

“CRICKETPICS” RESULT THIS WEEK!

# *The* **MODERN BOY**

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ROARING TO VICTORY IN THE GREAT ROAD RACE! (SEE PAGE 3.)

*A mighty banyan tree, hoary with age, storm-riven, older than the oldest white man's settlement in the South Seas, holds a great surprise for the shipmates of the ketch Dawn, in this topping story.*

By  
**CHARLES  
HAMILTON.**

**COMPLETE  
IN THIS  
ISSUE.**



In the shadow of the great trunk stood the store of the Pacific Trading Company, and in the doorway of the store stood the Company's manager staring out to sea.

# The SECRET of the BANYAN!

## The Trader.

LIKE a tall column, seen far out at sea, the trunk of the ancient banyan-tree stood by the store of the Pacific Company on Tolo. Ken King, the boy trader, picked it up with his binoculars while his ketch, the Dawn, was still far from the island. And when the ketch, gliding before the south-west trade, drew nearer to Tolo, the tall, massive old trunk was the most conspicuous object that met the naked eye.

"That's Tolo!" said King of the Islands, as the boy trader was called. "And I shan't be sorry to drop the hook in the lagoon, Kit. I fancy there's a big change coming in the weather."

"Big feller wind he come bimeby, sar!" said Kaio-lalulalonga—otherwise Koko, the Kanaka bo'sun.

The wind came stiffly from the south-west, filling the white sails of the Dawn. But the heat was intense—the sun like a ball of fire sailing in cloudless blue.

Kit Hudson, standing by his skipper's side, stared curiously

towards Tolo. It was the first time the young Australian mate of the Dawn had seen the atoll.

The lonely banyan by the trader's store riveted his attention. The tree was old—older than the oldest white man's settlement in the Pacific. It had been standing, tall and full-leaved, many-stemmed, before Captain Cook sailed to the South Seas. It had seen many a generation of brown-skinned islanders pass away.

But age and wind and weather had robbed the great tree of its splendours. Now it gave out no branches, and dropped no stems to the earth. Only the parent trunk remained—a massive column of wood, sound to the eye, but rotten at the core. Yet it stood, its vast roots holding it against the fiercest wind.

In its shadow stood the store of the Pacific Trading Company, and in the doorway of the store stood the Pacific Company's manager, staring out to sea at the sails of the nearing ketch.

Drave, the manager, rough-bearded, slovenly, stared with little interest at

the ketch from dull eyes sunk in masses of wrinkles. Yet it was seldom more than once in three months that a white man's ship touched at Tolo; at other times he had no company but that of the brown natives. But it was well known in the islands that Drave was an unsociable man—almost the only trader in the islands who did not welcome the coming of a ship.

"That's an old tree, Ken," Hudson remarked. "I fancy if I lived in that store I'd have it cut down. The next hurricane may send it toppling over the building."

King of the Islands nodded.

"I've told Drave so," he answered.

"And what did he say?"

"He told me to mind my own business!" laughed Ken.

"He looks a particularly cheery, polite sort of swab," remarked the mate, his glance resting on the sullen face of the man in the doorway of the store. "I suppose he's been on the island for years and years, and it's got on his nerves."

"Only two years," answered Ken. "Lockhart was here before him—a

## The Secret of the Banyan!

decent man. The Pacific Company sent Drave out as his assistant—Lockhart disliked the loneliness, and as there was plenty of work for two white men, an assistant was sent. When Lockhart disappeared the post went to Drave, and he's held it ever since; but he's never asked the company for an assistant, and you can bet they don't send one unasked. White men cost money in the islands."

"Lockhart disappeared?"

"Men do disappear in the islands," said Ken. "Lockhart had been on Tolo fifteen years, and I dare say he was fed-up. He had had other assistants before Drave, but they never stopped more than a year or two. Tolo is too far off the map for most whites."

"I should jolly well think so!" assented Hudson, with a glance round at the vast space of the Pacific, rolling endless round the lonely atoll. "Sea and sky—and nothing else—year in and year out!"

"It's a well-paid post," added King of the Islands. "The Pacific Company treat their men well. Lockhart had money banked at Sydney, and he was ripe for his pension—but he chucked it all and went. Drave stepped into a good thing, so far as money goes."

"And Lockhart's never turned up again?"

"Never been heard of. Screw loose very likely, after so many years of solitude. May have walked off the reef one night," said Ken.

He paused.

"Better not speak about him to Drave," he added.

"Why not, old man?"

"There are tales told on the beaches, of course," replied King of the Islands. "Lockhart vanished without leaving a word behind him. His assistant stepped into his shoes. They're not supposed to have been on the best of terms. Of course, there was no ground for suspicion—absolutely none."

