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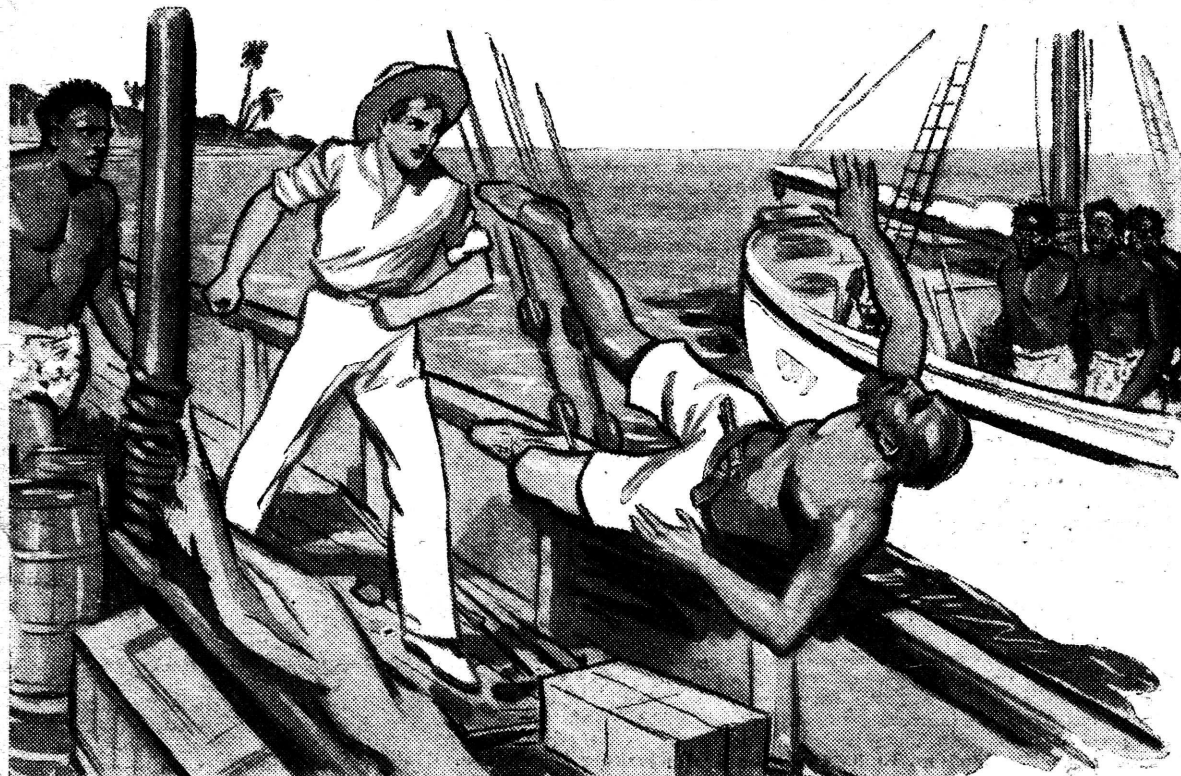
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A SLEDGE THAT GOES UPHILL!—See page 8

The scallywag deck-hand of the ketch Dawn has vanished! A small clue in the vast South Seas sets KING OF THE ISLANDS on the track of the one white man who has crossed the—

DESERTERS' TRAIL



News of the Lugger!

KING OF THE ISLANDS had a worried frown on his handsome, boyish face as the ketch Dawn raised the island of Kulua in the blue Pacific. Kulua lay wide of his course, and the boy skipper and owner of the ketch had no call to make there. But his glance turned again and again on the island, rising dark from the blue of the sea.

Kit Hudson, mate of the Dawn, grinned, reading the thoughts behind Ken King's frowning brow. Koko, the boatswain, at the wheel, watched his white master expectantly. But Ken King gave no order, and the boatswain's brown hands kept the wheel steady.

"It means chucking away a day, old man," said Kit Hudson, breaking the silence, in answer to Ken's unspoken thoughts. Ken started.

"Eh? What does?" he asked.

"Calling in at Kulua for news of Barney Hall's lugger!" chuckled Kit. "I've been reading your thoughts in your jolly old speaking countenance, old bean."

