

Treasure of Jemooka



A STORY OF KING OF THE ISLANDS

By CHARLES HAMILTON

CHAPTER I

COMING ABOARD !

“BARNEY HALL!” said Kit Hudson, the mate of the *Dawn*.
King of the Islands frowned.

Of all the skippers who sailed the sunny waters of the Pacific, the one he least desired to see at any time was Barney Hall, the red-bearded, hard-fisted, ruffianly trader of Tonga.

The *Dawn* lay at anchor in the lagoon of Ovuva. The sun was red in the west, glowing on the blue waters of the lagoon, on the circling beach of shining sand, the nodding feather fronds of the palm groves, and the dark shadowy bush beyond. Black-skinned natives on the beach stared across at the anchored

ketch, and every now and then there was a threatening gesture or a spear was shaken. At Ovuva King of the Islands and his crew were in a bad spot.

Ken King had come there for trade, as often he had done before. But since his last call there had been a change on Ovuva. Temooka, the old chief, who had been glad to trade copra for glass beads, musical boxes, trade-knives and sticks of tobacco, had fallen, and a young chief reigned in his place. Temooka's head was smoking in the hut of his successor: and Ogoo, the new chief, had no use for white men and their trade. It was in fact only the sight of the rifles in the hands of the ketch's crew, that kept the native canoes on the beach instead of swarming round the *Dawn* for an attack. Once a canoe had pushed out, near enough for a spear to be thrown, which stuck quivering in the deck. But a rifle shot had sent it scuttling back to the beach.

That reception at Ovuva had been an unpleasant surprise for King of the Islands. There was no trade to be done: there was nothing to be done but to pull out and make sail for the next port of call. But the wind which had wafted the *Dawn* into the lagoon was still blowing hard on the reef passage, and the boy traders had to wait for the morning and the off-shore breeze. So the *Dawn* still lay at anchor under the threatening eyes on the beach when a whaleboat pulled in from the open sea.

It was manned by half-a-dozen dark Tonga boys. In the stern sat a figure the shipmates of the *Dawn* knew well: Barney Hall, with his rough tangled beard, his dingy shorts and shirt, his wide-brimmed hat, and a big revolver buckled to his belt. There had been trouble more than once between King of the Islands and the ruffianly trader of Tonga. In lonely waters, Barney Hall was the man to help himself to stores from any small vessel, with a revolver in his hand: and he had tried that game once with the *Dawn*, with painful results to himself. But he was the man to try again, if pushed by need. The frown deepened on Ken King's handsome face as he watched the whaleboat pulling in from the Pacific.

"That swab!" he muttered, "Well, if he's looking for trouble, we can give him all he wants."

"And a little over!" remarked Kit Hudson.

"That feller Hall he plenty too much bad feller altogether," said Koko, the brown-skinned boatswain of the *Dawn*, "'Spose he comey along *Dawn*, little white master shoot along long-feller gun."

"He's seen us, Ken," said Hudson.

Barney Hall had evidently been unaware that the ketch was there, for as he suddenly sighted her, he gave a start of surprise: stared, and then, shading his eyes from the sun with a large hairy hand, stared harder. The shipmates, watching him, saw the surprise in his face, followed by a look of satisfaction. It was plain that Barney Hall was glad to see the vessel.

Ken's face grew grimmer.

"He's glad to see us here, Kit," he said.

Hudson shrugged his shoulders.

"That means that he's short of stores, and looking for stores—and trouble," he answered.

"Let him!" said Ken, briefly.

Barney Hall, after that long stare, rapped out something to his crew that the shipmates could not hear at the distance. But its import they guessed easily enough, as the whaleboat changed its course a little, and pulled directly for the anchored ketch. Whether he was looking for trouble or not, Barney was coming to the *Dawn*.

He waved his hand as he came, apparently in greeting. There was no answering wave from the ketch. All the shipmates wanted of Barney Hall was that he should keep his distance.

That, obviously, he had no intention of doing. The whaleboat pulled nearer and nearer across the sun-reddened waters.

"Coming aboard!" sang out Barney Hall, as soon as he was near enough for the shipmates to hear him.

"Keep your distance, Barney Hall!" called back King of the Islands, "You're not wanted on this packet."

The trader of Tonga scowled.

He rapped out a word to his crew, and the Tonga boys pulled harder. Ken King glanced round at his boatswain.

"You, feller Koko!"

"Yessar!"

"You take feller belaying-pin, hand belong you, knock that feller Hall back along boat, 'spose he comey aboard."

Kops grinned, with a flash of white teeth.

"Me savvy, sar! Me likee too much kill that bad feller Hall along belaying-pin!" he answered. "Kill", in the Kanaka dialect, signified no more than a hard knock: but clearly Koko was prepared to administer a quite sufficiently hard one, if Barney Hall asked for it.

The whaleboat floated alongside. Barney Hall stood up, scowling across the low rail at the shipmates—with a rather uneasy eye on Koko.

"Look here, Ken King . . .!" he began.

"You can stow it," answered Ken, "You're not coming on this hooker, Hall. Keep that rifle handy, Kit."

"You bet!" said Hudson, tersely.

"If you pull that gun, Hall, you get something sudden," said King of the Islands, "Keep your distance. If you're here to trade, I'm not stopping you. But I'll warn you that there's been trouble here . . . old Temooka's dead, and the new chief, Ogoo, would jump at the chance of smoking your head in the wood-fires. We've found that out since we came."

"I guess I know all that, better than you do," growled Hall, "No white man's life is worth a foot of shell-money on the beach of Ovuva now."

"If you knew, why have you pushed in?" said King of the Islands, "If it's stores, we've none to spare . . ."

"I've all the stores I want."

"Then your best guess is to pull out, while the going's good. We've got to wait for the wind—you haven't."

"Do you think I've come here for nothing, with the island swarming with black cannibals!" snarled Barney Hall, "I've come for something that I'm not going without—and as you're here, I'm willing and ready to share with you, if you'll go into it with me. Let me come aboard, and I'll explain—"

Hall put a hand on the rail. He snatched it away, and jumped back so suddenly that the boat rocked, as Koko lashed with the belaying-pin. He staggered in the boat, almost losing his footing.

Ken King laughed.

"That's a tip, Hall," he called out, "Steer clear."

Hudson, his rifle half-raised, watched Hall like a cat. He fully expected him to grab at the revolver at his belt.

