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Hardly daring to breathe, we gazed down. Captain Burton was tightly bound in his chair !

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Or, THE SCUTTLED SCHOONER.

A Tale of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, Introducing **NELSON LEE** and **NIPPER**. By the Author of "At the End of His Tether," "The Fall of the Tyrant," etc., etc., etc.

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(The Narrative related throughout by Nipper.)

CHAPTER I.

AN IMPORTANT MEETING—CAPTAIN BURTON'S PLANS—EXCITEMENT IN THE REMOVE.

CAPTAIN THOMAS JOSEPH BURTON smiled broadly.

"We're going to have some good times together, my lads," he said, in his bluff, hearty voice. "It'll be a holiday to remember, by jings! And we sail in ten days' time."

Tommy Watson took an excited breath.

"Ripping, sir!" he exclaimed. "Oh, my hat! Fancy us going away to the Pacific, hunting for treasure! Sounds like a—giddy adventure tale! It's rather a pity the school doesn't break up sooner!"

"Begad! Pray don't be so absurd, Tommy boy," protested Sir Montie Tregellis-West, eyeing Watson severely. "I'm frightfully worried about my tailor. I've got a horrid feelin' that he won't have my holiday suits ready in time for the start. An' I couldn't sail without proper clothing, you know. I couldn't really!"

I chuckled.

"Don't you worry, Montie," I grinned. "If your tailor lets you down, you can borrow some of my old suits. I've got two or three knocking about in one of the box-rooms. Just a few alterations——"

Tregellis-West regarded me freezingly through his pince-nez.

"The subject," he said, "is not one for flippancy, Benny. I feel compelled to remark that you an' Tommy have always displayed a frightful carelessness in matters of dress. Begad! I—I—Really——"

Sir Montie paused in some confusion, for Captain Burton was laughing loudly, and Tommy Watson and I were grinning all over our faces. We didn't consider the matter at all serious.

There was something infectious about the captain's laugh, and Sir Montie himself beamed after a vain attempt to look coldly indifferent.

Captain Burton was a big, bluff old gentle-

man with a full beard. His face was tanned by the suns of tropic skies and weather-beaten until it was the colour of mahogany. His eyes, surrounded by countless wrinkles, twinkled with good humour and cheeriness.

We were sitting in Nelson Lee's study in the Ancient House at St. Frank's. It was evening, and the sun shone slantingly in at the window. The guv'nor himself wasn't present, and we were waiting for him.

The meeting, in fact, was to be an important one.

Tom Burton, of the Remove, was with us. He was the son of this hearty old sea captain, and was known throughout the Ancient House as "the Bo'sun." He was, in many ways, a smaller edition of his father—big and bluff and cheery, with a constantly smiling face.

"Souise me! I can't get over it," he said absently.

"Can't get over what, son?" asked the captain.

"Eh? Oh!" exclaimed the Bo'sun, with a start. "I was thinking of what you told me a little while ago, dad. Swill my scuppers! It struck me all of a heap, and the more I think of it the more I'm surprised."

Captain Burton chuckled.

"I suppose you're talking about Master Nipper here—eh?" he asked, motioning his head in my direction. "I was surprised myself, by jings! But it has made me understand a lot, Bo'sun."

I knew what they were talking about, of course. Nelson Lee had revealed the fact to Captain Burton that he was Nelson Lee and that I was Nipper. This sounds rather queer, I daresay, but at St. Frank's the guv'nor was known as "Mr. Alvington" and I rejoiced in the name of "Dick Bennett." Nobody at St. Frank's knew who we really were with the exception of the Headmaster and my own chums.

But now the Bo'sun had been taken into the secret. It couldn't exactly be helped; and, anyhow, it was safe enough with him.

We were destined to be together for many weeks to come, and we couldn't keep up the innocent little deception during a holiday trip to the Pacific.

For that's what was on the board.

Several months before the Bo'sun had met with an exciting adventure at St. Frank's—almost immediately after his arrival, in fact. I've set down all the facts long ago, and in all probability you know all about it.

Captain Burton was a retired mariner of the old school; he was a white man to the backbone, and he had really left the sea because he had come into a decent little fortune. And that's why, also, his son had been sent to such an expensive school as St. Frank's. Tom Burton was one of the best chaps going, and as upright and openly honest as his father.

Captain Burton, some time before he came into his money, had hit upon a treasure on a tiny island in the Pacific—gold, or something of that kind, in a sunken Spanish galleon. I was in ignorance of the actual facts, but hoped to learn them soon.

Well, owing to his inheritance, the captain hadn't been in any hurry to fit out an expedition to raise the gold from the bed of the lagoon in which it was situated. But a blackguardly rascal named Captain Jelks had learned the secret in some way best known to himself, and he and his mate had kidnapped the Bo'sun from St. Frank's with the cheerful object of keeping him a prisoner until Captain Burton revealed the exact whereabouts of the island.

Nelson Lee had been extremely active in that little affair, and I hadn't been exactly idle. At all events, we rescued the Bo'sun and defeated the rascally efforts of Captain Jelks. The Bo'sun's father had been very grateful, and had told us that he would fit out an expedition to sail to the Pacific during the summer. In short, he made it plain that he wanted us to go with him during the holidays.

St. Frank's broke up in ten days' time, and Captain Burton had arrived in accordance with his promise. That was the long and the short of it. His schooner, the Swallow, was lying in Caistowe Bay, three miles off, and he was quite ready to start the voyage as soon as we were.

Just recently there had been a large amount of excitement at St. Frank's, due to the activities of Mr. Kennedy Hunter, a man who had been in temporary charge of the Ancient House, and who had turned out to be a spy of the most dangerous type.

That was all over now, and the prospect of going off in a pleasure trip to the Pacific was very alluring, to say nothing of the treasure hunt part of it. Tom Burton was as pleased as Punch—more particularly because Tregellis-West and Watson and I were to accompany the party. And now, of course, he understood the position far better than he had done before.

"The fact is, I can't get the hang of it," he admitted. "By hokey! And you ain't Bennett at all—you're Nipper, the assistant

of Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous detective of Gray's Inn Road! No wonder you keel-hauled Jelks so quickly!"

I grinned.

"We'd have told you before, Bo'sun, but there wasn't any real need," I said. "And now that you do know, I'm still the same chap as I was. I'm Bennett of the Remove, don't forget — and the guv'nor is Mr. Alvington."

"Great marlinspikes! It's like a dream!" said the Bo'sun frankly.

"I shall have to take you in hand, my lad," put in his father. "What's the meaning of these darned exclamations of yours? Where the thunder did you learn 'em? By jings! You never hear me say such qucer things, do you?"

The Bo'sun was about to make a grinning retort—and probably some reference to his father's "by jings"—when the door opened and Nelson Lee appeared. He was attired in cap and gown, and smiled cheerfully upon us.

"Quite a party, I see," he exclaimed. "My dear Burton, you needn't look at me in that peculiar fashion," he added with a chuckle. "I am not in the least formidable, I can assure you."

The Bo'sun turned red.

"But I can't get the hang of it, sir!" he said awkwardly. "Souse me! And to think that I've been living in the same school with the most famous detective in the world—"

"Come, come! This won't do!" said the guv'nor severely. "Whoever put such preposterous ideas into your head, Burton? I daresay your father has been blowing my trumpet in the most unwarrantable fashion."

"Don't you make any mistake, Mr. Lee," rumbled the skipper through his beard. "I've been telling Tom all about you—just the truth. By the Lord Harry! There's no need to blow any darned trumpets!"

Nelson Lee lit a cigarette.

"We must really change the subject," he smiled. "Suppose we talk of something far more interesting, captain — yourself, for example? It is very generous of you to invite us—"

"Generous be hanged!" ejaculated the skipper gruffly. "I'm selfish—that's the truth about it. I want company during the voyage, and I couldn't get any better company than yourself and these splendid fellows here. I'm all ready to start for the Pacific as soon as the boys are paid off—when the school breaks up, that is."

"I can assure you that we shall be most happy to take advantage of your generosity, captain," said Nelson Lee. "Nipper and I would have been compelled to remain at St. Frank's during the holidays, owing to the peculiar nature of our position. A long sea trip, such as you suggest, will be wonderfully welcome. And as for Tregellis-West and Watson, the matter is all settled with their people."

"We're just dying to go, sir," said Tommy Watson eagerly. "Are — are there any cannibals on this island?"

Captain Burton laughed heartily.

"Cannibals?" he replied with twinkling eyes. "Bless your life, lad, no! The island's uninhabited— But you needn't look so disappointed. There are other islands in the same waters, and there are plenty of savages on them. We may be able to call on one or two—just to pay our respects. But cannibals aren't so common nowadays as they used to be when I was a young 'un."

"Begad! That's rather a pity, sir," remarked Sir Montie. "I was dreamin' of cannibals last night; we were havin' a glorious scrap. Benny was fightin' like fury, you know. He was killin' cannibals in dozens—"

"You blood-thirsty bounder!" I grinned. "I've never killed a cannibal in my life, although I've seen a few. I've been out to the Pacific once or twice, and I'm anxious to know where this treasure island is located."

Captain Burton shook his head.

"You'll have to be anxious for some little time, lad," he said. "I'm not going to make any statement regarding our exact destination until we're in the Tropics. It's not because I don't trust you, but because the least there is said about our real object, the better. I have got maps and plans, and I know exactly where to lay my fingers on this treasure; but for several weeks to come we shall simply be on a pleasure cruise."

Nelson Lee stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Is something troubling you, captain?" he asked in a quiet voice. "You seem to be slightly uneasy."

"No, sir, not uneasy!" interjected the skipper gruffly. "But, by jings, I'm not altogether satisfied that we shall be allowed to do the trip in peace. There's a prospect of villainy butting in."

"My hat!" murmured Watson excitedly.

"Do—do you mean Jelks?" I put in.

"That's exactly what I do mean, youngster," said Captain Burton grimly. "That infernal rascal is still trying to get possession of my maps. I'm not going into details, but I've had positive evidence during the last week or two."

"But I thought Jelks was in prison, dad?" asked the Bo'sun.

"No, son. Captain Jelks and Bill Larson managed to elude the police at the finish of that other affair," replied his father. "By the Lord Harry! It's a pity a pair of rogues like them can't be set apart from all decent folk! But Jelks is at liberty, and I fancy that he'll prove troublesome if he gets half a chance!"

"Rippin'!" murmured Sir Montie languidly.

"What!" snorted the skipper.

"Begad! I—I mean it'll be rippin' to have some excitement," explained Sir Montie vaguely. "It's no good worryin', sir. A little excitement would do us heaps of good, it would, really. It would break the monotony of the voyage, you know."

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated the captain.

"Besides, Jelks can't do anything," went on Tregellis-West, with serene and complete confidence. "Mr. Alvin'ton and Benny are

comin' with us, an' there's nothin' more to be said. If Jelks tries any of his frightful tricks it'll be the worse for him, but it won't make any difference to us. Begad, no!"

Captain Burton laughed.

"By jings! You're right, boy, you've given me the tip I needed," he said heartily. "Why should we worry, indeed? I worried when Jelks kidnapped you, Bo'sun, months ago. But everything came all right."

"Montie's confidence is most flattering," smiled Nelson Lee. "I am quite sure that Nipper feels duly grateful—as I do myself."

"I'm terrifically honoured," I grinned.

"Oh, really— It's too bad, Benny!" protested Sir Montie. "I wasn't flatterin' at all. A fellow can speak the simple truth, I suppose, without descendin' to flattery?"

"Well, we'll leave the matter as it stands, Montie," smiled Nelson Lee. "If Jelks attempts to cause trouble we shall be well prepared for him. In the meantime there is much to be done in the way of preparation. This little meeting, I believe, was arranged for the purpose of deciding upon final arrangements?"

"That's it, Mr. Lee," nodded the skipper. "Of course, everything's in trim so far as I am concerned. The Swallow's ready to sail at an hour's notice, if necessary. But I daresay it will take you ten days to make full preparations?"

The guv'nor nodded.

"The first point to be decided—and the most important one—deals with the party itself," he said. "How many do you propose to take, captain? It is already arranged that Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson shall accompany your son—making four boys in all. But I understood you to say this morning that Burton could choose some other friends if he felt so inclined?"

"Exactly," replied the skipper.

"Bust my tops'l!" exclaimed the Bo'sun eagerly. "Do you mean that, dad? Can we take some other fellows along with us?"

"Your friends, Tom, are my friends," replied Captain Burton genially. "I give you permission to bring anybody you choose. I daresay there will be quite a number of young rascals eager enough to join the party."

"But—but we can't have a crowd, dad!" protested the Bo'sun.

"Naturally, I take it that you have a certain amount of discretion," said his father. "Suppose we say two others, or three, if you like. That will make six guests altogether. You ought to be able to keep yourself lively with six companions. I shall have the delightfully genial company of Mr. Lee, and we shall be a merry company, indeed."

"Souise me!" murmured the Bo'sun worriedly. "Whom can I ask? Benny, you've got to help me in this; you'll all have to help me, messmates. Do you think I shall be able to find three fellows who'll accept the invitation?"

I roared.

"Fied 'em?" I grinned. "My dear old

innocent Bo'sun, they'll be swarming round you in dozens. The fellows already know about this trip—it's no secret—and they're simply bubbling over with excitement and jealousy. Poor old Handforth is nearly dotty with it."

"Suppose we go along to our study?" put in Watson. "We shall have to decide this matter at once, of course, sir?" he added, addressing the captain.

"This very evening, my boys," was the reply. "There's none too much time as it is, and the other members of the party must write home explaining the matter without any delay. They'll have to obtain permission, of course."

"Let me make a suggestion," put in the guv'nor. "I don't wish to interfere——"

"Go ahead, sir," I said cheerfully.

"Well, you are on very good terms, I believe, with Farman," went on Nelson Lee.

"He's one of the best, sir," agreed the Bo'sun.