Ken stared at him for a moment, then laughed.

"Yes, that's what I was thinking of," he said. "We've seen nothing of

Ken King dashed out, and Barney Hall went over backwards, crashing down on the low gunwale. Then he slid into the water, and the lagoon closed over his vanishing feet.

the lugger since a week ago at the Albatross Reef, but, as likely as not, Barney Hall was making Kulua."

"But, as likely as not, he wasn't!" said Hudson. "Time's money, Ken, and we can't afford to put in at every island we raise on our course on the chance of picking up Barney Hall and that scallywag Paget there."

"No!" agreed Ken. But his eyes turned again on distant Kulua. He was worried.

Ray Paget, the scapegrace and

scallywag, had been put in his charge by his uncle, the Pacific Company's manager at Lalinge. It was by no fault of Ken's that Paget had deserted from the Dawn. He had swum off to the lonely Albatross Reef, and Barney Hall's lugger had picked him up. With the reef between the two vessels, King of the Islands had been unable to pursue. The scallywag was gone; and Hudson, at least, regarded it as a good riddance. Undoubtedly it was. But Ken had in mind his promise to the young wastrel's uncle.

His old enemy, Barney Hall of Tonga, had been glad to help a deserter escape from the ketch. Nothing had been seen of the lugger since. Ken would have been glad to run down the Tonga trader, square accounts with him, and take the scallywag back by main force, if necessary. But the lugger was lost in the immensity of the Pacific.

"Kulua, as likely as not!" muttered King of the Islands.

"And as unlikely as not!" Hudson laughed.

"I suppose so," said Ken slowly. "We can't spend time combing the Pacific for that reckless young fool. But Mr. Belnap put him in our hands,

By
**CHARLES
HAMILTON**

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Kit. We're responsible for him, and I'd give a good deal to get him back on the Dawn. The wind's fair for Kulua—"

"But not for getting away again!" said Hudson. "I fancy there's more than one craft in the lagoon there now, waiting for a chance to get out."

"Ay, ay! Keep her steady, Koko!"

King of the Islands made up his mind. And the Dawn kept on her course, with Kulua far away on the port side. But Ken's eyes lingered on the island he was passing, and where it was possible that Barney Hall's lugger lay at anchor in the lagoon.

From the direction of the island a speck moved on the water. Ken watched it for a few minutes, then called to the boatswain:

"You feller Koko, you look along sea eye belong you, along feller island! You see feller boat?"

The brown boatswain fixed his keen eyes on the speck.

"Feller whaleboat stop along sea, sar," he answered. "Comey along sea, no stop along Kulua."

"I thought so," said Ken. "That's a whaleboat pulling out of Kulua, Kit—some trader who doesn't care to wait for the wind. Shorten sail!"

The ketch was doing seven knots, and at that speed the boat would soon have been dropped. The boat evidently had pulled out of Kulua, and was heading to cross the course of the Dawn. It was a chance to get news of the craft in the lagoon, and King of the Islands shortened sail at once to stand by and hail the whaleboat.

THE boat came rapidly nearer. A crew of six Kanakas were pulling at the oars, and in the stern sat a small man under a big, shady hat. He stood up to look at the ketch, and Ken recognised the little dark olive face under the shade of the big grass-hat.

"Pedro Prado, the pearl-buyer!" he said. "We'll get the news from him, Kit." Ken leaned over the rail and waved his hand to Prado. The little Portuguese half-caste, recognising him, waved back, with a grin that showed his teeth in a gleam of white across his dark face. Prado was an old acquaintance of King of the Islands, and was evidently pleased to see him.

"This feller Prado plenty glad see King of the Islands, eye belong him!" said Prado, taking off the big grass-hat and making the boy trader a graceful bow under the rail of the Dawn. Prado had little English, and Ken less Portuguese, and the pearl-buyer spoke in pidgin-English. "You wantee look along feller pearl—buy um?"

"Not this time, Prado," Ken smiled. "You've just come out of Kulua?"

"Yes," said Prado.

"Any craft in the lagoon?"

"Two-three. stop along Kulua wait along wind," said the pearl-buyer. "This feller no wait. S'pose no sail, black feller washy-washy. Time, him money."