But Barney did not touch his weapon. He steadied himself, with a savage glare at the ship-mates on the deck of the *Dawn*.

"Tell your nigger to keep that belaying-pin clear, King of the Islands," he bawled. "Let me come aboard, and—"

"And we know the rest," snapped King of the Islands. "We know you, Barney Hall—you're a swab, and as treacherous as a tiger-shark. Pull off."

"I'll leave my gun in the boat, if you like. I tell you I'm here to make a fortune, and I'll share with you if you come in on it. Look!" Hall unbuckled the holster at his belt, and threw it, with the revolver in it, into the bottom of the boat. "There! Are you afraid to let an unarmed man come aboard your packet?"

Ken and Kit exchanged a glance. They did not like Barney Hall, and they did not trust him an inch. But unarmed, it was apparent that he had no hostile intention: and they were curious, too, to know the meaning of the strange words he had spoken.

"O.K." said Ken at last. "Stand back, you feller Koko. You can come aboard, Hall, but if you try any tricks, you go into the lagoon, and take your chance with the sharks."

Hall replied with a surly grunt. Then, grasping the rail, he clambered aboard, and stood on the teak deck of the *Dawn*.

CHAPTER II

A TALE OF TREASURE

KING OF THE ISLANDS, standing by the binnacle, waved his hand to a Madeira chair. It creaked as Barney Hall dropped his huge bulk into it. Kit Hudson sat on the taffrail, his rifle under his arm. Both the shipmates eyed the trader of Tonga curiously.

Hall had come aboard, apparently in amity. But the scowl on his brow, the glint in his little piggy eyes, told how he resented his unceremonious reception. Still, it was not likely that even the hard-fisted trader of Tonga would venture to let his evil temper rip, unarmed as he now was.

That his feelings towards the boy traders were no more amicable than they had ever been was clear enough. He came in peace because he wanted something of them. What he wanted was a puzzle: but King of the Islands was willing to hear what he had to say.

"Carry on, Hall," said Ken.

Hall grunted.

"I'm putting up a proposition, King of the Islands," he said. "We've never been friends—"

"Nothing like it," agreed Ken.

"Nor ever likely to be," scowled Hall.

"Nothing more unlikely," said Ken, with a smile.

"All the same, white men can stand together in a hole like this," said Barney Hall, with a wave of his huge hand towards the glimmering beach, now growing dim in the tropical dusk. "I guess I've never been pleased to see you before, but I'll say that I was glad to raise your hooker here when my boat pulled in. Nobody's ever been more pleased to see you, come to that."

"Thanks," said Ken, laughing.

"Not because I like the cut of your jib, any more than I ever did," growled Barney. "But you can help me— And I can help you, if you'd rather finger a thousand or so Australian sovereigns, instead of drumming around making small-time profits on copra."

"Copra's good business these days," said Ken. "The old traders used to dream of the days when copra was twenty pounds a ton, never hoping that they would come back again: now it fetches four times as much, and even five. We're not doing badly out of copra, Hall."

"Mebbe not! But there's something on Ovuva worth more than all the coconuts that ever grew on the island, and all the copra that ever came out of them," growled Hall, "and more than ever came out of the pesky margarine they make from the copra."

"And you're going to tell us where to lay hands on it?" grinned Kit Hudson.

Hall gave him a scowl.

"Jest that!" he snapped.

"Kind of you!" chuckled the Australian mate of the *Dawn*.

"I've got my reasons. I want help to lay my own hands on it, and finding you here, I'm ready to take you into the proposition. I'd have gone in alone, but—" Hall waved his horny hands towards the circling beach again, "Look at that crowd of niggers, all as keen to get our heads off our shoulders as their new chief Ogoo. They don't dare face the rifles: but ashore, in the bush, I guess it would be a different palaver."

"Very!" said Ken, drily. "If you set foot on the beach of Ovuvu, Hall, you can bank on your head smoking in the wood-fire in Ogoo's hut. Old Temooka was hardly able to keep them in check: and Ogoo is as savage a head-hunter as ever handled a spear. Keep afloat if you're not tired of life."

"I'm going ashore after a fortune, if every durned nigger in the Black Islands stood in the way," said Barney Hall, doggedly. "But I ain't denying that I'd like a white man at my side—and a man of your heft, King of the Islands. You'd stand by a man through thick and thin if you took it on."

"Bank on that," said Ken. "But you're talking in riddles. What are you after on Ovuvu?"

"Old Temooka's treasure!" muttered Barney Hall. He spoke in a low voice, slowly, as if reluctant to speak at all. "I ain't saying I'm keen on sharing it, Ken King. But I'll share it, fair and square, fifty-fifty, if you stand in with me. Better half the treasure, and live to spend it, than the lot of it with a spear in the back."

"Old Temooka's treasure!" repeated Ken.

He stared at the trader, and Kit Hudson chuckled.

"We've heard that yarn," said the mate of the *Dawn*. "You can hear a dozen such yarns on any beach."

"This isn't a beach-comber's yarn," snapped Hall. "This is the goods. Old Temooka traded for a good many years, and I guess he handled a whole heap of Australian sovereigns in his time. He was keen on trade—he raided other islands for heads to smoke in his canoe-house, but he kept the peace with white men for the sake of trade. A good many thousands of gold sovereigns passed through his hands when he was chief here."

"Passed through, no doubt," said Ken. "I've heard a yarn of a treasure on Ovuvu, and sometimes it's pearls, and sometimes rare corals, and sometimes golden Australian sovereigns hoarded by Temooka. I've never believed a word of it."

"You can believe it now," growled Barney Hall. "I'm not willing to tell you, and you know it: I'm telling you because I want your help in lifting a sea-chest packed with treasure."

Kit Hudson whistled.

"It's anybody's game, if you're particular," went on Hall, with savage sarcasm. "Old Temooka kept the sea-chest hidden in the bush. It was his as long as he lived. It's anybody's now that can lift it. I reckon you ain't thinking that it belongs to the new chief, for taking the trouble to spear Temooka in the back and cut off his head.

"Hardly," said Ken. "If it's there, I'd keep it out of that savage brute's hands, if I could."

"It's there!" rapped Hall.

"Well, how do you know?" demanded King of the Islands. "I can hardly think you're risking your life here on nothing more than a drunken beach-comber's yarn. But how do you know?"

