

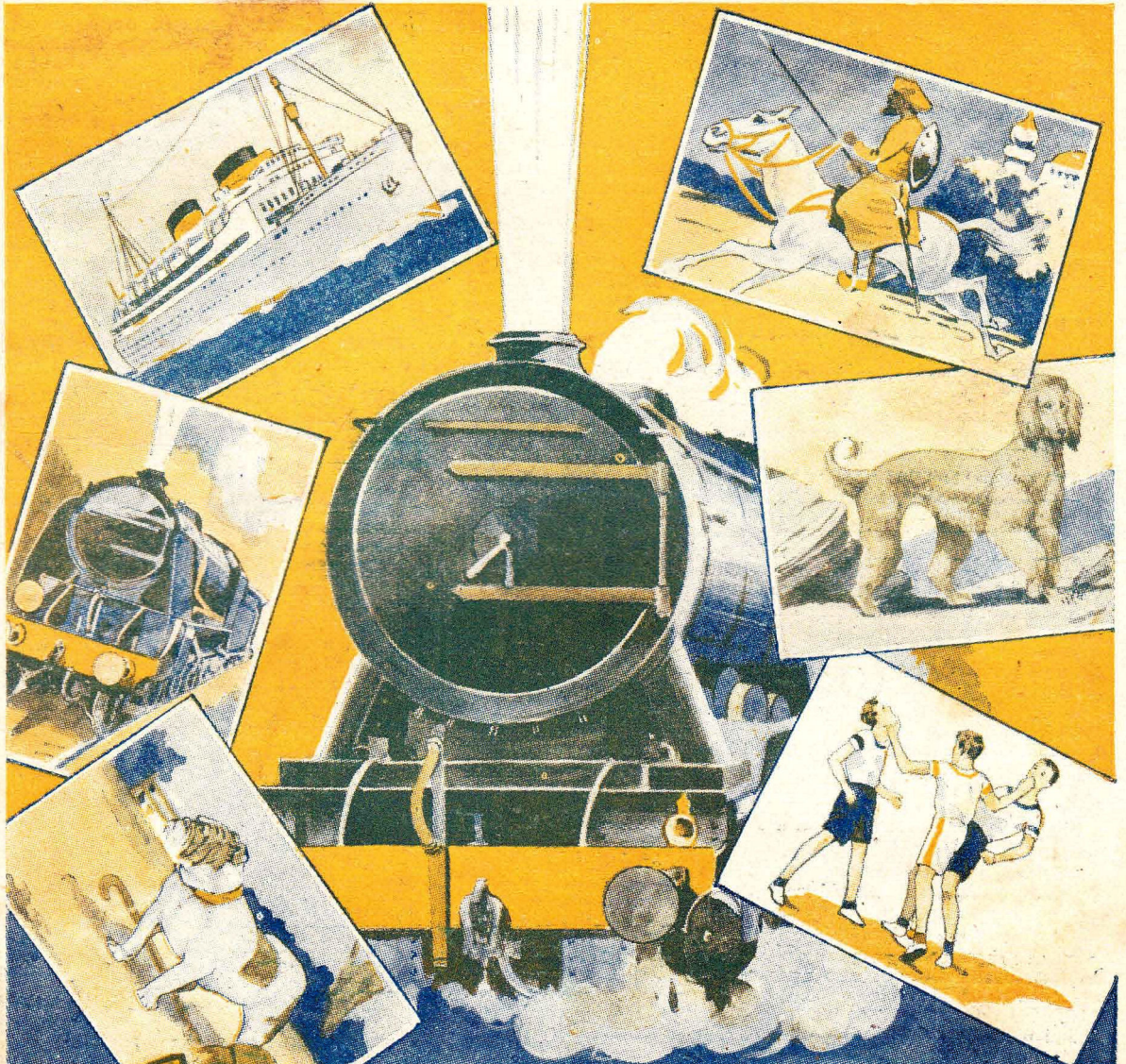
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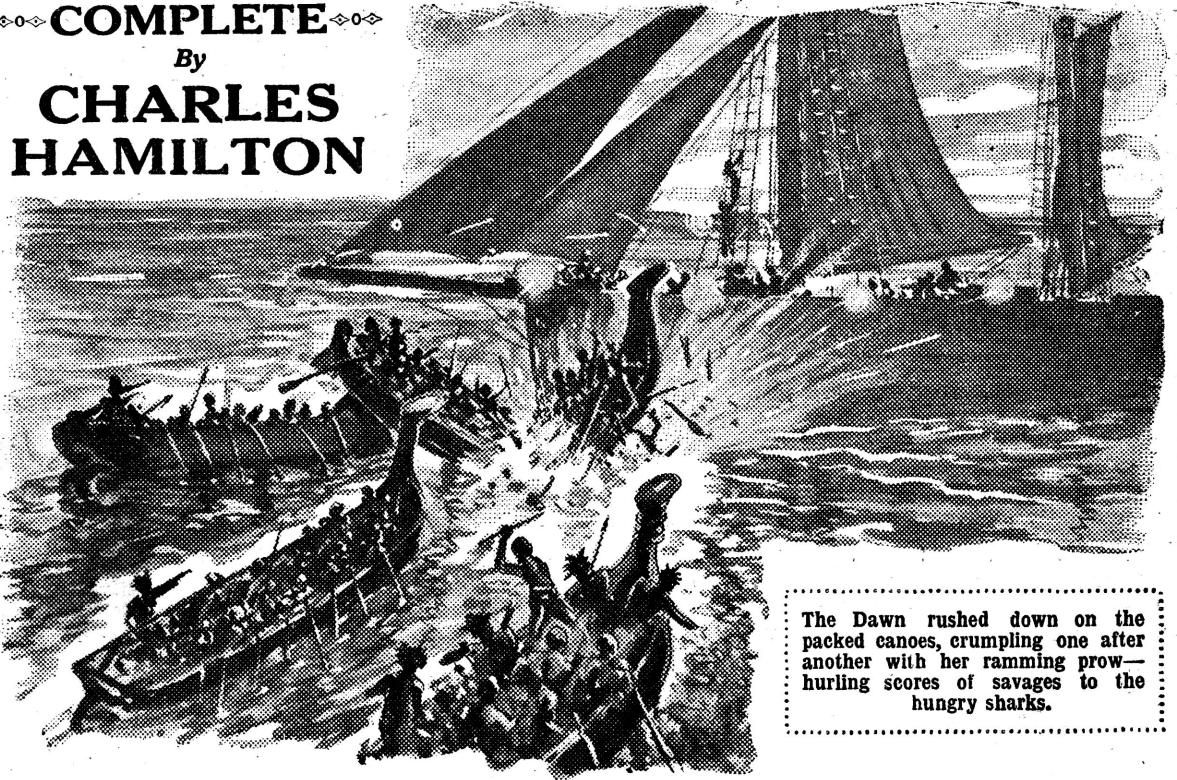


