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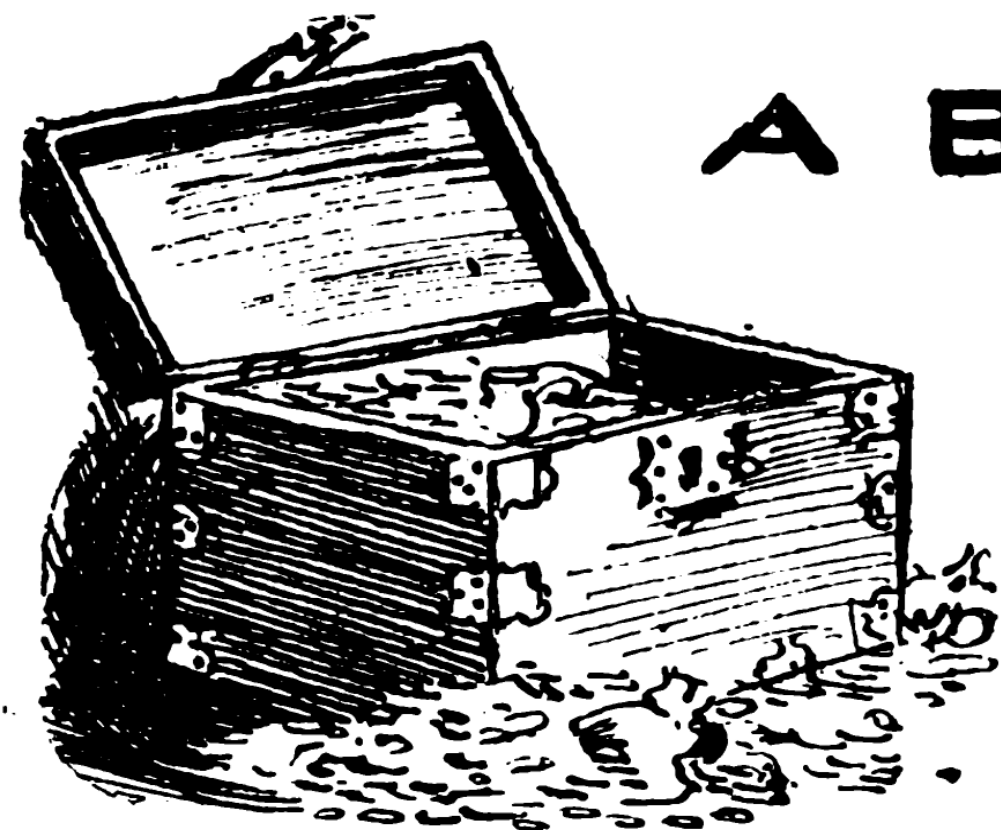
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THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S
EILEEN DARE, LORD DORRI-
MORE, and UMLOSI.

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(The Narrative related throughout by Nipper.)

CHAPTER I.

HOMEWARD BOUND — CAPTAIN BURTON'S
DECISION—THE LAGOON ON FIRE!

CHARLES DICKENS wagged his tail joyfully.

In case of any confusion, let me hasten to explain that Charles Dickens—in this case—was a curly-haired spaniel. Lord Dorrimore had christened him thus, although nobody on earth could understand why.

He was my dog, anyhow, and I had promptly reduced his name to "Boz," which was short and easy to say. At the present moment he was lolling at my feet, eyeing me expectantly as I investigated the interior of a cocoanut.

"You wouldn't eat this, my son," I explained, looking down at him. "You're too jolly fastidious; just like old Dorrie, in fact—"

"I'm awfully flattered by the comparison," came a lazy voice from beneath a handkerchief.

"And just about as lazy," I added.

"What have I done to deserve these compliments?" asked Lord Dorrimore, sitting up and extracting a cigarette-case from his pocket. "An' how the dooce can I sleep with all this row goin' on? Eatin' cocoanuts may be a frightfully fascinatin' pastime for those who are doin' it, but I wish you'd drop overboard or somethin'. Didn't you have enough breakfast, you young glutton?"

I grinned.

"Didn't you have enough sleep during the night?" I asked in turn. "Fancy wanting to sleep now—in the middle of the giddy morning! Go for him, Boz, and wake him up!"

Boz tried to knock a hole through the deck with his tail, but didn't move otherwise. Then he opened his mouth, licked his tongue round it, and cocked his ears with acute expectation.

"Always thinking of your tummy!" I exclaimed. "Here you are—try this!"

I tossed him a chunk of cocoanut, and in about two seconds it was gone and Boz was waiting for more.

"There you are," said Dorrie. "He's another glutton—an' you thought he wouldn't eat the stuff. I shall have to ask old Lee to institute food rations on board, so that you can't stuff yourselves between meals!"

His lordship lit his cigarette and leaned back in his chair again. Nelson Lee came along the deck at that moment with Eileen Dare, and Boz jumped up and frisked about joyfully.

"Homeward bound now, Nipper," smiled the guv'nor. "We have left Holiday Island behind, and I hope we shall have a swift and uneventful voyage home, for we have certainly had enough excitement and peril to last us for many a day."

"Begad! Rather, sir!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

We were all sitting under the awning in deck chairs, on Lord Dorrimore's splendidly equipped steam-yacht, the Adventure. The tropical sun beat down fiercely, and although we were not under its direct rays, the heat was well-nigh stifling. Having grown accustomed to it of late weeks, we didn't mind so much.

As Nelson Lee had said, there had been a sufficiency of excitement very recently. Our trip from England was being undertaken during the summer holidays—the St. Frank's vacation, I mean.

The party was quite a big one, consisting of the guv'nor and myself, nine other leading lights of the St. Frank's Remove, Captain Burton, Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, and Miss Eileen Dare and her Aunt Esther.

We had been searching for treasure—and had found it.

But, my word, there had been trouble! An old enemy of Captain Burton's, a scoundrel named Captain Ebenezer Jelks, had done his

utmost to obtain the treasure for himself, committing crimes without scruple.

It had been a series of ups and downs, but at length we had gained the mastery, and Captain Jelks, defeated and furious, had managed to sail away on the schooner Aurora, the property of a fellow-conspirator named Barrow.

Holiday Island—as we had christened the uninhabited little coral islet—was situated in the Pacific, far from any other land, except for a slightly larger island near by.

The treasure which we had obtained consisted mainly of old Spanish gold-pieces and jewels, and was a rich haul. But all the excitement was now over, and we were en route for England.

Our spirits were of the best, and, indeed, we considered ourselves extremely lucky to have come through so many perilous adventures scathless. Boz, insignificant though he looked, had played quite a big part, having tracked Eileen down after she had been captured by hostile savages.

"The little beggar will be useful," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully, gazing down at Boz as he chewed another piece of coconut. "I'm rather glad we got hold of him, Nipper. He possesses all the good qualities of a bloodhound without being so cumbersome and noticeable. A man with a bloodhound generally attracts attention, but Boz would not call for a second glance."

"For detective work, you mean, sir?"

"Of course!"

"My hat! I hadn't thought of him in that way," I said. "But yet, he's quite a treasure when it comes to picking up a scent. I wouldn't sell him for ten pounds."

"I wouldn't let you sell him for fifty!" smiled Nelson Lee. "I can assure you, Nipper, I have taken a strong liking to that little—Dear me! What on earth was that?"

"Sounded like some of the machinery bustin' up!" remarked Lord Dorrimore calmly. "It'll be a shockin' nuisance if we've got crocked. By gad! There's never an end to our misfortunes!"

"There's nothing wrong, is there?" I asked, rather startled.

Yet I knew very well that there was something wrong. The steady, almost imperceptible throb of the engines had been interrupted by a grinding jar which seemed to shake the whole ship for a few seconds. Complete silence followed, and I knew that the engines had ceased their steady stroke.

Captain Burton was on the bridge, and we could distinctly hear him talking down the speaking-tube to the engineer. After a moment or two he descended to the deck and disappeared down the engine-room hatchway.

"Shall we go along?" asked Dorrie, jerking his cigarette over his shoulder, by way of implying the direction.

"Better wait until the captain comes up," replied Nelson Lee. "If the matter is serious he won't want us bothering about."

"I suppose it's only a trifle, Mr. Lee," said Eileen, taking a seat in one of the deck-chairs.

"I don't see how anything really bad could happen on such a splendid yacht as this."

I knew very well that Eileen was speaking in that careless way in order to comfort her aunt, who was rather prone to imagine all sorts of dangers which didn't exist. The girl was attired in white from head to foot, and looked about as lovely as any girl could look. There wasn't a junior on board who wouldn't have sacrificed anything in order to serve her.

Very soon Captain Burton came on deck and approached us. He was frowning with annoyance, but there was no alarm in his eyes. Handforth and McClure and two or three other fellows walked nearer so that they wouldn't miss the news.

"What's happened, skipper?" asked Lord Dorrimore, flicking the ash from his cigarette. "Have the propellers dropped off, or has the boiler sprung a leak? We heard somethin' go bang a few minutes ago."

Captain Burton fingered his grizzled beard.

"It's nothing serious, ladies," he said comfortingly. "No, Lord Dorrimore, the boilers have not sprung a leak, and the propellers, to the best of my knowledge, are still on their shaftings. But the chief engineer reports that one of the main bearings developed a defect, and it partially seized a few minutes ago."

"Isn't that serious?" asked Dorrie. "It's no good talkin' to me about bearin's an' seizures, you know. It's all double-Dutch to me. What happens when a bearin' seizes?"

"Well, the engineer will be able to make a report after he has examined the trouble," replied the captain. "He is of opinion that the defect can easily be remedied. It only means that we shall have to steam at half-speed, or possibly less, until repairs are effected."

"Oh that's nothing much, sir," I said.

Half an hour later the chief engineer made his report, and it was discovered that the damage could be repaired within the space of twelve hours, but for the main part of that time we should have to remain stationary.

"Twelve hours or so won't make much difference," remarked Dorrie. "An' as long as the engines ain't crocked it doesn't matter."

"I'm not so sure about it," said Captain Burton, casting an anxious eye towards the horizon. "The glass is rather queer just now, and I fancy we are in for a tropical storm. It would be awkward to hit a cyclone with our engines out of gear."

Captain Burton did not say any more, but walked away to the bridge. And from below continuous hammerings told us that the engine-room crowd was already commencing repairs.

"What did he mean?" asked Handforth. "Whoever heard of such rot! Why, the weather's beautiful—no sign of a storm!"

"The skipper wouldn't talk rot, Handy," I replied. "And landlubbers can't judge weather conditions the same as a sailor—"

"Are you calling me a lubber?" demanded Handforth warmly.

"Yes—a landlubber!"

"If you're looking for a fat ear——"

"Oh, don't start now, Handy!" implored McClure hastily and in a stage whisper. "Miss Dare can hear all your jaw——"

"I can't help that!" snorted Handforth, upon his dignity. "If you think I'm going to stand here and be called a lubber, you're jolly well mistaken! I don't mind being called an ass, or anything like that, but there's a limit! Of course, if Nipper's willing to apologise——"

"You don't seem to understand what I'm driving at, Handy," I said patiently. "I suppose it's this heat, but you're frightfully dense. When you call anybody a landlubber it ain't an insult——"

"Oh, ain't it?" growled Handforth.

"Mr. Lee's a landlubber; Montie's a landlubber; Lord Dorrimore's a landlubber," I explained. "Miss Dare's a landlubber——"

"My only hat!" gasped Handforth.

He tore off his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves.

"That's about the limit!" he roared. "If you think I'm going to stand here and hear Miss Dare insulted, you're off-side! Put up your hands, you awful boulder! Put 'em up!"

Eileen laughed merrily.

"But Nipper's quite right, Handforth," she said softly, her eyes twinkling. "I am a landlubber—and so are you!"

"You—you—— I—I——" Handforth paused, gasping. "Nip—Nipper's right?" he panted. "Why, I was going to punch his nose, Miss Dare!"

"Oh, but that would be silly, Handforth," said Eileen, trying not to laugh. "It seems that it is you who are wrong. Besides, I'm afraid that you would get the worst of it, because Nipper is a terror!"

"There you are, Handy!" I grinned. "You'd better shove your coat on again before you make any more bloomers. What were we talking about? Oh, the weather, wasn't it? Well, Captain Burton knows more about it than we do—— Hi! Where are you off to, you ass?"

But Handforth, greatly discomfited and red in the face, was backing away. The sight of Eileen and Lord Dorrimore laughing at him was more than his sensitive nature could stand—and Handforth was about as sensitive as a rhinoceros, except in matters where his dignity was touched.

Church and McClure were openly joyful. It always amused them to see their redoubtable leader taken down a peg. Retribution followed swiftly, however, for certain sundry sounds of an unmistakable nature floated aft from amidships. Later on Church and McClure appeared looking somewhat hot and dishevelled, but satisfied upon the whole. The reason was not far to seek, for when Handforth came under public gaze again his somewhat prominent nose was even more prominent than ever. Church and McClure had evidently laid sacrilegious hands upon their mighty leader.

After luncheon Nelson Lee made an announcement which somewhat surprised us.

"We are going back to Holiday Island, boys," he said quietly.

"Going back, sir?" I asked blankly.

"Only until our repairs are effected," replied the gov'nor. "Captain Burton has decided upon the course, and I uphold his decision. Dorrie declares that he doesn't mind what we do so long as we don't bother him."

"But what's the good of going back to the island, sir?" asked De Valerie.

"The captain is of opinion that the weather is threatening," replied Lee. "As you are aware, storms come up very quickly in these latitudes, and they are invariably violent. Considering our crippled condition, we should be at the mercy of a cyclone if it swooped down upon us. It will be far better to seek the refuge of the island lagoon, for that is a secure natural harbour. To be caught on the open sea with the engines temporarily disabled would probably result in serious trouble, and we don't want that."

"But the weather's glorious, sir!" protested Handforth.

"So it would appear," replied Lee. "A cyclone is not far off, though—and if you have never experienced a cyclone you can't quite realise their terrors. I sincerely hope we shall escape this one."

"I don't!" said Handforth softly, after the gov'nor had walked away. "I've often read about cyclones in stories, and it'll be fine if we get in the middle of one. It's tommy-rot going back to the island!"