"I've had the news," said Hall slowly and again with evident reluctance. "I've got it square. Ogoo wiped out all the old chief's friends that he could lay hands on, when he wiped out Temooka, but some of them got away in canoes—one of them at least: for I contacted him at Loa: old Temooka's servant Bomoo. Mebbe you've seen him—"

"I've traded with him, my last call here," said Ken, "and what did you pick up from him at Loa?"

"The whole bearings," said Hall. His reluctance seemed to leave him, and he spoke eagerly. "I traded him rum till it all came out." He scowled, as he noted Ken's look of distaste. "That was the way to make the nigger talk, and he talked. He dare not come within fifty sea-miles of Ovuva, or I reckon he would be after the treasure himself. But he was more'n willing to let a white man take the risk if he wanted to. I didn't swallow the yarn whole at first, but I got more and more out of him, till I had it clear. There's a big cedar-wood sea-chest hidden in the bush on Ovuva, and inside it is Temooka's treasure. I've got the bearings. If the sun wasn't so low down you'd see a big banyan over-topping the bush—but I reckon you've seen it—"

"I've seen it. It's a regular landmark here."

"That's the location. There's a grass hut under that banyan, and the sea-chest is hidden under the floor of the hut. It's not hidden deep—only covered up with grass and rushes to keep it out of sight. Lifting it would be as easy as falling off a yard, if the niggers don't stop us."

"Bomoo had seen it?"

"More'n once, spying on old Temooka, who kept the secret to himself. He's not seen inside it, but he's seen the chest, and seen old Temooka visit it, and if he'd dared, I reckon he would have helped himself. The chest was kept locked, and old Temooka kept the key: he was as jealous as a tiger about that chest, and if he'd known that Bomoo knew anything about it, he would have had his head smoking in a jiffy. But Bomoo knew, and I've got the bearings from him."

"And what's in the chest?" asked Kit Hudson.

"I've told you—Temooka's treasure. What would be in it?" snarled

Barney Hall. "Do you think old Temooka kept a sea-chest hidden in the bush, and visited it secretly, with nothing in it?"

"Well, not likely," admitted Hudson, with a nod. "If he hoarded Australian sovereigns, as the chiefs often do, that's where he would pack them, safe out of thieving hands. But—"

"But what?" snapped Hall.

Kit Hudson laughed.

"Look at the beach," he said, "A white man's life wouldn't be worth the toss of a ship's biscuit if he landed on Ovuva. We shall be lucky if we get through the night without having to fight off a swarm of canoes with yelling head-hunters in them. Landing on Ovuva is asking for it."

"Nothing risk, nothing win," growled Barney Hall, "I've come to Ovuva for Temooka's treasure, and I'm not going without it. I know the risk—and I'm ready to face it, for a bigger prize than all I've ever made by trading in fifteen years. If they get me, I'll make a few of them roll over, before they get the head off my shoulders. But after dark there's a chance, a good chance, of pulling through, and pulling it off; especially with two good men instead of one. With one carrying the chest, and another handling a gun if the niggers show up—what?"

"You can bet that some of them would show up," said Hudson.

"That's not sure. They'd never be expecting a white man to land, and they're not cats to see in the dark. Might get through without a shot fired. I ain't saying it's likely: but we might. If it comes to shooting, I want a man to stand by me—share and share alike. Are you on, King of the Islands?"

Ken did not reply immediately.

Barney Hall watched him, with an anxious scowl.

Evidently, he was prepared to make the desperate venture alone, if he did not receive aid from the shipmates. But finding the *Dawn* at anchor in the lagoon had given him hope of aid: and the danger was so terrible, so overwhelming, that the aid of a steady and reliable comrade in the venture, was very likely to make all the difference between success, and failure—which meant a fearful death. Bitter as were his feelings towards the boy trader, Barney Hall wanted his help that wild night if he could get it, on any terms.

"Mebbe thousands," he muttered, "You're making nothing but a loss on this trip to Ovuva, King of the Islands—time and money wasted. And there's a fortune in the bush for the picking up."

"And a wood-fire in a canoe-house for a sailorman's head to smoke in," said Hudson.

"Are you afraid of niggers?" snarled Barney Hall. "If I'm ready to go it alone, I reckon one of you lubbers ought to be willing to go it in company."

King of the Islands nodded, slowly.

"One of us would have to stay on the ketch, Kit," he said, "Ogoo's crew might attack, after dark—we cannot tell. I'll go—"

Barney Hall's face lighted up.

"Good for you, King of the Islands," he exclaimed, and his look, for the moment, was almost cordial. "You're the man I'd rather have at my side, than any other white man in the Pacific, on a venture like this."

"Let's have it clear, Hall," said Ken, quietly, "I don't trust you an inch. I believe what you've told us, because I know you wouldn't be risking your life here unless you believed it worth while. I believe the sea-chest is hidden in the bush, as you say, and I don't see what can be in it excepting old Temooka's treasure. I'll go in with you to lift it—nobody on Ovuva has any claim to it, and I'd be glad to stop any chance of it falling into the hands of that murderous villain Ogoo. But—"

"But what?" muttered Hall. He eyed the boy trader furtively.

"But we've got to have it clear. If we stand in with you, the treasure, if we get it, is shared fairly—one-half to you, and one-half to us. And the chest will be brought on board the *Dawn*, and opened here—landed on this deck for the opening and the share-out."

"You figure that I'm trying to double-cross you?" sneered Hall.

"I've said that I don't trust you an inch," answered King of the Islands, coolly. "There's the terms—if you agree, it's a go: if not, get back to your whaleboat and leave us out of it."

"Of course I agree," growled Hall. "We land the chest on this deck and open it here, and then, share and share alike. Can any man say fairer than that?"

King of the Islands glanced at his shipmate, and Hudson nodded.

"It's a go, then!" said Ken.

Barney Hall lighted a cheroot, with a grin of satisfaction. Far away across the Pacific, the sun dipped beyond the sea, and the sudden night of the tropics came. It was to be a wild night for the white men in the lagoon of Ovuva.

CHAPTER III

IN THE DARK NIGHT

NIGHT lay like a dark velvet cloak on the Pacific. Stars gleamed in the deep dark blue of the sky: distant to the south, the Southern Cross sparkled like a mass of jewels. But on the lagoon of Ovuva it was dim: the shelving beach was dusky, the palm groves and the high bush black and impenetrable. Here and there through the night came glimmerings of lights from the native villages: but these died out one by one, and at last all was shadow. After dark, King of the Islands would not have been surprised if canoes had paddled out to attempt an attack on his ship: and all hands were ready to pour rifle-fire on the head-hunters if they came. But as yet there was no sign of it.