"If you invited Farman, you would be doing him a real kindness," said the guv'nor. "The majority of the boys have homes to go to during the holidays, but Farman's people are right out in California, and he will be compelled to spend his vacation at the school—not a very cheerful prospect for him, poor lad."

"He'll come!" declared the Bo'sun firmly. "He'll enjoy a trip to the Pacific better than mooning about St. Frank's, sir. And I was thinking about little Yakama. His people are in Japan, ain't they?"

"Yakama's position is similar to Farman's," replied the guv'nor. "If you invite those two boys you will be granting them a very high favour, and they will appreciate it enormously. As to the third boy—well, you can easily find a deserving case," he added smilingly.

And so, when we left the guv'nor's study, it was virtually decided that Justin B. Farman and Sessue Yakama should accompany us on the trip. If they had been ordinary sort of chaps we might not have been so considerate; but Farman and Yakama were thoroughly decent fellows, and it would have been difficult to choose two companions of a more entertaining character.

As for the third guest—well, we hastened to Study C in the Ancient House with the idea of holding a solemn confab. on the subject.

It was quite a serious matter.

CHAPTER II.

THE HONOURED GUESTS—HANDFORTH AND CO. ARE INDIGNANT—THE PARTY FORMED.

THE Remove was in a tumult.

For one thing, the Hunter affair was still the talk of the school. The Remove, particularly, was excited, for Mr. Hunter had had a very special "down" on the Remove.

Tregellis-West and Watson and I, who had played big parts in exposing Hunter for

what he actually was, came in for much admiration. Handforth, of Study D, was quite indignant over the matter. He couldn't see why he hadn't been called upon to lend a hand. But Edward Oswald Handforth, although a thoroughly decent fellow in the main, was several kinds of an ass. His good nature was stupendous, and he was amazingly innocent. You could pull Handy's leg until further orders, if you felt so inclined.

It was all the more astonishing, therefore, that he should consider himself the concentrated essence of keenness, so to speak. We all knew old Handforth, and we all liked him; but he was rather tiresome occasionally.

Just at present he had a grievance—that is to say, a special grievance. He always had something to growl about, of course. Handforth wouldn't be Handforth if he wasn't airing some trouble or other.

The Hunter affair had been bad enough, but this amazing trip to the Pacific was just about the limit. Handforth was of a romantic turn of mind, and he gloried in adventure yarns about the South Seas. And here were several fellows actually going off to the Pacific for the holidays! And he—Edward Oswald Handforth—was to be left out of it!

The idea was not only preposterous, but unthinkable. Handforth, curiously enough, had the idea that it was a deadly insult to leave him out of anything. His indignation at such times was terrific. And this thing—this Pacific stunt, as he called it—was beyond the limit.

Somehow or other the fellows believed that we should search for treasure. There hadn't been a word breathed to this effect—I could swear to that—but either Teddy Long had been up to some of his keyhole tricks, or the juniors had invented the rumour themselves—quite a likely supposition. That it hit the nail right on the head was disconcerting.

At all events, the whole junior section of the Ancient House was humming with the story that Captain Burton was to take "Old Alvy" and several Removites on a treasure hunt to the Pacific islands.

And Handforth broke records in talking; he jawed for hours on end. Considering that his theme was always the same, the fellows soon became fed-up, and Handforth was booted out of four studies in quick succession.

At last he carried off his chums to Study D and talked to them alone. Church and McClure, who shared the study with Handforth, were long-suffering youths. They had to be. Church and McClure liked Handforth tremendously—he was, indeed, a very likeable chap. The three were inseparable chums. Where Handforth went Church and McClure went. To see Handforth without his chums was something of a novelty. Handforth declared that his personality was responsible for this; but Church and McClure maintained that the actual reason was that Handforth needed looking after; it wasn't safe to allow him out alone.

The amount of "jaw" Church and McClure had to put up with was terrible. But they were used to it, and didn't mind so much. Handforth was plentifully supplied with pocket-money, and he was astonishingly generous with it, and his chums overlooked his manifest weaknesses. Not that they were spongers; they were staunch and loyal chums, and Handforth would have been completely lost without them.

At the same time, their life was one long round of troubles. Minor scraps took place in Study D about three times a day, on the average. If Church's nose wasn't swollen, then McClure's was. Handforth had a very impulsive habit of punching a fellow's nose if he expressed a view which opposed his—Handforth's. This was just one of his little "ways." In spite of the drawbacks, however, Church and McClure were true to their leader. Just at present their endurance was tried sorely, for Handforth was particularly violent.

"Is it likely?" he demanded warmly—"is it likely that I'm going to stand it?"

"It's likely that you'll have to!" retorted McClure, who was getting tired. "What the dickens is the good of growling——"

"Who's growling?" roared Handforth.

"I—I mean to say grumbling——"

"Grumbling!" bellowed Handforth.

"Oh, corks! There's no pleasing you!" gasped McClure. "Blessed if you don't get so jolly huffed, Handy. I can't see why you're so keen on this trip. Strictly speaking, it ain't our affair——"

"And, if it comes to that," put in Church thoughtfully, "we haven't even been asked, Handy. I don't suppose we shall be asked. So what's the good of making a lot of fuss?"

"If you say I'm making a fuss——"

"Well, not exactly a fuss," said Church hastily. "The fact is, Handy old man, it's hard lines on us, and those chaps will be rotters if they don't take us along. But it's no good getting excited or objecting. You're not going to push yourself forward and butt in, I suppose?"

Handforth snorted.

"There's no question of butting-in," he said tartly. "This ain't like an ordinary affair. One or two chaps extra won't make any difference on board a big ship. 'Tain't likely. And just think of the glorious times out in the giddy tropics, with the blue sky overhead and everything lovely!"

"And sharks all round, and fevers, and goodness knows what else!" said McClure, in an attempt to dampen Handforth's enthusiasm. "It's a frightfully dangerous place, you know, Handy. If we went out there we should probably stop there for good."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I wouldn't stop out there for good——"

"I mean we should get killed, you ass!" explained McClure.

"I suppose you're trying to be funny?" sneered Handforth. "You're trying to choke me off? If we ain't invited to join this giddy party, there'll be trouble! My only hat! Benny and those other chaps will go away from St. Frank's with bandaged heads! A

hospital will suit them better than a fat-headed ship!"

Church sighed.

"Now, look here, Handy, don't go and ask for trouble," he implored. "What's the good of trying to punch Benny's nose? You know jolly well that he can whack you any day——"

Church paused, realising that he had blundered. Handforth's gaze was tremendous, and, by all rights, Church ought to have dropped to the floor, withered up to ashes. Strange to say, he remained standing perfectly whole.

"Say that again!" said Handforth in ominous tones.

"You—you ain't deaf!" growled Church, fired with a sudden spirit. "And it's true, anyhow! Benny can whack you, hands down! What the dickens is the good of bragging and blustering—— Ow! Oh, crumbs!"

Church proceeded to yell lustily. With one bound Handforth had rushed at his chum, and had now placed his head in jeopardy. Handforth's fist hammered away for some few seconds.

"Now!" he panted. "Perhaps you won't be so jolly ready with your fatheaded remarks. It's a wonder I stick you chaps!"

Church, at that moment, was vainly attempting to find out why he and McClure "stuck" Handforth. If it had not been for the fact that Church wasn't much hurt, he would have told Handforth some home truths which would have staggered that lordly youth considerably.

But Church was a sensible fellow, and he realised that this was no occasion for a big quarrel. Handforth needed looking after badly, and Church had the honour of Study D to think of. He didn't want Handforth to kick up a terrific row with the rest of the Remove at the end of the term.

"I wish you wouldn't be so jolly impulsive, Handy," said Church, dabbing his nose gently. "Why can't you be resigned? We can't go on this trip to the Pacific, and it's no good expecting we can. For one thing, we ain't invited, and then there's our people to think about. What about your pater?"

"Well, what about him?" demanded Handforth.

"He wouldn't give you permission to sail to the other end of the world," put in McClure. "My pater wouldn't, either. And Church's people would be just the same—they're going to take him up to Scotland for the vac."

"Scotland ain't so good as the South Seas, I suppose?" snorted Handforth.

"Scotland's a jolly fine place!" declared McClure, who had Scottish blood in his veins. "For goodness' sake chuck the whole thing up, Handy. Your pater wouldn't dream of letting you go."

"It's simply a question of diplomacy," said Handforth. "If I put it to him in the right way, he'll be as tame as your giddy white mice!"

"That's a fine way to talk about your pater!" grinned McClure. "I'm jolly sure my people wouldn't let me go. And you've

always been one of the best behaved chaps in the Ancient House, Handy," he added, diplomatically. "You ain't going to spoil your record by angling for an invitation, I suppose?"

Handforth turned to the door.

"Angling be jiggered!" he said. "I'm going to ask the Bo'sun, point blank, if any other chaps are going with him, in addition to those Study C bounders. If he's got any sense, he'll understand what I'm driving at."

McClure was on the point of asking Handforth to explain in what way that method differed from angling, but wisely decided to keep his tongue still. This saved quite a lot of trouble in the long run.

The three left the study and paused two doors up the passage. But Study F was empty. Handforth and Co. then tried Study C, which was next door to their own. As it happened, Sir Montie and Tommy and the Bo'sun and I were just in the middle of deciding who the third extra guest was to be.

"Hallo!" I exclaimed, looking up. "No time to jaw now, Handy. We're busy. Shut the door after you—"

"Rot!" said Handforth politely. "I thought I should find Burton here. I want to ask him a plain question."

"Go ahead," said the Bo'sun jovially.

"I understand that your pater's going to take these three chaps on this treasure hunt to the Pacific?" said Handforth.

"That's right, messmate," nodded the Bo'sun. "They're coming with us, at least. But as for the treasure hunt—"

"Oh, you can't kid me!" said Handforth, distorting the left side of his face in an attempt to wink. "I ain't quite a fathead, you know."

"Begad! Is that so?" inquired Sir Montie, with mild surprise.

"Is what so, you ass?"

"Dear fellow, you mentioned that you were not quite a fathead," explained Tregellis-West languidly. "You surprise me—you do, really. I've always understood that you were, you know."

Handforth opened his mouth widely, and then grinned.

"I don't suppose I'd better punch your nose now, Tregellis-West," he said, with great self-control. "When I come across you out in the Triangle, though, I'll make you sit up!"

"Begad! I'm feelin' quite nervous," murmured Sir Montie.

"What's the point of all this," I asked patiently. "I never knew such a chap for asking silly questions, Handy. You know jolly well that we're going to the Pacific. We shall start next week."

"Is there anybody else going with you?" asked Handforth carelessly.

"Yes. Captain Burton has told the Bo'sun that he can choose three other fellows—making seven of us in all," I replied. "We were just discussing the question when you butted in. If you've quite finished we shall be greatly relieved to see your backs—that's putting it politely!"

Handforth and Co. exchanged significant glances.

"Three other chaps?" said McClure thoughtfully.

"We came in just at the right time," put in Handforth, with great cordiality. "I always thought you were a topping sort of chap, Bo'sun. This is ripping of you. Thanks awfully!"

Burton stared.

"That's all right," he said, without understanding the drift of Handforth's remarks. "No need to thank me, messmate. If it comes to that, there's nothing to thank me for, anyhow!"

Handforth beamed.

"Well, of course, I suppose it's been an understood thing all along," he said, waving his hand. "It's a pity you didn't tell me before, though. I shall have to buck up and write to my pater this evening."

"Dear fellow, what on earth for?" asked Sir Montie.

"Why, to explain the thing."

"But, dear old Handy, there's no need to write," said Montie. "Can't you tell him all about it when you go home for the holidays?"

"But I sha'n't go home!" roared Handforth.

"Oh! You've been invited somewhere else, then—"

"You—you dotty ass!" howled Handforth. "Hasn't Burton just invited me to go on this trip to the Pacific?"

The Bo'sun jumped out of his chair.

"Great marlinspikes!" he gasped. "I can understand now! Why, you slabsided lubber, I didn't do anything of the sort. You're a good chap, I daresay, but we want to have some peace on this trip. Souse me! We're compelled to put up with you at St. Frank's—there's no getting out of it—but that's no reason why we should stand your rot during the holidays!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

I simply roared. I had understood the drift of Handforth's remarks from the first, and the expression upon his face just now was worth quids. Burton's painfully plain speaking had left him in no doubt whatever as to the truth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We all roared, and Handforth glared.

"Didn't—didn't you mean it?" he gasped.

"You've been dreaming," said the Bo'sun.

"How could I mean it when I didn't say it? I'm sorry, Handy, but we've made our plans already. If there was more room, and if you weren't such a hopeless fathead, my pater might—"

"Then—then we ain't invited?" bellowed Handforth.

"My dear old idiot, of course you aren't invited," I grinned. "Farman and Yakama are coming with us, but we haven't quite decided about the third, although we're certain of one thing. It won't be you, Handy!"

Edward Oswald Handforth breathed very hard, and for some few minutes his feelings were too great to be expressed by mere

words. Somehow, I couldn't help feeling for the ass.

For, of course, he was dotty to suppose that he would be invited. He wasn't exactly a close chum of ours, although we had always got on with him well enough. And there was also the question of gaining permission from his people—and that was very unlikely.

Church and McClure looked somewhat relieved. They were quite anxious to sail for the Pacific—nearly every junior in the Remove was—but they had sense enough to realise that everybody couldn't go.

"All right!" said Handforth, in a thick voice. "All right! We'll see about this, by George! All right! We'll see about this!"

"Dear fellow, can't you think of any other words?" asked Sir Montie politely.

Handforth, who apparently couldn't, attempted to wither us with a glance, and then stalked to the door. Church and McClure, grinning slightly, followed him. Handforth turned back for a moment.

"Just you wait!" he exclaimed darkly.

The door slammed, and we grinned at one another. Handforth's ominous threat had no effect upon us.

"Bogad! It's rather rotten for Handy, old boys," remarked Sir Montie. "I can't help feelin' sorry, you know. He's such a blunderin' ass, an' I dare say he means well. I suppose we couldn't make him the third guest?"

