

FULL PAGE MAP OF "LAGOON" ISLAND ON PAGE 22!

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E. LONGWORTH.

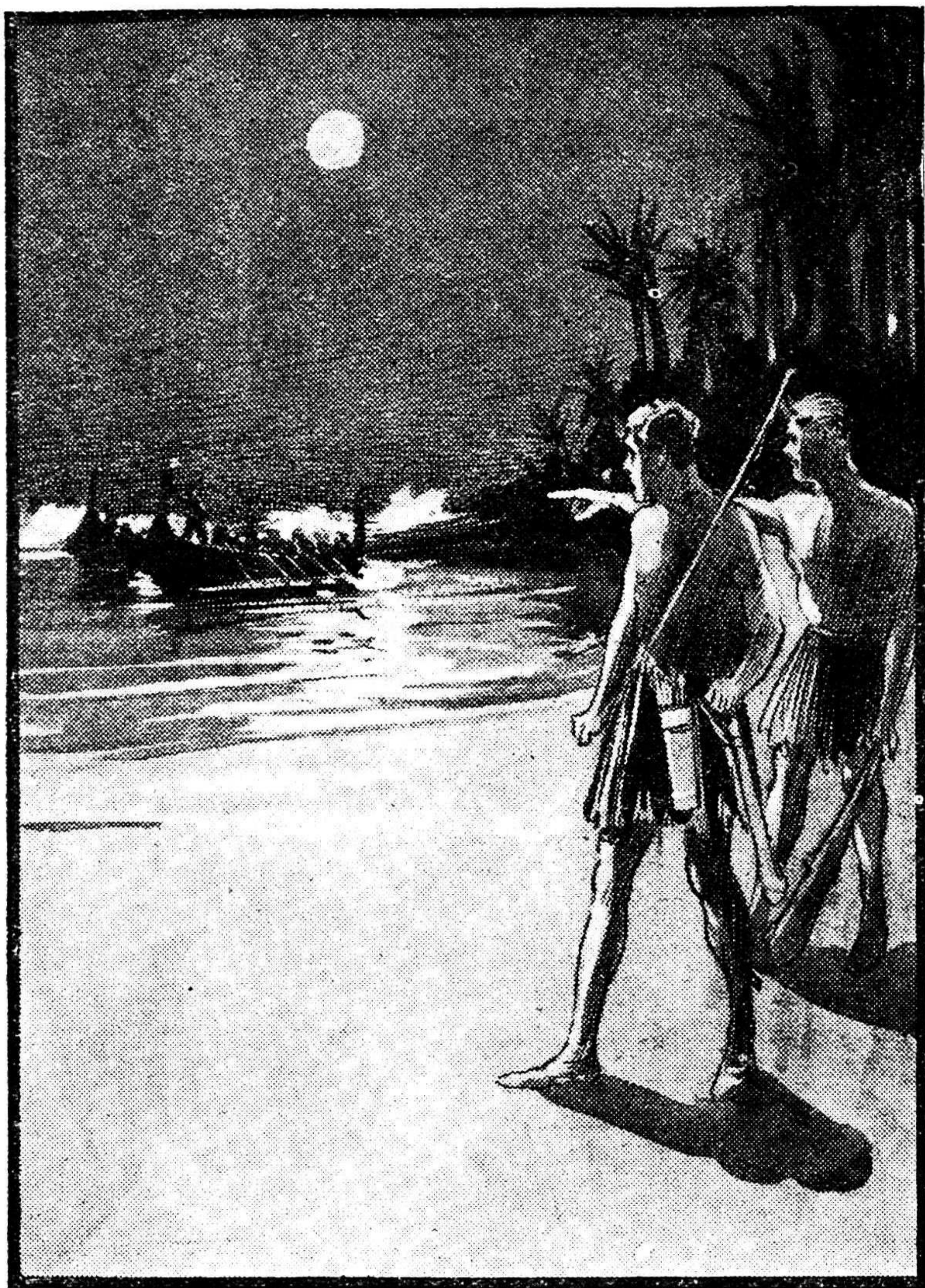
THESE
TWO
MAGNIFICENT
PHOTOGRAPHS
OF
FAMOUS
FOOTBALLERS

GIVEN AWAY THIS WEEK.



THE ENEMY UNKNOWN!

A STORY OF THE REMARKABLE EXPERIENCES OF
SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURERS ON A SOUTH SEA ISLAND.



And we could see that each canoe was filled with savages—awful looking fellows, with ugly faces and extraordinary head-dresses.



THE ENEMY UNKNOWN!

If you will just glance at the sketch map of "Lagoon Island," on the last page of the Mag., you will see a precipitous ridge stretching across the island like a backbone. Beyond that ridge lay "The Great Unknown," the secret of which will be unfolded in the following narrative.—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I

THE ALARM BY NIGHT!

REGINALD PITT looked at Handforth closely.
 "Are you absolutely sure of this?" he asked.
 "Sure?" said Edward Oswald Handforth. "Don't be an ass!"
 "But——"

"But nothing!" interrupted Handforth. "I know what I'm talking about—and you needn't cast any doubts on this affair. If you don't jolly well like to believe it, you can do the other thing!"

Reggie Pitt grinned.

"No need to get excited!" he said softly. "Keep your hair on, Handy, but, you see, you have a bit of a reputation for letting your imagination run loose. And we don't want to make all sorts of preparations if they're not necessary."

"You—you fathead!" snapped Handforth. "You disbelieving ass! You're just like Nero."

"Nero?" repeated Pitt.

