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## PRANKS IN THE BRINY!

See centre pages



# A KING OF THE ISLANDS STORY

By CHARLES HAMILTON—Complete



There was a cackle from the Santa Cruz boys as Ken King emerged from the companion with Wu Fang squirming in his grasp.

## The SEA-CAT'S PRIZE

"Twenty on the line! A cable's length on the beach, five fathoms in the bush! Bags of pearls—bags of pearls!" That's all they can get out of Ben Keefe, the castaway whom King of the Islands is frantically seeking in as thrilling a chase as ever the South Seas Islands have known!

### Keefe, the Pearler.

DANDY PETER PARSONS, of Lukwe, held on to a rope as his cutter heeled over to the wind, and stared across the moonlit water. Astern of the cutter, the island of Lalinge lay a black mass against the moon. Ahead, the vast Pacific rolled, and on the wide waste of waters a single object was visible—a canoe that was fleeing as fast as four paddles could drive.

Four brawny Santa Cruz boys knelt to the paddles, with tireless arms. But, fast as the canoe fled, the Sea-Cat under her tall sail was overhauling her, hand over fist. And Dandy Peter, the sea-lawyer of Lukwe, grinned as he watched.

Three Lukwe boys manned the cutter, one at the tiller, two at the sheets. Their eyes were on Peter Parsons, not on the chase, and they jumped to obey his orders almost before they were uttered. Dandy Peter had a heavy hand with

"niggers," often with a capstan bar in it.

Why the "feller white master" had suddenly left his moorings in the lagoon at Lalinge and rushed the cutter out to sea, the black boys did not know, nor could they guess what might be his interest in the fleeing canoe.

But they knew that he was in desperate earnest, and that there would be aching backs on board the Sea-Cat if he failed to overhaul the canoe!

"They're making Kufa!" Dandy Peter muttered. "They'll beat King of the Islands, but they won't beat this hooker!"

He shot a rapid glance astern. There was no sail on the sea between the cutter and the dark mass of Lalinge. If King of the Islands was putting to sea that night, he had not yet got out of the lagoon.

Dandy Peter snapped his fingers at the island. He had no fear of the boy trader of the Pacific. If Ken King sailed that night, he would sail too late!

His gaze returned to the canoe. He was close enough now to see every object on board. Streaming with perspiration, the Santa Cruz boys slaved at the paddles. In the stern of the canoe crouched a little figure, with slanting eyes fixed on the pursuing cutter—Wu Fang, the Chinaman. Something lay in the bottom of the canoe, hidden by a boat-cloak. But Dandy Peter knew what lay there.

Wu Fang's slanting eyes glittered with rage as he watched the Sea-Cat. He had feared pursuit from King of the Islands. The sight of the Lukwe cutter had not, at first, alarmed him, but he had changed his course twice to avoid the cutter, and each time the Sea-Cat had followed suit. And

then Wu Fang knew that he was chased.

Dandy Peter, watching, saw the Chinaman's hand grope in his loose garments and reappear with something that gleamed in the moonlight. The sea-lawyer laughed, picked up a Winchester rifle, and pushed the barrel across the cutter's rail. Wu Fang's revolver disappeared again.

It needed only a pressure of the Lukwe skipper's finger to send a stream of bullets into the canoe, and Wu Fang knew that it was not good enough.

FAR away across the moonlit waters, a tiny speck showed where the islet of Kufa lay. But the canoe had no chance of reaching Kufa. Like a swooping albatross the cutter ran it down.

"You feller Chink!" Dandy Peter roared, as he came within hail. "You stop along this cutter! You hear me?"

The slanting eyes blazed at him, but the canoe did not stop. The paddles flashed on.

Bang! The rifle roared, and Dandy Peter pitched a bullet into the canoe. He fired to scare the paddlers, but he cared little if the bullet found a billet in flesh and bone. There was a yell of alarm from the Santa Cruz boys, and one of them clapped a black hand to a fuzzy head, where the shot had grazed the skin. The black boys stared round in terror, and the paddles were immediately idle.

The canoe shot onward a cable's length, then lost way and rocked in the wash of the Sea-Cat. Dandy Peter snapped an order to his crew, and the cutter shortened sail and ran alongside the rocking canoe.

Again the yellow hand sought the revolver. But the rifle, and the desperate, reckless face looking over

## The Sea-Cat's Prize

it, daunted the Chinaman, and he did not draw his weapon. Dandy Peter could, and would, have riddled him with bullets. One of the Lukwe boys jumped down with a rope, and made the canoe fast, and Wu Fang raised no hand to stop him.

But the savage rage with which he had watched the cutter pursuing had disappeared from Wu Fang's face now. His yellow countenance was a blank mask as he looked up at the Lukwe skipper.

"What name you makee this canoe stop along cutter, sar?" he asked.

"What name you run along sea?" grinned Dandy Peter.

"Me run along sea, along me go Kufa," answered Wu Fang. "What name me no run along sea, spousee me likee?"

"You've got a passenger for Kufa?" asked the Lukwe skipper.

The Chinaman started. He had feared that the Sea-Cat's pursuit meant that Peter Parsons knew what was hidden under the boat-cloak. Now he was sure of it. But he answered calmly:

"No passenger stop along this canoe, sar."

"No feller stop except you and your black boys?"

"No feller stop, sar."

The Chinaman was watching the Lukwe skipper like a cat. But Dandy Peter was not the man to give him a chance for a sudden pot-shot.

"You takee feller gun belong you, drop along sea!" he snapped, and the glitter of his eyes over the rifle enforced the command.

Wu Fang, with set teeth, drew the revolver from his hidden pocket and dropped it into the Pacific.

