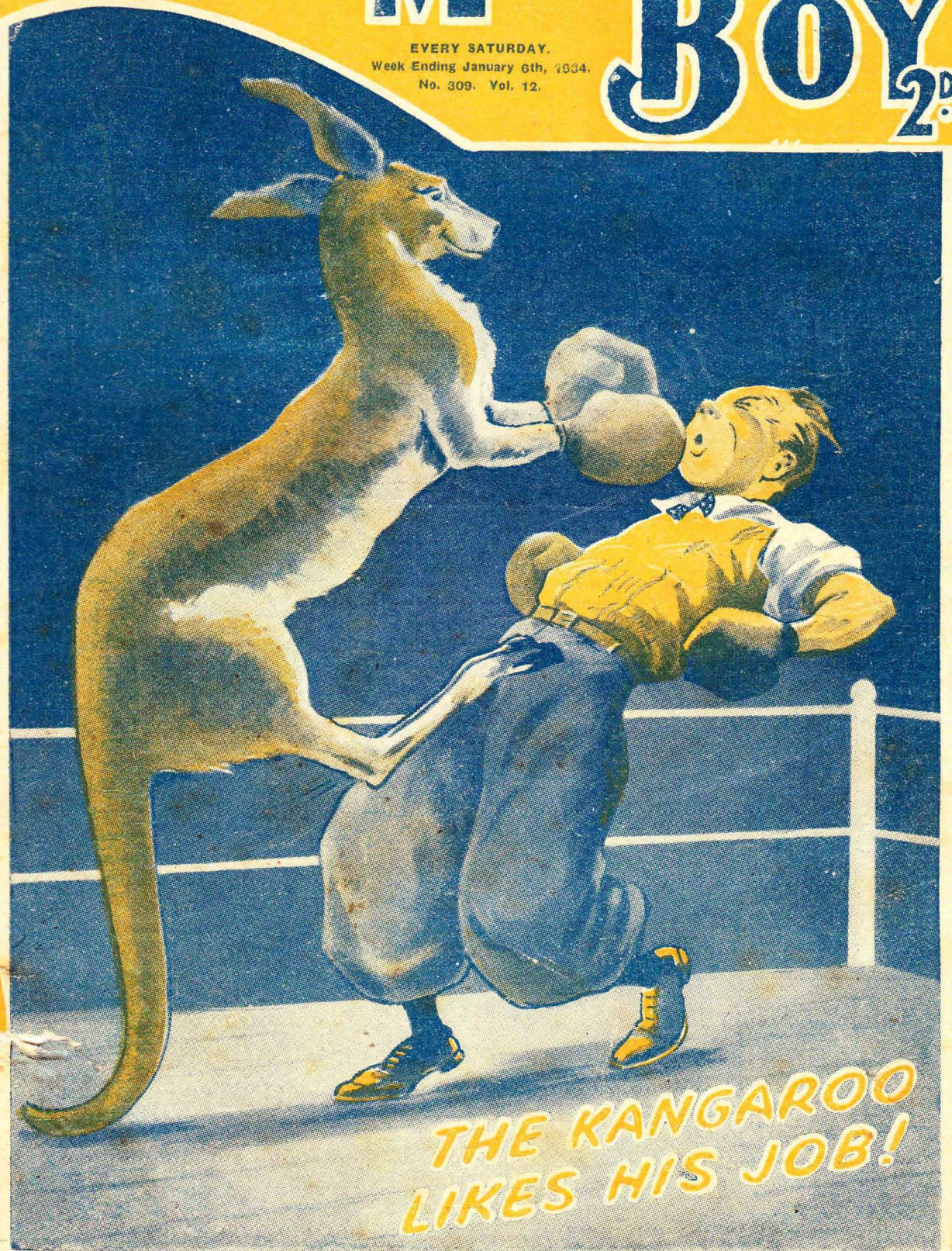


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The **MODERN BOY** 2^d

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**THE KANGAROO
LIKES HIS JOB!**

The ATOLL of MYSTERY!

KING OF THE ISLANDS, looking for a fortune in Pink Coral in the South Seas, finds a first-class mystery—and hidden watchers on an island that should be uninhabited!