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By

**CHARLES  
HAMILTON**



The Dawn rushed down on the packed canoes, crumpling one after another with her ramming prow—hurling scores of savages to the hungry sharks.

# Island of Pearls

*It is also an island of Head-Collecting Cannibals, and Ken King—boy trader of the South Seas—and his comrades have never been nearer a fearsome end!*

## Spears and Axes.

"PLENTY too much black feller, my word!" said Koko, the brown-skinned boatswain of the ketch Dawn. His face was grave as he looked across the sunlit lagoon of Aya-ua. So were the faces of the remainder of the Hiva-Oa boys who made up the crew—Lompo, Lufu, Tomoo, Kolulo, and Danny the cooky-boy.

Their skipper, Ken King, the boy owner of the ketch and trader of the South Seas, known throughout the Pacific as King of the Islands, was standing by the rail watching a fleet of high-prowed canoes gathering on the lagoon, every one packed with black men.

By his side stood Kit Hudson, his Australian mate, rifle in hand, a faint grin on his sunburnt face.

An atoll, probably the loneliest in the whole of the Pacific, Aya-ua was very rarely visited by a white man's ship. Round the lagoon circled the beach of white sand and powdered coral, shelving up to the palm-trees, and broken only where a passage through the reefs gave access to the Pacific.

Back of the palm-trees was high, thick bush, which covered the island from the inner beach to the outer reef.

It was a large island, and more than one tribe dwelt on it, waging endless warfare on one another in the dark runways of the bush.

Far as they were from other islands, the natives were accustomed to cannibal feasts following the fighting, and in the canoe-house of Tame'eto, chief of the tribe dwelling near the lagoon, many heads smoked in the wood fires.

Tame'eto, with a canoe full of men, had already attacked the Dawn and been beaten off. Now he was gathering all his fighting men and canoes for a massed attack.

"There's trouble brewing, Ken!" remarked Hudson.

"Looks like it!" King of the Islands agreed.

"We had plenty of trouble picking up Keefe's island!" Kit went on. "It wasn't easy to get here, and it looks as though it's going to be a jolly lot harder to get away again."

"I'm not thinking of getting away, Kit! And you're not?"

"No fear—we're seeing it through." There was time for King of the Islands, had he chosen, to lift the anchor and sail out into the Pacific before the crowd of canoes closed round his ketch. But the boy trader did not choose.

He had come to Aya-ua to rescue a pearler named Keefe whom he had found drifting, desperately ill, in an open boat at sea. Keefe had been kidnapped from the Dawn by Wu Fang, a Chinaman, who sought to gain from him the location of an island where Keefe had made a great find of pearls.

