

**SOUVENIR CRICKET BAT FREE!** (SEE INSIDE.)

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**ON THE PRINCE'S RANCH!** (See page 3.)

# The PRISONERS of the CORAL CAVE!

By

CHARLES HAMILTON.

—: 8:—

*The way of escape seemed clear to young Ken King, the boy trader of the Pacific known as King of the Islands. Open, shining water lay before him—but he was more effectually a prisoner than if he had been guarded by bars of steel! A vivid, long, and complete yarn of South Seas adventure.*



Helpless, with his arms held fast by the Nuka-hiva boys, the boy trader faced a haggard white man with bearded face.

## Missing!

**S**TARS in glittering myriads came out in a sky of velvety darkness. As in a glimmering mirror they were reflected in the still waters of the lagoon of Aao.

Only the soft wash of the lagoon on the shelving sands and the murmur of the surf from the outer reef came through the shadowy silence.

All was quiet and peaceful on the atoll of Aao, save in the ketch that was anchored in the lagoon—the ketch Dawn, owned and skippered by Ken King, the boy trader of the Pacific known as King of the Islands.

The Dawn had put in at Aao with half-yearly supplies for the owner, Poynings, and had met with a very hostile reception. The white man who was bossing the island did not answer to the description Ken had of the owner and, after he had refused to pilot the ketch into the lagoon, an attempt had been made to wreck the Dawn as Ken himself piloted her in.

Ken had scented a mystery, and had dropped hook in the lagoon, determined to remain at Aao until he had found out what was wrong. He had gone ashore with Kaio-lalulalonga, the bo'sun, in search of a clue to the mystery.

They had gone different ways, and Ken had failed to return at nightfall. Now Kit Hudson, his young Australian mate, was going ashore to

demand an explanation from the white man.

The Hiva-Oa seamen were lowering the whaleboat. Kit Hudson waited impatiently, rifle in hand. The moment the boat touched the water he leaped into it.

"Washy - washy, quick!" he snapped.

Kaio-lalulalonga, the giant Kanaka bo'sun, commonly known as Koko, and three of the crew of five Hiva-Oa boys bent to the oars. The whaleboat flew towards the little coral quay.

Hudson's eyes, with a fierce gleam in them, were turned on the bungalow above the beach.

From door and window of the bungalow light streamed out into the veranda; the only light that showed in the velvety darkness that wrapped Aao.

In a Madeira chair, on the veranda, the white man of Aao could be seen, sprawling at ease, smoking a cheroot.

If he noted that the Dawn's boat

was pulling to the beach, he seemed to give no heed.

Hudson, fiercely suspicious as he was, could not help feeling that the lonely pearler of Aao did not look like a man who was expecting a hostile visit.

But King of the Islands had not returned. He had vanished into the high bush that lay beyond the bungalow and the palm grove; and if any man on Aao knew what had become of him, it must be the pearler. The mate of the Dawn meant to force his knowledge out of the man.

The boat bumped on the coral, and Hudson leaped ashore. Kaio-lalulalonga followed him, and they tramped swiftly up the path of powdered coral that led to the pearler's bungalow.

Still the white man of Aao made no movement. A rifle leaned against the rail of the veranda close by him; but he made no motion to touch it. He turned his head carelessly to glance at the newcomers as they reached the steps, and that was all.

## The Prisoners of the Coral Cave!

Hudson tramped up the palm-wood steps, Koko close behind him, and the veranda trembled under his heavy, angry tread. The pearler looked at him with cool, keen eyes from under his shaggy brows. The lamplight from within glimmered on his tanned face, and showed up the scar that cut across one dark cheek.

"Where's King of the Islands?" rapped out Hudson, coming to a halt before the man in the Madeira chair.

The pearler raised his eyebrows.

"Your skipper? Isn't he on board his ship?"

"You know he is not."

"How should I know?" drawled the man of Aao. "I remember he went ashore this morning. I've not seen him since. I don't know anything about your kid skipper. I'm interested in my own business, not in yours."

Kaio-lalulalonga broke out savagely:

"Feller Poynings he tell plenty big lie, mouth belong him. He savvy plenty where King of the Islands he stop."

The pearler sat up, his eyes gleaming.

"You'd better tell your Kanaka to take a bight on his tongue!" he said angrily. "I don't allow niggers to talk to me in that style!"

"You'll get something worse than rough talk, Poynings—if your name's Poynings!" exclaimed Hudson. "King of the Islands is ashore—and he was to be back at sundown. He's not come back."

"Lost in the bush, maybe," said the pearler carelessly. "The bush isn't safe for a 'griffin' to wander in!"

"King of the Islands is no griffin, and the bush on this little atoll is hardly big enough for a greenhorn to get lost in. He's not lost in the bush. That's bunkum. Something's happened to keep him from coming back. You've had a hand in it."

The pearler shrugged his shoulders.