"Plenty much better you 'bey order along me, Wu Fang, or you dead feller Chink!" said Dandy Peter grimly. "Now lift that boat-cloak, and we'll see your passenger."

The Chinaman hesitated.

"Baggage belong me stop along canoe, sar!" he said.

"I reckon I'm lifting your baggage, Wu Fang," the sea-lawyer laughed. "I reckon your baggage is alive, and bound hand and foot! I was watching you when you got that feller pearler off King of the Islands' ketch in the lagoon at Lalinge. I let you get away with him, to run you down outside the reef. I'm taking him off your hands, Wu Fang."

"What name?" hissed the Chinaman. "What name you wantee takee feller pearler?"

"All samee you wantee, I reckon!" retorted Peter Parsons. "You haven't taken this risk for nothing, Wu Fang. No talk any more, mouth belong you. Lift that boat-cloak, or—"

Wu Fang, with gritting teeth, bent and pulled the cloak aside. The moonlight glimmered on a man who lay bound hand and foot in the bottom of the canoe, gagged with a tapa cloth tied over his mouth. What could be seen of the face was haggard and gaunt, and the sunken eyes

stared wildly up, gleaming strangely in the light of the moon. Peter Parsons' eyes fixed on the haggard face.

"It's Keefe, the pearler!" he said. "I knew him in the Paumotus. He was after pearls then. And I reckon he's found them, as you're so keen to lay hands on him, Wu Fang. This feller savvy plenty too much!"

The sea-lawyer chuckled, and called an order to his crew. Two of the Lukwe boys dropped into the canoe and lifted the bound man. Wu Fang's slanting eyes glittered with fury. The Santa Cruz boys stared on in silence.

The rifle in the hands of the sea-lawyer daunted the canoe's crew. Dandy Peter's reckless reputation was known throughout the Islands; he was more than ready to open fire if he was resisted. Every life in the canoe hung on a thread under his rifle.

The Lukwe boys passed the bound man up the side of the cutter. Wu Fang's eyes followed his recaptured prisoner, with a deadly fury in them which the sea-lawyer did not heed. To Peter Parsons a Chink was of little more account than a black boy, and he did not heed the hate and vengeance in the Chinaman's glare. He made a motion with the rifle.

"Sheer off!" he snapped. "You feller washy-washy along Kufa, or along Davy Jones, spousee you likee! You washee-washee plenty too quick, or this feller rifle he talkee. You savvy?"

The Santa Cruz boys "savvied." Without waiting for a word from their master, they knelt to the paddles again and the canoe shot away. The Chinaman, stuttering with rage, shook a clenched yellow fist at the cutter.

Bang! In sheer recklessness the sea-lawyer loosed off the rifle, and Wu Fang gave a yell as the bullet grazed his shoulder, and there was another yell as it tore a fuzzy lock from a black boy's head. The Santa Cruz boys paddled desperately, and the canoe raced away over the glimmering sea and vanished, followed by the mocking laughter of the sea-lawyer.

### On a False Scent.

"FELLER cutter he stop, sar!" exclaimed Koko, the brown boatswain of Ken King's trading ketch, the Dawn.

"Parson's packet!" said Kit Hudson. King of the Islands nodded. There was still a glimmer of moonlight on the sea from the sinking moon, as the rosy flush of sunrise gleamed up in the east. The new day was at hand.

Ken King's face was set and stern. Hours had passed since the ketch Dawn had sailed out of the lagoon at Lalinge in search of the Chinaman's canoe. Ken's deepest anger had been roused by the kidnapping of the castaway from his ship. He had picked the man up at sea from a drifting boat, saved his life, and carried him in to Lalinge—only for the man to fall into the hands of that little Chinese demon.

Why Wu Fang wanted him Ken could not guess, but that he meant the castaway evil there was no doubt. The man, Ken believed, had been a pearler, and he wondered whether Keefe knew the secret of some pearling-ground, and whether that was the Chink's object. It was the same suspicion that had crossed the keen mind of Peter Parsons.

It was not only anger at the Chink's audacity that stirred the boy trader. He feared for Keefe in the hands of Wu Fang. The castaway's terror, when his eyes had fallen on the Chink, showed how much reason he had to dread the little man with the slanting eyes.

For hours the ketch had been searching the sea, under the moon, for the canoe that had fled with the prisoner. But once outside the reef, Ken realised only too clearly the difficulty of the task he had set himself. In almost any direction, the Chinaman might have vanished into the vastness of the Pacific and he had a long start. Once sure of a course, the swift ketch would have run him down fast enough.

**B**UT what course to set was a problem to King of the Islands. He could only sweep on long tacks, watching the sea, hoping to catch sight of the canoe, hoping to sight some craft that might have seen it. And he was glad when he raised the cutter's tall sail in the glimmer of the sunrise and the dying moon.

He had missed the Lukwe cutter from the coral quay at Lalinge, and knew that Dandy Peter must have sailed soon after the Chinese. As likely as not, Peter Parsons had seen something of the canoe, though Ken little dreamed that Parsons had watched the kidnapping of the castaway and sailed in pursuit of the kidnapper!

"It's the Lukwe packet right enough!" said Ken, his eyes fixed on the tall sail that danced on the sea southward. "We'll run her down and speak to Parsons. He may be able to tell us something."

Kit Hudson, the Australian mate of the Dawn, wrinkled his brows thoughtfully as he watched the distant cutter. The Sea-Cat was heading south-west, which was the course for Lukwe, and it looked as if Peter Parsons was sailing back to his own island. But it was hours, at least, since he had pulled out of the Lalinge lagoon, and Kit wondered why he was not farther on his way. If Peter Parsons had set a straight course he should have been far below the sea-line by that time.

"Something's delayed him," said Ken, the same thought occurring to his mind. "He may have gone round by Kufa. Anyhow, I'm glad of a chance to speak his cutter."