"But, naturally, in a lonely place like Tolo, the whole story hangs on Drave's word—on the word of the man who replaced the man who vanished! It was three months after Lockhart's disappearance that it first became known that he had disappeared. Drave couldn't report it earlier—there was no ship. But—" He broke off.

"And they say on the beaches—"

"They say lots of things on the beaches," broke in Ken, as Kit paused. "There was bound to be some talk. Unless Lockhart went off his nut, there was no reason for what he did. He could have resigned and left Tolo in the next ship, and it's said that he had a good sum put away at Sydney. But he just vanished."

"Not Lice for Drave?"

"No; for several skippers have asked him questions, and perhaps looked at him rather queerly, and have spoken to the natives about it—trying to find out exactly what happened to Lockhart. I dare say that

sort of thing may have got on Drave's nerves and made him unsociable.

"Most likely he's perfectly innocent in the matter. There's nothing to go upon, except that he was alone on the island with his chief—which, of course, he couldn't help; that he didn't report the matter for three months, which he couldn't help, either; and that he stepped into Lockhart's place, which was unavoidable."

"He had to carry on after his chief went, and the Pacific Company confirmed him in the post. There's really nothing against him."

"And the niggers could tell nothing?"

"They knew nothing—and that is a point in Drave's favour, to my mind. He simply couldn't have made away with Lockhart without the natives knowing, so far as I can see. They live in a swarm all round the store—the house is never out of sight of two or three dozen of them. If Drave knocked his chief on the head one dark night, as they hint on the

## SURPRISE GIFTS

Carry a copy of MODERN BOY with you at the seaside on your holiday this year. Our representatives are on the look-out for readers displaying their copies, for the special purpose of presenting to such readers a surprise gift selected from the following: Kites, Windmills, Large Balloons, Mystery Packets, and Flags.

There may be one of them  
**FOR YOU!**

beaches up and down the islands, what did he do with him afterwards?"

"The lagoon—"

"Some of the niggers would have spotted him carrying a dead man down to the lagoon," said Ken, with a shake of the head, "and nearly every night there are fishing canoes out. It would have been too risky. And there are no sharks in the lagoon of Tolo. The niggers dive for pearl-shell there, too. Something would have come to light."

"Might have buried him in the gardens—"

Ken smiled and shook his head.

"Drave's niggers cultivate taro and yams in the gardens, and dig where they like."

"Nothing in it, most likely," agreed Hudson. "But beastly unpleasant for Drave to have such a suspicion tacked on to him."

"I don't know that it exactly amounts to a suspicion," said Ken. "But there was bound to be talk. It came to Drave's ears, in one way or another. I dare say that accounts for his unsociable ways. It's certain that

he never seems pleased to see a ship touch at Tolo. He won't make us welcome, Kit."

"We can do without his welcome!" said Hudson, laughing. "He doesn't look attractive company. We don't stop long?"

"Only to take on board the Pacific Company's copra and pearl-shell. Unless"—King of the Islands glanced at the sky—"unless the weather pins us to the lagoon for a day or two."

"Big feller wind he come bimeby!" said Kaiolalulalonga, for the second time.

"If the weather's fair, we up hook," said Ken, "but if it breaks—as I'm afraid it will—we stick to the lagoon till the blow's over. Drave won't ask us to tiffin, or even to smoke a cigar in his veranda. A skipper coming to Tolo has to keep strictly to business—and Drave cuts that as short as possible."

The Dawn was now close enough to the reef for the shipmates to read clearly the face of the man who stood in the doorway of the store.

With a face expressive only of sullenness, Drave stood there, staring at the ketch.

When the Dawn entered the passage in the reef, the manager turned away and disappeared into the store.

He was not seen again as the ketch glided into the lagoon, and dropped her anchor in still, deep water, opposite the store and the towering trunk of the old banyan.

## The Shadow of Suspicion!

THE whaleboat dropped from the anchored ketch and pulled to the beach. Ken and Kit stepped ashore on the shelving sand and powdered coral, and walked up towards the store.

Ken had been on Tolo before, and the store, with the giant banyan standing sentinel-like at its side, the sullen-faced, unsociable trader, the swarm of brown natives were familiar to his eyes. But Hudson was new to the island, and he was interested—with the story Ken had related fresh in his mind. The disappearance of a man was not uncommon in the islands. Men came and went, and left no sign.

But there was a strange interest in the tale of Lockhart of Tolo, all the more because of the vague suspicion—in all probability undeserved—that attached to his successor.

A greedy subordinate, anxious for promotion and high pay, might have taken advantage of the loneliness of the atoll. A sudden blow on a dark night—not a shot, for a shot would have told Tolo what was toward—that might be the truth of the matter. More likely, Lockhart had been crazed by years of lonely life, and had walked off the reef, as many a man had done in the islands.