"Have a little sense," he said. "I haven't left my bungalow all the day—if you've had your eyes open, you've seen me here. I don't care to get on with my pearl fishing so long as your ketch is in the lagoon. I'm taking a rest till you go. You've seen me."

It was true enough. All through the hot day, while Hudson had loafed under the awning on the ketch, the white man of Aao had been loafing on the veranda of the

bungalow. At no time had he been out of sight from the ketch for more than a quarter of an hour. He had taken his meals there, smoked sprawling in the Madeira chair, or looked over the newspapers Ken King had landed at the atoll.

It had looked as if he was simply killing time until the Dawn sailed. And King of the Islands had gone into the bush that stretched from the palm grove, across the belt of land to the outer reef of the atoll. The spot where Koko had parted with

been hanging round the bungalow, as well as the white man.

The man who called himself Poynings grinned sarcastically.

"If your skipper's lost, you're free to go and look for him," he sneered. "I never asked him ashore on my island. I ordered him off—and he refused to go. If anything's happened to him, it's his own look-out. No business of mine."

Hudson breathed hard.

"He's not the man to get lost in the bush. If one of your blacks has got him on the bush-paths—"

"None of my boys are in the bush. There's a crazed Kanaka loose on the island, as I warned you—a case of sunstroke. If your skipper's fallen in with him—"

The pearler shrugged his shoulders again.

"Plenty big lie!" growled Koko. The pearler gave the brown boatswain a glare, and grasped the revolver at the back of his belt.

Before he could draw it, Koko's mighty grasp was upon him.

Powerful man as he was, the white man of Aao was wrenched out of the chair as if he had been an infant. The revolver, grabbed away by Koko's brown fingers, was tossed far through the starlight, and fell on the beach. The pearler, gasping and struggling wildly, yelled, with the grip of Koko's sinewy fingers on his throat.

"You plenty bad feller!" snarled Kaio-lalulalonga. "You speak plenty quick, mouth belong you. You savvy plenty where King of the Islands he stop. You sing out plenty quick, or my word, you dead feller!"

"Stop him!" panted the pearler, struggling frantically. "Hang you, Hudson drag your Kanaka off me!"

"Koko!" exclaimed the mate of the Dawn.

"Me makee feller Poynings sing out where King of the Islands he stop!" roared Kaio-lalulalonga.

"Let him go!"

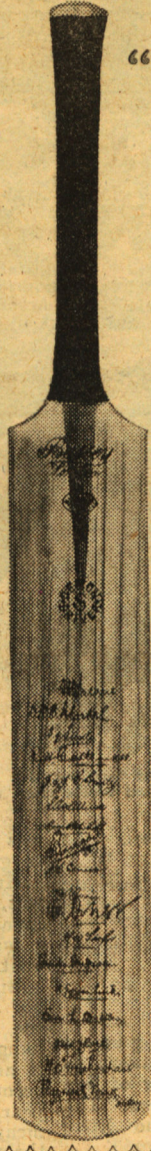
Hudson grasped the Kanaka's arm and forced him to release the pearler.

"We're not sure yet, Koko."

"Me plenty too much sure!" snapped Koko. "This Kanaka he savvy feller Poynings he plenty bad feller too much."

The pearler staggered against the veranda rail, his tanned face white with his breath coming in great gasps. There was a jabbering of excited voices below, where the Santa Cruz blacks were gathering. Hudson gave them a grim look and half raised his rifle. The blacks promptly retreated. The look on the Australian's face was enough for them.

(Continued on page 22.)



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him was more than half a mile from the pearler's bungalow.

The mate of the Dawn was perplexed. Either the pearler was innocent of what had happened to the boy trader, or else he had deliberately kept in sight while his blacks dealt with Ken in the bush. The latter seemed unlikely. King of the Islands was not the man to be handled easily by Santa Cruz boys. Most of the black boys, too, if not all of them, had

# The Prisoners of the Coral Cave!

(Continued from page 20.)

Hudson fixed his eyes on the panting pearler.

"I believe that King of the Islands has fallen into some trap, and that you've laid it for him," he said between his teeth. "My belief is that you're not Poynings at all, but some beachcombing scoundrel, and you've got rid of Poynings and got hold of his bungalow and his pearl fishery. I'm going to find out. I'm going to find King of the Islands. If I fail, you won't get the benefit of the doubt. I'm giving you a chance. I won't shoot a white man on suspicion. But if King of the Islands is still missing to-morrow, you're a dead man!"

"I tell you——" panted the pearler.

"You've said enough. If you've got my shipmate in some trap, hand him out. Your life depends on it."

"Hang your shipmate, and hang you!" snarled the man of Aao. "Get out of my bungalow! Come here again and I'll meet you with a rifle!"

"You'll find that's a game two can play at!" said Hudson contemptuously. "You'd have met me with a rifle this time if you'd dared!"

"Get out!"

"Come, Koko!"