By
CHARLES HAMILTON

Hidden Reefs!

"YOU fellow Koko!" rapped King of the Islands, boy skipper and owner of the trading ketch Dawn. "You bring feller chart along cabin!"

Koko, the brown boatswain, ran down the companion. There was a buzz of wild excitement on the deck of the Dawn. The Hiva-Oa crew stared back at the pursuing schooner, and babbled to one another. Billy the Beachcomber hung on to a rope as the ketch surged through the Pacific rollers, his eyes almost bulging from his head at the sight of the fat figure of Mr. Jam, the dealer in false pearls, discernible on the schooner. On Tahiti he had narrowly escaped Mr. Jam. But on the high seas, with the Frisco schooner rapidly overhauling the ketch, there seemed to be no escape.

"Burn my timbers!" mumbled the outcast of Tahiti. "He's got me now. I'll never raise that fortune on Tunaviva now. Captain King, you'll stand by a man!"

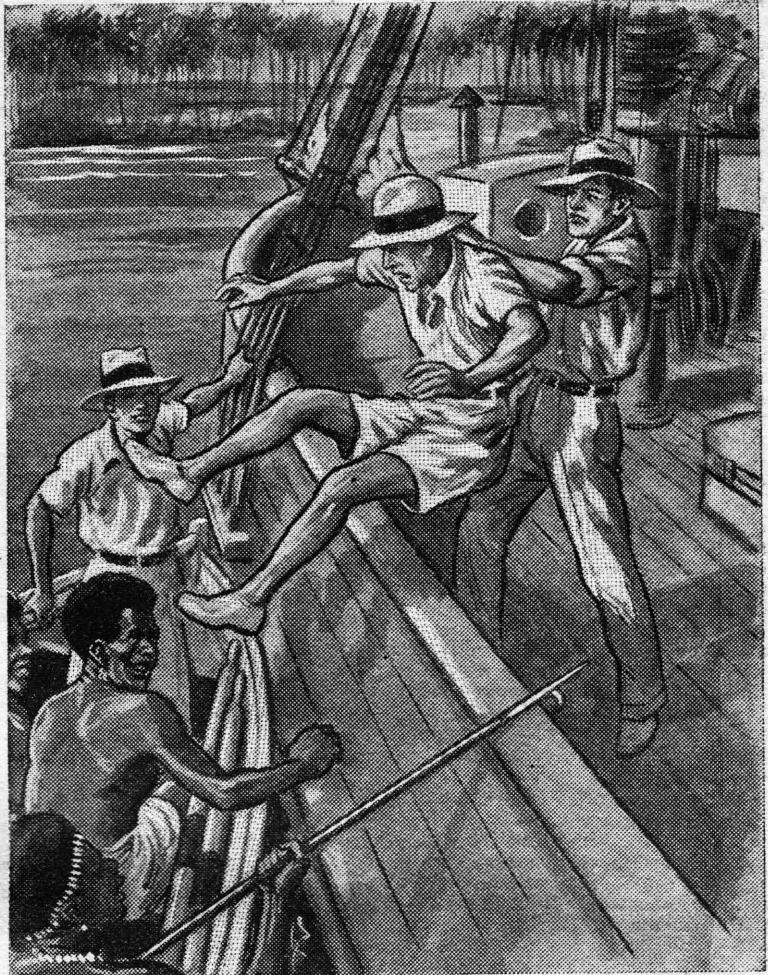
"Belay it, you lubber!" snapped Ken King. "We're all in the same boat now. If that schooner lays us aboard, they won't leave a man alive to tell the tale."

"She'll lay us aboard before sundown," said Billy.

Ken made no reply, but turned and watched the schooner, his face set and hard. Hudson, his Australian mate, rested his rifle on the taffrail.

"No doubt now, Ken!" he said quietly.

"None!" said King of the Islands. "I know that packet. She's the Frisco Belle, out of San Francisco, with the scum of the Pacific on board. That swab Jam knew how to pick his man for this job!"