If Drave was a guilty man, it accounted, no doubt, for his sullenness, his dislike of callers at the atoll, and his unsociable manners. But if he was an innocent man, an unjust suspicion easily accounted for them. Evidently his employers, the Pacific Trading Company, had taken no heed of the rumour of the beaches,

for they had continued him in the missing man's place.

Thinking of that story, Kit Hudson looked round him with unusual interest as he walked up the beach with King of the Islands.

And he could not help observing that what Ken had said was correct—it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for Lockhart's assistant to have rid himself of his chief without the knowledge of the natives.

Brown-skinned natives swarmed on Tolo. Their grass-houses stood back of the beach, close up to the store—on either side of the building, and at the back of it, stood the native houses, some within a stone's throw.

At night, Hudson knew, many of the natives would be sleeping on the open beach, and many fishing-canoes would be abroad on the lagoon.

Behind the native village and the store lay fields of yam and taro, open and without any sort of cover—the palms were a long distance back. Save the ancient banyan that grew beside the store, there was no tree anywhere near at hand.

Hudson tried to picture, in his mind, a desperate man in the building, with a body at his feet—a body of which he must dispose swiftly. And he shook his head. Some among the hundreds of eyes round would have seen Drave bearing that dread burden away from the house. Out of the house, there was nothing to hide him. And the house itself, built on a wooden platform, with open space beneath it, gave no place of concealment.

King of the Islands, as he noticed his shipmate scanning the building and its surroundings, smiled.

"Nothing in it, Kit!" he said.  
"No," Hudson answered, "the fellows who talk on the beaches only want to come and look at the place, and they will see that there's nothing in it. The natives would have known."

"It's hard cheese on Drave. He never was a good-tempered man, from what I've heard—but since that time he's grown a good deal of a savage. I heard a skipper at Lalinge putting it down to a guilty conscience. But Drave had ordered that skipper out of his store for asking too many questions."

"Then we'd better not ask any," said Hudson, laughing.

"No; keep right off the subject, and don't mention Lockhart's name. It might make the man go off at the deep end."

The shipmates were drawing near the store now. Natives in lava-lavas were loafing about the building and inside it, and there was a ceaseless chatter of tongues. Two or three islanders were lying lazily in the shadow cast by the old banyan.

Branches and leaves it had none;

but the single massive trunk, standing like a column more than sixty feet high, cast a black bar of shade, ample to shelter half a dozen natives from the glaring sun. They lay and loafed, only moving as the sun moved, to keep in the shadow.

Hudson paused to look at the tree.

Obviously it was of venerable age. It looked solid to the eye, felt solid to the touch, but it was easy to guess that it was rotted within. Here and there were decayed gashes in the wood, and in several places it had been strengthened by supports of palm poles and lashings of fibre.

"My hat!" said Hudson. "I'd rather have that tree down, if I lived here. It's bound to go sooner or later." Looking up at the tall column of ancient wood, he measured it with his eye, and its distance from the store. "With the wind in the right direction, if it blew down it would crash right on the building," he remarked.

"I fancy a dozen fellows have told Drave so," said Ken, laughing. "But he won't have it cut down. After all, it's a landmark for the natives, and they would miss it if it went. They steer their course in their canoes by that old banyan."



Leaning in the hollow trunk was a human skeleton. Ken and Hudson stood still—gazing spellbound at the grinning horror.

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"Drave cares for what the natives think about it, then?"

"Well, I don't know; he may not be so surly as he seems. Anyhow, he has spared that old tree, and taken the trouble to have it strengthened against the wind. The natives have some superstition about it—they believe it has been here as long as the island itself—and Drave might have some trouble with them if he had it cut down; I don't know."

Hudson, standing close by the remains of the old banyan, struck on the trunk with his knuckles.

"It doesn't sound hollow!" he remarked.

There was a rapid footstep in the doorway of the store, and a hoarse, angry voice called to the shipmates.

"Let that tree alone!"

Ken and Kit spun round in astonishment.

Drave, his seamed, sullen face inflamed with rage, was striding towards them.

"What are you meddling with my tree for?" he bellowed, glaring at the shipmates.

A crowd of natives gathered round instantly. A shindy among white men would have provided Tolo with a sensation that would have lasted it as a topic for months.

"What the thump do you mean?" demanded Hudson, staring at the enraged trader. "No harm in tapping the old tree, I suppose? Do you think a tap will knock it down?"

"Keep your hands off it!" snarled Drave.

"I'll keep them off it—and off you," replied the mate, with a flash in his eyes, "but you'd better speak a little more civilly, Mr. Drave. You're not talking to a nigger."

"My dear man," began King of the Islands pacifically, with a warning glance at Hudson.

The savage, uncertain temper of the Tolo trader was well known, and Ken was anxious to avoid a dispute in his brief stay on the atoll.

