate replied.

"Get on board and see with our own eyes what's happening!" suggested Hudson.

"We've no right to set foot on that hooker without the consent of the crew that has taken possession," answered Ken.

"I know! But if they refuse we shall know why!" grunted Hudson.

"I'm not so sure!" said Ken. "You can bet they're afraid of having their salvage collared, especially after the trick they played on us. Whether you're right or wrong, Kit, they're certain to resist an attempt to go on board—and

if they handle their knives, it means shooting."

"We can't stand by that hulk for ever," said Kit. "And when they get a jury-mast rigged they may give us the slip after dark. We've got to know, Ken."

"Aye, aye!" agreed Ken. "We've got to know. But—"

It was a difficult position for the boy skipper of the Dawn. But he made up his mind at last. If there was, by some chance, a survivor of the crew on the derelict, he could not and would not leave him at the mercy of that desperate gang. He had to know.

"Lower the whaleboat!" said Ken at last.

There was a sudden stirring on the cluttered deck of the derelict as the Dawn's boat dropped to the water. The schooner was hardly a cable's length from the ketch, and in the bright sunlight the swarthy faces were clearly seen. The three Italians burst into a sudden excited gabble of words and came to the side, over which dragged a tangle of torn rigging and canvas and shattered spars. It was clear that they intended to resist a boarding from the ketch. Giuseppe's white teeth showed through his stubby beard in a snarl like a wild animal's, and he gripped a boathook. The other two drew knives.

Ken and Kit buckled on their revolvers—but using them, unless they were assured how affairs stood, was another matter. Koko steered, and Lompo and Tomoo sat to the oars. From the Ketch, Lufu and Kohulu and Danny watched the boat as it pulled for the schooner.

There was still a swell on the Pacific from the storm. The whaleboat surged and dipped as it drew nearer to the drifting schooner. Three pairs of fierce black eyes glinted at it as Lompo held on to the cluttered wreckage under the schooner's side, and Ken stood up.

"What you want, signor?" came Giuseppe's voice. "This is my salvage—what you want on my ship?"

Ken scanned the excited face. For the life of him he could not guess whether the dago feared the discovery of a guilty secret, or whether he was merely alarmed for his salvage.

"We're not after the salvage, Giuseppe," Ken answered. "If you found that packet deserted, the salvage is yours."

"What you want here, then?"

"We want to make sure that the ship was deserted!" answered Ken. "Let us come on board and search. When we are satisfied, we will go back to our own craft and leave you in possession. I give you my word on that—you've heard of me, and you know my word is good."

Giuseppe gave a savage laugh.

"You think I trust any man's word, when it is a small fortune?" he snapped. "You do not set a foot on this ship! I will knock you back into the sea."

"Si, si, si!" exclaimed the other two, and the knives were brandished.

"You fancy there is someone?" went on Giuseppe. "I have searched the ship—there is no one! You see that the boats are gone—all went in the boats, as you can see. It is a trick to rob me of my salvage!"

Hudson's hand went to the butt of his revolver. But King of the Islands touched his arm.

"Hold on, Kit! We can't shoot a man on bare suspicion! Give the schooner a hail—if there's a man on board besides those three he will hear and answer! Give him a hail!"

Ken's words were heard on the schooner as well as in the whaleboat. They had a startling effect on the dagoes. If looks could tell anything, the looks of the three told that they dreaded a hail from the boat, which must be heard by any man on the Grampus who had ears to hear. Giuseppe clutched his knife, with desperation in his face.

"It is enough!" he panted. "You go, signor. You have no business here—you go!"

Unheeding him, the shipmates shouted together:

"Ahoy, the Grampus! Ahoy!"

The shout rang loud and sharp. It must have been audible in every corner and recess of the schooner. Ken and Kit listened—and it was palpable that the three dagoes were listening, too, with anxious intentness.

But there came no answer. The shipmates waited, then Ken King shouted again, loud and clear.

"Aho! King of the Islands hailing! If there's a man on board that hooker, answer up!"

The shout died away—with no answer save its echo. No voice called from the drifting Grampus.

Ken looked at Hudson. The mate of the Dawn was puzzled and dubious. From Giuseppe came a mocking laugh.

"You call, and there is none to answer," he jeered. "Are you satisfied now, signor?"

Ken drew a deep breath, and signed to Lompo. The Kanaka let go his hold, and the whale boat slid back from the schooner.

CHAP. 14.—Battering Down the Door.

GIUSEPPE stood staring after the Dawn's boat as it receded. Beppo and Felipe grinned at his side, in satisfaction and relief. The three desperadoes had been prepared to fight like wildcats to prevent the boarding of the schooner. But such a struggle would have been a desperate one, and its result more than doubtful. They were glad and relieved to see the whaleboat recede.

For a minute Giuseppe watched. Then he muttered to his comrades, and stepped away to the companion. The companion, as Hudson had seen from the ketch, had been shut—and he suspected why. Quietly Giuseppe opened it and stepped down the narrow ladder within. The boathook was still in his hand, and he gripped it to use as a weapon.

Giuseppe knew what Hudson only suspected, that the skipper of the Grampus was still on board, and when King of the Islands hailed, he had dreaded to hear a shout from below in answer.

But he guessed at once why Jim Furley was silent. There could be only one reason: the burly skipper of the Grampus had sunk back into unconsciousness, from which he had been roused when the dagoes boarded the schooner.

Giuseppe stepped from the companion into the cluttered cabin and

stared round him. Jim Furley was not to be seen.

"Gospetto!" muttered Giuseppe in surprise and rage.

He had fully expected to see the black-bearded skipper of Lukwe stretched senseless on the cabin floor. But he guessed at once what had happened. Black Furley, feeling his senses going, knowing that the dagoes might descend at any moment and find him defenceless, had dragged himself into some place of concealment. Giuseppe grinned savagely as he realised that. It would not take him long to find the Lukwe skipper.

Forward of the schooner's cabin was a lazarette, the door shut. A swift glance showed Giuseppe that that was the way Furley had gone.

There were spots of blood on the cabin floor, where he had dragged himself along—the struggle with the dago had caused the cut on his head to break out afresh. Giuseppe followed that ghastly trail, stopped at the door of the lazarette, and groped over it with his swarthy hand.

It was fast!

The door was of thick, strong teak, and there was a stout lock on it. Generally, no doubt, it was locked on the outside, to keep the stores safe from the thievish hands of a native crew. Now it was locked on the inside.

Giuseppe breathed curses in Italian.

Putting his burly shoulder to the door, he drove at it savagely. But it did not stir.

On the other side of that door, Black Furley lay senseless. He was silent now—he had to remain silent if the salvage-hunters were not to lose their prize. The Dawn was still in the offing. Whether King of the Islands was satisfied that there was no survivor on the schooner, Giuseppe could not be sure—but if he was not, if the boat returned, the game was up if Jim Furley gave one call! In savage rage the dago beat on the door and kicked at it. But it was in vain; the thick teak and the strong lock held fast.

There came a call from the deck. Beppo and Felipe had heard the noise from below.

Giuseppe stepped to the foot of the

companion and explained, and Beppo descended with an axe in his hand.

Giuseppe snatched it from him and tramped back to the lazarette. Swinging the axe in both hands, he crashed it on the door.

Splinters flew from the hard wood. The dago was strong and muscular, and he wielded the axe with all his energy. The crashing blows might have been heard as far as the Dawn, but that could not be helped. Again and again the axe crashed.

But the lock was strong; the teak hard almost as iron. Giuseppe handed the axe to his comrade, and Beppo hacked at the door.

From within came the sound of a groan! It reached the two dagoes. They knew what it meant. The skipper of the Grampus was coming to his senses again.

Giuseppe stepped to a porthole. The Dawn was still in the offing. He could see King of the Islands and Kit Hudson watching, and he guessed that the crashing of the axe had reached them. If they suspected—if they came now

Giuseppe spat a curse and snatched the axe from his comrade. With desperate and savage strength he beat on the lazarette door, and at long last it began to yield.

Black Furley groaned and dragged himself to a sitting posture, leaning against a bulkhead, and with dizzy eyes stared at the gleaming edge of an axe that came through the wood.

The sight roused him. Grasping at the bulkhead for support, he dragged himself to his feet. Crash! crash! came the axe, widening the split in the hard wood, letting in a gleam of light from the cabin.

"Presto! Presto!" he heard a hissing voice from the other side of the door.

Crash! Crash! The door was yielding fast now. Great splinters were torn from the teak by the gashing of the axe.

Through the widening gap, Furley had a glimpse of a sweating, swarthy face. It was the face of the dago who had found him in the cabin and attacked him. Who the dagoes were, how they had come on board his ship,

he did not know; but he could guess that they were a salvage-hunting crew, and that they did not mean to let the life of a survivor stand in their way.

Leaning on the bulkhead, his shaking hand groped for his hip-pocket, closed on the butt of his revolver and dragged it out. His head was spinning—his hand shaking—but he pulled himself together and, feeling his way along the bulkhead with his left hand, groped to the door and pulled the trigger.

Bang! The report roared through the schooner like thunder. There was a fierce yell from Giuseppe as the bullet scored along his arm, tearing away a patch of skin.

Beppo jumped away.

Bang! Roared the revolver again. Had not Furley's hand been shaking, Giuseppe would have been stretched a dead man on the cabin floor. As it was, the bullet gashed his cheek.

Giuseppe swung up the axe to strike at the ghastly face that glared from the gap in the door. Furley pulled trigger a third time, and the dago leaped aside.

"You scum!" panted the Lukwe skipper. "You dago scum!"

His arm was thrust through the split door, and his haggard eyes glared over the revolver as he took aim. Giuseppe darted into the companion and fled for the deck after his comrade—the bullet behind him as he went.

There was a crash above as the companion door shut. Once more Black Furley was shut below. He reeled against a bulkhead, his brain spinning, but he found strength enough to drag boxes and kegs to the shattered door and block the opening. And behind that barricade he watched like a cornered wolf, ready to fight to the end.

CHAP. 15.—Furley Finds a Clue.

KIT HUDSON, his brows knitted in a frown, stared across the water at the drifting derelict. The sun was dipping behind Lololo, level red rays turning the Pacific into a sheet of crimson and gold. Faintly but clearly the sound of heavy knocking came across the intervening sea.

"I'd risk it, old man!" said Hudson at last.

Ken shook his head.

"It's the dago's salvage, Kit. We're keeping that packet company, and we can do no more than that."

"They'll rig a jury-mast and give us the slip after dark," replied Hudson.

"Ken, I feel in my bones that there's dirty work going on on that schooner."

"Not to the extent of putting a bullet through Giuseppe Giro, and boarding over his body, Kit?"

"No," said Hudson, after a pause. "We can't go to that length on suspicion. But—" He broke off, as sharp and clear, ringing from the drifting schooner, came the report of a firearm.

Hudson's eyes blazed.

"Ken! That was a shot, and the dagoes had no firearms. There's a white man on that packet!"

"Hark!"

Again a shot rang sharp and clear. It was followed by another. And then, after a moment or two, another shot!

There was a buzz from the crew of the Dawn. The Kanakas stared across at the schooner, cackling with excitement.

"Feller shootee along gun, along that feller schooner, sar!" exclaimed Koko. "Tinkee white feller stop, sar, along that packet."

"Look at them!" hissed Hudson.

Two of the dagoes had been below on the schooner. First one, and then another had bolted on deck. In the glare of the red sunset, Giuseppe could be seen binding a rag round his arm.

There had been firing below, and the dago had been hit. The matter was settled now for King of the Islands. There was a man on the Grampus, as well as the dago crew—and it was he who must have fired. It could not be doubted now.

Ken King rapped an order, and once more the whaleboat dropped to the water. Ken's face was grim and he had his revolver in his hand, as the boat pulled for the schooner.

The three dagoes lined up at the schooner's rail, two of them knife in hand, Giuseppe with an axe. With savage eyes they watched the whale-

boat pull under the rail. Lufu caught hold with a boathook, and Giuseppe unhooked it and hurled it back.

"Go back to your ship, King of the Islands!" shouted Giuseppe. "No man shall come aboard here."

King of the Islands stood in the boat, revolver in hand.

"Stand back from that rail! We're coming aboard—resist, and we shall fire! There's a man on that ship—"

"There is no one! Keep to your boat, meddling fool!" yelled Giuseppe.

"You feller Lufu, hold on along that packet!" snapped King of the Islands, and the Kanaka hooked on again. Giuseppe slashed with the axe, and cut the boathook in two.

Crack! Kit Hudson fired, sending the bullet near enough to cut a lock of greasy black hair from the dago's head. The desperate ruffian swung up the axe in both hands and hurled it at the mate of the Dawn.

But Hudson saw it coming, and a swift movement saved him. The axe crashed into a thwart, missing him by bare inches.

"Suffering cats!" panted Hudson.

The next second he fired at the dago point-blank. Giuseppe gave a wild yell and staggered back, reeling and staggering across the deck, and falling, with a heavy crash, by the companion door. Yell after yell came from him as he sprawled there with a bullet in his body.

Crack—crack—crack! King of the Islands loosed off rapid shots—driving the other two dagoes back from the rail.

Lufu caught hold, and the shipmates clambered up the side. Then there was a rush from the deck; but Ken, with a leg over the rail, fired again, and Beppo and Felipe dodged back round the stump of the mizzen mast. A moment more, and the shipmates of the Dawn were on the schooner's deck, and Koko leaped on board after them.

Giuseppe strove to drag himself to his feet, but he sank back again and lay still. Beppo and Felipe, knife in hand, eyed the shipmates like tigers; but the fall of their leader had daunted them. Ken made a gesture with his revolver.

"Drop your knives, you scum!" he snapped.

"And sharp!" rapped Hudson. The knives clanged on the deck. Ken called to the boatswain:

"Koko, you makee feller rope stop along hand belong that dago feller."

"Yessar!" grinned Koko.

The dagoes snarled like savage cats; but under the menace of the revolvers they made no resistance. Giuseppe lay sorely wounded, senseless from loss of blood, on the deck, and his associates had no desire to share his fate. In a few minutes Koko had bound the hands of the two scowling, cursing ruffians behind their backs.

King of the Islands stepped to the companion.

"Below there!" he shouted.

And he tramped down. Kit Hudson followed him down to the cabin. A hoarse, panting voice reached their ears. They stared round at the shattered door of the lazarette.

"You dago scum!"

It was a husky yell of defiance from the barricaded lazarette at the sound of their footsteps.

King of the Islands laughed.

"Ahoy, Jim Furley!" he shouted. "Don't you know friends from foes? King of the Islands come aboard!"

"King of the Islands! By hokey!"

It was the following morning. The ketch and the dismantled schooner lay at anchor in the lagoon at Lololo. The Dawn had towed the Grampus in through the reef passage in the last glimmer of the sunset. Three prisoners were on board the Dawn—Beppo and Felipe with their hands bound; Giuseppe too sorely wounded to need securing. Jim Furley had not left his ship.

