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A. SOMMER

KING OF THE ISLANDS in Search of His Shipmate!



Kit Hudson kicked the revolver at the very moment that Dandy Peter pulled the trigger.

SOUTH SEAS PARTNERS!

In partnership with the most lawless rascal in the whole South Seas, Kit Hudson is crazed by the vision of Big Salvage! - - - By CHARLES HAMILTON

Too Late!

THE whaleboat, with six brown Kanakas pulling at the oars, and a little wizened, dark-skinned Portuguese sitting in the stern, came surging through the Pacific rollers. It came out of the west, black against the crimson of the sinking sun.

Dandy Peter Parsons, the sea-lawyer of Lukwe, standing in the rocking, drifting motor-boat, did not see it. His eyes were turned to the south-east, where the mountain-top of distant Lascelles Island loomed in the clouds. Round the helpless, drifting motor-boat stretched the boundless Pacific, far as the eye could reach—broken only in that one spot by a glimpse of land that mocked the sea-lawyer from afar.

On that spot Dandy Peter's eyes were fixed, and he clenched his hands and gritted his teeth with a fury that made Kiwe, the black boy, shrink from him in fear.

The wind from the south had died away after noon. Northward, black clouds were banking up on the

horizon. But Dandy Peter did not heed, or note, the coming change in the weather. He seemed unable to take his eyes from the far-off blur of Lascelles—in sight, but far beyond his reach.

On Lascelles, the auction of the wrecked Crackerjack was taking place, probably in those very moments. But the "tick-tock" boat was silent; the engine had conked out for good. Dandy Peter's chance of bidding for the hulk on the reef of Suna-Suna was gone.

It was for this that he had driven Kit Hudson, mate of the ketch Dawn, of which King of the Islands was boy skipper and owner, at the pistol's point into his canoe, and seized the motor-boat—to be left helpless on the wide sea, while the mate of the Dawn pushed on in the canoe to Lascelles, with a chance at least of getting there in time. He raged in the helpless boat like a caged tiger.

It was not the first time that the sea-lawyer of Lukwe, in his unscrupulous rascality, had over-reached himself. He had counted on petrol to see

him through with an ample margin; but he might have guessed that Ezra Hunk's crazy old tin can would conk out. He had played into his rival's hand, and that knowledge maddened him.

"Feller whaleboat comey along sea, sar!" ventured Kiwe, at last. For hours, while they drifted, Ezra Hunk's black boy had watched the raging rascal in fear, uneasy lest Dandy Peter's fury should turn on him. But if Parsons was blind to the coming change in the weather, Kiwe was not, and his eyes turned, many times, anxiously towards the banking clouds northward; and it was with deep relief that he saw the whaleboat rise in the offing.

Peter Parsons stared round at him. Kiwe pointed with a black finger, and Parsons, shading his eyes from the sun, stared into the burning west.

"Prado's whaleboat!" he exclaimed, and his eyes glinted.

He knew the little wizened Portuguese pearl-buyer, who sat in the stern. Prado was well known among the Islands, where he made trips,

South Seas Partners!

sometimes of hundreds of miles, in his whaleboat. He was a friend of King of the Islands—no friend of Dandy Peter.

But friend or foe was equally welcome to Peter Parsons, if there was a chance of getting a lift to Lascelles—in time for the Crackerjack auction, if luck befriended him; in time for vengeance on the mate of the Dawn, at any rate.

He waved and shouted to the whaleboat. On its present course, it would have passed at a cable's length distance. But Prado was staring at him, his little bright black eyes gleaming from his dusky face. For some moments Parsons doubted whether the pearl-buyer intended to run down to him. But he saw Prado glance to the north, where the storm-clouds were banking in the direction of Lalinge.

When the gale came, the two men in the drifting motor-boat had little chance of their lives. That thought, doubtless, determined Pedro Prado to take an unwelcome passenger on board. He steered towards Dandy Peter.

The Kanakas drew in their oars as the whaleboat came alongside, and a brown hand held on. Prado nodded and grinned to Dandy Peter.

"Feller tick-tock no stop?" he asked. The Portuguese half-breed spoke in the beche-de-mer, having little English.