Drave calmed down a little.

"I'm sorry," he said awkwardly and ungraciously. "I did not mean to be uncivil. But I'm attached to that old tree, and I don't want to see it damaged."

"A tap from my hand was not likely to damage it," said Hudson dryly.

"I know, I know! You must excuse island nerves," said the trader, with a kind of surly apology.

"All serene," said Hudson shortly.

He could see that the man was in a nervous state. But now it seemed as though he were trying to make up, in a rough way, for his incivility.

"The natives have a belief about that old tree," he said. "They believe that it grew when the island first rose out of the sea, and that when it goes Tolo will go. I should have no end of trouble with the niggers if that banyan was damaged. I wouldn't give ten cents for my life if I had it cut down, as a lot of fools have advised me to do."

"It's wiser to give the niggers

their heads in such matters," said King of the Islands soothingly.

"Not much choice in the matter for me, as I'm here alone with them," said the trader. "There's a taboo on that tree. It must not be touched. I did not mean to offend you, but don't touch it again. Come into the store."

"Right-ho!" said Ken cheerily.

He went into the store with the trader, and Hudson followed more slowly.

In the doorway he paused.

Hudson was not a fellow to take offence easily or willingly, but he felt that the less he saw of Drave the better he would like it. The man was not merely unsociable and sullen, he was offensive and on the alert to take offence. The less the mate saw of him the less likely he was to spoil Ken's business on the island by a quarrel.

He had felt a strong inclination to knock Drave head over heels when the trader first addressed him.

"You won't want me, Ken?" he asked. "If not, I'll take a stroll on the beach while you're here."

"Right," answered Ken. "I shan't be a long time with Mr. Drave."

"That's so, you won't," said the trader surlily. "It's not a matter of half an hour to settle about the consignment."

"You're not keen on company here, Mr. Drave," Hudson could not help remarking as he heard that ungracious rejoinder.

Drave stared at him.

"I'm not," he said curtly.

"Yet you don't often see a white man."

"More often than I want," sneered Drave. "I'm satisfied with the niggers. I can keep them in their place. White men can't come here without asking me more or less plainly whether I murdered the man who had the post before me. A man gets fed-up on that."

"My hat, I should say so!" answered Hudson, and his annoyance faded away into something like sympathy. "I should be tempted to answer such a question with my knuckles!"

Drave grunted.

"I've done so more than once when it was put plain," he said. "The skippers who touch here say that I'm the worst-tempered man in the islands. I don't say I ever was the best-tempered. But what would you feel like, or any man? I've seen them questioning the natives, putting it in their heads that I killed Lockhart and hid the body. There's niggers on Tolo who believe it now, since it was put into their heads."

He made an angry gesture.

"Let it drop. I'm not asking for your good opinion. King of the Islands, we want to get our business done if you're going to lift your hook this side of sundown."

He turned his back unceremoniously on Hudson.

The mate of the Dawn coloured a little. He compressed his lips and stepped out of the store.

Drave might be a wronged man, soured by an unjust suspicion, but his manner was very hard to bear with patience. Hudson did not envy

King of the Islands his interview with such a character. He was glad enough to get away from the store and stroll in the blazing sunshine outside.

### The Hurricane.

THE sun, sinking in the Western Pacific, sank into a bed of glowing copper. Over the sky spread a steely paleness. The heat was breathless, unrelieved by a single puff of wind. The breeze that had brought the ketch to Tolo had utterly died away.

Outside the reef the Pacific rolled in long, glassy swells, and the surf broke with a dull murmur. The lagoon was like a sheet of glass. The Hiva-Oa crew of the Dawn looked anxiously at sea and sky. By this time the signs of the coming hurricane were clear to all eyes. That night was to be a wild one on Tolo.

Across the glassy water from the beach to the ketch canoes ferried the cargo of copra and pearl-shell that the Dawn was to take away. A swarm of brown-skinned natives were at work, a dozen of them doing about as much work as one white man would have done, in the South Sea Islanders' way.

King of the Islands superintended the packing of the cargo on board. Drave was on the beach, directing the natives. Breathlessly hot as it was, the trader of Tolo was speeding on the work. In his usual uncivil, un-social way he was anxious for the ketch to be gone.

In his cotton breeches, slovenly cotton shirt, Panama hat, and with his unkempt beard, the Tolo trader made a wild and almost haggard figure. His loud voice could be heard by those on the ketch, shouting to the slacking natives. He was obviously in a savage and dangerous temper.

Neither of the shipmates was anxious to linger on Tolo. They had come across many a rough character in South Sea trading, but never so thoroughly disagreeable and unpleasant a man as Drave.