"You won't say that if the cyclone comes this way, Handy!" I said grimly. "I've seen one, and I'm not particularly anxious to see one again. It's a good thing that we have scientific instruments to give us warning."

"You can see 'em coming, I suppose?" asked Handforth.

"Yes, when they're practically on you!" I replied. "But these tropical storms are sudden things. The day might be bright and clear—just like it is now—and then all in a moment the hurricane comes along. And it's not like an English storm, it's something fifty times as bad."

"I'd like to see one of 'em, anyhow," said Handforth obstinately.

His wish was certainly fulfilled, but the cyclone didn't come along yet. I was quite in agreement with Captain Burton, although I didn't pride myself upon being a sailor. Ships have foundered in cyclones many a time—more often than shore-people think—and a ship without full engine-power is far more likely to suffer.

We had only started out from the island during the morning, and we turned back at midday. Although travelling at half-speed now, we sighted the land again towards evening, and before dark entered the gap in the barrier reef and anchored securely and snugly in the lagoon.

It was like coming back to an old friend, for we knew practically every inch of the little coral island. A party of savages from the neighbouring island had seen us off, but they had gone back to their own home, and we had the place quite to ourselves.

The evening seemed quite fine. Not a breath of wind was stirring, yet there was something in the appearance of the sun as it quickly sank out of sight which made us think. It was like a great ball of copper fire, and the sky was lurid and unhealthy-looking.

"Oh yes, we're going to have somethin' nice an' lively before long," said Lord Dorrimore, as he leaned against the rail after tea. "It may not come until to-morrow, but when it does come we shall know all about it."

"I believe you're right, Dorrie," nodded Nelson Lee.

Darkness came on quickly, and we all remained on deck in order to be as cool as possible, for the saloon and the lounges were stifling. The open air was little better, and it was a positive exertion to walk about.

"Come and look here, boys," called Nelson Lee some little time later.

He had walked forward, where there were no gleaming electric-lights, and we all went to the rail where he and Dorrie and Eileen were standing.

"Rather remarkable, isn't it?" he said.

We could see, then, that he was referring to the lagoon. There was something almost uncanny about its appearance. At first glance it appeared solid, like a great mass of marble. But then the true nature of the phenomenon was apparent.

The lagoon was seemingly alight!

The phosphoric fire was right within its depths, a part of the lagoon itself. We had never seen anything like it before, although we had been in the lagoon after dark on several nights. Every passing fish was a burning torch, and the incoming tide caused the waters to move, and converted the bed of the lagoon into something astounding. It seemed to move and shiver, and as the tiny waves lapped against the yacht's side they left a glowing line of fire behind.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth amazedly. "What—what is it?"

"These coral island lagoons are all more or less phosphorescent," explained Nelson Lee. "Indeed, the surf itself is just the same. But the curious phenomenon is far more apparent at certain times."

"But—but the water's on fire, sir!" muttered Tommy Watson uneasily.

"Not actually, Watson," said the guv'nor. "Is the accommodation-ladder in position? Yes? Then come with me, and you will obtain a closer view."

We hurried eagerly after Nelson Lee. I had been in tropical waters before, but I had never seen anything of this astounding nature before. Phosphorescence is visible, to a certain extent, on our own coasts in England, but this wonderful display was enough to take one's breath away.

We descended the ladder until the water lay at our feet. Nelson Lee had stood aside, and Sir Montie and I and two or three other fellows bent down low over the water.

"Put your hand in, Nipper," suggested the guv'nor.

I plunged my fist into the lagoon.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth, aghast.

My immersed hand burned beneath the water like smouldering fire. We could all see it distinctly, as though it were possessed of interior light. It was really an astounding spectacle. I drew my hand out of the water, and it was covered with illumination as far as the water had reached, just as though it were smeared with extra powerful luminous paint. But the effect was quite different; it was altogether more amazing.

"What's the cause of it, guv'nor?" I asked.

"Well, young 'un, I'm not sure that I can explain thoroughly," replied Nelson Lee. "I have witnessed phosphorescence of this nature before, and it is always fascinating. It seems as though the lagoon were actually on fire, and yet it is merely a perfectly natural phenomenon."

Other fellows placed their hands in the water, hardly able to believe that it wouldn't hurt them. We could see fishes swimming to and fro, leaving trails behind them like comets.

Returning to the deck, we gazed out to the reef, where the sea was thundering against the rocks. The foam was a mass of brilliant fire. Eileen was just as interested as anybody, although somewhat awed by this strange exhibition of Nature.

It did not last very long.

Practically everybody was on deck, enchanted by the wondrous sight. Umlosi, although as brave as a lion in most matters, was inclined to be "scared" now. This was something beyond his ken, so to speak.

"Wau! I like not this water of fire, Man-zie," he whispered to me. "I fear it portends something grave. N'Kose tells me that there is no danger, but I fear that we shall be even as the egg in the pot of boiling water!"

"You silly old chump!" I grinned. "The water's not hot. It's only a natural display—"

"See, O nimble one!" interrupted Umlosi. "The light fades and dies!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I muttered.

Even while we were speaking the extraordinary phosphorescence flickered away and disappeared, leaving the lagoon dead black and unpleasant to look upon. The change had been so sudden that we scarcely realised it.

"That's jolly queer!" I exclaimed. "Why did the change come, guv'nor?"

"Perhaps the moon has something to do with it," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "I don't quite like her appearance either."

The moon was just rising from beyond the water, far on the horizon. She looked almost blood-red in hue, and so unnatural that I felt uneasy.

"Oh, there's trouble comin' right enough," declared Lord Dorrimore, lighting a cigarette. "I'm not much of a judge of weather as a rule, but I should be blind in both eyes if I didn't recognise the signs now. It's a good thing the skipper brought us back into the safety of this lagoon."

And Dorrie's words were to prove very true!

CHAPTER II.

ON BOARD THE AURORA—CAPTAIN JELKS'S
SCHEME—A BID FOR GOLD.

THE schooner Aurora, owned and skippered by Captain William Barrow, was mouching along at an easy eight knots, her canvas spread in a somewhat untidy display.

The weather was hot, and the sun blazed down upon a sea of sparkling blue. The schooner was well out of the region of the cyclone which threatened to swoop down upon Holiday Island.

Captain Barrow paced moodily up and down the poop, chewing a black cigar with unnecessary violence. His face, never very pleasant, wore a scowling expression just at present.

He and Captain Jelks were not on very friendly terms. Not so very long ago the two men had been hand in glove in the plot against Captain Burton and Lord Dorrimore, but relations were now decidedly strained between the two rascals.

"Guess I was a blamed fool to take any notice of the doggone guy!" muttered Captain Barrow savagely. "Ten days wasted, and we've got them fools aboard, Ned."

Mr. Ned Brown, the mate, nodded.

"Still, there ain't much to grumble over, cap'n," he remarked. "Ten days or so don't make much difference to this old hooker. An' it ain't cost us nothing, except the food Jelks an' 'is fellows 'ave eaten. An' I guess they'll have to pay for that afore they leave this craft!"

"I should smile!" grunted Captain Barrow.

At that moment two figures appeared from the cabin companion; they were Captain Ebenezer Jelks and Mr. Bill Larson. It was these precious scoundrels who had instigated the plot against Captain Burton to obtain the treasure. They had done their utmost, with Barrow's help, and had gained nothing. When victory had seemed certain they had been forced to flee for their very lives.

"Lookin' gay, ain't you?" snapped Barrow, glaring at his fellow-skipper somewhat aggressively. "Say, Jelks, I guess you sure git on my nerves. I'll allow you're about the biggest fool guy I ever struck!"

Captain Jelks grinned.

"You ain't no good as a schemer, Barrow," he said. "Our plans went wrong, an' we was just ready to do murder. But wot's the good of growlin'? Wot's the good of scrappin' wi' me?"

"I don't want no words, Jelks!" snapped Barrow. "See here, I'm jest about filled up with your darned foolery. This is my poop, an' I guess you'll please me a heap if you'll git right off it—"

"I ain't longin' to please you, Barrow," said Jelks. "An' y' needn't order me about in that way. Why the thunder can't you keep a civil tongue in your 'ead? Come down in the cabin an' talk the thing over."

"Guess I'm dead sick of talkin'!"

"We've been good pals, Barrow," said Jelks softly. "Why, old man, you an' me don't want to 'ave words. If it comes to that I'm just as bad off as you are; so wot's the

good of growlin'? Come down an' have a chat!"

Captain Barrow grunted and threw his chewed-up cigar overboard. But he followed Jelks and Larson down into the stuffy, evil-smelling cabin. Jelks could see that he was in a vile humour.

"You're a queer cuss, Barrow," said Jelks, sitting down on a locker. "You ain't lost so much as a bad cent, an' yet you're in the most blamed temper I've ever seen a man. By ginger! Wot about me an' Bill Larson? We ain't in tempers—an' we've lost piles!"

"That's so," agreed Mr. Larson gloomily. "This is your ship, Cap'n Barrow, an' all you've lost is jest a little time—which don't make no sort of difference anyhow. Jelks an' me 'ave sacrificed our own ship an' all the money we 'ad, an' there's nothing to show. By gosh! We're the chaps to cuss!"

Captain Barrow realised the force of the argument.

"I guess you're hit a heap harder than I am," he admitted. "But, say, I'm jest mad about that treasure. We had the yacht in our hands, an' if it hadn't been for our own fool carelessness we should 'ave 'ad the yacht now. I guess drink's a sure comfort, but, hully gee! It's cost us a tidy heap!"

Captain Jelks was not gratified by the reminder. He and his companions had been hopelessly drunk when the tables had been turned upon them. They had been so sure of their own victory—so positive that the mastery was theirs—that they had neglected to take even commonplace precaution. As a result, they had been compelled to flee from the island in disorder.

"It was a good chance, an' we chucked it away," said Jelks. "By ginger! Arter all the trouble we took, too! Well, Barrow, I ain't goin' to let you say that I've bin spongin on you. I've got a tidy wad of notes—close upon fifty quid—an' if you'll name your price for the accommodation o' me an' Bill, why, I'll pay up handsome. There was five o' my crew with us, but you're makin' 'em work for'ard, so there ain't no call for me to pay for their keep. Wot's your price, old mate?"

Captain Barrow, although a scoundrel, was not a mean man. This unexpected offer of Jelks's took him by surprise.

"Say, don't talk foolery!" he growled. "I guess I don't want no payment from old pals of mine. Gee! I should be a mean guy if I couldn't be 'ospitable to a feller-skipper an' 'is mate. We don't need to talk about it, Jelks. You keep your money in your darned pocket!"

"Why, that's 'andsome of you, old man," said Jelks, who had fully expected this reply. "But I'm willing to pay if you ain't agreeable to Bill an' me stayin' on board. We can't git out an' walk."

"Say, 'ave some whisky!" said Captain Barrow gruffly.

The three men drank their own health, and good humour was restored. It did not suit Jelks's book to be on bad terms with Captain Barrow, for he had a request to make.

"You're sailin' for one o' those Pacific islands, are you?" he asked.

"Sure," said Captain Barrow. "I guess I'm goin' to pick up a cargo—"

"That don't interest me," interrupted Jelks. "I've been working out our position, an' I reckon we'll run across one o' the regular steamship routes to-morrow or the next day."

"Well, what of it?"

"We an' Jelks want you to stop a home-ward-bound ship," said Jelks coolly. "We don't want to offend you, Barrow, but there's no reason why we should be meanin' about the Pacific month after month. We want to get back to London, an' the quickest way is to git on board a steamer."

"I guess it can be done," said Barrow slowly. "But I'm doubtin' if the skipper o' one o' them swell steamers will heave to for an old hooker like this. An' you'll need to spin him a yarn, I guess—"

"You can leave that to me," interrupted Jelks promptly.

He was quite satisfied. Barrow, in his former temper, would have refused to signal any passing ship. It was for this reason that Jelks had got him into a good humour—and Jelks took care to keep him in a good humour.

Two days later several large steamers were sighted, but all of them were foreigners, except two, and they were outward bound. Towards evening, however, a third-rate passenger steamer hove in sight, flying the British colours. She was a small boat, as passenger steamers go, but fairly fast.

Signals were exchanged, and the steamer, which was the *Balboa*, of Liverpool, slowed her engines and waited. The schooner edged up towards her, and by means of megaphones the desires of Captain Jelks were made known.

As a result, Jelks and Larson were rowed across in a boat and boarded the steamer. There was some little talk with the steamer's captain, but in the end the matter was arranged, and the vessel pursued her course once more.

Jelks had spun a yarn to the effect that he had lost his ship in a gale. His papers were quite in order, and the *Balboa's* skipper was pleased to grant Jelks and Larson a passage home.

And so, in this way, the two rascals were bound for England once more, and they reckoned that they would easily arrive before Lord Dorrimore's yacht. Given fair weather, they would step ashore on English soil a week before the *Adventure* put into the Thames—for London was her port of destination.

Jelks was rather thoughtful for several days and Larson could get very little out of him. Both men, in fact, were feeling somewhat down in the dumps in consequence of the failure of their schemes.

"It's no good tryin' to think of any other schemes, cap'n," said Larson, one day.

"We're clean beat. That treasure—"

"Don't you be so sure, Bill," said Jelks. "We've 'ad some ups an' downs, but I ain't throwin' up the ghost yet."

"But what can we do?" asked Larson blankly.

"Nothin'—until we git to London."

"An' wot then?"

"Well, we shall arrive afore the yacht, an' there's no tellin' 'ow things'll go then," said the rascally skipper. "Don't you make no mistake, Bill. We've gone so far into this game that we ain't out of it yet. No, I won't say no more yet. You just wait until I've got my plans made."

Mr. Larson was surprised and puzzled. But he said no more. Several days passed, and still Captain Jelks kept his own counsel. It was not until the Atlantic was reached, and the voyage was half over, that Jelks confided in his mate.

Then, one evening in their cabin, Jelks chuckled as he filled his pipe. He had been looking satisfied with himself all day, and the mate had been expecting to hear the reason.

"Cheerful, ain't you?" asked Mr. Larson.

"Not exactly cheerful," replied Jelks, striking a match. "But I'm hopeful, Bill. I reckon we still stand a chance."