"You've got it!" grunted Dandy Peter. Without waiting to be asked,

he swung himself into the whaleboat. Kiwe, following, hesitated.

"Feller Mister Hunk no likee that feller tick-tock boat walk about along bottom sea!" said the black boy.

Dandy Peter laughed. He was not much concerned about the fate of the craft he had seized from the mate of the Dawn.

"No can tow tick-tock boat!" said Pedro Prado. He gestured to the north. "Big feller wind comey too soon. This feller makee Lolo plenty quick."

"Let it go to Davy Jones!" answered Parsons, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You feller Kiwe, you stay along tick-tock boat, s'pose you likee."

But Kiwe did not "likee." He followed the sea-lawyer into the whaleboat, and the Kanakas pulling at the oars again, Ezra Hunk's old craft was left wallowing astern.

DANDY PETER dropped into the stern seat beside Prado. The old Portuguese, little as he liked the sea-lawyer, made room for him. He rapped an order to the Kanakas to "washy-washy debblish quick," with an uneasy glance to the north. He was anxious to get into the shelter of the Lolo lagoon before the gale broke.

But Peter Parsons had his own ideas about that. It was more than likely that Prado had saved his life by taking him off the drifting motor-boat. But that weighed little with the hard-hearted sea-lawyer of Lukwe. Lolo, a low island to the east, was not in

sight; but it was half the distance of Lascelles. There was time to make it before the coming gale churned the Pacific into a cauldron of raging seas and foam.

Twice the distance meant pulling through the breaking gale. But the sea-lawyer of Lukwe was utterly reckless when his mind was set on a purpose. There was no risk he would not have taken for a chance of yet raising Lascelles before the hulk on Suna-Suna was sold.

His hand slid under his duck-jacket and he gripped the butt of the revolver at his hip.

"I reckon I want you to land me on Lascelles, Prado!" he said quietly. "I'll stand you a fair price for the trip."

Prado shook his head. "No can!" he answered. He gestured to the north again. "Big feller blow comey too plenty soon."

"I reckon you can make it with your boys going all out! Leave it to me to drive them!"

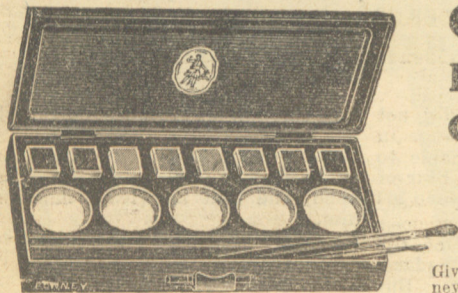
"No can!" answered Prado briefly.

Parsons' eyes glittered. If there was a ghost of a chance of yet getting hold of the hulk on Suna-Suna, with seven thousand golden sovereigns in the strong-room, he was not the man to let it pass him by. By hook or by crook, by lawful means or lawless, he was going to put up a fight for it.

"I reckon you'll make Lascelles!" he said, between his teeth. A hard metal rim was jammed to the bony ribs of the little Portuguese, and he gave a convulsive start and howl, his black

(Continued opposite)

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eyes flashing wildly at Dandy Peter.

"Senhor!" yelled Prado, in alarm and terror. "What you makee along feller gun belong you?"

Dandy Peter showed his white teeth in a snarl.

"Steer for Lascelles, you coffee-coloured scum! I'll pay you for the trip! Steer for Lascelles, or, by James, I'll drive hot lead through you, and throw you over the side!"

The little Portuguese looked at him, his black eyes burning with rage. The muzzle of Dandy Peter's revolver ground into his ribs, and the sea-lawyer's face was like iron. For a second, Prado hesitated, his rage almost overcoming his fear of the desperate sea-lawyer. But it was only for a second. Then, spluttering with rage, he steered for Lascelles Island.

The Kanaka crew eased for a moment on their oars. Dandy Peter's glittering eyes turned on them.

"Pull, you scum! Washy-washy too quick altogether, you black swabs, s'pose you no wantee this white feller knock seven bells outer you!" he snarled.