Other South Sea ruffians had heard of Keefe, and before Wu Fang could extract the secret, the pearler had been taken from him by Dandy Peter Parsons of Lukwe. Keefe had escaped from him only to fall into the hands of Black Furley, the Lukwe pearler-poacher.

Ken had hunted high and low for Furley without success. Then, remembering Keefe's delirious babblings whilst on the Dawn, he at last found in them a clue to the whereabouts of the pearl island.

"We've got to see it through, Kit," Ken said quietly. "So far as we know, Black Furley and his crew are on their way here. They've got Keefe a prisoner, forcing him to steer a course for them. We came here to save the man, and to save his pearls for him. We're standing to it."

"There's Tame'eto!" Hudson pointed with the rifle to the tall chief of Aya-ua, standing in one of the

## Island of Pearls

canoes. Brass ear ornaments, and a brass ring in his broad, black nose, glistened in the sun. "I could get him at this range!"

"We won't fire the first shot."

"Right-ho!" agreed Hudson. His rifle-butt dropped to the deck. "But it's going to be a dickens of a scrap, Ken!"

"No doubt about that! We've offered them peace and fair trade, but they choose scrapping. Let 'em get on with it!" said King of the Islands. He glanced at Koko's grave, brown face and smiled. "You feller Koko, you no fright along plenty too much black feller?"

"Me no fright, sar!" answered Koko, with a sniff. "Tinkee plaps head belong me smoke plenty soon, along canoe-house belong Tame'eto! But me no fright along black feller! Me no common Kanaka, sar!"

"Right! Up hook!" ordered King of the Islands.

**T**HE boatswain's whistle piped, and the Hiva-Oa boys' brown faces brightened as they rushed to lift the anchor. At least two hundred blacks were gathering in the war-canoes by the beach, a quarter of a mile away, and the Kanaka crew would have liked nothing better than to run out to sea.

The wind was ruffling the shining surface of the lagoon, and it filled the foresail and jib as the canvas was shaken out. But King of the Islands was not thinking of running out to sea. There was ample room for handling the ketch in the wide lagoon, and he did not intend to remain at anchor when the islanders attacked.

"This feller ketch go along sea, sar?" asked Lompo at the wheel.

"This feller ketch stop along lagoon!" answered Ken. "This feller ketch plenty kill canoe belong Tame'eto bimeby!"

All round the ketch, above the rail, were lines of barbed wire to keep off boarders. That was a precaution often taken by South Sea traders in dangerous waters—and there were no waters in the Pacific so dangerous as the lagoon of Aya-ua that bright morning.

Every man on the ketch was armed with repeating rifle and axe. Behind the barbed wire, few as they were in numbers, they could give a good account of themselves. But King of the Islands knew that it was likely enough that the Dawn would never sail again from Aya-ua!

Keefe the pearler was the only survivor of the pearling lugger from the Paumotu that had raised pearls in the lagoon, and what had happened to his lugger might happen to the ketch. But the boy trader was as cool as ice.

"Black feller comey!" announced Koko. The canoes were putting off from the beach. Twelve tall-prowed canoes, crammed with black fighting-men, headed for the Dawn across the shining waters. By the grass-houses on the beach, a crowd of islanders stood and watched, and the dull drone of a war-drum sounded from the distance.

In the leading canoe stood Tame'eto, his brass ornaments shining, a spear

glistening in his hand. His fierce eyes were fixed on the ketch, which was now gliding through the water under easy sail. At a gesture from the chief, the canoes spread out to surround the white man's ship.

Every black face was fierce and set. The plunder of the ship meant untold wealth to the blacks. And more attractive than the plunder was the prospect of the cannibal feast, and of heads smoked as trophies in the wood-fires.

Many heads smoked in the canoe-house of Tame'eto, tended by the devil-doctors—white men's heads as well as black—and the fierce chief of Aya-ua had no doubt that he was going to add to the number.

As the chief's canoe drew nearer, King of the Islands raised his hand and shouted to Tame'eto. It was war—war to the death—but he gave the black chief a last warning.

"You feller chief Tame'eto, you stop along beach! You hear me, ear belong you?"

"Me hear you, sar!" answered Tame'eto contemptuously. "This feller big chief comey along ship belong you, kill-dead every feller, smoke head belong you, along canoe-house, my word! This feller no fright along you, sar!"

"He's asking for it!" said Kit Hudson, and lifted his rifle. Tame'eto ducked under the high prow of the canoe as the rifle cracked, and the bullet whizzed over his black shoulder and passed through one of the paddlers behind. The paddler sprawled over, yelling. Tame'eto shouted and waved his spear, and the paddles flashed like lightning as the crowd of canoes rushed at the ketch.

King of the Islands snapped an order. The ketch swung towards the chief's canoe, and rushed it down before the paddlers could dodge the collision. Wild yells rose from the blacks as the cut-water came crashing through the canoe, smashing it and sinking it, and leaving Tame'eto and his warriors struggling in the water.