He lit his pipe, and Larson watched him.

"Do we?" he exclaimed. "I'd be mighty pleased if you'd tell me 'ow."

"I've bin thinkin'," said Jelks thoughtfully.

"I should reckon you 'ave," agreed the mate. "You've bin thinkin' for weeks! By gosh! Judgin' by the time you've taken, I reckon you ought to 'ave thought out something—"

"Sarcastic, ain't you?" growled Captain Jelks. "Look 'ere, Bill. I ain't a man to be beat; I don't take no nonsense. If a plan goes wrong I jest git busy, an' think of something else."

"You do, cap'n," agreed Bill.

"Well, about this 'ere treasure of Burton's," went on Jelks. "It's on board that blamed yacht by this time, an' it's on its way across to England. There's just a chance that we can lay 'ands on some o' that loot—"

"Some of it?" asked Larson.

"By ginger! We can't 'ave the durned lot!" snapped Jelks. "Why, if we 'touch' only a quarter of it we'll be rich for life! An' that's my game, Bill. Barrow's out of it now, an' I ain't sorry. It's jest you an' me."

The mate shook his head.

"I don't see 'ow it can be done, cap'n," he remarked. "I don't see—"

"You never did see anything!" snapped Jelks. "If I was to rely on you for ideas I shouldn't git far! You're a 'andy sort o' chap, Bill, but brains ain't your strong point—not by any means!"

"Look 'ere—" began Larson indignantly.

"Brains ain't your strong point!" repeated the captain. "I ain't blamin' you, Bill, 'cos it wouldn't be fair—you was born like that. But you always bin a good pal to me, brains or no brains, an' I don't expect you to think o' things like me."

Mr. Larson was scarcely mollified.

"That's all very well, cap'n," he growled. "A man don't like to be called a fool to 'is face. Maybe I ain't so durned cunnin' as you

are, but accordin' to wot you say I'm fair loony—an' my brains are jest as good as yourn, an' don't you forgit it!"

"I ain't likely to!" snapped Jelks. "Strikes me you're gettin' impertinent, Bill. I'm your skipper——"

"An' a fine mess you've made of things, ain't you?" sneered Larson bitterly. "Tellin' old Barrow you 'ad fifty quid! Forgot to mention it was mine, didn't yer? All our blinkin' money gorn, an' nothin' to see for it. An' now you're suggestin' some more cunnin' schemes. Not me—not Bill Larson!"

Captain Jelks removed his pipe deliberately.

"Ho! That's your tone, is it?" he exclaimed. "Seems to me, Bill, you got riled over that remark o' mine about your brains. Well, we'll let that pass; I didn't mean to give offence, old man. This new idea o' mine is goin' to put a nice, tidy sum in your pocket—if you stick by me. No, don't start sayin' I promised all that afore. I did, an' I knows it. But we 'ad bad luck, an' I ain't sure that it wasn't the fault o' that blamed Yankee, Barrow. I did my part all right, but Barrow failed."

"You did your part with the whisky!" said Mr. Larson, with unwelcome truthfulness. "That's wot finished us, cap'n. Cuss the whisky, I say."

"That's wot you say when you ain't got none of it!" exclaimed his skipper. "But we don't want to go into no argyments. I s'pose? Listen to this 'ere plan o' mine, an' don't keep makin' fool interruptions!"

"Go ahead, cap'n," said Mr. Larson.

Jelks went ahead, and although Bill was somewhat sceptical at first, he began to get enthusiastic as Jelks proceeded. It was a full hour before the captain had fully outlined his scheme.

"It's a larst bid for that gold, Bill," concluded Jelks. "We can git a small fortune even now, an' I reckon we'll take the chance. Mind, it'll be risky, but if I'm prepared to stand the racket I reckon you orter be."

"Rely on me, cap'n," said the mate readily.

"I will, Bill, an' I don't see why we can't rope in enough to make us comfy for the rest of our little lives," said Captain Jelks. "Mind, it depends upon 'ow things go once we git to London, but I'm 'opeful. Shake 'ands on it."

And the two rascals sealed the compact.

CHAPTER III.

THE CYCLONE—NATURE'S FURY—A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE.

HANDFORTH looked at the sky critically.

"All tommy-rot!" he declared.

"It's a bit dull, perhaps, but there's going to be no giddy storm, my sons. You can't tell me!"

Church nodded.

"That's a fact!" he agreed heartily.

"We can't tell you anything, Handy. If a train was going to run over you, and you

didn't see it, you wouldn't believe anybody if they yelled out a warning! Captain Burton knows a lot more than we do about the sea and the weather——"

"He's nervous," interrupted Handforth, with a sniff. "Just look at that sky! Does it look threatening?"

"I reckon it looks jolly qucer!" said McClure, shaking his head.

"Oh, rot!"

Handforth strolled away, and met me as I came along the deck. It was morning, and so far the cyclone had not appeared upon the scene.

"I suppose we'll be getting to sea again before long?" asked Handforth. "No sense in hanging about here, that I can see."

"What you can't see, Handy, amounts to a terrific lot," I said cheerfully. "You always think your idea is better than anybody else's. But I'll bet you my best topper that we're in for a storm of the most violent kind. I've seen the signs before, and I know 'em!"

The clouds overhead were like a solid roof, the colour of lead, and without a single break. I had never seen the clouds exactly like that before. And there was an oppression in the air which seemed to make every movement a labour.

Not a breath of wind stirred, and we could see the birds flying about near the shore restlessly, crying to one another as though they knew that some disaster was impending.

"When do you think the storm will break, sir?" I asked, as Nelson Lee came along the deck with Lord Dorrimore.

"It won't be long now, Nipper," replied the gov'nor, looking up at the sky, and then transferring his attention to the horizon. "Captain Burton declares that it will be no ordinary storm—and when I say ordinary, I mean the violent storms of the tropics."

"It's goin' to be somethin' big, Nipper—somethin' that'll do its best to wipe us off the face of the earth," remarked Dorrie languidly. "I've only been in a cyclone once—right in the middle of it, I mean—an' it was quite enough for me, by gad! Cyclones are brutes!"

"Shall we be in any danger here, sir?" asked McClure.

"Well, I suppose there will be a certain amount of danger," replied Nelson Lee. "It really depends upon the course of the storm. We may miss the violence of it; but on the other hand it is far more likely that we shall catch it where it is most terrific. Fortunately, this lagoon is perfectly sheltered, and there is no reason for us to be nervous."

In order to be on the safe side, Captain Burton ordered the second anchor to be lowered, and other precautions were taken. This was very significant, for it proved that the skipper expected something very dreadful. As it afterwards turned out, Captain Burton's preparations were by no means needless.

The morning passed slowly, and at first we saw no change in the weather conditions,

Then the clouds, although appearing the same at first, became thicker almost imperceptibly, until a semi-darkness had descended over the island and the sea. And a breeze sprang up; a breeze which caused the palms to sway ominously.

"Listen!" I exclaimed, as I stood on deck with a group of other fellows. "Can't you hear something?"

"I can hear Handforth jawing!" said Tommy Watson tartly. "Dry up, Handy!"

Handforth glared, but held his tongue. He would not have done so, only he was anxious to listen on his own account. And as we stood there we heard a curious, indefinable sound. It filled the air, and it seemed to come from a tremendous distance. It was almost as though a hundred aeroplanes were traversing the sky scores of miles away—a low continuous throbbing roar.

"What the dickens is it?" asked Handforth blankly.

"The storm!" I replied.

"My dear chap, we couldn't hear it like that!" protested Tommy Watson. "It sounds more like a million voices in the distance—My hat! There's a big draught coming along now! Just look at those palms!"

The wind had increased suddenly, drowning that ominous roar, and the trees which lined the shore were bending desperately before it. It settled itself down into a fierce, dead rush of wind.

The lagoon surface became tossed and broken, and hundreds of leaves were blown through the air like crazy butterflies. The foam on the reef had changed, too, for it now broke with tremendous violence, hurling masses of spume through the air in dense clouds.

"This is just the overture, so to speak," observed Lord Dorrimore. "The musicians are tunin' up. When the show really starts we shall have a rippin' time. The skipper says that we must all go below presently. I'd prefer to remain on deck, but we can't disobey the skipper's orders. It would be mutiny!"

"Begad! I wanted to see it all, sir," said Sir Montie.

"You'll see quite enough, my son," said Dorrie, shaking his head. "In fact you'll see more than you want before this little blow is over. The clouds are gettin' a move on now, I notice."

We had been so intent upon the lagoon and the reef that we had not turned our gaze upwards. But the solid roof appearance had gone, and now the clouds were skipping across the zenith with great haste.

Every now and again we caught that low roar from the distance—mysterious and uncanny. It was something which we could not define, and it reminded me of the sounds one seems to hear in a nightmare.

As for the beautiful island—well, its beauty had disappeared. All the colours, so brilliant the previous day, were now flat and leaden. Everything was grey—dull and miserable-looking.

The palms and other trees were in sore distress, for the wind was blowing like a hurricane at times. We found it necessary, during those terrific blasts, to cling to the rail and to clutch our hats.

"By George!" roared Handforth. "It is a storm after all!"

"You ass! This isn't the storm!" I shouted. "This is just the beginning—the storm is a good way off yet. You'll know all about it when it starts, my bonnie boy!"

Captain Burton was still on the bridge, and, although we were snugly secure in the sheltered lagoon, he wore an expression of acute anxiety. I saw him yell something to Nelson Lee, who was standing on the deck, but I couldn't hear a word.

The guv'nor came hurrying along.

"We've got to get below, boys!" he said sharply.

We did not question the order, for, to tell the truth, we were just a wee bit scared by the appalling force which Nature was exerting. The awning had been removed long since, of course, or it would have been blown to shreds in five seconds. Everything loose had been shifted from the decks, and heavy articles were securely lashed.

Captain Burton's advice was none too soon.

For almost as soon as we got below the heavens seemed to open. The crash of thunder which roared out was the most appalling sound I had ever heard in my life. There had been no actual warning. It simply ripped down with a mighty explosive power which deafened every soul on board.

The clouds themselves opened out and water came down in floods. It would seem ridiculous to refer to it as rain; for it was just one solid sheet, which beat upon the decks with a noise like a thousand machine guns firing.

"Oh, great pip!" gasped Handforth faintly.

"Look outside!" I bellowed.

We crowded round the ports. The lagoon was practically invisible in spray, caused by the driving rain. The whole yacht rocked and swayed alarmingly, creaking and protesting in every joint.

Conversation was utterly out of the question. We just huddled there, waiting—waiting for this stupendous effort of nature to expend itself. The thunder kept up its battery roar with hardly a single pause, shaking the yacht, and doing its best to deafen us for all time.

The wind, passing overhead, shrieked like a thousand demons. The sound was monotonous and acutely piercing. Everything was dark now—black and impenetrable. But the lightning blazed out with the intensity of a million electric arcs.

All these terrors combined simply left us stunned. We could do nothing; we almost felt as though nothing mattered. We merely wanted the storm to be over—to finish. It was the most terrible effort of Nature I had ever seen—something I had never dreamed possible.

Some cyclones may be fairly violent, but this one was really the worst the Pacific had

experienced for many years. Many a good ship disappeared for all time in that appalling storm, and others which managed to escape its clutches struggled out of it battered and beaten.

Captain Burton was full of anxiety, for if once the yacht tore free from her moorings, nothing on earth could save us from terrible destruction. We should be flung upon the reef, or upon the shore, and battered to atoms.

But the strong hawsers held, and the Adventure swung stoutly and steadily to the fury of the seas. But yet the lagoon was perfectly calm in comparison to the smother beyond. The skipper had acted wisely in returning to this safe harbour. Had we been caught by the cyclone on the open sea, disabled as we were, the yacht would undoubtedly have foundered.

The end came as abruptly as the start. Almost before we knew it the wind had ceased, just as though a steam-cock had suddenly been turned off. The rain ceased with it, and an extraordinary light filtered through the ports.

Eileen gave a little cry.

"Is it over, captain?" she asked, her voice sounding rather curious in our deadened ears.

"Not yet, Miss Dare," replied the skipper. "But I think it will be safe to go on deck for a little while. The centre of the cyclone is approaching, and it will be a sight worth seeing. Thank Heaven we have come through safely. I only hope we shall survive the rest."

"Why, ain't it finished, sir?" gasped Handforth. "Goodness knows, we've had enough—Hi, wait for me, you chaps!"

But we were dashing for the deck. Arriving up there, we found the water streaming over the planks, and everything was glistening with moisture. But there was something else to attract our attention.

"What the thunder's that?" asked De Valerie.

From afar came a strange sound, like the droning of a giant aeroplane or a still more gigantic top.

"I like not this wondrous display!" growled Umlosi. "Wau! We have storms in Kutana-land, but they are even as the gentle breeze of summer compared with this mighty effort. I am uneasy, N'Kose!"

"Oh, we shall pull through all right," said Dorris confidently.

The drone continued and grew louder.

"What is it, sir?" asked Tommy Watson, turning to Nelson Lee.

"It is the centre of the cyclone, my boy," replied the gov'nor. "As you have probably learned at St. Frank's, a cyclone is a great circular storm. It travels with incredible speed, and forms a ring. And this ring, on its outer edge, is the real danger zone. The very centre of a cyclone is a place of complete calmness. You will understand presently."

"It's awfully queer, sir," remarked Sir Montie seriously.

"There are many things in this world that we find it difficult to understand, my lad," replied Nelson Lee. "But listen—the centre of the storm is coming nearer rapidly."

The hum had already sharpened to an astounding degree. It actually hurt our eardrums. And in the midst of it Captain Burton gave the order for us all to get below again as quickly as possible.

The cyclone was of a far more serious nature than he had at first realised. He believed that we had still to go through the most violent part of it. His observations on deck had led him to one conclusion.

"I am almost sure that the very core of the cyclone will pass over this island," he declared quietly. "Until a few minutes ago the actual danger was not apparent, for I believed that we should miss the actual centre."

"Why, will it be worse than what we've already had, sir?" I asked.

"Worse!" repeated the captain. "I only pray that we come out of it alive, my boy! Cling to anything you can grasp, and don't move. If the centre comes right over the island we shall need all our fortitude."