Barney Hall's whaleboat was tied up to the ketch. His crew of Tonga boys sprawled in it, sleeping on their mats, or sitting up and idly chewing betel-nut. They were unarmed: Barney was not likely to sail alone in solitary seas with an armed native crew. They were of little use if an attack came: King of the Islands did not count on them. But on board the *Dawn* every man was wakeful and watchful: even Danny the cooky-boy had a rifle under his arm. Every man, every shot, would be needed if the islanders attacked in the hours of darkness.

Kit Hudson stared at the shadowy beach, with a faintly uneasy look on his sunburnt face. Had he been making the venture with Barney Hall, he would have been as cool as ice: careless of peril. But the thought of his comrade and shipmate plunging into the black shadows of the bush, amid swarms of savage head-hunting blacks, troubled him. Yet Barney Hall, assuredly, was prepared to make the venture alone, if it came to that: and neither of the shipmates could have thought of hesitating, where the ruffianly skipper from Tonga dared to go. And the treasure, too, was worth the risk—if it materialized. But Hudson was uneasy all the same.

Koko, the brown skinned boatswain, eyed his "little white master", from time to time, without speaking. But when, at last, it was midnight, and Ken made a move, the Kanaka spoke.

"This feller Koko go along little white master, along bush along Ovuva, sar!" he murmured.

Ken smiled, and shook his head.

"You feller Koko stop along ketch," he answered. "Spouse black feller belong Ovuva comey along night, you shoot along long-feller gun, Koko."

"No likee little white master go along bad-feller-too-much Hall," muttered Koko: quite regardless of the fact that Barney Hall was within hearing. "He no good-feller along little white master."

"You'd better tip that nigger to stow his jawing-tackle, King of the Islands," came a sullen growl from Barney Hall.

"I trust you no more than Koko does," answered Ken, coolly. "But we're together in this, and you cannot but play fair. Tell your crew to be ready."

Barney Hall muttered an oath, and slouched to the side, to speak to the boat's crew below. Ken glanced at his shipmate, and smiled faintly as he read his thoughts in his face.

"O.K. Kit," he said. "The big banyan's a landmark I know like the back of my hand, and even in the dark I shall make it without any trouble. Hall will carry the chest, if we find it there—I shall cover his retreat to the boat with my gun. Even if the blacks get wise to us, we shall get through. And it looks as if we may make it a quiet trip."

"Look here, Ken, if I come with you, and leave Koko in charge here—" muttered Hudson.

"It wouldn't do, old man. Ogoo and his horde may attack the ketch before dawn—every man here will be wanted, you most of all."

"Aye, aye! But—"

Hudson broke off: he knew that his shipmate was right.

"It will be all right, old man," said Ken, smiling, "and it's worth while. We know that old Temooka handled stacks of Australian sovereigns in his time; and that chest hidden in the bush looks as if he hoarded them, as many of the chiefs did. It's worth the risk."

"I know! But—" Hudson broke off again. "Carry on, shipmate. But—for goodness sake, make the quickest trip you can and keep a weather-eye on Barney Hall—he would play you false if it suited him."

"It won't suit him, under my gun!" said King of the Islands, grimly. "Any tricks from Barney Hall, and I'd shoot him as soon as I would a mad dog. But what tricks could he play, Kit? We're in this together, and if we don't stand together through it, his head goes to smoke as well as mine."

Hudson nodded.

"I know!" he assented. "Rely on me to keep the old packet safe while you're gone, Ken. If Ogoo butts in with his horde, they won't get a foot on the *Dawn*. If you hear gunfire you can bank on that."

There was a growl from Barney Hall at the rail.

"Ready, King of the Islands?"

"Ready," answered Ken.

The whaleboat rocked as Barney Hall's heavy hulk dropped into it. King of the Islands followed him.

The Tonga boys sat at the oars. Hall cast off the painter, and pushed off from the ketch. From the rail, Kit Hudson and Koko, and the Hiva-Oa crew of the *Dawn*, watched the whaleboat glide away into the shadows.

For some minutes it was visible as a dark shadow. There was little or no sound as it moved with muffled oars—nothing to give the alarm to the savages ashore if any were wakeful. It disappeared in the deep tropical dusk. Kit Hudson drew a deep, deep breath. Koko's brown face was dark and gloomy.

"No likee!" he muttered.

Hudson stood silent, watching, listening. The night was very still. If the savages on shore were plotting mischief, there was no sign of it. But the mate of the *Dawn* would not expect a sign of it, till the canoes, crowded with savages grasping spears and war-clubs, came rushing out of the dark. That the rifle-fire from the ketch would drive them off he had no doubt; but one minute of unwariness might be fatal. The crew of the *Dawn* had to watch like cats till the new day came.

The minutes were long to Kit Hudson as he waited. With his mind's eye he followed his shipmate—ashore by this time; the boat waiting in a dark inlet, King of the Islands and the Tonga trader tramping by the dark runways of the bush. If they got through without an alarm—!

He could only wait, and wait, and watch, and listen. So still was the night, that he could hear, faintly from afar, the "plop" of a falling coconut, falling

in the wind from the sea. Minutes, that seemed hours, crawled by. And when, at length, the silence was suddenly broken, the crack of a pistol shot from the dark bush startled his strained ears like a crash of thunder.

CHAPTER IV

HIDDEN TREASURE!

“STARBOARD!” muttered Barney Hall.
“Port!” said King of the Islands, briefly.

Hall cursed under his breath.

They were at a cross in the tortuous runways in the bush of Ovuva. In the blackness, hardly broken by the glimmer of a star through tangled branches, they could see little or nothing. They peered, and groped, and tramped with silent feet, till they came to the spot where runways crossed in the shadowy bush, and there Barney Hall halted, in perplexity, and King of the Islands drew to a halt also.

So far, all had gone well. The whaleboat, with the Tonga rowers, had been left in a little inlet that ran from the lagoon into the bush. There it was to await their return, in darkness and silence: the Tonga boys would be silent enough, knowing that headhunters lurked on Ovuva: some as likely as not, wakeful, in the late hours of the night. Landing in the bush, Ken King and the burly trader plunged on in the deep gloom: guided by their memory of the position of the over-topping banyan-tree, for nothing could be seen. But at the cross of the ways, Barney Hall was uncertain. Seen in daylight, that vast and towering banyan seemed a certain guide: but in the blackness of the night it was a different matter, and Barney was far from sure of his bearings. He fancied the way lay to the right: but he was not sure: and as King of the Islands chose left, he cursed in low tones, fearful lest some savage lurking in the bush might hear.