"Of course!" said Handforth. "Playing the giddy violin while Jerusalem was burning——"


"Jerusalem!" gasped Pitt. "I always thought it was Rome!"

"What the thunder does it matter whether it was Rome or Jerusalem or Timbuctoo!" roared Handforth irritably. "I never saw such a chap for quibbling! I can't open my mouth without you putting your foot in it."

"It's large enough, anyway—your mouth, I mean!" chuckled Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth fairly danced.



"You're mad—the whole crowd of you!" he declared, glaring round. "Messing about here, jawing and arguing, and there are thousands and thousands of cannibals swarming through the bush and coming to the attack."

"The prospect seems to be black!" said De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It'll be black enough when we're surrounded!" said Handforth grimly. "Be funny if you like—but you'll jolly well laugh backwards in a few minutes. Thousands of cannibals—"

"How many did you see?" asked Pitt.

"Oh, a lot!" declared Handforth.

"About five!" said Church truthfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Five!" repeated Handforth, with scorn.

"All I can say is that some chaps are as blind as bats!"

"Did you see more than five?" demanded Church.

"What about the hundreds and thousands that were hidden in the trees?" asked Handforth triumphantly. "It just shows what a rotten imagination you've got!"

"It shows what a glorious imagination you've got!" said Pitt.

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Handforth. "There was no imagination about it—the thing was obvious. We saw these beggars coming out of the woods with torches. It stands to reason that they were followed by crowds and crowds of others. If we had waited, we should have seen 'em!"

The juniors did not continue arguing.

Indeed, there was a lot to be done, and no time for talking. It was brilliant, glorious moonlight, and Lagoon Island was looking wonderful in the silvery sheen of the lunar monarch. Just in front of the little stockade—which was snugly surrounded by palm groves—lay the gently sloping beach, and the lagoon beyond.

In the moonlight, the lagoon rippled and shimmered. So calm was the night that everything was reflected in that magnificent sheet of water. The barrier reef, out beyond, with the little group of palms on one section. These palms could be seen as clearly in the water as on the reef. And the continuous thunder and roar of the surf seemed hushed and subdued.

Not a cloud was in the sky—not a breath of wind stirred a single leaf. Yet there was no humidity. The air was fresh and delightful, and laden with the conglomerate scents of the thousand-and-one flowers which grew in abundance in the glades.

There were twenty-two of us on Lagoon Island. Twenty Remove fellows of St. Frank's, including myself, and Nelson Lee and Phipps. The latter had originally been Archie Glenthorne's valet. But now he had been exalted to a position of the utmost eminence.

Phipps was, in fact, the Prime Minister of the Lagoon Island Government.

Strictly speaking, this Government was a bit of a ragtime affair—it couldn't very well be anything else when it is realised that Handforth was the War Minister. However, we had been getting on smoothly since the Government had been formed. Each department had done its work well, and there had been no lack of enthusiasm. Things had been done—and that was the main point.

Nelson Lee, of course, was a mere passenger. Grievously injured during our battle with the raging hurricane that caused us to be cast ashore on the island, he had been gravely ill for many days—but was now improving rapidly. His strong constitution was making light of the bodily hurts.

But even now he was an infant, and treated as such. The gov'nor wanted to do things—but we wouldn't let him. We absolutely insisted upon his remaining quiet and inactive. In fact, the Government had held a special Cabinet meeting on the matter, and a decree had been passed that if Nelson Lee refused to obey, he would be held a prisoner.

The gov'nor, of course, laughed at all this, and consented. But now there was peril in the air—the possibility of fighting. An attack might come at any moment, and instead of being asleep, as usual, every one of us was on the alert, waiting for something to happen.

And nothing whatever happened.

Possibly this was because Handforth had brought the alarm. And Handforth's reputation was a somewhat uncertain one—when it came to things of this sort. Handy was always too liable to take things for granted. He grabbed hold of one fact, imagined about a thousand others, and honestly believed them to be the absolute truth. Indeed, if Church and McClure had not backed him up, we should have laughed at him and turned into our hammocks.

That day we had completed the house in the clearing of the palm groves, and had been experimenting with the Lagoon Island Railway. In other words, we had faked up an extraordinary locomotive, and it was rather wonderful that we were all alive to tell the tale. It was still more wonderful that the locomotive was in one piece.

It was a weird contrivance, faked up from a donkey engine, a zinc tank as a boiler, logs for a carriage, and great slabs of wood in place of wheels. The most wonderful fact about the whole business was that the engine moved.

But it had moved to such purpose that Handforth nearly succeeded in travelling on it into the next world. But nothing seemed to kill Handforth. He had asked for death in various forms ever since we had arrived on the island. He had had a fight with a shark—he had narrowly escaped being chewed into lumps by an alligator, and he had known what it was like to be caught in the clutches of a deadly cetopod. Yet Handforth was none the worse.

As Pitt had remarked, he was like a cat.

—he had nine lives. After about another five escapes, Handforth would get to the end of his lives, and there wouldn't be any further chance for him.

This little piece of humour caused Pitt to go about for a whole day with his nose in a very swollen state. But Handforth's was even more swollen—for it was rather a perilous business for anybody to punch the nose of a chap like Pitt. He possessed a lightning return—as Handforth had been amazed to discover.

And now, as I have said, we were all on tenterhooks.

There's no need for me to go into details about the reason for our being on Lagoon Island—which was a small, reef-encircled spot of land in the infinite ocean of the tropic seas. We didn't even know in what latitude we were—except for the fact that we were in close proximity to the Equator.