Even while he was speaking there came the sound of crashing trees and the wind was howling afresh. And then something happened which was deadly. The very cyclone itself—the most dangerous zone of all—burst upon us like a million furies.

That first crash of thunder was simply nothing to the noise which now prevailed. The cyclone broke overhead with a scream which frightened every one of us. The yacht was tossed and turned and twisted. We could see nothing, hear nothing, and only clung to anything we could lay hold of.

How long it lasted none of us could say. I suppose it was brief actually, or we should never have survived. But then the crashing ceased and calmness came once more. But it was a false peace, and we all felt that the trouble was by no means over. We staggered on deck, more to obtain some fresh air than anything else.

The great moment had come. The centre of the cyclone was passing over the island on every side the storm raged, but we were in peace. It was so astounding that we simply gazed round without speaking.

Whilst the storm had lasted we could think of nothing. But here we were in the centre of it, with the strife going on on every side. We had time to look about us and to marvel.

Yet although we were interested there was something appalling about it all—something which scared us and made us realise what puny mites we were. And the knowledge that the whole storm had to be repeated filled us with dread and anxiety.

Just for the moment, however, the centre of the cyclone claimed our attention. It was a sight I shall never forget. The air was full of bird-life of every description. Butterflies and insects were there by the million—all flying in the heart of the storm and

travelling with it. They were safe so long as they kept within that zone.

And from every side came the deafening shout of the hurricane.

There were birds from the sea, and birds from this island and from Zambua, and probably from other islands afar off. The sky overhead was like a gigantic glass dome, carrying beneath it the myriads of birds and insects.

But the respite was not long.

The hum and roar of the southern quadrant of the cyclone was drawing near, and we once more sought the refuge of the saloon. During the short interval the crew had been tightening the hawsers in preparation for the next attack.

The other rim of the storm burst upon us with the same deadly fury, and then everything happened as it had happened before. The hurricane raged for hours, and by the time it was all over the yacht was still whole.

But we within were so utterly exhausted by the continuous strain that sleep was the only thing possible. How we crawled to our bunks I don't know, but we got there somehow. Although we had not actually been out in the storm itself—to have done so would have meant death—we had been compelled to cling to anything we could grasp, waiting—waiting for the end of the ghastly business.

We slept until the morning. And when we awoke I found it hard to believe that what had happened was not a particularly violent nightmare. It seemed impossible that the cyclone could have actually occurred.

The sun was shining from a cloudless sky; the lagoon was gloriously blue, and birds were twittering and singing everywhere.

But it was only necessary to glance around to convince me that the thing had been a reality. The yacht itself did not show many signs, except for a good deal of minor destruction on the bridge and in the deck-houses—but these could all be repaired during our homeward voyage.

The sea was thundering against the reef with tremendous force, masses of foam being flung almost sky high as the waves struck the rocks. It was the aftermath of the tremendous storm.

The island had suffered severely in places. Hundreds of trees were uprooted, and hundreds of others were stripped bare of every vestige of foliage. Birds were lying dead by the score, and there were other signs of destruction on every hand.

But it was all over now, and we all fell to wondering how it was that we had been spared. Captain Burton was openly jubilant, with very good reason. His judgment had been perfectly sound, and it was only natural that he should feel satisfied.

"But we'll remain in this lagoon until the sea is slightly less rough," he declared. "We could get through the gap in safety, I dare say, but we mustn't take any chances. And the interval will give the engineers a chance to complete their work of repair."

So once more we went ashore on Holiday Island and examined the destruction at close hand. The fury of the storm had been far greater up on the high ground than we had experienced. Enormous trees had been torn from the ground by their very roots and carried completely away. No doubt they had been deposited in the sea some hundreds of miles distant; at all events, they were no longer on the island.

The experience was one we were not likely to pass through again, and we felt rather pleased with ourselves for having been permitted the opportunity of seeing Dame Nature in one of her destructive moods.

The following morning the engineer announced that the repairs had been effected to his complete satisfaction, and we steamed through the gap in the reef and once more started for home.

This time it was a start in earnest.

CHAPTER IV.

DEAR OLD LONDON AGAIN—WELCOME HOME—
WHERE IS EILEEN?

"ENGLAND at last!" exclaimed Nelson Lee smilingly.

"Where, sir?" came a chorus of shouts.

Händforth and Co. and Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I hurried to the rail and gazed across the sparkling blue of the sea. There, on the horizon, a dull, black smudge was showing.

"Well, I'm jolly glad to see it again!" I declared heartily. "I was eager to come out on this trip to the Pacific; but, by Jove, I'm glad to be home again!"

"Rather!"

It was a general exclamation.

Although we had enjoyed our trip immensely, we were nevertheless delighted to see the Old Country again. Our homeward voyage was practically at an end. We had made good speed from Holiday Island, and there's no need for me to go into any details.

We watched eagerly for the coast to take shape. It was a baking day in early August; but we had been so long accustomed to tropical weather that it seemed mild and pleasant.

The sun shone down with great heat, and everybody on board was feeling as cheerful and as healthy as possible. We were as brown as berries, sunburnt and absolutely fit. And the monotony of the voyage had not ceased. Before so very long we should be in the Thames—and then for dear old London again!

We shouldn't have long in London, for the new term had already started at St. Frank's—ten days since, in fact. Considering all the adventures that we had passed through, we reckoned that this was jolly good. We should be just a fortnight late in returning to the old school.

During the trip home our wireless installa-

tion had been repaired—for it had been badly damaged early in our adventures. And long before we got to England we sent messages to Dr. Stafford at St. Frank's—to Sir Montie's guardian, to Tommy Watson's people, and to many others. We should be sure of receiving a hearty welcome when we dropped anchor in the Thames.

Handforth and Co. were distinctly uneasy. Messages had been sent to their people, and Handforth and Church and McClure looked forward to the meeting with a certain amount of consternation and alarm.

They didn't forget that they had taken French leave. They had been invited on this trip by Captain Burton and Lord Dorrimore, but their paters had put the ban on the idea. So, at Handforth's instigation, the trio had boarded the Adventure at the last minute—as stowaways!

They were soon discovered, naturally, and had been allowed to come along. But now they would be called upon to stand the racket. Handforth had pointed out at the commencement that no trouble would follow after being so long away; but his confidence had oozed away much during the last day or two. Not that he admitted it—not a bit of it. He still maintained that his pater would greet him with open arms. But Church and McClure openly expressed their opinion that the chopper would fall heavily.

"Still, it ain't for us to grumble," remarked McClure philosophically. "We've had our giddy trip, and now we must face the music. My hat! It was worth facing a giddy German band!"

"Rather!" agreed Church. "But German bands don't play music, you ass!"

"Don't you worry your little selves," I said. "If your people kick up a dust—which isn't likely—I'll just steer 'em into a cabin with old Dorrie. He'll talk to 'em like a Dutch uncle for about ten minutes, and they'll come out smiling all over their faces!"

"You don't know my pater!" said Handforth grimly.

That remark told us quite plainly what he expected, but I was content to leave the affair to Dorrie. Personally, I was worried in another way. Nelson Lee and I had been at St. Frank's for a long while, he as House-master of the Ancient House and I as skipper of the Ancient House Remove.

But he had been "Mr. Alvington" and I had been "Dick Bennett." There was no longer any necessity for us to keep up the pretence, however, for our peril from the Chinese Secret Society was at an end. But this meant something else.

We had been at St. Frank's because it provided us with a safe refuge. Well, a safe refuge was no longer necessary. Should we return to St. Frank's, or should we resume our old, strenuous detective life at Gray's Inn Road?

It was a vital point, and the guv'nor partially settled it.

"Yes, you will return to St. Frank's, Nipper," he declared, when I put the question to him. "At least, that is what I have

supposed all along. But you know very well, young 'un, that I shall allow you to please yourself. It really rests with you."

"Begad!" gasped Sir Montie anxiously. "You won't go, Benny?"

I grinned.

"Not likely!" I replied. "What about our cricket fixtures and football arrangements? I'm skipper of the Remove, and it's not likely I'll chuck it all up. But the guv'nor's coming back as well."

"Rather!" exclaimed all the fellows.

Nelson Lee stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Well, boys, I don't know," he exclaimed. "It is a matter which requires very careful consideration. You needn't worry yourselves just at present, however—you'll hear my decision before we get back to the old school."

And we had to be satisfied with that.

So many other things occurred almost at once that I had no time to think of our return to St. Frank's.

We arrived in the Thames without mishap, dropping anchor at the time arranged, almost to an hour. We were in the river, not so very far from the Tower Bridge. Later on the yacht would go into dock, but there was no room for her just at present. And we were content to lie in the river.

Our plans were cut and dried to the last degree. First of all, we should certainly have a party on board to welcome us home. After that we were all to go straight to Lord Dorrimore's town house in Belgrave Square, in order to participate in a whacking farewell supper. We should stay there the night, and on the morrow would disperse.

The guv'nor and I meant to go along to our dear old chambers in Gray's Inn Road. Sir Montie and Tommy and most of the other chaps would go to their various homes. But Yakama and Farman would be the guv'nor's guests until we returned to St. Frank's on Monday, in three days' time.

It was evening when we dropped anchor, and we judged that we should get ashore by about nine. London was looking just the same as ever—just as smoky and just as grimy. But we enjoyed the sight as much as any gorgeous piece of scenery we had gazed upon on Holiday Island.

An August haze was hanging low over the great city, and the river itself was inclined to be misty. Almost as soon as we dropped anchor a big motor launch shot out from the wharf and came towards us.

Needless to say, everybody on board was dressed up "to the nines." We had changed into full dress rig-out, so to speak, and felt rather stiff after the easy-going flannels which had been our principal attire throughout the voyage.

Poor old Umlosi had struggled into evening dress, and he was looking more miserable than I had ever seen him. Dorrie had taken an hour persuading him to take this great step, and he had succumbed—much to his regret now.

"Wau! It would please me to get within

my grasp the fool of a man who planned this attire of madness!" rumbled Umlosi gloomily. "I vow he would suffer to the extreme limit! I am sorely troubled, Manzie. My limbs are great, and this clothing clings tightly. Wan! I fear to bend, lest some great disaster should occur!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thou art unsympathetic, thou unfeeling one!" growled the black giant.

"Not at all, old chap!" I grinned. "I was just picturing what would happen if you bent down to tie up your shoe-lace. You'd better be careful, Umlosi!"

"Thy advice is late, Manzie," he replied. "N'Kose has already warned me to remain stiff. Things have, indeed, reached a pass when I, the King of Kutaland, may not even squat myself down!"

"Things would reach a prettier pass if you did!" I chuckled.

I left Umlosi to his misery, although I must acknowledge that I was most unfeeling. His troubles amused me—and everybody else—greatly. He slunk away into odd corners, praying for the time when he would be able to don his old flannel suit once more. This was free-and-easy—and looked it! A rag-and-bone merchant would not have offered three farthings for the whole collection. Umlosi possessed others, but wild horses wouldn't have forced him to don them. It was only upon his knees, almost, that Dorrie had begged Umlosi to get into evening dress.

Well, after that everything was bustle.

The motor launch came alongside, and quite a number of visitors trooped up the accommodation ladder. Montie's guardian, the Earl of Westbrooke, was one of the first to come aboard, and he was as genial as ever, and delighted to see us all looking so well.

Almost immediately after that I observed Handforth fingering his collar nervously, as though it was a size too small for him. He was very red in the face, but attempted to look carelessly at his ease.

"Anything wrong, Handy?" I asked.

Handforth stared.

"Wrong?" he repeated huskily. "Why, do I look—funny?"

"My dear chap, you always look funny!" I replied cheerfully. "But just at present you look like a chap who's been ordered to go to the Head's study for a flogging. What's the matter?"

"Handy's pater's just coming up the ladder!" hissed McClure. "I expect you spotted him, didn't you, Handy?"

"Oh, is my pater there?" said Handforth, attempting to speak in a surprised tone. "Rather decent of him to come and meet me, ain't it? I hope your pater's there, too, McClure," he added darkly. "I don't see why I should have to go through——"

He broke off, and dodged behind me.

"I—I say!" he gasped. "My dad's just come on board. Tell—tell him I—I—— Oh, my only hat! He's spotted me!"

Handforth's nerve had failed him at the last moment. But now there was no getting out of the fateful meeting. Mr. Handforth

was a huge man—a large edition of Edward Oswald himself. The expression upon his face as he came forward to meet his erring son was quite sufficient to make old Handy uncomfortable.

"You young rascal!" he thundered, planting himself before Handforth.

"Oh, go easy, dad!" gasped Handforth.

"I—I——"

He broke off, at a loss for words.

"What have you got to say for yourself, Edward?" roared Mr. Handforth. "By gad, boy, you're looking better than I've seen you in all your life! You infernal young rascal! What do you mean by going on this trip after I had expressly ordered you not to do so?"

"I—I—— That is to say, we——"

"Don't look so flustered, Edward!" said his father, bursting into a laugh. "You're a young dog, but I've forgiven you long ago. You deserve a thrashing, but I don't suppose you'll ever receive it. Gad, boy, I'm pleased to see you again!"

"Rather, pater!" gasped Handforth. "I—I mean I'm glad to see you!"

He had evidently been expecting a terrific dressing-down, and his relief was enormous. But it was something quite unusual to see the mighty Handforth shivering like a reed in the breeze.

Church and McClure had no trouble whatever; their parents received them with open arms. Later on Handforth tried to make out that he hadn't been at all nervous, but he was laughed down.

Several of Eileen's friends had come aboard, and she was busily entertaining them. Her fiancé, Captain Masters, had not yet returned from the United States, where he had gone on a special mission for the British Government. But his mother had come on board to welcome her future daughter-in-law.

Altogether we had a pretty lively time during that first hour. It was evident we should be rather late in going to Lord Dorriemore's mansion, but we didn't mind that.

We had to get rid of the guests first—although that sounds rather blunt. It was quite nice of them to see us in, but we should not formally arrive home till we met together at Dorrie's.

And so, as soon as the visitors had left the yacht, we prepared for leaving ourselves. We should all meet together again later on in the evening, to partake of the terrific supper at Belgrave Square.