Hudson picked up the rifle that leaned against the veranda rail, smashed it across the rail, and tossed it down into the garden. The pearler watched him in silent fury. Then the mate of the Dawn left the bungalow, followed unwillingly by Kaio-lalulalonga.

## The Cave.

**S**LOWLY, painfully, King of the Islands came back to consciousness. He lay in darkness, broken only by a glimmer of the stars. For a long time he lay, half conscious to his surroundings, conscious chiefly of aches and pains that racked him from head to foot. Slowly his mind cleared, and he remembered what had happened.

He recalled the sudden fall into the hidden pit on the bush path; the breaking under his feet of the flimsy covering of twigs and earth that had hidden the pitfall; the crash on the ground at the bottom of the deep pit. After that he remembered nothing.

The fall must have stunned him; he knew that. How long was it since it had happened, and where was he now? He was lying on hard rock and sand, evidently no longer in the pit into which he had fallen in the bush.

It was at sunset that he had fallen into the trap. Now it was night—dark night, with a gleam of stars. He raised himself at last on his elbow and looked round him with dizzy eyes. The murmur of the sea was in his ears. He was close to the sea, not to the lagoon in the interior of the atoll. It was the surf on the outer reef that he could hear.

Round him were walls of rock—rough coral rock. Overhead were rugged arches, with openings here and there through which the stars gleamed.

King of the Islands realised that

he was in one of the innumerable coral sea caves on the outer rim of the atoll. Evidently he had been carried there after he had fallen stunned and senseless in the pit in the bush. The runaway he had been following through the bush led to the outer reef. He remembered that the coral rocks and caves had been in sight, at the end of the tunnel-like path, when he fell. The trap had been laid, the pit had been dug, to guard the path—dug specially for his feet, as the boy trader realised bitterly. In that direction had lain the clue to the mystery of the pearl island. In any other direction he was free to wander unchecked and unwatched, disregarded by the pearler; but the pitfall had been prepared on the way to the coral caves.

There lay the secret of Aao—whatever that secret might be.

King of the Islands, sitting in the sand that strewn the coral floor of the cave, leaned his aching head in his hands.

He had been unconscious a long time. The position of the stars he could see gleaming overhead told him that it was midnight. Now that he had recovered his senses he was aching, dizzy, and in no condition to offer resistance to his captors. Yet he was a little surprised to find that his limbs were not bound. His strength would return. He would escape from this strange prison of coral, and once on board the ketch again he would hold the upper hand. It was strange that his captor was taking the chance.

For a long time the boy trader sat, resting his aching head, while his dizzy brain cleared more and more, and he began to feel more like his old self. When he stirred again it was to feel over his limbs with careful fingers to ascertain that no bones had been broken. But beyond bruises and a severe shaking he had received no injury.

The boy trader scrambled shakily on to his feet at last.

Sick and seedy as he felt from the effects of the shock that had stunned him, he was curious to find out his exact position and to ascertain what chance he had of getting clear.

Obviously, no one had been left on guard over him. He moved along the rugged cave, stumbling over juts of coral, towards the glisten of water that told him where the mouth of the cave lay. He reached the opening—a shelf of rock a couple of feet above the water.

Deep water lapped below. Overhead the projecting rock jutted out to some distance. On either side glistening coral rose abruptly from the water to join the bulging rock above. The opening of the cave faced seaward. Ken could see a vast stretch of the Pacific shining under the stars. Unless he left the cave he could see nothing of the atoll, on the rim of which the rugged coral broke the surf.

Swimming was the only way of escape, and King of the Islands was one of the best swimmers in the South Seas. The distance was nothing to him. He could have swum completely round the atoll of Aao.

But he paused, looking at the shining waters below him, standing

on the rocky shelf as on a diving-board.

The enemy who had trapped him and placed him here—and it could only have been done by the pearler or by the pearler's orders—had not left him at liberty to swim away and return to the ketch when he liked. He realised that clearly enough. The way of escape seemed open. Before his eyes a channel ran between coral cliffs to the open sea. But——

The boy trader stooped, picked up a fragment of coral, and tossed it into the water.

Before the circles made by the falling stone had faded away there was a stirring in the starlit water. A black fin rose into view, and then another and another.

They glided to and fro and then sank again. But King of the Islands had seen enough.

The coral sea-cave was effectually guarded. The pool before it, shut in by cliffs, was a haunt of tiger-sharks. It was death—death without hope—to plunge into it.

Ken drew a deep breath.

Obviously, he must have been brought there in a canoe. He could guess that some of the pearler's Santa Cruz boys had been watching the pitfall on the bush-path, deep in cover; that they had drawn him out of the pit and brought him to the sea-cave in a canoe. But they were gone and had taken their craft with them. The open, shining water lay before King of the Islands, but he was more effectually a prisoner than had he been guarded by bars of triple steel!

He turned back from the cave-mouth at last. He was a prisoner, shut in the sea-cave, guarded by the sharks that haunted the pool. But there might be other ways.