I shook my head.

"My dear old Montie, we want some peace on this trip, as the Bo'sun said a little while ago. Handforth's one of the best chaps in the world, but he always tries to ride the high horse. He doesn't know it himself, but it is so. Let's talk about something else."

The door opened abruptly, and Justin B. Farman appeared, looking very excited.

"Say, folks!" he began. "I guess I've butted in, though. Mebbe you ain't in the mood for visitors just now. Say, I'll just slide—"

"What's up, Farman?" I asked.

"Waal, that blamed idiot of a McClure has been blowin' hot-air," said the American boy. "I guess he was just pullin' my leg. Gee whiz! It couldn't be true—it's too darned good to be true!"

"No, it isn't, Farman," said the Bo'sun smilingly. "It's a pity McClure talked about it, because I was going to hunt you up myself. My dad's given us permission to invite three other fellows. I say, messmate, we should be ever so pleased if you'd come along with us."

Justin B. Farman stared.

"Gosh!" he gasped. "You mean it?"

"Honest Injun!"

"Say, I just can't let you know what I think!" he exclaimed in a low voice. "I'm sure knocked over, pardas! I guess this is just about the grandest thing that ever happened! Gee! Thanks—thanks—"

"That's all right," interjected the Bo'sun jovially. "You were going to stay here during the holidays, weren't you?"

"Sure!"

"Then all you've got to do is to pack your trunk and come along with us," I put in. "Mr. Alvington will send a cable to your people, I expect. Anyhow, you needn't worry about it."

Farman's face was red and his eyes were gleaming.

"I sure thought that galoot was blowin' gas!" he exclaimed. "By gum! This is goin' to be some holiday! I kinder hanker after the sea, an' if I ever try to thank you enough, Burton, I'll sure make a miserable failure of it. I just guess I won't try. But, say, you understand, don't you?"

"There's nothing to understand," grinned the Bo'sun. "You're one of the honoured guests, Farman. Yakama's coming, too."

"He's come!" murmured Sir Montie languidly.

Sessue Yakama had just appeared in the doorway. The little Japanese junior was smiling all over his face, but I could see that his eyes were gleaming with excitement. Behind him crowded a number of Removees.

"'Course it ain't true!" yelled Gilmith. "It's only one of McClure's fairy-tales. Yakama ain't going—'tain't likely!"

"What's this—a giddy invasion?" I asked politely.

"Really, my esteemed Bennett, I did not request these honourable fellows to accompany me to the beautiful study," said Yakama. "It is the matter of great regret that they should so far forget their excellent manners as to push me forcibly into this apartment—"

"Say, Jappy, I guess you'll just need to shout good an' plenty!" cried Farman enthusiastically. "It's true, my son!"

"Of course it's true," said the Bo'sun. "I wanted to do the thing properly, though. If you'll honour us, Yakama, we should like you to join our party. Of course, you needn't come unless you like. Souse me! You're a polite chap, and you might not care to refuse. Just you speak your mind shipmate."

Yakama's smile became more expansive.

"It is the overwhelming favour that you bestow upon my unworthy and preposterous person," he exclaimed. "It is the great wish of mine that I should indeed be your shipmate, Burton. I will speak the mind as you generously intimate, and express my tremendous and amazingly inadequate thankfulness. I am greatly pleased, Burton, to accept your beautiful invitation."

"Good!" said Burton. "That's settled, then!"

"And what about the third?" I asked, before Yakama could go on speaking—for if he was allowed his own way he would continue expressing his thanks for ten minutes on end. "We can't exactly decide about the third chap—"

A chorus of yells came from the doorway, but I shook my head.

"Sorry, old sons, but you ain't deserving enough!" I said. "It's got to be a deserving case."

"Say, Benny. I guess——"

Farman paused awkwardly.

"Well, guess away," I said, smiling at him.

"Say, I happened to be chattin' with De Valerie last week—long before this thing got around," said Farman. "I guess De Valerie is that same deserving case you just mentioned. He is, sure. It sort of looks as though his pop and mam are 'way out in Spain, or some doggone country like that. He's just got to hang around his home town sort of lonesome. Say, he was tellin' me how darned rotten it would be for him. De Valerie's the feller——"

"Hallo! Who's jawing about me?"

Cecil de Valerie of the Remove—known until recently as the Rotter—pushed his way through the crowd of excited fellows at the door and entered Study C. He was as elegant as ever, and looked carelessly interested.

"What do you say, Bo'sun?" I asked quickly.

"I'll put it to the vote," was Burton's prompt reply. "I vote 'Yes'!"

"Begad! Same here!"

We were unanimous, and De Valerie looked on wonderingly.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. "Where do I come in?"

"You've heard about this Pacific trip, I suppose?" asked the Bo'sun.

De Valerie grinned.

"I'm not quite deaf—what?" he retorted. "You lucky bounders!"

"Say, you're one o' them lucky bounders!" roared Farman, who couldn't keep his high spirits in check. "Say, yell! Yell like blazes, you hobo! I guess you're comin' right along with us!"

"If you feel so inclined," added the Bo'sun smilingly.

De Valerie understood in a second.

"You're—you're invitin' me?" he asked slowly.

"Yes."

"Thanks!" said De Valerie quietly. "I'll come with pleasure. I don't know why the deuce you've done it, though. If there's any fellow in the Ancient House who ought to be barred, Bo'sun, it's me! It's jolly good of you!"

There was tremendous feeling in De Valerie's tone—and I know why. As a matter of fact it was he who had actually helped the rascally Captain Jelks in the latter's design on the Bo'sun, months before. Since then, however, De Valerie had changed completely, and he was "white" to the backbone. At the same time, he fully appreciated the generosity of the Bo'sun's invitation. Burton had been the first to vote for De Valerie, and I myself was struck by the wonderfully good feeling which now existed between the one-time enemies.

De Valerie didn't say much, but he felt a lot. It was quite true about his people, and I knew that we had chosen the three

most deserving cases in the whole Ancient House.

"Well, that's done with!" I exclaimed, taking a deep breath. "Good! Everything's all ready now. There's no need to worry any longer."

The honoured guests had been chosen, and all these juniors, in consequence, were regarded with something like awe by the remainder of the Removites.

But I little realised what was to happen in the immediate future!

CHAPTER III.

A VISIT TO THE SWALLOW—AMAZING NEWCOMERS—A STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND.

IT was a half-holiday on the following day, and as soon as dinner was over I suggested that we should pay a visit to our future home—in other words, the schooner Swallow.

By "we" I mean the members of the Remove who would join the treasure-hunt party. So Sir Montie and Tommy and I got out our bicycles, the Bo'sun borrowed Griffiths', and De Valerie and Yakama and Farman got out theirs.

We started off in high spirits, much to the envy of the other fellows. I noticed that Handforth and Co. were hovering about, and saw them hurry to the bicycle-shed just as we were riding out of the Triangle.

"Those asses are going to follow us," I remarked. "Well, there's no law against them riding to Caistowe, and they'll be able to feast their eyes on the schooner. It's a silly thing to do, because they'll only feel more disappointed."

Sir Montie looked thoughtful.

"There's a queer glint in Handforth's eye, begad!" he observed. "I noticed it all the mornin', dear fellows. He looks like a chap who has made up his mind to do something desperate."

I grinned.

"Handy always looks like that when he's been diddled," I replied.

At the same time, I knew that there was something in Montie's remark. There certainly was a glint in Handforth's eye, and it was an unusual kind of glint, too. The silly ass seemed to be taking the thing to heart. He had set his mind upon voyaging to the Pacific, and even now I believed he had a sneaking idea that he would be able to manage the trick somehow. Of course, he was offside, and he would find that out finally when the Swallow sailed.

Many other fellows, too, had decided to cycle over to Caistowe that afternoon. The affair had aroused the interest of the entire junior school. The nearness of the holidays and the splendid weather had put everybody into good spirits.

The day was blazingly hot, the roads were dusty, and we took the journey easily. Under ordinary circumstances we should

have played cricket that afternoon, but cricket looked very small just now.

Sir Montie complained vigorously—or as vigorously as he could complain—about the dust. He even declared that the journey wasn't worth the candle, but regretted it almost at once. For Tommy Watson and the Bo'sun fell behind, and then shot past at full speed, kicking up clouds.

"Oh, begad! The horrid bounders!" gasped Tregellis-West.

"How does that suit you?" grinned Watson, as he circled round again.

"I have nothin' to say, Watson!" exclaimed Sir Montie frigidly.

Tommy grinned more than ever. When Sir Montie called him "Watson" it proved beyond question that he was severely displeased. And for some little time we rode on in silence.

Tregellis-West, however, could never remain cross with anybody for more than a few minutes, and by the time we got to Caistowe he was beaming as genially as ever. We dismounted from our machines at the jetty.

"By hokey! Doesn't she look fine?" said the Bo'sun admiringly.

We all looked out across the sparkling blue waters of the bay. The schooner lay there in the sunshine. She was a splendid craft, trim and neat, and as clean as a new pin.

Captain Burton was on board, and he knew that we were coming. Evidently he had seen us, for a boat put off at once and came hobbling towards the jetty. We waited, enjoying the cool breeze from the sea.

We found a grey-haired old sailor in charge of the boat, and we tumbled into it eagerly, and were soon sliding across the water to the schooner. Three hot and dusty youths appeared on the jetty, and I chuckled.

"Cheer up, Handy!" I called out. "No need for you to look so glum, you know. You'll have the pleasure of thinking about us while we're away!"

Church and McClure grinned, but Handforth wore a stony expression. They stood on the end of the jetty, watching us go out. I had an idea that Handforth meant to row over to the schooner himself, but before we reached the vessel he and his chums had disappeared.

"It's rather rotten for those chaps," remarked De Valerie thoughtfully. "I feel as though I don't deserve——"

"Souise me! Don't you feel like that any more!" exclaimed the Bo'sun, frowning. "We've got to be a merry party, and there's no question of deserving, anyhow. Hallo, dad!" he added jovially.

Captain Burton was standing on the poop, and he looked down at us genially as we came alongside. Two minutes later we were on board, with the white decks under our feet. We all looked round critically. The vessel was not new, but she was beautifully neat and clean.

"Ain't she just splendid?" said Farman enthusiastically.

"Oh, first-class!" remarked Watson. "Rather a pity she ain't a steamer, though. It'll take us a terrific time to get to the Pacific under sail, won't it?"

"Dear fellow, that'll be all the better," said Sir Montie serenely. "If we get becalmed we sha'n't arrive back until the middle of the term, begad! That'll be rather rippin'!"

We grinned, and greeted Captain Burton, who had been chatting with his son.

"Well, boys, how do you like the old hooker?" he asked smilingly. "I'm not a poor man, but I couldn't quite run to steam. A slap-up yacht costs a small fortune to run, lads, especially if the trip's a long one. The Swallow won't cost much in fuel, at all events!"

"She's a splendid craft, sir," I said promptly.

The skipper was quite right about the cost of a steam yacht. We were after treasure, of course, and if the captain's hopes were fulfilled, he would be very rich indeed. But, after all, it was a chance, and he would have been a foolish man if he had spent all his money on a steam-yacht. If the project failed, he would simply be beggared—for only millionaires or enormously rich people can afford to keep large steam-yachts going. By sailing to the Pacific in this schooner the captain was not risking much.

And, after all, she was a nice craft. The only possible drawback would be delays. Sailing ships are sometimes becalmed for weeks on end, and then it becomes monotonous. However, we didn't think of grumbling.

Captain Burton took us all over the vessel, and we were delighted with the quarters which had been set apart for our own use aft. The Bo'sun and Yakama and Farman and De Valerie decided to stay on board for tea, but Montie and Tommy and I took our departure after staying about an hour. We had arranged to talk over certain things with Nelson Lee—had been invited to tea by the guv'nor, in fact, and so we couldn't stay on board. But there was no reason why the others shouldn't.

We were rowed ashore, and found our bicycles on the jetty. An aged gentleman in a blue jersey was sitting upon a still more aged bollard, eyeing the scene in general with a somewhat watery eye. A blackened clay pipe stuck out of the corner of his mouth, and he touched his forelock respectfully.

"Just bin keepin' me eye on 'em, young gents," he said wheezily.

"This is a case for a collection," I remarked. "The first contribution, in fact. When the other chaps come ashore there'll be another donation, grandad!"

We contributed sixpence each, and the ancient gentleman gazed upon the coins with much approval, spat upon them thoughtfully, and transferred them into a mysterious pocket somewhere beneath his jersey.

"Real young gents, that's wot you are," he said genially.

"It's lolly cheap, begad!" said Sir Montie,

as we cycled off. "Bein' a young gent for sixpence ain't at all bad. The old fellow will reap a fine harvest if the other chaps make themselves young gents, too. I wonder if it'll all be dissipated in beer, dear boys?"

"There's no need to wonder about that, Montie," I replied. "Judging by his nose, he's quite an expert on all matters beery. We can take it fairly easy on the way home," I added. "And what do you think of the Swallow?"

"Oh, she's all right," said Watson. "But—but—"

"But you'd be better pleased if she had engines?" I suggested.

"Well, of course—"

"It couldn't be did, my son," I said. "I'd prefer a whacking great steam yacht myself. But we shall be all right if we get decent winds. And, besides, it'll be a glorious holiday."

We were all agreed upon that point. There wasn't the slightest question of being dissatisfied. If the schooner had been a dirty old hooker of the worst type we should have been delighted; as it was, we were still more delighted; if she had been a steam-yacht, we should have been in raptures.

So far as we knew at the moment, everything was in perfect trim for the start. But just then I received a bit of a jar.

We were cycling out of Caistowe. Except for the usual summer visitors, the place was deadly quiet. I happened to notice a man leaving a public-house in the distance—right down a small side-turning. He at once walked into a little alley, and I only saw him for a couple of ticks. But my heart jumped.