"Well, I'm glad that's passed off all right," said Dorrie with a sigh. "I'm always afraid of a hitch occurin', you know. It makes me frightfully nervous to meet new faces, by gad! I thought your pater was goin' to eat me, Handforth, when I shook hands with him!"

Handforth grinned sheepishly.

"That—that's only his way, sir," he said. "My dad's a very modest sort of chap, really—just like me!"

"Begad! He must be modest, then!" murmured Sir Montie.

"We're going ashore in three parties.



Eileen Dare took a deep breath and lowered herself through the opening. Hanging by her hands, her feet just touched the water.—(See page 20.)

boys," said Nelson Lee. "You'd better hurry up, Nipper, because we're among the first batch. Is Miss Eileen ready, do you know? She will be with us, too."

"I haven't seen her for half an hour, sir," I replied.

"I really don't know where she is!" said Aunt Esther, with a trace of anxiety in her voice. "She went to her cabin to fetch something, and I didn't see her when she came on deck again."

"Oh, she's still below, Miss Gilbey," I replied. "I'll go and—"

"But she isn't below, Nipper," put in Aunt Esther. "Her maid has been searching for her for ten minutes past—and so have I. Do you think it possible that she has gone ashore?"

"I should hardly think so," replied the guv'nor. "My dear Miss Gilbey, don't look so worried!"

"We'll have a search," I said promptly.

But after ten minutes we made quite certain of the fact that Eileen was not on board. Rather concerned, we attempted to ascertain if she had gone ashore with the departing visitors—although the idea seemed absurd, for Eileen had no wrap or hat on.

Mr. Scott was able to give us positive information. He had stood by the gangway the whole time.

"No, sir, Miss Dare didn't go down the ladder," he said, in reply to Captain Burton's inquiry. "I haven't seen Miss Dare for some little time, sir."

"Are you quite sure, Mr. Scott," asked Leo keenly.

"Positive, sir!"

"Then it is extremely odd," said the guv'nor, turning to Dorrie and me. "Where on earth can Miss Eileen be?"

"Oh, my goodness!" I muttered. "I hope nothing's happened to her, sir. It's come over misty, and—"

"Tut, tut, Nipper, you needn't get such alarming ideas as all that," snapped Nelson Lee. "I have no doubt that Miss Eileen will turn up safe and sound within a very few minutes."

Truth to tell, the guv'nor was very anxious himself, but he didn't like to show it. And our alarm increased rapidly. Eileen's maid and Aunt Esther's maid and the two stewardesses thoroughly searched the ladies' quarters; but Eileen was nowhere to be found.

Meanwhile we searched every other inch of the yacht.

Result—nil.

And Mr. Scott was willing to swear on his oath that Eileen had not left the vessel in the usual way, by means of the accommodation-ladder. We were hot and breathless and terribly alarmed.

What could it mean?

How had Eileen been spirited away, and where was she now?

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HAPPENED TO EILEEN—CAPTAIN JELKS'S AUDACITY—A STRANGE POSITION.

EILEEN DARE, to tell the truth, was passing through an alarming adventure; and it was all the more alarming because it had been so unexpected.

Having reached prosaic London again, we certainly did not expect to meet with any trouble or peril. Actually we didn't—but Miss Eileen did!

It happened at a time when she least expected treachery. As Aunt Esther had said, Eileen left a little knot of people on the deck just after she had bade them good-bye, and had tripped below in order to get something from her cabin.

We were all on deck at the time, the majority of us collected round the head of the accommodation ladder. Eileen did not take long to get what she required, and then she returned.

At the head of the saloon companion she was about to turn off down the deck, when a member of the crew stepped towards her and respectfully touched his cap.

"Beg pardon, miss," he began. "May I say something, miss?"

"Certainly," replied Eileen. "What is it you want?"

"Beggin' your pardon, miss, but could you just come for'ard for half a minute?" said the man anxiously.

Eileen was rather curious. This man was not one that she liked the look of much, but she certainly did not suspect anything wrong. He was one of the fellows who had caused a little trouble at the start of the voyage, but had since been quite exemplary in his conduct.

"Why do you want me to come forward?" asked Eileen.

"It's that there little dog, miss—him as they call Boz," replied the man. "One o' the stokers was carryin' some tools a minute ago, an' he dropped a spanner on to the little feller. I believe his leg's broke—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Eileen, in distress. "Why didn't you bring Boz here?"

"We was afraid to shift 'im, miss," said the man. "But if you'll just come for'ard—"

"Yes, yes—of course I will!" exclaimed the girl quickly.

She started moving as she spoke, all her thoughts centred upon the little spaniel. She was very fond of animals, and particularly fond of Boz. She did not forget that she really owed her life to that astute dog.

To hear that he had broken his leg was quite alarming, and Eileen only thought of going to him with as little delay as possible. There was utterly no reason for her to suppose that the whole thing was a craftily laid trap. The scoundrels had displayed great cunning in tricking Eileen for'ard, for they certainly could not have drawn her away from her friends so easily by any other means.

Even as she walked forward she could hear the laughter and talk of the merry crowd aft, and for her to suspect that peril lay in front of her was quite impossible. Eileen was just as astute as Nelson Lee himself—but I wouldn't mind betting that the gov'nor would have fallen into the trap just the same. Only he, perhaps, would not have forgotten all else at the moment. Eileen was a girl, and all her feminine sympathy went out to the supposedly injured little spaniel.

"Just along here, miss," said the man.

Eileen walked by his side quickly until the pair were right for'ard and far away from everybody else on deck. Another few yards, perhaps, and Eileen would have suspected that something was wrong. But suddenly, without the slightest warning, something thick and enveloping was flung completely over her head and drawn tight.

"Oh!" cried Eileen, startled.

She knew then, in a flash, that she had been tricked. But it was too late to retrieve the situation. Eileen was as nimble as a trained athlete, and she twisted rapidly, ducking at the same time in order to free herself from the overwhelming folds of the blanket.

But she was borne down through sheer weight of numbers.

In addition to the man who had acted as the decoy there were three others—three powerful fellows who simply forced Eileen to the deck and held her there so that she could not move an inch.

One great hand was clapped over her mouth, with the thick folds of the blanket in between. To make any outcry was impossible, and before three minutes had passed she was roped up hurriedly but effectively.

Eileen was not frightened—not in the least.

But she was tremendously angry, and her ready wits were even now forming a shrewd guess at the reason for this villainous attack. She could not help connecting it with Captain Jelks. Who else indeed could be responsible for such an affair? Yet Captain Jelks had not had time to reach England on the old Aurora.

Eileen concluded that these men were either his agents, who had received instructions, or it was possible that Jelks had reached England by boarding a homeward-bound liner. She guessed the actual truth, of course.

The man who had decoyed her for'ard was a weak-minded fellow, and he had easily fallen victim to bribery. The other three men were not members of the yacht's crew at all, but three of Jelk's own men—ruffians who were in his pay.

The girl realised that there was very little chance of rescue for her. There wasn't a soul up here, right against the fo'c'sle. Practically every member of the crew was on duty, aft and amidships. And Lord Dorrimore and all his guests and visitors could have heard nothing.

And the whole thing was over so quickly that there was little chance of interference. Through the folds of the blanket Eileen heard

muffled, whispered voices. Then she was lifted up and carried bodily to the rail.

A rope had evidently been passed round her, for she was lowered overside in a giddy series of lurches, and at last she felt other hands, which drew her into a waiting boat. A few further whispers, and then the boat edged away into the misty darkness of the river.

There was one man in it at the time of Eileen's descent, but the other three rapidly swarmed down and took their places. Then the boat glided silently and swiftly down on the tide.

"Dead easy, mates," muttered one of the men. "Talk about bloomin' cheek! I reckon this is jest about the limit—an' the softest job we've ever done!"

"Easy money!" said one of the others, with a chuckle.

Two men were rowing, and the other two remained on guard over the helpless girl. There was not much possibility of them being stopped, for the river was very dark, and the gathering mist helped them.

The whole trick had been far more successful than the scoundrels had hoped for. Events had played into their hands in the most gratifying manner. Even if those on board the yacht discovered that Eileen had disappeared there could be no chase.

And so the boat slipped down the river without undue haste and attracted no attention whatever.

Its journey was a comparatively short one, for after a row of about twenty minutes' duration the nose of the little craft was turned towards the northern shore and edged its way near the landing-stage of an apparently deserted warehouse.

The landing-stage was in a dilapidated condition, the old piles which supported it being rotten and green with slime.

They were fairly high, and the boat was able to worm its way in between them, and so reach the wall of the warehouse itself, where it met the water. The whole place was as dark as pitch, and scarcely a sound broke the stillness, except for the gurgle and splash of the water.

"Easy now, mates—easy!"

Eileen, of course, had not the slightest idea of where she was, but she could easily tell that the trip was at an end. She was lifted from the boat, carried through a low doorway, and then taken along a brick passage.

A door closed, and there was a pause while one of the men went forward. Then another door opened, allowing a flood of light to come out.

"Good!" exclaimed a voice. "Bring 'er along, men, an' handle 'er careful. I 'ope you've carried out my instructions not to 'arm a 'air of 'er pretty 'ead?"

"Yes, cap'n," said one of the men.

"Becos you won't git no pay if the young lady makes any complaint," said Captain Ebenezer Jelks. "I ain't never bin accused of 'armin' a lady, 'an I 'ope I never shall be!"

Eileen was carried through the lighted

doorway, and then the ropes were quickly untied and the blanket removed. In spite of the fact that her hair was disarranged and that she was very flushed, the girl wore an air of quiet dignity when she looked round at her captors.

It was no frightened look either, but one of anger and contempt. She had already recognised the voice of Captain Jelks, and knew that her first suspicions were correct.

She was standing within a low cellar, the walls of which reeked of damp. A lantern was suspended from a long iron bracket upon one of the walls, and she saw that Captain Jelks was facing her. He was looking quite smart in a new suit, and a cigar was between his teeth.

Close by him stood Mr. Larson, but the other men had withdrawn and were waiting outside in the passage.

"What is the meaning of this, Captain Jelks?" asked Eileen steadily. "Oh, you must be mad to imagine that you will gain any profit from such a foolish act as this! Why have you brought me here?"

Captain Jelks was frankly surprised.

"You're a cool 'un, miss!" he exclaimed admiringly. "I thought you'd be just frightened out o' your little wits, an' we've got smellin'-salts all ready in case you needed revivin'. Ain't that so, Bill?"

"They're in my pocket this minnit!" declared Larson untruthfully.

"An' if I may make so bold, I must say that you're lookin' a real picture," added Captain Jelks. "It 'urts me more'n I can say to treat you rough, Miss Dare. But it was the only way out of a difficulty, an' mehbe you'll forgive me——"

"Why have you brought me here?" repeated Eileen calmly. "You are very fond of hearing your own voice, Captain Jelks, but I can assure you that I am not particularly interested. If you expect to obtain money from Lord Dorrimore in return for my release I am afraid you will be disappointed."

"It's marvellous 'ow you guess these things, Miss Dare!" said Captain Jelks. "Please don't think I'm goin' to 'arm you—I ain't. An' I want to know if those men o' mine did you any 'urt?"

"Am I expected to answer these foolish questions?" asked the girl scornfully.

"Darn me if you ain't a sure wonder!" declared Jelks. "I won't trouble you no more, Miss Dare—you've made me feel sorry I've touched ye. 'Tain't often a gal shows such pluck—eh, Bill?"

"I never seed the like!" said Mr. Larson.

"If Cap'n Burton is reasonable you'll be with your friends agin afore the mornin'," went on Jelks. "It all depends on Burton, miss. But wotever happens, no 'arm won't come to ye. You can take my word for that."

Eileen made no reply, and Captain Jelks tossed the ash from his cigar and turned towards the door.

"I don't want you to be worrited by them men o' mine, miss," he said. "So I'm jest goin' to lock you in this 'ere cellar, an'ug

an' cosy. You'll be as safe as 'ouses until I come back, an' I 'ope I shall be able to restore you to your friends. Blame me, you deserve to be!"

Jelks really meant the last sentence, for Eileen's attitude had stirred up within him a feeling of keen admiration. He had expected the girl to snivel and to go into fits of hysterics. And Jelks, whatever his faults, was a great admirer of levelheadedness and pluck.

Rather to Eileen's surprise she was not rebound. Jelks and Larson took their departure, leaving the light burning in the cellar. The door closed, and Eileen heard a rusty key turned in the lock.

It was perhaps only natural that she should at once turn her attention to her disordered hair. In spite of her desperate situation she thought of her personal appearance. She wouldn't have been a girl if she hadn't done so.

Captain Jelks chuckled as he walked down the passage with Larson.

"I reckon we've done well, Bill," he said. "It's a good thing we arrived a week afore the yacht, or we couldn't 'ave made our plans an' found this nice little place to use as a prison."

"But will it pan out well, cap'n?" asked Larson practically.

"You can bet your larst quid on it!" replied Jelks. "Why, Bill, we're playin' a trump-card, an' I'm goin' to act bold. It's cheek as'll win this game—jest blamed cheek!"

At the doorway, under the landing-stage, the boat was still waiting with the three men in it. Jelks paid them some money, and after a few words the trio went off. Their part of the scheme had been accomplished.

"I'm going' off now, Bill," said Jelks. "an' I ain't sure whether to take you with me or to leave you be'ind. I reckon that gal will be safe enough in the cellar. There ain't a livin' soul within four or five 'undred yards, an' if she screams till she loses 'er pretty voice she won't make 'erself 'eard. She can never break that door down, an' there's no other way out."

"I'll leave it to you, cap'n," said Larson.

"Well, we don't want to take no risks," said Jelks, after a moment. "You'd better stay be'ind, old man, an' 'ang about this door. Keep a sharp look out, an' expect me back when you see me. I don't s'pose I shall be longer than an hour, an' then we shall both be rollin' in quids!"

"P'r'aps!" said Mr. Larson shortly.

"It's a sure cinch, as old Barrow would say," declared Jelks. "Don't you make no bloomin' error, Bill, we've got them fellers in the 'ollow of our 'ands. 'Elp us to git one o' them boats over."

There were three small boats floating in amongst the piles, and one of them was quickly brought round, and Captain Jelks pushed off and floated out into the tide. Then, shipping the oars, he commenced pulling strongly up the river towards the Adven-

ture. His plans were already mapped out and he had decided to act with absolute boldness.