We were all members of a holiday party which Lord Dorrimore had been taking out to the South Seas with the intention of visiting the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides group.

But we had been wrecked en route, and cast upon this apparently deserted island—like so many Robinson Crusoes.

Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, and all the members of the yacht's crew were lost—they had gone down with the Wanderer, and nothing remained to tell the tale except a few scraps of wreckage. And even these had not been discovered until just recently, after we had managed to contrive a boat. We had gone to the reef, and there we had found several large packing cases—which had been pitched from the yacht's deck from the moment of the impact.

It was from the salvage thus obtained that we faked up the demon steam engine. It was not of much use for transport purposes—but we realised that it might come in very handy in the event of an attack by savages.

And now it seemed that an attack was almost upon us.

Handforth and Co. had gone exploring in the moonlight—an hour or so earlier. Right in the centre of the island—which was about four miles wide, as far as we could judge—there was a high ridge of hills, with rough, rocky ground rising up in cliffs and precipices, so that it was impossible to get beyond.

The task had only been essayed in daylight, and the brilliant sun had made the fellows tired and weary—and content to stay on what we termed our side of the island.

We had had no knowledge of what lay beyond until to-night—for Handforth and Co. had brought in their news. Of course, we had always realised the possibility of blacks inhabiting the other side of the island—and for this reason we had built ourselves a stronghold in the palm grove, with a substantial house, and a surrounding

wall, which provided us with a kind of stockade.

This surrounding wall was made of strong, young trees—saplings—which had been cut down, trimmed up, and then pushed into the ground until they formed a continuous fence. They were set so close together that not even an arrow could have passed through any of the cracks.

But here and there were little loopholes—with cunningly contrived doors, so that they could not be seen until opened. Phipps had been the genius of all this. For Phipps realised the danger more than we did, perhaps—and he had been urging us to make sure of the defences.

The stockade was provided with a great swing door which, when closed, looked like the fence itself. Inside this surrounding wall we believed ourselves to be comparatively safe—unless, of course, we were beset by such hordes that our defences would be wiped away.

The chief drawback at present was our almost total lack of adequate weapons. We did not possess a firearm among the lot of us—having arrived on the island nearly naked, and without even any clothes. We were all attired in grass dresses—scanty and primitive—with the exception of Nelson Lee. The gov'nor had come ashore in flannel trousers and a shirt, and still wore them.

Certainly, we had done our best to provide ourselves with some means of defence. Bows and arrows had been made—but only a few, for there were not more than five fellows who could handle them.

Phipps was determined to coach all the fellows very carefully, and to get them proficient in the art of using the bow. These could be made with comparative ease, for we had a plentiful supply of wood, and Phipps had manufactured a fine substitute for catgut from the interior portions of wild pigs—which Fatty Little had snared and cooked for various meals.

The arrows, of course, were to be obtained by the thousand. Young canes, straight and true, pointed and prepared. We only had a small supply, so far, for there were such a lot of other things to do.

And we had never really feared an attack. We had taken it for granted that the island was quite uninhabited, and that it was a paradise of the tropics. True, we had seen a flickering light over the hills a day or two after our arrival—but had set this down to volcanic origin.

But now real figures had been seen—and coming towards us!

As I have said, Handforth and Co. had attempted to climb the ridge by moonlight—Handforth declaring that it was far better in the cool of the night than in the broiling heat of the day. And, undoubtedly, this was a sensible argument. More by luck than anything else the three chums of Study D had found a kind of cleft in the rocks—a canyon which led straight through

the ridge to the other side, with only a few boulders to hamper progress.

While we were still discussing the situation, Nelson Lee came out among us. Everything was gloomy and dim for the moonlight did not penetrate into the stockade—which was in the deep shadow of the towering palms.

"Well, boys, everything is all right so far," said Nelson Lee. "I should like to ask you a few questions, Handforth."

"Certainly, sir," said Handy.

The gov'nor had his arm in a sling—for it had been broken, and was still a good way from being sound again. We were all delighted to see him active, but he had not regained his usual robust strength.

"Tell me about this adventure of yours," said the gov'nor.

"Well, it was hardly an adventure, sir," said Handforth. "We were too far off to do anything. But I jolly well know that the blacks are coming here. Church and McClure can vouch for that."

"Well, we saw something, sir," admitted Church.

"Something!" repeated Lee. "That is rather vague."

"We got over the ridge, sir," said Handforth, with a glare at Church. "And then we looked down and could see right across the dropping ground to the other coast of the island."

"What is it like?" inquired Lee.

"A lot more rugged than this side, sir," replied Handforth. "There are bays and headlands and narrow inlets, and a lot of cliffs, I believe. And the reef seems to be broken up in parts, with channels between—so that a ship could get into the lagoon."

"That, at all events, is very interesting," said Nelson Lee. "I do not doubt that you actually saw these things, Handforth. But what about this party of blacks which you contend are bent upon making an attack?"

"We saw figures, sir, coming out of the woods," replied Handforth. "They had torches, and they were all coming up into the hills."

"I have heard some mention about thousands—"

"Oh, that was only Handy's exaggeration, sir," put in McClure. "We really saw about six or seven, and Handy took it for granted that there were hordes of blacks in the rear, and still hidden by the trees."

"It is just as well to fear the worst, but I hardly think Handforth's surmise can be correct," smiled Nelson Lee. "The New Hebrides, an archipelago of twenty islands, consists of an area of approximately five thousand square miles—and the population of the entire group is not much greater than fifty thousand. Taking that as an example, it is safe to assume that a mere isolated island such as this cannot have more than a few hundred inhabitants at the very most."