The brown crew pulled again. They were not the first crew into whom the handsome wicked face of the Lukwe sea-lawyer had put deadly fear. They pulled as if for their lives, and the whaleboat raced through the sea, heading now for the mountain-top of Lascelles, that drew nearer and clearer with every long sweep of the oars.

And it was soon for their very lives that they were pulling, for the threatening gale came down while the hill-top was still distant. Seas of foam rolled behind the whaleboat under the lashing wind and torrents of drenching rain.

"Us feller all dead feller!" muttered Pedro Prado, through his chattering teeth.

Dandy Peter laughed recklessly.

"We'll make it!" he snapped.

And they made it—though even the iron-nerved sea-lawyer wondered whether he had not taken too long a chance, as the desperate Kanakas pulled and pulled through tossing surges, lashed by wind and rain. Pedro Prado, crouched and clinging to the stern seat like a cat, left the steering-oar to Dandy Peter—whose slim hands on it were like steel.

On a foaming billow, the whaleboat swept into the reef passage at Lascelles, under the red glare of the sinking sun—the little Portuguese half-insensible; the Kanakas, weary to the bone, pulling for their lives; Dandy Peter steering with a steady eye and a cool head, utterly unmoved by danger.

They swept into the calm waters of the lagoon, and the weary crew dropped the oars as the whaleboat bumped on the sandy beach. Dandy Peter scrambled ashore and ran up the beach, Prado rousing himself to shake a furious fist after him.

The sea-lawyer shouted to the first white man he saw on the beach—a trader hurrying through the rain for the shelter of a bungalow.

"Has the auction started?"

The man looked round at him.

"Started and finished, long ago!" he called back. "The Crackerjack's sold!"

"Who's bought her?" hissed Dandy Peter, between his teeth.

"Kit Hudson, the mate of the Dawn."

Running Before the Storm!

CLOSE-REEFED, beaten by the wind, drenched by the breaking seas, the ketch Dawn rocked and plunged in the heaving Pacific. Through openings of the black clouds the glare of the sunset came in crimson patches. King of the Islands, in glistening oilskins, stood by the steersman, staring into the murk, heedless of the spindrift that lashed in his face.

Koko, the Kanaka, with a giant's grasp on the wheel, kept the Dawn's nose to the wind. The Hiva-Oa crew were all on deck, ducking their dusky heads to the wind and the rain. The blow had come on suddenly as the sun went down, but it had not taken Ken King by surprise.

The Dawn was riding out the gale as she had ridden out many a one, and Ken was not uneasy for his ship. But his boyish face was dark and clouded, and Koko, stealing a glance at the set face of his white master, knew what was passing in his sorely troubled mind.

At sundown the previous day, the Dawn had sailed out of Lalinge with a fair south wind behind her. She had sailed without her mate, who had gone south in Ezra Hunk's motor-boat, while his skipper sailed north before the wind.

A night and a day had passed, and with every knot that reeled off, Ken's heart had grown heavier, and the cloud on his face deepened and darkened.

He had been right in telling Hudson that it was impossible for the Dawn to sail against the wind and make Lascelles in time for them to bid for the wreck of the Crackerjack, and Hudson had been wrong. But right or wrong, Hudson was so keen on putting in for the chance of picking up seven thousand pounds in the hulk on the Suna-Suna reef that he had parted from his shipmate and gone off on his own. If he succeeded at the auction, it meant a trip to the Solomons—his life in his hands among the head-hunting cannibals. That was where the shoe pinched.

Through that night and day, King of the Islands had told himself that, with the wind coming straight out of the south, it was impossible to get a windjammer down to Lascelles; he could not give up the disputed point, and rejoin his comrade, if he wanted to.

And it seemed to him like the hand of Fate when the gale came, and the wind, veering round the compass, blew great guns from the north. In the teeth of it, the ketch rocked on the heaving ocean 's if Fate had decided that Ken should sail no farther from his comrade.