The sun leaped up from the sea, and it was day. Like a curtain drawn, the shadows rolled from the Pacific.

"Feller Parsons no wantee speak along this hooker, sar!" said Koko.

"Uncivil brute!" muttered Hudson. "He knows we're after him, but he won't shorten sail."

King of the Islands frowned. There had been bitter blood between him and the sea-lawyer of Lukwe, and he did not expect Peter Parsons to trouble himself to be civil. Ken was not surprised to see Parsons standing steadily on his course, heedless of the obvious fact that the ketch desired to speak.

But the ketch sailed almost two fathoms to the cutter's one, and she swiftly ran down the Sea-Cat. It only meant delay, but delay was what Ken was most anxious to avoid, when every minute might be precious if he was to save Ben Keefe from the Chink.

In the blaze of the sun, now high above the horizon, the shipmates could see the dapper figure of Dandy Peter, standing on his deck, and could see the three Lukwe boys staring back.

Ken waved his hand. The Lukwe

his eyes showed that his mind was a blank.

He lay in the bunk like a log, his fixed eyes staring, hardly heeding the Lukwe skipper looking down at him. Perhaps some throb of compassion stirred in Dandy Peter's hard heart as he looked at the gaunt face ravaged by suffering.

If King of the Islands learned that the castaway was on board the cutter, Dandy Peter's game was up. The handsome blackguard of Lukwe was as reckless of his own life as of the lives of others, but he did not want a desperate fight against heavy odds, if he could avoid it—especially as he was not yet sure that the game was worth the candle. He had a shrewd suspicion of what Wu Fang wanted the pearler for, but as yet it was only suspicion.

Coolly and quietly he took a tapa

an ironical grin on his face. Wu Fang's canoe had fled to the north-east. Every fathom that glided under the ketch's cutwater drew King of the Islands farther and farther from the Chinaman he sought.

Which was all to the good, from Dandy Peter's point of view. If Ken King picked up the Chinaman, he would not be long in learning where the castaway was. At this rate he was not likely to pick him up. Peter Parsons hoped that Wu Fang had gone while the going was good, and would not be seen in those seas again.

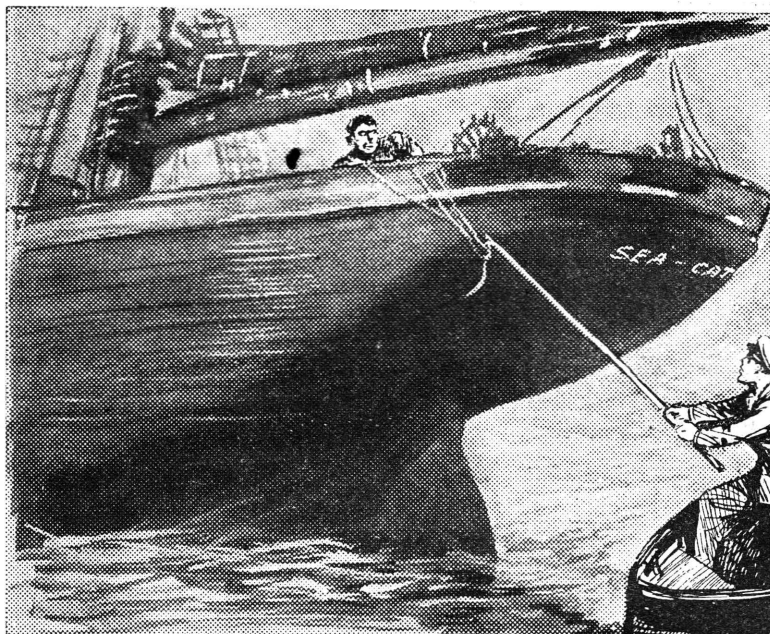
The ketch ranged up within a biscuit's toss of the cutter, and Ken shouted across to the Lukwe skipper: "Ahoy, the Sea-Cat!"

"Ahoy, King of the Islands," called back Peter Parsons. "You're early out of Lalinge!"

"I'm looking for a canoe, with a Chinaman and a bunch of Santa Cruz boys. Seen anything of such a craft?"

"Not Wu Fang?" asked Parsons.

"That very Chink!" answered King of the Islands, eagerly. "You've seen him, Parsons?"



A startled black face looked down from the cutter's deck as Hudson hooked on to the chains. "Call your captain!" rapped Ken, from the stern of the whaleboat.



skipper took the cheroot from his mouth and waved back, with a grin on his face. But he did not shorten sail. If King of the Islands wanted to speak, he had to overhaul the Sea-Cat.

Parsons disappeared from the deck, vanishing into the cutter's tiny cabin. Out of sight of the eyes on board the Dawn, the shipmates little dreamed how he was occupied.

In the Lukwe skipper's bunk lay the man he had taken from Wu Fang's canoe. That the man was sick, very far from recovered from his sufferings in an open boat at sea, Parsons had seen at a glance, and he had released Keefe from bonds and gag and made him as comfortable as he could in the bunk. He had seen, too, that the castaway, though conscious, had not come to his right senses. The wild and vacant stare of

cord and bound the castaway in the bunk, and fastened a gag in his mouth. The man hardly stirred as the sea-lawyer handled him, but lay in the same state of torpor.

Parsons lounged back to the deck and called to his crew. The Lukwe boys watched him curiously. All their master's proceedings, since he had left the coral quay at Lalinge, were a mystery to the Lukwe boys.

"You feller boy," said Dandy Peter. "Feller King of the Islands comey speakee along this cutter, you savvy. You no sing out along King of the Islands feller stop along cabin belong me. S'pose King of the Islands speakee along you feller, you no savvy nothing along that feller stop along cabin."