"Great Scott! Did you see that chap?" I asked huskily.

"What chap?"

"I wouldn't mind betting a quid that he was Jelks—Captain Jelks!" I exclaimed, in a low voice. "I'd know his walk anywhere!"

"Jelks—in Caistowe!" ejaculated Sir Montie. "Begad! Not—not really?"

"Oh, you're offside!" declared Watson.

"Well, I can't be sure, and it wouldn't do to go nosing about," I said; "but I don't often make mistakes like that. If it wasn't Jelks, it was somebody exactly like him. I wonder if there's any trouble brewing?"

The incident was somewhat worrying, and we continued our way thoughtfully. If Jelks was in Caistowe it certainly meant activity of some kind. But I told my chums that it wasn't worth concerning ourselves about; there was just a chance that I had been mistaken.

"The skipper's coming to see the guv'nor this evening, and we'll mention it to him," I said.

"You ass! He isn't coming!" said Watson. "Didn't he tell us that he'd wait until to-morrow?"

"Oh, yes! I'd forgotten that— Whoa! Near side!" I yelled.

A roar from behind us had warned us of the approach of a powerful motor-car, and I saw that it was roaring along at a terrifi-

cally reckless speed. Sir Montie groaned, thinking of the dust, but I grinned. I couldn't help remembering that I had driven the guv'nor's car at high speed on many occasions.

Just before the car roared past us I turned my head again. It was a rakish-looking racer—a two-seater, with an enormous bonnet, hinting at powerful engines beneath. It contained two men, but one of them was black. The driver lounged in his seat in the most careless attitude, and was attired in flannels.

Just that one glance was sufficient for me. I let out a yell which nearly caused Sir Montie to dive head-first into the ditch. It was a yell with all sorts of things mixed up in it—amazement, excitement, joy, and I don't know what else. But I realised, afterwards, that it was blood-curdling.

"Good gracious!" gasped Tregellis-West. "Is—is—"

"Stop!" I shrieked. "Hi! Hi!"

The car shot by, but the driver turned his head, and I saw a cheerful grin overspread his features before the dust-cloud swallowed it up. The roar of the engine stopped abruptly, brakes shrieked, and the powerful racer came to a standstill a hundred yards further on.

"My only aunt!" gasped Watson. "Are you dotty, Benny?"

"I believe I am!" I roared.

I shot forward, and my chums followed in wondering amazement. And when we arrived at the car I knew that I hadn't been dreaming. For there, sitting in the driving-seat, carelessly lighting a cigarette, was the one and only Lord Dorrimore! And beside him, by all that was miraculous, sat Umlosi!

"How goes it, Nipper?" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore genially. "Still lookin' as bright an' gay as ever— By George! I mustn't call you Nipper, must I? You're Thompson, ain't you, or—"

"Bennett!" I yelled joyously. "Great Scott! I never expected to see you, Dorrie!"

"Which only shows that you mustn't be surprised at anything that happens in this world," said Lord Dorrimore placidly. "And here's the cheerful young baronet, too. And Sherlock Holmes, by all that's wonderful!"

We stood in the road breathlessly.

"Sherlock Holmes!" I gasped.

"That's his name, isn't it?" said Lord Dorrimore, pointing his finger at Tommy. "Or is it Watson? I forget. Names are a shockin' bore."

"The same old Dorrie!" I chuckled. "And Umlosi, too! Oh, I know I shall wake up in two minutes. I thought Umlosi was fighting battles out in East Africa!"

The black giant in the car smiled broadly. "Wau! It is the agile Manzie!" exclaimed Umlosi, displaying a large number of pearly-white teeth. "Thou hast grown but little, O son of the wondrous Umtagati! But my eyes see a vast change in other respects. Thou art clothed in a strange

fashion, Manzie. It appears to me that thy coat is singularly brief——"

Lord Dorrimore chuckled.

"By gad, that's good!" he grinned. "As a matter of fact, it is brief, young 'un. Etons always were the bane of my existence. They're Etons, you chunk of coal!"

"Wau! That is a strange word, indeed, to apply to body coverings!" exclaimed Umlosi. "How comes it that clothing can be eaten——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" I roared. "It's no good trying to explain, Umlosi, but it's just the name of 'em. Rats to 'em! I want to know what you chaps are doing down here?"

"My dear burglar-tracker, we've come for you and your guv'nor," explained Dorrie, leaning back comfortably. "Lemme see, these cheerful youths know all about it, don't they? I hope to goodness I ain't puttin' my foot in it, Nipper? Didn't I see your pals at Tregellis Castle?"

"Of course they know all about it," I replied. "But they're too astonished to speak."

"Begad, it's the truth!" said Sir Montie. "I haven't seen you since Christmas-time, Lord Dorrimore. This is amazin'ly splendid—it is, really. We're all delighted to see you, an' I'm sure we shall be still more delighted if you'll introduce us to your friend in the bathin' costume!"

The introduction was informal, and Umlosi was soon in possession of the fact that Sir Montie and Tommy were particular friends of mine. That was quite sufficient for the old rascal.

"I am satisfied, O nimble Manzie," he exclaimed. "Is it for me to raise questions? Since these stalwart youths are thy friends, they are mine, too."

"I'm honoured, I'm sure," murmured Sir Montie politely.

"Thou art a noble one, is it not so?" asked Umlosi. "That is as it should be, since thou hast a noble face. But I, too, am of great birth. For am I not the King of the Kutanas?"

"Nobody's questionin' it, old man!" said Dorrie. "You needn't think we're goin' to make you out to be a common or garden nigger. You're black, but you're white enough inside. But ain't we blockin' up the road?"

A minute later Montie and Tommy and I had mounted our bicycles and were cycling in advance of Lord Dorrimore's car, Sir Montie politely, but firmly, refusing to be choked. In consequence Dorrie was compelled to proceed at a very sedate pace.

I was altogether bewildered, and my mind was in a chaotic state. These visitors were the last people in the world I had expected to see at St. Frank's. As Sir Montie had said, Umlosi was attired in a costume which came precious near to resembling a bathing-suit. His clothing was of white drill and fitted him atrociously. As Dorrie afterwards explained, the tailor had made a miscalculation in cutting—not a very surprising fact, considering Umlosi's giant size. And the King

of the Kutanas had refused to wait while alterations were performed.

The presence of Lord Dorrimore was surprising enough, but Umlosi fairly took my breath away. They were old friends, of course. Nelson Lee and I had known them for a long while, and we had all passed through many adventures together. Since our arrival at St. Frank's, however, we had only seen Dorrie once—and that had been during the Christmas holidays at Tregellis Castle. This accounted for the fact that his lordship was known to Sir Montie and Tommy.

Lord Dorrimore was about the most careless man I had ever known. He happened to be a millionaire, and he spent the major portion of his life in roaming about the wild quarters of the earth. If he wasn't in the heart of Africa he was busily courting death in Central Papua or some other outlandish place of the same sort. Strangely enough, he survived all fevers and other forms of death, and turned up smiling every time.

His favourite haunt was the great African continent, and he and Umlosi were great pals. Umlosi was no ordinary black; when I had first met him he had been a great chief of the Kutanas. But since then he had succeeded to the throne of Kutaland—and didn't exactly like it. For he was as much a roamer as Dorrie himself, and was never really happy unless he was accompanying his lordship on some hair-raising adventure into the wilds.

It was all the more surprising, therefore, that the two should be careering over the peaceful Sussex countryside. I had never dreamed of seeing Lord Dorrimore now, and I was fairly aghast at the sight of Umlosi. He had been to England once before, and had expressed great disgust at the climate and the smoke and the other drawbacks of London.

I didn't attempt to guess at any explanation, but waited until it pleased Lord Dorrimore to tell us the facts. I realised that the St. Frank's juniors would be more excited than ever, and felt glad that Umlosi was not sensitive, for some of the juniors, without a doubt, would make fun of him. If so, he would take it all in good part.

And, my word, there was a sensation, too!

The Triangle was fairly deserted when we rode in, but before Lord Dorrimore's car had reached the Ancient House steps quite a crowd of fellows were gathering, to say nothing of a number of excited fags.

"Great pip!" yelled Owen major. "Look what the wind's blown in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who's your inky pal, Bennett?" shouted Gulliver derisively.

Lord Dorrimore stopped the engine, and leisurely climbed out of the driving-seat, his cigarette still between his lips. He eyed the crowd severely and waved his hand.

"Little boys should be seen and not heard," he observed. "Run away and play, my good little men. We're visitors. Don't you know better than to be rude to visitors? Who's that chap with the swollen nose?"

Dorrie nodded accusingly at Gulliver, and that youth turned red. His nose wasn't actually swollen at all—it was naturally large, and a sore point with him. Dorrie was certainly personal, but that was just his way.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You leave my nose alone!" growled Gulliver savagely. "It ain't any business of yours, anyhow!"

"I've been told off!" said Lord Dorrimore frankly. "As a matter of fact, it is no business of mine, but one rude remark deserves another. My friend here isn't at all inky, I assure you—any more than your nose is swollen."

"Serve you right, Gully!" yelled Owen major.

Albert Gulliver scowled.

"Of course, if he's Bennett's pal, that explains it!" he sneered. "Some bloated profiteer, I expect! Like his cheek, coming here with his giddy nigger minstrel! Yah! Outsiders!"

Dorrimore looked pained.

"By gad, the boy's rude—actually rude!" he exclaimed. "Umlosi, old son, you might take that cheerful youth and duck him in the fountain. I'd do it myself, but it's too much of a bore."

"Wau! It shall be done, N'Kose!" rumbled Umlosi.

"Don't—don't you touch me!" gasped Gulliver, starting back. "You—you beastly black rotter——"

"Thou hast offered the deadly insult to N'Kose, my father!" said Umlosi, in a terrible voice.

"Your—your father!" roared Griffith. "Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mayhap thou seest cause for merriment, O sons of the great White King!" went on Umlosi. "It is well. I am permitted to know thy feelings, and shall act accordingly. Nay, stay where thou art!" he added, as Gulliver began to edge away. "Wau! Wouldst thou flee?"

Gulliver, as a matter of fact, was running across the Triangle for all he was worth. I looked on in some alarm, for I knew that Umlosi could run like a hare. He gave chase immediately, and a howl of laughter went up. Umlosi was an extraordinary figure, and the manner in which he overhauled the thoroughly frightened Gulliver was a scream.

Gulliver found himself caught from behind. He was yanked up into the air as though he had been a feather.

"Lemme down—lemme down!" he shrieked.

"Thou shalt be released, little one, when N'Kose, my master, commands that it shall be so," said Umlosi. "I have orders to duck thee into the fountain—although my wits are sorely strained to grasp the meaning of those strange words. Ah! But what is this? Do I not see water, and does not duck mean dip?"

He carried the unfortunate Gulliver over to the fountain and held him over the water, utterly helpless. Everybody was waiting to hear the splash. But Umlosi suddenly broke

into a hearty laugh, showing all his perfect teeth. He set Gulliver down on the ground and held him.

"Thinkest thou that I would harm thee, little one?" he asked genially. "Nay, I am a visitor and thou art one of my hosts. Thou hast had a fright, and it is sufficient. Go thou, and utter not the words of cheek again!"

Gulliver staggered away and vanished completely. The majority of the fellows were greatly disappointed, for Gulliver was a rotter, and to see him ducked into the fountain would have been a sheer pleasure.

"I thought old Umlosi wouldn't do anything rash," I grinned. "Now then, you chaps! Don't you know who these gentlemen are? One's a lord, and the other's a king!"

"Oh!"

The juniors uttered a general gasp.

"My good old Bennett, you shouldn't spring it on 'em like that," protested Dorrie. "It's too much of a shock all at once. I'm a mere nobody, of course—just a common or garden sort of fellow. But this noble by my side is His Majesty, the King of Kutaland. He's a heap big pot!"

The juniors were duly impressed and excited. They soon learned that the "common or garden fellow" was the Rt. Hon. Lord Dorrimore. And there was considerable animation in the Ancient House.

After much trouble I succeeded in marshalling the visitors along the corridor to Nelson Lee's study. Nelson Lee wasn't there—of course, it would happen like that!—but fortunately he came along a minute later, and the passage cleared as though by magic.

"Visitors, sir!" I exclaimed cheerfully.

"Indeed, Bennett?" said the gov'nor. "I was wondering— Well, upon my soul! Dorrie, by all that's wonderful!"

CHAPTER IV.

DORRIE IS DISAPPOINTED—A STUNNING IDEA—
ANOTHER VISIT TO CAISTOWE.

LORD DORRIMORE grinned.

"I daresay you want to know what it all means—why we've come?" he asked languidly. "But, my dear old Lee, I couldn't explain anythin' just now—I'm choked with dust an' dyin' for some tea."

"We'll have some at once," smiled Nelson Lee as he rang the bell.

Greetings were over, and Dorrie and Umlosi were lounging in the gov'nor's best chairs, Sir Montie and Tommy and I squatted near the window, and Nelson Lee sat in his swivel desk chair. He had been much surprised to see the visitors, and was undoubtedly delighted.

"It is good to see thee once again, O great Umtagati!" exclaimed Umlosi. "Dost thou remember the exciting times we had in Kutaland? Dost thou remember our wondrous trip over the sands that stretched into Eternity? Wau! I like not the desert, Umtagati. I would prefer even this strange land of thine own."



Several huddled forms lay in the derelict boat; and Handforth took a deep breath.

"Dead," he exclaimed, "every one of them!"—(See page 20.)

"I admire your comparison, old man," chuckled Nelson Lee. "England is certainly better than the desert! Oh, Tubbs, will you please tell Mrs. Poulter to send tea at once."

"Yes, sir," said Tubbs, the page-boy, who had just appeared. "For how many, sir?"

"Oh, six, Tubbs—six, of course."

Tubbs went off cheerfully. He had only returned to his old post that morning, having been dismissed by the tyrannous Mr. Hunter. Nelson Lee, of course, had reinstated him without a minute's delay, greatly to the delight of Master Tubbs.