Ken would have been glad to lift the hook the moment the last bag of copra was on board and turn his stern to Tolo and its surly master. But he was not thinking of doing so. The lagoon was a safe anchorage in the strife of the elements that plainly was coming with nightfall, and Ken had no intention of putting to sea until the storm was over.

The Tolo consignment was all on board at last and stacked away, and the canoes paddled back to the beach. There the natives drew them out of the water and far up the sand, out of reach of the waves when the lagoon began to boil, for every native on Tolo knew what was coming.

The slovenly figure of Drave stood on the beach alone, staring towards the Dawn.

Hudson looked towards him and grinned as he turned to King of the Islands.

"That swab is waiting to see us lift the hook, Ken," he remarked.

Ken laughed.

"He's in a hurry to see us go. He's always like that," he answered. "But I suppose he knows as well as we do that a blow's coming."

A little later the trader's whale-

boat came out to the ketch, rowed by a crew of natives.

Drave stood up in it, held on to the teak rail of the Dawn, and glared aboard.

"Captain King!" he called out.

"Ay, ay!" answered Ken.

He went to the side.

"You're not hanging on here, I reckon?"

Ken stared and then pointed to the sky. The trader of Tolo followed the direction of his pointing finger with his eyes.

"You're afraid of a capful of wind?" he sneered.

"There's more than a capful of wind coming, Mr. Drave," answered Ken good-humouredly. "There's a hurricane just about due."

"Rubbish!" snapped Drave.

"Haven't you eyes, man?" exclaimed Kit Hudson.

Drave gave him no heed. His sullen, angry eyes were fixed on King of the Islands.

"Are you putting to sea?" he demanded.

"No."

"You know you're not wanted here," snarled Drave.

"Wanted or not, I'm staying here till the storm's over," replied Ken.

"What's your objection, Mr. Drave?"

"Keep on board your hooker, at any rate," snarled Drave. "I've told you I want no meddling fools messing about on Tolo. If I find you on the beach now your business is done, look out for trouble!"

He slumped down in the whaleboat and snarled to the native crew.

"Washy-washy along beach, you feller nigger."

The whaleboat shot away.

The shipmates stared curiously after Drave as he went. They watched him land and tramp up the shelving beach to the store. He stopped, for a few moments, by the old banyan, and stood staring at the ancient tree. Then he went into the store and was lost to sight.

"That fellow's on the way to becoming a hatter, what with solitude and brooding," remarked Hudson, shrugging his shoulders. "Ken, old man, I don't quite know what effect an unjust suspicion might have on a man, but—"

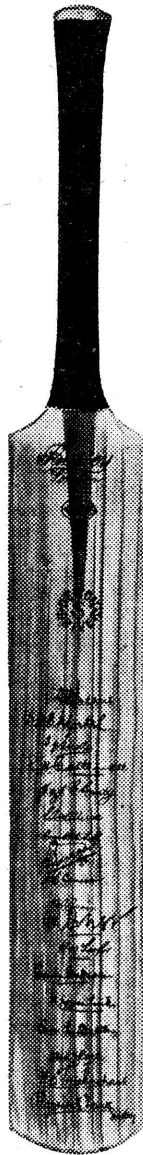
"But what?"

"But I reckon that that's not what's the matter with Drave," said the Australian. "Now I've seen something of him, I rather agree with the man who put it down to a guilty conscience."

"More than one man's got that impression of him," replied King of the Islands. "He really asks for it. But you figured it out yourself, old man, that he couldn't have got rid of Lockhart without the natives spotting him—and it's certain that they know nothing. Let's think the best of him—though I admit his manners are against him."

In the gathering darkness Hudson's eyes lingered on the store, now shut up, and on the tall, solitary trunk that stood sentry-like beside it.

"There's a big blow coming, Ken," he said. "I fancy we may see that old banyan go west at last. It's a miracle that it's stood so long. I



# "CRICKETPICS"

## RESULT!

IN this competition no competitor submitted a correct solution to the four sets of puzzle-names. **THE CRICKET BAT** (autographed by the **SOUTH AFRICAN TOURING TEAM**) has therefore been awarded to:—

**HOWARD THOMPSON,**  
8, High Street,  
Egham, Surrey,

whose effort contained one error.

**THE TWELVE CRICKET BALLS** have been awarded to the following readers whose efforts each contained two errors:—

C. Baines, 29, Foxhill Street, Princes Park, Liverpool; D. Barrett, Newton St. Faiths, Norwich; E. S. Brown, 18, Thornogate, St. Swithins Square, Lincoln; W. V. J. Cole, 67, Athelstan Road, Exeter; G. Hogger, 2, Groe Villa, Builth Wells; E. J. Nicholls, Oaklands, Lichfield Road, Rushall, Walsall; C. W. Paris, 8, Astey's Row, Essex Road, Islington, N.1; L. Short, 6, Albion Place, Exmouth; R. T. Swanston, 17, Whitehouse Road, Sunderland; W. Topping, 53, Haddington Gardens, Belfast; N. A. Tucker, 3, Frederick Street, Rugby, Warwickshire; D. W. Webster, College Farm, Somersham, Hunts.