Ken and Kit went across from the ketch, and found Furley on his deck, his head bandaged, his stubbly face haggard, but otherwise very much his old self—grim—truculent, hard-fisted Black Furley of Lukwe. But, for once, Jim Furley was civil—he was only too well aware how much he owed to King of the Islands and his mate. But for their intervention the struggle on the schooner could only have ended one way.

"No!" said Jim Furley, shaking his

bandaged head. "I don't want a tow, King of the Islands. I reckon I've lost enough on this trip without paying for a tow of two hundred miles. No!"

"Just as you like!" answered Ken. "We'd cut it down to the lowest figure for a skipper in distress, Furley."

"You're a white man," said Furley. "But I reckon I can pull through and make Pita on my own."

The shipmates stared at him.

"You don't bank on seeing your crew again?" asked Hudson.

"No! Whether they got ashore or went down in the boats, I reckon I've seen the last of those black lubbers!"

"But you're not going to try to sail a dismantled ship single-handed?" asked King of the Islands.

"I'm going to get a jury-mast rigged, and sail her to Pita!" answered Furley. "She's sound as a bell. I knew she'd float when those niggers got out of hand and ran for the boats. And she did float, by hokey! I've saved ship and cargo, thanks to you, King of the Islands, and I reckon I can make Pita. What d'you think of doing with them dagoes?" he added.

"I'm going to leave them on Lololo—marooned, as they were before. One of them is pretty hard hit, but he will pull round if the others look after him."

"Hand them over to me!" said Furley. "I want a crew. I can sail this schooner with two men, and I reckon the other will pull round enough to lend a hand before I raise Pita."

Ken and Kit stared. Jim Furley was one of the toughest skippers in the South Seas, but the idea of sailing with such a crew was rather startling to the shipmates.

"You reckon that I can't handle 'em?" growled Furley. "I'll see that there's no stickers for them to get hold of, and I shall keep my gun handy I've sailed with a crew of Solomon Island cannibals before now. Will you hand them over?"

Ken laughed.

"You're more than welcome to them," he said. "And I'll hang on here till sunset and let my Kanakas help get you shipshape."

"You're a white man, King of the

Islands—and I won't forget this!" said the Lukwe skipper. "Chuck those dagoes on board, and I reckon I'll break 'em in under ten minutes."

The shipmates pulled back to the Dawn with smiling faces. Ken had intended to leave the dagoes on Lololo, but the rascals deserved punishment. And sailing with Black Furley was likely to be a fairly severe punishment. There was no reason why the ruffians should not make themselves useful, and their own probable objections did not count.

Kit would have liked to have handed over Ahab Pinner, too. But that rascal had to be delivered into the hands of the Law.

That Jim Furley was himself again was made clear as soon as the dagoes were transferred to the schooner. Giuseppe was put into a bunk in the forecabin—even Furley admitting, after a look at him, that he was not likely to be able to turn to for some days at least. Beppo and Felipe, their hands unbound, stood on deck with sullen, apprehensive faces, casting longing looks at the beach. But they were given no chance of attempting a swim ashore. Jim Furley gave them a few words—emphatic words.

"You're my crew now, you lubberly, unwashed scum!" he said, glaring at them with threatening eyes under the bandages. "Got that? You're going to jump to orders, and you're going to work till you drop—and when you drop, I'm going to kick you going again! Sayvee?"

"Never!" snarled Beppo. "We go ashore—"

"We do not sail with you!" hissed Felipe. "We—"

They spoke together and were simultaneously interrupted. Jim Furley's brawny fists clenched. His right came smashing into Beppo's dusky face, his left into Felipe's. The two dagoes, yelling, rolled over on the deck and crashed in the scuppers.

There was a cackle from the Hiva-Oa boys. Beppo and Felipe picked themselves up dizzily. Jim Furley gave them a roar.

"Any more backchat from you, you 'dago swabs?"

But there was no more backchat from

the dagoes. With sullen, scowling faces, they turned to without another word.

It was a busy day on the Grampus. Ken King's crew lent helping hands—and Beppo and Felipe worked harder than, probably, they had ever worked before in their rascally lives. Long before sunset the schooner was ship-shape, with a jury-mast rigged and canvas bent. Late in the sunny afternoon Ken gave the schooner a tow out of the reef passage.

Outside the reef the tow-ropes were cast off. Black Furley was left to sail the Grampus with his dago crew. He was short-handed, but he was the skipper to get at least four men's work out of two. Neither was he the man to let Giuseppe linger in his bunk longer than was necessary. It was probable that, by that time, the dago gang wished that they had never sighted the Grampus and gone salvaging. Black Furley, who had narrowly missed being thrown to the sharks by them, was not likely to give them an easy time! The shipmates of the Dawn did not envy him his crew—but still less did they envy the dagoes their skipper!

Furley, a haggard figure with his bearded face and a bandaged head, waved farewell as the two ships parted, and Ken and Kit, smiling, waved back. Koko gave a chuckle as he watched two scowling, swarthy faces.

"Dago feller no likee!" he remarked. "No likee plenty too much!" grinned Hudson.

The Dawn, picking up the wind, glided swiftly on her way.

The two vessels rapidly separated. Looking back, the last the shipmates saw of Jim Furley, he was brandishing a thick lawyer-cane—and the sound of yelling came down the wind. And they exchanged a smile as the Dawn flew on over the blue Pacific.

CHAP. 16.—Hidden Treasure.

"GOLD?" exclaimed Ken King. "Mais oui! Gold!" replied the little Frenchman.

King of the Islands smiled. Kit Hudson laughed. The shipmates of the Dawn had heard, in their time, many a tale of treasure on the Pacific beaches.

But this tale seemed, to them, about the steepest they had ever listened to.

The Dawn lay at Luta, where they had handed over Ahab Pinner to the Pacific Company's agent, waiting for a wind. The lagoon was as still as a pond, the Pacific outside the reef hardly stirred by a breath of a breeze. A cable's length from Ken King's ketch another craft lay at anchor—a cutter from Lukwe. Ken had finished his business at Luta and he was ready to pull out when the calm broke. But a windjamming skipper had to wait on the wind—and King of the Islands waited with all the patience he could muster. On board the cutter, Dandy Peter Parsons of Lukwe, was scowling at the cloudless sky, muttering swear words and snarling at his black crew, in the intervals of smoking endless cigarettes. Every now and then he stared across at the Dawn, his look showing that he had not forgotten old enmities. But the shipmates paid no heed to Dandy Peter.

It was weary work waiting for the wind that showed no sign of coming, and when the little Frenchman came out in the canoe the shipmates welcomed him as a break in the monotony. Monsieur Dubosq was small, spare, and neat, with a trim little pointed black beard and very sharp, black eyes in a shallow, narrow face. The shipmates had seen him ashore once or twice while they were getting through their business with Macfarlane, the Pacific Company's agent at Luta. They wondered what he wanted on the Dawn, but having time to kill, they were quite willing to give him a hearing. And so they listened, for the umpteenth time, to a tale of treasure. They listened politely—but with smiling faces. Indeed, they rather admired Monsieur Dubosq for having thought of something new. Wonderful pearl-beds, easy salvage, precious corals, boxes of Australian sovereigns buried by native chiefs, they had heard of before. But gold was a new one.

Ken King had sailed far and wide in the South Seas, and he knew the Islands like a familiar book. But this was the first time he had heard of an island gold-mine; so he gave Monsieur Dubosq full marks, as it were, for his ingenuity.

He did not, of course, believe a word of it, it was only a variation on an old theme. Still, it was a new and original variation.

"Mais oui, gold!" said Monsieur Dubosq, waving both hands in earnest gesticulations. "It is to pick up for ze picking!—I sell you one secret that shall make you, oh, so very rich! Is it not?"

Monsieur Dubosq did not look rich himself. He was dressed in ducks that had seen a great deal of wear and tear, and were patched and mended in many places. He was dapper and clean and neat; but his outfit was hardly worth a fathom of shell-money. But that was the rule with these tellers of treasure-tales on the Pacific beaches. There was always a fortune just out of their reach; and they were always hard up for a little ready money.

Often they believed their own dreams. Whether Monsieur Dubosq really believed that there was gold on Kulu, Ken did not know. But he was willing to think, charitably, that monsieur did. Believing it himself was another matter.

"Gold for the picking up!" said Kit Hudson. "Sounds good—much better than drumming for copra. By the ton, I suppose?"

"Non, non!" said Monsieur Dubosq, taking that playful question seriously. "Ze ton, he is very much. By ze ounce, sair."

"And you picked up a few ounces when you were on Gulu?" asked the mate of the Dawn, still playful.

"Mais oui, oui!"

At that reply the shipmates of the Dawn sat up and took notice. As they had not the faintest belief that there was gold on Gulu, or on any other island nearer than Fiji, which was eight hundred miles away, they were naturally surprised by the Frenchman's statement.

"You've got specimens?" ejaculated Hudson.

"But yes!" said Gustave Dubosq. "Here on Luta, I spend. I spend ze gold dust at ze store—one must eat to live!"

"And you've none left to show!" grinned Hudson. But King of the Islands looked at the little Frenchman very curiously. It was easy enough to

ask at the company's store whether Dubosq had disposed of gold dust there. It was difficult to imagine so very sharp-looking a man telling a falsehood that could be so easily disproved.

But again the Frenchman's answer was unexpected.

"Out, out, out!" he said. "You look!"

He groped in a pocket and drew out a small leather bag. He opened it with great care and there was a glimmer of yellow in the glare of the tropical sunshine.

"Suffering cats!" said Hudson blankly.

The shipmates stared at the contents of the little bag. The quantity was small—hardly an ounce. But there it was—gold dust!

"One shall see, and one shall believe!" said Dubosq. "You will not take a word—there are so many who tell ze tale! But to see viz an eye, zat is to believe."

Ken held out his hand for the bag. A little to his surprise Gustav handed it to him at once. Clearly he did not fear examination of that sample of the treasure of Gulu.

"Gold!" said Ken.

"Gold!" repeated Hudson. The mate had, in other days, prospected for gold in his own country, and had dabbled in placer mining.

Monsieur Dubosq grinned triumphantly.

"Now, you shall believe, Monsieur King of the Islands," he said. "It is not to everyone zat I would tell zis so valuable secret—only to ze man zat I can trust! You give me one fair play."

Ken handed back the bag. The gold it contained was genuine. But that it had been gathered on Gulu, the island whose wooded summit could be seen on the sea-rim from Luta, was by no means certain. He could not doubt Gustave's gold, but he doubted Gustave!

"We're sticking to trade, monsieur!" said the boy trader. "You'll find plenty of skippers to go treasure-hunting on Gulu—if you can make them believe that gold can be picked up there."

"But ze skipper zat I can trust, he

is you zat is called ze whitest man in ze Islands," said Monsieur Dubosq. "And for five hundred of ze English pounds, I sel you zat gold-mine."

Ken shook his head, with a smile.

"By gum, though," said Hudson, "it might be worth looking into, Ken! They found gold on Fiji. Why not on Gulu? How did you come to make the find?" he asked Dubosq.

"It is many months," said Gustave. "I am on Gulu because I zink zere may be pearls. Zere is no pearls; but zere is black savages, and I run from zem to save ze head on ze shoulders. It is while I hide in ze hill zat I find zat stream where zere is gold in ze sand. I alone know ze secret. You will not fear ze blacks. Zere is ze gold to pick up."

Kit Hudson looked up at his shipmate.

"My dear chap," said Ken, "we're waiting for a wind—and we've got calls to make and time to make up. We're traders, not day-dreamers, Kit!"

"You say non?" asked Monsieur Dubosq. He restored the bag to his pocket, evidently deeply disappointed. "It is you who lose a fortune, sair."

Ken made a gesture towards the Lukwe cutter. Peter Parsons, on her deck, was staring at the ketch, as if interested in what was going on. Perhaps he had caught a gleam of the gold in the sunshine.

"Try Captain Parsons!" said Ken, with a smile. "Dandy Peter's the man for any hare-brained adventure. If you make him believe that there's gold on Gulu, he will jump at the chance."

"Zat Dandy Peter, he is not one zat I trust!" said Dubosq. "Perhaps he drop me in ze sea, after I take him to ze gold on Gulu. Sair, it is one fortune zat you zrow away."

He gave the shipmates a last look. Ken shook his head—Hudson did the same, more slowly. It was not that the shipmates were not willing to reap a handsome profit from a new gold-mine. King of the Islands was as eager as the next man to be in on a good deal. But he had been sailing the Pacific for many years, and knew just how likely it was that there really would be truth in the Frenchman's story. Monsieur

Dubosq, with a shrug of the shoulders, stepped down into his canoe, and the brown boys paddled him back to the beach.

CHAP. 17.—After the Secret.

"MAN," said Macfarlane, "it's true enough!"

Sitting on the molasses barrel in the Pacific Company's store on Luta, the old Scottish trader nodded through a cloud of smoke from his black cigar. Kit Hudson gave his shipmate a look, and Ken frowned a little.

They were still waiting for a wind—and likely to wait! In the cool of the evening, they had come ashore, and Kit Hudson had headed at once for the trader's store. And Ken guessed why. He knew that his comrade was thinking of the Frenchman's tale of gold on Gulu—a tale for which Ken had no use. The first question to Macfarlane elicited confirmation of Gustave's statement that he had changed gold for goods at the island store.

"True enough," went on the trader. "I'll not say where he got it, but he's got it. He's lived two months on Luta—he's got a hut at the back of the beach—and he's lived on gold dust and nuggets."

"Ever heard of gold on Gulu?" asked Ken.

"Only from Dubosq," answered the old trader dryly, "and I'm not believing all that I hear."

"He's got the gold," said Hudson.

"Ay, he's got it!" admitted Macfarlane, "and I reckon that sooner or later he will get a skipper to take up the proposition. He's tried it on with five or six, since he's been here. Nobody's taken it up, so far. They come in and ask me questions—Peter Parsons was here an hour ago, and he was verra curious to hear all about the Frenchman. Perhaps he'll take it up." The old trader grinned. "But I'm sorry for Dubosq if he makes a fool of Peter Parsons. It will be a verra bad day for him if he does."

"You think it's a catch?" asked Ken bluntly.

"I'm saying nothing," answered the trader. "But I'd not give him two

fathoms of shell-money for his gold-mine on Gulu."

"Where the dickens did he get the gold, then?" exclaimed Hudson. "There's no gold-mine nearer than the Fiji Islands that's known."

"I dinna ken," answered Macfarlane. "But it's easier to buy gold off a trader than to wash it out of a stream on Gulu, to my thinking."

King of the Islands laughed.

"That's it," he said. "A sprat to catch a whale, Kit! Mister Dubosq is looking for a greenhorn."

"I'm not so sure," answered the mate of the Dawn. "If it was that, why hasn't he tackled Peter Parsons with the same story?"

"Easily answered," said Ken. "If he swindled a man like Dandy Peter, he would be more likely than not to find himself deep down in the Pacific afterwards. Dandy Peter's too dangerous to play that kind of game on."

"Well, look here," said Hudson, "we're hung up for a wind, and no sign of the calm breaking. We could make the trip across to Gulu in the whaleboat. Why not look into it?"

"And lose the wind when it comes, Kit?"