Hudson picked up the beachcomber, lifted him over the side of the Dawn, and dropped him bodily into the boat.

Hudson nodded. His face was tense. Still far away, but clear to his keen eyes, he picked out the rough and savage faces that looked over the schooner's bows. Twice the ketch had changed her course, and the schooner had followed, and twice Hudson had fired as a warning to cease the pursuit. Now the shipmates knew what was intended. If they had had any doubt, the sight of the fat man on the schooner's deck would have enlightened them.

On Tahiti, Mr. Jam had shown that he was prepared to take the most desperate measures to keep King of the Islands away from the mysterious isle of Tunaviva, where Billy the Beachcomber declared there was precious pink coral, worth five pounds an ounce! On the high seas, out of sight of land, out of sight of all eyes, he was taking still more desperate measures. And now that he recognised the Frisco Belle, Ken knew only too well the kind of men he had to deal with. Well he knew the reputation of Elias Shuck and his wild crew!

Shots were spattering from the schooner. They pitted the white sails of the Dawn, and pinged on her timbers. Lompo, at the wheel, gave a howl and ducked as a bullet tore a coral comb from his thick hair. His eyes rolled wildly.

"My word! This feller Lompo no

like gun shot along head belong him," he gasped.

"We've picked up a large-sized packet of trouble, Ken, on account of that unwashed swab," grunted Hudson.

"We're going through with it, Kit!" Ken's eyes gleamed. "We'll make Tunaviva if every sea-thief in the Pacific stands in the way. There's some rascally game going on there, to make that villain take such measures to keep white men away! We're making Tunaviva whatever happens!"

"I'm with you all the way! But I reckon we shall want all our luck to pull through this," answered the mate of the Dawn. "It's going to be a fight to a finish. That crew of pirates, twice our number—"

"They've not run us down yet," broke in King of the Islands, quietly. "I've got a card to play yet. I know these seas better than a pearl-poaching thief from Frisco!"

Koko brought the chart, and Ken spread it out on the cabin skylight. The brown crew looked at him in wonder. It was no time for consulting charts, so far as the Kanakas could see, when an enemy was coming

The Atoll of Mystery!

up hand-over-fist. Hudson gave his skipper a stare of surprise, but Ken, his eyes on the chart, did not heed. The mate of the Dawn turned back to the taffrail, gripping his rifle. Shots came every minute or two from the schooner.

THE fat figure in white ducks and crimson cummerbund was no longer to be seen. Mr. Jam was in cover! Hudson pitched a bullet among the ruffians on the schooner's forecabin who were potting at the fleeing ketch, and had the satisfaction of seeing one of them leap and drop his rifle. A burst of rifle-fire came back and a bullet tipped the hat on the head of King of the Islands as he bent over the chart on the skylight.

Bang! Bang! Bang! went Hudson's rifle. The range was easy now, and he pitched every bullet into the schooner. Ken lifted his head from the chart, a grim look of satisfaction on his face. He roared orders to the Kanakas. Cackling with wild excitement, but obedient to the voice they were accustomed to obey, the Hivo-Oa boys grasped the ropes, and Lompo jammed over the wheel. The ketch swung away sharply to the east, with a clatter of blocks and a roar of the swinging boom.

Hudson's eyes glinted over his rifle as he leaned over the taffrail. The schooner had been directly astern, but as the Dawn shot suddenly on her new course, Hudson had sight of her whole broadside, and the man at the wheel astern. He fired with swift and deadly aim, and the steersman of the Frisco Belle lurched at the wheel, let go the spokes, and rolled on the deck. A roar of savage voices from the Frisco Belle came down the wind as she yawed wildly and lost way.

Crack! Crack! rang Hudson's rifle, and the mate of the Frisco Belle dashed a spurt of blood from his cheek as he leaped to the wheel. Captain Shuck's hoarse voice could be heard as he roared orders to his crew. Slowly the schooner came round on the new tack, but she had lost way and time, and the ketch had gained what she had lost.

"Good man!" said Ken quietly. "I reckoned we should make it, Kit—and now it's a cert!"

"I don't see it, Ken," answered Hudson. "She's got bags of time to run us down before dark—and dark's our only chance of pulling clear."