"Is there a lugger in the lagoon?"

"Lugger belong Barney Hall, he belong Tonga," answered Prado.

"Then Barney Hall is there, Ken!" exclaimed Hudson. "That means you're going to put in at Kulua?"

"You've seen Barney Hall's craft in the lagoon, Prado? Did you see a white man on board—a boy—a fellow named Paget?"

Prado shook his head.

"Barney Hall only white man along lugger," he said. "Four-five Tonga boys and Barney Hall. No other white."

"You're sure?"

"Plenty too much! This feller go along lugger along trade along Barney Hall. No other white feller stop along lugger."

"What the dickens has become of Paget, then?" muttered Hudson. "We saw Hall pick him up, across the Albatross Reef."

Ken shook his head.

He thanked the pearl-buyer for his information, and Prado made another deep bow, waved his hat, and pulled off in his whaleboat. Koko, watching his white master, received a sign from him, and gave a turn to the wheel. Prado's whaleboat disappeared into the blue of the Pacific as the ketch ran down to the reef passage of Kulua.

"Waste of time, old man!" said the mate of the Dawn.

"We know now that Barney Hall's lugger is there, Kit."

"But not Paget!" Hudson laughed. "I'd like to see Barney, and kick him for the trick he played us at the Albatross Reef—but it's not worth losing the wind for."

"But where can the scallywag be if he's not on the lugger?"

"The lazy lubber hated being on this packet," Hudson answered. "Do you think he found it any better on Hall's filthy little lugger? He jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire in making the change. Hall may have touched at some island before Kulua, and if he didn't kick the swab ashore, very likely Paget would clear off on his own. Anyhow, it doesn't look as if we shall find him on the lugger."

Ken was silent for a minute or two. He knew that he was losing time, and losing the wind, and after what Prado had told him, it did not seem that Paget was still with Barney Hall. He was tempted to rap out fresh orders and resume his former course. But he shook his head at last.

"You're right, Kit," he said. "But I'm answerable for that exasperating young swab. I can't lose a chance of getting him back and keeping him out of mischief. Prado mayn't have seen him—the fellow may have gone ashore. Anyhow—"

"Anyhow, we're losing this wind on the chance of picking up a cheeky fool we don't want!" grunted Hudson.

"All right, go ahead!"

Ken smiled. On her new course the ketch made good speed, and an hour after dropping Prado's boat she was threading the reef passage of Kulua. As the ketch came through the reef into the lagoon, the first craft that met the eyes of the shipmates was Barney Hall's lugger—

with the brawny trader of Tonga standing on his deck, staring blankly towards the Dawn as she came sweeping in.

Looking for a Sail!

RAY PAGET, standing on a coral islet that jutted hardly a couple of feet above the sea-level, shaded his weary eyes with his hand and stared across the blue infinity of the Pacific.

East and west, the long Albatross Reef ran for miles; here and there jutting above the water, but for the most part sunken below the surface, marked by creaming surf.

North and south the Pacific stretched—blue, blinding, endless.

It was a dangerous reef, avoided by skippers. Only in fair weather was any craft likely to sail with the Albatross Reef in sight. Even in fair weather most skippers gave it a wide berth, rounding it with a wide offing. Paget, as endless day followed endless day, realised how little chance there was of his ever being taken off the solitary reef on which Barney Hall had marooned him.

How many blazing days and starry nights had passed since he had been abandoned there, he did not know—he had lost count of time. Every day, shelterless under the burning sun, seemed without end.

For the first two or three days it had seemed like some horrid dream to the hapless scallywag. On Ken King's ship he had been an unwilling recruit—lazy, sullen, discontented, watching for a chance to desert.

He had jumped at the chance of getting away from the Dawn—on a dirty trading lugger, or any other craft. He knew nothing of Barney Hall, except that he was an enemy of Ken King's—a recommendation, in the eyes of the scallywag. He had trusted himself, with his money in his belt, in the hands of the most ruthless ruffian in the South Seas.

His money was in Barney Hall's belt now, and he was marooned on the Albatross Reef—to perish there.