"That's sound enough, gov'nor," I agreed.

"We further know that the whole of this

side of the island is uninhabited," continued Nelson Lee. "That brings down the native population still more—and fully half of these cannot be regarded as active enemies—being women and children and old men. The full fighting force of the blacks, I should assume, could not be greater than fifty, or slightly over."

Handforth gasped.

"Fifty, sir!" he stuttered. "But—but—"

"Mr. Lee is right," said Pitt. "You can't get away from the facts, Handy. Why, before long you'll be saying that we've got as many blacks here as there are in the whole of Borneo!"

"Rats!" shouted Handforth, glad to have somebody to let off steam to. "I tell you there are hundreds and hundreds of blacks—and if you don't believe me, you can go and eat coke!"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"That advice, I presume, is really intended for me?" he asked. "All right, Handforth—perhaps we shall see before long what this black force really consists of. But I advise you all to get some sleep."

"And what about if we're attacked?" asked Bob Christine.

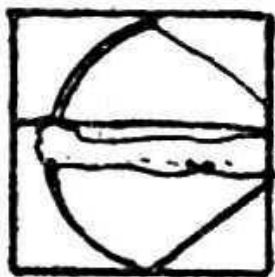
"Several of you must remain on guard," replied Lee. "It is most unnecessary for all of you to stay awake."

And shortly afterwards the majority of the fellows turned in, with four sentries left to guard the fortress. Nobody was allowed outside the stockade. And we waited for the dawn—or an attack.

Which would come first?

CHAPTER II.

PREPARING FOR THE FRAY!



"ALL CLEAR!"

The sun was shining brilliantly—and there had been no attack. The dawn had come, and now the full tropical morning was upon

us. Everything was exactly the same as usual. There had been no sign whatever of strangers.

"It was all spoof—sheer imagination!" declared Armstrong.

"Of course it was!"

"Handy's rot again!"

Nearly all the fellows believed this. They came to the conclusion that Handforth had given a false alarm, and that there had been no need for any excitement. In fact, the majority of the fellows were quite convinced that Lagoon Island had no other human inhabitants than ourselves.

Handforth, of course, was indignant. He offered to fight every fellow who doubted the yarn. Personally, I thought there was something in it. Even Handforth couldn't see blazing torches if they didn't exist. And

Church and McClure corroborated the story. They had seen figures, too.

"It's clear enough," I said. "Handy assumed that the blacks were coming over the ridge with the intention of making an attack upon us. Of course, that was wrong. The savages were probably out hunting—or bent upon some of their dotty religious schemes. I don't suppose they even know that we're here."

"That's about the size of it," agreed Reginald Pitt.

"At the same time, we ought to do something," I went on. "I suggest that three or four of us go on a scouting expedition this morning. Handy can act as the guide, and we'll go to this cleft in the ridge, and look down into the valley."

"Good idea!"

"And then you'll jolly well find that I was right all the time!" said Handforth. "In the daylight we shall see a whacking great native village, with storms of blacks all over the place!"

"Well, we don't want to argue—wait until we're on the ridge," I said.

And so no time was lost after breakfast.

Only four of us went—Handforth, Pitt, De Valerie and myself. The others remained behind, and Phipps saw that they were kept extremely busy. Bows and arrows were being manufactured as rapidly as possible—especially a plentiful supply of arrows. Chunks of rock were collected and placed in handy piles just within the stockade. And the juniors were practising archery.

I was fairly expert at this kind of thing, and Handforth and De Valerie and Pitt had already been putting in some practice, and were pretty accurate with the bow. That's why they came with me. The others had to remain behind, hard at practice. Everything indicated that we had to buck up.

"It's quite likely we sha'n't find our way over the ridge by daylight," remarked De Valerie, as we pushed our way through the undergrowth of the chapparel groves. "Things look different in the moonlight."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "You can trust me. I'll lead you into this gully with my eyes closed. Once I've been to a spot I always know the way there again—without any trouble at all."

"Let's hope so!" exclaimed Pitt.

Handforth was not quite so confident half-an-hour later.

We had pushed on through Geyser Valley, and then up the hillside through the big cane brake and the long waving grasses, and now we had come to rocky, volcanic ground. Rocks rose up jaggedly on every side, with only a trace of vegetation here and there. There was no sign of any cleft in the ridge.

I had noticed that Handforth had been looking about him somewhat anxiously during the last five minutes. But he said nothing. He still led the way. And we toiled after him in the blazing sun.



As we looked, we caught sight of a gigantic savage—a black nearly naked, who carried a huge spear.

The going was rather difficult, for the ground was rocky, and it must be remembered that we were wearing no shoes. But the soles of our feet had become very hard and leathery during the past week or so, and we did not feel much discomfort.

If we had essayed this trip during our first day on the island, we could never have accomplished it—our feet would have been torn to shreds. But now they were tough and hardened.

"Well?" said Reggie, at last. "Where's the canyon, old son?"

Handforth paused and scratched his head. "Jiggered if I know!" he confessed. "I'm absolutely sure this is the right way. Yet—yet I can't see the rotten thing!"

"I thought you could find your way blindfold?" I asked.

"So I could," retorted Handforth firmly. "But I can't help it if the giddy mountain changes during the night, can I?"

"Here, come off it" said Pitt. "How could the mountain change—"

"Easy!" interrupted Handy. "There's been a landslide, or an earthquake, or something. Anyhow, the cleft in the ridge was here—absolutely in front of us. And now there's nothing but blank rocks."