But almost in the same moment a canoe closed in on either side of the ketch, fierce black hands took hold, and savage faces and flashing spears and axes swarmed up over the rail.

### The Burning War-Fleet.

**F**"IRE!" King of the Islands shouted. Every rifle on board sent bullets into fierce black faces and brawny bodies swarming up the sides. The ketch rushed on over the wreck of Tame'eto's canoe, leaving the chief and his men swimming far astern. Swift as the canoes were, the Dawn, with her foresail and jib bellying in the wind, was swifter, and the greater part of the Aya-ua war-fleet dropped behind.

Two canoes were holding on, their crews clambering up the side, to be met by shot and steel. But for the lines of barbed wire, the ketch would have been boarded, and the struggle would have been hand to hand on her deck—a struggle that could have ended only one way against such overwhelming odds.

The blacks screamed and yelled as they struggled at the wire. And all the time tearing lead and flashing axes met them from the Dawn's crew, crashing them back.

Koko's heavy axe rose and fell with lightning swiftness, and every blow sent a yelling savage splashing into the water. Heads cracked under the iron saucepan wielded by Danny the cooky-boy.

Tomoo, Kolulo, and Lufu blazed away with their rifles, and at point-blank range even the excited Kanakas did not miss.

Of all the savage swarm that came up the sides of the ketch, only one got through the barbed wire and reached the deck—to fall under a bullet from King of the Islands' revolver.

The Dawn swept on, leaving the two canoes rocking on the water, with but two or three men in each. Swimmers struggled in the water, and among them black fins and hideous snouts appeared. There were sharks in the Aya-ua lagoon, and the sharks were active! And few of the blacks who fell into the water succeeded in scrambling back into the canoes.

**K**ING OF THE ISLANDS looked back as the last clambering savage was struck away by Koko's axe. The war-canoes were paddling fiercely in pursuit of the ketch.

The Dawn was close to the reef passage now, and probably the islanders supposed that Ken was seeking to escape to the open sea. They paddled with savage energy. Escape would have been impossible, for in the passage of the reefs Ken would have had to pick his way slowly. The canoes would have closed in on him, and there would have been no room for manoeuvring.

But King of the Islands was not thinking of escape. Within half a cable's length of the reef, the Dawn spun round in the wind as the boy skipper rapped an order. Almost across the noses of the cluster of canoes she shot across to the distant beach. With a burst of fierce yells, the canoe crews swung in pursuit again.

Crack! rang the rifles from the ketch, and over the taffrail a stream of bullets pitched into the crowded canoes, sending paddler after paddler sprawling.

"Keep it up, old man," said Ken to Hudson. "We're not out of the wood yet. Keep them at arm's length, and we've got them on toast!"

Hudson pumped bullets at the canoes, and every whizzing shot rolled over a yelling savage. Keeping the enemy at arm's length was the game, and luckily for the Dawn's crew there was plenty of sea room.

The boom swung and the canvas roared as the ketch tacked across the lagoon and came about. Whizzing spears crashed on her sides, and flew over the deck. But not one of the canoes came close enough to board.

The Dawn turned on them like a hunted stag turning on hounds, and



## Island of Pearls

down his whaleboat in the night. With him were Dick Finn, Keefe the pearler, and two other men who had been saved.

Also on board was Dandy Peter Parsons, whom Furley had found held prisoner by Wu Fang and being tortured to extract the secret of the whereabouts of Keefe's Island of Pearls. Actually, Parsons did not know where the island lay, but he couldn't convince Wu Fang of this.

FROM the deck, all these men, together with the crew of Santa Cruz blacks, watched Furley. Every face was eager and excited. He slithered down the rigging at last. There was a look of satisfaction on his sunburnt, black-bearded face.

"I reckon it's the island," he said. "Keefe, you figure that it's your pearl island?"

"If you've sighted land, it's the island," answered the pearler. "There's no other land in these seas—except reefs and rocks—for a hundred miles at least. It's Aya-ua—that's what the niggers call it."

"We shan't make it before sundown," said Furley. "I reckon we'll stand off till morning, and then run into the lagoon. You know the channel, Keefe? You ran the reef when you were here in your lugger with the Paumotus crew."

Keefe nodded.

Furley and his men were eager, excited, but the Paumotus pearler's brow was dark. It was not willingly that he had set a course for the Island of Pearls as a member of Black Furley's crew. But he still had a faint hope that Ken King's ketch might be sighted when Aya-ua was raised.

"What's the passage like?" asked Furley.

"Easy enough to run in the daylight. At night, you'd pile the schooner up on the coral!" answered Keefe.

