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No. 22

JULY 16th, 1938

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2<sup>D</sup>

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# HEAD-HUNTERS' GOLD

By CHARLES HAMILTON

**A Tempting Proposition**

mates of the Dawn had heard, so their time, many a tale of treasure on the Pacific beaches. But this tale seemed, to them, about the simplest they had ever listened to.

The Dawn lay at Luta, waiting for a wind. The lagoon was as still as a pond, the Pacific outside the reef hardly stirred by a breath of a breeze. A cable's length from Ken King's ketch another craft lay at anchor—a cutter from Lukwe. Ken had finished his business at Luta and he was ready to pull out when the cutter lurched. But a windjammer skipper had to wait on the wind—and King of the Islands waited with all the patience he could muster. On board the cutter, Dandy Peter Parsons, of Lukwe, was scowling at the cloudless sky, muttering swear words and snarling at his black crew, in the intervals of smoking endless cigarettes. Every now and then he stared across at the Dawn, his look showing that he had not forgotten old enemies. But the shipmates paid no heed to Dandy Peter.

It was weary work waiting for the wind that showed no sign of coming, and when the little Frenchman came out in the canoe the skipper welcomed him as a break in the monotony. Monsieur Dubosq was small, spare, and neat, with a trim little pointed black beard and very sharp, black eyes in a yellow, narrow face. The shipmates had seen him before twice or three while they were getting through their business with Macfarlane, the Pacific Company's agent at Luta. They wondered what he wanted on the Dawn, but having time to kill, they were quite willing to give him a hearing. And so they listened, for the skipper's time, to a tale of treasure. They listened patiently—but with smiling faces. Indeed, they rather admired Monsieur Dubosq for having thought of something new. Wonderful pearl-beds, easy salvage grounds, oceans bristling with treasure, they had heard of before. But gold was a new one.

Ken King had sailed far and wide in the South Seas, and he knew the Islands like a familiar book. But this was the first time he had heard of an island gold-mine, so he gave Monsieur Dubosq full marks, as it were, for his ingenuity. He did not, of course, believe a word of it, it was only a variation on an old theme. Still, it was a new and original variation.

"Mais oui, gold!" said Monsieur Dubosq, waving both hands in earnest gesture. "It is to pick up for me, picking! I sell you one secret that shall make you, oh, so very rich! Is it not?" Monsieur Dubosq did not look rich himself. He was dressed in drabs that had seen a great deal of wear and tear, and were patched and mended in many places. He was dapper and clean and neat, but his outfit was hardly worth a fraction of shell-money. But that was the rule with the holders of treasure-tales on the Pacific beaches. There was always a fortune just out of their reach, and they were always hand up for a little ready money.

Others believed their own dreams. Whether Monsieur Dubosq really believed that there was gold on Gulu, Ken did not know. But he was willing to think, charitably, that Monsieur did. Believing it himself was another matter.

"Gold for the picking up," said Kit Hudson. "Some good—much better than dreaming for cups. By the way, I suppose."

"Yes, yes!" said Monsieur Dubosq, looking that playful questioner solemnly. "Yes, yes, it is very much. By an outer, say."

"And you picked up a few ounces when you were on Gulu?" asked the mate of the Dawn, still playful.

"Gulu, oh!"

"As that reply the shipmates of the Dawn sat up and took notice. As they had got the further belief that there was gold on Gulu, or on any other island nearer than Fiji, which was eight hundred miles away, they were naturally surprised by the Frenchman's statement.

"You've got specimens?" speculated Hudson.

"But yes!" said Gustave Dubosq, "Here on Luta, I spend. I spend at gold dust at a store—one must eat to live!"

"And you've none left to show!" grinned Hudson. But King of the Islands looked at the little Frenchman very curiously. It was easy enough to ask at the company's store whether Dubosq had disposed of gold dust there. It was difficult to imagine so very sharp-looking a man telling a falsehood that could be so easily disproved.

But again the Frenchman's answer was unexpected. "Out, out, out!" he said. "You look!" He groped in a pocket and drew out a small leather bag. He opened it with great care and there was a glimmer of yellow in the glare of the tropical sunshine.

"Suffering cats!" said Hudson bleakly. The shipmates stared at the contents of the little bag. The quantity was small—hardly an ounce. But there it was—gold dust!