I looked up at the jagged hill critically. One glance, of course, was sufficient to show me that there had been no recent change—no landslide. Away to the right the formation of the hill was hidden by jutting-out masses of volcanic rock. I pointed this way.

"Let's try over there," I suggested.

"No good!" said Handforth. "The canyon was here—on this very spot."

"Well, it's not here now," I retorted. "It's no good going to the left, because there's nothing but blank cliff for nearly a mile. The only chance is round these crags."

And so we toiled over the rough ground until we rounded the rocks. And then we perceived a long, black, tunnel-like opening amid the boulders. It seemed to penetrate right into the mountain side.

"Ah!" said Pitt. "This looks promising."

Handforth gave a yell.

"Of course—that's the canyon!" he said triumphantly. "I knew it all the time! Didn't I tell you to come in this direction?"

I didn't argue—it wouldn't have been any good. But I just pointed out to Handforth that it was never wise to be too cocksure. That was one of his little weaknesses—although he couldn't see it.

We pushed on up between the rocks, and then found that we had made no mistake. It was, indeed, the canyon—a kind of split in the mountains. By following this rugged path we should cut clean through the ridge and emerge on the other side.

We were all rather excited now. For a long time past we had been anxious to catch a glimpse of the other side of Lagoon Island. Handforth and Co. had seen it during the night, but only by the light of the moon. And moonlight can be very deceptive, and it is liable to play tricks with one's vision.

We paused half way through the canyon for a rest, and could not help being impressed by the grandeur of the scene. Try to imagine to yourself what it would be like to stand between two skyscrapers only about ten feet apart. The walls rose sheer on either side, and were partly smooth, and partly standing out in jutting masses of volcanic rock. And, far above, a slit of brilliant blue sky. And this great cleft cut clean through the mountain, and was about three-quarters of a mile in length, as far as we could judge.

No sunlight penetrated here now—although at midday, no doubt, a blazing shaft would come down, converting the rock into hot masses which would give off waves of heat. But only for a very brief spell, for the sun would pass beyond the range, and again leave the canyon in a state of gloom.

At present it was delightfully cool, and we were greatly relieved. It was very pleasant in here, after the glare and heat of the hillside. Now and again we caught sight of a lizard, but there were practically no animals and very few insects. And we pushed on again.

"Jolly interesting, but we haven't come on an exploration tour," I said. "We're scouts, don't forget—and we've got to spy out the lay of the land."

"I suggest we go straight on, and go

down to the forest," said Handforth. "We'll have a look at these blacks at close quarters—and examine the reef, too. It's no good doing a thing by halves."

"What about the thousands of cannibals?" asked Pitt.

"Oh, we can dodge them!"

"Thanks—but I'd rather be excused," smiled Reggie. "If we didn't happen to dodge at the right moment, the result would probably be somewhat embarrassing. Personally, I don't quite fancy adorning a cannibal cooking-pot with my young remains. But you're safe, anyway, Handy."

"Why am I?"

"Because you'd be too tough," replied Pitt sweetly. "Jokes apart, though, we can't risk going down into this part of the island in full daylight. We're unarmed, and there are only four of us. It would be simply asking for trouble, and we should find it."

"You're right," I agreed. "Even if there are only fifty blacks altogether, we shouldn't stand an earthly. And, personally, I don't much fancy being massacred. We'll confine ourselves to taking observations."

"Hear, hear!" said De Valerie.

Handforth grunted, but made no comment. He probably realised that our view was the best, although he didn't like to admit it. And by now we were nearing the end of the canyon. And the cleft was opening, and the sides were growing more rugged and rocky.

And then, at last, we emerged.

It was like coming out of a doorway, and at first we all stood there staring in astonishment.

"My hat!" exclaimed De Valerie, at length. "What a ripping view!"

"Glorious!" said Reggie. "It's not a bit like I expected!"

We found ourselves standing upon a wide flat ledge which extended to right and left on the very face of a precipice—a great cliff which rose sheer for hundreds of feet.

And this ledge petered out on both sides after about a hundred yards, making it impossible to progress further. And just in front of us the ledge came to an end—it was about ten feet wide here. Going cautiously near, I peered over, and found that the drop was one of about three hundred feet! Immediately below there were the tree-tops, the forest growing right up to the cliff!

And away over the forests we could see the coast-line of the island. It was a very different coast-line to the one we already knew, for it was extremely rugged, with sharp-pointed headlands and many narrow bays. And there seemed to be rocky cliffs against which the lagoon lapped.

Out beyond, the reef was broken and patchy, as though only half-formed. There were many places where the sea raced in. And now, for the first time, I could understand how it was that the lagoon had been

so fearfully violent during that memorable hurricane. It was not entirely enclosed, as we had believed.

Handforth turned to us, and looked rather pale.

"Great pip!" he said faintly.

"What's the matter?" I inquired.

"The—the matter!" said Handforth. "Look! Look down there! It's hundreds of feet sheer! One step forward, and it would mean death! Don't you see?" he added, staring at us all in a queer way.

"Yes, of course, we see!" exclaimed Pitt. "But you're not scared, I suppose?"

"Scared!" roared Handforth. "You—you babbling lunatic! But I was just thinking! When Church and McClure and I came here during the night all this mountain side was in deep shadow and as black as ink. But everything beyond—down there—could be seen clearly in the moonlight."