Had King of the Islands known, there might have been a chance of rescue. He hated the boy trader, but Ken would never have left him to die in this horror of solitude, and he knew it.

But Ken did not know, and could not know. All Ken knew was that he had been picked up by Hall's lugger.

In his desperation, Paget clung to a hope that Hall might relent, and return to the reef to take him off. But he knew that it would not be so.

He had been left with the clothes he stood in—nothing more. From sunrise to sunset he watched the sea with aching eyes. Once, twice, he saw, or fancied he saw, a sail.

But it came nowhere near the reef, and he had no means of making a signal. There was nothing on the reef but masses of seaweed cast up by the tides—not a speck of earth to give root to a solitary palm. A signal-fire on the reef might have caught a distant eye, but he had no means of making a fire. Only by the remotest

miraculous chance could rescue come, and he knew that it would not come.

Yet he clung to life! In crannies of the reef he hunted for sea-birds' eggs and found them in plenty. For whole days thirst tormented him, but a sudden rain-storm that beat on the reef in sheets of water relieved him, leaving every hollow an overflowing pool. He slept at night in a bed of banked-up sand—to drag himself at dawn to another weary day of watching the sea.

Now he stood on the highest point of the coral islet in the reef, and scanned once more the endless blue waters. Sea-birds wheeled and called over the long reef in infinite numbers. Fishes of many colours played and darted in the waters by the coral. Other signs of life there were none—not even a lizard crawling on the hot rocks.

North and south, east and west, he searched the sea for the sail that did not come. Overhead, the sun burned, a ball of fire, in a cloudless sky.

He ceased to search the sea at last. There was nothing—only the endless blue. He stared down at the lapping water below him. The thought was in his mind of a sudden plunge, and the end of his sufferings. But he knew that it would not come to that unless silence and solitude and burning sun crazed him.

Leaving the high point of the coral islet, he resumed his usual weary daily task of hunting along the reef for eggs. The rain-pools were drying up in the hot sun—only here and there, in some deep hollow, remained a little brackish water. When that was gone—

Before a week had passed it seemed to the castaway that life had always been on the coral reef, in the im-

mensity of sea and sky—that his previous existence was far off—an unreal dream!

Night came, bringing relief from the burning sun. But the starry nights, like the days, seemed endless. Sleeping by fits and starts, waking with the boom of surf in his ears, he longed for dawn—to watch the sea again, for the sail that did not come.

Ken Hits Out!

BARNEY HALL fixed his sunken eyes, gleaming under shaggy brows, on the handsome ketch as it came sweeping into the lagoon at Kulua. His teeth shut hard on the stem of his black pipe. It was the Dawn, and he could see King of the Islands, his mate, Koko, and the Hiva-Oa crew on deck, all looking towards the lugger.

His Tonga boys were ashore, with the exception of Koo, the boat-steerer. Koo, following his master's fixed stare, glanced at the Dawn, and gave Barney a quick, alarmed look.

"Feller King of the Islands comey along Kulua!" muttered Koo.

Hall gave him a glare. His Tonga crew, of course, knew what had happened on the lugger—knew where the scallywag had been left, and why. Barney Hall could trust them; they went in terror of his savage tongue, his heavy fist backed up by his clubbed revolver. They had helped him in more than one dark deed, in lonely waters of the Pacific, and they

Suspicion flashed into Ken King's mind as he read the words and signature on the back of the banknote the old trader had given him. "Where did you get this note, MacFinn?" he demanded.

had learned to tell no tales on the beaches. But if King of the Islands questioned them it might be a different matter.

But why should he? It was over a week since Ray Paget had been picked up in the lugger. It was easy enough to account for the fact that he was no longer on board. A lie or two cost Barney little.

"You feller Koo, you no talk too much tongue belong you, s'possee King of the Islands talk along you feller boy!" growled Hall threateningly. "You savvy?"

"Yessar!" murmured Koo.

"You go along shore, you speak along feller boy belong me, you tell feller boy no speak along King of the Islands!" Hall paused. "That white feller name belong him Paget, he go along shore along Manu, you savvy?"

"Savvy too much, sar!" Koo grinned.