The interior of the sea-cave was deeply gloomy. Here and there great gaps in the rocky arches overhead let in the star-shine. But where the starlight did not penetrate all was black.

King of the Islands scanned the openings high above. They were far over his head—at least ten or twelve feet—and there was no means of reaching them.

He moved on, treading cautiously and groping his way in the gloom towards the back of the cave until he was pulled up by a wall of solid coral.

He groped over the rough edges of this, hoping to find an opening. He found none, and moved away towards the mouth again, feeling his way along the side of the cave. His foot struck something that lay on the coral floor, and he felt it stir.

He stopped, his heart thumping madly.

He was not alone in the cave!

From the blackness came a sound of stirring, as of a sleeper suddenly awakened. The cave had another occupant—sleeping in the darkness, undisturbed hitherto by the boy trader's movements. Was it, after all, a guard that had been set over him, and who had fallen asleep at his post?—likely enough in the case of a black boy. King of the Islands drew back, his eyes watchful, striving

to penetrate the darkness that hid the unseen man from his sight. He heard the sound of the man getting on his feet. A quick, deep-drawn breath reached his strained ears. His own breathing, perhaps, betrayed his position, for a second later an unseen figure leaped on him. Fierce hands clutched him in the darkness, and King of the Islands was struggling desperately with a man he could not see.

### The Prisoners!

"YOU dog!" It was a fierce, hissing voice from the unseen man who was gripping the boy trader and striving to drag him down.

"My chance—at last!" Ken struggled desperately. He was in the grasp of a powerful man. At any other time King of the Islands would have been fully a match for him, but the boy trader was not in his usual condition now. He was weak and sick from the crash in the bush-pit, his head was dizzy, and every limb ached. Two fierce hands groped for his throat and fastened there with a terrible grasp. In spite of his resistance, the boy trader was borne down to the floor.

Over him sprawled his assailant, still clutching at his throat, Ken striving furiously, but in vain, to drag away the choking hands. "Tao! Kuli-Kuli!" the man was shouting, his voice awakening wild echoes in the sea-cave.

There was a stirring somewhere in the blackness, a jabbering of startled native voices. Other occupants were in the cave—two natives, at least, as Ken realised. They had been sleeping; and until he had stumbled on one of the sleepers King of the Islands had never suspected that he was not alone in the coral prison.

It was a white man who was grasping him. And he was calling on two natives to help him. In the darkness Ken could hear them groping to the spot, while he struggled with the white man.

He tried to speak—but the grasp on his throat choked his voice.

"Tao! Kuli-Kuli! You feller boy, you comey along this place plenty quick!"

"Yes, sar, this feller comey!"

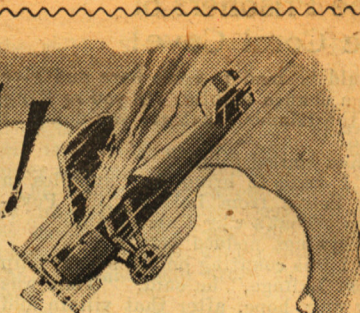
Ken strove desperately to speak. He knew the truth now. A white man and two natives were prisoners in the coral cave. It was as he suspected; the man at the bungalow was an impostor—a freebooter who had seized the island, and the prisoners in the coral cave could only be Poynings and his two Nuka-hiva boys. It must be Poynings, the lone pearler of Aao, in whose grasp he was struggling. But in the darkness the man had taken him for an enemy—doubtless for the freebooter who had made him a prisoner. And the choking hands kept Ken from speaking.

Other hands were laid on him—he had a glimpse of rolling eyes in the darkness.

Then the grip on his throat relaxed.

"You dog!" The voice came vibrating with fury. "Bransom, you

# The LEAKING RADIATOR!



Most airmen have had their breathless moments—times when their lives were in the balance—when it was touch and go whether they "got through!" Here the MODERN BOY Air Expert tells you of a thrilling incident in his own career.

IT happened in the early days of commercial flying, when there was no efficient organisation like there is nowadays and the trip by air to Paris was really an adventure, even if all went well—as it did on the outward journey for me.

Passengers then were allowed to sit in the nose of the machine in front of the pilot, and on this occasion I stood the swaying of the machine a good deal better than my passenger-neighbour.

But coming back! I shall never forget that journey—at least, what there was of it! We had climbed to a height of about 1,500 feet, and were heading for Abbeville. The machine was flying fairly steadily and I had resigned myself to as good a journey as before. Perhaps I dozed a little.

Suddenly I was startled by a nudge in the back. Turning round, I saw the pilot pointing upwards with one hand. For a moment I could not see anything amiss. Then I noticed that little beads of water were falling from the radiator—*drip—drip—drip*.

I did not at once realise the significance of the leak, and I endeavoured by dumb motions to let the pilot know that.