"I've sailed these waters before," said Ken, in the same quiet tone. "I

had a trip once taking supplies to the people on Pitcairn. I know what lies between Pitcairn and Mangareva, dead ahead of us at this minute, old man, and I reckon Captain Shuck doesn't, or he would be raving to all hands to take in sail!"

"Take in sail!" repeated Hudson, staring blankly at his skipper.

"That's all that can save him!" said King of the Islands coolly. "We're out of danger now, Kit, but if Captain Shuck is going to steer clear of Davy Jones he will have to put in quick work with his boats."

Hudson was about to speak again, when the Dawn gave a sudden tremble. There was a howl of alarm from the crew. Ahead of the ketch, the Pacific rollers surged on their way, with no sign of land, no sign of a reef. Yet the Dawn's keel had scraped coral.

"Feller reef he stop!" roared Koko. "She's struck!" panted Billy the Beachcomber.

"Belay your jawing - tackle!" snapped King of the Islands. "We're over the reef, Kit. But that Frisco boat draws seven or eight feet more than we do—and seven or eight inches would do it!"

"Suffering cats!" breathed Hudson. He understood now, and knew why King of the Islands had scanned the chart while the bullets were humming over the ketch.

To save his ship being boarded and his crew killed, Ken King had deliberately lured the schooner on to the hidden rocks!

The Dawn sailed on in shallow water over hidden reefs, but pulling every moment into deeper water. Astern came the Frisco schooner under bellying sails, eating up the fathoms. It looked as if nothing could save the ketch. The schooner was rushing down on her like a sea-hawk hungry for prey, and already the desperate crew were preparing to leap down on the Dawn when they shot alongside. Hardly a cable's-length separated the two vessels when the crash came with fearful suddenness.

One moment the schooner, a tower of bellying sail, was rushing down on her prey, next she was reeling dizzily, her masts crashing, canvas crumpling over spars, and the sea rushing into her hold through jagged gaps torn by the teeth of the coral. In the midst of the staggering wreckage, Captain Shuck could be seen raving like a madman, screaming out orders. And the fat figure of Mr. Jam, in white ducks and red cummerbund, was seen for a moment shrieking with terror. Frantically the crew of the Frisco Belle rushed for the boats as the schooner piled up on the sunken reef.

King of the Islands stood on, and reef and wrecked schooner dropped astern into the sunset.

"I reckon they'll make Mangareva in two or three days in their boats," said the boy trader. "But that packet will never sail the Pacific again—and a good many sailormen in lonely waters will be jolly glad to hear it!"

The sun's rim dipped, and darkness rushed down on the Pacific. Under the glittering stars the Dawn

changed her course again, and stood once more for Tunaviva.

Silence and Solitude!

FAR away across the Pacific, in the lonely waste of waters between solitary Pitcairn and almost as solitary Tubuai, a blur showed on the blue. According to the calculations of the boy skipper of the Dawn, that blur was Tunaviva—the tiny atoll that was the outmost speck of the wide-flung Society Group. Nominally French, like the rest of the Societies, it was never visited by white man or brown, and uninhabited save by gulls and land-crabs. It was productive of nothing but a few coconuts not worth a copra-trader's while.

Once in three or four years, perhaps, a native canoe might touch on Tunaviva, but only if driven far by bad weather. And there it lay, a tantalising blur on the deep blue, hardly nearer at sunset than at sunrise. The wind that had brought the ketch down from the main group of the Societies had failed. Light and baffling winds kept the Dawn away from her destination. Billy the Beachcomber, on the forecabin head, watched and muttered under his breath.

It was three days since the Frisco Belle had been left astern on the sunken reefs, with her captain and crew scrambling for the boats. With a wind, King of the Islands would have run down swiftly enough to Tunaviva, and already the beachcomber would have been rooting over the atoll for his precious pink coral. As it was, the isle of fortune mocked the beachcomber from a distance, and he shook his fist at it.