"This feller savvy, sar!"

Dandy Peter, cheroot in mouth, resumed watching the pursuing ketch,

"He was just ahead of me coming out of the lagoon," said Parsons coolly. "What's your trouble with Wu Fang?"

"He's taken the castaway, Keefe, out of my ship, and got away with him," answered Ken. "I reckoned he had run out to sea, and if you've seen him that makes it certain. Did you see Keefe in the canoe?"

Parsons shook his head.

"There was something under a boat-cloak," he said. "Might have been your man."

"Not much doubt about it! What course were they steering?"

"South-east by east when I dropped them," said Parsons. "I wondered if the Chink had been up to something—his boys were going all out with the paddles."

"South-east by east—that looks as if they might be making Tu'ua,



## The Sea-Cat's Prize!

though it's a long trip for a canoe. Thanks, Captain Parsons."

"Not at all, Captain King," answered Dandy Peter politely. "I reckon if I'd known you wanted news I'd have shortened sail. You'll run down the Chink before he makes Tu'ua."

"I reckon so!"

King of the Islands shouted an order, and the bows of the ketch swung away from the cutter, like a sea-bird on her new course.

Dandy Peter grinned. There was a cackle of laughter from the Lukwe boys. Without a suspicion in his mind, King of the Islands was driving his ketch under full sail south-east by east, and the Chinaman in the canoe had fled to the north-east.

The boy trader was not likely to pick up the speck on the ocean that he was looking for. His new course led him away from the fleeing Chinaman, and away from Lukwe, and the Lukwe crew cackled over the deception that had sent King of the Islands on a wild-goose chase.

**K**OKO, at the wheel of the Dawn, stood on the course set him by his white master. But several times his dark eyes turned back to the cutter fleeing away towards distant Lukwe. Koko, as he often said, was no common Kanaka, and he had much more "savvy" than most of the unthinking children of the south. His dusky brow was thoughtful, and he shook his head more than once. King of the Islands glanced at him.

"What you tinkee, head belong you, Koko?" he asked.

"Me tinkee that white feller Parsons plenty bad feller, sar!" answered the boatswain. "You tinkee that feller talk good talk along you, sar?"

Ken stared. So far as he could see, the Lukwe skipper had no imaginable motive for deceiving him.

"What name you no tinkee that feller Parsons talk good talk along me, Koko?" he asked.

"Me no likee look along eye belong him," said Koko slowly. "Me no likee look along eye belong Lukwe feller."

Ken's eyes met Hudson's. A doubt stirred in his mind, for he had great faith in the keen instinct of the brown boatswain of the Dawn. But the Australian shook his head.

"Why should even that blackguard have lied to us for nothing?" said the mate of the Dawn. "Wu Fang is nothing to him. And even Peter Parsons couldn't want to leave a white man in the hands of a Chink. Even that nest of scoundrels on Lukwe stand by their own colour."

"That's so," Ken said. "I reckon Parsons gave it to us straight. Why shouldn't he? We'll pick up the Chink by noon."

And the Dawn raced on south-east by east. But she did not pick up the canoe by noon. And she did not pick

it up as she ran on in the sunset towards Tu'ua. Many a canoe was sighted on the rolling Pacific, but there was no Chinaman in any of them.

Likely enough, the Chink had changed his course, or had been taken aboard some vessel at sea. But as the sun sank red in the west, King of the Islands wondered whether Koko had been right and whether the sea-lawyer of Lukwe had sent him on a false scent.

### A Strange Secret.

**T**WENTY on the line! A cable's length on the beach, and five fathoms in the bush!"

The muttered words in the veranda caught the ear of Peter Parsons as he came up the steps out of the sun-blaze on Lukwe. He fixed his eyes curiously on Ben Keefe, who lay listlessly in the long chair.

Dandy Peter's cutter, and two or three luggers, were at anchor in the lagoon, with sleepy black boys sprawling on their decks. The beach of sand and powdered coral was dazzling to the eye. A few natives loitered among the palms, back of the beach, but most were sleeping in the shade.

The white men on Lukwe—the rough crew of pearlmen and traders—were mostly asleep in the heat of the day. But from the veranda of Ferguson's bungalow came the sound of voices and the clinking of bottles and glasses, where three or four men were playing cards, waited on by perspiring house-boys.

It was that jolly party that Dandy Peter had just left, followed by grinning glances from his associates. All Lukwe knew that Peter Parsons had brought home a castaway in his cutter a few days ago, and had threatened his house-boy, Kolo, with the sting-ray tail if he failed to take care of him.

Kolo, who had felt the weight of that sting-ray tail, watched over the castaway like a brother. And all Lukwe wondered what it might mean, and whether the hardest case in the Pacific was going "soft."

Peter Parsons did not look "soft" as he stood staring at the man in the chair. His dark face was grim.

Kolo's care had done the castaway good. He had fared, so far, as well in Dandy Peter's hands as in those of King of the Islands. The gaunt frame had filled out, the strength was returning to the wasted limbs. There was colour in the bearded cheeks, light in the sunken eyes, not so haggard and sunken now.

Dandy Peter had believed, and hoped, that with returning health the man's senses would return, that his dazed mind would recover with his wasted body. But as yet there was no sign of it.

The man ate and drank and slept and moved like an automaton, but he did not talk, and Dandy Peter waited and watched in vain to see intelligence dawn in his eyes. Only at intervals the castaway muttered to him-

self—words that had no connected meaning.

His fearful experience in the drifting boat had numbed his brain. Sense and memory were gone, and even when his own name was spoken, it conveyed nothing to him. That he would recover, given time, Peter Parsons was certain. But with the passing days he was growing savagely impatient.