Tea was served almost at once, and the meal proved most entertaining. My chums and myself were allowed to remain, of course, and we appreciated the honour. It was something very special to take tea with the Housemaster in his own apartment.

Lord Dorrimore refrained from mentioning anything connected with the object of his visit. And so we were compelled to wait until afterwards before our curiosity was satisfied.

Tea had been rather late, to begin with, and it was a long, easy meal. After it had been cleared away Dorrie and the guv'nor smoked cigars and talked over old times. Meanwhile Sir Montie and Tommy and I waited impatiently.

"Oh, he's only just popped down for an hour or two," remarked Watson privately. "It's nothing to do with us, anyhow. I vote we buzz off."

"Dorrie wouldn't come all the way from London just to pay an afternoon call," I said, shaking my head. "There's something doing, my sons. I don't know what it is, of course——"

I was suddenly interrupted by a cry of dismay from Dorrie.

"Rot!" he exclaimed. "Don't be an ass, Lee!"

"My dear man, it's the truth," chuckled Nelson Lee.

"But it can't be!" protested Dorrie. "Did I actually understand you to say that you are goin' off to the Pacific next week?"

"Yes."

"With Nipper?"

"Exactly!"

"An' in a blessed old schooner?"

"Of course!" laughed Nelson Lee. "Why, what's wrong?"

"Everythin's wrong!" snapped Lord Dorrimore. "You're not goin', of course. I sha'n't let you go, by gad! I'll chain you up—I'll trump up a charge against you an' have you clapped into chokey for a week—until that bally old hooker has sailed!"

"Why, what's the matter over here?" I asked, crossing the room.

"Matter enough!" growled Dorrie. "This pig-headed guv'nor of yours, Nipper, is actually suggestin' that he and you are going off on some fool trip to the Pacific Islands!"

"Well, it's true!" I grinned. "Montie and Tommy are coming, too."

Lord Dorrimore snorted.

"Do you hear that, Umlosi?" he demanded warmly.

"It is ill, N'Kose," rumbled the black

giant. "My ears have heard all that has passed between Umtagati and thee, and I am sorely troubled. I know not the Pacific, but I remember that thou hast referred to it. Is it not a wondrous stretch of the blue waters far to the westward?"

"Something like that," said Dorrie. "And these idiots are going there!"

"Wau! It is indeed strange," exclaimed Umlosi.

"Strange!" echoed his lordship. "It's appallin'. They're not going!"

"My dear man, we are going!" protested Nelson Lee. "It is all arranged, right down to the last detail. But why are you so troubled? What does it matter to you?"

Lord Dorrimore looked utterly dejected.

"What does it matter?" he repeated. "Oh, nothin'—nothin' at all! I don't count; I'm nobody! Don't mind me at all!"

"It's not like you to talk so bitterly——"

"I'm not bitter—I'm thundering wild!" said Dorrie. "Here I've been arrangin' my little pet ideas, an' I come here to find that you're goin' off on some bally wild-goose chase to the Pacific. I meant to take pity on you, you ruffians, an' now I find that I'm too late. It's rotten—that's what it is, by gad!"

"I'm sorry——" began the guv'nor.

"Oh, rot! You ain't sorry at all," said Dorrimore gruffly. "I suppose you know that I've got a yacht? She's called the Adventure, and she's a spankin' fine boat. My idea was a trip in the Mediterranean, or somewhere like that. I was goin' to invite the whole crowd of you. Oh, but what's the good of talkin'? It's off now, of course."

Nelson Lee looked concerned, and I did, too. We couldn't go with Dorrie, because our arrangements were all cut and dried. But I warmed when I realised that he had been thinking of us; he knew how we were situated, and he had decided to give us a ripping holiday on his magnificent steam yacht—Dorrie being a millionaire. His disappointment was tremendous.

"Miss Dare will be cut up, too," he grunted. "She——"

"Miss Dare?" I gasped. "Do—do you mean Miss Eilcen, Dorrie?"

"Of course I do, you young ass!"

"Is—she is going on this trip?"

"It's all settled," said his lordship glumly. "She an' her aunt have been especially invited, an' they were overjoyed. We were goin' to be a happy party together. And now—— By gad, it's rotten, Lee! Miss Dare's fiancé, Captain Masters, of the Royal Air Force, has been sent to America on some military business, and he'll be away for a couple of months. Miss Dare was delighted——"

"Delighted!" I gasped.

Dorrimore grinned faintly.

"Not because Masters went away, you young fathead!" he explained. "She was cut up about that, of course. She was delighted to accept my invitation, and Aunt Esther was in raptures. They were lookin'

forward to a holiday all together—the crowd of us. But now it's off!"

"Oh, I say!" I exclaimed in dismay.

Nelson Lee gave me an expressive glance. He, too, would have liked to accept Dorrie's invitation, but it was impossible. We were already "booked." It never rains but it pours, as the saying goes, and it was certainly pouring now. We had never dreamed of another voyage.

"I appreciate your kindness, Dorrie—we all do!" said the gov'nor gently.

"Kindness be hanged!"

"Kindness," repeated Leo firmly. "But you'll realise that it's impossible, old man. We can't disappoint Captain Burton now; indeed, I should not think of mentioning this matter to him. It would only upset him—for his vessel is merely a sailing schooner."

"It wouldn't matter if it was a bath-tub, so long as we were all together," said Dorrie gloomily. "But it's no good jawin'. We'll change the subject. You do some talkin', Umlosi."

"It is not in my heart to talk, my father," said Umlosi, shaking his head. "I am troubled sorely. It is ill, indeed. That which thou callest our 'luck' has deserted us shamefully. Wau! I am sad!"

There was rather an awkward silence. Dorrie, being a gentleman to the finger-tips, couldn't butt in. He was forced to retire as gracefully as possible. He had come too late—and that's all there was in it.

As for myself, I was so chagrined that I didn't know what to say. Eileen Dare was going on the trip! All my good spirits vanished when I realised what I should be missing. Eileen Dare was more than a friend; she had helped the gov'nor in dozens of detective cases—she was, indeed, a detective of the most amazing cleverness. And at the same time Eileen was about the sweetest and prettiest girl in the whole world. I'd often told the gov'nor that Captain Masters was a terrifically lucky boulder.

And, if it hadn't been for the Pacific trip, we should have gone for a long cruise with Eileen and Aunt Esther and Dorrie and Umlosi! Oh, I felt awful. I even felt ungrateful to Captain Burton—and that was wrong of me.

Sir Montie and Tommy were rather glum, too. The situation was awkward for us, and it was awkward for Dorrie. And there didn't seem to be any way of altering it, either.

I excused myself and left the study, my chums following me. It was growing dusk now, and the corridors were gloomy. As it happened, we ran into Tom Burton in the lobby. He and the others had just got back from the schooner.

"Souise me!" he ejaculated. "What's wrong, messmates?"

"Everything!" I grunted. "Come along to Study C!"

He followed us wonderingly, and just before we arrived I gave a bit of a gasp. An idea had come into my head—a solution

of the whole problem—and I was more glad than ever that Burton was with us.

Within Study C I briefly told the Bo'sun of Lord Dorrimore's plans. He listened with concern.

"Of course, we can't go—we shouldn't dream of such a thing," I concluded. "We're off to the Pacific, Bo'sun—thanks to your pater's generosity. But, my hat! I should like Dorrie and Umlosi and Miss Eileen and her aunt to come, too! If they could only be with us, everything would be absolutely top-hole!"

The Bo'sun nodded thoughtfully.

"By hokey! I see what you mean," he exclaimed. "But there ain't room, Benny. That's the trouble. And the Swallow's only a small schooner—she'll seem a rotten little craft after a spankin' steam-yacht!"

"Begad! That's nothin'," put in Sir Montie. "Lord Dorrimore said that it wouldn't matter if she was a bath-tub!"

"The fact is," I went on, "Dorrie's a sensitive chap. He'd rather go to prison than butt in where he isn't wanted. He can't invite himself to come with us, can he? But supposing we put it to your dad, Bo'sun? Supposing we rushed over to Cais-towe at once on our bikes——"

"Shiver my mainmast!" gasped the Bo'sun. "That's a splendid idea. I haven't seen the people, but I know they're all serene, Benny; they must be if they're friends of yours."

"But, mind, Dorrie mustn't know a word of it," I said excitedly. "If he found out that I had asked Captain Burton to proffer an invitation, why, he'd skin me in two seconds! It'll be as easy as falling off a form, if we only arrange it right. We'll bring your pater back with us, introduce him to Dorrie, and then the skipper can get busy with his invitation."

"My only aunt!" breathed Watson. "I believe it'll work!"

"It's got to work!" I declared grimly.

"But—but——"

"But what?" I asked.

"There ain't room, Benny!" protested Tom Burton. "Don't think I'm trying to make difficulties, because I'm not. But how can we accommodate a couple of ladies? And there's Lord Dorrimore, too——"

"It'll simply mean a little arrangement—that's all," I interrupted briskly. "We chaps can sleep for'ard, if necessary, and leave the state-rooms for Miss Eileen and her aunt. And, besides, with some match-boarding and some carpenters working overtime, one of the holds could be converted into cabins for us. Anyhow, let's put the thing to Captain Burton at once."

"Good!" said the Bo'sun heartily. "We'll sail at once!"

We were all filled with great enthusiasm, and we "sailed" off on our bicycles without a moment's delay—and without letting Nelson Lee see that we had gone. He would certainly have smelt a rat if he had witnessed our departure.

By hook or by crook I meant to gain my end.

But, at that hour, I wasn't aware that Fate was to decide matters in her own peculiar way—and Fate, in this instance, took the shape of Captain Ebenezer Jelks!

CHAPTER V.

AN ASTOUNDING SURPRISE—PERIL AND ADVENTURE—A DISASTER.

CAISTOWE was in darkness when we arrived.

The air was heavy and still, and a thunderstorm was travelling about not far off, although it wasn't likely to come our way. It had caused the sky to be clouded. We were perspiring freely after our brisk ride, and noted with satisfaction that two or three boats were lying near the jetty.

Nobody was near them, and we didn't worry ourselves about the question of ownership. We just tumbled into one, and commenced pulling over towards the Swallow as rapidly as we could.

The schooner was nearly in darkness, only her riding lights twinkling. So far as I could see, there was nobody in the cabin, and I thought it most probable that the entire crew was ashore. Captain Burton was on board, and he was an easy-going shipmaster. We should doubtless find him quite alone.

During the ride I had been thinking over our scheme. I couldn't see a flaw anywhere. Naturally, a cruise in an old sailing schooner was not so alluring as a cruise in a luxurious steam-yacht. At the same time, Dorrie would jump at the chance—I knew it. And it would certainly be a bit of a novelty for him.

We arrived at the schooner and quietly climbed on deck. Perhaps it was because we were very thoughtful, or because we didn't feel like talking. At all events, we boarded the Swallow silently.

The deck was deserted, but a light gleamed upwards from the cabin skylight. We had to pass this in order to reach the companion-way. It was slightly open, owing to the closeness of the air, and I glanced down.

Exactly two seconds later I clapped my hand over the Bo'sun's mouth. He had been in the act of sending out a lusty hail, but only succeeded in giving a weak gasp.

"Sssh!" I hissed urgently.

"What the——"

Sir Montie only breathed the words, but paused abruptly. He and the others could see that I was quivering with excitement and that my face was flushed.

I waved my hand, and my chums crept nearer. While they were doing so I realised how fortunate it was that we had not made any noise. Hardly daring to breathe, we gazed down into the cabin.

And there sat Captain Burton. There was nothing very startling in this, but he was bound to his chair with steel cords, and standing beside him were Captain Jelks and Mr. Bill Larson!

The unexpectedness of the thing was staggering.

The Bo'sun's father had been attacked—

made a prisoner on his own ship! I knew that I hadn't been mistaken during the afternoon—it was Jelks I had seen. But I had never imagined for a second that the scoundrel would go to such lengths as this.

The crew was ashore, and Jelks had taken advantage of the fact. He hadn't reckoned upon our arrival! And that was going to make a big difference.

All our original thoughts had vanished; we only wanted to rescue the skipper from these daring ruffians. And as we peeped down Jelks commenced speaking. His tone was eloquent of satisfaction and triumph.

"This 'ere is wot comes of bein' unreasonable, Cap'n Burton," he said, lighting a cigar. "I ain't the chap to do no acts of violence—they ain't my character. 'Ave you ever knowed me to be violent, Bill?"

"Never!" declared Mr. Larson. "Well, 'ardly ever," he added reflectively.

"That bein' so, I ain't goin' to do no 'aria to ye," went on Jelks. "You can just sit there till you're rescued. Mehbe that'll be a hour, or mehbe that'll be two or three hours. Any'ow, me an' Bill will 'ave time to git away. I'm sure we're much obliged to yer—you've been horstopitality itself!"

Captain Burton could make no reply, owing to the simple reason that he was gagged. But his expression was deadly, and Jelks and Larson grinned with great satisfaction. Tom Burton grabbed my arm.

"Let's go for 'em!" he gasped in a quivering voice. "Souuse me! We can do t—there's four of us."

"Begad, rather!"

"Come on!" I hissed. "All together!"

We were half dotty with excitement, and rushed to the companion-way, tumbled down in a bunch, and burst violently into the cabin.

"Why, wot—— Well, I'm busted!" gasped Captain Jelks.

"You—you rotter!" roared the Bo'sun.

He was a big chap, and he simply hurled himself at Jelks with all his weight and strength. Tommy Watson assisted, and the rascally skipper went down upon his back with a thud which made the deck-planks quiver.

Sir Montie and I tackled Mr. Larson, who was really the more powerful of the two. And our rush was also violent. Larson caught me a terrific swipe on the side of the head, but I didn't go down. He went down, instead, and his fall was even more violent than Jelks's had been.

"You—you young varmint!" raved Jelks hoarsely.