The outcast of Tahiti was not the only man on the Dawn who was weary of shifting winds. Nothing is more exasperating to captain and crew of a sailing ship than to beat and beat, and tack and tack, with everlasting pulling and hauling and weary tramping, stealing a few cables' length here, a knot or two there, and perhaps losing it again. The Hivo-Oa crew were tired, their brown faces less sunny than usual, and skipper and mate were fed up.

A dozen times King of the Islands had called himself a fool for having consented to run down to Tunaviva at all—all the more because the man he had befriended was a thankless waster, a slacker, and a trouble on the ship. But he had given his word, and his word was his bond. And it was true also that the skipper and mate of the Dawn were keenly curious to look in at the lonely isle and see what there was there to account for Mr. Jam's desperate determination to keep visitors away from it. It was not pink coral, as the beachcomber believed—they were sure of that. But what was it?

Again King of the Islands was rang out, and the Kanakas padded on the deck with naked feet. Once more the boom swung, with creaking of blocks and tackle.

"All hands!" roared Hudson. "Where's that loafing waster?"

Billy the Beachcomber squatted low on the forecabin, and gave no heed.

TO READERS IN THE IRISH FREE STATE

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Laziness was ingrained in him from long years of loafing on tropical beaches. His few days on the Dawn had done him good—he was clean and tidy, and there was even a returning glow of health in his gaunt face, now that he was no longer able to touch the liquid poison that had rotted his whole system. But he was not enjoying the process of improvement.

More than once, he had almost regretted taking this chance to run down to Tunaviva, so hard did the slacking lounge find life on board Ken King's ketch. Only lawyer-cane or hard knuckles could make him turn-to. Even the Kanakas, the laziest race on earth, despised his laziness.

The mate of the Dawn, lending a hand himself at the pulling and hauling, was not likely to leave the waster to loaf. His keen eye spotted the sprawling figure on the fore-castle. His grasp fell on it a moment later. Billy came down on the fore-deck with a crash and a howl.

"Turn to!" roared Hudson. "Can't you handle a rope as well as a better man?"

"Burn my timbers!" growled the beachcomber. "I'll—"

A kick sent him spinning along the deck before he could say more. Another followed him up, and another, and then Billy laid hold of a rope and pulled. The Dawn slid through the glassy water on her new tack, the blur of Tunaviva faded, and there was no land to be seen.

The sun was low in the west when,

on another long tack, the island was raised again. King of the Islands turned his binoculars on the blur, and the coconut palms leaped into view. The boy trader watched intently. It was merely a coral atoll—a ring of land surrounding a lagoon, with one break in the ring where the tide creamed in.

Whether the passage in the reef would admit the ketch to the lagoon, Ken did not know. If not, he would have to anchor off the island. Thick clusters of palm trees grew round the lagoon, and here and there he made out patches of bush. Near the reef passage were great masses of coral rocks high from the sea, forced up from below by some volcanic action of ancient days.

Over the reef gulls were wheeling. The whole island was so low on the sea that he could scan almost the whole interior lagoon.

It was a sheet of crimson in the glow of the setting sun. A dark speck on the crimson caught his eye, and he watched it keenly and curiously.

"Kit!" he called abruptly. Hudson came up. "Take a look, old man! There's something afloat on the lagoon! It might be a drifting palm, but—"

Hudson clamped the glasses to his eyes, and picked up the long, dark object on the gleaming waters of the lagoon. For a minute he stared hard, then lowered the glasses.

"A boat, I reckon!" he said.

"Then there's somebody on Tunaviva!" said Ken.

He took up the binoculars again. Hudson was right—it was a boat, not a canoe. Four moving dots in it were its crew. It disappeared, and he picked it up again, closer to the lagoon beach. Then it vanished, screened by the palms.

"Somebody on Tunaviva!" he repeated. "But who—and what? And why? Pearls?" hazarded the boy trader. "When we picked up that rascal Jam, capsized, he told us that he came from Rimitara—and we knew he was lying, as we picked him up east of Tahiti. He had come up from Tunaviva in that lugger that was wrecked in the hurricane. If he's found pearls on Tunaviva, that would account—"

"He hasn't!" Hudson laughed. "That scoundrel Jam is a dealer in false pearls, and he wouldn't be trading in dud pearls if he had found the genuine article on Tunaviva!"