The order to 'bout ship trembled on his lips more than once. Hudson's was a mad and reckless scheme. It

NOVELTY BARGAINS

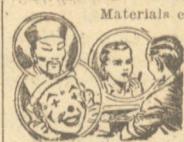
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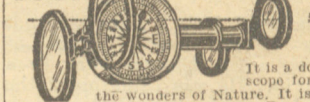


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was a cargo of copra to a fathom of shell-money that the Crackerjack had broken up long ago in the surf of Suna-Suna. The bushy isles round that deadly reef swarmed with savage cannibals. But if Kit was going among them, his shipmate's place was at his side—and the island trade could go to pot!

"This strong-feller wind plenty good go along Lascelles, sar!" said Koko. He could read his master's troubled mind like an open book.

King of the Islands started, and glanced at him.

"You tinkee good us feller go along Lascelles, Koko?" he asked.

"Me tinkee, sar!"

"There's nothing in it, Koko—a waste of time and trade! If Hudson's bought the Crackerjack, they've sold him a pup!" growled King of the Islands. "You tinkee that rotten old brig walk about along that reef along Solomon Islands?"

"No tinkee, sar! Me tinkee no good, feller Hudson stop along cannibal boy, along Solomons, along us fellow no stop!" said Koko simply. "Tinkee plenty good us feller stop along feller Hudson, sar, s'pose he stop along cannibal boy along Suna-Suna."

Ken smiled faintly. Koko was not thinking of the loss of trade—of long, long weeks thrown away in a useless trip. He was thinking of the peril into which Kit Hudson was going to plunge recklessly and alone. And at the bottom of his heart, that was what King of the Islands was thinking of. With his mind swaying in doubt, it needed little to bring him to a decision. Koko's words had that effect.

The order that had trembled on his lips half a dozen times since the wind changed rang out now. The Hiva-Oa boys jumped into activity. Koko threw his weight on the wheel. The ketch had long battled painfully against the gale. Now she flew like a sea-bird, with the wind astern, and Koko grinned a cheery grin as he saw the brightening of his white master's face. A load seemed to have rolled from Ken's heart now that he was on his way to rejoin his comrade. To give way in a dispute—to yield his better sense to a reckless fellow's whim—what was that compared with standing by a friendship that had never faltered in peril by land and sea?

THE last red glare of the sunset through the dark clouds vanished. Under hardly more than a rag of canvas—through rolling, roaring seas and torrents of rain—the ketch fled on through the night. For hours and hours the tropical gale blew with savage force, and no eye closed on board the Dawn; even Danny's snore was not heard from the cook's galley. Towards dawn the gale blew itself out, and the sun rose on a wildly tossing ocean. The wind was still strong and steady from the north, and with mainsail and foresail pulling, the ketch raced on towards distant Lascelles.

"Makee Lascelles plenty too soon, along this feller wind he stop!" said Koko.

The rain had ceased with the dawn, and Ken went down to throw off his streaming oilskins. Danny, staggering on the slanting deck, brought him breakfast, and steaming-hot coffee. When Ken went on deck again the sea had gone down a little, though the swell was still heavy. On all sides the Pacific glistened and shone under the bright sunlight, streaming down from a sky that was now of cloudless blue. A canoe, bottom upward, floated past the ketch; all who had been abroad in the wild night had not had the luck of the Dawn. Far away to the south, a blur on the blue marked the mountain-top of Lascelles Island. Ken reckoned on making it by noon.

He would find Hudson there, and learn whether he had succeeded in buying the Crackerjack. There was a chance, too, that he had arrived too late for the auction the previous afternoon. The rotten old motor-boat he had hired from Ezra Hunk on Lalinge was an unreliable craft. Anyhow, Ken would find his shipmate there. He must have raised Lascelles long before the gale broke—unless Hunk's old tin can had let him down!

Koko had given the wheel to Lompo. He was standing by the rail, his eyes fixed on an object that bobbed at a distance in the sea. Kolulo and Lufu and Tomoo were staring at it also, and muttering to one another in their dialect of Hiva-Oa. King of the Islands called to the brown boatswain.

"What feller thing you see, Koko, eye belong you?"

Koko glanced at him. He seemed unwilling to answer. There was a strange look on his brown face.