"One shall see, and one shall believe!" said Gustave Dubosq. "You will not take a word—there are so many who tell me that. But to see via eye, zat is to believe."

Ken held out his hand for the bag. A little to his surprise, Gustave handed it to him at once. Clearly he did not fear examination of that sample of the treasure of Gulu.

"Gold!" said Ken. "Gold!" repeated Hudson. The mate had, in other days, prospected for gold in his own country, and had dabbled in placer mining.

Monsieur Dubosq grinned triumphantly.

"Now you shall believe, Monsieur King of the Islands," he said. "It is not to everyone that I would tell this so valuable secret—only to one man that I can trust! You give me one fair play."

Ken handed back the bag. The gold it contained was genuine. But that it had been gathered on Gulu, the island whose wooded summit could be seen on the sea-rim from Luta, was by no means certain. He could not doubt Gustave's gold—but he doubted Gustave!

"We're sticking to trade, monsieur!" said the boy trader. "You'll find plenty of skippers to go gold-hunting on Gulu—if you can make them believe that gold can be picked up there."

"But as skipper zat I can trust, he is you zat is called as whitest man in se Islands," said Monsieur Dubosq. "And for five hundred of se English pounds, I will you zat gold-mine."

Ken shook his head, with a smile. "It might be worth looking into, Ken. They found gold on Fiji. Why not on Gulu? How did you come to make the find?" he asked Dubosq.

"It is many months," said Gustave. "I am on Gulu because I sink here may be pearls. Zere is no pearls, but zere is black swages, and I run from zem to save se head on se shoulders. It is while I hide in se hill zat I find zat stream where zere is gold in se sand. I alone know se secret. You will not fear se blacks. Zere is se gold to pick up."

Kit Hudson looked up at his shipmate.

"My dear chap," said Ken. "We're waiting for a wind—and we've got calls to make and time to make up. We're traders—not day-dreamers, Kit!"

"You say zat?" asked Monsieur Dubosq. He restrained the bag to his pocket, evidently deeply disappointed.

"It is you who lose a fortune, zat!"

Ken made a gesture towards the Lukwe cutter. Peter Parsons, on her deck, was staring at the ketch, as if interested in what was going on. Perhaps he had caught a gleam of the gold in the sunshine.

"Try Captain Parsons," said Ken, with a smile. "Dandy Peter's the man for any hare-brained adventure. If you make him believe that there's gold on Gulu, he will jump at the chance."

"Zat Dandy Peter, he is not one zat I trust!" said Dubosq. "Perhaps he drop me in se sea, after I take him to se gold on Gulu. Zat, it is one fortune zat you may away."

He gave the shipmates a last look. Ken shook his head—Hudson did the same, more slowly. It was not that the shipmates were not willing to reap a handsome profit from a new gold-mine. King of the Islands was now eager at the prospect to be in on a good deal. But he had been sailing the Pacific for many years and knew just how likely it was that there really would be truth in the Frenchman's story. Monsieur Dubosq, with a string of the shufflers, stepped

down into his canoe, and the brown boys paddled him back to the beach.

**M**AN," said Macfarlane, "it's true enough!"

Sitting on the molasses barrel in the Pacific Company's store on Luta, the old Scottish trader nodded through a cloud of smoke from his

black cigar. Kit Hudson gave his shipmate a look, and Ken frowned a little. They were still waiting for a wind—and likely to wait! In the cool of the evening, they had come ashore, and Kit Hudson had headed at once for the trader's store. And Ken guessed why. He knew that his comrade was thinking of the Frenchman's tale of gold on Gulu—a tale for which Ken had no use. The first question to Macfarlane elicited confirmation of Gustave's statement that he had changed gold for goods at the island store.

"True enough," went on the trader. "I'll not say where he got it—but he's got it! He's lived two months on Luta—back and he's lived on gold dust and nuggets."

"Ever heard of gold on Gulu?" asked Ken. "Only from Dubosq," answered the old trader drily, "and I'm not believing all that I hear."

"He's got the gold!" said Hudson. "Ay, he's got it!" admitted Macfarlane, "and I reckon that sooner or later he will get a skipper to take up the proposition. He's tried it on with five or six, since he's been here. Nobody's taken it up, so far. They come in and ask me questions—Peter Parsons was here an hour ago, and he was verra curious to hear all about the Frenchman. Perhaps he'll take it up!" The old trader grinned. "But I'm sorry for Dubosq, it he makes a fool of Peter Parsons! It will be a verra bad day for him, if he does."