"Got 'em!" panted the Bo'sun. "All right, dad! Just wait until we've roped up these scoundrels, and then we'll set you free. They'll be in prison by the end of another hour!"

"Hi!" bellowed Captain Jelks madly.

"Help, you lubbers—help!"

"Help!" echoed Larson violently.

I grinned.

"Trying to make us believe that somebody else is aboard, eh?" I said breathlessly.

"That trick won't work——"

"You wait till I cop you alone!" snarled Jelks. "By ginger! I've met you afore, an' I'll meet you agin, too! I'll 'arf skin you for this job when I get the chance!"

"You'll never get it!" I exclaimed calmly.

"I—"

"Look out!" roared Tommy Watson suddenly.

At that moment a loud clatter sounded from the direction of the companion-way, and almost before I could turn my head two rough, berry-looking men in jerseys charged into the cabin. They were loungers of Calis-towe—good-for-nothing pub-haunters, evidently in Jelks's pay.

"Oh, Great Scott!" I gasped.

It hadn't been a trick, after all. The two men must have been sitting in a boat at the stern, or had been in the fo'c's'le. Anyhow, we hadn't seen them when we had boarded the schooner. They had heard the frantic yells of Jelks and Larson.

"Grab 'old 'o these young cubs!" snarled Jelks.

I felt myself grasped from behind. I couldn't turn without releasing my grip of Mr. Larson. As a result, I was pulled back forcibly, almost helpless in the grip of the powerful ruffian.

This left Sir Montie tackling Larson by himself, and, of course, the thing was impossible. The same fate befell the Bo'sun and Watson. Within three minutes, in fact, the tables were turned and we were prisoners. Four men against four boys can't exactly be called even odds.

"Oh! This is awful!" stormed the Bo'sun, glaring round. "By hokey! Somebody's going to pay for this—"

"Stow your lip!" rasped out Jelks harshly.

"It's no good, Bo'sun," I put in. "We can't do anything against the four of 'em. Better say as little as possible."

"It's frightfully rotten, Benny," murmured Sir Montie. "I thought we were gettin' on so well, too. What's goin' to happen now? There's no tellin' what shockin' tricks these scoundrels will get up to."

"And over the rope, Bill," snapped Captain Jelks.

A coil of rope was picked up from a locker, and three minutes later Tommy Watson was bound hand and foot. He sat on the locker dazedly. Jelks, thus released, lent the others a hand, and the task of stringing us all up was accomplished in record time. Soon we were all sitting on the locker, side by side.

"See wot you git from interferin'!" sneered Jelks, who had recovered his good humour. "As it 'appens, it don't matter a jot. You'll just be treated the same as we're goin' to treat Cap'n Burton."

"Help!" roared the Bo'sun, with all the power of his lungs. "Help—help!"

Captain Jelks snapped out an oath.

"Silence that young brat!" he snarled.

Mr. Larson clapped a gnarled, dirty hand over the Bo'sun's mouth. The night was still, and Tom Burton's cry might easily

have been heard by someone on the jetty, for sounds carry far over the water.

But he didn't shout out any more, and we were not given the opportunity. Thick cloths were tied round our heads, serving as effective gags.

"That's better," panted Jelks. "You go up on deck, my men, an' see if you can see anythin' movin' from the jetty."

The two men went up, but one of them soon called down through the skylight that everything was quiet. Jelks smiled grimly, and stood eyeing us with satisfaction. He suddenly burst into a laugh.

"Sailin' next week, are yer?" he jeered. "Not in the Swallow, yer ain't. If I wasn't a kind-hearted man, I'd put you out of action, but I ain't goin' to do that. I'm just goin' to— Well, I reckon you'll find out afore long wot I'm a-goin' to do!"

Jelks left the cabin, but returned two or three minutes later with the other men.

"The boys fust," said Jelks. "You needn't 'andle 'em gently, neither!"

We were lugged up the companion stairs, dragged across the deck, and hoisted overboard. Just for a second I had a horrible feeling that we were being cast into the sea; but I realised almost at once that Jelks wouldn't be so mad as that.

Actually, we were flung into our own boat. The oars were missing, and there was nobody else in charge. Almost immediately afterwards Captain Burton himself was dropped down in amongst us.

"Quite a happy little party," said Jelks, leaning over the side. "The tide's on the ebb, so I reckon you'll drift out a bit. Well, you won't come to no 'arm, and the Calis-towe fishin'-boats'll sight you in the mornin'."

Our boat was pushed off into the darkness, and it drifted away from the Swallow. I knew now what the idea was. We had been cast into this boat, helpless and without oars, and we should drift about aimlessly throughout the night.

It was a rascally business, but we could do nothing. Being gagged was the worst feature of all, for otherwise we might have yelled in unison, and attention would have been attracted. But our gags were secure, and although I felt certain that I could free myself ultimately, by that time we should have drifted far out of earshot of the shore.

We lay huddled in the boat, and the schooner became merged into the blackness of the night. We were drifting almost parallel with the shore at present, and the schooner was already thirty or forty fathoms away.

"Boys—boys!"

I started. The voice was thick and soft, and I suddenly realised that Captain Burton was speaking. I couldn't reply, but I gave a grunt.

"I have been working this infernal cloth, but I can't shift it," came the skipper's thick voice. "But I can just manage to mumble. It loosened, and I can work my jaws."

An extra vigorous grunt came from the Bo'sun.

"Yes, son, I know how you feel," mumbled Captain Burton. "You did your best, but they were too many for you. That scoundrel! He's got the plan, boys—he's managed to steal the plan of the treasure island!"

We were terribly dismayed.

"It's only a copy of the original, but that's no consolation," went on the skipper. "I just happened to be examining it and studying it in the cabin when they crept aboard like ghosts. It's a disaster, boys!"

There was a kind of a break in the captain's voice, and I could easily imagine his feelings. Jelks had got the plan! No wonder he was triumphant—no wonder he had acted so drastically!

Just when we had been congratulating ourselves that everything was O.K., too! And why had Jelks cast us adrift? Why hadn't he left us on board? The crew wouldn't be back for hours yet. The move was significant, and I even had a suspicion that Jelks meant to take possession of the schooner.

Yet I couldn't quite see how this could be done; and our own position was quite serious enough without worrying about anything else. But, although we didn't know it at the moment, there were others active on this particular night.

CHAPTER VI.

HANDFORTH AND CO. ARE USEFUL—MORE EXCITEMENT—AND ANOTHER DISASTER.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH caught his breath in quickly.

"Looks a bit fishy, my sons," he said. "Jolly fishy, in fact!"

Church and McClure grunted. They couldn't see anything particularly fishy in it themselves. The trio had been chatting together against the wall of the gymnasium in the Triangle.

Handforth, as usual, had been doing most of the chatting. And while engaged in this occupation he had caught sight of four forms leaving the Ancient House. They belonged to the Bo'sun, Tregellis-West, Watson, and myself. We didn't know that Handforth and Co. were watching us, and were quite innocent in intention.

As I have already described, we fetched our bicycles, and hurried off to Caistowe at top speed. And Handforth, to use his own term, considered that our movements were "jolly fishy."

"Didn't you notice how they were hurrying?" said Handforth. "And didn't you twig how excited they were?"

"Oh, rot!" snapped McClure. "There's no law against their hurrying, I suppose? And ain't it likely that they'd be excited? I wish you'd show some sense, Handy. Blast if you ain't trying to make a mystery out of nothing!"

Handforth glared.

"You chaps seem to be growling and

grumbling all the giddy time!" he snorted. "I never knew such wet blankets! If you want to know what I'm going to do, I mean to get out my jigger and follow those bounders to Caistowe—that's where they've gone, I'll bet a quid!"

"You're dotty!" snapped Church. "I'm not going, anyhow!"

"Oh, ain't you?" said Handforth threateningly. "Do you see this?" he added, thrusting a huge fist into his chum's face. "If you don't come with me, Walter Church, you'll get this fist in your optic!"

Church shifted uneasily.

"I ain't afraid of your fist, if it comes to that," he said. "But I suppose we'd better humour you. If we let you go by yourself, there's no telling what silly rot you'll get up to!"

At any other time, possibly, Handforth would have resented this candid speech on Church's part; but now he nodded briskly.

"Come on, then!" he exclaimed.

They hurried across to the bicycle-shed, and Church and McClure were feeling decidedly fed-up. They had been over to Caistowe once that day, and they didn't see why they should waste their time in going again. But when Handforth fairly got started, there was no telling when he would stop.

The great Edward Oswald would not have taken it as a compliment, perhaps, if he had known that Church and McClure regarded him, in their own private opinion, very much as an asylum keeper regards his patient. They felt responsible for him, in a sort of way, and couldn't dream of letting him go to Caistowe alone.

Church and McClure knew that argument would be useless. The only thing was to go, and get it over. And so they cycled off with their redoubtable leader, grumpy, but resigned.

"Looks like a thunderstorm!" growled McClure, as they whizzed through Bellton.

"Rats! It won't come over this way," panted Handforth, who was pedalling hard. "We ought to have started before, you know; those fatheads have got a long way ahead. We shall have to catch 'em up!"

Church and McClure, although not in the mood for hard riding, kept up with Handforth admirably. They didn't wish to give him the chance of declaring that they had failed him at a critical moment.

And so the three miles to Caistowe were accomplished swiftly.

"Not a sign of 'em!" panted Church, as they entered the little sea-coast town. "I'll bet they haven't come here at all. It's a wild-goose chase, Handy. You always were so jolly impulsive!"

Handforth didn't reply, but led the way down to the front, where the waves were breaking gently upon the smooth sands. The jetty was in darkness, but four bicycles were seen leaning against the railings.

"There you are!" exclaimed Handforth. "what did I tell you? They can't have been here long, though. Can you spot a boat going out?"

The three of them stared across the dark water in the direction of the motionless schooner. Nothing was to be seen, and all was quiet. Caistowe seemed to be three-parts asleep already, though the hour was not late.

"Well, I'm going to squat here for a bit," declared Church, taking his seat upon a bollard. "I don't feel up to doing that journey back until I've had a rest. I suppose you're satisfied now, Handy? Or are you going to row out to the ship?"

Handforth considered.

"Well, I suppose we'd better wait here for a bit," he said, feeling that he had been rather hasty, perhaps. "But I've got an idea in my head that there's something unusual going on. The way those chaps buzzed here was jolly queer, to my mind. And I ain't often wrong."

"Oh, no!" said McClure bitterly.

"If you're trying to be sarcastic——"

"Not at all, Handy!" said McClure. "I ain't trying. I jolly well am sarcastic. As a matter of fact, I'm fed-up, too. If you can see anything funny in bringing us down to Caistowe when we ought to be having supper—well, I can only say that you've got a kink in your brain!"

"Ass!" said Church. "You can't have a kink in nothing!"

Handforth gazed at his loyal chums with suppressed wrath.

"It's no good your goading me," he said in measured tones. "I don't feel in the mood for quarrelling now. But I shall remember this," he added darkly. "If your nose ain't punched to-morrow, McClure, it'll be a jolly queer thing!"

McClure sniffed, but made no other answer.

For once in a way, however, Handforth was to gain a complete triumph. Certainly, he didn't exactly deserve it, but he took all the credit. When he came down to Caistowe he did so out of sheer curiosity, and not because he had any suspicion that he could make himself useful.

The fact remains, however, that he was there—and that made just all the difference in the world. He and his chums waited upon the jetty, and enjoyed the cool air after their strenuous ride. Everything was wonderfully quiet and peaceful, the tiny waves breaking on the foreshore causing nothing louder than a musical murmur.

And then, clearly and distinctly, came a clear, boyish voice from afar. It sounded thin and faint, but was quite audible.

"Help—help!"

The cry sounded once more, and then came complete stillness. Church and McClure jumped up, and Handforth was quivering with excitement.

"My hat!" gasped Church. "What——"

"Shurrup!" hissed Handforth. "Listen!"

They stood in tense attitudes, but no other sound reached their ears. A motor-car passing along the front created a slight disturbance, and it was certain, in any case, that nobody but Handforth and Co. had heard the frantic cry. They had caught

the sound merely because they were right out on the jetty.

"It—it came from the schooner!" muttered Church uneasily.

"Didn't you recognise the voice?" asked Handforth. "It was Burton—I wouldn't mind betting a quid. There's something frightful going on out there. Pirates, or a mutiny!" he went on romantically. "Perhaps the crew have got wind of this treasure-hunt, and mean to pinch the schooner!"

"Oh, don't be potty——"

"Chaps don't cry for help for nothing!" said Handforth grimly. "This is where we get busy, my bucks."

McClure nodded.

"Yes, we'd better go and tell the police——" he began.

"Rot!" snorted Handforth. "What's the good of doing that? These country bumpkins wouldn't believe us, and we should be an hour trying to find 'em! We've got to act on our own."

"But what can we do?" asked Church.

Handforth waved his hand down towards the water. Now that an emergency had arisen the leader of Study D was coming out strongly; he was revealing the fact that he was capable of prompt action when necessary.

"The boats!" he said crisply. "There are three or four of 'em down here. Tumble into one, my sons. We're going to investigate. Rather a pity we haven't got revolvers, or—or cutlasses, but that can't be helped. I daresay we shall find some belaying-pins once we get on board!"

Handforth was in the midst of a thrilling sea story just at present in which belaying-pins and cutlasses played a prominent part, and he ejaculated the words with much satisfaction. He did it so well, in fact, that Church and McClure half shivered. They hadn't believed that old Handy could sound so blood-curdling.

"I—I say, won't it be risky?" asked Church. "Goodness knows I ain't a funk, but we ought to get some men on the job——"

"If you're afraid, Church, you'd better say so at once!" snapped Handforth. "I'm only too jolly pleased to have a whack at some pirates!"

His chums said no more, but tumbled into a boat with him, and the painter was hastily unfastened from a rusty iron ring. Handforth and Church took the oars, and they slid out across the bay.