Hudson gave a grunt.

"Where's the Frenchman's hut, Mac?" he asked.

"Under the palms, back of the beach," said Macfarlane, grinning broadly. "I'll send my house-boy to point it out, if you want to talk to Dubosq."

He called a brown boy, and the shipmates followed him from the store, leaving the old trader grinning. Evidently Macfarlane, who had lived for ten years in sight of the summit of Gulu, did not believe that there was gold on that island. Ken was fully of his opinion.

"We've got time to kill," grunted Hudson. "No harm in seeing the man, Ken. He can't be fool enough to think that we should hand over five hundred pounds on a stranger's word, backed up by a pinch of gold-dust. He's got some proof to offer, if it's genuine."

"Ay, ay, but it's only the old tale over again in a new shape, Kit."

Hudson gave another grunt, and they followed the brown boy along a path under the shade of the tall, nodding palms.

"Flessman stop along that place, sar," said the boy, pointing. And he returned to the beach.

The shipmates walked on in silence. It was seldom that there was a difference of opinion between the shipmates of the Dawn, but one had crept in now. Hudson was disposed to put the Frenchman's tale to the test; Ken to dismiss it as one more of the thousand idle tales of the beaches. He had to admit that there was something like evidence in the fact that Dubosq had lived on Luta by selling gold-dust at the store. But if the whole thing was a swindle, that, no doubt, was a part of the cunning game.

The sound of a voice reached their ears as they drew nearer to the hut. Just within the open doorway stood the dandy Peter Parsons, a handsome figure in his spotless ducks and pipe-clayed shoes and panama hat. He was leaning on the doorpost, speaking to the man in the hut, his back turned to the shipmates. They stopped.

"Looks as if we're too late!" muttered Hudson.

Ken shrugged his shoulders. He did not think that they had lost much, if they were too late.

"Cough it up, Dubosq!" Peter Parsons' voice came clearly to them. "King of the Islands has turned you down—I saw you on his packet. From what old Macfarlane says, you've put it up to half a dozen skippers, and they've all turned you down. I reckon I shall do the same, but I'll give you a hearing."

"I do not wish to do ze business with you," answered Dubosq. "Ze secret is mine, and I keep him."

The shipmates could see only the profile of Dandy Peter's face as he stood within the doorway. But they did not fail to note the dark, savage look that came over it at the Frenchman's reply.

"That won't do, Dubosq!" snapped the Lukwe skipper. "I saw what you showed King of the Islands on his packet, and I've asked questions on the

beach, and if there's anything in it I'll take it up."

"Is it zat you have five hundred pounds on your cutter, sair? I do not zink so. I tell you nozzing! King of ze Islands I trust, but you—non! I would not trust ze life on your cutter."

"I'll give you fair play, Dubosq. I'll run you across to Gulu in the Sea-Cat when the calm breaks——"

"Non!"

The Lukwe skipper muttered an oath.

Hudson gave his shipmate a reproachful glance. What he was hearing gave him the impression that the story of gold on Gulu was the truth. It was evident that it gave Dandy Peter that impression also. Had the proposition been put up to him, probably Dandy Peter would have turned it down. But the Frenchman's refusal made him eager. He stepped farther into the hut.

"You're going to cough up the whole story here and now, you swab. I reckon I've made obstinate lubbers talk before now!"

His words were followed by a sound of struggling and a gasping yell inside the hut.

"Come on, Kit!" exclaimed King of the Islands.

The shipmates reached the open doorway of the hut in a few seconds.

It was a startling sight that met their eyes. The little Frenchman, gasping and spluttering, was crumpled up in the grasp of the Lukwe skipper. Dandy Peter's grip was on his throat.

"You swab!" said Dandy Peter, between his teeth. "You reckon I'm the man to take back-chat from a beachcomber! You——"

He broke off as Kit Hudson dashed into the hut and hit out straight from the shoulder. His clenched fist struck the dandy of Lukwe on the side of the head, and Parsons went staggering across the hut, the wriggling Frenchman dropping from his grasp. He staggered as far as the farther wall. Standing unsteadily, he glared at the shipmates like a tiger. Then, like a tiger, he came at Hudson.

For three or four minutes there was a desperate fight, then the dandy of

Lukwe went down, knocked off his feet by a drive from the mate of the Dawn.

It was a long minute before he staggered up again. Then his hand went to the hip-pocket of his duck trousers.

"Better not, Parsons!" rang Ken King's voice; his own revolver was in his hand.

The enraged Lukwe skipper released the butt of the weapon. He gave the shipmates a glare of hate and fury, then tramped unsteadily from the hut. Dubosq, who had been eyeing him in terror, gasped with relief when he had gone.

CHAP. 12.—Ken Gives In.

KOKO, the brown-skinned boatswain of the Dawn, glanced at his white masters, and his glance was troubled. Some sort of dispute seemed to have arisen between them.

King of the Islands stood leaning against the rail, looking rather moodily towards the beach, where a crowd of natives were dancing in the faint glimmer of the moon. Kit Hudson paced the deck with a clouded brow. And Koko glanced from one to the other, and wondered.

"Feller Parsons no stop along packet belong him, sar," said the bo'sun, chiefly to break the silence. "That feller go along sea, sar, along boat belong him."

Ken nodded and glanced carelessly at the anchored Sea-Cat, dimly visible across the dark lagoon. He was not interested in the proceedings of the Lukwe skipper, and he had not noticed that the dinghy, which the cutter towed, having no room for a boat aboard, was gone. Indeed, only Koko's keen eyes could have noted it in the deep dusk on the lagoon.

Ken left the rail and crossed over to his mate.

"Look here, Kit," he said, "it's not worth disputing about—"

"I'm not disputing," said Hudson. "You're skipper, and I'm mate—I'm obeying orders!

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Ken. "Ten to one we shall get a wind to-morrow. But if we waste time going on a wild-goose chase to Gulu, we shall

be fools for our pains! There's no more gold on Gulu than there is in Danny's saucepans in the galley yonder."

"You know best!" said Hudson.

"If you're bent on it, old man, I give in!" Ken said quietly. "There may be a sporting chance that Dubosq has told us the truth.

"More than that," grunted Hudson. "Look at it sensibly, Ken. That swab Parsons was keen enough on it."

"Only because the Frenchman stood him off. But whether he believes it or not, I can't get it down."

"You mean that you won't," said Hudson tartly. "We've had a talk with Dubosq, and got his terms. Nothing could be fairer. He's asking us for nothing till we've seen the gold on Gulu. He's ready to lead us to the place where he washed out gold, and until we're satisfied, with the sight of our own eyes, we don't pay him a cent. If he's fooling us, where does he come in?"

"He could work the place himself—"

"He's afraid of the blacks. You know that they're a fierce crew on Gulu. No white man has ever dared to settle on the island. We shall have to go well armed. His life wouldn't be worth a yard of shell-money there on his own."

Ken was silent again. The Frenchman had convinced Hudson; and Ken, though he was not convinced, could not dispute that Dubosq seemed to have made his case good.

"I'm not thinking about myself, either," went on Hudson. "I'm keen enough, but I'd like to see you pick up something better than a cargo of copra, and you know that, Ken."

"I do know it, old fellow," said Ken. "I'd rather stick to copra—slow and steady, at any rate. But if you're bent on it, I give in. All the same, I think you're an ass and I'm another—let it go at that!"

Hudson laughed.

"It's a go, then!" he said. "You won't be sorry for it, Ken! Get Dubosq on board and let's pull out in the whaleboat. Plenty of light when the moon's up, and the sea's like a pond."

"Lower the whaleboat!" Ken called across to Koko.

Hudson glanced at his comrade once or twice as the Kanakas pulled to the beach. But Ken's face was smiling and cheerful. He had yielded the point to satisfy his shipmate, and, having made up his mind to it, he hoped for the best, though he still doubted whether a fortune was to be picked up on Gulu. He had turned down the proposition at the Frenchman's hut—now he had, as it were, turned it up again, and he hoped that Hudson would turn out to be right.

Laying the Kanakas with the boat, the shipmates took the path to Dubosq's hut.

There was no light in the hut, and the flimsy door stood wide open. Hudson put his head inside and hailed:

"Ahoy, Dubosq!"

There was no answer.

"Wake up, man!" exclaimed Hudson impatiently. "We've come back for you. We're taking on the trip to Gulu."

Deep silence followed his words. Hudson stared into the dark interior of the hut. If the Frenchman was sleeping no sound of breathing reached his ears.

"There's something wrong here, Kit!" said King of the Island. He pointed to the open door. "That's been forced!"

Hudson's teeth snapped.

"Dandy Peter!" he breathed.

King of the Islands stepped into the hut and struck a match.

The flickering flame showed the signs of a struggle. The few articles of furniture had been overturned—some of them broken—the door hanging by a single leather hinge.

Dubosq had been overcome and taken away by force. The shipmates could guess by whom.

"Dandy Peter!" repeated Hudson.

Ken nodded.

"It can only have been Peter Parsons. He believes——"

"Pretty clear now what he believes!" said Hudson savagely. "He's got Dubosq. But he's not beaten us yet!

Back to the boat! He can't get out of the lagoon without a wind, and if he tries to keep us off the Sea-Cat——"

Ken remembered what Koko had said.

"He's not on the Sea-Cat, Kit—he's pulling for Gulu."

They left the hut and returned to the beach at a run. The Hiva-Oa boys were waiting by the whaleboat, and Ken shouted to them. They tumbled into the boat and pushed off.

"Washy-washy along Sea-Cat, plenty too quick!" rapped Ken.

The boat shot across the still lagoon. Swiftly it reached the anchored cutter—though not swiftly enough for Hudson's angry impatience. A startled black face looked at them as they scrambled on board. It was that of Sululo, Dandy Peter's boat-steerer. No one else was to be seen on the cutter—and the dinghy was gone.

"You feller boy, what place 'Cap'n Parsons he stop?" rapped Ken.

"Cap'n Parsons stop along boat, sar, along feller Kotoo and Nalasu," answered Sululo. "He go along sea, sar."

"White feller Flessman stop along boat, along Cap'n Parsons?"

"Me no savvy, sar."

But it was unnecessary for Sululo to answer, whether he "savvied" or not. There was no doubt, and the shipmates dropped back into the whaleboat. Dandy Peter had more than an hour's start, and he was on his way to Gulu, with the Frenchman a prisoner. Ken rapped a word to Koko, who steered for the reef passage, the Hiva-Oa boys bending to the oars. Danny, left on the ketch, stared after the boat; but it was gone from his sight in a few minutes. Swiftly the whaleboat threaded the passage in the reef, out into the open sea, and headed for distant Gulu.

CHAP. 19.—Chasing Dandy Peter.

DANDY PETER strained his eyes in the glimmer of the sunrise, and muttered an oath. He snarled at the two black boys who rowed the dinghy—almost sinking at the oars, brawny and burly as they were. In the bottom of the boat lay Gustave Dubosq. The Lukwe skipper gave him no heed. His attention was divided between slave-

driving the Lukwe boys and watching the sea astern for a sign of pursuit.

That the shipmates of the Dawn had taken up the Frenchman's proposition he had little doubt, after what had happened at Dubosq's hut; neither did he doubt that they would pursue him as soon as they discovered the kidnapping. The Dawn's whaleboat, with a full boat's crew pulling, would travel twice, as fast as the Sea-Cat's dinghy. Once ashore among the rocks and bush of Gulu, he could defy pursuit—but on the sea it was a different matter. He watched the Pacific anxiously, and at every sign of slacking from the Lukwe boys he cursed them into renewed activity.

And as, in the clearing light of dawn, he sighted a speck on the sea astern, he drew the revolver from his hip-pocket. Distant as that object was, he knew that it was a boat—and a boat so far from land meant pursuit.

"Washy-washy, you scum!" snarled Parsons, and his savage glare and the revolver in his hand drove the weary Lukwe boys to fresh efforts.

He gave a savage stare towards Gulu. The high hill, covered with thick bush, seemed close, but there were miles yet to cover before the dinghy ran in to the rocky shore. Dandy Peter doubted whether he would cover them before the pursuers overhauled him. He stared back at the speck on the sea—no longer a speck, but taking shape as a boat. He cursed the Lukwe boys, but they were doing their utmost and could do no more. Under his savage eyes, the whaleboat drew nearer and nearer, and he saw King of the Islands stand up, shade his eyes with his hand and stare across the intervening water.

"Washy-washy, you black scum!" Dandy Peter yelled to his exhausted crew. "My word, you no washy-washy too quick, me knock seven bells out of you!"

But it was futile. The sweating Lukwe boys were sinking at the oars. Twice as many strong arms were pulling in the whaleboat, with Koko to relieve the oarsmen in turn. The dinghy had no chance in the race—faster and faster the pursuers swept down to the desperate sea lawyer of Lukwe.

Gustave Dubosq lifted his head to look. With a drive of his foot, Parsons

knocked him back into the bottom of the boat. The dinghy was losing way; the Lukwe boys, exhausted, could do no more. Dandy Peter stood up, the revolver in his hand, his finger on the trigger. The whaleboat came on with a rush.

"Sheer off, King of the Islands! I'll fire if you try to lay me aboard!" Parsons lifted the revolver, his eyes gleaming over it.

"Fire, if you dare!" retorted King of the Islands, and his revolver glimmered in the sunshine. Hudson, standing up, levelled his revolver at the same moment. The two boats were hardly a cable's length apart, and the distance lessening every moment.

Dandy Peter's desperate eye gleamed over his revolver. But even as he was about to pull trigger, Kotoo, utterly spent, fell forward over his oar. Nalasu was still pulling, and the dinghy spun and rocked, and Parsons stumbled over.

He scrambled savagely to his feet as the whaleboat, coming on with a rush, crashed into the dinghy and almost capized it.

A wash of the Pacific came over the gunwale, drenching Gustave Dubosq and drawing a wild shriek from him. Kotoo and Nalasu let go the oars and clung on to the rowlocks.

Parsons, scrambling wildly in the dancing boat, fired—but the rocking of the dinghy caused the bullet to whistle away skyward. He had no time to pull trigger again. Koko struck him with a boathook, and Dandy Peter rolled in the water in the bottom of the boat.

Kit Hudson leaped into the dinghy. Dandy Peter, dazed and dizzy, tried to lift his revolver, but the mate of the Dawn kicked it from his hand, and it went with a splash into the Pacific.

With a yell of rage, the man scrambled up—and Hudson hit him fair and square. Dandy Peter gave one gasp and dropped, knocked senseless.

Hudson opened his clasp-knife and cut the Frenchman's bonds. He gave him a cheery grin.

"Hop into the boat!" he said.

King of the Islands gave the Frenchman a helping hand, and Dubosq scrambled into the whaleboat. Hudson followed him in. Dandy Peter still lay

like a log in the washing water at the bottom of the dinghy.

It was a full five minutes before the man sat dizzily up, his hand to his head, feeling a lump there almost as large as an egg where Kit Hudson's knuckles had struck. He stared dazedly round him at the sweating black faces of Kotoo and Nalasu, at the flooded dinghy, at the blue Pacific. He scrambled up—drenched, dishevelled, dizzy—and stared across the shining sea.