"We run it at sunrise, then! We'll run down to the island, and stand off till dawn," said Black Furley. "We're in luck!" he chuckled. "I reckoned the game was up when the Chink ran down our boat, but the luck's held!" He glanced, with a jeering grin, at the yellow face of Wu Fang. That yellow mask of a face remained impassive, but the slanting eyes gleamed.

"We've lost two of our crew and the boat," went on Furley. "That leaves five of us to share—us four and Keefe! I reckon you'll own that we're treating you white, Keefe. What do you figure Peter Parsons would do in my place—with the island in sight, and nobody wanted to steer a course? Your share would be a bar of lead at your heels and a dip in the Pacific. Lucky for you we ain't that kind of swabs, Keefe."

Black Furley and his gang had forced the pearler to set a course to Aya-ua to lift the cache of pearls he had left there. But in their own rough and lawless way, they were playing the game. Now that the pearl island was in sight, they stood by their compact with the man from

the Paumotus. Keefe was well aware that he would have received very different treatment from either Dandy Peter or Wu Fang.

"And where do I come in, Furley?" asked Peter Parsons.

"You don't come in at all, Peter Parsons," answered Furley surlily. "You had your chance at Lukwe. If you'd offered us shares, we'd have gone in with you. You left us out—and now, by hokey, you're left out. We found you a prisoner on this schooner, with the Chink putting you to the torture—I reckon you're lucky we saved your life. You don't come into this game."

"You'd better think again, Furley—"

"Belay your jawing tackle!" interrupted Furley roughly. "You're a passenger on this craft, Parsons—and a passenger that's not wanted. If I were your sort of swab, I'd put you over the side and get shut of you, and you know it! Keep quiet while you've got a whole skin."

Dandy Peter made no reply. He lounged away and stood by the rail, staring moodily towards the distant blur on the sea that was Aya-ua.

His thoughts were bitter. He had lost his cutter—lost his all—in his lawless attempt to lift the pearls of Aya-ua. And it was only the chance that the schooner had run down the Lukwe boat at night, and fallen into the hands of the Lukwe crew, that had saved him from the Chink, whose prisoner he had been.

He was, as Black Furley had said, out of the game—lucky to be given a passage on the schooner to watch his rivals take possession of the treasure of Aya-ua!

But if a chance came, Dandy Peter was the man to jump at it, and he had not yet abandoned hope of getting his hands on the pearls.

The schooner surged on before the wind as the sun sank lower. Higher and clearer the distant palm-trees rose to view, and before the sun dipped, the Lukwe crew had a glimpse of the coral reefs and the white foam of the eternal surf that broke round the island.

Darkness fell on the Pacific. Under shortened sail, the schooner stood on towards the island, as the glittering stars came out in the sky.

Dandy Peter had wondered whether Wu Fang would make some attempt to turn the tables on the freebooters who had seized his schooner. But there was no sign of it. If treachery could serve the Chink's turn, he would not fail. But he dared not lift a hand against the Lukwe ruffians, and the black crew would never have backed him if he had.

Black Furley had the Santa Cruz boys feeding from his hand, and Pipiteto, the mate, jumped to his orders as he had never jumped to the orders of the Chink.

A mile from the island, the Flamingo was hove-to, to wait for dawn. The night was calm, the sea smooth.

Dandy Peter moved about restlessly, listening every now and then to the muttered talk of the Lukwe

crew, smoking and staring towards the shadowy island across the starlit sea.

Dandy Peter leaned on the rail again, staring towards the dim island. A few hours to sunrise, then the schooner would make the reef passage and drop anchor in the lagoon of Aya-ua. And then he would look on while the pearls were lifted and the Lukwe crew sailed away with the fortune he was not to share.

He knew Keefe's story of the Paumotus crew and what had happened at the pearl island. They had made a rich find, rotted out the oysters, and packed the pearls in a tapa sack hidden in the bush. Then they had searched for more pearl-oysters, without finding any, till the blacks came down on them. As often happened, there had been a rich patch of pearl-oysters in one spot, and the Paumotus crew had exhausted it.

There would be no delay at the island. It was only a question of lifting the hidden sack of pearls on which Keefe could lay his finger, and then up anchor and away. And Dandy Peter was to look on, lucky if he was not left marooned at the mercy of the cannibals when the schooner sailed.

But running in Dandy Peter's mind were the babbled words of the pearler, when the man had been a prisoner in his hands and babbling in delirium—"A cable's length on the beach—five fathoms in the bush!" That was where the cache of pearls lay. Parsons had no doubt about that.

There could be no other meaning to the words the sick man had muttered again and again. The sack of pearls was hidden in the bush at some spot a cable's length from the lagoon and five fathoms from the edge of the bush. Likely enough, near the spot where the lugger's crew had camped and rotted out the oysters—a spot it would be easy enough to locate from the heaps of shells.