The mist was somewhat thicker now, and he did not meet any other boat as he ascended the river, except a River Police launch—and Jelks didn't care a snap of his fingers for that.

About an hour had elapsed since the time of Eileen's capture, and we had just finished our search for Eileen and were in a state of uncertainty and alarm. Of course we did not guess that anything of such a scoundrelly nature had occurred to Eileen; and Jelks was not in our thoughts at all.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Captain Burton had collected in the skipper's cabin to discuss the situation, and we boys were collected in a knot on deck. The sound of a boat grating against the yacht's side drew our attention, and then we saw that somebody was mounting the ladder.

"Perhaps he's brought news of Eileen," I said quickly.

We hurried forward, and then received about the biggest surprise we had had for many a day. For Captain Ebenezer Jelks stepped on deck, a cigar between his teeth, a smile on his face, and with a confidence which was breathless in its cool audacity. Considering our relations in the past, it was staggering that he should walk aboard Lord Dorrimore's yacht in this fashion. And how the dickens had he managed to get to London so quickly?

"Evenin', young gents!" he said genially. "Cap'n Burton aboard?"

"You—you rotter!" roared Handforth. "It's like your blessed cheek coming here, after trying to kill us on that island——"

"What's the matter here?" exclaimed Mr. Scott, striding forward. "Why, what the thunder—— Jelks!"

"'Imself!" said the cool scoundrel. "'Ow do, Mr. Scott? I'm rather anxious to see Cap'n Burton—an' Lord Dorrimore, too! You might take my card along an' say that I'm waitin' for an interview!"

"You infernal rogue!" exploded Mr. Scott. "If you don't clear off——"

"An' tell the cap'n I'm in a hurry," went on Jelks. "I shouldn't advise you to waste time, young feller. My business is very important, an' if you try any games you'll be sorry for it. Jest go aft an' tell the cap'n I'm waitin'."

Mr. Scott looked at Jelks, and then looked at us. But before he could move I was already scudding along the deck, and I burst into the captain's cabin rather unceremoniously. The guv'nor and Dorrie and Captain Burton looked at me quickly.

"Any news, Nipper?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Jelks is here!" I panted.

"Jelks!" repeated the guv'nor. "Nonsense!"

"He is, sir—as bold as brass!" I gasped. "Says he wants to see the captain. I'll bet a quid he knows something about Miss Eileen, too."

"By gad!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore, ris-

ing to his feet, and clenching his fists. "If that cur has dared to lay a finger on Miss Dare I'll wring his infernal neck for him! By gad!"

Nelson Lee took a deep breath.

"I don't pretend to understand it," he said, "but I advise you to see him at once, captain. It is very significant that Jelks should come aboard at this particular time. And the very boldness of his action seems to point to the fact that he has a lever to wield. We must see him!"

"I'll have him clapped into gaol!" declared the skipper furiously. "Oh, Mr. Scott!" he added, as the first officer appeared. "Bring Jelks here at once, will you? Yes, yes, I know all about it! Bring him here at once!"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Scott.

Two minutes later Captain Jelks was ushered into the cabin. He walked in with an assurance and a jauntiness which made me want to punch him. He removed his cap, and bowed.

"Pleased to meet you agin, gentlemen," he said coolly. "Our last meetin' wasn't much of a success——"

"What do you want here, Jelks?" interjected the guv'nor curtly.

"Well, I didn't come 'ere to talk to you," said Jelks, sitting down without waiting to be asked. "I'm 'ere on a matter of business—between me an' Cap'n Burton and Lord Dorrimore——"

"You confounded ruffian!" shouted Captain Burton, rising in his seat.

"Now, now, don't git excited," said Jelks, removing the cigar from between his teeth. "Excitement won't 'elp you, an' it might make things go 'ard with a certain young lady——"

"You rotter!" I gasped. "Then—then you know where Miss Dare is?"

"That's why I'm 'ere," nodded the visitor. "I'm a kind-hearted man, an' I know as 'ow you're in trouble, gents. Miss Dare ain't aboard, but it so 'appens that I know just where to lay my 'ands on 'er——"

"You kidnapped her, Jelks!" exclaimed Nelson Lee grimly. "By heaven, if you've harmed a hair of Miss Dare's head——"

"Now, now, don't git imaginin' things," interposed Jelks. "Miss Dare ain't 'armed in the least, an' she's as safe as wot you are yourselves. This 'ere is just a matter of business between you an' me. Savvy? We've got to come to a compact."

"If you think I'll make any terms with you, Jelks, you're frightfully mistaken," said Lord Dorrimore, with deadly calmness. "By gad! Will you excuse me a moment, Captain Burton? I just want to call Umlosi. I ain't afraid of tacklin' this worm myself, but it would be a fag. Umlosi can pitch him overboard quite easily."

"None o' them tricks!" said the visitor hastily. "It won't do you no good to try force, an' it won't do Miss Dare no good neither. We ain't been the best o' friends in the past, an' I own that I've played a few low-down games. But we'll let bygones

for hygeene, an' talk business. Just five minutes, Cap'n Burton—that's all I want."

Captain Burton sat down again.

"On ahead!" he said curtly.

"Now I ain't a graspin' man," said Jelks, waving his cigar. "Blowed down below you've got a pretty tidy treasure, ain't you? I've bin to a lot of trouble to git 'old of it, an' I've failed. All I want is to be made nice and comfy; so if you'll 'and me out a quarter share you'll find that I sha'n't grumble."

The cool audacity of this suggestion caused Captain Burton to go purple in the face with rage.

"You you ruffian!" he exploded. "If you think for one moment——"

"A quarter share of the treasure," went on Jelks deliberately. "If you'll be reasonable, why Miss Dare will be back agin afore midnight. I only want your promise—an' Lord Dorrimore's promise."

There was a moment's silence, and then Dorrie spoke.

"Are we to understand, Jelks, that you demand a quarter of the treasure in return for Miss Dare?" he asked calmly.

"That's it, exactly."

"Then, by gad, I think you've got the most overwhelming nerve a man could possess!" said Dorrie. "In fact, your very visit to this yacht is a piece of infernal impudence! How the deuce did you get to England—and how did you know that we had managed to free the yacht from that lagoon?"

"Them questions is easy to answer," replied the rascally visitor. "I didn't keep aboard that old hooker o' Barrow's for long—we an' Larson changed for a homeward-bound liner. An' you may remember that I collared some o' your crew durin' one of our little scraps? Well, I got to know all about your explosive stunts, an' when you turned the tables on me that explosion 'appened—so I knew that you would be able to git out o' the lagoon easy enough."

"But, my dear man," said Dorrie, "that explosion was only a small affair. It didn't break a gap half big enough——"

"I dunno anything about that," interrupted Jelks. "Any'ow, you got out, didn't ye? An' now we're 'avin' a little business chat. So let's stick to it. Wot about it, Cap'n Burton? Is it a deal?"

"No, you scoundrel, it is not!" roared the skipper.

"Then it'll be 'ard for Miss Dare," said Jelks ominously. "Don't you make no mistake, my fine fellers. If I don't git wot I want, you'll be sorry for the rest o' your blamed lives!"

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"This attempt at bluster is very pretty, Jelks," he said grimly. "But do you realise that you have placed yourself in our hands? You can be arrested on the evidence of your own assertion, and we have only to call a police-constable and——"

"You won't do a fool thing like that!" sneered Jelks.

"Indeed! And why not?"

"Becos I've got the whip 'and—that's why not?" replied Jelks calmly. "I didn't come aboard 'ere—right into the 'ornet's nest, so to speak—without takin' proper precautions. Ho no! Ben Jelks ain't such a durned fool as all that!"

"You had better be explicit!" snapped Nelson Lee.

"Well, Miss Dare is somewhere not far off, an' she ain't 'armed, but if things don't go as I want 'em she will be 'armed!" threatened Jelks. "I've got a good few pals on the watch, an' if I don't go ashore at the end of an hour there's no tellin' wot'll 'appen to that pretty gal. I'm desperate, mind, an' I don't believe in using threats which I can't carry out. You can't do nothin'. And if you send for a policeman, or make any move of any sort, you'll regret it all your lives—'cos Miss Dare won't come back no more. I'm goin' ashore soon, an' you daren't detain me!" Jelks sneered. "That's all I've got to say, gents. If anything 'appens to me you won't see that gal agin. So it's up to you!"

He leaned back in his chair, puffing at his cigar.

"And there's another thing," he added. "If I'm follered when I go ashore I shall know about it. My pals are on the watch. You simply can't do nothin'. Nice position, ain't it?"

"By gad! You're a cunnin' rascal!" exclaimed Dorrie frankly.

"Thanks for the compliment!" sneered Jelks.

Nelson Lee and Captain Burton were silent. They knew quite well that this impudent visitor held the upper hand. In all probability his assertions regarding a host of "pals" were untrue; but it would not do to take risks. Jelks had them in the hollow of his hand—solely because he was able to wield such a strong lever.

In spite of himself, Nelson Lee could scarcely help admiring the amazing audacity of Jelks's plan. It was a master-stroke. With Kileen in his clutches he was in a position to dictate his own terms. And they could do nothing to frustrate him—nothing whatever!

To inform the police would be to endanger Kileen. A great rage filled the breasts of Nelson Lee and Captain Burton. They realised the helpless nature of their position far more than Dorrie did. He, in his usual blundering way, was anxious to pitch Jelks overboard, neck and crop.

"Well, gents?" asked Jelks, after a few moments. "I'm waitin' for you to give the word. A quarter is what I want. It's such a little you won't never miss it. In fact, I'd ask for a 'all share if I wasn't a reasonable man."

"You—you——" choked Captain Burton.

"Please remain calm," interrupted Nelson Lee quietly. "We must consider this matter carefully, captain. And you, Dorrie, must keep yourself in check. Much as I should like to give this rascal his deserts, we cannot do so without endangering Miss Kileen in the most grave manner. It would be well to

recognise the fact that Captain Jelks has played a trump card."

"That's just the truth, an' nothin' more," said Jelks, nodding.

"It pains me to give in, old man," said Lord Dorrimore. "But I'll tell you what. Jelks can have my share of the treasure—bein' a millionaire already, I don't particularly want it."

"By jings! We won't allow that!" declared Captain Burton hotly. "We'll do what Jelks says, but the remainder shall be shared. I suppose you're right, Mr. Lee. Jelks has certainly got us properly fixed. And for Miss Dare's sake we've got to knuckle under. It's the only way. By the Lord Harry! I should never lift my head again if anything happened to that sweet girl!"

"So you accept the terms—hey?" said Jelks eagerly.

"Yes!" growled the skipper.

It cost him a great effort to say so, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore looked on with helpless rage. But they could do nothing, so what was the good of trying to think they could? To call the police was impossible; to follow Jelks when he left was equally impossible; to hold him a prisoner would be just as fatal. There was not one course which they could pursue—except to give in.

"Say, you're real gents!" exclaimed Jelks, getting to his feet. "If you'll hand that quarter share over at once Miss Dare shall be returned to you by midnight."

Nelson Lee smiled grimly.

"Oh, no, Jelks, we are not quite such fools as that," he said. "You cannot expect us to take your word. You would probably demand another sum once you got away with the first amount. You shall not touch a penny until Miss Dare is brought back to this ship, unharmed."

"How am I to know that you'll keep your word?" demanded Jelks gruffly.

"Because we are gentlemen, and because we should not demean ourselves by making a promise which we have no intention of fulfilling," replied Lee. "Bring Miss Dare here before midnight and you shall have your price. Now you can get out! Take it or leave it, whichever you like."

"Well, I reckon I'll take it," said Captain Jelks comfortably. "I'm much obliged to you gents, for listenin' to me so calm-like. It's allus nice to understand one another. You'll see me agin afore midnight."

And, with a mocking bow, Jelks took his departure.

CHAPTER VI.

EILEEN IS NOT IDLE—FREE—A SURPRISE FOR NELSON LEE AND DORRIMORE.

EILEEN DARE examined her prison with interest.

Jelks had taken his departure a few moments before, and she could still hear him talking with Mr. Larson at the doorway which led out into the open. And Eileen was already wondering if she could escape.

She was no ordinary girl. Eileen had proved her sterling worth on many occasions during her famous campaign against a gang of criminals known as "The Combine"; she had shown the gov'nor and I that when it came to detective work, or any enterprise demanding prompt action and a good supply of courage, she could almost beat us at our own game. Although the gov'nor's often told me that I'm a pretty decent detective—in my own little way—Eileen could whack me any day.

She hadn't forgotten those stirring days when she had passed through many perils and excitements. And now her first thought was to examine the cellar with the idea of liberating herself.

Jelks, of course, thought that she was just an ordinary girl, and concluded that she would never have the pluck to make any attempt to free herself. That's just where he was wrong.

And Eileen didn't believe in wasting time.

She didn't stand there for an hour thinking, but got busy almost as soon as the key had turned in the lock. A quick examination of the door made it plain to her that no escape was possible in that direction.

The door was heavy and the lock formidable. It would have required Umlosi's strength to smash it down, and Eileen was just a dainty little girl. She could not escape by brute force.

The floor was of wood, but as this place was a kind of cellar there was not much possibility that any escape could be made by ripping up the boards. The walls themselves were of solid stone, without even a grating or a crevice.

As for the ceiling, that was far out of her reach. Heavy beams crossed it, and the whole structure was of tremendous strength. Eileen sighed as she came to the conclusion that her prison was a secure one.

"And yet I should love to escape!" she told herself. "Oh, that scoundrel! He means to force money from Captain Burton and Lord Dorrimore—there can be no other reason for this crime. But if I could escape—"

She paused, realising the futility of her wish. The voices had now ceased, and she concluded that Jelks had taken his departure. Whether Larson had gone with him was a question she could not decide.

But she listened intently.

Gurgle—gurgle!

The sound of the Thames came from almost beneath her feet, and she was rather startled. Did the river run right beneath the cellar? Regardless of the dust upon the floor, she knelt down and listened again, her pretty neck suffering severely. And this time the sound was much more distinct.