Far in the distance the Dawn's whaleboat was disappearing. Dandy Peter spat out an oath and shook his clenched fist after it. His savage eyes watched it till it disappeared, and the dinghy was left rocking alone on the Pacific.

CHAP. 20.—Blacks in the Bush.

"BLACK feller stop!" exclaimed Koko suddenly.

King of the Islands stood up in the whaleboat, his rifle under his arm, and scanned the rocky shore of Gulu. There was a slight frown on the brow of the boy trader of the Pacific. Kit Hudson, on the other hand, looked very bright and cheery. The four Hiva-Oa boys, pulling at the oars, glanced round over bare brown shoulders as Koko announced that a "black feller" was in sight. Gulu was a "black" island, though within ten sea-miles of the "brown" island of Luta. And the black men of Gulu had an unenviable reputation. No white man had ever settled on Gulu, and a white man who landed on its rocky shore did so at the risk of leaving his head to be smoked in the canoe-houses of the natives.

The Pacific was as smooth as a pond. The whaleboat was running in to the shore of Gulu: a wild and rocky, barren shore, backed by wild thick bush that covered the slopes of rugged hills. And from among the rocks a fuzzy head popped into view, and fierce black eyes watched the boat.

"Only one!" said Kit Hudson.

"Plenty more out of sight!" said King of the Islands. "All Gulu will know we're here under the hour."

"Bad feller stop along Gulu, sar," said Koko. "Takee head belong us

feller, sposee can, smokee along canoe-house belong him"

"You plenty flaid along black feller belong Gulu?" asked Hudson sarcastically.

"Me no flaid along that feller, sar!" answered the bosun. "Allee samee, me likee head belong me stop along shoulder belong me."

Hudson gave a grunt. There was peril on Gulu—plenty of it; but the mate of the Dawn was quite indifferent to peril.

"Washy-washy, you feller boy!" rapped King of the Islands, for the Hiva-Oa boys, at sight of the black man ashore, slacked rowing. Tomoo & Co. did not seem to like the aspect of that fuzzy head, and the gleaming eyes that watched the boat from the rocks. But at their skipper's word, the Kanakas pulled on again, and the whaleboat drew nearer the shore. Koko steered for a patch of sandy beach among the rocks—one of the few spots where a safe landing could be made.

"Look out!" muttered Hudson. "That black swab means trouble." He lifted a rifle to his shoulder.

The black man had clambered over the rocks, closer to the landing-place. Standing on a rugged mass of basalt, he was fitting an arrow to a bow. The bow twanged, and the arrow dropped a fathom from the boat, disappearing into the sea. It was a warning of what the visitors had to expect from the natives.

Crack! Hudson's rifle rang sharply. The bullet carried away the bow in the black's hands smashing it. In his surprise and terror, the savage stumbled backwards, fell, and disappeared on the farther side of the mass of basalt, his big black feet waving in the air.

Loud yells were heard, then the black came into sight again, leaping from rock to rock, and disappearing in the bush on the side of the hill.

"That's a tip to them to keep clear," said the mate. "The niggers won't give us a lot of trouble. Ken."

"We can hold our own, if they do," answered Ken, "but——"

"But what?" asked Hudson rather sharply.

Ken did not answer. They were cannibals and headhunters ashore, and

Ken did not want unnecessary trouble with them. But he had agreed to the trip to please his shipmate, and there was nothing more to be said.

Hudson's brow clouded a little as the whaleboat pulled in to the beach. But he said nothing.

"Par ici!" said Gustave Dubosq. "Zis vay!"

King of the Islands lost no time, once he was landed on Gulu. The black man who had watched them had vanished, and nothing more had been seen of him, or of his tribesmen. But there was no doubt that news was spreading fast on Gulu that white men had landed, and that it would stir the savages in their dens in the dark bush. The Hiva-Oa boys were left in charge of the boat, with orders to pull off shore if hostile natives appeared—an order they were quite certain to obey. Koko followed his white masters as they went with the Frenchman.

Koko carried a bush-knife in his hand—a weapon nearly two feet long, with an edge like a razor. The shipmates had their rifles under their arms, and revolvers in their belts. Gustave Dubosq also was armed with a revolver, but he did not look as if he would be of a great deal of use in a brush with the cannibals. His sharp, glinting eyes watched uneasily on all sides as they left the beach and plunged into the bush.

The way lay up a rugged hill, and in a few minutes the beach and the Pacific were lost to sight when they looked back. Thick bush clothed the hillside, and early as it was in the day, the heat was stifling. Here and there runways were cut in the bush, paths used by the natives; in other places the shipmates had to force a way, and Koko hacked and slashed with his heavy bush-knife.

Every now and then Gustave paused to look about him, and several times he examined trees in which signs had been cut. That was proof, if it was needed, that he had been there before, he had "blazed" a trail to find his way again. Only a short distance had been covered, but a toilsome hour had passed when a sound of tinkling water fell on their ears.

"C'est ca!" exclaimed Gustave. "Here we are!"

He pushed on ahead of the others eagerly. Hudson gave his shipmate a perspiring grin.

"What do you think now, Ken?" he asked

Ken smiled.

"Looks as if you win, old man!" he answered. "I'll be jolly glad if we find it that you were right and I was wrong."

"Bank on it!" said Hudson confidently. "By gum! Picking up gold is better business than drumming for copra. What?"

"Aye, aye—when we pick it up!"

"Good old Doubting Thomas! We shan't be long now, I reckon."

From the thick bush they emerged into a rocky, stony tract, where the tropical growths thinned away and the going was easier. A cascading torrent dropped from slope to slope down the rugged hill, tinkling as it fell. The water was shallow, and Gustave stepped into it, wading up the course of the stream. Ken and Kit and Koko followed him in single file.

Ahead was a narrow rocky gorge, between high rocks, through which the stream flowed. Gustave looked back with a sweating, sallow face and pointed.

"Par la!" he squeaked, and tramped on up the stream. A minute later he stopped with a squeal of alarm, and dodged down behind a rock by the water.

"En garde!" he shouted.

"Black feller comey!" exclaimed Koko, gripping the bush-knife.

Ken's rifle leaped to his shoulder as there was a sudden rush of black faces, fuzzy heads, and brandished spears from the bush. Twenty or more of the cannibals leaped into sudden sight, yelling and howling as they rushed at the party in the stream.

Bang! bang! roared the rifles, and bang! bang! again, pitching the lead into the thick of the rushing, howling savages. The shipmates fired low, and wounded blacks reeled and staggered to right and left.

Koko, the long bush-knife in his hand, stood ready if the cannibals reached close quarters. But the hot

lead, tearing among the bare limbs, daunted them. The rush stopped as suddenly as it had started. Five or six of the blacks rolled over shrieking—the rest tore back to the bush.

The shipmates loosed off rapid shots into the bush, driving the savages into faster flight. Half a dozen wounded men were crawling away, howling; the rest were running, the thick bush swaying and crashing as they fled.

Gustave peered out of cover.

"Allons! Suivez-moi!" he panted. And he ran scrambling up the rocky watercourse, and clambered into the gorge. The shipmates hurried after him, breasting the stream that tumbled down between the rugged walls of rock. Yells from the bush, and whizzing arrows, followed, but the blacks did not venture to show up in the open again, and the yelling died away as they clambered up the rocky gorge and disappeared from the sight of the cannibals of Gulu.

CHAP. 21.—Dandy Peter's Peril!

DANDY PETER PARSONS stood in the dinghy, shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared at the shore of Gulu. Kotoo and Nalasu, the black Lukwe boys, gladly rested on their oars, while their hard-fisted master stared and scowled. The dandy of Lukwe did not look his usual natty self; his once-spotless ducks were rumpled and ruffled, damp with salt water, and there was a dark bruise over his eye, with an ache in it to remind him of the knuckles of the mate of the Dawn. There was a rifle under Dandy Peter's arm. His revolver had gone overboard in the struggle that had taken place in the dinghy when it was overhauled by the Dawn's whaleboat.

His eyes glittered, and he grasped his rifle at the sight of the whaleboat beached on Gulu. Had the shipmates been in it, Parsons might have been tempted to open fire, his vengeful rage getting the upper hand of his prudence.

But neither King of the Islands nor his mate was to be seen—neither Koko nor the Frenchman. Four Kanakas lolled idly on the sand by the beached boat—chewing betel-nut, but more warily on the look-out than was their

careless custom. Unwariness on Gulu meant the probability of their heads parting company with their shoulders. And Parsons saw them gather in a group, staring seaward as they sighted the dinghy.

"Washy-washy along shore, you black scum!" snarled Parsons to his crew, and the weary Lukwe boys pulled again.

The four Hiva-Oa boys stood by the whaleboat, handling rifles. They watched Peter Parsons intently and uneasily as he leaped from the dinghy to the sandy shore and came striding towards them. Kotoo and Nalasu beached the dinghy and sat on it to rest their weary black limbs.

Dandy Peter gave the four Hiva-Oa boys a threatening glare. He would not have feared a conflict with the four of them, if it had come to that.

"What place master you belong stop?" he snapped.

"White master belong us fellar, stop along bush, sar," answered Tomoo. "He stop along bush, along feller Hudson, fellar Koko, feller Flessman."

"You show that place, finger belong you!" snapped Parsons.

Tomoo pointed the way the shipmates had gone. The bush began quite close to the little beach. Dandy Peter scanned it. He reckoned that he would be able to track the party through the bush—it was so thick that they could not possibly have forced their way through without leaving ample sign. If there was truth in the Frenchman's tale, the shipmates were heading for the gold of Gulu, and he was too late—but he was not too late to dispute its possession. The fact that he had two white men and a Kanaka to deal with, without counting Dubosq, did not daunt the desperado of Lukwe.

"Black feller stop along bush, sar," said Lompo, as Parsons moved away.

Parsons looked round at him.

"You see black feller, eyes belong you?" he asked.

"Yessar! Black feller watch, along us feller come along Gulu. White master belong me shoot gun belong him, along bush, plenty too much; tinkee findee black feller along bush, sar."

Parsons shrugged his slim shoulders.

But black cannibals had no terrors for him.

"You feller Kotoo, Nalasu, you stop along boat, along me goey along bush!" he called to the Lukwe boys in the dinghy, and tramped away up the sandy beach to the bush.

It was easy enough to pick up the track of the Dawn's party. Trampled weeds and ferns, tangled bush slashed by Koko's bush-knife, told at a glance the way they had gone.

Parsons tramped on their track, finding the way easier than the party that had gone before. Koko's bush-knife having cleared the path. His eyes were watchful, his rifle ready. He knew that he was taking his life in his hands in entering the bush. Indeed, he would not have been surprised to discover that the Dawn's party had fallen victims to the savage blacks. The fact that there had been firing showed that they had been attacked.

There was a rustle in the dense bush. Dandy Peter threw up his rifle and fired in the direction of the sound. A fearful yell answered the shot, and a crash of the tangled bush under a falling body.

Five or six arrows flew whizzing round the dandy of Lukwe. One of them pierced the brim of his hat; another passed between his right arm and his body. Another grazed his leg. He blazed bullets into the bush, then ran swiftly onward, reloading his Winchester as he ran. It was like Dandy Peter, even with the bush swarming with savage enemies, to advance instead of thinking of retreat.

He broke from the thick bush on the edge of the rocky watercourse. There the track, hitherto an easy guide, ended—the water left no trail. He stood staring round him with savage eyes. They had gone up the stream, he had no doubt of that—yet it was possible that they had gone down; and as he stood in enraged doubt, there was a rustling and brushing and swarming in the bush, and fuzzy heads and ferocious faces and gleaming spears circled him.

With a curse, he loosed off lead into the thick of the mob. Twice, thrice, he fired, and with each shot a howling savage went reeling. But as he pulled trigger again, a whirling spear struck

his rifle and dashed it from his hands. The blacks on the point of breaking under his fire, rushed off as they saw him disarmed—and Dandy Peter clutched at his belt, forgetful for the moment that his revolver was at the bottom of the Pacific. In a moment more they were upon him.

Dandy Peter struggled madly in the grasp of five or six powerful blacks, every one of them a more powerful man than himself. In that fearful moment he knew that the lure of the gold of Gulu had led him to a dreadful doom—the cooking-pots and the wood-fires of the canoe-house. He fought madly for his life, and snatched a broad-bladed spear from a hand that was lifted to impale him.

He slashed and stabbed with the spear, breaking through the blacks and springing away into the bush.

He was not thinking of the gold now, but of the bare chance of saving himself from the cooking-pots. He ran like a deer back the way he had come—with the mob of savages howling in ferocious pursuit.

Twice a savage sprang and clutched, to fall under a desperate slash of the spear—and then, with a last bound, he was clear of the bush and running down the beach. Arrows and spears whistled after him, and from the bush a dozen wild figures broke in fierce chase—to be met by a shout of alarm from the Hiva-Oa boys at the whaleboat, and a rattling spatter of rifle-fire.

That volley saved Parsons' life. The howling mob of blacks bolted back into the bush. Dandy Peter staggered on, and stumbled over on the sand beside the dinghy.

The Hiva-Oa boys, having emptied their rifles, promptly pushed off in the whaleboat, and stood off shore. Kotoo and Nalasu dragged their master into the dinghy and pushed off after them. And Dandy Peter, sprawling exhausted in the dinghy, spent what little breath he had left in a string of gasping curses, and signed to the Lukwe boys to pull for the open sea. It took a lot to frighten Dandy Peter, but fearless as the lawless captain was, he had no intention of risking his life again in the bush. The sea-lawyer was finished with Gulu!

CHAP. 22.—Salted Sand:

"GOLD!"

"Gold!"

"Feller gold stop!"

"Vous voyez!" grinned Gustave Dubosq. He waved both hands. "Is it not? N'est-ce-pas! You shall see and believe! De l'or, monsieurs! Is it not?"

Kit Hudson laughed, in sheer exuberance of spirits. King of the Islands stared, astonished, but no longer doubting. Koko ran the golden sand through his brown fingers, and grinned with glee. Of gold-mining, placer or quartz, Koko knew no more than the man in the moon; but he knew the yellow gleam of gold, the same gleam that delighted his eyes in the bright yellow Australian sovereigns. There was gold on Gulu for the washing—gold that gleamed and shone in the tropical sun that blazed down on the rocky hill.

"What about it, old man?" chuckled Hudson.

King of the Islands drew a deep, deep breath.

"You win!" he said.

"Glad you came?" grinned Hudson.

"Aye, aye!"

Seeing was believing—and the shipmates saw. Gustave Dubosq grinned and gesticulated. This was his moment of triumph.

Above the rocky gorge was a valley in the hills, in which the stream spread out in shallows over a bed of shining sand. Here and there sandbanks were uncovered along the shallow water. And in the sand gleamed the precious yellow particles—tiny fractions of gold that leaped to the eye in the sunshine. It was a placer, such as Hudson had seen in his own land of Australia; the precious grains, embedded in the sand, required only to be washed out and gathered. Hudson told King of the Islands he had never seen one that looked, at the first glance, so rich as this. The sand that cascaded through Koko's brown fingers cast a thousand yellow gleams in the sunlight.