A RESOLVE was growing in the desperate heart of Dandy Peters as he thought it over and stared in the dim starlight towards Aya-ua.

There were cannibals on the island—a swarm of savages, according to Keefe. They had massacred the lugger's crew, only Keefe escaping, through happening to be on board the lugger when his comrades were attacked on shore. By a miracle he had got out to sea and escaped. But Peter Parsons gave little thought to the savages. The thought of the pearls and of beating Black Furley dominated his mind.

His resolve became fixed as he stood there leaning on the rail, staring shoreward. It was a mile to the dim mass of Aya-ua, but a mile in a calm sea was nothing to a swimmer like Peter Parsons. If there was a chance of getting ahead of his rivals, and unearthing the cache of pearls, no thought of danger was likely to stop him.

With the treasure in his hands he could make terms with the Lukwe crew, or he might steal a native canoe

and escape to sea. At least he could defeat his rivals.

Dandy Peter made up his mind. He stood up from the rail and glanced round the shadowed deck.

The schooner was burning no lights—Black Furley did not want to advertise his arrival to the natives, if they were on the watch. From the shadows came the muttering voices of Harris, Preece, and Finn. Aft, he picked out the red glow of Black Furley's pipe. Most of the Santa Cruz boys were asleep on their mats, but in any case he had nothing to fear from them.

Softly, silently, Dandy Peter slipped over the rail and held on with his hands, his feet swinging over the calm water. As soon as he dropped, the Lukwe crew would hear the splash and know that he had gone—would know why he had gone. Bullets might be splashing round him in the sea as he swam.

For a long moment he held on to the schooner's rail. Then, with set teeth, he let go his hold and dropped. Splash! The next moment he was swimming, heading for the island with long, rapid strokes. There was an outburst of voices on the schooner. Black Furley leaped to his feet, dropping his pipe, and grasping his revolver. Dick Finn gave a shout and pointed to a dark head on the water, where the shining sea parted and rippled under the swift strokes of the swimmer.

"Dandy Peter's gone!" yelled Finn.

"By hokey!" Furley rushed to the side, revolver in hand. He roared to the swimmer, his bull-voice booming far over the sea.

"You swab! Come back, Peter Parsons; come about, you lubber, or I'll riddle you!" Bang! The revolver roared and a bullet splashed into the water a yard from the swimmer.

The Lukwe crew clustered at the rail, staring after Dandy Peter, who was swimming swiftly and strongly already vanishing into the shadows of the sea.

"The madman!" said Keefe. "He has gone to his death!"

"He's gone after the pearls," Furley roared.

"He'll never find the pearls," said Keefe quietly. "He will find his death on Aya-ua! If he reaches the beach the blacks will get him!"

Furley lowered the revolver. He hesitated, doubtful whether to lower a boat and hunt for the escaping sealer. But he shrugged his burly shoulders at last.

"Let him go!" he growled. "I reckon if the niggers kill him, nobody in the Pacific will miss Dandy Peter. Let him go!"

"Ay," agreed Finn. "Let him go. He can't do us any harm. If what Keefe says is true, the niggers'll get him before he gets anywhere near the pearls!"

Parsons had taken a desperate chance—more desperate than he knew. The Lukwe crew had no doubt that Keefe was right and that Dandy Peter had gone to his death. And to Dandy Peter himself, as he

swam under the stars, it seemed only too likely.

#### Five Fathoms in the Bush.

"KING of the Islands!" Dandy Peter breathed the words in utter wonder. He looked, rubbed his eyes, and looked again. Sunrise was creeping over the Pacific and the island of Aya-ua. The tall fronds of the palm-trees glistened in the coming light and the lagoon caught the gleam. Day was coming, and Dandy Peter, waking in his bed scraped out in the sand of the beach, rose and looked about him. And almost the first object that he saw was a ketch at anchor far out in the lagoon.

For some moments he could not believe what he saw. King of the Islands at Aya-ua! He had believed him hundreds of miles away—perhaps gone back to the island trade, or still seeking the kidnapped pearler—anywhere but at Aya-ua.

Parsons stood on the coral beach and stared blankly. He had made good his swim to the island and landed on the reef. Even then his energy had not been exhausted, and he had circled the inner beach surrounding the lagoon, seeking the spot where the Paumotus crew had rotted out the oysters for pearls.

And he had found the place. There was still a lingering smell of the rotting oysters by the heaps of shells, and he was left in no doubt that he was near the spot. Then, at last, he had slept till sunrise, resolved to begin his search for the cache of pearls at the first glimpse of day. But even the pearls were forgotten now as he stared with blank eyes at the ketch anchored in the lagoon.

He knew the Dawn well enough by sight, and if he had doubted what craft it was, he could not have doubted whose was the slim, sturdy figure pacing the after-deck, rifle under arm, keeping watch and ward. It was Ken King.