“I guess it’s starboard, King of the Islands,” he muttered. “I got the lie of it when my boat pulled in—”

“Port,” repeated Ken, curtly. “Don’t waste time, Barney Hall. You’re more a lubber than a sailorman.”

“I reckon I got my bearings—”

“You reckoned you had your bearings when you ran your lugger on the reef at Oao, a year ago.”

The trader cursed again. He had never hated King of the Islands more than he did at that moment. But he knew that the boy trader of Lalinge was most likely right. Ken was ten times the sailorman that Barney had ever been: and when he had taken his bearings, there was no doubt about it. The burly trader suppressed his bitter resentment, and muttered:

"Have your way, King of the Islands! I'm not sure, and if you're sure—"
"Follow on."

That was Ken's only reply, as he led the way again. They swung into the dark tangled runway to the left: and it added to Barney's sullen rage to realize that, without the help of the boy trader, he would never have found his way at night in the trackless bush. It was unfamiliar ground, and the darkness was blinding and baffling. But King of the Islands trod on, as if he could see like a cat in the dark, and Barney tramped sullenly after him: savagely resentful but more than glad of his guidance.

"Stop!" came a whisper from the boy trader.

"What—?" began Barney Hall.

"We're here! Here's the big banyan."

"Oh!" breathed Barney.

He peered round him in the deep gloom. He made out the mass of the vast banyan, with its many stems that seemed like a grove in a single tree. It loomed up like a vast building, over-topping the other trees, though many of them were tall. Evidently King of the Islands, had chosen the right path: the Tonga trader would have wandered in the bush, without him, and perhaps never have found the banyan before dawn came. But they had arrived, at last, at the spot where, according to the tale told by Bomoo at Loa, the treasure of old Temooka was hidden under the floor of a grass hut.

"We're here," breathed Barney. He muttered an oath. "It's as black as the deep pit, under that banyan—I reckon we got to strike a glim, if we're going to find that hut."

"I've a dark lantern. Come on."

King of the Islands flitted silently between the banyan stems, under the mighty tree. Hall tramped clumsily after him. With its many stems standing like columns, it was like aisles in a cathedral under the great banyan. The blackness was intense: not a glimmer of starlight came through the dense mass of foliage overhead. King of the Islands groped to the main trunk of the great tree: a mass of timber that was a dozen yards in circumference. There, feeling fairly sure that the surrounding stems would hide the light from the bush, if there were eyes to see, he turned on a gleam of the dark-lantern. Barney blinked in the light, and cast an uneasy glance round him. But all was silent and still in the dense bush of Ovuva.

With merely a glimmer of light showing, but enough for his purpose, Ken moved round the vast trunk, searching the endless recesses among the stems for the grass hut. And in a few minutes he found it.

"Here!" he whispered.

Barney Hall's narrow eyes glittered in the glimmer of light.

"By hokey!" he breathed. "I told you it was true. King of the Islands—I knew I got it straight from that nigger at Loa. This is where old Temooka kept his treasure—by hokey, we've got it."

"Looks like it!"

There was a doorway to the hut, of matting hanging from a palm pole. King of the Islands pulled it aside, and Barney followed him in. It was a small hut, not more than twelve feet across either way: the floor covered with tapa mats. Certainly, without a clue, no one could have dreamed that it was the hiding place of a treasure. But Barney knew, or at least was certain that he knew, what lay hidden under the mats.

He began to drag them aside with feverish haste. The earth was revealed, and again, without a clue, no one could have guessed what it hid. But Barney knew, and he knew, too, that it was not hidden deep—old Temooka could not have buried his treasure deep, when he was in the habit of visiting it, adding to it, gloating over it. There was a mere screen of earth and grass over the lid of the hidden sea-chest: easy to remove by old Temooka when he came: easier for the burly trader of Tonga. With a huge claspknife in his horny hand, Barney Hall slashed at the earth, and barely suppressed a shout of triumph as the knife checked on something hard under the earthy surface.

"By hokey!" His narrow eyes danced. "Here—!"

"Belay it!" breathed King of the Islands. "Listen—"

"I tell you—"

"Listen, will you?" hissed the boy trader.

Eager as he was to hack the earth away from the hidden chest, Barney Hall paused, and listened. But there was no sound.

"What did you fancy you heard?" he muttered, savagely.

"I heard a sound from the bush—it's quiet now—"

"Getting nervy?" jeered Barney Hall. "There's no sound—the niggers on this island are sleeping like pigs. Look here, keep your gun in your hand, while I get out the chest."

"Quiet—and quick!" said Ken.

He stood with the lantern in his left hand, his revolver in his right, his face tense. If some lurking savage had heard a sound, or caught a glimmer of the light, it meant the alarm on Ovuva—it meant a swarm of fierce enemies in the bush: it meant a desperate fight for life, a fighting retreat to the boat: it meant, as likely as not, white men's heads smoking in the woodfires in the canoe-house of Ogoo. But Barney Hall, in his greed and eagerness, almost forgot the deadly peril, as he slashed the shallow covering away, and revealed the lid of a sea-chest sunk in the earth.

It was locked: and the lock was strong. Barney Hall, with an exertion of his burly strength, swung the chest out of its place, and lifted it to the floor of the hut, his eyes bulging under his bushy brows with greed. He jabbed savagely at the lock with his clasp-knife.

"If we'd brought an axe—!" he breathed.

"Fool! Do you want to wake the whole island? Quiet, I tell you, and listen," whispered King of the Islands.

"There's nothing—!"

"Will you listen?"

Hall scowled savagely, but he listened. And his face changed, as faint sounds from the bush round the banyan came to his ears. He gritted his teeth.

"The wind—!" he muttered.

"It's not the wind! There was no sound before. We've been spotted, and a crowd of them are creeping in the bush, looking for us. We've got to run."

Hall knew that it was true. His face set doggedly.

"We're not going without the chest!" he hissed. "If every durned nigger in the South Seas stood in my way, I'd not take a step without that chest. I can handle it, King of the Islands—cover me with your gun and we'll get through."