The schooner was now absolutely silent, and Handforth felt a twinge of disappointment. He had been half hoping that a gory battle was in progress on the deck, but this couldn't be the case. Gory battles aren't exactly silent occurrences.

"What's that over there?" whispered McClure suddenly.

He pointed over to the left, and Handforth turned his head.

"I can't see anything," he breathed. "Your imagination, I expect. And don't speak so jolly loudly, you cuckoo! We're a

rescue party, and we've got to steal up silently——"

"But there's something there, I tell you!" persisted McClure. "By jingo! It's another boat! Benny and his pals must have escaped. Suppose—suppose we make over that way?" he added eagerly.

Neither Church nor McClure were cowardly, but they were junior schoolboys, and they were not nearly so excited as Handforth. They fully realised that if something drastic was happening on board the schooner, their arrival would make no difference to anybody—except themselves.

But Handforth never considered odds; he would have advanced against a hundred without quailing. Yet he wasn't particularly brave; it was sheer blundering recklessness and aggressiveness.

At the present moment he turned in his seat again and gazed over to the spot McClure indicated. Sure enough a boat could be seen. But it was drifting helplessly, as though deserted.

"Some of the wounded, I expect," said Handforth tersely. "They must have been chucked overboard out of the way—wounded ain't any use in a battle. Perhaps we'd better have a squint at that boat before we board the schooner."

"Of course—rather!" muttered Church breathlessly.

They altered their course and pulled over towards the drifting boat, which was now some little distance from the schooner itself. The water was soon covered, and Handforth, who had never been known to handle a boat gently—or anything else for that matter—nearly succeeded in ramming a hole clean through the side of the other craft.

Owing to the efforts of Church, however, the disaster was avoided, and the two boats bumped dizzily. Several huddled forms lay in the derelict one, and Handforth took in a deep breath.

"Dead!" he exclaimed. "Every one of 'em! I had a suspicion——"

One of the "dead"—it happened to be myself—suddenly sat upright and gave vent to a terrific roar of relief and joy. At least, it was meant to be a roar, but my gag drove it down my throat again, and the sound was confined and muffled.

"My hat!" said Handforth. "There's one of 'em alive, anyhow!"

He jumped into our boat, and Church and McClure held the two little vessels together. Exactly one minute later Handforth's fumbling fingers had found my gag and he quickly removed it.

"Thank goodness!" I gasped thickly.

"Well, I'm jiggered! It's Bennett!" Handforth ejaculated. "What's been happening?" he added eagerly. "It seems to me that you were in a pretty tight fix——"

"Handy, old son, I'll never call you an ass again!" I panted joyously. "Untie these ropes, for goodness sake! You're a stunner—you're absolutely a double-barrelled wonder!"

Handforth nodded.

"That's rot, of course," he said. "I'm a

modest chap, and I don't claim to be a worker; but I must say that I've done this trick pretty decently. We were just going to the schooner to engage the enemy——"

"That's all right," I cut in. "Leave the jawing until afterwards, Handy. Fish your knife out and cut these ropes, like a sport."

As soon as they were cut I got busy myself, and Montie and Tommy and the Bo'sun and Captain Burton were rapidly released. We hadn't hoped for such a quick rescue as this, and the fact that Handforth and Co. had come to our rescue was simply astounding. But there wasn't time to think of all that just at present.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Captain Burton. "This is indeed fortunate. By jings! We might be able to detain those infernal scoundrels even now. Did they see you coming to our rescue, boys?"

"Not likely, sir!" said Handforth promptly. "We were jolly careful."

"I haven't had time to thank you, but we'll talk about this later on, by the Lord Harry!" said the skipper. "We must pull back to the schooner at once. We're seven now, and we might be able to overpower Jelks and his men!"

"Souise me! We must try it, dad," said the Bo'sun excitedly.

There were two pairs of oars in Handforth's boat, and one pair was transferred to ours. A minute later we were rowing rapidly towards the Swallow. Two or three husky shouts from the deck, however, made it quite apparent that our approach was observed by the enemy.

"They'll try to get away!" I panted. "Is there another boat alongside, cap'n?"

"There's a darned motor-boat hitched to the stern!" growled the skipper. "They'll take her, lads—they'll escape in her, as sure as Davy Jones! Jelks even told me that he was going to borrow the craft!"

"Oh, goodness! That's done it, then!" I muttered.

We redoubled our efforts, and simply shot through the water towards the dark bulk of the schooner. A dull, roaring sound made itself heard distinctly. I took it to be the noise of the motor-boat's engine, but yet it was different. A moment later a low, musical hum sounded.

"Durn them!" roared Captain Burton furiously.

A dark object came shooting round the stern of the schooner, two waves hissing on either side. I knew very well that it was Captain Burton's motor-boat, and all hope of overpowering Jelks and Co. was at an end.

The motor-craft came shooting along and passed within a cable's length of us. Jelks leaned out and gave a roar of laughter.

"You're done this time, Captain Burton!" he jeered. "I've got the plan and I've got you fixed! I don't reckon you'll use that pretty craft to sail for the Pacific this summer!"

The motor-boat shot away into the darkness. We were now close against the Swallow, and the curious roaring sound was

louder than ever. We pulled close in and were soon scrambling on to the deck. The very planks quivered beneath our feet, and the captain gave such a shout that we were startled.

"The scoundrel!" he raved. "Oh, the cowardly hound! The Swallow's sinking, boys! Jelks has opened the sea-cocks and my craft is doomed!"

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN BURTON'S FURY—DORRIS TO THE RESCUE—BETTER THAN EVER.

JUST for a second we were all speechless; and then came the outburst.

"Sinking!" I shouted, aghast.

"Doomed!" panted the Bo'sun.

"Begad!"

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!"

Everybody had something to say, and we were all trembling with excitement and dismay.

"Ay, sinking!" roared Captain Burton. "Do you think I don't know, lads? Jelks has taken full advantage of his opportunity, confound him! And the poor old Swallow is going down rapidly!"

The Bo'sun danced about madly.

"But can't we do anything, dad?" he shouted frantically.

"What can we do, son?" asked his father, with a note of despair in his voice. "The sea-cocks have been opened, and I daresay there's something worse, too. Just listen to the rush of water. The only thing is to beach her—and we can't do that!"

"Begad! Why not, sir?"

"By jings! What a question!" exclaimed the skipper. "There's a flat calm, boy, and we can't move the ship an inch. There's no time to fetch a tug, even if there was one here. No, there's nothing to be done!"

As he finished speaking he hurried to the companion way. The Bo'sun dashed after him, and two or three juniors followed. I pelted to the fo'c'stle hatch and dropped down into the seamen's stuffy quarters. There was just a possibility that one or more of the crew were fast asleep in their bunks, although it wasn't likely. But it was just as well to make sure. The fo'c'stle was quite empty. From far below came the sound of hissing, foaming waters.

By the time I reached the deck again the captain had returned.

"Yes, she's sinking," he said sadly. "I know how you feel, lads, but we can't do a single thing. If Jelks isn't put into prison, though, I shan't die happy! Oh, the destructive ruffian!"

We stood on deck for some little time. The schooner was already listing and was down by the head. Within half an hour, at the most, she would take the plunge. This disaster had sobered us completely; even Handforth was as quiet as a lamb. There was something tragic in this stout ship going down beneath our very feet in waters as calm as a millpond.

"Will—will she sink far, dad?" asked the Bo'sun, huskily.

"No, son; we could stay on board and still be safe," replied the captain. "The water's shallow here, and her decks will still be above the surface even after she's plunged."

"Then she won't be lost, sir?" I asked hopefully.

"Oh, no; it'll be a comparative easy matter to raise her again," replied the captain. "But that's not the point, lad. We can't start this trip now; the whole thing's ruined. I've no other vessel, and we couldn't get one at a moment's notice. And Jelks—Jelks—"

The words choked in Captain Burton's throat. He raised his fists helplessly and shook them across the dark bay. Then he dropped his hands to his sides and uttered a sigh.

"We'd better be getting off," he said quietly. "Come, boys."

We followed him to the side; but then he checked himself.

"I'm mad, I think," he exclaimed sharply. "There's no desperate hurry, and we might as well save articles of clothing and the like. Come below, boys, and help me to get the things together. Some of you had better go to the fo'c'sle and heave the men's sea-chests into one of the boats."

For the next twenty minutes we were tremendously busy; so busy, that we forgot the appalling nature of the occurrence. And we really succeeded in packing a huge amount of stuff in the two boats. Then we pushed off.

"No trip to the Pacific!" muttered Watson gloomily. "I—I can't realise it, Benny! Oh, ain't it rotten!"

"Don't talk about it," I growled.

I turned to Handforth and asked him all about his own adventures. He was only too glad of the opportunity of relating them, and he told us exactly what had occurred. We were delighted with him, and, needless to say, Handforth was as delighted with himself. He made that fact quite evident.

"But this affair's simply awful!" he concluded. "I wish to goodness we'd come sooner. We might have been even more useful, then. I'm sorry, you chaps; it's jolly hard lines on you!"

"It's appallin'," said Sir Montie soberly. "But, dear fellow, if it's hard lines on us, it's frightfully harder lines on Captain Burton. I'm simply overwhelmed with sorrow—I am really!"

By the time we reached the jetty we found several groups of people there. Somebody had noticed that the schooner was down by the bows, and there was quite a deal of excitement.

As the captain had said, the Swallow would not become a total loss; she would only sink to her deck—and Caistowe Bay, fortunately, was very sheltered. Even at high tide the schooner would not be completely submerged.

But it would take weeks and weeks to raise her again, and ships can't be obtained at a day's notice. And there was another point which worried me. The rascally Cap-

tain Jelks had gained possession of the map—or a copy of it, which amounted to the same thing.

He had managed to escape completely, and I had no doubt that his own plans were already cut and dried. He had caused this delay so that he himself should have a good start.

The whole thing, therefore, was appallingly serious. Not only was the Swallow disabled, but, as matters now stood, it looked very much as though Jelks would be able to obtain the treasure.

He would be first in the field, and we should be unable to bring him to book. The very thought of it half-maddened me.

Perhaps the other chaps didn't think quite so deeply as I did; they were mainly affected by the thoughts which concerned themselves. The glorious trip to the Pacific was "off."

Captain Burton did not stay long on the jetty. He had no wish to see his ship sink. Nothing could be done, and so it would be better to leave as soon as possible. He talked with his first officer and two or three members of the crew for some little time, and then hired a trap.

We boys had our bicycles, of course, and we rode behind the trap to St. Frank's. I don't think I've ever been with such a silent party. Even Handforth and Co. were quite subdued. Under ordinary circumstances Handforth would have been crowing tremendously, but he couldn't do that now. He hadn't the heart to do so.

Just before we reached St. Frank's I found myself riding side by side with Handforth, and I drew closer.

"We haven't had time to thank you properly, Handy," I said. "The way you came on the scene was just splendid. I don't know what we should have done without your help. What made you come?"

"Instinct," replied Handforth promptly. "That was it, Benny—instinct. I had an idea in the back of my mind that there was some excitement brewing. But what was the good of it? I was too late—all through Church and McClure!"

"Here, I say—" began McClure indignantly.

"It's a fact!" declared Handforth. "You and Church raised all sorts of objections, and if it hadn't been for that we should have arrived five or ten minutes sooner, and that would have made all the difference in the world. But it's no good jawing now. The game's up!"

We relapsed into silence again, and entered the gates of St. Frank's in the rear of Captain Burton's trap. It was just about bedtime, but we didn't think of that. The sweetness of life seemed to vanish. The whole place seemed dull and dreary.

At the Ancient House steps we stood in a crowd.

"No, I ain't coming in with you," said Handforth. "What's the good? The whole trip will have to be abandoned, anyhow. And so far as I'm concerned there's nothing doing—I'm an outsider."

Handforth spoke rather bitterly, and I couldn't help feeling just a bit sorry for him. I knew that he badly wanted to join the party, but of course it couldn't be done. And now there would be no party at all.

Captain Burton had been told of the visit of Lord Dorrimore, but he knew nothing of the scheme I had worked out—the scheme which was knocked on the head, and which wouldn't even be mentioned now.

The Bo'sun followed his father down the corridor, and Sir Montie and Tommy and I went along in the rear. Arriving at Nelson Lee's study we found it solely occupied by Umlosi, who was deeply interested in the pictures of a monthly periodical. He rose to his feet with dignity as we all crowded in, and seemed to tower nearly to the ceiling.

"Good gracious me!" ejaculated Captain Burton aghast.

He was naturally astonished to see the extraordinary visitor in the gov'nor's study, and I hastened forward.

"Umlosi, you old bounder!" I exclaimed. "Where's Umtagati?"

Umlosi waved his huge hand.

"The wise Umtagati has departed with He-Of-The-Shimmering-Eye to the apartment of the white chief who controls this great kraal," he said solemnly. "But thou art looking sad, O nimble Manzie. What has befallen thee?"

"It's not what's befallen me, Umlosi," I replied. "This gentleman is Captain Burton—he is a great friend of Umtagati's. Captain, let me introduce you to his Majesty, King Umlosi of Kutanaland."

"By jings!" ejaculated Captain Burton, in astonishment.

He thrust out his hand and Umlosi took it heartily.

"Thou art indeed welcome, O roamer of the seas," he exclaimed. "Who am I to greet thee? Manzie was pleased to call me a king, but I am but a poor specimen. Thou art indeed a man, Captain Burton—thou hast the figure and muscle of a mighty warrior. I greet thee, my master!"

"I'm much obliged, I'm sure," said the skipper. "But—Oh, I'm glad you've come, Mr. Lee," he added, as the gov'nor and Dorrimore appeared in the doorway. "I have some terrible news for you."

Nelson Lee, who had been smiling, became very grave. Lord Dorrimore was downcast already, and he now looked up with an expression of dull curiosity. There was something in Captain Burton's tone which arrested immediate attention.

The introduction was quickly over, and then we all sat down.