A brown-skinned native rose from a sleeping-mat on the ketch's deck, and Parsons recognised the gigantic figure of Koko, the boatswain. The boy skipper and the big boatswain stood looking across the lagoon in the opposite direction from Dandy Peter. Something on the beach on the eastern side of the lagoon seemed to draw their attention, and Parsons wondered what it was.

He stared in the same direction, and wide as the lagoon was, he could make out the grass village of the natives on the other side. It seemed deserted, for not a single native showed among the grass-houses. Neither was there a canoe to be seen on the surface of the lagoon.

On the Flamingo, Parsons had caught talk among Keefe and the Lukwe crew, and learned from it that the pearler had some vague idea, or hope, that Ken King might be at Aya-ua. It had seemed a wild and impossible idea to Parsons, and he had given it no thought. Yet here was the Dawn, riding at anchor in the middle of the lagoon, with King of the Islands and his crew.

He dropped down among the coral rocks and wondered how long the ketch had been there. Days, perhaps—he could not guess. Had King of the Islands found the pearls and lifted them? Some unknown clue had led him to the island, and if he had found the pearls, Dandy Peter was too late, and Black Furley and his crew were too late.

Parsons grinned at the thought of Black Furley's face when he brought the schooner into the lagoon and found King of the Islands there. Likely as not there would be shooting—it was certain that there would be shooting if Ken King had the pearls. Furley was not the man to sail away empty-handed, leaving the treasure to another.

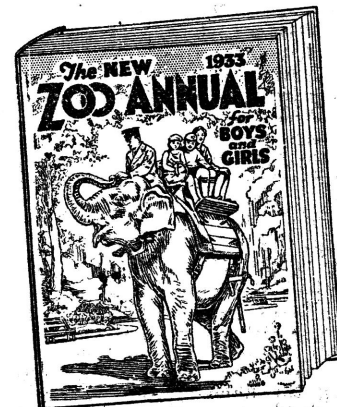
Dandy Peter lay among the coral rocks and watched the ketch. He saw Kit Hudson join his shipmate on deck, and watched Danny bringing out breakfast for the white masters. He saw King of the Islands lift the binoculars to his eyes and sweep the whole circle of the lagoon with the powerful glasses. But he knew that the glasses would not pick him up in his cover.

He was puzzled by the fact that no natives showed among the grass-houses, or appeared on the beach. He wondered whether King of the Islands had already had trouble with the blacks, who had evidently taken to the bush.

In circling the lagoon after landing in the night, Dandy Peter realised he had passed close by the deserted native village, though he had not seen

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## Island of Pearls

it in the dark. He had seen and heard nothing of the natives. If King of the Islands had frightened them away from the beach, so much the better. Unarmed and alone, Parsons was anxious to avoid the blacks.

He moved away at last, crawling up the beach, keeping as much as he could in cover of the coral rocks and ridges of sand. Thick on the beach were the piles of shell rotted out by the Paumotus pearlshells. The wind that came with the dawn stirred the smell that still hung about the heaps.

Keefe and his companions had camped here, diving for oysters and rotting them out in the tropic sun—watched, no doubt, by the natives from the distance, while Tame'eto waited for a favourable opportunity of descending upon them.

The cache could not be far away—it would be somewhere near the pearlshells' camp. In the soft sand, Dandy Peter left deep tracks as he moved; but his eyes, keenly about him, failed to pick up any other tracks. If they had landed here from the ketch there would be footprints in the sand.

He was soon sure that they had not landed, for not a single footprint was to be picked up by his searching eyes. Perhaps the niggers had attacked King of the Islands, and kept him busy. At all events, it was clear that he had not yet visited the scene of the massacre of the Paumotus crew. Dandy Peter, after all, was first in the field.

"A cable's length on the beach—five fathoms in the bush"—the babble of the delirious pearly ran in his mind.

Keeping low among the coral rocks and the ridges of sand, in fear of being seen by a watchful eye from the ketch, Parsons moved slowly up the beach, counting his paces as he went. Back of the beach were nodding palms, and beyond the palms high bush, as was the case all over Aya-ua. But in most places the bush grew down within half a cable's length of the lagoon.

Back of the spot where the rotting shells lay there was a deep embayment in the bush, where the ground cropped out in rock, and even the hardy bush could not grow. In that spot Dandy Peter measured a full cable's length from high-water mark to the bush.

In that hollow of the bush, screened on three sides by the high jungle growth, he came on the fragments of what had been a hut of palm poles and pandanus thatch. This must have been a shelter put up by the Paumotus pearlshells and dragged down by the natives after the massacre. This was the spot that was, as the delirious pearly had babbled again and again, "a cable's length on the beach."

He reached the edge of the bush. There was no runway, and the bush rose almost like a wall: dark, thick—apparently impenetrable. But the keen eyes of Peter Parsons, searching along the wall of jungle, soon picked

up sign of the spot where men had entered—a broken branch, with a fragment of a cotton-shirt caught on thorns.