The water certainly found its way beneath the cellar. And, since this was the case, Eileen argued, it was clear that there must be a wide space through which the tide could flow.

"Oh!" she murmured. "I—I wonder—"

She paused, rather startled by the thought which had occurred to her. The girl was quite ready to take risks if there was any reasonable prospect of attaining success.

She remembered that one of her captors had muttered something about some other boats just outside; he had warned his companions not to collide with them. And Eileen decided, without delay, to test a theory she had conceived.

Footsteps outside, and a cough, told her that Mr. Larson was still near-by—obviously upon guard. But he made no attempt to enter the cellar, and Eileen commenced work without waiting any longer.

First of all she examined the floor closely, and at length selected a board which seemed looser than the others. She attempted to prise it up, but her delicate little fingers were quite incapable of the task.

If I or the gov'nor had been in a similar position we should have fished out a whacking great clasp-knife; but Eileen did not carry such delicate tools about with her. It's a rummy thing to me that girls are content to go about without any pockets. How the dickens they get on is more than I can understand.

Eileen looked round the cellar, a frown puckering her pretty brow. But there was nothing—nothing whatever. Over the whole floor space there was not a single article except dust, and the walls were equally bare.

"How helpless I feel!" she murmured, walking round the cellar. "Oh, can't I find anything? If I could only get that board up—Oh, what a silly I am!"

She darted across to the lantern and removed it from the bracket. This latter was a rusty iron thing, secured to the wall by means of three or four nails. But Eileen had a leverage owing to the projecting nature of the bracket, and she worked it from side to side, her excitement growing as she felt the nails giving.

After five minutes of cautious work—for she was afraid to cause any noise—the bracket parted from the wall and she held it in her hands. Just for a few moments Eileen rested, for she was out of breath.

"Now to test the floor!" she murmured.

She knelt down amid the dust and inserted the end of the bracket between two of the floor-boards. It was slow work, and fully fifteen minutes passed before she obtained any definite result.

Then the board creaked somewhat and became loosened. Gradually, by dint of prizing, Eileen succeeded in lifting the board sufficiently for her to gaze through the black hole.

Tilting the lamp, she looked down, and saw the glittering water some five feet below her. It was restless, proving that the river had free entry. And Eileen decided to make a bold move.

If Jelks had ever thought of the possibility he had cast it aside at once. Why should he suppose that his girl prisoner would dare to drop into that water, with the intention of swimming into the open river?

But that was precisely Eileen's intention.

She did not waste a moment, for she realised the urgent necessity of haste. She could occasionally hear Mr. Larson outside, and was afraid that he would enter at any

second. If so, her whole plan would be ruined and she would have no second chance of getting away.

So, easing up three other boards—a simple task now that the first one was removed—she took a deep breath and lowered herself through the opening. Hanging by her hands, she felt that her feet were under water. Being August, the river was not particularly cold, and Eileen was a very expert swimmer.

She dropped, with a little gasp, and plunged deep down. When she came to the surface she clung to a slime-covered wooden support, and saw an opening in the dimness ahead. Overhead the lantern light streamed through from the cellar.

As silently as possible Eileen swam forward, and her relief was boundless when she found that there was a clear exit into the space beneath the old landing-stage. She passed between two masses of brickwork, and her fingers almost immediately clutched the gunwale of a boat.

She worked her way round to the stern, and then hauled herself into the little craft. There was no sign of Mr. Larson, though Eileen could dimly see that the door was open. The mate had evidently gone up the passage, but it was probable that he would return at any moment.

So, breathing fast, Eileen unfastened the boat with nimble fingers and pushed out into the river. Two minutes later she was rowing strongly and steadily through the hazy mist.

She had not seen where she had been brought to, but had known that she had come down on the tide. She therefore pulled against it strongly, knowing that she would come upon the yacht sooner or later.

Eileen knew that she would be able to pick out this old warehouse again, for she took very careful stock of it and the immediate surroundings. The exercise warmed her and prevented any possibility of taking a chill.

And she was glowing with triumph. It was glorious to realise that she had defeated Jelks, in spite of all his cunning. But would she arrive at the yacht in time to prevent her friends parting with a big sum of money? As she pulled up the river a launch came swinging along, and she recognised it as one belonging to the River Police.

The girl came to a decision at once and hailed the launch. The engines ceased their steady beat and the little craft edged towards the boat. Three minutes later Eileen was on board, telling her story to a keen-eyed inspector.

This was a smart move of Eileen's, to board this police launch, for she was enabled to speed up the river much more swiftly, and to have a force of police in readiness in case of emergency.

Inspector Hammond, of the River Police, was rather startled. This was not at all surprising, for it was not often he met a beautiful girl in an open boat on the Thames who had such an extraordinary story to tell as Eileen. But he listened intently to her story and steered his course towards the Adventure.

When he heard that Nelson Lee was on board he grew far more interested. For, to

tell the truth, the worthy inspector was somewhat sceptical.

At last the yacht was reached, and Eileen and Inspector Hammond mounted the ladder to the deck. Almost the first person they met was myself. Captain Jelks had departed about ten minutes before, and there was misery on board. Telegrams had been despatched postponing the supper at Lord Dorrimore's, and now we were waiting for the first news of Eileen.

I simply yelled with relief when I saw her appear on deck. And then I yelled with excitement when I spotted the well-known uniform immediately in her rear. Jelks had failed! The police had brought Eileen back!

"Thank goodness, Miss Eileen!" I gasped joyfully.

"I'm still safe and sound, Nipper," said Eileen breathlessly. "Where is Mr. Lee—and Lord Dorrimore? I have brought the police, believing that Captain Jelks was on board—"

"He's gone!" I gasped. "Why, what—I say, come below, Miss Eileen!"

We hastened down the companion and burst into the saloon.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE TRACK—THE FINISH OF CAPTAIN JELKS—THE GATHERING OF THE CLANS.

NELSON LEE took a deep breath. "Upon my soul, Miss Dare, I scarcely know what to say!" he exclaimed. "My admiration is boundless; you have acted in the most courageous manner, and I cannot find words to compliment you—"

"But, Mr. Lee, I haven't done much!" protested Eileen. "It was quite an easy matter to escape from that cellar, really!"

She had told her story and I was simply bubbling over with delight and joy. Jelks had been beaten—after we had resigned ourselves to the fact that he had beaten us! And it was Eileen who had turned the tables.

Before telling her story both Nelson Lee and Aunt Esther had insisted upon Eileen changing into dry things; only ten minutes had been lost, but the gov'nor was not prepared to let Eileen wear those soaking things a moment longer than was necessary. During those ten minutes Nelson Lee had arranged matters with Inspector Hammond, so, actually not a second was lost.

"We thought you had been rescued by the police, by gad!" exclaimed Dorrie. "But you're smarter than they are, Miss Dare—although I'm speakin' in the presence of Inspector Hammond. What's the programme now?"

"I am afraid I shall have to ask you to act as our guide, Miss Dare?" said the gov'nor briskly.

"Afraid!" echoed Eileen. "Why, I'm sure I shouldn't like to be left behind, Mr. Lee! I do hope we shall succeed in capturing that wretched man. He has caused us terrible trouble ever since we left England for the

Pacific. It is high time he was sent to prison."

"By glory!" murmured Lord Dorrimore. "He ought to have been there before we started the voyage! It strikes me that prison would be the best permanent home for Captain Jelks!"

Nelson Lee looked keen.

"We promised Jelks that he should receive his reward upon your safe return, Miss Dare," he exclaimed. "That promise is now, of course, null and void. You escaped on your own initiative, which therefore simplifies the whole matter. We shall be justified in taking any steps possible to capture Jelks—and we shall not be breaking our given word. Had you not escaped we should have been compelled to let Jelks go free, but that necessity is fortunately obviated."

"Hadn't we better start, gov'nor?" I put in eagerly.

"Yes, we must not lose another minute," replied Nelson Lee. "Even if we do not arrive before Jelks we shall probably find him on the spot—if not, the police will be on his track long before the morning."

We were all glad to know that the compact between Captain Jelks and Lord Dorrimore and Captain Burton was at an end. Eileen's escape had changed the whole aspect of the situation. She had returned on her own account, and it was up to us to lay Jelks by the heels.

Of course, everybody was excited—that is to say, Aunt Esther, and Sir Montie and all the other fellows. Handforth and Co. were dying to come along with us in the police-launch, but we couldn't take the whole crowd. Eileen and I went in addition to Nelson Lee and Dorrie, and Captain Burton came along as well. Inspector Hammond was quite keen, being anxious to get a feather in his cap.

We shot down the river rapidly, and in a very few minutes Eileen gave the word that we were nearing the old warehouse. It didn't take long for the swift launch to cover the distance.

It was now quite foggy, and Eileen had some little difficulty in picking out the exact spot; but she succeeded at last, and the launch was nosed into the wide spaces between the rotting old piles, and came to a stop in such a position that one of the boats which was moored there could be used as a bridge to reach the doorway. Nelson Lee himself went across first, with the inspector and several constables following.

As the gov'nor reached the doorway he heard a footstep along the dark passage. A dim figure loomed out of the gloom.

"That you, cap'n?" came a gruff voice.

"Larson!" murmured the gov'nor, over his shoulder.

"Come 'ere, Bill," he added loudly, in a wonderful imitation of Jelks's voice. "Just a minnit, ole mate!"

"Anything gorn wrong?" inquired Mr. Larson, as he came forward. "I'm glad you've come back, Jelks. The gal's very quiet, an' I was just about to 'ave a peep in— Why, wot the thunder— Narks!"

Mr. Larson realised the truth too late. Even as he attempted to back away Nelson Lee's hand shot out and grasped the rascally mate's shoulder. A short struggle, and Larson was rendered helpless.

"I am glad you have told us that Jelks hasn't come back yet," said Nelson Lee grimly. "It makes our task so much easier, my friend. Your little plot has failed—just as your other plots failed!"

"Ang you!" snarled the mate savagely.

"By gad! You came precious near to that yourself," commented Lord Dorrimore languidly. "In fact, I ain't sure that you don't deserve hangin', Larson. By gad! Close his mouth, somebody!"

Larson was swearing, and he was rapidly hustled out and placed on board the launch. The first part of the programme had been accomplished with great success, and it was almost certain that Captain Jelks would appear upon the scene within the next five minutes or so.

"If he sees the launch here, he'll take fright and slip away," said Nelson Lee shrewdly. "We mustn't lose a minute, Hammond. You're in charge of this business, but I suggest that you remain here with several men, and send the launch up the river."

"A splendid idea, Mr. Lee," said the inspector. "We'll do it!"

The launch got away quickly, disappearing into the mist. And then we turned our attention to the cellar which had done service as Eileen's prison. The key was in the lock, and Nelson Lee turned it and we all crowded in.

The place was exactly as she had left it—the floor-boards torn up, and the lantern standing upon the floor near by. Eileen flushed prettily as we all showered compliments upon her for having shown such ingenuity.

"I'll tell you what," suggested Dorrie. "I've got a bright idea—a scintillating stunt, by gad! Why not put all these boards back an' lock Miss Dare up again in the cellar?"

"Why, what the dickens——" I began indignantly.

"We shall be near by, of course," went on Dorrie. "It would be rather amusin' to hear old Jelks come in, swaggerin' an' blusterin'. An' don't you police fellows want evidence? You'll hear heaps of it if you hide, because Jelks is sure to be bubblin' with triumph. And then we can spring on him and give him the surprise of his life."

"I shouldn't like to ask the young lady——" began the inspector.

"Why, I don't mind at all!" put in Eileen. "You will be just near by, so I shall have nothing to fear. Please do just as you think best."

"Then we'll adopt his lordship's plan," said Hammond briskly.

The river policemen soon had the floor-boards back in their places, and the bracket was temporarily fixed on the wall once more. With the lamp hanging on it, and with Eileen in the cellar, there was nothing whatever to show that she had escaped—except, in the fact that she was wearing different clothing.

And Jelks would hardly notice that during the first minute. If he did, he would certainly conclude that he had made a mistake.

There was another cellar adjoining, and as soon as Eileen had been locked into her prison we concealed ourselves. And then commenced the wait. Five minutes—passed—ten minutes.

And then, just as we were beginning to get somewhat impatient, we distinctly heard a boat grating against the brickwork of the doorway. A few moments later a heavy foot-step sounded, and Nelson Lee, who was peeping round the doorway, saw the glow of a cigar.

"Ain't you here, Larson?" came Jelks's voice. "Larson! Blamed fool!" Jelks added under his breath. "Can't never take no orders!"

He came along the passage, and paused outside the cellar door. We heard the key turn in the lock, and Captain Jelks entered the prison. It was quite clear that our plans had panned out in every particular; Jelks had not the slightest idea that disaster was looming near.

"Ho, so you ain't fainted, Miss Dare?" exclaimed the skipper, as he walked into the cellar with a jaunty air. "I've brought you good noos."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Eileen coldly.

"Noos of the best brand," went on Jelks comfortably. "In a few minutes you're goin' to be took back to your kind friends—an' a 'air of your 'ead won't be 'armed. I don't mind tellin' ye that Lord Dorrimore an' Cap'n Burton an' that feller named Lee 'ave agreed to my proposition. They're gents, they are—every blamed one of 'em! I ain't denyin' that the game was agin the law, but they daresn't say nothin' arter givin' their words."

"Have you demanded money from them?" asked Eileen angrily.

"Money?" laughed Jelks. "Lor' bless yer little life! My price was somethin' like a 'undred an' fifty thousand quids—a quarter o' that treasure. An' I've got the price, too. By ginger! An' I must say you're worth it, miss!"

Jelks lurched forward, and Eileen backed away. It was quite evident that the captain's late arrival was due to the fact that he had been celebrating his success in his usual spirited manner!

"Now's our time!" muttered Nelson Lee sharply. "I'm afraid the scoundrel is about to lay his unclean fingers upon Miss Dare! Come on, Hammond!"

They left the adjoining cellar silently. We followed, and Jelks was so positively confident of his security that even when he heard a sound at the doorway he did not turn. He merely gave a laugh.

"That you, Larson?" he asked. "Come an' lend a 'and——"

He paused as a fist thumped upon his shoulder. The next second he twisted round, and a bellow of alarm and fury left his throat as he saw the guv'nor and the inspector and all the rest of us.