Ken stepped to the rail. Bobbing in the sea, half-submerged, was a craft of some kind. Ken King's face changed as he fixed his eyes on it. The colour wavered in his cheeks. He snapped an order to Lompo, and the ketch swerved towards the derelict.

King of the Islands grasped the teak rail as he leaned over and stared—grasped till his knuckles showed white.

"Koko!" he muttered hoarsely. "Speak, you fool! You savvy that feller craft? You savvy—"

"Me savvy, sar!" muttered the brown boatswain reluctantly. "That feller craft tick-toek boat belong Melican feller Hunk along Lalinge."

King of the Islands groaned. It was Ezra Hunk's motor-boat that was drifting past the ketch; a wreck, untenanted, smashed by the gale. Kit Hudson had trusted himself to that rotten old tin can for the long run across the Pacific from Lalinge to Lascelles. Dipping and rolling in the waves, it bobbed past the Dawn. Ken's eyes followed it in misery. Where was his shipmate?

The distant mountain-top seemed to mock him as the swift ketch stood on to Lascelles. He had parted with his comrade in anger. And where was his comrade now? That battered

wreck, rolling away on the waves, seemed to tell. He had resolved to throw in his fortunes with his shipmate—too late!

Hudson's Bargain!

COCONUTS, thickly strewn, lay like leaves on the ground; here and there a wrecked warehouse, an unroofed bungalow, or a heap of dismantled native grass-huts, told of the fury of the storm that had swept over the Pacific and Lascelles Island. Outside the reef the sea still rolled heavily.

But the lagoon was calm as a pond. The sunlight streamed down from cloudless blue; brown-skinned natives in the fishing-canoes laughed and sang; and white men sat in shady verandas and sipped from long glasses. In the blaze of the morning sun, only one white man was out on the open beach, and as he tramped along by the line of bungalows, Dandy Peter's eyes gleamed round him in search.

Until late in the morning the seawayer of Lukwe had slept the sleep of utter weariness. He had wakened to thoughts of vengeance. By his own rascally trickery he had defeated himself and placed victory in the hands of his rival. Kit Hudson had bought the Crackerjack, and if the sunken gold was ever taken from the hulk on Suna-Suna it would be taken by the mate of the Dawn.

In his bitter rage and disappointment, Dandy Peter hardly remembered that he was no longer on the wild and lawless island of Lukwe. On Lascelles there was law and police. But Dandy Peter, in his rage, would have sought out his enemy if he had been in the city of Sydney.

And his eyes blazed at the sight of a figure under the shadow of the palms up the beach. He slid his hand to the back of his belt to make sure that something was there and ready, and tramped up to the palms.

Kit Hudson did not even see him. He was not thinking of Dandy Peter. He had his own problem to think of, and the night had brought no solution. He had bought the Crackerjack for eight hundred and fifty pounds, and paid ten per cent of the purchase price to Macfadyen, the auctioneer.

He had barely five hundred pounds at his command, and he asked himself again and again how he could have been wild enough, excited enough, mad enough to land himself in such a scrape. Only with his shipmate's help could he raise the necessary sum; and he had parted from his shipmate. King of the Islands might be five hundred miles away, for all he knew.

What was he going to do? Lose what he had paid, and see the Crackerjack sold over again to someone who could buy it? Not till he had tried every resource. But—

"You scum!" A bitter voice, trembling with hate and rage, broke in on his dark reflections. "I've found you!"

The shadow of Peter Parsons fell on
(Continued on page 30)

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(Continued from page 23)

him. He glanced up and stared at the sea-lawyer of Lukwe. His look was indifferent and contemptuous.

"Keep your distance, you Lukwe thief!" snapped the mate of the Dawn. "You'd better, after the trick you played on me yesterday."

"You've bought the Crackerjack?" Hudson laughed—a rather mirthless laugh. He had bought what he could not pay for, which was no great cause for satisfaction. But that laugh gave the finishing touch to Dandy Peter's fury. He came at Hudson like a wildcat.

"Stand back, you swab!" roared the mate of the Dawn. The next instant they were fighting furiously.