He took a pad from in front of him, wrote on it, and passed the note to me: **GOT TO GO BACK. RADIATOR LEAKING BADLY. CAN'T KEEP UP MANY MORE MOMENTS.**

A nasty cold shiver ran down my back, and I couldn't have spoken even if speech had been of any use. Instantly the plane was put into a frantically dizzy nose-dive. Down and down we swept in ever-shortening circles, the ground appearing as though it must rush up and strike us as we swept earthwards.

Then, just as I felt certain that the end was at hand, the pilot managed to flatten the plane out. He had no time to search for a landing place, but just made for the largest available field.

Over the hedges we rushed, the plane tilting at an alarming angle. The wheels touched the ground, and sitting as I was in the nose of the plane I had a delightfully clear view of the hedge in front of us. Nearer and nearer it came—nearer—nearer—

Then, as though by the touch of a magic wand, the plane rose a few feet, skimmed the hedge, and came to a standstill in the field beyond.

It took all my will-power to make myself stand up. I turned round, and saw the pilot grinning at me.

They have pluck, these airmen!

dog, you've given me a chance at last! You thief—"

"Stop! Hold your hand, you fool!" Ken panted. "I'm not Bransom!" He knew that Bransom must be the name of the man at the bungalow.

"What?" There was a change in the tone of the man he could not see. "That's not Bransom's voice! Who are you?"

"Let me loose, and—"  
"Hold him fast, you feller boy!" The voice from the darkness was grim and savage again. "If you're not Bransom, you are one of his gang. There's nobody else on the island. You feller boy, you keep hold along feller arm belong him, bring him along light."

In the grasp of the three Ken was dragged along the coral cave to a spot where the starlight streamed in from an opening above.

There he could see the men who

held him. Two of them were brown-skinned Polynesians; the third a haggard white man with a bearded face. The latter scanned King of the Islands searchingly.

The boy trader, helpless, with his arms held fast by the Nuka-hiva boys, faced him.

"Are you Poynings?" he demanded.

"You know I'm Poynings," growled the other. "Who are you? How did you get here? Where's your canoe—you must have come in a canoe? Quick—before you go to the sharks!" "Belay your jawing tackle and listen to me!" snapped Ken. "I'm a prisoner here like yourself."

Poynings stared.

"A prisoner! Who are you, then?"

"Ken King—called King of the Islands."

"King of the Islands! I've heard of you—if that's true." The man's look was grim and doubting. "I took you for Bransom in the dark—but he

## The Prisoners of the Coral Cave!

would be mad to come here and give me a chance at him. If you're King of the Islands, what are you doing at Aao?"

Ken smiled faintly.

"I came to bring your supplies in my ketch, from Lalinge, Mr. Poynings. That's why I am at Aao."

Poynings nodded slowly.

"I was counting on the supply ship from Lalinge," he said. "That was my only hope, after that villain and his black crew seized the island. He knew nothing about the supplies coming from Lalinge, and I reckoned there would be a chance for me when the ship came—at least, if the skipper was a man who knew me. He would have wanted to know where I was and what had become of me. That was all I had to reckon on. And you—"

He signed to the Nuka-hiva boys to release King of the Islands. "It was clear to him now that it was a fellow-prisoner with whom he had to deal.

"This is my first trip to Aao," said Ken. "And I knew nothing of you but your name. Naturally I took the man at the bungalow for you."

Poynings gritted his teeth.

"He's calling himself by my name?"

"Ay, ay; and as nobody on my ketch had ever seen you, it was easy enough. But the scoundrel could not be sure of that, of course; and he attempted my life, and tried to wreck my ketch on the reef."

"And you suspected—"

"Yes, and stayed at Aao to investigate," answered King of the Islands. "And here I am—a prisoner like yourself."

"I'm sorry I handled you, King of the Islands," muttered Poynings. "In the dark—"

"That's all right," said Ken. "No harm done. I'm glad I've found you alive, Mr. Poynings. I reckoned that if the man at the bungalow was a freebooter who had seized the island, you might be a prisoner somewhere on Aao; but it was more likely that—that—"

"That I should have gone to the sharks," broke in Poynings grimly. "I reckon I'd have gone as soon as I fell into the villain's hands if he knew where to lay hands on my pearls."

"You've got them hidden?"

Poynings laughed harshly.

"I was not likely to keep them lying about the bungalow. They're hidden safely enough—where that scoundrel will never find them. He got a handful or so of seed-pearls—that's all. What I've taken from the lagoon in the last five years—that's a fortune—he will never lay hands on—not if I die in this cave!"

Ken glanced at the Nuka-hiva boys, and Poynings laughed again.

"The black boys don't know—they're good boys, but I trust no one with a fortune. Bransom—that villain's name is Bransom—may keep us here as long as he chooses, but he will never lift the pearls I've taken from the lagoon. How did he get you?"

Ken told of the bush-pit.

"I reckon that was fixed up ready, in case you came in this direction," muttered Poynings. "But your Kanakas—your mate—they will miss you—they will search— They're not likely to sail without you, Captain King?"