"Trapped!" he snarled, grabbing for his revolver.

There was a quick struggle, and Nelson Lee snatched the weapon away and dropped it into his own pocket.

"Exactly, Jelks—trapped!" he said calmly.

"You blamed traitor!" shouted Jelks. "Give me yer word that you wouldn't foller, an' then you come along——"

"On the contrary, Jelks, we arrived first," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "You failed to imprison Miss Dare securely, and she escaped and led us back. This was just a little theatrical business in order to deceive you, and to take you off your guard. You are not the only clever man, you know!"

"Curse you!" snarled Jelks, breathless with rage. "An' curse you, too, Burton! Curse the 'ole crowd of you!"

"By gad!" exclaimed Dorrie. "You're rather hard, ain't you? The fact is, Jelks, you've played too many games—you've been an infernal nuisance to us for months past, an' if you don't get ten years I shall declare that the British law is too easy-goin'!"

"Oh, he'll get ten years all right!" said the inspector grimly. "Abduction and conspiracy are quite a nice little charge—and there will probably be other counts as well."

Captain Jelks raved with mad fury. But he had reached the end of his tether; he had made his last bid, and had failed. Both he and Larson would very soon receive the deserts they so richly deserved.

Well, that's all. We returned to the yacht, a jubilant party, and slept there during the night. The next day arrangements were made with regard to the treasure. Captain Burton insisted upon Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee taking equal shares; and nearly everybody came in for a nice little sum. Even Handforth and Co. and the other juniors were presented with a handsome amount—to be placed in a bank intact until they were of age. It only needs to be said that the crew were joyful at the amount of money they received. Umloot refused to take anything, declaring that he was quite content to roam about with Lord Dorrimore. Money was of no use to him.

The farewell supper at Dorrie's mansion was a great success, and it was an extremely joyful occasion. Everything had turned out well at the finish, and we felt that we should return to St. Frank's contented.

And we were due to arrive at the old school on the following Monday. Only one point worried me. Would Nelson Lee come back to St. Frank's and take up his old position as Housemaster of the Ancient House? I had a startled idea that he would not—mainly because he refused to say positively.

So the matter was left in doubt, and when I returned to St. Frank's on the Monday with all the other members of the holiday party I was not quite so happy as I should have been otherwise. Nelson Lee was coming down later—and then we should know the verdict.

What would it be?

THE END.

"BY GENERAL REQUEST"

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The Chums of Littleminster School.

A Magnificent Story of School Life and Adventure.**By ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

The First Chapters.

BASIL HOOD is a new boy at Littleminster School.

On his arrival he makes a friend of

JOHN CHALLIS, a Senior in the Fifth Form.

MYERS and **COGGIN** are two bullies, who, with some others, try to make Challis join the "Clubs," an athletic society. He refuses, and they determine to send him to Coventry. He is persuaded later by Mr. Evans, a master, to join. Ponsonby puts down Challis's name to play in a practice match. The next day he visits Challis in his study.

(Now read on.)

MYERS'S TREACHERY.

"IT'S a pity you haven't had a bit of practice at the nets," he remarked, "for then we might have got an idea of what you could do. However, I don't suppose it'll make any difference. One couldn't expect a chap like you to make much of a show."

"I—I'm awfully sorry, Ponsonby," stammered Challis, finding his voice at last.

"Sorry about what?"

"I shan't be able to play in the match this afternoon. I've got no flannels. I certainly shouldn't dream of borrowing them. And, besides, it completely slipped my memory. I've—I've made other arrangements."

"What do you mean?" stormed Ponsonby furiously.

"You see, I didn't regard my selection for the sixteen seriously. I—I didn't think you wanted me. Can't see that you do. Explain to the others, will you, and do your best for me. I'll play some other time."

Ponsonby, with flaming face and clenched fists, confronted Challis.

"Look here," he almost shouted, "this high and mightiness won't do. You'll have to play. If you don't, by George, the fellows will make your life unbearable for you."

"Then I suppose I shall have to take my chance," said Challis, with a frown and a sigh. "I'm out of practice, Ponsonby. I'll do my best for the team when I've had a chance of getting into form. But—I've got to get my things and find the time first."

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" hissed Ponsonby, boiling with rage, for he'd expected a meek and mild collapse on the part of the cad instead of this firm opposition.

"Surely," was the quiet answer, "that's my business. Apologise to the club for me, and let me off as lightly as you can."

With that he abruptly turned and walked away, leaving Ponsonby a prey to the deepest rage.

It was in an exceedingly ugly and revengeful mood that Ponsonby ran upon Myers a little later.

"Hello!" said the latter coolly. "You look in no end of a tear, old chap. What's up?"

"Oh, it's that brute Challis."

"What about him?"

"He won't play. He's going on a jaunt on his own account, I believe. When I remonstrated with him he cheeked me. I tell you, I'd give something to take a rise out of him, Myers." Ponsonby spoke in the heat of passion and without reflection. A little later he was obliged to confess to himself that, after all, Challis had not been guilty of any really outrageous act.

Myers smiled an ugly smile.

"Oh, all right," he murmured. "Leave it to me. I'll see that Challis gets punished as he deserves. By the way"—this came as a sort of afterthought—"I've hurt my foot rather badly and twisted my right wrist. Had a tumble this morning. Deuced awkward, because I shan't be able to play this afternoon, either. Could get a chap to run for me if it were only my leg. No good with a sprained wrist, though. Just explain, will you—"

"Oh, but you're going to see the match, aren't you?"

"No," and Myers shook his head. "I've something else on hand." And he walked quickly away.

"Wonder if he's going to spy on Challis?" thought Ponsonby, as he stood and watched the retreating figure of his chum.

As the day wore on the sun gained in power. There was just sufficient breeze to temper it. A more glorious day could hardly be imagined.

At any rate, John Challis thought so as he made his final preparations for the afternoon's fishing.

Some of his paraphernalia was down at the boat-house near the little inn, the Magpie,

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

which was situated on the road that ran close to the river Awle at that point.

He gathered up his new rod, some lines, and such flies as he needed, grabbed his basket, and then turned expectantly at the door.

Almost as he turned his head it opened, and Basil Hood looked in.

The boy wore his cap, and his face fairly beamed with excitement as he looked at Challis.

"I say, I'm ready!" he cried jubilantly.

"Then come on, young 'un. It's a tidy step to the boat-house. Every minute is of value."

"It's awfully good of you to take me with you fishing, Challis."

"Shut up," growled the bigger boy, as he made for the door. "Get along, kid." He fast locked the door of his study against possible raiders, and, putting the key in his pocket, made his way down the stairs and out of the schoolhouse by a door that was seldom used.

Walking at a brisk pace, his lips curved in a smile, he shunned the sports ground, not because he was afraid, but because common-sense dictated that it would be wiser not to rouse comment.

Soon they had passed the gates and were footing it along the dry and dusty road. A turn into a lane, a leap across a stile, and they were able to proceed at their leisure through fields of growing crops, bordered with hedgerows, with here and there a stately elm or massive oak to screen them from the sun.

Challis hardly spoke at all. His head was slightly bent and his eyes fixed upon the ground. Now and again, as he kept pace with his champion and friend, little Basil Hood would cast a questioning and timid glance at him. Was Challis angry because he was so silent?

The smile that flickered at the corners of the bigger boy's firm mouth proved the contrary, and Basil was silent and happy too.

"There's the Magpie," cried Challis presently, with a nod of his head at a red-tiled and somewhat neat-looking building which showed up across a field. It was the back of it they saw. They heard the whirr and chatter of a passing motor, and saw the dust-clouds fly, plainly revealing the presence of the road.

Then Basil caught sight of the river. The Awle was not over-broad at this point, measuring about thirty yards between the banks, but the stream flowed swiftly, and they could hear the musical splash and roar of the water as it fell tumbling over a weir in the distance.

Near by was the boat-house. A punt was moored close in to the bank and against a raft.

"That's our craft," said Challis, his whole face lighting up. "And, I say, that's good of Mr. Laws. He's had all the stuff put in for us. Kind of him. Get in, kid. I'm going to punt you up-stream a bit. My write fishing-ground's up there. Some boys think it's a bad place, but I've caught

me prime trout there."

Basil Hood got into the punt, fairly quivering with pleasurable excitement. John Challis leapt in after him, methodically examined the gear and tackle that had been put in it, and finally, with a grunt of satisfaction, released the punt and began to drive it up stream with dexterous thrusts of the punting pole.

As Basil sat and watched he thought he had never seen anybody manage a punt as well as Challis. In spite of the swift rush of the stream he kept in close to the bank, creeping in and out of its irregular face, often having to duck to avoid the low, overhanging branches of the willows, until, with a cry of delight, he indicated a spot ahead which he said was his fishing-ground.

He swung the punt in so that its side rested against a pile, and, running into the bank, tethered it there. The work was dexterously accomplished, and Challis, with a laugh, got the fishing gear ready.

"This is better than cricket, young 'un," he said, "and I think we shall strike lucky to-day."

Five minutes later he made his first cast, and from that moment onward remained silently absorbed in his task, while the smaller boy sat and watched and dreamed in an ecstasy of lazy employment.

But it seemed that the fish were shy. For an hour or more Challis hadn't a trace of a bite.

He persevered, however, knowing that his luck might change at any moment. And it did. Suddenly the line was drawn deep under and the rod bent right over.

"Got him!" yelled Challis, becoming excited.

And then began the fight for the mastery. The fish that he had hooked was a big one, judging from the way the top joint of the rod bent and the manner in which it fought against the reel. Now in, now out, Challis played him with the science of a master. He became utterly absorbed in his task.

For a quarter of an hour the fight went on, and then Challis, as he reeled slowly and carefully in, said, "Grab that landing-net, Hood, and sweep him up as I draw him close. He is tired. I think we can manage this time."

So absorbed were the pair of them in their sport that neither had heard the branches crackle behind them or the tear of the grass as it was trodden underfoot. Neither looked round, or they might have caught a glimpse of the white and vindictive face of a boy peering at them.

Myers had followed them to the river. He had seen them punt up to the fishing place. He crept along the bank and watched and watched, waiting for an opportunity that seemed as if it would never come.

Now it had come at last.

Even while Basil Hood was stretching out his arm with the landing-net ready to sweep beneath the magnificent trout that Challis was drawing closer and closer to the punt, Myers's nervous and trembling hands were

(Continued overleaf.)

busy with the painter. He untied it, and with an inward chuckle cast it off.

IN DANGER.

CHALLIS was one of those boys who possess the gift of concentration.

From the moment he hooked that trout he became absorbed in his task. An expert fisherman and a lover of the sport, he knew from the very first that his task would not be an easy one.

Judging by the strain on the rod, it was obvious that the fish was a big one, and he knew from past experience that it would be a fight.

More than once he feared that the line would break, and his management of the reel was masterly.

All the time he watched the water. Once only he turned his eyes away from it, to make sure that Basil had got the landing-net.

As he at last caught a glimpse of the trout his heart leaped and he uttered a cry of joy.

"Young 'un," said he, "I've landed him—he'll be the biggest trout I've ever caught."

The fish was flapping close to the surface. Nearer and nearer it was drawn by the master hand, until the boy, leaning out with the net outstretched, felt certain he could reach.

It was then that Myers cast the punt adrift. For a moment the swift flowing current held it fast against the pile. Then slowly its stern swung outward into the waterway until it was free, and the punt was left behind as the punt, slantwise, made for the middle of the stream, and willows and banks flashed by at an ever-increasing speed.

Basil was almost thrown into the water as the punt swung away.

In his haste to grasp the side he let the landing-net go, and it vanished in the clear water.

"You young idiot!" cried Challis in a tone of bitter exasperation.

Basil was stunned with dismay. He looked up into the furious face of his companion with fright in his wide-open eyes.

"I—I didn't mean it. The punt's adrift—"

Challis did not hear. The trout had dashed away again, probably realising that it had still one chance left. The line got entangled with some reeds, and the next instant it snapped.

Challis reeled backwards, his face convulsed with rage and disappointment. In his anger he was a boy to be feared.

Basil shrank back.

"Really, it wasn't my fault, Mr. Challis," he faltered. "But—the punt broke away, and—"

Challis seemed suddenly to realise.

"What's that," he cried, with a start, glancing back along the stream. Already they were some distance from the fishing-ground, and the punt was gaining speed. The roar of the waters as they fell over the weir came to him bearing a new message.

He stood still, sober enough now, his anger gone. His eyes followed the line of the rope as it tailed off on the surface.

He glanced at the bank back there, and fancied that he saw a figure moving among the willows.

Then he cast the rod down and looked at Basil.

"Young 'un," said he, and his voice was very gentle now, "have you got any nerve?"

Basil brightened up. His fear of Challis vanished.

"I'd never be afraid of anything as long as I were with you," he answered.

Challis thought hard for a moment. They were already abreast of the Magpie Inn, and they could see the bridge ahead of them as it rose in a single-span arch from bank to bank. The roar of the weir was louder.

He could see nobody on the bridge there was nobody on the river banks. Challis realised that he would have to rely upon his own exertions to save himself and Basil.

The punt-pole, which he had driven deep to the bottom when he wedged the punt against the pile, had been uprooted. The craft swung round, and he had nothing to use in the attempt to stay the progress of the vessel towards destruction.

"Basil, old chap," he said, "somebody deliberately untied that rope and cast it."

"What a shame! What a beastly shame!" said the lad in a tone of deepest sympathy.

"But, still, it won't matter much. We'll soon get ashore, won't we?"

"Can you swim?" asked the bigger boy.

"Not much. The doctor always said I was too delicate to bathe, and my mother was afraid. I can get across the bath, though."

"H'm."

The bridge was close at hand. Challis watched the punt swerve end on, and nodded approval as he saw that they would go through almost in the exact middle.

Looking ahead, he noticed how the bank jutted out on one side.

He knew from experience that the current ran swiftly round that bend, and that they would be drawn in to within about ten yards of the shore. The echo of the falling waters was growing louder every moment. When they reached that bend they would be able to see the weir. There would be no avoiding it if they remained in the punt. They would be drawn over it if they remained in her.

Challis decided to make his effort there.

(To be continued.)