### THE CRICKETERS' NAMES:

- |            |             |             |               |
|------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1. Chapman | 8. Ryder    | 15. Haig    | 22. Fox       |
| 2. Hobbs   | 9. Bell     | 16. Capes   | 23. Barnett   |
| 3. Tate    | 10. Day     | 17. Worsley | 24. Langridge |
| 4. Carr    | 11. Livsey  | 18. Ames    | 25. Lane      |
| 5. Deane   | 12. Hammond | 19. Payton  | 26. Watson    |
| 6. Mead    | 13. Ryan    | 20. Sidwell | 27. Walden    |
| 7. Geary   | 14. Ducaat  | 21. Lee     | 28. Wood      |

*Watch out for our Great New  
Competition—Coming Very Soon!*

expect that we'll see the last of it."

"Likely enough," replied Ken. "It might go in any big wind—and if it outlasts one more real hurricane, I shall be surprised. My sainted Sam, here comes the wind!"

Darkness lay on sea and land, only a coppery glow from the west telling where the sun had gone down. From the breathless stillness of the Pacific came a puff of wind.

"Big feller wind he come, sar!" said Kaio-lalulalonga. "Plenty big storm stop along sea bimeby."

The "big feller wind" was not long in coming. With a shriek, deepening to a roar, it came.

Outside the barrier of the reef the Pacific, a short time ago glassy and still, roared and raved and leaped, thundering on the coral with a deafening din.

The still lagoon was agitated. Waves gathered and crashed on the sandy beach, washing up almost to the grass-houses of the natives.

The wind struck the island like a hammer. The anchored ketch reeled, and creaked, and groaned, but held to her cable. Ashore, the crashing of coconuts hurled from the trees came with a sound like artillery. Crashing of falling nuts and crashing of branches made a stunning uproar in the darkness.

Across the black sky lightning streaked, showing up in brief glimpses the island and the lashing lagoon, and the wall of raging surf that thundered on the outer reef.

Through the tearing wind came cries and shouts from the natives on shore, and when the ghastly glare of the lightning came, King of the Islands could see the fragments of the grass-houses whirled away on the roaring blast.

The Dawn strained at her cable. The hatchways were battened close, for the water was swept over the deck by the raging wind, and it was difficult to keep a footing on the slanting wet planks. The Hiva-Oa crew had

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crowded into the forecabin; but Ken and Hudson remained in the open, and Kaio-lalulalonga stayed with his white master.

When the lightning played, Hudson's eyes turned, with a curious interest, on the tall banyan-trunk by the store. Back in the woods trees were crashing right and left, palms going down like skittles. Yet that ancient banyan, deeply rooted, still held against the hurricane.

Hudson gave a sudden shout.

"It's going, Ken!"

The roar of the wind drowned his voice. He fought a way nearer to the boy trader, and yelled in his ear:

"The banyan's going—at last!"

"Ay, ay!" said Ken. His eyes, too, were on the ancient tree, that for perhaps two or three hundred years had braved all the winds of the Pacific. All that was left of it was now facing its last storm. In the intervals of light they could see it sway, rocking to the gale—and suddenly, with a crash that was heard through the yell of the wind, it went.

"It's down!" shouted Hudson.

Ken's face was white.

"And the trader——" he breathed.

The giant trunk was down—and it had fallen across a corner of the store. Where the enormous mass struck, the building crunched like matchwood under its weight.

What had happened to the trader within the building? King of the Islands watched anxiously. No boat could have lived in the wildly-tossing lagoon. It was impossible to go ashore, to help, till a lull came. The lightning blazed again, and Ken saw the door of the store wide open, and a ghastly face looking out.

Drave was staring with wild eyes at the fallen banyan. But the fierce wind, rushing in at the open doorway, struck him back like a giant's hand, and he vanished. When the lightning gleamed again he was not to be seen.

### Taboo!

"LOWER the boat!"

The fierce storm had blown itself out. The Pacific still roared and surged madly outside the reef, and heavy waves dashed on the beach. But the wind had dropped almost as suddenly as it had come. The blackness was gone, hurrying clouds in dark battalions were driving north-east, and glittering stars were coming out in the sky.

Ken and Hudson leaped into the boat, and the Kanakas pulled to the beach.

Not a native was to be seen. The village lay in ruins, the grass-houses torn to fragments and scattered far and wide. The Pacific Trading Company's store was the only building that remained standing—and half of it was in ruins, smashed under the falling trunk of the banyan.