In his rage and fury, Dandy Peter drove the stalwart young Australian back with blow on blow, snarling like a cat as his blows crashed home. But it was only for a few moments that he had the upper hand. Kit Hudson rallied, and came back at him with fists that crashed like flails.

The dapper sea-lawyer fought desperately, panting, snarling, almost spitting in his fury. The mate of the Dawn had his hands full for long, wild, whirling minutes. But strength and coolness told, and the Lukwe lawyer went crashing down on his back with a shock that jarred every bone in his body.

The sea-lawyer struggled to his knees, and his hand groped at the back of his belt. There was a gleam of metal in the sunlight as he threw up an unsteady hand to fire.

Kit Hudson leaped forward and kicked at the revolver, just as the desperate rascal pulled the trigger.

Bang! The bullet flew among the fronds of the palms as the revolver whirled away under the swift kick. The next moment Hudson's grip was on the sea-lawyer. He threw the writhing rascal from him like a sack of copra!

"You fool!" said Hudson. He laughed—a harsh laugh. "It was your own rotten trickery that sent me here in time for the auction—and you never did me a worse turn!"

"You've bought the Crackerjack!" muttered Dandy Peter hoarsely.

"But I can't pay for it, you fool! If that's any satisfaction to you, chew on it, and crawl away and get out of my sight!"

Hudson turned contemptuously away.

DANDY PETER, with the help of a palm, pulled himself to his feet. Kit Hudson's words had not been lost on him. His quick brain seized at once on how the matter stood.

For long minutes he stood leaning on the palm, his brain working quickly. Then, limping and panting, he hurried after the mate of the Dawn. Hudson, pacing under the palms, gave him a menacing look.

"If you want more—" he said, between his teeth.

"Cut it out! What did you give for the Crackerjack?"

"Eight hundred and fifty!" snapped Hudson. "They ran up the bidding out of my depth. Out of yours, too,

you swab, if you'd been here—you'd have had no chance."

"None! And your shipmate—" "King of the Islands isn't in this with me. You know that!"

Dandy Peter breathed hard, and his eyes snapped. He seemed to have forgotten that ten minutes ago he had pulled a gun on the man to whom he was now speaking.

"Everybody said the old hulk would go for a song; but eight hundred and fifty—pshaw! You can't raise it without Ken King's help. And Ken King sailed north when you came south. You're done to a frazzle!"

"Chance for you, if you can raise the money, when they put the old brig up again!" said Hudson bitterly.

"It's a long way out of my depth. But together—"

"Together?" repeated Hudson.

"Why not?" Dandy Peter's face was eager. "We're not friends, and never have been, but we can be partners in a venture! You've got no ship; I've got my cutter lying at Lalinge. I'm no more afraid of the black devils in the Solomons than you are. Chew on it, Hudson! You can't raise the money—and I can't. I'll go in with you—share and share alike."

Kit Hudson stared at him in silence. His first impulse was to throw the sea-lawyer's offer back in his teeth. But he checked that impulse. Sea-lawyer and scoundrel as Dandy Peter was, he was the man for that desperate venture among the cannibals in the Solomons. He had a ship and a crew. It was a way out of the dilemma.

To lose what he had paid, and let the Crackerjack go—that was the alternative. Dandy Peter was the last man in the Islands that he would have picked for a partner, but there was no other choice!

"You mean it?" said Kit, at last.

"My fist on it!"

Dandy Peter held out his hand. For a long moment Kit Hudson hesitated. Then he grasped the hand of the sea-lawyer of Lukwe.

"Done!" he said.

Dandy Peter grinned.

"By James!" he said. "We're both in luck, Hudson! We'll raise the sovereigns on Suna-Suna if we have to fight every mop-headed, man-eating fiend in the Solomons! Come with me! I've got my pile in my belt—you've got yours. Let's make Macfadyen's and settle the matter now—what?"

Hudson nodded, and they left the palms together. Half an hour later they came out of Macfadyen's office, joint owners of the wrecked Crackerjack. As they emerged into the sunlight on the beach Kit Hudson's eyes fell on a white sail glancing across the lagoon, and he gave a startled cry.

Standing across the lagoon from the reef passage was the Dawn, with King of the Islands on her deck!



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