Ken King had not believed it. But he could not doubt his eyesight. And he felt a spot of remorse for his doubt. The Frenchman, it seemed, had been telling only the truth—it was no beach-

comber's tale. His story of gold on Gulu had been laughed at on Luta—Macfarlane, the canny old storekeeper, had chuckled over it; no skipper, putting into the lagoon, had given it heed, till Gustave tried his luck on the Dawn—and then Ken had not heeded, and it was Hudson who had secured this prize for himself and his shipmate.

"You believe, monsieur, now zat you see?" grinned Gustave.

"Aye, aye!" answered Ken. "It's the truth, Mr. Dubosq—but one hears so many tales on the beaches—"

"Suffering cats!" said Hudson. "It's a fortune, Ken. I tell you this beats drumming for copra! We shall pick up more here in a week than we make on a round trip of the islands! We start washing to-day."

"It's not ours yet, old man!" said Ken, with a smile.

"Mais oui, it is yours if you buy," said Dubosq. "I make you offer at Luta—zat offer I repeat now. I sell for five hundred of your pounds."

The shipmates exchanged glances. If the placer was anything like so rich as it looked, fifty to a hundred pounds a day could easily be washed out of the gleaming sand while it lasted. It was, as Hudson said, a fortune. Five hundred pounds was a large sum to the boy traders. They had done well on their latest trip, but such a payment would very nearly clear out the strong-box on the ketch at Luta. But in a few days they would see it again, washing out gold on Gulu; in a few days more, twice as much. And if the placer lasted, as there was every indication that it would, thrice and four times as much would follow. And they shook their heads—and the brightness faded out of Monsieur Dubosq's gleeful face.

"You do not buy!" he ejaculated. "But you see—"

"We're not going to rob you, Monsieur Dubosq," said King of the Islands. "Five hundred pounds is big money to us, but it's not a patch on what your gold-mine is worth. Look here, stay and go into it with us—we will buy a share."

"Non! I have fear of ze blacks!" said Gustave. "On Gulu, ze head do not feel as if he stick on ze shoulder! I have grand fear."

"The blacks won't bother us!" said Hudson. "Let us come in on shares, Dubosq, and see it through together."

But the Frenchman shook his head.

"I sell!" he said. "I make one offer at Luta—I make zat offer vunce more on Gulu! Five hundred pounds, and ze head on ze shoulders, zat is better zan ze big fortune and ze head in ze canoe-house! You do not fear ze blacks—bon! But I feel ze head every moment, to know if he stick! Messieurs, I stay not on Gulu for one night—not for all ze gold many times over!"

Kit Hudson laughed.

"If you're fixed on that, Dubosq," he said, "it's a trade, then!"

"Aye, aye!" said King of the Islands.

It was only from a sense of fair play that the shipmates had hesitated to close with the tempting offer. They admitted that the Frenchman might be right—there was deadly peril on Gulu—and Gustave preferred a moderate sum and safety, to a fortune accompanied by the terror of the cooking-pots! Danger the shipmates were prepared to face—but Gustave was not—and that was that!

"You buy!" said Gustave. "I return to Luta! At Luta I see you again—I see you rich! Bon! It is vat you call a trade?"

"It's a trade!" said Ken. "We're not leaving Gulu, Dubosq—but we'll send you back in the whaleboat."

"You pay," said Gustave. "You pay and I go."

"We don't carry hundreds of pounds in our pockets, Dubosq," laughed Ken. "But my boatswain will run you back to Luta, and I will give him instructions."

"C'est ca!" agreed Dubosq, and there was a greedy gleam in his narrow eyes.

Koko gave a grunt.

"This feller no likee go along Luta, along white master stop along Gulu!" he said.

"You'll get back by sundown, old coffee-bean," said Ken, with a smile. "I can trust you with the key of the strong-box; Koko. Come on, Kit!"

They tramped down through the gorge, and with watchful eyes and rifles at the ready, followed the track through the bush down to the beach.

King of the Islands stood on the beach, Hudson at his side, watching the whaleboat as it pulled out.

Gustave sitting in the stern of the whaleboat, was grinning with satisfaction—perhaps at getting clear in safety from the cannibal island. But it seemed to Ken, as he looked at the grinning, sallow face, that he caught a glimmer of mockery in it, and he wondered. Seeing was believing, and he had seen the gold. Yet, at the bottom of his heart, there lingered a spot of distrust.

The Hiva-Oa boys pulled steadily, and the whaleboat ran swiftly out to sea; and the Frenchman in the stern waved his hand in farewell to the two figures on the beach. Hudson, smiling, waved back—but King of the Islands stared harder and harder—in that gesture he seemed to read something ironic, and again he felt that surge of distrust.

"Come on, Ken!" said Hudson briskly.

The shipmates picked up the packages of stores and camping outfit that had been landed from the boat. Each with a packet on his back they turned back to the bush. Watchfully and warily, they tramped up the track to the torrent and the gorge. But if there were blacks in the bush, they did not show themselves; they had not yet forgotten their severe lesson; and the shipmates clambered up at length through the gorge into the golden valley above.

The tropic sun blazed down but the shipmates did not heed the heat. Hudson was eager to get to work, and Ken almost as eager as his shipmate. It was Hudson, who had had some experience of placer-mining, who gave directions for cutting osiers in the bush and plaiting them into a "cradle" for washing out the gold—a rough and rude contrivance, yet with such ready-made appliances fortunes had been washed out of Australian rivers.

Hours and hours of hard labour followed, washing the sand for the golden particles that seemed so rich and numerous to the eye and that, somehow, did not seem either so rich or so numerous in the cradles!

King of the Islands was puzzled—Hudson puzzled at first, grew more and more silent and morose. At length,

while Ken was still wearily but busily at work, the mate ceased and sat down on a boulder, brows knitted.

The mate rose from the boulder at last. He did not resume work at the washing, but moved along the stream, picking up handfuls of the sand here and there, examining it with intent eyes, and throwing it aside again. All the while his brow grew blacker.

He came back to King of the Islands at last.

"Belay it!" he said, very quietly.

"I'll keep on till dark, old fellow!" answered Ken.

"Don't!"

"Why not?"

"How much have you washed out, so far?" asked Hudson bitterly.

"Very little."

"Same here!" Hudson drew a deep, deep breath. "Chuck it, Ken! It would take us a week to wash out the five pounds' worth of gold that that scoundrel salted the sand bed with."

King of the Islands straightened up and looked at his shipmate. Hudson clenched his hands almost convulsively.

"Me, that's washed out gold on placers back home!" he said, between his teeth. "Taken in like a baby! Oh, kick me!"

"What on earth do you mean, Kit?"

Hudson gave a savage laugh.

"I mean that we've been done—diddled—swindled—at least, I have, and I've led you into it like the fool I was! Have you ever heard of a salted mine? Of course you have! And you're hearing now! Salted!" Hudson bit the word between his teeth. "Taken in like a baby, with a salted mine!"

Ken caught his breath.

"Kit, what on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that we've been sold a pup—diddled with a salted mine!" yelled Hudson. "There's no gold on Gulu, and never was—till that villain packed a shotgun with a pinch of gold-dust and salted these sandbanks to take in the first man with money in his pockets who was fool enough to listen to him! That's what we've risked our heads for—that's what Dandy Peter's ready to put bullets through us for—five pounds' worth of gold-dust from a shot-gun! A

salted mine, by gosh! Two sailormen—done by a shark!"

"My sainted Sam!" said King of the Islands.

And he stared at Hudson; while the mate of the Dawn brandished a clenched fist that he would have given a heap of Australian sovereigns to plant in the sallow face of Gustave Dubosq. But that sallow face, with a mocking grin on it, was far away from Gulu and its phantom fortune.

CHAP. 23.—The Greed for Gold.

DANDY PETER PARSONS stood on the deck of his cutter, the Sea-Cat, becalmed in the lagoon at Luta, and scowled at a whaleboat pulling in from the Pacific.

He was very glad to be back on the Sea-Cat, after his adventure on the island of Gulu. But he was anything but pleased with things.

In the dead calm, the lagoon was like a sheet of shining glass. The Sea-Cat did not stir at her cable, and the ketch Dawn, the only other vessel in the lagoon, lay still as a painted ship. On the cutter's deck Kotoo and Nalasu lay fast asleep on tapa mats, and Solulo sat hunched against the rail, chewing betel-nut. There was no breath of wind, and the heat was like an oven. All Luta seemed lifeless in the drowsy heat of the tropic afternoon—the only spot of life was the whaleboat, with four sweating and weary Kanakas at the oars.

As the Dawn's whaleboat came through the reef, Dandy Peter stepped to the side and stood staring at it with knitted brows, and his hand went as if unconsciously to the hip pocket of his duck trousers.

His look was perplexed as he watched the whaleboat. Four Hiva-Oa boys sat at the oars, weary from the long pull. Koko, the boatswain, was steering, and in the stern sat Gustave Dubosq. But King of the Islands and Kit Hudson were not there. The shipmates of the Dawn, it seemed, had stayed on the cannibal island. Or—Dandy Peter's eyes gleamed at the thought—perhaps they had fallen victims to the cannibals.

The whaleboat passed within a few fathoms of the anchored cutter. Dandy Peter hailed it:

"Ahoy! You feller Koko! King of the Islands stop along Gulu?"

Koko remained silent. He had no words to waste on his master's enemy.

"You hear me, ear belong you?" roared Parsons.

"Me hear, sar, ear belong me!" answered the boatswain, speaking at last. "Me no talkee along you, sar, mouth belong me. You feller boy, you washy-washy along ketch."

Parsons gripped the butt of the revolver. He was more than half-inclined to pull it and spray the whaleboat with lead. He was not the man to take "back-chat" from a Kanaka patiently.

"Dubosq, you dog, did you leave King of the Island on Gulu, or have the niggers got him?" he called.

"Cap'n King and Meester Hudson remain on Gulu," Dubosq answered. "I leave zem zere, monsieur. Zey send me back in zis boat to Luta. I am finish viz Gulu, monsieur."

The whaleboat pulled on to the Dawn, and Dandy Peter watched as the crew went on board and Gustave went below with the boatswain.

He would have given much to know how matters stood on Gulu.

The whaleboat had come back with the Frenchman and the Kanakas, leaving the shipmates on the island. Had they remained to wash out gold from the placer pointed out by the man who knew the secret? Had Dubosq sold them the secret and finished, as he had said, with Gulu?

Dandy Peter was tempted to step into the dinghy, pull across to the Dawn, and demand information at the muzzle of the revolver.

He stared savagely across at the ketch. The boatswain and the Frenchman remained below for hardly ten minutes, then he saw them emerge from the companion. The Frenchman was grinning—his whole aspect was one of satisfaction. Whatever had happened on Gulu it had contented Gustave Dubosq. He stepped into the whaleboat, and Tomoo and Kolulo pulled to the beach.

Dandy Peter saw the Frenchman land and walk up the beach to Macfarlane's store. Then the two Kanakas pulled back to the ketch.

But the boat was not taken in. Watching, Dandy Peter saw stores passed down the side and packed in the boat. He realised what that meant. The whaleboat was going back and taking stores to Gulu. That meant that the shipmates were remaining some time on the island—and that could only mean that they were working the gold-mine.

Parsons watched the whaleboat pull away from the Dawn again and slide out to sea, taking the direction of the distant summit of Gulu.

Dandy Peter had no doubt now—there was gold on Gulu, and King of the Islands and Kit Hudson had found it. And that beachcombing French swab could tell him where to lay his finger on it, if he chose—and, once the wind came he could slip out of Luta, pick up a crew of his lawless associates, and fight it out on Gulu, with force on his side.

For several days Dandy Peter had been cursing the calm that chained his cutter to the lagoon. Now he cursed it more savagely than ever. And even as he uttered a string of oaths, there came a whisper of a cool breeze on his face—the first whisper of the coming wind.

"You feller boy, you look alive!" Dandy Peter snarled to his crew.

Solulo spat out a final stream of betel juice, and lunged to his feet. Kotoo and Nalasu rose yawning from their mats. Dandy Peter's eyes were gleaming. Very soon now the Sea-Cat would no longer be a prisoner in the lagoon. With or without the Frenchman as a guide, he was going to strike a blow for the gold of Gulu. He scowled at the beach, half-minded to seek Gustave Dubosq ashore and seize him by main force. Then he gave a sudden start—and stood staring.

From the beach a long canoe shot out into the lagoon. Six brown boys were kneeling at the paddles. Under a canvas awning, stretched to four palm poles to shelter him from the sun, lay Dubosq.

The Frenchman was leaving in a hired canoe. For Gulu—to rejoin the

goldseekers there? Gulu lay northward—the canoe when it had threaded the reef passage, swung to the south. He had said that he was finished with Gulu. This looked like it. But he was not finished, if Dandy Peter could stop him.

The wind was coming.

It ruffled the lagoon—it shook the tall palms—it whispered in the rigging of the Sea-Cat.

Far away, seen across the low reef, the canoe diminished to a speck—it had the sail up now, catching the rising wind. But the wind that was rising on the Pacific was rising on the lagoon—and the Sea-Cat, at long last, was in motion. The cutter glided down to the reef passage, and slid into the open sea. The canoe had vanished, but with his binoculars, Dandy Peter picked it up again—and the cutter, with gathering speed, ran before the wind in pursuit. Sailing three fathoms to the canoe's one the Sea-Cat overhauled the man who knew the secret of the gold.

CHAP. 24.—Rushed by Blacks.

"MY sainted Sam!" repeated King of the Islands.

"Fooled—swindled—taken in like the greenest griffin that ever came out of the islands!" Hudson choked; "and that—that thief gone—out of reach—back at Luta before this—gone from Luta—you bet he won't hang on till we hit Luta again and deal with him!"

King of the Islands could hardly believe it yet.

"You're sure, Kit?" he said at last.

"We've been hoaxed—robbed—and we've let that thief escape. We've sent away the whaleboat and can't get after him!" Hudson panted with rage. "Hoaxed—swindled—tricked—"

"Maybe we'll find him at Luta—"

"D'you think he'll wait for us to get back and wring his rascally neck?" roared Hudson. "He'll pull out of Luta an hour after the whaleboat lands him there—as fast as he can get a craft to take him—"

"But—look here," said Ken, "this beats me. I never believed there was gold on Gulu till we had it proved. I'm

no judge of such things, but you were satisfied—"

"I'm a fool—an idiot—a dolt—a dud!" snorted Hudson. "Why didn't you tell me so instead of listening to my foolery?"

Ken smiled.

"But the signs of gold, old man," he said. "Are you sure—"

"Salt!" said Hudson. "A salted mine I've known salted mines at home, but who'd dream of a salted mine on a Pacific island? It's an easy trick to a cunning swindler like Dubosq—he loaded a shotgun with gold-dust, and planted all this sign for us to see, like the fools we are. There's no gold except what he scattered from a shotgun."