And Koo dropped into one of the Kulua canoes round the lugger and made for the beach, to give Barney's warning to the rest of the Tonga crew.

Left alone on the lugger, Hall bent his scowling brows on the incoming ketch again. He hitched his belt a little to bring the butt of his revolver nearer his hand. Even on Kulua, a law-abiding island with a white magistrate and native police, Hall was the man to handle a weapon, if he saw fit. And he had cause to look for trouble when King of the Islands laid him aboard. Apart from the affair of Ray Paget, from which he feared little, he had loosed off his rifle at the Dawn on the last meeting at sea, sending bullets through her canvas from sheer defiant insolence. It was



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not likely that the shipmates had forgotten.

The Dawn came gliding through the smooth waters of the Kulua lagoon. At a distance, an American whaler and a Dutch brig lay at anchor, waiting for a wind to get out to sea. It was for a wind that Barney Hall was waiting—he had finished his trade on Kulua. He had not expected to see King of the Islands there. He had asked on shore whether the boy trader was expected at Kulua, and learned that none of the traders expected the Dawn. So it was a surprise, and an unpleasant one, to see the Dawn come in.

The ketch ranged in, and dropped her sails and ran alongside the lugger. Ken and Kit looked over the rail at Barney Hall, who scowled at them blackly.

KEN'S quick glance flashed over the dingy, dirty lugger. Barney Hall sailed a foul craft; and it seemed likely enough that the fastidious Paget had found it little to his taste. He was not to be seen on the lugger, at all events; but neither were any of the crew.

"I'm coming aboard, Barney Hall!" called out the boy trader.

"Stick on your own packet, Ken King!" snarled back Hall. "You're not wanted on this lugger, and you know it."

"I want my man, who deserted at the Albatross Reef."

"You won't find him here! He cleared off at the first stop—a lazy lubber with too much lip!"

Hudson grinned. That was a good description of the scallywag of Lalinge. If, indeed, he had sailed with Barney Hall, it was certain that he would have had rough words and hard knocks from the ruffianly trader of Tonga. Hall was the last skipper in the Pacific to take laziness or "lip" from a man in his crew, white or brown or black.

"The first stop?" repeated King of the Islands. "Where was that?"

"Manu!" answered Hall curtly.

"You put in at Manu—when?"

"Two days after dropping the Albatross Reef."

"And Paget deserted there?"

"I reckon I was willing to let him go," said Hall coolly. "I only picked him up because he was running from your ship, King of the Islands, and you know that without my telling you. I sail with a native crew—I don't want any fine gentlemen on my lugger."

Ken stood silent. Hall's tale was plausible enough; it was, in fact, exactly what might have happened, had not the scallywag allowed the ruffian to learn that he had money in his belt, and thus excited Hall's cupidity.

"Look on Manu for him, if you want him!" added Hall, and he turned his back on the shipmates.

He swung back as there was a light footfall on his deck. Ken had jumped on the Dawn's rail, and thence down into the lugger. Koko followed him.

Hall made a stride at Ken, fists clenched.

"I've told you I don't want you on this packet, King of the Islands!" he roared. "Look on Manu for your man, if you want him."

"I'm looking on your lugger first, Barney Hall!" answered the boy trader.

"You got an Admiralty warrant to search another skipper's ship?" bawled Hall.

"No! But I'm going to look through your lugger for my man Paget, and you're not going to stop me."

Barney Hall came at him with clenched fists. He had nothing to fear from a search of the lugger, but his savage temper boiled up. He was not to be braved on his own deck—if he could help it.

The gigantic ruffian towered over King of the Islands, sturdy as Ken was.

"Get back on your own ship, Ken King!" roared Hall. "I give you one second to jump, before I knock you into the lagoon."

"Thank you for nothing!" said Ken quietly.

"You going?" roared Hall.

"No!"

That was enough. The trader of Tonga rushed at King of the Islands, lashing out blows with both huge fists.

From the Dawn, Kit Hudson and Tomoo and Lufu and Lompo and Kolulo and Danny all watched with bated breath. All of them knew what the boy trader could do with his hands; but the trader of Tonga was so big and heavy, that perhaps they felt a twinge of doubt. If so, it was soon relieved.