"You think it's a catch?" asked Ken bluntly. "I'm saying nothing!" answered the trader. "But I'd not give him two fathoms of shell-money for his gold-mine on Gulu."

Where the dickens did he get the gold, then? exclaimed Hudson. There's no gold-mine nearer than the Fiji Islands, that's known."

"I dunna ken," answered Macfarlane. "But it's easier to buy gold off a trader than to wash it out of a stream on Gulu, to my thinking!"

King of the Islands laughed. "That's it," he said. "A sprat to catch a whale, Kit! Mister Dubosq is looking for a greenhorn."

"I'm not so sure!" answered the mate of the Dawn. "It is was that, why hasn't he latched Peter Parsons with the same story?"

"Easily answered," said Ken. "If he swindled a man like Dandy Peter, he would be more likely than not to find himself deep down in the Pacific afterwards. Dandy Peter's too dangerous to play that kind of game on."

"Well, look here," said Hudson. "We've hung up for a wind, and no sign of the calm breaking. We could make the trip across to Gulu in the whale-boat. Why not look into it?"

"And lose the wind when it comes, Kit!"

Hudson gave a grunt. "Where's the Frenchman's hut, Mac?" he asked.

"Under the palms, back of the beach," said Macfarlane, grinning broadly. "I'll send my house-boy to point it out, if you want to talk to Dubosq."

He called a brown boy, and the shipmates followed him from the store—leaving the old trader grinning. Evidently Macfarlane, who had lived for many years in sight of the summit of Gulu, did not believe that there was gold on that island. Ken was fully of his opinion.

"We've got time to kill," grunted Hudson. "No harm in seeing the man, Ken. He can't be fool enough to think that we should hand over five hundred pounds on a stranger's word, backed up by a pinch of gold-dust. He's got some proof to offer, if it's genuine."

"At, at—but it's only the old tale over again, in a new shape, Kit."

Hudson gave another grunt, and they followed the brown boy along a path under the shade of the tall, nodding palms.

"Flessman stop along that place, sar!" said the boy, pointing. And he returned to the beach.

The shipmates walked on in silence. It was seldom that there was a difference of opinion between the shipmates of the Dawn, but one had crept in now. Hudson was disposed to put the Frenchman's tale to the test: Ken to dismiss it as one more of the thousand idle tales of the beaches. He had to admit that there was something like evidence in the fact that Dubosq had lived on Luta by selling gold-dust at the store. But if the whole thing was a swindle, that, no doubt, was a part of the cunning game.

The sound of a voice reached their ears as they drew nearer to the hut. Just within the open doorway stood the dandy Peter Parsons, a handsome figure in his spottish ducks and pipe-clayed shoes and Panama hat. He was leaning on the doorstep, speaking to the man in the hut, his back turned to the shipmates. They stopped.

"Looks as if we're too late!" muttered Hudson.

Ken shrugged his shoulders. He did not think that they had lost much, if they were too late.

"Cough it up, Dubosq!" Peter Parsons' voice came clearly to them. "King of the Islands has turned you down—I saw you on his packet. From what old Macfarlane says, you've put it up to half-a-dozen skippers, and they've all turned you down. I reckon I shall do the same—but I'll give you a hearing."

"I do not wish to do se business with you!" answered Dubosq. "Ze secret is mine, and I keep him."

The shipmates could see only the profile of Dandy Peter's face as he stood within the doorway. But they did not fail to note the dark, savage look that came over it at the Frenchman's reply.

"That won't do, Dubosq!" snapped the Lukwe skipper. "I saw what you showed King of the Islands on his packet, and I've asked questions on the beach—and if there's anything in it, I'll take it up."

"Is it zat you have five hundred pounds on your cutter, sar? I do not zink so! I tell you nowing! King of se Islands I trust—but you—non! I would not trust se life on your cutter."

"I'll give you fair play, Dubosq! I'll run you across to Gulu in the Sea-Cat when the calm breaks—"

"Non!"