"But look here" argued Ken, "he gave us a lot of evidence at Luta. He had a bag of dust and nuggets—"

"His stock-in-trade!" said Hudson bitterly. "Spreading the snare to catch greenhorns. Ten to one he'll start the same game all over again on some island a hundred miles from Luta. Nine skippers in ten would laugh at the story, but if he waits long enough he'll catch mugs, as he caught us—me, I mean. He never fooled you—you only gave in because I was an obstinate fathead—"

"Then—we're done!" said Ken.

"Dished and done! We've sent him back to Luta; no wonder he was in a hurry to go—it wasn't all fear of the blacks, as he made out. He had to get clear before we spotted the game. And we've sent Koko with orders to hand him five hundred pounds from the strong-box on the Dawn—the price of a gold-mine worth half a fathom of shell-money. All that we've made in the last two trips gone in that thief's pockets." Kit almost foamed. "Too late to stop him—do you fancy he will stop on Luta with our money in his pockets?"

Ken shook his head.

"The wind's come," said Hudson. "But he never waited for the wind. He would run in a canoe—get away as soon as the whaleboat was out of sight. Oh! The mate of the Dawn clenched his fists convulsively. "I don't care for what I've lost I deserve it for being such a fool, but you—"

"No good grousing, old man; if we're done, we're done. But we'll try getting after that Froggy—we may get him yet!" Ken's eyes gleamed. "He's done us, but I'd like to stop him playing the same game again on others. If I get my hands on him—"

"Look out!" yelled Hudson suddenly, and leaped for his rifle.

In the gorge, through which the stream dropped from the high valley, a score of fuzzy heads appeared, and there was a gleaming of spears.

The "salted" mine, the swindle to which they had fallen victims, the escape of the cunning Frenchman with his plunder, vanished at once from the minds of Ken King and his mate. They grasped their rifles and faced the enemy—a swarm of the black cannibals of Gulu.

All through that blazing day they had worked, and watched for an attack. Now it had come.

Up from the rocky gorge, yelling and waving their spears, came the fuzzy-headed fighting-men, and arrows dropped and clattered on the sand round the shipmates.

Bang bang, bang! The rifles roared, pitching bullets into the savage mob as they came on at a fierce rush.

Ken and Kit backed behind a rugged boulder for shelter from whizzing arrows and spears. Over the rock they fired fast, pumping bullets at the yelling savages.

It was well for the shipmates that their shooting was good. There were more than twenty of the blacks, and the shipmates had never been so near the cooking-pots of the cannibals.

For a fearful minute it looked as if the shipmates' fire, deadly as it was, would not stop the rush; that the cannibals would reach close quarters, with hacking knives and thrusting spears. Had they done so, neither of the shipmates would ever have trodden again the deck of the Dawn.

But the hail of bullets did stop the rush, and the savages, yelling and howling, scattered, leaving six or seven dead or wounded sprawling by the stream.

But they did not flee down the gorge. They scattered among the rocks of the

little valley, and arrows whizzed in the air, dropping round the shipmates in their cover.

"Get out of this, Ken!" Kit Hudson panted, as he reloaded his rifle.

Ken nodded.

Had there been gold in Gulu, as they had believed and hoped, the shipmates would have stood their ground till Koko returned with the crew of the Dawn. But it was futile to prolong a desperate fight now.

Rifles in hand, the shipmates made a sudden rush down the sandy bank of the stream to the gorge, where it tumbled down to the bush on the hillside below. The blacks rushed again the moment they saw the white men in retreat.

The shipmates faced round and fired into the thick of them—and again the blacks broke howling before the fire. Then, splashing in the falling water, they clambered down the gorge and reached the path in the bush below. Howls and yells told that the cannibals were in pursuit; but, once in the bush path the shipmates ran, and they emerged, sweating and panting, from the high, thick bush on the beach.

In the red of the sunset a sail danced on the sea to the south—the sail of a whaleboat. The wind had come—and with the wind came the Dawn's whaleboat, tacking down to Gulu.

From the bush came savage yells, and here and there a fierce face glared out—but the blacks did not venture to follow into the open. King of the Islands and his mate leaned on their rifles, watching the whaleboat as it ran in.

CHAP. 25.—Too Late!

KOKO'S brown face expressed relief and satisfaction as he leaped ashore from the whaleboat. He had been reluctant to leave his white masters, and he was delighted to find them safe.

"This feller plenty too much glad, sar!" said the boatswain. "Altogether too much glad, see head belong white master stop along shoulder belong white master belong me."

Ken nodded and smiled. The coming of the wind, so long waited for, had brought the whaleboat back earlier

than he could have hoped. The whaleboat had had to tack to get back, for the wind came out of the north-west; but it was quicker work than pulling weary sea miles with the oars. Ken had a faint hope that the rascally swindler, Dubosq, might yet be caught before he could pull clear of Luta. The whaleboat was back, well before sunset, and the wind was favourable for Luta—it would be a swift run down to the island where he had left his ketch. If there was the faintest chance of getting hold of the swindler before he escaped King of the Islands was going to make the most of it.

"All aboard!" he rapped; and the crew, who had been about to land, stood fast in the whaleboat.

"White master no stop along Gulu?" asked Koko in astonishment. He had cause to be astonished, as he had brought stores for a long camping on the black island, and had supposed that the stay there would last many days, if not weeks.

"No!" answered Ken briefly.

He stepped into the whaleboat, followed by Hudson and the amazed Koko. There was a howling from the bush, and a swarm of blacks appeared on the beach.

Hudson grasped his rifle, but he dropped the butt again with a shrug of the shoulders. The shipmates were done with Gulu, and done with its savage inhabitants.

"That hound!" muttered Hudson. "We might have gone to the cooking-pots. Little enough he cared. Oh, if we're in time to get him!"

"We've got the wind!" said Ken.

"And he's got it, too!" Hudson grunted. He turned to Koko as the sail picked up the wind and they ran out to sea: "You feller Koko, feller Flessman stop along Luta, you savvy?"

"Yessar," answered Koko. "Feller Flessman go along beach, along Luta, takee feller gold-money along bag belong him all samee white master tell this feller, sar."

Hudson breathed hard and deep. Koko had carried out his instructions. Five hundred pounds had been handed over to Gustave Dubosq—the price of the gold-mine which had looked worth thousands, and was worth nothing. If

the Frenchman was still on Luta with the money in his pockets he would not keep it long; he would exchange it for the soundest thrashing that a rascally swindler had ever received. But it was not likely.

"You no see feller Flessman go along sea, eye belong you?" asked Hudson.

"No, sar," answered Koko in surprise. "He go along beach, sar."

"He would wait till the whaleboat was clear of Luta, and then pull out," said Ken. "He wouldn't risk Koko spotting the course he steered. He doesn't need telling that we shall get after him if we can."

The whaleboat was making great way. Fast as it flew, it was slow to Hudson's fierce impatience.

As they drew nearer to Luta the shipmates scanned the sea, but there was no craft to be seen. They ran, at long last, in at the reef passage into the lagoon, and Hudson gave a sharp exclamation:

"Parsons has pulled out!"

There was only one vessel in the lagoon—the Dawn, with Danny, the cooky boy's, brown face grinning over the rail. The Sea-Cat was gone from her anchorage, and evidently had been gone some time, as she had not been in sight of the open sea.

"Aye, aye, he's gone!" said King of the Islands. He laughed. "If Dandy Peter were still here, we'd give him the news—he would be welcome to hunt for the Gulu gold as long as he liked."

"The swab!" growled Hudson. "It was because he was after Dubosq and his lying secret that I was so sure——"

"And I reckon he was sure because we were after it," said Ken. "We've helped to make fools of one another. But he seems to have chucked it and gone as soon as he got the wind."

"As we should have done, if I'd had the sense of a bunny rabbit!" muttered Hudson.

Passing the Dawn's anchorage, and leaving Danny staring, the whaleboat ran on to the beach. King of the Islands and his mate jumped ashore. There were brown natives on the beach under the nodding palms, but no sign of the swindler who had sold

them the salted gold-mine. They ran up the beach to the trader's store, where old Macfarlane was sitting on the molasses barrel at his doorway. The old trader's face wrinkled into a grin as he saw them.

"Ye've made Gulu, Cap'n King!" he chuckled. "Man I'll give ye a stick of tobacco for all the gold ye've found there."

"Where's Dubosq?" rapped Hudson. Macfarlane waved his pipe to the Pacific, creaming on the reef.

"Gone!" said Hudson between his teeth.

"Aye," answered the old trader. "Months he lived in Luta, waiting for a mug to listen to his tale. Looks to me as if he found one—or two." He chuckled. "Man, I've seen him board craft after craft to tell his tale, but he never had any luck—till now!"

"He's gone!" repeated Hudson.

"Aye, he's gone!" answered Macfarlane. "He hired Popololuto and his canoe crew for a run among the islands. He had money to spend, I reckon, and he was pressed for time. They went out under paddles before the calm broke. But the wind came soon after, and it's a sailing canoe. If you want Dubosq you've all the Pacific to choose from."

"He lost no time!" said Ken bitterly.

"But what?" went on the old trader curiously.

But the shipmates stayed no longer. They cut down the beach to the boat, leaving Macfarlane staring, and grinning.

"There's a chance, Kit," said King of the Islands, as the whaleboat shot across the lagoon to the Dawn.

"You think so? He's been gone for hours, and we can't even guess the course he steered!"

"If he'd had to keep under paddles we should be guessing. But the wind came soon after he pulled out, from what old Mac says, and a man in haste would run before the wind. His object is to get as far away from Luta as he can in the shortest possible time. Ten to one he's running south."

"Ten to one!" said Hudson. "It's a chance—all we've got, anyhow. A

chance in a thousand of picking him up at sea, Ken."

"He's not getting away, Kit, if there's a ghost of a chance of laying him by the heels. If it's only the ghost of a chance, we're making the most of it."

No more was said—the shipmates were resolved. The whaleboat swung up to the davits, the hook came up from the coral, and the Dawn slipped out to sea. The sun dipped to the Pacific, and in the tropic dusk the ketch ran south before a booming wind. Far and wide rolled the vast Pacific, and seeking the fleeing canoe was like seeking a needle in a haystack—a small needle in a big haystack. But there was, at least, a ghost of a chance—and to that the shipmates pinned their hope.

CHAP. 26.—Dandy Peter's Prisoner.

DANDY PETER grinned as the startled face of the Frenchman stared back from under the awning in the canoe. Of what had passed on Gulu, Parsons knew nothing; and he wondered, without guessing, what might be in the Frenchman's motive for pulling out of Luta in a native canoe, after staying for months on the island. Whatever his motive was, he was not getting away from Dandy Peter. The canoe, under its mat sail, was swift—but the tall cutter was thrice as swift. Dubosq had had a long start; but once Dandy Peter had picked him up on the sea with the binoculars, he had no chance. Swiftly, the Sea-Cat swooped after the escaping Frenchman—for whom there was no escape.

The canoe's crew stared back in wonder, seeing that the cutter was in chase, but not understanding why. Dandy Peter, watching, could see the Frenchman gesticulating to them; screaming at them, though the wind carried away his words. He saw the six natives dip their paddles again, labouring to help the sail with swift paddling. Kneeling to the labour, they paddled incessantly, while the Frenchman stared back, with black gleaming eyes of rage and fear.

But the flight was futile. Gustave, perhaps, hoped to spin it out for the

fall of night to save him. But the sunset was still red on the sea when the cutter ran him down, and the canoe, with its long outrigger, rocked in the wash of the Sea-Cat.

Dandy Peter leaned over the rail, and the revolver in his hand glimmered in the sun.

"You feller, Luta boy, you stand by!" he roared. "You hear me, ear belong you? You wantee this white feller shootee along gun belong him?"

Popoluloto and his dusky crew stared in alarm—but the Frenchman gesticulated and yelled, and they paddled on. The revolver cracked, the reckless ruffian on the cutter pitching a bullet right into the canoe, regardless of the damage it might have done.

There was a wild howl from Popoluloto as the bullet gashed along his bare brown leg. He howled, and made frantic signs of submission. The paddles were drawn in at once, and the mat sail dropped, Dubosq spitting like a cat with rage and fear as the Luta boys drew in under the cutter's quarter. Solulo threw a rope, and the canoe crew held on, eyeing the desperado of Lukwe in terror.

"Get aboard, Dubosq!" rapped Dandy Peter. He aimed the revolver at the fallow, black-bearded face.

"Mais, jamais!" panted Dubosq. "Pourquoi, donc? Jamais—" He broke off with a terrified yell as Parsons fired again, cutting a lock of greasy black hair from his head.

"Get aboard, you scum!" snarled Dandy Peter. Dubosq, in rage and terror, stared up at him from the canoe. "You scum!" repeated the sea-lawyer. "I made you a fair offer—I'd have taken up the proposition—you chose to hand it to King of the Islands. I reckon you'll have no choice now, Gustave Dubosq."

"Mon Dieu! But you are one fool!" panted Dubosq.

"Not fool enough to let King of the Islands beat me!" grinned Dandy Peter. "Let them wash out the gold on Gulu—for me. Do you savvy, you scum? In a couple of days I shall have six men at my back, and you will guide me to the gold-mine on Gulu—then let them put up a fight if they

like, and I'll leave what's left of them to the niggers. Get aboard!"

Gustave's one desire was to put long sea miles between him and the swindled shipmates before they began hunting for him. But he was caught in his own trickery. They had believed him—and Parsons believed the tale chiefly because they had believed it—and, believing it, he had run the Frenchman down to seize him. The bare possibility of being brought into contact again with King of the Islands and Kit Hudson, after they had discovered the cheat, sent cold chills to his rascally heart.

"Fool!" he snarled. "Listen to me. Zere is no gold on Gulu—comprenez? It is a tale—une histoire—histoire faite a plaisir—ze tale zat I tell—"

"Get aboard!"

"Mais, je vous dis—I tell you," yelled Dubosq. "zere is no gold on Gulu, and already King of ze Islands he find zat zere is no gold!"

Dandy Peter laughed. It was the truth that the rascal was telling now, to save his liberty, and pursue his flight. Had the sea-lawyer believed him, no doubt he would have allowed Dubosq to go, and laughed at the trick that had been played on his old enemy. But he did not believe a word of it. It seemed to him a clumsy lie which the Frenchman had invented on the spur of the moment in the hope of escaping his clutches.

"Get aboard, you scum!"

"Mais, but I tell you—"

Crack! rang the revolver. Gustave gave a wild howl and clapped his hand to an ear, from which a strip of skin had been whipped by the bullet.

"Do you want the next through your carcase, Dubosq?" snarled Dandy Peter, glaring down at the Frenchman. "By gosh, I'll riddle you if you don't get aboard!"

That was enough for Gustave. Spluttering with rage and terror, he clambered on the cutter and stumbled on her deck.

"But I tell you—" he howled.

"Pack it up!" said Dandy Peter.

He snapped an order to his crew, and the Sea-Cat was put before the wind again. The canoe dropped astern.

Popoloto and his crew had lost their passenger and the promised payment for the trip, a matter to which the Lukwe skipper gave not a single thought. They stared after the cutter, then swung round the canoe, to paddle back to Luta.