King of the Islands side-stepped the rush so suddenly and swiftly that Barney Hall swept past him, crashed into the low gunwale of the lugger, and almost toppled over it.

There was a cackle of laughter from the Hiva-Oa boys. Kit Hudson chuckled.

Hall brought up at the gunwale, swung round, and lurched towards the boy trader, his rugged face crimson with fury.

King of the Islands did not wait for him. He leaped at the trader of Tonga, his fists lashing out like lightning. His right crashed on a stubby jaw, his left in a savage eye, and Hall went over backwards as if he had been shot. His back crashed down on the low gunwale, his weight causing the lugger to rock. His feet flew into the air.

A scream of laughter came from the crew of the Dawn.

For a split second, Hall lay athwart the gunwale, his long legs sawing the air—then he slid head-foremost into the lagoon between the two vessels.

Splash! The trader of Tonga shot down into the green water, head-first, and the lagoon closed over his vanishing feet.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Hudson.

"That feller Hall stop along bottom lagoon plenty too much!"

chuckled Danny. "That feller stop along anchor belong feller lugger."

There was a splashing and foaming in the water as the trader of Tonga came to the surface. He came up astern of the lugger, swimming, panting for breath.

Unheeding him, King of the Islands proceeded to look through the lugger. It needed only a few minutes to satisfy him that Ray Paget was not on board. He and Koko jumped back to the Dawn as Hall clutched at the side to clamber on the lugger.

Panting for breath, gasping with rage, drenched and dripping, Hall dragged himself on board—and stood in a pool of water that ran down from his limbs. Mad with rage, he grasped at the revolver in his belt; but it was soaked with water and useless.

The Dawn was sheering off to pick an anchorage; and Barney Hall shook a fierce fist after the shipmates looking back with smiling faces.

A cable's length from the Tonga lugger, King of the Islands dropped the anchor, Hall's hoarse voice shouting savage abuse from the distance. But the shipmates gave him no heed. The whaleboat was lowered, and King of the Islands pulled to the beach.

Suspicion!

MACFINN, the old Scottish trader on Kulua, stared at Ken King from his seat on the flour barrel in the store. Ken did not notice it. He, too, was staring—but it was at a banknote in his hands.

Hudson was walking the beach, renewing acquaintance with men he knew on Kulua. The Hiva-Oa crew were given shore leave; only Danny remaining on the ketch. Ken King had had no call to make at Kulua on that trip—but he had often touched at the island before, and knew all the white traders there. Pinned to the lagoon till the wind should change, the boy traders had to waste time; but with a good store of trade goods on the ketch, Ken naturally looked for a stroke of trade if it could be picked up. And he had picked it up at MacFinn's store.

The Dawn, in her trade-room, carried a new "line" of aluminium kettles, which the shipmates intended to trade off here and there among the islands. MacFinn jumped at the new line. Not, as he explained, with his dry old chuckle, that there was a big demand for kettles at Kulua—as kettles! But, polished bright and shining like silver, they would make magnificent neck ornaments for the untutored native. And, accordingly, a case of aluminium kettles was landed at MacFinn's store, and unpacked there.

Ken was still in talk with the old trader, when brown men in loin-cloths and beads began to drop in, to purchase those new and beautiful adornments for their persons. It looked as if in a short time MacFinn's new stock would be sold out, and every fashionable native dandy on Kulua would have a gleaming aluminium kettle suspended round

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his black or brown neck, reflecting the tropical sunshine!

MacFinn sent his native house-boy for his cash-box, unlocked it on the flour barrel, and counted out the sum due to Captain King.

It was a satisfaction to Ken to have done some trade on Kulua, and not wholly to have wasted his time there. The unfavourable wind might keep him there two or three days—a sheer waste of time, as Paget had not, after all, been found on Barney Hall's craft.

Ken had resolved to run down to Manu when he got away from Kulua—a further loss of time. But it was on his conscience that he had lost the young waster entrusted to his care by the Pacific Company's manager at Lalinge.

There was no reason to doubt what Barney Hall had told him concerning the scallywag, and he hoped to pick up Paget at Manu, or at least to get news of him there. That he had not arrived at Kulua with Barney Hall was certain, as the shipmates had inquired up and down the beach.