The Lukwe skipper muttered an oath. Hudson gave his shipmate a reproachful glance. What he was hearing gave him the impression that the story of gold on Gulu was the truth. It was evident that it gave Dandy Peter that impression also. Had the proposition been put up to him, probably Dandy Peter would have turned it down. But the Frenchman's refusal made him eager.

He stepped farther into the hut.

"You're going to cough up the whole story here and now, you swab. I reckon I've made obstinate lubbers talk before now!" His words were followed by a sound of straggling and a gasping yell inside the hut.

"Come on, Kit!" exclaimed King of the Islands.

The shipmates reached the open doorway of the hut in a few seconds.

It was a startling sight that met their eyes. The little Frenchman, gasping and spluttering, was crumpled up in the grasp of the Lukwe skipper. Dandy Peter's grip was on his throat.

"You swab!" said Dandy Peter, between his teeth. "You reckon I'm the man to take back-chat from a beach-comber! You—"

He broke off as Kit Hudson dashed into the hut and hit out straight from the shoulder. His clenched fist struck the dandy of Lukwe on the side of the head, and Parsons went staggering across the hut, the wriggling Frenchman dropping from his grasp. He staggered as far as the farther wall. Standing unsteadily, he glared at the shipmates like a tiger. Then, like a tiger, he came at Hudson.

For three or four minutes there was a desperate fight, then the dandy of Lukwe went down, knocked off his feet by a drive from the mate of the Dawn.

It was a long minute before he staggered up again. Then his hand went to the hip-pocket of his duck trousers.

"Better not, Parsons!" rang Ken King's voice. His own revolver was in his hand. The enraged Lukwe skipper released the butt of the weapon. He gave the



disgrace a glare of hate and fury, then stamped unsteadily from the hut. Dubois, who had been waiting him in terror, gasped with relief when he had gone.

### Ken Gives In

**K**ENGO the brown-skinned boatman of the Dawn, glanced at his white man, and his eyes glared with a fierce flame as he looked at the white man.

King of the Islands stood leaning against the rail, looking after steadily towards the beach, where a crowd of natives were dancing in the faint glimmer of the moon. Kit Hudson paid the dock with a clouded brow, and Koko glanced from one to the other, and wondered.

"Feller Parsons no stop along jacked before him yet," said the boatman, glancing at the sailor. "That feller go along sea, far, along soon being him."

Ken nodded and glanced caustically at the brown-skinned Sea-Cat, dirty white across the dark lagoon. He was not interested in the proceedings of the Laka skipper, and he had not noticed that the dinghy, which the cutter towed, having no room for a boat astern, was gone. Indeed, only Koko's keen eyes could have noted it in the deep dusk on the lagoon.

Ken left the rail and crossed over to the shore.

"Look here, Kit," he said, "it's not worth disputing about—"

"It's not disputing," said Hudson.

"You're skipper, and I'm mate—I'm doing orders."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Ken.

"Ten to one we shall get a wind tomorrow. But if we waste time going on a wild-goose chase to Gulu, we shall be fools for our pains. There's no more gold on Gulu than there is in Danny's sashpans in the galley yonder."

"You know best," said Hudson.

"If you're bent on it, old man, I give up," Ken said quietly.

"There may be a sporting chance that Dubois has told us the truth."

"More than that?" queried Hudson.

"Look at it sensibly, Ken! That scoundrel Parsons was bent enough on it."

"Only because the Frenchman stood him up. But whether he believes it or not, I shall get it done."

"You mean that you won't?" said Hudson sternly.

"We've had a talk with Dubois, and got the terms. Nothing could be fairer. He's asking us for nothing all we've seen the gold on Gulu. He's ready to lead us to the place where he buried our gold—and until we've searched with the light of our own eyes, we don't pay him a cent. If he's fooling us, where does he come in?"

"He could work the place himself!"

"It's his afraid of the black. You know that they're a fierce crew on Gulu. No white man has ever dared to settle on the island. We shall have to go well armed. His life wouldn't be worth a post of shell-money here on the coast."

Ken was silent again. The Frenchman had convinced Hudson; and Ken, though he was not convinced, could not dispute that Dubois seemed to have made his case good.

"I'm not thinking about myself, either," went on Hudson. "I've been enough, but I'd like to see you put up something better than a cargo of coffee, and you know that, Ken."

"I do know it, old fellow," said Ken.