Gustave Dubosq's sallow face was haggard as the Luta canoe dropped from his sight. He was a prisoner, in the hands of the most lawless desperado in the South Seas, with five hundred pounds in the bag buckled on his belt. He had tricked King of the Islands and his mate, robbed them of almost all they had—and now his trickery had, as it were, come home to roost. His eyes burned at the grinning face of the sea-lawyer.

"No gold on Gulu!" said Dandy Peter banteringly. He laughed. "I reckon you'd better guess again, Dubosq. I've got a sting-ray tail on board—look out for it, if you fail me when I make Gulu!"

The Frenchman made no answer; and Dandy Peter laughed again as the Sea-Cat ran on under the falling dusk on the Pacific.

CHAP. 27.—Ken Gets the News.

THE full moon sailed high over the Pacific, and the sea rolled like a rippling sheet of silver. King of the Islands, standing by Koko at the wheel of the Dawn, swept the sea with searching glances, every now and then lifting the binoculars to his eyes.

Kit moved restlessly about the deck. He had spoken hardly a word since the ketch had pulled out of Luta in the last glimmer of sunset. Seldom had he looked so black and bitter, seldom had his mood been so fiercely vengeful. It was past eight bells, but neither of the shipmates was thinking of a watch below. Neither were any of the Hiva-Oa crew off duty—not a man had sought his sleeping-mat. Tomoo & Co. watched the sea almost as keenly as their skipper—even Danny, the lazy cooky-boy, was not snoring in his galley. Every eye on the Dawn scanned the vast rollers that glistened and glimmered in the streaming light of the moon.

Ken could not even be sure of the

course steered by the fugitive rascal who had run from Luta, many hours ahead of the pursuing ketch. He reckoned that a man in flight, in a sailing-canoe, would run before the wind; and if that guess was correct, Gustave Dubosq had sailed southward from Luta; and the Dawn was following him. But with no guide beyond that uncertain clue, Ken had to realise how little chance he had of ever seeing again the rogue who had robbed him and his shipmate of five hundred pounds.

"My fault, Ken," said Kit Hudson, breaking a long silence. "Taken in like a greenhorn fresh to the islands. Gold on Gulu—the maddest yarn ever spun by a beachcomber. Five hundred pounds for a salted mine! To think that we risked our heads on Gulu—that we might have gone to the cooking-pots—while that swab cleared off with what he had robbed us of. Fools—fools!"

"We weren't the only fools, Kit. Dandy Peter was after the gold. He must have believed it."

"Only because we did," growled Hudson. "One fool makes many. He fancied we were on to a good thing. He would have laughed at the tale if Dubosq had tried to pull his leg as he pulled ours. A chance of doing us an ill-turn was enough for Peter Parsons. If—"

"Feller canoe stop along sea, sar," said Koko.

"What?"

Hudson bounded to the rail. Koko released one hand from the wheel and pointed. Far away, a speck on the shining Pacific, was the object that had caught the keen eyes of the Kanaka boatswain—far away to the south on the port bow.

"A canoe?" said Hudson doubtfully.

His eyes were keen enough; but it was the merest speck to him, in the glimmering moonlight.

"Yessar," said Koko confidently. "Feller canoe, sar."

Hudson gritted his teeth. A canoe paddling up to Luta against the wind could hardly be Dubosq's.

"No use to us," grunted Hudson. "We may sight a dozen canoes in these waters."

"And any one of them may have sighted Dubosq, if he's running south," said Ken. "We may pick up news of him."

The canoe came more and more clearly into sight. They made out the brown-skinned crew kneeling to the paddles.

"That feller canoe belong Luta, sar," said Koko. "Me savvy too much that feller Popololuto."

"Popololuto!" exclaimed Hudson. "Popololuto's sailing-canoe that Dubosq ran in, Ken. The villain can't be going back to Luta. He knows that we've found out the swindle before this. That can't be Popololuto's canoe."

"Me see um, eye belong me," said Koko. "That feller Popololuto stop along that feller canoe, sar."

The shipmate watched in amazed silence. If Koko was right, this was the canoe in which Gustave had fled from Luta. He could not be returning to meet there the shipmates whom he had deluded and robbed. Moreover, there was no sign of a white man in the canoe. Six natives were at the paddles—they were all the crew. If that was the canoe in which the swindler had fled, where was Dubosq?

But that Koko's keen eyes had made no mistake was proved before long. Brown faces in the canoe were turned towards the Dawn, and among them they recognised the face of Popololuto, whom both knew by sight. It was Dubosq's canoe.

"They've landed him, then," said Hudson.

"I can't make it out," said Ken, his brows wrinkled. "Dubosq would never go ashore till he was a safe distance from Luta. He must know that we should hunt for him. He may have changed into some other craft. But we'll get the truth from those Luta boys, whatever it is."

The ketch ran down to the canoe. Ken signalled to the crew, who paddled alongside willingly enough.

Popololuto stood in the canoe, and held on to a rope, looking up at King of the Islands. Ken leaned over the rail.

"You feller Popololuto, what name

feller Flessman no stop along canoe belong you?" he asked.

"Feller Flessman no stop, sar, along whitee feller takee that feller Flessman along ship belong him," answered Popololuto. "Him shootee along gun, sar, makee this feller Luta boy plenty too much fright, my word!"

This meant that some white skipper had taken the Frenchman by force from the canoe. It was utterly unexpected news to the shipmates.

"You savvy that white feller? You savvy ship belong him?" asked Ken.

"Yessar, savvy plenty too much. That white fellow, Cap'n Parsons, sar—ship belong him Sea-Cat."

"Dandy Peter!" yelled Hudson. "We found that Parsons had pulled out of Luta when we got back from Gulu. Don't you get it, Ken? Dandy Peter's still after the gold—and he's got Dubosq a prisoner on his cutter."

"That feller Flessman no likee go along ship belong Cap'n Parsons," said Popololuto. "Cap'n Parsons shoot gun belong him, sar, that feller Flessman too much fright. Him stop along Sea-Cat, sar."

King of the Islands laughed. He could not help it. The shipmates were in fierce pursuit of Gustave Dubosq, because he had swindled them with a "salted" gold-mine, Dandy Peter had run him down and seized him, in the belief that that gold-mine was a reality. The sea-lawyer of Lukwe was still on the track of a phantom fortune:

"We'll get him now!" said Hudson. "By gum, we'll get him! We've got to overhaul the Sea-Cat, Ken. And I reckon Dandy Peter will be willing to hand over Dubosq when we tell him how much the gold is worth." And Hudson laughed, too.

King of the Islands rapped out a few questions to the canoe crew. But all that Popololuto could tell him was that the Sea-Cat had run on before the wind, bearing south, when he had lost sight of her. That looked as if Dandy Peter was making his home-port of Lukwe. Anyway, it gave the shipmates his bearings.

The canoe cast off, and the Dawn surged on southward under the booming wind.

CHAP. 28.—In Sight of Death.

"STRONG-FELLER wind, my word!" murmured Koko; and he hunched himself over the wheel, his head bent, his mop of dark hair blowing out.

Ken King held on to a stay, and stared through the murk.

It was sunset—if the sun could have been seen. But between the tossing, pitching ketch, and the sunset, black battalions of clouds had mustered. An hour ago bright sunshine had been streaming from a blue sky; the Pacific only ruffled by a breeze. Now all was deeply dusky, and the wind was blowing great guns.

With plenty of sea-room, he would not have feared the Pacific at its wildest. But his brows were knitted with an anxious pucker as the ketch drove through the heaving waters. Under the inky-black clouds that almost touched the sea stretched the long, low sandbank that was called the Whale's Back. How near, he did not know, and he could see nothing but wave-crests that tossed and foamed in the night-like gloom.

The Hiva-Oa crew were all on deck—holding on. The Dawn pitched almost like a cork on the wild sea, and the most active Kanaka could not have crossed the deck without a hold. Kit loomed through the gloom, joining his shipmate. He put his head close to shout, in the roar of the wind:

"We'll clear it, Ken!"

"Aye, aye, I reckon we'll clear it. But —" The wind carried away the rest of his words.

"We owe this to that swab Dubosq," said Hudson.

From overhead came a streaming blaze of lightning. It was not a flash—it was more like the heavens opening in fire. There was a startled cry from the Kanakas, and even Koko, at the wheel, shut his eyes for a second. Kit Hudson involuntarily clapped his hands over his eyes as that glare of livid light shot over the sea—dazzling, blinding in its unearthly brightness.

But King of the Islands' eyes were steady in the blaze of blinding light. For a second all was light as at noon-day. In that second, he saw what

might have curdled a sailorman's blood—the tossing of mad surf on a half-hidden sandbank, a patch of trees and bushes on the single spot that rose to a height above the waters, bending and cracking in the wind, and holding on to a bending tree, a human form—a man who clung there to save himself from being blown into the wild waters. Like a swift picture on the screen he saw it, taking in every detail in that blinding blaze of light.

Then, as the darkness shut down again, and the thunder rolled as if the universe were shaking to fragments, King of the Islands plunged headlong at the wheel, where Koko stood, half-dazed. It was useless to speak in the roar of the wind. He grasped the spokes, and shoved with every ounce of his strength, knowing that if the ketch refused to answer to her helm, all was lost—the ship, and every life on board!

For a second—a century!—he doubted, and then he knew. He could see nothing in the darkness; hear nothing but the roar of the wind, the thunder of the sea. But he knew that the ketch had swung true to her rudder, otherwise her timbers would have been grinding in the surf.

Koko's brown face and startled, rolling black eyes dawned on him from the darkness.

"What name?" panted the boat-swain.

"Keep her steady!"

The Dawn raced on. She had cleared the Whale's Back by the skin of her teeth. She rushed on before the wild wind; but Ken's heart was light now. The sandbank was astern, and there was open sea for a hundred miles.

"Rot, old man!" grunted Kit Hudson.

"I tell you I saw him, Kit!"

"Fancy!" said the mate of the Dawn. "A ghost!"

Ken shook his head. He knew that it was not fancy, or a ghost. He could still see, in the light of morning, that wild scene that had been disclosed to his eyes by the lightning blaze—the

roaring surf on the sandbank, the bending trees, the clinging figure of the castaway. Only his eyes had seen it, but there was no doubt.

It was morning—a wild morning. The hurricane had blown itself out, and the Dawn had ridden through safe and sound. But there was still a heavy swell on the sea, and the wind still came strong and sharp, blowing hard out of the east. Many a long sea-mile had the ketch run before the wind, and the deadly sandbank was left far astern. Not till the dawn came, and the worst of it was over, did Ken mention what he had seen on the Whale's Back; and he found his mate incredulous. Hudson had seen nothing of it, the crew had seen nothing of it—even Koko had seen nothing of the castaway on the sandbank. But King of the Islands knew what he had seen.

Danny, the cooky-boy, came staggering aft with hot coffee from the galley. Lompo had relieved the boatswain at the wheel; Koko, extended on a sleeping mat on the rocking deck, was asleep. Tomoo was on duty; Kolulo and Lufu, like the boatswain, slept. The shipmates were weary and worn, but neither was thinking, for the moment, of a watch below. They argued as they drank hot coffee.

"A man on the Whale's Back!" said Hudson. "Rot, I tell you!"

"A shipwrecked man, Kit! Many a craft has gone to pieces on the Whale's Back! We came near enough to it last night."

"Aye, aye, but—"

"We can't leave him to it, Kit!" said King of the Islands quietly. "I know what you're thinking, old man, but we can't."

Hudson gave a grunt and stared at the rolling sea, the windy sky. He was as kindhearted a fellow as ever sailed the blue waters, and he would have gone far to help a sailorman in distress. But he did not believe that there was a castaway on the Whale's Back. He believed that Ken's eyes had deceived him in that blinding glare of lightning. Easy enough, at such a moment, to mistake one object for another.

"Now, talk sense, old man!" said

Hudson. "Getting back to that sandbank means beating against the wind; and you know better than I do what wind-jamming in the teeth of the wind is like. Throwing away time you know we can't spare."

"I know. But—"

"Oh, let a fellow speak!" said Hudson gruffly. "Ten to one—a hundred to one—you never saw what you fancied you saw. A bending palm, a bunch of hibiscus—any old thing—"

"It was a man—"

"Rot!" said Hudson. "A thousand to one it was nothing of the sort! Look how we stand, I tell you, Ken! We're more than a week behind time, overdue everywhere. Thanks to Dubosq, we've lost all we've made this trip, and we've got to make it up again; and we've not got hours to waste, let alone days."

"I know! But—"

"Getting back to the sandbank won't be child's play. Even the Dawn can't sail in the wind's eye," said Hudson irritably. "We've got a wind to carry us on our business, and you want to beat against it, because you fancy that a palm bending in the wind was a castaway. Wash it out!"

Ken smiled faintly.

"It was not fancy, Kit! There's a man on the Whale's Back—a shipwrecked man!"

"How do you know that?" grunted Hudson. "If a craft went down on that bank in rough weather, precious little chance of a man getting away alive. Not a dog's chance! If you really saw a man on that bank, Ken, it was more likely a marooned man than a shipwrecked man. Some swab marooned by his skipper. Are we going to throw away time and trade to pick up some waster who has fallen out with his skipper?"

Ken was silent.

He had to admit that Hudson was right there. A castaway on the Whale's Back was much more likely to be marooned than shipwrecked. It was little likely that there would be a survivor from any craft that had piled up on that deadly bank. Yet it was possible. Ken's mind was haunted by the picture of that desolate figure

clinging to the bending tree. Marooned man or shipwrecked sailor, he felt that he could not leave him to it. But Kit was right, all the same; the shipmates had had cruel luck.

"Wash it out, and get about our business, Ken," urged the mate.

Ken shook his head slowly.

Hudson drew a deep breath.

"Well, you're skipper!" he said curtly. "We've lost a week; let's lose another, and when they ask us, at a dozen islands, why we're late on dates, we can tell them that we went mooning round for an imaginary man on a sandbank."

Ken laughed.

"Leave it at that, then, Kit," he said. "You'll be as glad as I when we make the Whale's Back and take that poor wretch off."

"When!" grunted Hudson.

A dreary day followed. Hudson said no more on the subject; but his thoughts were easy to read, and that long and dreary day of beating against contrary winds made Ken wonder whether, after all, he was not the fool that his shipmate believed him to be. He knew, though Hudson did not, that there was a man on the Whale's Back. But he knew, too, that it was ten to one that it was some malefactor marooned for bad conduct. All the chances were against the man being a survivor from a shipwreck. Nevertheless, there was a chance that that was what he was; and the thought of a shipwrecked man on that lonely and desolate spot, watching and watching for the sail that never came, was too much for King of the Islands. He was in no position to face further losses but at any cost of time and trade he had his duty as a skipper and a sailorman to do, and he was going to do it.

Tacking and wearing, wearing and tacking drew the Dawn slowly—all too slowly—on her way, and all the while that gusting wind would have borne them about their own business but for the memory of that desolate, clinging figure.