Of the trader nothing was to be seen. That he had survived the fall of the ancient banyan the shipmates

knew, from the glimpse they had had of him. But he had not been seen since, and it was likely enough that he lay injured, perhaps dead, in the wreck of his house.

Little as they liked him, the shipmates were anxious for him, and more than ready to give any help they could. As soon as the fall of the wind made it possible, they pulled ashore.

Ken and Kit were drenched with spindrift as they scrambled out of the boat and hurried up the beach towards the store.

No sound, no movement came from the half-destroyed building. If Drave was still living, he gave no sign.

The front part of the building was still intact. The doorway was wide open.

King of the Islands hurried to it and stared in. Outside was bright starlight, but within was darkness. Only through gaps in shattered and shaken walls came a glimmer of starshine.

"Drave!" called out Ken. "Are you safe? Speak, man."

Crack! It was the ring of a revolver.

King of the Islands started back in amazement. The shot went yards from him, but it had been fired with intent to hit, that was clear.

"Drave! Are you mad?" he shouted. "What——"

He leaped back from the doorway as another shot rang. It went nowhere near him—the hand that fired was shaking as if with the palsy.

A wild laugh followed—a sound that was horrible, blood-curdling. It struck Ken that the terror of the hurricane, the crashing banyan, and the wreck of the house had driven the trader insane—added to the effect of months of loneliness.

There was something hideous, wild, mad in the laugh that came from the dark interior of the store.

"Ha, ha! He's come back—he's come back!" yelled Drave's voice. "He's come back!"

Ken shuddered.

"Drave! Cool down, man—the danger's over!" He kept out of range of the doorway as he spoke, in soothing tones. "Put away your gun—we're friends here, Drave."

"He's come back!" shrieked the discordant voice within. "But you won't carry the story through the islands, hang you!"

A random shot from the revolver followed, whizzing through the open doorway and whistling away across the beach and the tossing lagoon.

"Who's come back, man?" exclaimed Ken, his flesh creeping.

"Ha, ha! Lockhart—he's come back!" yelled Drave. "Come in if you dare, King of the Islands. Come, hang you! I'm ready."

"Good heavens! He's mad!" muttered Ken.

The trader of Tolo caught the words, and his eerie laugh rang again from the darkness of the store.

"Mad? Yes, very likely! It's driven me wild, watching him—watching him—knowing all the time he was there, though no one else

knew—watching him, watching him, knowing he was waiting for a chance to come back at me—and now he's come! Now he's come back! Lockhart's come back! Take care, King of the Islands—I won't be taken alive!"

Again the revolver sent a shot whistling through the doorway.

"Ken!"

It was Hudson's voice, low and husky, thick with horror. He grasped the boy trader's arm and jerked him away.

Ken turned towards him, startled by the horror in the face of his shipmate.

"The man's mad," he said. "He's been brooding so long over the fate of Lockhart that he's gone off his crumpet, Kit! He thinks Lockhart has come back——"

"He has come back!" said Hudson in the same horrified tone.

"Kit!"

"Come—look!"

The mate drew Ken towards the fallen banyan. The huge trunk lay across the rear portion of the building, amid wreck and ruin. It had snapped off a few feet from the ground.

"Look!" repeated Hudson, shuddering, and he pointed to the stump of the great tree that still remained.

"Heavens!" breathed King of the Islands.

He gazed in utter horror.

The great trunk, rotten with extreme age, was hollow in the interior. The breaking away of the upper part had disclosed a huge gap inside. Once that gap had been visible from the outside of the trunk, but it had been stopped up with stakes of palm-wood and lashings of coconut fibre. What had appeared to be a strengthening of the failing trunk had in reality been a careful stopping-up of the hollow.

Now, by the breaking away of the upper part of the trunk, the hollow within was revealed.

And it was not empty! Leaning in the hollow, with its grinning skull turned towards the horrified shipmates, was a human skeleton.

For several minutes Ken and Hudson stood still, gazing spellbound at the hideous thing in the banyan.

They did not need the insane babblings of the man in the store to tell them the truth. They would have guessed at the sight of the hidden skeleton, revealed now by the destruction of the old tree in the hurricane. Lockhart, the vanished trader of Tolo, had come back! The hollow banyan had held the secret, and now the secret was revealed! Hudson pressed his companion's arm.

"He's come back, Ken—come back in the storm! That's Lockhart—what's left of Lockhart! That demon yonder murdered him—and hid him in the hollow tree——"

King of the Islands shivered. But he pulled himself together and approached the hideous relic that told of Drave's unknown but suspected crime.

As he passed into the huge stump of the fallen banyan, the skull grinned at him in the starlight.

One look, close at hand, was enough to tell how the man had died. The back of the skull was crushed in—a terrible blow from an axe or a bush-knife, struck from behind, had done the work. Under so fearful a blow the trader must have died instantly. The secret of Lockhart's fate was a secret no longer.