For the suspicion that had led the sea-lawyer to kidnap him from Wu Fang, the kidnapper, was now a practical certainty. Dandy Peter knew what Wu Fang had wanted, as clearly as if the Chink had told him. It was useless to speak to the man. At a word, he became dumb.

But often and often Peter Parsons listened to his rambling mutterings, broken sentences and disconnected words which he knew had a meaning could he only have pieced them together. For the subject was always the same—the Chink, the sea, the island, and pearls—pearls—pearls!

The man had been a pearler once, in the Paumotu, as Parsons knew. It was years since he had seen him, but he knew him. He was Ben Keefe, and he had run a pearling lugger with a Raiatean boat-steerer. That was all Parsons knew of him, and he had forgotten the man's existence till it was recalled to him at Lalinge.

Pearls—and pearls—and pearls—always the muttered talk ran on pearls—and an island! What island? Dandy Peter would have given much to know. Pearls—bags of pearls—sacks of pearls—pearls thick as fallen coconuts after a gale! It might have been the fantastic dream of a crazed man. But if it was that, why did Wu Fang want the man and take such desperate risks to lay hands on him? It was not that.

The disconnected mutterings, fragment after fragment, day after day, told the sea-lawyer more. He had pieced together the castaway's story, more or less. He had been a prisoner on a schooner, in the hands of a Chink who sailed with a black crew. There was no doubt that the Chink was Wu Fang.

**P**ARSONS gathered that the Chink had used him cruelly. Why, if not to extract a secret from him? He pieced it together that the pearler had escaped one dark night, casting loose a boat, with a keg of water and a bag of biscuits, trusting himself to the boundless sea.

That fitted in with what Dandy Peter had learned from King of the Islands, who had picked the man up in a drifting quarter-boat. He had escaped the Chink, but he had not escaped hunger and thirst and the sun!

Dandy Peter could guess now, too, why Wu Fang had loitered long days at Lalinge, watching the sea and the incoming ships. The Chink had lost his man, adrift in the trackless Pacific, and his only hope had been that the boat might have been picked up at sea. He had chosen Lalinge for his watch, because it was the centre of trade for hundreds of miles round. And he had been right, for it was into



Lalange that King of the Islands had sailed with the man he had saved.

"Twenty on the line!" came distinctly from the castaway's lips, as the sea-lawyer stood watching him with lowering brows. "Bags of pearls—bags of pearls—bags of pearls!"

He stared direct at Dandy Peter, but the staring eyes did not seem to see the sea-lawyer. Kolo, the house-boy, looked out of the doorway with fear and distaste at the castaway. The Lukwe boy had all an untutored savage's dislike and dread of the insane; a "feller brain belong him no walk about any more," as he would have expressed it. But that dislike and dread made no difference to his care of the castaway. Kolo dreaded the sting-ray tail still more!

"Babbling fool!" broke out Peter Parsons at last. "What do you mean by twenty on the line? Twenty what? Not longitude, in these seas! Latitude? That would be between the Paumotus and South America. Plenty of room to search!"

AT the sound of his voice, the castaway's mutterings ceased. Dandy Peter's eyes gleamed at him. Had the pearler been in his senses, able to speak intelligently, the sea-lawyer would have had little scruple in forcing an answer from him. His methods might have been only too like those of the Chink.

But even the sting-ray tail could not force an intelligent answer from a man whose wits were wandering.

Parsons threw himself into a chair, lighted his cheroot, and snarled to Kolo to bring him a drink. He sat smoking, and staring at the castaway, listening for any further mutterings that might fall from him. But Keefe was silent now, his eyes fixed, staring, on the lagoon rippling on the beach in front of the bungalow. Darker and darker grew the sea-lawyer's brow as he watched him.

The man had a secret—a secret of rich pearls that had cost him dear. Somewhere, in his wanderings in his lugger, he had struck a rich find. Of that Dandy Peter was certain. When the numbed brain functioned once more, he should tell his secret—or Dandy Peter would know the reason why. The time would come. But till it came, Parsons had to wait—with angry, savage impatience!

And while he waited, anything might happen. The Chink would not be idle. The sea-lawyer had never imagined that he had scared Wu Fang away for good. And there was King of the Islands, whose search could not for ever prove as fruitless as it had begun. There was indeed cause for Peter Parsons' impatience!

For an hour he sat there, smoking, scowling, but no word came from the castaway. The sea-lawyer rose at last, and left his bungalow, to return to the uproarious gambling crowd in Ferguson's veranda. As if his departure had released the dumb tongue, he heard a muttering as he went down the palm-wood steps:

"A cable's length on the beach—five fathoms in the bush! Bags of pearls—bags of pearls!"

## STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER!

*YOU may have heard of the boy seeking entry to Dartmouth Naval College, who was asked by an admiral in the preliminary interview at Whitehall to name the three most famous admirals in British history.*

*The bright candidate answered: "Nelson, Drake, and—I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch your name, sir?" That boy got his cadetship!*

*Often, in the Navy, an ounce of tact is worth a hundredweight of discipline. The captain with a thousand men under him usually discovers that, sooner or later.*

*Tact is a rare quality, and one well worth the cultivation. Like oil in an engine, it assists in the smooth running of the complicated wheels of life.*

*By tact you avoid commenting on the plumage of the ducks on the village pond as your chum returns from the cricket match with the recollection of a big O against his name in the score book!*

*By the constant exercise of tact, you avoid hurting needlessly the feelings of other people. And, incidentally, you avoid much trouble yourself!*

## The Admiral



The dandy of Lukwe could have sworn that the mumbled words were a clue to hidden pearls—if he could but have understood the clue!

### Luck!

**K**EN KING had sailed out of Lalange with every hope of running down Wu Fang's canoe on the open sea. But the canoe had vanished as utterly as if the Pacific had swallowed it up. A week had passed, and now the Dawn lay in the lagoon of Voa.