"That's so!" assented King of the Islands. "But if it's not pearls, what the dickens is it, Kit? He was willing to sink us to keep us away from Tunaviva. It's not precious pink coral, as that swab of a beachcomber believes—if it was Jam would be selling pink coral, not cultured pearls. What the dickens is his game on that speck of unknown land?"

"Ask me another!" answered the mate, shrugging his shoulders. "It's got me beat! But we're going to find out, Ken. I'm not sorry, on the whole, that we let that swab Billy

(Continued on next page)

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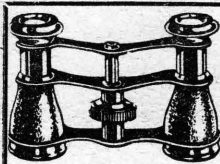
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The Atoll of Mystery!

bamboozle us into making Tunaviva. I'm pretty keen to put a spoke in Mr. Jam's wheel, whatever his game is!"

NIGHT fell, and blotted out Tunaviva. During the night there were two eyes at least that did not close on the ketch—those of Billy the Beachcomber, staring through the darkness at the unseen isle, as if by staring he could bring it and its fancied fortune nearer. Sunrise on the Pacific showed the atoll far away on the port bow, tantalising from afar. The lagoon, gleaming through the palms, could be seen by the naked eye from the deck.

Through the long, hot morning the ketch won her way down to the baffling island. But it was in vain that Ken and Kit scanned the atoll for a sign of an inhabitant. That there was somebody on Tunaviva they knew, from the boat they had seen on the lagoon. But no boat was to be seen now. There was no sign of a dwelling, or hint of smoke from a dwelling, and no sign of life save the gulls on the long, low reefs.

It was hard to believe that that speck of lonely land was inhabited, yet they knew that men were there. They knew, too, from that aspect of utter loneliness, that the men on Tunaviva had sighted the ketch in the offing, and were keeping out of sight. Whoever was on Tunaviva did not want his presence to become known. The shipmates had expected it, yet it seemed to add to the strange mystery of the place.

The hot, tropical noon was past, and Tunaviva still mocked them from a distance. Billy watched it with hungry eyes. It was well on in the afternoon, when the fierce heat of the day was over, that King of the Islands ordered the whaleboat to be lowered. By that time the Dawn had won her way to within a few cables' length of the reef passage, and her prudent skipper intended to explore that passage in the boat before attempting to take his ship in. The wind had almost died, and the sea was like glass.

King of the Islands went in the whaleboat, with four Kanakas pulling, and Hudson watched him from the ketch—Billy still more eagerly. Ken's face was cheerful when he pulled back to the Dawn.

"There's a passage for us?" asked Hudson.

"Ay, ay! I reckon that swab Jam took his lugger in and out easily enough," answered Ken. "We shall tow in."

The towrope was run to the whaleboat. Koko, Lompo, Lufu, Kolulo, and Tomoo, sat to the oars. Hudson ordered the beachcomber into the boat. Billy took no notice, and Hudson picked him up by the neck and the slack of his shorts and dropped him bodily into the boat. There was a cackle from the Hiva-Oa boys as Billy sprawled among them.

"Pull, you waster!" snapped Hudson over the rail. And the beachcomber, snarling, sat to an oar with the Kanakas. Hudson went to the wheel. Six oars pulled in the whaleboat, and the ketch glided slowly on to Tunaviva, and into the passage in the coral circle. Slowly she towed in. Then Ken and the boat's crew came on board, and the whaleboat

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P	A	T	L	E	D	R	A	T	E

Winners' Names on Page 32

was swung up again to the davits. The cable ran out, and the anchor hooked on coral in fifty feet of water.

From the anchored ketch, King of the Islands looked round at the gleaming circle of the beach, the slanting palms, the dusky bush. Silence and shadow—as if no man had stepped there since the day of creation. Silence and solitude—yet he knew that there were men on Tunaviva. He could not doubt that even then eyes were watching the anchored ketch.

But if there were hidden watchers they gave no sign. Silence and solitude brooded over the lonely isle, and there was no hint of a clue to its mystery!

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