Ken stepped back, sick with horror. But anger, as well as horror, filled his heart now. The man in the store had done this—the man whose reeling senses had snapped under the terror of seeing his crime revealed by the storm.

"The villain!" breathed Ken. "The cowardly villain! A blow from behind—the villain!"

He turned back towards the store.

He knew the whole story now—knew how the crime had been accomplished without the knowledge of the natives who had swarmed in the grass-houses close at hand. The hollow banyan was but a few steps from the store.

Within the building, one night, Lockhart had perished under the treacherous blow—it had been the work of but a few minutes, perhaps a few moments, for the murderer to bear the body to the tree and thrust it out of sight in the hollow of the ancient trunk.

And the "taboo" that lay on the old tree had made it the safest hiding-place that could have been designed—there were only natives on the island, and no native would touch any object that was under "taboo."

Only from a white man could discovery have come—and white men came seldom to Tolo, and were repelled when they did by the surly man who had so fearful a secret to keep.

For two years since the crime the wretch had lived there, with his dread secret at his very door unsuspected. Brooding over his crime, his punishment had been heavy. Ken could understand now the unreasoning rage of the trader when Hudson had lightly struck the banyan with his hand that morning. It was rage born of haunting terror and guilt.

Ken set his teeth hard.

"Kit, we've got to secure that murderer—he's going away on the Dawn in irons!"

"You bet!" said Hudson grimly. And the shipmates strode to the store.

#### Justice!

**D**RAVE appeared in the open doorway as the shipmates approached.

There was a revolver in his hand, but his hand was shaking so much that there was little danger from his weapon.

He raised it unsteadily as Ken and Kit, faces grim, came towards him.

He had heard their words, they could see that, and he knew what they intended.

"Drop that gun, Drave!" ordered King of the Islands coldly. "You're a prisoner."

Drave laughed.

It was a blood-curdling sound. The man's brain, unsteadied by long brooding, had given way. It was a madman who was staring at the shipmates over the shaking revolver.

"He's come back!" cried Drave. "I've thought of him there—every day, every night—waiting to pounce

The bullet missed by a yard or more, and the next moment the boy trader was upon him with a bound.

The revolver was knocked away, and Ken grasped him.

As the boy trader gripped him, the mists of insanity seemed to clear from the brain of the wretched man. He stared stupidly at the revolver that lay at his feet, and then at King of the Islands, passive in Ken's grasp. Then his glance went to the skull that grinned from the hollow banyan, and a shudder shook him from head to foot.

"Lockhart!" he said in a whisper.

"Lockhart! He's come back—I killed him in the store that dark night—and hid him in the hollow tree—no one knew—no one knew he—"

"You are my prisoner!" said King of the Islands.

The insane blaze came back to the sunken eyes of the trader. He laughed, and with a sudden wrench tore himself loose from Ken's grasp.

"After him!" shouted Ken.

He expected the man to make a break for the distant bush. But it was towards the lagoon that Drave was running.

Fast behind him the shipmates pursued. Ken shouted to the Kanakas standing by the whaleboat.

Kaio-lalulalonga made a rush to intercept the fugitive.

Drave paused a second, swerved, and ran on towards the beach again. He ran with the swiftness of a deer.

"Stop him!" yelled King of the Islands, guessing the man's intention now.

But there was no hand to stop the fleeing, desperate wretch. Drave reached the margin of the beach, where the tossing lagoon thundered on the sand.

A moment more, and he had plunged into the waters.

King of the Islands reached the water's edge, panting. Hudson was with him in a moment. They stood knee-deep in the water, staring into the starry lagoon. But they did not see the trader of Tolo—and in life no

eye ever saw him again. The wretch whose terrible secret had been hidden in the hollow banyan had gone to his account!

*(And now we must bid farewell for a time to Ken King and his trusty crew. After months of eventful voyages, storms and stresses, the Dawn is going into dock for overhaul and repairs, and Ken King and his shipmates are to take a well-earned holiday. We shall not follow them ashore, but will leave them to enjoy their rest, satisfying our thirst for more adventure by meeting next week young Tony Sturrock, and joining in the thrills that come his way in "KLONDIKE LURE," as related by JOHN HUNTER.)*



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on me! I knew he'd come back some day! Oh, I knew it! They used to tell me to have that banyan cut down—ha, ha!—they would have found out something if I had cut it down! I made the devil-doctor put a taboo on it—no nigger on the island dared to touch that tree! Ha, ha! But I knew he'd come back!"

His staring eyes went to the skeleton in the hollow trunk.

"You're there, Lockhart, you're there, hang you! But they won't take me back to Fiji to be hanged! One or two more—what does it matter?"

He laughed again, and fired at King of the Islands.