"I'd rather stick to coffee—slow and steady at any rate. But if you're bent on it, I give in. All the same, I think you're an ass and I'm another—let it go at that!"

Hudson laughed.

"It's an ass then," he said. "You won't be sorry for it, Ken! Get Dubois on board and let's pull out in the whale-boat. Plenty of light when the moon's up, and the sea's like a pond."

"Lower the whaleboat!" Ken called across to Koko.

Hudson glanced at his comrade once or twice as the Karakas pulled to the beach. But Ken's face was smiling and cheerful. He had noticed the point to satisfy the skipper, and, knowing made up his mind to it, he hoped for the best. Though he still doubted whether a fortune was to be picked up on Gulu, he had turned down the proposition at the Frenchman's bid—now he had, as it were, turned it up again, and he hoped that Hudson would turn out to be right!

Leaving the Karakas with the boat, the skipper took the path to Dubois's hut.

There was no light in the hut, and the dinghy door stood wide open. Hudson put the boat inside and halted.

"Aloof, Dubois!"

"There was no answer."

"Woke up, man?" exclaimed Hudson impatiently. "We've come back for you. We're taking on the trip to Gulu."

Deep silence followed his words. Hudson thrust into the dark interior of the hut. If the Frenchman was sleeping he would be snoring, and the dinghy was full of something cracked the case.

"There's something wrong here, Kit!"

said King of the Islands. He pointed to the open door. "That's been forced!"

Hudson's teeth snapped.

"Dandy Peter!" he breathed.

King of the Islands stepped into the hut and struck a match.

The flickering flame showed the signs of a struggle. The floor was a mass of wreckage—

—the door hanging by a single wooden strip.

Dubois had been overcome and taken away by force. The skipper could guess by whom.

"Dandy Peter!" repeated Hudson.

Ken nodded.

"It can only have been Peter Parsons. He believes—"

"Pretty clear now what he believes!" said Hudson sharply.

"He's got Dubois. But he's not beaten us yet! Back to the boat! He can't get out of the lagoon without a wind, and if he tries to keep us off the Sea-Cat—"

Ken remembered what Koko had said.

"He's not on the Sea-Cat, Kit—he's pulling for Gulu!"

They left the hut and returned to the beach at a run. The three-Gu boys were waiting by the whale-boat, and Ken shouted to them. They jumped into the boat and pushed off.

"Waddy-waddy along Sea-Cat, plenty too quick," rapped Ken.

The boat shot across the still lagoon. Swiftly it reached the anchored cutter—

though not swiftly enough for Hudson's angry impudence. A scarlet black face looked at them as they scrambled on board.

It was that of Suluho, Dandy Peter's boat-steerer. No one else was to be seen on the cutter—and the dinghy was gone.

"You feller boy, what place Cap'n Parsons he stop?" rapped Ken.

Cap'n Parsons stop along boat, far along feller Kotoo and Nalasa, answered Suluho.

"He go along sea, far."

"White feller Frenchman stop along boat, along Cap'n Parsons?"

"He no away, far."

But it was unnecessary for Suluho to answer, whether he "sawed" or not. There was no doubt, and the dinghy dropped back into the whaleboat. Dandy Peter had more than an hour's start, and he was on his way to Gulu with the Frenchman a prisoner. Ken rapped a word to Koko, who stepped for the red passage, the three-Gu boys bending to the oar. Danny, left on the beach, stared after the boat; but it was gone from his sight in a few minutes. Swiftly the whaleboat threaded the passage in the reef, out into the open sea, and headed for distant Gulu.

### Dandy Peter's Defeat

**D**ANDY PETER started his eyes in the glimmer of the surf, and muttered at last. He started at the two black boys who rowed the dinghy—almost sitting at the oars, heavily and busily as they were. In the bottom of the boat lay Gustave Dubois. The Laka skipper gave him no heed. His attention was divided between staring through the Laka boys and watching the sea astern for a sign of pursuit.

That the skipper of the Dawn had taken up the Frenchman's proposition he had little doubt, after what had happened at Dubois's hut, neither did he doubt that they would pursue him as soon as they discovered the kidnapping. The Dawn's whistle, with a full boat's crew pulling, would speed him as fast across the Sea-Cat's dinghy. Once ashore among the rocks and bush of Gulu, he could only pursue—out on the sea it was a different matter. He watched the Pacific anxiously, and at every sign of danger from the Laka boys he cursed them into renewed activity.