Hall swung the heavy cedar-wood chest on his brawny shoulders. He could handle it, as he said: but he could not handle a weapon at the same time. His life depended on King of the Islands covering his retreat to the boat.

Ken shut off the light.

"Ready?" he whispered.

"Aye, aye."

"Follow me! It's for life or death now."

"Don't I know it?" muttered Hall. "Lead the way! We'll beat them—we'll beat the durned niggers! Lead the way."

Ken stepped from the hut, his revolver in his hand, his eyes as watchful as a wildcat's. Hall followed him, with the heavy chest on his shoulders. They wound among the many stems of the banyan, back to the runway. There was no mistaking the sounds from the bush now—they were nearer and clearer: rustling of twigs, padding of naked feet, now and then a low call. As Ken emerged into the runway, there was a sudden gleam of a spear point, a flash of rolling eyes: his revolver roared even as the savage sprang, and a yelling black islander went rolling. Loud and sharp in the night silence rang the crack of the revolver, heard all over the island, heard on the anchored ketch in the lagoon. It was followed by yells from the bush.

"Come!" breathed Ken.

Barney Hall plunged on, at a run, the heavy chest swinging on his broad shoulders. At his side ran King of the Islands: and from the black bush round them came yell on yell of the savage horde hunting them in the darkness.

CHAPTER V

PUNIC FAITH!

CRACK! CRACK! crack! crack!
"Durn the niggers—"
Crack! crack!

On all sides came yelling from the bush: two or three score, at least, of the savages of Ovuva were hunting them. But the darkness was baffling: and the treasure seekers hoped, for a moment or two, to get through with a rapid rush down to the inlet where the whaleboat waited. But from the bush at the side of the runway, shadowy forms suddenly leaped, with brandished spears and war-clubs. Ken's revolver blazed fast, and black man after black man reeled and rolled under his fire. He dodged a spear-thrust, and a crashing club, he hardly knew how, and fired and fired.

There was a heavy thud in the darkness close by, and a roar from Barney Hall. A whirling war-club had caught his shoulder, and he staggered, the sea-chest crashing to the earth. The savage roar he uttered was more of rage than of pain. He clutched the revolver from his belt, and standing over the treasure-chest, fired at the leaping, half-seen dark figures in the dark.

It was pandemonium for a long wild minute—then there was a crashing in the bush, as the savages fled from the fire, leaving five or six of their number groaning on the earth. Ken panted as he hurriedly reloaded.

"Quick!" he breathed. "Are you hurt, Hall?" There was a note of anxiety in his voice. Hall, for the moment, was not the ruffianly, unscrupulous, hard-fisted trader: he was Ken's comrade in a fight for life. "Hall—"

Barney Hall was staggering against a tree. But he pulled himself together, growling savagely.

"Only a knock—my shoulder's bruised! Get on—get on—they'll be swarming over us in a brace of shakes—get on!"

Unheeding the pain of his bruised shoulder, the burly trader bent over the chest, to swing it up. In spite of himself, a groan escaped him as he did so. But he gritted his teeth and swung up the chest.

"If you're hurt—"

"Get on, I tell you, get on."

"Give me the chest—I can handle it, if you're hurt—"

"Leave it to me."

Even at that moment, with bitter pangs of pain in his bruised shoulder, intensified by the weight of the chest, with swarming savages yelling all round them, in the very shadow of death, Barney Hall could not bring himself to relinquish hold of the treasure-chest. He staggered and stumbled along the dark runway, the sea-chest on his shoulders: and King of the Islands followed him, gripping his revolver.

In that fierce brief fight the savages had been driven off, and the way for the moment was clear. But they knew now exactly where the fugitives were, and there was no more hunting at random in the bush: the whole swarming crew were in the runway behind, pursuing. Yelling voices and padding feet were terribly close, as the two white men raced down to the inlet. Twice Hall would have taken a wrong path, had not King of the Islands caught his arm, and guided him aright. It was well for the trader of Tonga that he had been able to enlist the aid of the boy skipper of the *Dawn*: only too well he knew that, alone, his life would have been beaten out under crashing clubs and thrusting spears. But there was a glimmer of water ahead at last: they were close on the inlet: but Barney, racked with pain, stumbled and slackened speed.

A spear whizzed by, missing him by an inch. King of the Islands turned, and blazed back a shot: answered by a yell. It slackened, for a moment, the rush of the swarming pursuit.

"Give me the chest, Hall—and run!" panted Ken.

"Leave it to me! Keep them durned niggers back!" muttered the Tonga trader, hoarsely.

Again Ken fired back in the run way, and again there was a brief slackening



He fired fast into the rushing horde.

of the rush of padding feet. Barney Hall, staggering, reached the swampy margin of the inlet: and with a final effort, hurled the chest into the boat, among the bare legs of the Tonga crew.

There was a wild chattering from the Tonga boys, terrified by the savage yelling from the bush. Barney Hall gave them a fierce glare.

"Cast off!" he hissed. "Cast off, you black scum."

"Stand by me, Barney Hall!" came King of the Islands' voice. "They're on us!"

From the dark runway came a wild rush. King of the Islands faced about, his revolver up, his eyes gleaming over it. He fired fast into the rushing horde, but they came on, yelling.

Barney Hall glared round.

One of the Tonga boys had cast off the painter. The boat rocked on the inlet. King of the Islands, his face to the rushing enemy, his back to the trader, was only a yard from him. For a second, Barney Hall grasped his revolver, to turn back to his aid. But it was only for a second. The next, he had leaped into the boat: the impact of his weight sending it spinning far out on the water.

"Washy-washy too quick, you black scum!" he snarled. "You hear me, ear belong you? Washy-washy, or me knock seven bells out of your hides."

The oars dipped into the water. Ashore, King of the Islands emptied his revolver into the rushing horde on the runway, and savage forms reeled to right and left under the fire. It checked them, if only for a moment, and the boy trader turned and leaped towards the inlet, staring into the darkness for the boat.

"Barney Hall! Where—?"

He broke off, as the dash of oars from the night came back, to answer him. The boat was gone. Barney Hall was gone.

Even then, for the moment, King of the Islands did not grasp the full extent of the Tonga trader's treachery. He shouted:

"Hall, you fool! You're leaving me behind—bring the boat closer, you lubber—get to the bank. Do you hear?"