King of the Islands smiled.

"Kit Hudson will root over every foot of the atoll till he finds me. If he doesn't find me soon, he will put a bullet through that scoundrel at the bungalow. I reckon we're not here for long. That sea-lawyer has got to deal with the mate of the Dawn."

"Listen!" breathed Poynings.

From the sea-pool at the mouth of the cave came the splash of a paddle. A canoe was approaching the sea-cave.

### The Light in the Night.

**K**AIO-LALULALONGA gripped Kit Hudson's arm and whispered:

"You look, sar, eye belong you! Feller pearler he go along bush."

Hudson's eyes glinted.

From the darkness of the bungalow a light glimmered. It was the gleam of a hurricane lamp, moving slowly through the velvety darkness from the house, in the direction of the bush.

The mate of the Dawn had not returned to the ketch. The whaleboat lay at the coral quay, with the Hiva-Oa boys in it. Hudson and Koko were on the beach, watching the bungalow.

Hudson had felt at a loss after the visit to the man who called himself Poynings. To search the bush in the black darkness for the missing skipper of the Dawn was impossible. Koko was firm in his belief that the white man of Aao was responsible for King of the Islands' disappearance, and Hudson felt that the Kanaka was right.

Yet the man had been in sight all the day, and most, if not all, of his Santa Cruz boys. King of the Islands had been on his guard and well armed. If he had been attacked in the bush, Hudson could not believe that one or two black boys had got the better of him, and without a shot being fired. It was barely possible that the boy trader had, as the pearler suggested, lost himself in the dark, winding recesses of the bush, and that with the morning he would return.

Hudson was troubled and perplexed; but until morning there was nothing to be done save keep on the watch. And on the shadowy beach the mate of the Dawn and the Kanaka watched the pearler's bungalow.

That King of the Islands had fallen into some deadly trap seemed only too likely; but that he had been slain, Hudson did not believe. He could not believe that the pearler, desperate as he was, would take the risk so long as Ken's shipmate was at liberty to avenge him. He would not venture to take that last desperate step unless he could be sure of dealing with Hudson. Of that the mate of the Dawn felt assured.

If King of the Islands had somehow been trapped in the bush by the blacks, he was a prisoner now—and if so, the pearler knew where he was. More, than once he was strongly

tempted to return to the bungalow and demand his comrade at the pistol's point.

Yet while doubt existed, it was impossible to proceed to extremes—he could not feel sure enough of the man's guilt to shoot him out of hand. To watch the bungalow, to watch the pearler if he left it—that was all that the Australian felt that he could do until a new day came.

And then, after midnight had passed, the light glimmered behind the house, winking and twinkling in the darkness, telling that the pearler was stirring.

Hudson watched it breathlessly.

He remembered the light he had seen, moving in the palm-grove, the night the ketch had hung outside the reef. Then, as now, the pearler had left the bungalow mysteriously, in the dark, silent hours.

Koko touched his arm again.

"That feller he go along bush, sar—plaps he go along bush see feller King of the Islands."

The same thought was in Hudson's mind.

"Little white master he tinkee that feller he no Poynings," muttered the Kanaka. "Me tinkee all same little white master. Plaps he keepee feller Poynings along bush, go see along him night he come. Along day, he flaid go, along we see him eye belong us."

"I think you're right," Hudson nodded. "If he's a sea-lawyer who's seized Poynings' house, as King of the Islands believes, he may have the real man hidden in the bush—that may be where he was going the night I saw the light. King of the Islands may be in the same place—"

"Us feller foller that feller, sar."

Hudson paused.

"We can't both go, Koko. He may lead us to Ken King, or it may be a trick to get us away from the beach. If the ketch should be seized while we are gone—"

"Me no tinkee along feller ketch, sar; me tinkee along little white master."

Hudson did not reply for the moment. He glanced out into the lagoon, where the riding-lights of the ketch glimmered through the night.

He was torn by uncertainty and doubt. To follow the pearler, who was as likely as not going to some secret rendezvous in the bush, might lead him to his shipmate. But King of the Islands had left his ship in Hudson's charge, and faithful as the Hiva-Oa boys were, they were hardly to be trusted to keep watch and ward without a white man on board. Even so, they were not a match for the gang of Santa Cruz blacks if the pearler should attack the ketch.

The previous night it was practically certain that he had attempted to dynamite the ketch, and had only been foiled by the wariness of King of the Islands.

Hudson believed that the light winking under the palms was carried by the pearler; but it might be a trick—it might be the hand of a black boy. The white man of Aao might be close at hand, watching. And if the ketch should be lost—

"We can't both go!" Hudson broke out at last. "We've got to see the

ship safe. Ken King would expect that first of all."

"This Kanaka he foller along that feller, sar," said Kaio-lalulalonga eagerly. "Feller Hudson he stop along ketch—this feller go along bush."