And as, in the dimming light of dawn, he sighted a speck on the sea astern, he drew the revolver from his hip-pocket. Instant as that object was, he knew that



Leaping at the little Frenchman, Dandy Peter gripped him by the throat. "I've made obstinate swabs talk before now," he was snarling as Ken and Kit burst into the hut.

it was a boat—and a boat so far from land meant pursuit.

"Waddy-waddy, you scound!" snarled Parsons, and his savage glare and the revolver in his hand drove the weary Laka boys to fresh efforts.

He gave a savage start towards Gulu. The high hill, speared with thick bush, seemed close, but there were miles yet to cover before the dinghy ran in to the rocky shore.

Dandy Peter doubted whether he would cover them before the pursuers overtook him. He started back at the shock on the sea—no longer a wreck, but taking shape at a boat.

He cursed the Laka boys, but they were going their utmost and could do no more. Under the savage eyes, the whaleboat drew nearer and nearer, and he saw King of the Islands stand up, shade his eyes with his hand and stare across the intervening water.

"Waddy-waddy, you black scound!" Dandy Peter yelled to his astonished crew. "My word, you no waddy-waddy too quick, no knock seven bells out of you!"

But it was futile. The sweating Laka boys were striking at the oars. Twice as many strong arms were pulling in the whaleboat, with Koko to relieve the oarsmen in turn. The dinghy had no chance in the race—faster and faster the pursuers swept down to the desperate sea lawyer of Laka.

Gustave Dubois lifted his head to look. With a drive of his foot, Parsons knocked him back into the bottom of the boat.

The dinghy was losing way; the Laka boys, exhausted, could do no more. Dandy Peter stood up the revolver in his hand, his finger on the trigger. The whaleboat came on with a rush.

"Shoot at, King of the Islands! I'll live if you try to lay me aboard!" Parsons lifted the revolver, his eyes gleaming over it.

"Fire, if you dare!" selected King of the Islands, and his revolver glimmered in the darkness. Hudson, standing up, levelled his revolver at the same moment.

The two boats were hardly half a cable's length apart, and the distance lessening every moment.

Dandy Peter's desperate eye gleamed over his revolver. But even as he was about to pull trigger, Kotoo, utterly spent, fell forward over his oar. Nalasa

was still pulling, and the dinghy spun and rocked, and Parsons stumbled over. He scrambled savagely to his feet as the whaleboat, coming on with a rush, crashed into the dinghy and almost capsized it.

A wash of the Pacific came over the gunwale, drenching Gustave Dubois and drawing a wild shriek from him. Kotoo and Nalasa let go the oars and clung on to the rowlocks.

Parsons scrambling wildly in the falling boat, faced—but the rocking of the dinghy caused the bullet to whistle away skyward. He had no time to pull trigger again. Koko struck with a bull-horn, and Dandy Peter rolled in the water in the bottom of the boat.

Kit Hudson leaped into the dinghy. Dandy Peter, dazed and dizzy, tried to lift his revolver, but the mate of the Dawn kicked it from his hand, and it went with a splash into the Pacific.

With a yell of rage, the mate scrambled up—and Hudson hit him fast and square. Dandy Peter gave one gasp and dropped, knocked senseless.

Hudson opened his clasp-knife and cut the Frenchman's bonds. He gave him a cheery grin.

"Hop into the boat!" he said.

King of the Islands gave the Frenchman a helping hand, and Dubois scrambled into the whaleboat. Hudson followed him in. Dandy Peter still lay like a log in the washing water at the bottom of the dinghy.

It was a full five minutes before the mate sat dazedly up, his hand to his head, feeling a lump there almost as large as an egg where Kit Hudson's knuckles had struck. He started dazedly round him at the smothering black frown of Kotoo and Nalasa at the soaked dinghy, at the blue Pacific. He scrambled up—drenched, dazed, dizzy—and stared across the smiting sea.

Far in the distance the Dawn's whaleboat was disappearing. Dandy Peter spat out an oath and shook his clenched fist after it. His savage eyes watched it till it disappeared, and the dinghy was left rocking alone on the Pacific.

Next Week:  
PHANTOM FORTUNE