Only the dash of oars answered, dying away towards the lagoon. Then King of the Islands understood. The treasure-chest was in the boat: and it was gone: Barney Hall had abandoned him to the head-hunters. That the ruffian was as treacherous as a tiger-shark, Ken knew: he had not trusted him: but he had given him, and intended to give him, no opportunity for treachery. But the close pursuit of the savages had offered Barney the chance he wanted: and he had been quick to seize on it. The boat was pulling away to the lagoon—pulling away to sea—as fast as oars could drive it, the Tonga boys slaving at the oars under the savage threats and curses of the trader—and King of the Islands on the shore of the inlet, was left to death under the spears of the head-hunters of Ovuva.

CHAPTER VI

FOR LIFE OR DEATH!

KING OF THE ISLANDS stood, knee-deep in the shallow margin of the inlet, panting, his empty revolver in his hand. Had the boat been still there, one leap would have carried him to safety. His eyes gleamed with rage, as he realized how the trader of Tonga had tricked him: fleeing with the treasure, and leaving him to his fate. He did not need telling that Barney Hall was not pulling for the ketch: he was pulling for the reef passage, to escape to the open sea: the treasure wholly his, and laughing at the man he had tricked. It was well for the trader of Tonga that he was out of Ken King's reach at that moment.

But there was no time to think of Hall and his treachery, or the loss of the treasure—or anything else but the shadow of death that lay on him. He turned his head as he stood in the shallow water. From the darkness of the runway, the savages came pouring from the bush—even in the darkness the spear-points, the wild rolling eyes, the glimmering lava-lavas, could be seen: and they were almost upon him. Ahead of the yelling crew came a brawny young savage with a brass ring in his nose, and strings or cartridge-clips adorning his thick neck: Ogoo, the new chief of Ovuva. With blazing eyes Ogoo ran at him, his spear lifted to strike.

Up went Ken's arm, and the empty revolver was hurled, crashing into the ferocious black face. Ogoo, yelling, staggered back, his spear dropping. The rest came on with a rush: but King of the Islands had a moment. He plunged out headlong into the water, to swim for his life. There were sharks in the lagoon, but he had to take his chance of them—it was swift and sudden death to linger. A moment after he cleft the water, a yelling mob was on the margin of the inlet, splashing in the mud, hurling spears.

Ken felt a spear touch his arm as it grazed. There was a splash a foot from him, as a hurled war-club smote the water. But he swam with powerful strokes, and shot almost like an arrow down the inlet to the lagoon. Splashes behind him told that several, at least, of the savages had taken to the water in pursuit—crashing of bushes showed that others were racing along the bank of the inlet. He gave no heed, though it seemed to him that he could almost hear the rustle of the wings of the Angel of Death. With steady powerful strokes he cleft the glimmering water, and the inlet was left behind, and he was swimming swift and strong for the ketch.

The *Dawn* was anchored well out in the lagoon: out of range of arrows from the beach. But King of the Islands was a strong swimmer, and he was almost like an arrow in the water. On board the ketch, they must have heard the firing in the bush, and the yelling of the savages: they would be on the look-out for

him. The *Dawn's* riding-light was his guide, and he drew rapidly nearer. And he ceased to swim, and, treading water, shouted with the full force of his lungs.

"Ahoy! *Dawn* ahoy!"

A shout came back from the ketch.

"Ken! Ahoy, King of the Islands." It was Kit Hudson's voice. It was followed by the deep tones of Koko:

"Little white master comey along he swim along lagoon. Little white master he stop along water."

In the glimmer of the stars Ken swept on. He had a glimpse of the brown face of Koko, and of Kit's anxious face, over the rail. Then something touched him in the water, and for a second a shudder of horror ran through him at the thought of a shark. But it was a hand that touched—and grasped: one of the blacks, more powerful than the rest, had swum him down, and grasped him: and in a moment Ken gave grasp for grasp, and was fighting for his life in the water.

He did not hear a splash, as a brawny form plunged down from the *Dawn's* rail. But he felt the fierce grasp on him suddenly relax, and he was free: his head came up, and he panted for air. The brown face of Koko grinned at him in the shadows, and a brown hand held him.

"Koko!" panted the boy trader.

"Me comey along water help little white master, sar! That black feller go kill-dead knife belong me," grinned Koko.

"Good man!"

"Look out!" yelled Hudson, over the rail, and a rope splashed in the lagoon. "Quick! For your life!" A black fin glided over the water: it was a shark, drawn by the scent of blood.

Ken grasped the rope.

"Hold on, Koko," he panted.

"Yessar."

The Hiva-Oa boys on deck dragged at the rope. Ken and Koko were dragged headlong up the side: and as they reeled panting and drenched on deck, there was a gleam of white below: the shark had turned over to bite. But he was moments too late: King of the Islands and the faithful Kanaka were safe on the deck of the *Dawn*.

Kit Hudson grasped his shipmate's arm, and helped him to his feet. Ken stood unsteadily, leaning on the mate.

"You're all right, Ken?"

"Right as rain! But it was a close thing," breathed King of the Islands.

"The closest ever, Kit!"

"But the boat—Barney Hall—what—?"

Ken's eyes glinted.

"Gone!" he said. "He ran in the boat, with the treasure-chest, and left me

to it—he had his chance, with the blacks fairly on me, while I was stalling them off. The dastardly villain—!”

“Oh, the hound!” breathed Hudson.

“I knew he’d double-cross us, if he had a chance! But—he would never have had a chance if the blacks had not been so close behind.” Ken clenched his hands. “You’ve seen nothing of the whaleboat?”

“Nothing!”

“He’s through the reef passage before this, making for the open sea. He was quick to take his chance,” said Ken bitterly.

“Up hook, and after him!” exclaimed Hudson. But he shook his head the next moment. “We can’t run the reef passage in the teeth of the wind. He knows that! Oh, the double-crossing swab!”

“Nor pick up the boat in the darkness, if we did,” said Ken. “And—we’re going to be busy in a minute or two, Kit. Look!”

From the shadows of the night, dim shapes were visible on the lagoon towards the beach. Canoes were pushing out from the shore. Whether Ogo and his head-hunting crew had intended to risk an attack or not, the affray in the bush had settled the matter: the savages of Ovuva, maddened with rage, were manning their canoes and paddling out to the ketch’s anchorage. There was no time now for talk, or for wasting thought on Barney Hall: every hand grasped a rifle: every eye watched for the attack that was coming.