Hudson paused again. He was eager to follow himself on the track of the gliding light under the palms. But the ship had been left in his hands, and until daylight came he could not leave it to the crew.

"One of us, Koko—"

"Me go along bush, sar. Me plenty clever feller along bush," said Koko. "White master he good feller along ship, Kanaka he good feller along bush, sar."

Hudson smiled faintly. Kaio-lalulalonga was right. He was far better fitted than the white man to track a cunning enemy in the mazes of the dark bush.

"Go, then, old coffee-bean," said Hudson. "But take care—you keep plenty eye open along bush, Koko."

"Eye belong me he plenty open, sar," said Koko. "This feller no common Kanaka, sar!"

He waited for no more. Like a black shadow, he vanished into the night; and Hudson was alone.

The mate of the Dawn stared after him. The light was still winking under the palms; Koko was pursuing it, but Hudson could see no sign of the Kanaka in the darkness.

He turned away at last and went down to the coral quay. There the three Hiva-Oa boys were sleeping in the whaleboat. Two had been left on the ketch; and Hudson had little doubt that they were sleeping also. He awakened the seamen, and the boat carried him back to the Dawn. As he expected, he found Danny and Kolulo asleep on their tapa mats on the deck, under the stars.

There was no sleep for Kit Hudson. Pacing the deck restlessly in the starlight, rifle under arm, he watched the starry lagoon and the black mass of the island. Koko was to be trusted in the bush—he had little fear for Koko. Yet King of the Islands had vanished in the mysterious recesses of the bush. And if Koko should fall into an ambush—then Hudson alone would be left to carry on.

More than once he told himself savagely that he wished he had put a bullet through the white man of Aao; yet he knew that, without more definite proof against the man, he could not have done so. It was a night of sleepless anxiety for the mate of the Dawn.

In his thoughts he followed Koko, swift and silent as a shadow, tracking the mysterious light in the blackness of the bush. He longed to be with him—seeking his missing comrade. But duty held him where he was, and he could only wait and watch—anxiety and bitter wrath growing keener as the long hours wore away.

#### Trapped!

**K**AIO-LALULALONGA trod softly and swiftly through the palm-grove. The light ahead of him moved slowly along the path, among

the slanting trunks of the palm-trees. The man who carried it seemed in no haste. Swiftly, silently, the Kanaka gained on him, till his keen eyes could make out the form of the man with the hurricane-lamp.

It was the white man of Aao—not one of the black boys. As the man half-turned, where the winding path curved among the trees, Koko had a glimpse of the tanned face with its livid scar in the glimmer of the lamp. It was the man who called himself Poynings—stealing away into the bush in the darkness of the night. He moved at a leisurely pace, and did not look behind him, as if it had not occurred to him that he might be watched and followed.

Kaio-lalulalonga's task was easy enough. His bare feet made no sound on the path as he padded along at a little distance behind the pearder, guided by the gliding light.

From the palm-grove, the man of Aao plunged into a bush-path—a narrow runway cut in the thick bush. Koko was not more than twenty paces behind him when he entered it.

Straight ahead went the moving light. Leisurely as he was, the white man of Aao was evidently proceeding direct to some definite destination. And the hope was strong in Koko's heart that the pearder was unconsciously guiding him to the spot where his little white master was held a prisoner.

At that thought Koko gripped his rifle harder, and his dark eyes glinted. Once he was in sight of his white master, the Kanaka was prepared for drastic action. No man's life would be worth much who stood in his way then.

Softly, silently, he followed, in the very heart of the bush. At the intersection of two runways, the spot where Koko and King of the Islands had parted the previous day, the white man of Aao turned to

the right. That was the way King of the Islands had gone, and from which he had never returned. Koko's hope of finding him grew stronger and stronger as he followed on, the sound of the surf on the outer reef reaching his ears now.

The runway, barred on both sides by impenetrable bush, arched over by dense branches, was like a black tunnel. Only the winking light of the hurricane-lamp broke the blackness.

But the sound of the surf told the Kanaka that they were nearing the open reef, on the outer rim of Aao. And at last the blackness was broken by a pale glimmer, which he knew was the starshine at the open end of the runway where it led on to the reef.

The white man of Aao was making for the reef and the coral caves.

And then, suddenly, the wary Kanaka knew that danger lay ahead. The guiding light had steadily followed the middle of the narrow path. Now it swerved to the left, and for several yards' distance the man who carried it trod carefully along, crouched close to the bush at the side of the path. Koko's eyes did not lose a single detail. He knew the trick of the islanders—of guarding a bush-path with a hidden pit. Many a time had Koko himself thus trod cautiously round the edge of a death-trap hidden under a flimsy covering of branches and earth.

It flashed into his mind at once what had happened to King of the Islands, who had followed that runway, with no guiding light to put him on his guard. He knew now how the boy trader had fallen into the hands of his foes.