"By Jove!" I said, with a whistle. "You mean that you didn't know about this ledge and the sheer drop?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Handforth. "It was only by a piece of luck that we didn't walk forward! We saw the lights and the figures, and so we turned back. But we might have plunged down to death!"

It was the thought of Handy's narrow escape that had startled him. And, without a doubt, it had been a narrow escape. Moonlight is all very well, but can be very treacherous and deceptive. The three juniors had passed through this canyon in the darkness, and upon emerging on to the ledge they had had no idea of the yawning chasm which lay only a step or two in front.

Further progress, of course, was quite impossible. We were on the face of the cliff. We could not mount, for the face was sheer. We could not descend, for the drop was enormous and the cliff-side smooth. And we could only venture along the ledge either way for a very short distance, for it narrowed and finally vanished into nothing.

There was only one way to get off this ledge in safety—and that was to go back.

But we stood looking at the scene for some time, allowing a clear mental picture to become imprinted in our mind's eye. At first it seemed that the island on this side was quite deserted. We could see patches of the lagoon, but these patches were bare. We could see grassy slopes and forests and the gleaming white beach. But there was no movement—no indication of human presence. But we were wrong—there was an indication.

I suddenly raised my hand, and pointed.

"Look down there!" I said.

From behind a clump of trees—a big patch of cocoanut palms—there arose a thin spiral of blue smoke!

"By jingo!" exclaimed Pitt. "Smoke! And a camp fire, by the look of it! There must be a native village down there. But I don't think there's much reason for us to be alarmed. The island isn't exactly swarming with cannibals, anyhow."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We can't tell what this jungle conceals."

This, in a way, was right. We had no means of knowing what lay hidden in this well-wooded stretch of land. The spiral of smoke was eloquent evidence of the presence of human beings.

"There doesn't seem to be much danger," remarked De Valerie. "The blacks can't get up here, however much they try. This cliff is like a blank wall, and can't be climbed in any way."

"Still, it's good to know that there's a way through," I said. "We'd better go back now and report. And it'll be just as well to push on with the defences—because the natives may come round the lagoon."

"In boats or canoes?" asked Pitt.

"Yes," I replied. "They haven't done it yet—but that doesn't say they won't. They evidently don't know that we are on the island, and so they haven't troubled. But as soon as they find us—well, there'll be some excitement."

"It's quite likely the blacks themselves will be the scared ones," said Reggie. "I don't suppose they'll harm us, anyhow. But, as you say, we must be prepared for any emergency."

It certainly would not do to take things for granted. Just because we saw only one small spiral of smoke, that was no guarantee that there were not large numbers of blacks on this part of the island. And I knew well enough that in many of these isolated tropic isles there were savages still as primitive and cannibalistic as there were hundreds of years ago.

Even Papua—or New Guinea—is dangerous to penetrate in many parts, owing to the savagery of the blacks. And Papua is under British rule, and controlled by the Australian Government, I believe.

If cannibals exist in such a place, it is certain they exist in an isolated, uncharted island, where there is no sort of rule—and where the natives have probably seldom seen a white man.

It behoved us, therefore, to be very careful.

And so, without wasting time, we turned back and went through the deep canyon. Emerging on our side of the island—as we called it—we descended the slopes and once more returned to Shark Bay.

We found all the fellows greatly active—still practising with their bows and arrows. And they were becoming surprisingly proficient with these weapons. But as soon as we appeared we were surrounded.

We gave our reports, and both Nelson Lee and Phipps listened with great interest and attention.

"By all appearances there does not seem to be any great danger," said Nelson Lee. "At the same time, we will push forward our preparations for defence—"

"Hold on, gov'nor—you're not in this!" I said firmly.

"Indeed."

"Of course not," I declared. "You're an invalid, sir. All you've got to do is to keep to your little apartment, and look on. I'm not going to have you taxing yourself, or worrying. We'll deal with this matter."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"It seems that I have a very small voice nowadays," he smiled. "But with this broken arm, and with my strength at a low ebb, I'm afraid I should not be of much use. I should, indeed, be in the way. So I'll let you get on with it without interference."

It was the best way.

Nelson Lee was not himself, or he would have been the absolute leader, and we should have relied upon him for everything. But he was just getting better, and we certainly wouldn't allow him to overtax himself now—which was really the critical time. A relapse might be fatal, for it would probably bring a return of the fever. And we didn't want that.

We knew for certain, now, that others were on the island in addition to ourselves. This much we had discovered. And it destroyed that feeling of security and confidence which had hitherto been with us.

We had to be constantly on the alert.

We never knew when a dozen black faces might be peering at us through the bush. The juniors were constantly looking up and down the lagoon, as though expecting a crowded war-canoe to come nosing around into our own domain.

There was a feeling of uncertainty in the air.

CHAPTER III.

THE LIGHT THAT DIDN'T FAIL!



REGINALD PITT
grinned.

"Well, we don't seem to have much gore flowing about!" he remarked. "But we're all prepared, and that's one

thing."

"Rather!" agreed Handforth. "Why, with all these defences we could keep off hordes of blacks—thousands, in fact!"

"I wouldn't be too optimistic," I smiled. "I'm perfectly satisfied with the defences, but it's no good deceiving ourselves."

"What do you mean?" asked Handy.

"I mean that if a force of blacks numbering two or three hundred attacked this stockade, they would wipe us up in less than half-an-hour," I replied grimly. "One determined rush would smash the fence down, and we should be done."

"Rats!" said Handforth.