It came with a rush: canoe after canoe shooting out towards the *Dawn*: savage eyes gleaming and rolling, black hands grasping spear and axe and war-club: spears and sharp stones whizzing through the air. A hundred or more yelling savages crowded down on the *Dawn*.

“Fire!” shouted Ken.

And the rifles roared, pouring hot lead into the crowded canoes. They came on: and for anxious minutes it seemed that the infuriated head-hunters, in spite of raining bullets that tore through flesh and bone, would push on and reach the low freeboard and clamber up.

But the rifle-fire was too hot for them. Black savage after savage rolled over in the canoes: and in sudden panic they whirled away and fled into the shadows. The Hiva-Oa boys, grinning, pumped lead after them as they fled.

The *Dawn* rode safe at her anchor for the rest of that wild night—though with a sleepless, watchful crew. And when the sunrise came, and with it the change of wind, the anchor was swung up, the canvas shaken out, and the ketch glided across the lagoon for the reef passage to the open sea. On the beach black head-hunters yelled and howled and brandished spears: till the tall sails of the *Dawn* disappeared over the reef.

Glad enough were the shipmates to see the palms of Ovuva sinking astern. And as the *Dawn* glided through the blue waters under the blaze of the sun, they searched the horizon on all sides with the binoculars, in the faint hope of picking up Barney Hall’s whaleboat.

But there was no sign of the whaleboat on the wide rolling waters of the Pacific. Barney Hall had vanished into the immensity of the boundless ocean: and with him the treasure of Ovuva. And the shipmates, with deep feelings, could only set their course for their next port of call, hoping at some future date to call the treacherous trader of Tonga to account.

CHAPTER VII

BARNEY'S PRIZE!

BARNEY HALL grinned and chuckled in the glimmering sunrise. He was far from Ovuva.

Not a moment had been lost by the wily trader after he had left King of the Islands to his fate among the head-hunters. He was in fear of pursuit. Whether King of the Islands perished under the spears of the savages or whether he escaped with his life, Barney cared little: but in either case he had pursuit to fear, for he had the mate of the *Dawn* to reckon with. The adverse wind chained the ketch to the lagoon till sunrise: Barney counted on that. But once out of the lagoon, his whaleboat, if still within the range of powerful binoculars, would be run down helplessly by the swift ketch: and his treasure, and as likely as not his life, depended on putting the furthest distance he could between himself and Ovuva. And, scarcely heeding the locked chest that lay in the bottom of the boat, Barney took an oar and rowed with the Tonga boys: twice as powerful an oarsman as any of them, and driving them on with threats and oaths to equal his efforts.

Fast through the night the whaleboat fled, sea-mile after sea-mile gliding under her keel. And when the dawn came at last, Barney was satisfied that he was fairly safe from pursuit. The palm-tops of Ovuva were many a long mile below the horizon, as he glared round over the sea, shining in the rising sun. Even yet the swift ketch could have run him down, had the shipmates known what course to steer to find him: but how were they to know? Unless the binoculars on board could pick him up he was safe—and he was sure now that the most powerful glasses would search for him in vain.

But for many long minutes he watched the horizon anxiously in dread of seeing a tall white sail rise over the blue waters.

But there was no sail. The whaleboat floated alone in a vast solitude of waters. He was safe—and the treasure was his! He had made use of King of the Islands: and, at the finish, wreaked his old grudge: and he grinned and chuckled as he thought of it—every now and then a gasp of pain interrupting his gleeful chuckles. His bruised shoulder was aching horribly, and pulling

at an oar had made the ache more bitterly intense. But the burly trader seemed made almost of iron: bitter as the pain was, it was as nothing in comparison with his triumph over his old enemy, and his possession of the treasure locked in the sea-chest.

The Tonga boys, exhausted with the long, hard pull, lay listless in the boat, when Barney at length permitted them to slacken. They hardly heeded him, as he bent over the sea-chest: at leisure, at last, to examine his prize, to break open the lock with an axe, to run the hoard of Australian sovereigns through his greedy fingers—to count them, and count them, in hundreds, perhaps in thousands! His piggy eyes blazed with greed at the thought. He grasped an axe, and rained blows on the lock of the sea-chest.

It was a strong lock: old Temooka had taken care of that. Even the axe, wielded in Barney's brawny hand, made no impression on it for long minutes. But as he exerted his great strength, crashing blow after blow, it cracked at last, and the lid was loose.

He flung the axe aside, grasped the lid, raised it and threw it back. The treasure-chest was open.

Within was a covering of dried palm leaves over what the chest contained. Barney, with blazing eyes and panting breath, tore them aside: and the contents of old Temooka's chest were revealed.

And then—!

Then Barney Hall, on his knees, staring into the chest, looked like a man stunned by a sudden and terrible blow. He looked, indeed, as if he could not believe his eyes.

It was not a stack of Australian sovereigns, hoarded by the old chief of Ovuvu in his trade with the white skippers, that he saw. It was not strings of pearls. It was the treasure of Temooka—such a treasure as any savage head-hunting chief might have prized, and gloated over, and guarded with care—but such a treasure as the greedy trader of Tonga had never dreamed of. For what was packed in the treasure-chest was a collection of smoked heads—heads of Temooka's enemies smoked and dried in the wood-fires!

Barney Hall's jaw dropped.

The colour went out of his bearded face, leaving him ghastly. He gazed, and gazed, dropping over the treasure-chest like a sick man. Smoked heads of savages slain in battle, or in treacherous ambush in the bush—ineestimable in the eyes of the head-hunting chief; to a white man, repulsive and sickening and utterly worthless.

Barney Hall stirred at last. A pang of agony shot through his bruised shoulder. He groaned aloud. It was for this treasure that he had risked his life on Ovuvu, that he had suffered the hurt that racked him with pain, that he had treacherously betrayed a white man to almost certain death—for this! For a collection of smoked heads, the trophies of a cruel and ignorant savage!

The disappointment was too bitter. The Tonga boys stared at their master,

and exchanged glances and grins. Barney did not heed them—or see them! He slumped down in the boat, utterly overwhelmed, and groaned, and could only groan.

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King of the Islands, and his mate, as the *Dawn* sailed the blue waters that sunny morning, thought of Barney Hall, and of calling him to account. But they might have pitied him, had they been able to see the wretched, overwhelmed possessor of the Treasure of Temooka.

THE END