With redoubled care, Kaio-lalulalonga trod along the deadly path. He went slowly, feeling the ground before him with the muzzle of his

*(Continued on the next page.)*

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## The Prisoners of the Coral Cave!

rifle, as a Solomon Islander would  
have felt his way with a spear.

When the rifle-muzzle stirred the  
seemingly solid path, he knew that  
he had reached the pitfall.

Under the thrust of the rifle,  
cunningly-twisted branches, covered  
with earth and leaves, caved in, and  
a black pit yawned at the feet of  
the Kanaka.

Then, as the white man of Aao  
had done, Koko moved along the  
edge of the path, close to the wall  
of bush, holding on to the bush,  
and picking his steps. A few  
minutes more, and he was past the  
pitfall and on solid ground again.

Ahead of him the light still winked  
in the darkness—less dark now from  
the shine of the stars at the end of  
the runway.

It stopped suddenly.

Koko saw it shining on the  
ground; the white man of Aao had  
set the hurricane-lamp down in the  
bush-path and was standing a little  
way from it, looking back and  
listening—listening, as Koko knew  
now, for the crash of the falling  
man in the pitfall. And he knew  
now, too, that the pearler had  
known that he was followed, and had  
deliberately led his pursuer by that  
deadly path; his watching, listening  
attitude told what he expected.

The Kanaka broke into a run—  
rapid and silent. Before the watch-  
ing eyes of the pearler could pick  
up the dark figure in the darkness,  
Koko had leaped on him.

There was a startled cry and a  
crash as the white man of Aao went  
heavily to the earth in the grasp  
of the Kanaka.

"You plenty bad feller!" snarled  
Koko, between his teeth. "You  
tinkee me go along pit, my word,  
you white trash. This Kanaka he  
no shut up eye belong him!"

The white man of Aao grappled  
with him fiercely. But the Kanaka's  
sinewy knee was on his chest, and  
his dark eyes gleamed down death  
at the pearler.

"You plenty too much bad feller!  
You speak, mouth belong you—you  
sing out where King of the Islands  
he stop, s'pose you no wantee this  
Kanaka cuttee off head belong you."

Koko's knife was in his hand,  
flashing before the startled eyes of  
the white man of Aao. In the  
gleam of the hurricane-lamp the  
Kanaka's face showed set and savage.  
The pearler had not been guiding  
him to King of the Islands, but  
into a death-trap—Koko knew that  
now. But he had not fallen into  
the trap, and the life of the ruffian  
was at his mercy. And the deadly  
look of the Kanaka showed that  
the pearler's life was no more to  
him than a mosquito's.

"Stop!" panted the pearler, his  
tanned face white with dread,  
"Stop, you mad nigger!"

"You takee me along place, along  
King of the Islands he stop!" hissed

Kaio-lalulalonga. The uplifted knife  
flashed before the eyes of the pearler.

There was a sudden rush of feet  
in the darkness. Hands gripped the  
Kanaka on all sides, and he  
struggled in the grasp of the Santa  
Cruz blacks. He wrenched his right  
arm free and aimed a desperate  
blow with the knife at the white  
man of Aao.

The pearler barely eluded the  
slash, the keen steel tearing a gash  
along his shoulder and arm. But  
the next moment the knife was torn  
away from Koko's hand, and he was  
down on the path, struggling madly  
with four or five brawny, fuzzy-  
headed blacks.

The pearler staggered to his feet.  
Blood was flowing freely from the  
gash in his shoulder, and he was  
stuttering with rage. He clutched  
up Koko's rifle. But the weapon  
was not needed. The Kanaka boat-  
swain, powerful as he was, was over-  
powered by heavy odds. With hands  
and feet and teeth, he fought  
furiously; but in a few minutes he  
was overcome, and lay bound with  
tapa cords on the bush-path.

The scarred man glared down at  
him as he lay panting. Round him  
the blacks were grinning and jabber-  
ing.

"You black scum! I'd put a bullet  
through you now, but—I've got to  
get that Cornstalk swab first! I  
reckoned it was that swab following  
me till I saw you, you confounded  
nigger! I reckon the bush-pit would  
have got a white man. I'll get him  
yet—and the ketch, too—" He  
broke off. "You feller boy, you put  
that Kanaka along canoe, takee him  
along sea-cave where King of the  
Islands he stop."

"Yes, sar!"

Kaio-lalulalonga, helpless in the  
knotted tapa cords, was lifted from  
the path and carried along to the  
reef—the white man of Aao follow-  
ing the blacks, muttering threats as  
he followed.

On the ketch, at anchor in the  
lagoon, Kit Hudson watched and  
waited, while the Hiva-Oa boys slept  
on their tapa mats. Wearily, with  
growing anxiety, and a rage that  
grew more deadly as the long hours  
crawled by, he waited and watched  
till the long night was over and a  
new day shone down on the lagoon  
and the atoll.

With the coming of light, he was  
free to find King of the Islands and  
Koko—to find them, or exact ven-  
geance from the white man of Aao.

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