On a score of ships, on a score of islands, Ken had asked for news, and received none. A hundred or more native canoes had been stopped and questioned, but their crews had seen nothing of a canoe manned by Santa Cruz boys, "along Chineer feller he stop."

If Peter Parsons had set him a false course, he had robbed the boy trader of what chance he might have had of running down the Chinaman. Ken could not feel sure of that; but in any case it was too late to mend the matter. He was a hundred and fifty miles from Lukwe now, and it was scarce worth such a trip to call Parsons to account—even if he had played such a malicious trick.

Few South Sea trading skippers would have given up a week for the sake of an unknown castaway who was, after all, a stranger. King of the Islands would have given more had there seemed a chance of success. But he had to agree with Kit Hudson that there was no chance. Wu Fang had vanished into the boundless spaces of the Pacific, with—as Ken believed—the castaway pearler in his hands.

Seeking him was like seeking a needle in a haystack—a haystack, in

this case, thousands of miles in extent. It was hopeless, and the boy trader knew it, though he was unwilling to acknowledge it.

"We've done all we can, old bean," said Hudson quietly, "and we've got to pick up trade, Ken! We can keep our eyes and our ears open. And I reckon we're as likely to get news of Wu Fang while we're trading as while we're beating up and down the Pacific with nothing doing."

"That's so, Kit!" agreed King of the Islands. "But when I think of what may happen to that poor fellow in the hands of that yellow demon—"

"I know!" Hudson nodded. "I feel that as much as you do, Ken! But what can we do?"

"Nothing!" said Ken, with a sigh. Hudson made a gesture towards the warehouses on the beach of Voa, and said:

"We're offered cargo here, Ken, for a trip to Tu'ua. I think we ought to take the offer. We've got to get back to business, old man."

Ken rose from his deck-chair, and shook himself. He knew that Hudson was right. He had to make up his mind, and he made it up.

"We're not letting go, Ken!" added the mate of the Dawn. "With luck, we may get on the track of that yellow swab. If we get wind of him, the trade can go to pot while we run him down. But—"

"You're right, old man! I'd rather set a course for anywhere but Tu'ua—we've already combed Tu'ua for Wu Fang—"

"We can get cargo for Tu'ua—"

"It's settled," said Ken. And settled it was! For the time, at

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## The Sea-Cat's Prize

(Continued from page 15)

least, the quest of Wu Fang had to be given up, though King of the Islands was bitterly, savagely determined that the day should come when he would call the Chink to account.

But now that he had made up his mind, the boy trader settled down to business in his usual, cool-headed way. Wu Fang and the castaway were dismissed from mind, and he gave his attention to cargo. The whaleboat carried him ashore, to make terms with the Voa trader who had cargo for Tu'ua. And the Hiva-Oa boys were soon busy getting the goods on board and packing them away. The Dawn stood out to sea.

**I**N the sunny days and starry nights that followed, Ken and Kit gave plenty of thought to the vanished castaway, and discussed the strange affair often enough. They had little doubt that the man had, or that Wu Fang believed he had, the secret of a rich find in pearls—his delirious mutterings while on board the ketch confirmed that view.

And if he was still in Wu Fang's hands, the Chink might be driving him, perhaps by torture, to reveal his secret. That was a bitter reflection to the shipmates of the Dawn.

Day and night, King of the Islands swept the sea with keen eyes, though he knew he was hoping against hope. For wherever Wu Fang was, it was fairly certain that he could not have remained so long at sea in a canoe. He was ashore, or on a ship, there could hardly be a doubt of that.

On the fourth day from Voa, the Dawn ran into the lagoon at Tu'ua, a familiar island to Ken. Only one vessel was at anchor there—a handsome two-masted schooner, from whose deck two or three black boys stared at the ketch as she ran in before a fresh breeze in the sunny morning.

A boat, piled with casks, was coming off to the schooner, which looked as if her skipper had put in at Tu'ua for water.

King of the Islands lost no time in landing his cargo. For some time he and his crew were busy, and he came back to the Dawn with a cheerful expression on his sunburnt face.

"We've struck lucky here, Kit!" he said. "I've got the offer of a full cargo of copra for Lalinge, and a straight run home."

"Good luck!" said Hudson.

"We can get the stuff on board this afternoon, and tow out at sundown," said King of the Islands. "Here, you feller Danny, you bring feller lime-squash along this feller."

"Yessar," squeaked the cooky-boy from the galley.

It was nearly noon, and work was suspended till the heat of the tropical day should have passed. As the cooky-boy brought the lime-squash for his master, Ken's eyes turned rather seriously on the schooner that had been at anchor. The vessel was towing out of the lagoon astern of a whaleboat packed with black boys. They were pulling hard, sweating in

the heat, towing the schooner into the reef passage.

"That skipper must be in a hurry, to set his boys to work in this blaze," remarked the boy trader.

"Taking it easy, all the same," said Hudson, with a grin. "He's not on deck."

No white man was to be seen on the schooner. There were black boys in the boat, black boys on the deck, a black boy at the helm. Apparently the skipper was below, which was singular enough when the vessel was towing out through a dangerous passage in the reefs!

Danny, the cooky-boy, glanced after the receding schooner and gave a cackle.

"My word, sar, me plenty glad that hooker no stop," he exclaimed.

Ken glanced at him, and asked: "Why you plenty glad that hooker no stop, Danny?"

"Me no likee Santa Cruz boy, sar!" said Danny. "That Santa Cruz boy plenty too much kill this feller Danny, my word! Kill this feller along rope, along leg belong him, along arm belong him, sar!"

"What!" gasped Ken, and stared at the cooky-boy blankly. "What time that feller Santa Cruz boy he kill you, along rope along leg belong you?" exclaimed King of the Islands.