MacFinn paid over the purchase price of the case of kettles in the form of two Bank of England notes for £5 each. Ken was about to put them away when he stopped, and now he stood with one of the notes in his hand, staring at it blankly. And MacFinn, from the top of the flour barrel, stared at him at the same time. Finally the old Scot grunted.

"Mon, d'ye doubt banknotes ye get from Alex MacFinn?" he demanded. "Don't you know a Bank of England fiver when ye see one?"

KEN drew a long, long breath. "Where did you get this note, MacFinn?" he asked. "Grunt from the old trader. 'Man,' he answered, 'that's neither here nor there!'"

Ken looked at the banknote again. It was stamped on the back with a rubber stamp "Pacific Co." Under the official stamp of the Pacific Company was the written name "R. Belnap," in a hand Ken knew well; he had had plenty of dealings with Mr. Belnap at Lalinge.

The other banknote bore the stamp of the Bank of Australasia, and two or three signatures of traders through whose hands it had passed. That was of no particular interest to King of the Islands.

But the one he was examining was of intense interest—it might be tragic interest. For it had come from Mr. Belnap, the Pacific Company's manager at Lalinge—three hundred miles from Kulua. It was much newer than the other and had evidently not been in circulation long, if at all.

Ken knew that the scapegrace of Lalinge was provided with money which he had kept in a secret pocket in his belt. It flashed into his mind that this note had belonged to Ray Paget. He knew that it was not only likely—but almost certain. It was possible that it had drifted to

Kulua in the way of trade, though its newness was against that. It was much more likely that it was one of the notes Paget had received from his uncle on Lalinge.

Paget had not been on Kulua. But Barney Hall was there—and Paget had been on Barney's lugger.

Ken's heart beat faster. He knew that he had made a discovery. He had believed Barney Hall, because there seemed no reason to doubt him, after making sure that Paget was not on the lugger. But there was reason to doubt him—if he was spending Paget's money. Like a glimpse of a hidden tragedy, it flashed into Ken's mind what might have happened on board the lugger.

Old MacFinn slipped from the flour barrel, knocked out his pipe on it, and went round his counter to help his assistant as five or six natives came in in a bunch to inquire after the new shining ornaments.

"Look here, MacFinn——" called out Ken.

"Man," said MacFinn, "I'm through with ye, and I'm busy." Ken's close examination of the note had offended the old trader.

Ken waited impatiently till the natives were served with shining kettles. Then he leaned over the counter.

"MacFinn, this is serious," he said. "Listen to me, man! Did you get this banknote from Barney Hall?"

"Mebbe I did!" grunted MacFinn.

"He's traded with you here?"

"Mebbe he has!" said MacFinn stolidly. "I'll tell you what I mean, MacFinn," said the boy trader quietly. "If Hall paid you this note, he robbed the man it belonged to and very likely murdered him. Now let me know."

"By gum!" exclaimed MacFinn. "Barney Hall bought stores here for his lugger and paid for them with that banknote."

That was enough for King of the Islands. He hurried out of the store and looked for Hudson. The mate of the Dawn was in sight on the beach and he came up as Ken waved to him.

There was a grin on Hudson's face. "Barney Hall's had enough of our company at Kulua, Ken!" he remarked.

"What? What do you mean?" Hudson pointed across the lagoon. "He's not waiting any longer for a wind! He's got his crew on board and he's going out under the sweeps."

King of the Islands set his teeth as he stared across the shining waters of the Kulua lagoon. The Tonga lugger had left its anchorage. The crew of Tonga boys were all on board, pulling the lugger across to the reef passage with long sweeps. The wind from the east was dead on the reef, and no vessel could have got out under sail. But the dingy little lugger made fairly good speed with four brawny Tonga boys labouring at the sweeps.

"He's cutting loose!" Ken gritted his teeth. "We're not letting him get clear, Kit!"

"Why not? We're through with him!" Hudson laughed. "You don't

fancy he's got Paget headed up in a cask, do you?"