He pushed into the bush, and, impenetrable as it looked, wound his way among tangled thickets. Again and again his searching eyes picked up sign where men had trod before him. He counted his paces, measuring off five fathoms from the edge of the bush, then he stopped.

He was standing close by a massive baobab tree of immense girth, almost hidden by the bush that grew thick and tangled round it. His eyes scanned the ground, but there was no sign of the earth having been disturbed.

His first thought was that the sack of pearls had been buried there. But a keen examination of the ground proved that that was not the case. In a hollow of the tree—perhaps!

The baobab, massive and mighty as it may look to the eye, has a soft interior easy to scoop out with a knife. That was it!

In a flash, Dandy Peter knew it! A cable's length on the beach, five fathoms in the bush, stood that mighty baobab. And in a hollow of the huge trunk the sack of pearls was thrust out of sight. He knew it as if he had seen the pearlshells at work.

Thick round the great trunk grew the bush, the hanging creepers, and the giant ferns, hiding what he sought. With gleaming eyes, Dandy Peter set himself to the search, thrusting his arm through the tangled growths, groping over the surface of the hidden trunk in quest of an opening. He laughed aloud as his fingers came on a soft spot, and sank into the seemingly solid trunk.

### Surrounded!

"THE pearls!" breathed Dandy Peter. He dragged at the tangled bush to clear the spot he had found. Suddenly he stopped, standing quite still, his heart leaping. There was rustling in the bush. Was it an echo of the noise he had made? After he had ceased to move, the rustling in the bush continued, close at hand, and it came from different points. He was not alone in the bush. Others were there—many others.

Dandy Peter's teeth came together, and his eyes burned. Had they seen him, after all, from the ketch, and landed; followed him into the bush, and surrounded him there? It must be King of the Islands.

From an opening of the tangled bush a face looked. But it was not the face of King of the Islands, or his mate, or one of his Kanakas. It was a black face, with nose pierced and ornamented with a brass ring. It was the face of Tame'eto, the black chief of Aya-ua, savage and ferocious, his eyes rolling and gleaming.

Dandy Peter knew nothing of Tame'eto; but as he saw that fierce black face he realised that the savages of Aya-ua were upon him.

Dandy Peter's heart almost stopped beating. Alone, unarmed, the pearls

almost in his grasp, and the cannibals around him. All the pearls in the Pacific would have been of little use to him now.

No spear was lifted to strike, but that did not mean mercy—it meant capture, torture, and the cooking-oven!

Dandy Peter clenched his hands till the nails dug in the palms. Tame'eto, grinning hideously, pushed towards him through the tangle. Five fathoms in the bush, hidden from all eyes, and there were white men on the lagoon. They were enemies; but white men who would have saved even their most treacherous enemy from such a fate as hung over Parsons.

The recollection of King of the Islands came like a ray of light in darkness to the doomed man. Then hands were stretched out to seize him, but Dandy Peter, with the spring of a tiger, leaped away, and plunged madly towards the lagoon.

There was a howl from the blacks, and they swarmed after him. A hand grasped his shoulder, he struck into a black face, and the man went down with a grunt. Another grasp, and another, but he twisted furiously and tore free. Branches caught him, thorns tore him, creepers tangled round him, hands clutched and grasped; but Dandy Peter tore on and burst out of the bush, with the Aya-ua blacks whooping behind.

He ran madly for the lagoon, screaming and shrieking. Only King of the Islands could help him now, save him from a fate that made the flesh creep to think of. Far across the shining water, glimmering in the rising sunlight, lay the ketch, and far across the water rang the cries of the man for whom the hands of the cannibals were outstretched.

He saw the distant faces on the ketch—saw King of the Islands leap on the rail and stare towards him, and heard the shouts of the Hiva-Oa crew. He saw Kit Hudson drag a rifle from the rack by the mizzen, and throw it to his shoulder.

They had seen him, and would save him if they could. He heard the roar of the rifle and the howl of a savage who pitched over on the beach. If he could but reach the water, King of the Islands would save him yet.

A grasp on his shoulder dragged him backwards, still a score of yards from the lagoon.

"Bang!" roared the rifle again, and a savage fell across Dandy Peter. He sprang up, but hands gripped him from all sides and dragged him down again, back towards the bush.

He fought like a madman, kicking, clawing, tearing with hands and teeth. He heard the roar of rifles from the ketch and heard the bullets splattering on sand and coral, and the howls of stricken savages. But he was dragged on, and the shadows of the bush hid him from the sight of King of the Islands!

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*Book your MODERN BOY for Next Saturday and make certain of enjoying the next swift episodes in these adventures of young King of the Islands and his comrades and enemies!*  
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