"Something of a very grave nature has occurred," said Captain Burton slowly. "I'll get it over quickly, Mr. Lee. Jelks and three men with him attacked me on the schooner whilst I was alone in the cabin. They secured the map of the island, and escaped in my motor-boat."

Nelson Lee whistled softly.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "That is indeed grave, captain."

"But that's not all, guv'nor!" I burst out. "The—the schooner——"

"Please let Captain Burton speak, Nipper," interjected the guv'nor.

"Oh, the lad may as well say it for me," said the skipper wearily. "The schooner's been scuttled, Mr. Lee. Those infernal scoundrels did the thing thoroughly, and my poor little craft is now lying upon the sands of Caistowe Bay."

Everybody in the room was grave. Captain Burton proceeded to give details, and the guv'nor listened attentively. Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi were greatly interested and sympathetic.

"I'm no good when it comes to expressin' sorrow," remarked Dorrie. "It's just rotten, Captain Burton! By gad! I'm hanged if I know what to say. Your little holiday is knocked on the head—what?"

The captain nodded slowly in reply.

A short silence fell after that. The Bo'sun was looking so utterly miserable that I went over to him and patted his shoulder gently.

"Don't worry, old chap," I whispered.

"Shiver my mains!" groaned Tom Burton. "There's a thing to say, Benny. Don't worry! Why, by hokey, I'm worryin' tremendously!"

Just then I happened to catch sight of Lord Dorrimore's face. I started, and actually stared. All the gloom had left his lordship's countenance, and in its place there was an expression of unadulterated joy. In fact it can only really be described as a heavenly expression.

Without the least warning he bounced out of his chair and uttered a bellow of excitement and delight.

"Why, I've got it!" he roared. "What a silly ass I've been not to think of it before!"

And then he sank back into his chair again and laughed uproariously. The guv'nor and I gazed at him in astonishment. Captain Burton frowned, and the Bo'sun and Sir Montie and Tommy looked openly annoyed.

"Wau! What hast thou grasped, N'Kose?" rumbled Umlosi. "Have I not seen these fits before? Thy wits have been at work, and thou hast bethought thee of some amazing stunt—to use one of the strange words that thou hast taught me to understand."

Dorrie nodded calmly.

"You've hit the nail on the head, old man," he drawled, carelessly taking a cigarette from the guv'nor's box and lighting it. "It's a stunt right enough, although you needn't accuse me of teachin' you such 'shockin' language. This is the best news I've heard for ages! Things couldn't have been better. What a relief to learn that the Swallow has been sunk!"

Captain Burton nearly choked.

"How—how dare you, sir?" he thundered.

"Really, Dorrie, I can't quite see——" began the guv'nor gently.

"Of course you can't see," interrupted his lordship, puffing at his cigarette with the greatest enjoyment. "Just you wait until I've done, old man. Captain Burton is a pal of yours, ain't he? That's good enough—Captain Burton is a pal of mine; always providing, of course, that he'll accept me as one."

"Really, Lord Dorrimore, I don't understand you," said the skipper coldly.

"An' yet it's as simple as apple-pie!" chuckled Dorrie. "You may not know it, Captain Burton, but I came to St. Frank's to carry off these fellows on a trip to Timbuctoo, or some such beautiful spot. You see," he went on, "I happen to have a yacht—quite a decent craft, in her way. Well, why the dooce can't we all sail together? The whole job-lot of us!"

"Oh, my hat!" I gasped faintly.

"There you are!" chuckled his lordship. "Nipper's seen the idea first—the young beggar! My yacht, Captain Burton, is entirely at your disposal. You can do any old thing with her you like. Don't mind me in the least. Take her to the North Pole, if it'll suit you. I don't care so long as I'm with my pals here."

Captain Burton's eyes blazed with excitement.

"By jings!" he cried. "Do—do you mean——"

"Exactly. That's just what I do mean," drawled Lord Dorrimore. "Instead of goin' to the Pacific in the schooner, we'll join forces an' do the trip in my yacht. She's yours for the voyage, captain!"

"But—but the expense——"

"Oh, I say!" complained Dorrie. "Don't bring that in, for goodness' sake! Expenses are nothin', and we needn't talk about 'em. Well, is it a go? We'll have a high old time together!"

Captain Burton thrust out his hand impulsively.

"By the Lord Harry, sir!" he exclaimed. "You're a gentleman!"

"The same to you," murmured Dorrie, "an' many of them! It's settled, an' I don't care if it snows icebergs! The yacht's all ready for sea at a minute's notice, an' we can start off within a couple of days. By glory! We'll teach this Jelks merchant something!"

To say that I was delighted would be putting it altogether too mildly. I was simply bubbling with joy and satisfaction. Dorrie's scheme was a thousand times better than mine, for we should all go together on the great adventure in his lordship's luxurious steam-yacht.

And within a day or two we should sail for the Pacific—and many exciting adventures!

THE END

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

BEGIN THIS THRILLING SERIAL TO-DAY!

In the Grip of the Huns.

A Magnificent Tale of Thrilling Experiences in Germany.

By **CLEMENT HALE.**

NOTE.—As the title "In the Hands of the Huns" has already been used, we have altered the name of our Serial to the above.

The First Chapters.

GEORGE GRAY, his brother JACK, and WILSON, are three members of the Berlin Rovers, a football Club in Germany. When war breaks out they are interned in a camp at Oberhemmel, but one night they manage to escape. They contrive to reach Berlin, but are again captured and sent to a camp at Ruhleben. When there they enjoy a game of football. One day they are surprised to receive a visit from a German officer whom they knew in Berlin before the war. His name is Hoffmann, and he has been wounded. They ask him if he thinks Germany will win the war.

(Now read on.)

AT RUHLEBEN.

I DO not know. I am afraid so. We are strong. We are organised for war. The Allies have to get ready. How can they hope to succeed?"

"You don't know how a Britisher fights when he has got his back against the wall, old man."

"I do. I have lived in England. I have seen. I do know. And I wish them no harm. If Britain were beaten it would be a bad thing for civilisation."

"Do you really think that?"

"I know it. Think of it. In this war the British are fighting with clean hands, but I have seen unspeakable horrors committed by the soldiers of the Fatherland. Ah, it was horrible, horrible!" And, shuddering, he buried his face in his hands.

For a moment there was silence, and then the brothers turned the conversation into brighter channels.

They spoke of football at home and in Berlin in those happier days before the war, when they had managed to have a good time, when such men as Carl Hoffmann, Wilhelm Beckmann, and others like them had treated them decently, and vicious enemies, like the German full-back, Otto Brack, and Kutz, their Berlin landlord, had not thrown off the mask.

The fact that they were prisoners interned in an enemy camp was for the moment for-

gotten. They lived while they recounted past happy experiences in a different world.

Then the mention of Otto Brack's name caused George to ask:

"By the way, do you know what's become of Brack?"

The question threw them back into the war world again.

"He is dead," answered Carl Hoffmann solemnly.

"Dead?"

"Yes. I saw him twice while we were on the march; once in Brussels, when we pressed forward after the fall of the forts at Liege. He was insolent, mad with triumph. I saw him half-drunk in a Brussels cafe, making a waiter clean his boots as he sat at table drinking champagne."

"The beast!" cried George, his cheeks flaming with anger. "And after?"

"I saw him next in France. We had taken the pretty town of Sentennaire. Our troops occupied the Chateau Victorienne. The officers turned the place inside out, made the women wait upon them, and insulted them, too. Brock was drunk early in the evening, and boasted that he would not leave one stone standing on another when we moved on. Ah, I could have shot the swine. But retribution was close at hand. Some spy must have betrayed the fact that we occupied the chateau to the French, and their artillerymen quickly got the range. The second shell blew the middle of the chateau out, and I saw Brock, or what remained of him, carried out. It was a ghastly sight, and yet I was glad that he had gone. He was a brute, a villain. He deserved to die."

Perhaps the recollection of this and other sights he had seen saddened Carl Hoffmann; perhaps he grew tired; but, at any rate, from that moment he hardly spoke at all. Half an hour later he took his leave. And as he stood at the entrance to the stable, shaking hands with his two old friends, now his country's enemies, a figure brushed past them, jostling against him.

An exclamation of anger rang from Hoffmann's lips. The fellow had touched his injured arm, and, besides, every German

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

officer, even Carl Hoffmann, resents an insult to the uniform.

Words of anger rose to his lips, but as the man, cringing, muttered a "Pardon, sir!" in execrable German, he checked them.

"Who is that fellow?" he asked.

The Grays and Wilson glanced after the retreating figure. It was that of a raggedly dressed and dirty-looking man, who had allowed his beard and hair to grow since his confinement in the camp, to avoid the trouble of having both trimmed or cut.

An evil, cunning-looking man he was, who shuffled in his gait and kept his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Oh, that's Levinsky, the Pole," explained George. "He sneaks up in the hayloft with some of the foreigners. He was a journeyman tailor at Hammerstein's before war broke out. Everybody hates him. He hasn't got a friend, not even among his own countrymen.

"He certainly needs a lesson in manners," growled Hoffmann darkly, brushing his sleeve with his hand, as if to cleanse the point of contact.

"He goes into Berlin once a fortnight under escort," George went on. "And seems to have plenty of money, for he returns laden with foodstuffs always. But he eats all he gets himself, the pig. He won't even share with his comrades upstairs. And yet we used to share with him, the pig, until we found out what he was like."

Hoffmann watched the retreating figure until Levinsky disappeared, and then said, with a grim smile:

"An evil, skulking fellow. I shouldn't like to have him for an enemy. He's a dangerous man, or I never saw one, Jorge."

And so he shook them heartily by the hand, promised to see them again soon, and to witness the next big cup-tie match if he were free to do so when the time came.

So he strode away, and left the sunshine of his presence behind him.

"By Gad, George," cried Wilson emphatically that night, when the contents of the hamper were revealed, and they and twenty invited guests shared in the feast, "if every German were as white a man as Carl Hoffmann it would be a treat to fight 'em."

George laughed and shook his head.

"But they're not," he said. "He's one in thousands; witness the treatment we receive at the hands of the officers in command here and the men who guard us. They are pigs and brutes, the lot of 'em—unmitigated brutes!"

LEVINSKY THE POLE.

THE camp had indeed settled down to a dull and well-ordered routine, such as it was, by now. Restrictions were many and irritations numberless. The food again became poor in quality and small in quantity, so that had they not been able to add to it by purchased goods, they must have half-starved.

All the dirty work of the camp fell to their share.

There were irritating parades and roll-calls on the slightest provocation. Their complaints were mostly ignored.

Only when the American Ambassador visited them to see for himself the state of affairs did they get any consideration whatever out of the authorities. The prisoners were paraded, and the Ambassador inspected them, interviewed many, listened to their grievances, visited their quarters, and examined their bedding.

George and Jack hoped that they might get a word with their old friend, but the chance did not come their way, and he departed without noticing them.

Carl Hoffmann, true to his word, came again, and again they and others benefited by his generosity. He seemed to want to go out of the way to be nice to the British prisoners, as if to atone in some measure for the crime his country had committed in forcing this ghastly war upon the world.

The Hornets won another cup-tie against the Magpies, beating them by three goals to nothing, Morgan, Bert Thomas, and the three friends playing at their very best. Carl Hoffmann and a party of German officers were there to watch, and left the ground marveling at the wonderful spirits of the British, who threw as much vim and zest into the game as if they were playing at home in peace-time to a delighted crowd.

Rumours now began to filter through the camp of hardships felt throughout the length and breadth of Germany, of the failure of the German Navy, and Britain's triumph on the seas.

It became plain to the meanest intelligence that it would be a long war, and that they must prepare themselves for a long internment in the awful camp.

Freedom seemed farther off than ever, and often their hearts were as heavy as lead.

And yet their release was far nearer than any of them dreamed of, and the interned Pole, Levinsky, was to be the contributing cause.

George Grey had explained to Carl Hoffmann how Levinsky was allowed to enter Berlin about once a fortnight, under escort. He had plenty of money, though he spent none on personal adornment, and even the poorest of the prisoners in the camp was better dressed than he.

That he had some sort of influence over the authorities was obvious, but how or why or when he obtained it none knew. Some shrewdly suspected that he was a spy, and none trusted him.

Then one day the privilege was withdrawn, and Levinsky wandered disconsolately about the camp, whining at his bad luck, cursing the Germans, and bewailing his fate. He found few to sympathise with him.

He bought no more dainties outside, and

(Continued overleaf.)

had no money to purchase any within the camp. His lean and hungry features grew sharper in outline. His eyes glittered from sunken sockets.

He became an abject and miserable creature, devoid of self-respect, so that the Grays, who had hated him, began to pity.

One day, when Wilson had received a box from home, crammed with tinned goods, chocolates, cigarettes, and the like, and was sharing these with his pals, Levinsky suddenly appeared.

He hovered over them, gazing greedily at the food.

"For mercy's sake, give me some!" he whined. "I am starving!"

"Give the beggar a bit, Wilson," said George, reaching out for a thick slice of rich plum cake.

But Wilson seized his friend's wrist.

"No," he answered, frowning darkly. "Not for him. Anyone else in the camp can have some of my store, but not him. Did he ever give anybody anything? Not on your

life. There are heaps of hungry mouths to feed in Ruhleben before we feed his."

George had to admit the force of Wilson's objection.

"That's right enough. You can't have any, Levinsky," said he. "And you've only yourself to blame for it."

Levinsky at that raised his hands above his head and cursed them, cursed every Britisher, hoped and prayed that the Germans might win the war, and had not George restrained Wilson, the latter would have fallen on the cur and felled him to the ground.

He advised the Pole to clear out while he was safe, and the man went, reviling them until he vanished from their view.

From that moment the Pole held himself aloof from them. He hardly ever spoke. From one part of the camp to another he wandered, sulking in silence. And he had a worse time at the hands of his fellow-Poles it seemed, than even at theirs.

But all the time he was secretly planning to be revenged.

(To be continued.)

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