"Along Lalinge, sar," answered Danny. "Along me watch along sick feller, sar, along night feller Chink he takee sick feller along sea along canoe."

"Ken! We've got him!" Kit Hudson roared.

King of the Islands stared after the schooner now gliding into the reef passage.

**O**N the night that the castaway had been kidnapped from the Dawn, Danny had been left on board to keep watch, and had been bound and gagged by Wu Fang and his Santa Cruz boys. Evidently he had recognised his assailants among the crew of the schooner. But, with the irresponsibility of a Kanaka, he had never thought of mentioning the fact till it came out by chance!

"You plenty sure, Danny?" exclaimed Ken.

"Me plenty sure, sar," answered the cooky-boy. "Me savvy that feller Santa Cruz boy too much altogether. Me plenty glad that hooker no stop along lagoon!"

"Koko!" shouted Ken. The brown boatswain, who was busy in the trade-room below, put his head out of the companion. "Koko! You look along feller schooner, eye belong you. That feller black boy, what feller island he stop?"

"He stop along Santa Cruz, sar," answered Koko, after one glance at the distant schooner. There was not one of the hundred races of the Pacific that Koko did not know at a glance.

"A crew of Santa Cruz boys," said Hudson, "and Danny thinks he knows some of them! And the skipper keeping out of sight while the schooner tows out—and they stopped only to get the water on board after we came in. Ken, Wu Fang's on that craft!"

"It's a sack of pearls to a bag of copra!" Ken agreed. "You feller boy, you jump along boat plenty quick!"

He ran down to the cabin and returned with his own and Hudson's revolvers. The whaleboat that had brought him from the beach lay beside the Dawn with the painter tied. The Hiva-Oa boys tumbled in headlong, and Ken and Kit jumped after them and cast off the painter. King of the Islands pointed to the schooner.

"You feller boy, you washy-washy along that hooker, plenty too debblish quick!" he panted. The Kanakas bent to the oars, and the whaleboat shot after the schooner.

### Face to Face!

**K**ING OF THE ISLANDS sat in the stern of the Dawn's boat, his eyes on the schooner, as the Kanakas rowed hard and fast. The butt of his six-shooter was ready to his hand. He knew that he might need it if Wu Fang was on board the towing craft. And it seemed a sure thing—if the cooky-boy was not mistaken in his belief that he recognised among the crew his assailants on that wild night at Lalinge.

And why was no skipper to be seen on the schooner? It was incredible that a skipper should remain below while his black boys towed through a dangerous passage against the wind—unless he had a powerful reason.

If the schooner's skipper was Wu Fang, his reason was powerful enough—likewise his reason for getting out of the lagoon now that King of the Islands had arrived there! King of the Islands felt almost certain—and, anyhow, he was going to know. Hard and fast the Hiva-Oa boys pulled. Koko setting the pace with a mighty stroke. The whaleboat flew across the shining water, rapidly overhauling the towed schooner.

"Lucky we made the trip to Tu'ua, Ken," said Kit Hudson. "We've got him! If the Chink's there, his prisoner's there—out of sight under hatches, what?"

"Ay!" answered Ken, his eyes never leaving the schooner. "Faster—faster—washy-washy too quick altogether, you feller boy!" The oars flashed hard and fast.

Black boys on the schooner stared back at the boat and babbled together. One of them ran below, and the shipmates knew that he had gone to tell his unseen skipper that a whaleboat was following into the reef passage. But Ken had no doubt that a slanting eye was already on him from a port-hole.

He would not have been surprised to hear the roar of a rifle from the schooner, so he watched like a cat. On Tu'ua there were only a few white traders—no law to hold the Chink, no force to back up the law.

But King of the Islands was ready to take the law into his own hands, relying on his own gun and his mate's to see him through—if Wu Fang was on board the schooner. And he had little doubt of it.

The black boys in the towing boat rowed hard, but the towed schooner moved slowly behind them. There



was no chance of the schooner making sail till she was outside the reef, for the wind was dead on the entrance of the lagoon. It was only a matter of minutes before the Dawn's boat ran her down.

In the reef passage, with barely more than room for the boat between the schooner's hull and the coral rocks, the pursuers came alongside and Hudson hooked on to the chains. A startled black face looked down.

"YOU feller white master, what you want along this feller schooner?" asked that Santa Cruz boy.

"Call your captain!" rapped Ken from the stern of the whaleboat. "This feller white master he talk along captain belong you."

"Captain belong me he sick, stop along cabin belong him, sar!" said the Santa Cruz boy. "You talk along this feller, sar! This feller he Pipiteto, feller mate belong this hooker, sar."

"This feller white master come aboard!" answered Ken.

"You no come along this hooker, sar!" Pipiteto, mate of the Flamingo schooner, lifted a belaying-pin in warning. Ken made a spring, caught the schooner's rail and clambered on board. Pipiteto jumped back, his thick lips and gleaming white teeth in a snarl, but he did not venture to handle the belaying-pin. King of the Islands dropped on the deck, revolver in hand, and the black crew backed away from him, muttering.

There were six or seven on deck, as well as ten in the towing-boat. The schooner had a full crew. But the "feller gun," and still more the glinting blue eyes, of the white master daunted the Santa Cruz blacks.

Kit Hudson followed his skipper on the schooner. Koko was only a moment behind him. The Hiva-Oa boys held on.

Ken turned to Pipiteto. "Drop that belaying-pin!" he ordered. "Now you takee this feller along captain belong you! Step lively!" Leaving Koko on deck to keep an eye on the crew, Ken and Kit tramped down the ladder after Pipiteto into the schooner's cabin.