"At the same time, I don't believe the blacks would have enough pluck to make a determined rush," I went on. "And that's how we should score. And with a few

stunts to startle the beggars we might even, put them to flight. But they haven't arrived yet, so what's the good of discussing the matter?"

Although we kept on saying this, the conversation nevertheless continually reverted to cannibals and attacks, and all that kind of thing. The fellows could not keep calm, and were continually on the qui vive.

It was now morning, and the evening of the previous day and night had passed without any untoward incident. The defences were complete in every detail, and the Defence Minister and the War Minister were making an inspection, accompanied by a few other Government officials. In other words, Handy and I were strolling round, looking at everything.

Considering that we were only a party of twenty boys with one able-bodied man, the result was astonishing—more especially when it is remembered that we had no proper tools. Certainly, we had been greatly helped by the engineering tools which had been discovered in the packing-cases containing the donkey-engine. Those tools had come in for a hundred-and-one different purposes. The makers would have been rather astonished if they could have known to what purposes these things were being put!

The result was gratifying.

The house which we had built stood in a clearing in the palm grove. Three sides of it were surrounded by the towering, leafy cocoanut palms. The fourth side faced the lagoon, and was quite open. The four corner-posts of the house, to be exact, were live, growing trees. The result of this was that when an extra high wind blew the whole structure swayed slightly. But there was no fear of it collapsing, for it was built throughout of flexible canes and creepers and dried grasses. It could be driven nearly flat without coming to any harm.

Within the house there were several apartments, the Food Ministry occupying the rear, in charge of Fatty Little. There was a big living-room, airy and cool, and a sleeping apartment next to it. Then there was Nelson Lee's own special room, and one or two store places.

The floor throughout was made from tree-trunks, and smoothed over with sand. Upon the whole, we had every reason to be pleased with our efforts. The thatched roof came right down over the front, forming a fine veranda. The actual floor of the building was eighteen inches from the ground itself. Anybody could crawl right under the house from one side to the other.

We had taken particular care with Fatty's department, for if he happened to be careless with the fire, the whole building would go up in a blaze like a torch. But everything had been planned so excellently that the danger of fire was almost nonexistent.

Completely surrounding the house was a high fence—a palisade composed of young saplings—driven deep into the ground so as

to form a strong barrier. At intervals there were loopholes—although these were not apparent from outside. Each loophole was provided with a cunning little door.

And, in different places, there were stacks of arrows in readiness. There were bows all ready for the fellows to grab if an attack came. And every junior had his appointed place, and would know exactly where to go.

The palisade was provided with spiky points at the top. It would be a very difficult matter to climb over—a dangerous undertaking. Then, further back, we had constructed two or three primitive mortars. They were like gigantic catapults, each provided with a sling capable of hurling great lumps of stone to a distance of a hundred yards.

We called these contrivances our Artillery Brigade. Certain fellows were detailed to work these mortars in the event of an attack."

"We ought to be all right," I said. "Anyway, I reckon a crowd of blacks would be pretty surprised if they tried to rush us."

"I jolly well hope they'll come!" said Handforth.

"You hope they'll come?"

"Rather!"

"Are you anxious for a battle?"

"Yes, and so are most of the other fellows" said Handforth. "Get it over and done with—that's what I say! I'm just longing for a scrap! By George! We'll show these blacks what's what!"

As a matter of fact, a large number of juniors were indeed, looking forward to a scrap. Our defences were so excellent that we did not fear any disastrous consequence.

But the blacks didn't appear—we were left alone.

Accordingly, I determined to devote the day to something that required attention. As I pointed out to the fellows, we might just as well be busy. There wasn't much sense in sitting down and remaining idle. We might wait for days without anything happening.

"We're going to fix up the electric-light!" I declared.

"It can't be done!" said Christine. "We've got the dynamo, and everything to make the current with, but there's nothing to drive the thing with."

"Yes there is," I said. "If we all work with a will, we'll have the juice on, and the lights going by to-night."

Everybody was enthusiastic to proceed with the work, and all agreed to help. Even Fatty Little was deprived of one of his assistants for the day. The reason for hastening the work forward was that the electric-light would probably serve a good purpose if it came to a fight.

To suddenly switch on the lights in the darkness would scare the blacks out of their wits. Frightening the savages would suit us much better than driving them off by sheer force.

We had found the electrical installation



Uttering a gasp of disgust, the savage threw himself forward and grasped me in his powerful hands.

all packed in a big case. It had been washed off the Wanderer's deck with the steam-engine parts when the vessel struck the reef. And, remarkably enough, the whole thing was intact, and scarcely harmed in any way.

The most fortunate thing of all was that the vacuum lamps were whole. The filaments had not been broken—which spoke well for their manufacture. There was a good number of them, and if we got the plant going we should be able to have electric-light in every room—one on the verandah, and another in the centre of the stowade itself.

I set all the fellows at work.

The case was completely unpacked, and all the wires and fittings and fuse-boxes and other articles were laid out. I instructed Pitt and his men to proceed at once with the wiring, Pitt knowing quite enough about electricity to do the job all right.

In any case, he only had to run the wires over the house, and fix the switches on in the various rooms. A mere elementary knowledge of electricity was quite sufficient for this task.

Other juniors were set to work laying the thick insulated cable. This cable was run from the house to the plant, which would be set up a considerable distance away. But there was plenty of wire, and so we considered that we might just as well use it.

Ordinarily, of course, an electric-light plant is either driven by a gas-engine or an oil-

engine, and frequently by a water-motor. But there was nothing of this kind in the case. The motive power for the installation was evidently contained in another box—which had not been cast ashore.