"Look at that!" Ken showed his mate the banknote from Lalinge. "Barney Hall paid that note over at MacFinn's for stores! It's a thousand to one—ten thousand to one—that he got it from Paget! The fool had money about him, and Hall—you know his character——"

"Paget may have paid his passage," said Hudson. "He would rather pay than work, I reckon."

"Hall never said so! He said that the fellow cleared off at Manu. It never struck me that Hall knew that the reckless fool had a sum of money hidden about him. This banknote shows that he found it out—whether by Paget paying him anything for his passage or not! Is he the man to let the fellow take it safe ashore with him?"

"No!" said Hudson. "And why is he clearing off suddenly now—rowing out against this wind? He's been here two days, I've heard—waiting for a wind. Now he's suddenly going out under oars because we've come." Ken breathed hard. "He knew we might find out something, as he's been buying stores and spending money here—Paget's money."

"I hardly dare to think what may have happened to that reckless swab—in Hall's hands, with money about him. But I know I'm going to make Hall give an account of him. I'm going to search him and his lugger and see whether any more of Paget's money is on board—under the muzzle of a gun, if necessary! If he has dropped Paget into the sea for his money, I'm going to hang him from the boom of the Dawn!" Ken's voice came sharp and savage. He meant every word he said.

"We've got to know!" said Hudson. "But—he's done us, Ken! The Dawn can't get out against the wind—and if we tow her, Barney Hall will beat us to it by a good sea-mile. He's almost at the reef already."

KING OF THE ISLANDS stared after the disappearing lugger, his face almost white with rage. What Hudson said was true—it was impossible to pursue the lugger in the ketch.

"The whaleboat!" said Ken curtly. "But the crew—they're up and down the beach!"

"Get them—all you can! Sharp's the word, Kit."

Not a moment more was lost. Koko was standing by the Dawn's boat at the coral quay. A word was enough for him. In a few minutes he had rounded up Lompo and Tomoo. Ken did not wait for more.

The whaleboat was pushed off, and the three Kanakas and Kit Hudson sat to the oars. Four strong oarsmen made the whaleboat fly.

But Barney Hall had a long start. The lugger was entering the reef passage from the lagoon by the time Ken came within hail.

Barney Hall's brawny figure could be seen staring back. He had not been long in spotting the whaleboat in pursuit. Ken, standing up in the boat, waved and shouted to him.

"Heave-to, Barney Hall!"

Hall's defiant roar came back across the water:

"Follow me into the Pacific if you want me, Ken King!"

The lugger swept on into the passage of the reef, and the whaleboat shot after it. It was a matter of minutes before the swift whaleboat overtook the slower lugger. Hall was yelling to his crew—but the Tonga boys, already going all-out at the sweeps, could do no more.

The trader of Tonga leaned over the taffrail, glaring back at the pursuing boat. His hand went to the back of his belt, and the sun gleamed on the levelled barrel of his revolver. His eyes glared savagely over it. Three minutes more and the whaleboat would have been bumping on the

lugger and the shipmates scrambling on board. Crack! Crack!

Right into the boat crashed the bullets, pitched recklessly into the midst of the panting, straining oarsmen. Crack! Crack! Barney Hall blazed away at the boat as fast as he could pull trigger. The bullets crashed in.

Tomoo gave a yell as hot lead scored along his brown arm, and his oar slid from his grasp. Hudson yelled, a bullet spinning the Panama on his head.

The whaleboat lost way, swinging to port as Tomoo lost his oar. Lompo, ceasing to pull, ducked from the fire. Crack! came again, and a bullet tore a coral comb from Lompo's ducking head.

Hall, glaring, rage and defiance over his taffrail, crammed cartridges into his revolver. Ken gritted his teeth with rage. In a minute, or less, Hall was firing again, crashing bullets at the rocking boat. To pull on under-point-blank fire was impossible. The whaleboat rocked on the lagoon—the lugger, driven by the long sweeps, rolled on out of the reef passage into the open sea.

Barney Hall was gone!

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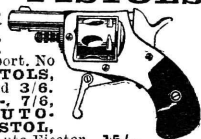
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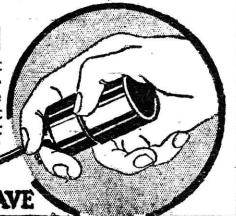
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