They went gun in hand, no longer doubting in the least that Wu Fang was on board, and ready for trouble. If the kidnapped pearler was there, they did not expect the Chink to yield him up without resistance. And if Wu Fang was there, they had no doubt that the castaway was there.

"Wu Fang!" shouted Hudson, at the sight of a diminutive figure in Chinese garb in the cabin.

To the amazement of the shipmates the Chink kow-towed to them, with a bland smile on his impassive face.

"O born-before-me," said Wu Fang, in his soft voice. "This humble person is honoured to see the great and admirable ones on board his ship!"

King of the Islands stared at him, blankly. A treacherous shot, or a thrown knife, would not have surprised him, but this bland and smiling Oriental politeness took him aback.

"Where's the man you stole off my ship at Lalinge, you heathen

scoundrel? Have you got him on board?" Ken demanded.

"That white feller Keefe he no stop along ship belong me," said Wu Fang. "You no savvy where he stop?"

The slanting eyes searched Ken's face.

"Me no savvy, sar!" said Wu Fang.

Ken's face set like iron. He lifted his revolver, and took point-blank aim at the little yellow face. Wu Fang stood still, but his slanting eyes glittered at the boy trader like a snake's. Ken spoke between his teeth.

"You took the man out of my ship at Lalinge," he said. "You carried him off in a canoe. I give you one minute to cough it up! One minute, Wu Fang—and you're a dead Chink!"

The Chinaman spat out hurried words:

"That feller Keefe he stop along Cap'n Peter Parsons!"

"Peter Parsons!" Ken exclaimed. "You lie, you yellow scum. What would that Lukwe swab want with him? You've killed him, and, by thunder, your life shall pay for his!"

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## OUR 10,000-GIFT PLAN!

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OUR recent huge coupon-collecting scheme, in which many thousands of Fine Gift Books were offered, proved a tremendous success, and as a result readers all over the country are now enjoying the topping books they have won.

We congratulate them on the many magnificent totals of points scored—prizes were awarded for totals ranging from 32,700, sent by H. Leggetter of Luton, down to 3,000—and we only regret that it is not possible to give all their names in the paper. All prizes for Home readers were, however, sent off promptly, and also personal letters from the Editor to all unsuccessful entrants.

The remaining 500 of the Prize Books offered are, of course, being reserved for Overseas readers—for whom there is a later closing date—and these will be awarded and sent as soon as possible after that date.

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Hudson, the man's dead—and this villain shall follow where he's sent him."

"No dead!" shrieked Wu Fang. "No dead! O venerable and benevolent one, you no shoot this poor Chinese. This humble person he tell plenty truth! You talk along Santa Cruz boy belong me, he tell you all samee thing. O beneficent and handsome one, you no shoot!"

"By gum, Ken!" muttered Hudson. "You remember Koko fancied that swab Parsons was putting us on a wrong scent? If it's possible—"

"We'll give him a chance!" said King of the Islands grimly. "If Parsons has got him, we'll run the swab down in his lair at Lukwe and deal with him. If not, I'll hang this scoundrel from the boom of the Dawn!"

He jammed the revolver in his belt, and grasped the shrinking Chinese. Wriggling in the boy trader's sinewy grasp, the Chink was hustled up to the deck. Pipiteto followed, his black eyes gleaming, but cowed by

the six-shooter in Hudson's hand. There was a cackle from the Santa Cruz boys as King of the Islands emerged from the companion with the Chink squirming in his grasp.

"Koko!" rapped Ken. "You takee care along this feller Chink!"

Wu Fang crumpled in the mighty grasp of the Kanaka boatswain. His yellow face was almost grey with fear; his slanting eyes bulging.

Ken called up Danny from the whaleboat, and the cooky-boy pointed out the Santa Cruz blacks who had seized him at Lalinge. King of the Islands questioned them, and they stammered out what they knew. There was no doubt that it was the truth. They were too scared by the boy trader's fierce look to give him "bad feller talk."

The Chinaman, in Koko's powerful hands, listened in terror, with the knowledge that his life depended on King of the Islands being convinced. Fortunately for him, the boy trader was convinced.

"Our man was on board Peter Parson's packet," said Ken, between his teeth, "when we spoke the swab, Kit—that's why he set us a course south-east by east, the lubber!"

"No doubt about it!" agreed Hudson.

"Koko savvy that feller Parsons plenty bad feller," murmured the brown boatswain. "This feller no likee look along eye belong him!"

"You were right, old coffee-bean," said Ken. "But we know where to look for Peter Parsons, and he shall answer for it. Koko, you takee feller lawyer-cane, you givee that feller Chink plenty too much lawyer-cane along back belong him."

"Yessar!" grinned Koko. The Santa Cruz boys stared on, some of them grinning, while Koko wielded a thick lawyer-cane, and the Chinaman yelled under a rain of lashes.

The shipmates watched the punishment grimly, and not till twenty-five lashes had fallen, did Ken make the boatswain a sign to desist. Spitting with fury, Wu Fang dodged down the companion and disappeared.

"Back to the Dawn!" said King of the Islands. And the whaleboat pulled away from the schooner.

**K**ING OF THE ISLANDS picked up no cargo at Tu'ua, after all.

Time was money, and trade was trade, but now that the shipmates knew where to look for the lost castaway they gave no thought to time or trade. Under the blazing sun, the Dawn towed out of the lagoon, and outside the reef all sails were shaken out, and the course set for distant Lukwe.

With a fair wind, and all canvas drawing, the ketch raced through the blue waters like a thing of life. But, fast as she fled, she seemed slow to the shipmates watching the Pacific for Lukwe to rise from the sealine!

*And now it's full speed ahead on the castaways' trail! Come for another splendid adventure - trip with the shipmates of the ketch in Next Week's MODERN BOY!*