Wind-jamming, in contrary winds, was hard and weary work. Wet decks,

the incessant swing of the boom, constant loss of way that had been slowly and painfully won, combined in a general effect of dismal dreariness. Several times Ken wondered whether he would ever make the Whale's Back at all unless the wind changed—and it showed no sign of changing. The sea was going down, sunshine streamed through the clouds. Fair weather was returning, but it brought little comfort to the weary crew of the Dawn. Not till the sun was dipping to the western sea did the shipmates sight the long, low bank, that looked, in the distance, like a stranded whale.

And then the task was not done. The sea had calmed, but there was no safety near the Whale's Back, from which sunken sands ran far under the waves. The Dawn hove-to at a safe distance, and the whaleboat was lowered. King of the Islands stepped into it, Hudson remaining in charge of the ketch. He gave his shipmate a sarcastic grin as the Kanakas pushed off.

"I don't see your man on the Whale's Back, Ken!" he said. "Keeping out of sight no doubt, now there's a craft in the offing! Get back, before we drift aground, old man!"

Ken, in silence, steered for the bank.

CHAP. 29.—Found!

"NO feller stop, sar!" murmured Koko, as the boat pulled towards the long, low bank.

All the extent of the Whale's Back, except in one spot, was open to the eye—only in that one spot, where the little hillock rose, and the straggle of stunted trees and bushes grew, was there a patch of cover. It was there that Ken had seen the clinging figure, or fancied that he had. But he almost wondered now whether it had been, after all, fancy. Where was the castaway, if he was there?

Blown from his hold, perhaps, by the roaring wind—drowned while the ketch was still running before the storm? Likely enough—and if so, that weary day of fighting against the wind had gone for nothing. Or had he, after all, taken some bush bending before the wind for a clinging man—and was the

whole thing fancy? If a castaway was there, he was not to be seen, and surely a castaway would have been watching for a sail—and for an hour past, at least, the Dawn had been in sight as she came beating wearily down to the bank. Now she lay in full view on the rolling waters, while the whaleboat pulled to the bank. Yet there was no sign.

The whaleboat bumped on the sand. It was piled up in stacks and ridges by the wild waves, and thick among the straggling bushes on the knoll. Ken stepped ashore. Now that he was there, he was going to make sure. Likely enough a famished and exhausted man was lying unseen, in despair, not even lifting his weary head to watch the sea with hopeless eyes. He was going to know.

He tramped through the straggle of torn bush and heaped sand on the knoll, and suddenly he sighted a figure that lay prone in a hollow of the sand—sleeping or senseless, or sunk hopelessly in a lethargy of despair.

Ken caught his breath.

He had been right. There was a man on the Whale's Back—and here he was! Looking at the crumpled figure, King of the Islands was deeply glad that he had had his own way and returned to save him. With deep compassion in his face, he stepped towards the prone figure.

The man's face was unseen; but it seemed to Ken, as he bent over him, that there was something vaguely familiar about him. He touched the recumbent form on the shoulder.

"Ahoj, shipmate!" he called.

The man looked as if he were unconscious. But at the touch, the voice, he started, and cried out, leaping to his feet. Wild eyes in a haggard face stared at King of the Islands.

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" His voice came cracked, and he stared at the boy trader with unbelieving eyes.

King of the Islands' eyes, too, were unbelieving as he stared at the man he had come to save. Not a shipwrecked seaman, not some fore-castle rowdy marooned by his skipper—but the beachcomber of Luta; the swindling rascal who had robbed King of the

Islands and his shipmate. In utter wonder, the boy trader stared at the haggard face of Gustave Dubosq.

"You!" he uttered at last.

"That bad feller Flessman!" gasped Koko.

Dubosq did not seem to recognise the boy trader for the moment. He stared at him, at the boat, and the Kanakas, and at the Dawn, hove-to in the offing. Then his haggard eyes came back to Ken's stern face. Then he knew him, and he shrank away from the man he had swindled.

"Vous!" he said, in a hollow voice.

"Mon Dieu! King of ze Islands—sauvez-moi, sauvez-moi—je suis au desespoir."

He clasped his hands in frantic appeal. For hours he had lain there, sunk in despair, never dreaming that while he lay a ship was bearing down on the sandbank—never hearing the dash of the oars as the whaleboat came, or the footsteps on the sand. Suddenly, like the shifting visions of a dream, he found himself in the presence of men, and saw the ship he had never dreamed of seeing—but the promise of rescue was dashed away by the recognition of the man he had wronged.

"You!" repeated King of the Islands. "You dog! You!"

"Moi!" groaned Gustave Dubosq, sinking on his knees. "Sauvez-moi—leave me not to die!"

"How did you get here? We picked up your canoe, going back to Luta, and the Luta boys told us you had been taken on the Sea-Cat."

"Vrai—vrai!" muttered Dubosq.

In a flash, King of the Islands comprehended.

"My sainted Sam! Did Peter Parsons maroon you here, Dubosq?"

"Oui, oui!" moaned Gustave.

"But why?" But again, in a flash, the boy trader understood. Dubosq had had five hundred pounds on him when he was taken on the Sea-Cat.

"On m'a vole!" breathed Dubosq. "Dandy Peter, he take all, and he leave me here."

"The swab!" Ken gritted his teeth.

He knew it all now. Ken's eyes blazed, and the wretched castaway shrank from him.

"Sauvez-moi!" he moaned. "Mon-sieur, you will not leave me? Mon Dieu! You will not leave me here?"

"Get into the boat!" snapped Ken. "If you'd robbed me down to the last shilling, I would not leave you here. Get in the boat!"

Dubosq looked at him incredulously for a moment, then ran for the boat. King of the Islands and Koko followed him. The boat's crew stared curiously at the panting man. He crouched down as King of the Islands took his place in the whaleboat, in terror that the boy trader might change his mind and leave him where Peter Parsons had left him. But Ken, with all his loathing for the cringing rascal, did not think of that for a moment.

Dubosq gave a cry of relief as the Kanakas pushed off from the sandbank and pulled back to the Dawn, where Kit Hudson stared over the side.

The expression on Hudson's face made Ken smile faintly as he looked up. Hudson had doubted, more than doubted, whether there was a castaway on the Whale's Back, but he could doubt no longer as he stared at the crouching figure in the whaleboat.

"Suffering cats!" said Hudson, as Ken swung himself on board. "You win, old man! Who—"

"Dubosq!" said Ken.

"By gum! Kit Hudson's eyes glittered, and his hands clenched. But when Koko helped the wretched man on the ketch, the mate of the Dawn unclenched his hands. Bitter, vengeful anger gave place to contemptuous compassion. He looked at Ken questioningly.

"That scoundrel Parsons marooned him on the sandbank!

Hudson drew a deep, deep breath.

"Ken, old man, kick me round the deck!" he said. "Suffering cats! I never believed there was a man on the Whale's Back—and if I had, I'd never have dreamed that it was that thief, Ken, if you hadn't had your way, and put back for him—"

"Lucky we did!" said King of the Islands. "We're making Lukwe now, Kit. We're going to call on Peter Parsons in his home port and collect five hundred pounds from him—at the

end of a gun, if necessary. My sainted Sam! I want to see Peter Parsons!"

"And I!" said Hudson, between his teeth. "Ken, old chap, you let time and trade go to pot to beat back here and pick up a shipwrecked man—and it's put us on the track of all we've lost. And I— Ken, next time I begin arguing, heave a capstan bar at my head!"

King of the Islands laughed.

"I'll keep the capstan bar for Dandy Peter!" he said.

CHAP. 30.—Parsons Pays Up.

DANDY PETER PARSONS stretched his lithe figure in the deep Madeira chair in the veranda of his bungalow at Lukwe and blew out a little cloud of smoke from his cigarette. On a table at his elbow was a long glass, filled by his house-boy. Dandy Peter was in a mood of sardonic satisfaction. He was back in his home port, back from the most profitable trip he had ever made. Seldom had he sailed into the lagoon at Lukwe with five hundred pounds in his pockets; and the fact that the five hundred did not belong to him mattered not a whit. Indeed, it gave an added zest to his satisfaction to reflect that it belonged to his old enemy, King of the Islands, and his mate.

As he sat at his ease, he glanced at the lagoon. The Dawn had just pulled in, and it amused him to glance at the ketch and to think of the shipmates cursing their luck.

He turned his head at a footstep on the palm-wood steps, and started a little. King of the Islands and Kit Hudson stepped on to the veranda. Following them came Koko, a thick lawyer-cane under his arm and a lurking grin on his brown face. There was another, that he could hear; but the other did not come up—he remained invisible below the veranda.

Dandy Peter sat up. He sensed danger at once. Yet, as he told himself, the shipmates could know nothing, and could suspect nothing.

"I saw your packet come in, King of the Islands," he drawled. "I reckoned I'd look you out and ask you if you had any news of the Frenchman."

Ken looked at him.

"We've come to tell you the news!" he answered.

"That's good of you," said Parsons. "I reckon he'll want some looking for, with your five hundred pounds in his pockets." He grinned. "Have you come to ask me whether I had him headed up in a cask on my cutter, all the time?"

"No!" said Ken. "But we know that he was on your cutter, Parsons. And we know that you marooned him, after taking over the five hundred pounds."

Dandy Peter's eyes narrowed.

"Dreaming?" he asked.

"Are you going to deny it?" asked Kit Hudson.

"Just a few!" laughed Parsons. "You're dreaming!"

"If you took over the money from that thief, intending to hand it to the owners, here we are!" said King of the Islands.

Parsons laughed again.

"Can I offer you a drink?" he asked.

"I reckon I've no more to offer."

"You deny it, then?" asked Ken.

"Aye, aye! Go back to your bunk and dream again."

"Show yourself, Dubosq!" called out King of the Islands. And the man below the veranda ran up the steps.

Dandy Peter leaped from the Madeira chair. The Frenchman glared at him, hate in his eyes.

A spectre from the sea could not have startled Parsons more. This was the man he had robbed of his loot and left on the solitary sandbank. Had it been his ghost, Dandy Peter could not have gazed at him with more amazement and dismay.

"Dubosq!" he stammered. "By hokey!"

"Scelerat!" snarled the Frenchman. "Pirate — zief — miserable — give back what you take!"

There was a desperate glitter in Dandy Peter's eyes. His hand shot to his hip. He was not the man to give up his plunder without a fight.

But even as the revolver whipped up from his hip, Hudson sprang forward, and his clenched fist lashed out. The dapper sea-lawyer went over backwards as if he had been shot. The shipmates had been watching for just such a

move, and they were ready for it. King of the Islands tore away the revolver and tossed it over the rail of the veranda.

"Now you cur!" said the boy trader. "You've got five hundred pounds of ours, Dandy Peter, and hand it over."

The sea-lawyer struggled up, yelling with rage. But even as he gained his feet, Koko, at a sign from his master, grasped him. The dandy struggled and screamed with fury, but the gigantic Kanaka held him like an infant.

Dandy Peter shot a wild glance round. He had desperate associates who would have stood by him in a lawless affray. But there was no help at hand. And his bones were almost cracking in the iron grip of Koko. With a bitter curse, he groped for the leather bag that was buckled to the back of his belt, and with another curse, flung it at the feet of King of the Islands.

Ken quietly picked it up, opened it, and counted the contents. Five hundred pounds, in Australian sovereigns and banknotes, were there. It was the sum that had been handed to the swindler Dubosq for the mythical goldmine on Gulu.

"O.K.?" asked Hudson.

"O.K.," answered Ken.

The rage in the face of the dandy of Lukwe, helpless in the boatswain's grasp, was demoniac. But it had no terrors for the shipmates of the Dawn. King of the Islands fixed his eyes steadily on the furious face.

"Dubosq's had his punishment from you," he said. "Now you're getting yours! Koko, give that feller Parsons five-five along lawyer-cane."

"Yessar!" chuckled Koko.

The sea-lawyer struggled, and yelled, and shrieked. But he bent helplessly in the boatswain's powerful grip, and Koko's strong right hand wielded the lawyer-cane. Twenty-five lashes he gave Parsons, then, when the last had descended, flung him aside.

The sea-lawyer rolled, exhausted and groaning, on the palm-planks of the veranda. And without a word more, the shipmates of the Dawn left him there.

THE END.

OUR MAGAZINE CORNER

DEEP SEA MONSTERS

Terrifying Monsters.

There are people who won't believe anything until they actually see it, and even then sometimes they won't.

People once scoffed at the mere idea that such a monstrosity as the gorilla could exist. Then, when the very first gorilla was captured about a hundred years ago, in the depths of Central Africa, their scoffs turned to sheepish grins. If these weird animals can exist on land, why not undiscovered monsters in the deep seas?

That there are more fish in the sea than ever came out of it is a very old saying, and that some of those "fish" are mighty strange monsters has yet to be disproved. What about the sea-serpents? Eye-witnesses have given personal accounts of these terrifying monsters, and there is no real reason why their statements should not be believed.

A Neck Four Feet Around!

The captain of one of our most famous luxury liners has declared that on one voyage he saw a weird head poking out of the water for a distance of twelve feet, the rest of the long, waving neck, which was four feet around, being under water, so there was no means of telling its full length. That apparition burst on the captain's astounded gaze at a distance of only two hundred yards, and as it was a perfectly clear day there can be no suggestion of "bad sight."

With Dragon's Claws.

A rear-admiral of the British Navy had an equally puzzling experience when a "thing"—no one has been able to give it a name—with claws like those of the great dragons in Chinese pictures and an enormous body, leapt clean out of the water fifty feet into the air, then dived out of sight. The

ship cruised around for a time in the hope that the nightmare creature would become visible again, but it had gone back to the pitch-black depths from which it had emerged.

Another naval commander had the evidence of several of his officers and crew to support his statement that whilst near the Cape of Good Hope they sighted an enormous head and sixty feet of body, rising four feet or more out of the water, tearing along at fifteen miles an hour. The visible part of the body was as large round as a water-butt, and on the savage-looking head was a thick mane of black hair. Those who saw this awful sight put their statement into writing and jointly signed it.

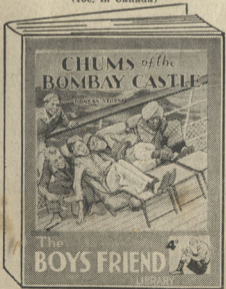
Like a Nightmare Turtle!

Between these startling visitations, the first properly authenticated one of which appeared in the year 1826, there are gaps of several years, as though the emergence from the vasty deeps of these monsters is just sheer accident. One of the most recent fell to the experience of two delighted but bewildered Fellows of the Zoological Society. They were cruising off the coast of Brazil when the peace of the scenery was suddenly shattered by a monster such as they had never dreamed of—a colossal body with a head like that of a nightmare turtle. They kept it in sight for several minutes, then, with a splash like that of a cliff tumbling into the sea, the weird creature dived and was seen no more.

It might be thought that if such monstrosities really did exist to-day, or ever existed in the dim past, some remains of them would be discovered. But the sea is deep; in some places the depth has never been plumbed. And if these creatures naturally exist in the deepest parts of the oceans, it is equally natural that they should eventually die there, and their remains lie hidden for ever in the ooze of the dark sea-bed.



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