It was up to us, therefore, to make a water-motor of our own.

At first sight this seemed a very tall proposition; but it wasn't very much of a task when we really got down to it.

Not a great distance from the house a stream flowed swiftly between grassy banks. It came from the high ridges, and raced down the hillsides, through Geyser Valley, eventually losing itself somewhere among the swamps near the alligator-infested stream which we had called the Alligator River.

This little rivulet was quite big enough for our purpose, and we carefully examined the banks for some distance before deciding on the exact locality for the power plant. The very nearest spot to the house was not quite suitable, for the current was hardly strong enough.

So we went about thirty yards further back, where the water raced down a miniature rapid. Here the current was swift and powerful, the water hissing and swirling in foaming cascades.

Just at this point, too, there was a large flat stretch of ground, providing an excellent foundation for the little house we had designed to build. It would merely be a hut, just big enough to shelter the plant from the weather.

And so we got to work at once.

And when ten juniors work hard, a great deal is done. The main thing was the water-wheel. I had already designed it in my mind, and once the wood was ready, fixing the thing together was not so very hard.

At all events, the late afternoon found the water-wheel complete, and running. It acted perfectly, and we had a kind of geared arrangement by means of pulleys which led direct to the current manufacturing plant.

But, of course, we could not put this into action until everything else was in readiness. There was a kind of lever which we could pull in order to set the dynamo in motion. The water-wheel itself was going all the time. There was no need to put this out of action.

Pitt and his men had been working hard at the other end, and all the wiring had been practically done. The cable was laid, and connected up. And when the evening was about to change rapidly into night I went round examining all the different points, and seeing that the wiring had been correctly done.

Then I got the fellows busy with the lamp-holders and switches. They were soon fixed. In fact, just when the darkness was about due we had the whole job completed—pretty nearly a record.

Now it remained to be seen whether the night would come!

The lamps were all fitted in, but the switches were turned off. It was quite likely

that the plant would be running too fast, and if too much current was generated it would naturally overtax the filaments, and burn them out. We didn't want to risk anything of that sort.

But the whole apparatus was excellently made, and could be controlled quite easily. I immediately sent a messenger to the power-plant itself—where two fellows were waiting—with instructions to put the water motor into operation. He arrived, and gave the order.

"Good!" said Christine, who was one of the two who had been left behind. "Is everything fixed at the other end?"

"Yes."

"Then let's hope it works," said Bob Christine. "Personally, it seems a bit too good to be true. I can't quite believe it, you know. Anyway, we'll shove the dynamo in action."

He pulled the lever, and at once the gears were set in motion, and the primitive contrivance got into action. The plant commenced humming with a business-like sound. And the juniors took good care not to touch any exposed part; there might be a short, circuit and shocks are not very pleasant.

But everything seemed all right, and after a few moments the three juniors hurried through the gloom towards the beach.

In the meantime I was standing by the switch in the verandah. The tropic night had swept down, and everything was black. Only a faint glimmer of the lagoon could be seen. Within the stockade itself all the amateur electricians were gathered round, hungry and very anxious.

Tea had been delayed nearly a couple of hours in order to get the job finished, for the juniors wanted to have the novelty of partaking of their evening meal by electric light.

I waited until I reckoned that the messenger had reached Christine. Then I put my hand to the switch. Instantly I knew that the current was there. The metal-work felt alive, although I had received no shock. The "dead" sensation had completely gone. Perhaps there was a tiny short circuit somewhere—but nothing that mattered.

"Look out, you chaps!" I said. "Watch!" Click!

I pressed the switch down, and at the same second the lamp hanging from the verandah blazed into life. The light was clear and brilliant, but, as I saw at a glance, was somewhat under maximum power. Nothing could have been better. The lamps would not be overstrained, and the light was good, in any case. And we were guarded against accidents by the fuse boxes.

"Hurrah!"

"It's alright—it's working!"

"Great!"

"Absolutely!"

The fellows crowded round, filled with excitement and delight. For it really was extraordinary to see the verandah lit up with

electric light. Amid such primitive surroundings, the effect was rather strange.

"Let's try the lights inside!" shouted Handforth.

"Oh, they're bound to be all right," I said.

They crowded into the living-room, and Pitt switched the light on. It blazed out, and showed every nook and cranny of the room. Nelson Lee and Phipps were greatly interested, and full of praise.

"Splendid, my boys!" said the gov'nor. "I must confess that I did not believe you would actually succeed. This is a vast improvement. The most modern lighting apparatus amid the most primitive surroundings."

"I mean to say, the bally thing is somewhat extraord.!" observed Archie. "Perfectly priceless, and what not! Dear old onions, kindly allow me to reel forth several yards of the old congratulation stuff. I mean to say, it's positively brainy. Absolutely!"

Fatty Little was delighted, and without any delay he proceeded to provide a hearty meal. The living-room was well supplied with chairs and a big table. The chairs were roughly-made articles, but quite satisfactory. And the table was made of great logs, each one being split in half—thus forming a smooth top. It was somewhat warped, but we didn't mind details of this kind.

Fatty sprang another of his surprises. He had a number of birds he had succeeded in killing, followed by fried fish, and a substitute for potatoes in taro root. Then we had banana fritters with breadfruit, and quite an excellent concoction to drink made from cocoanut milk and mango. In fact, Fatty was becoming so expert with the food supplies of the island that we were feeding better than we were accustomed to feed amid civilised surroundings. The grub was quite different, but it was wholesome and palatable and tasty.

And on this evening we enjoyed the electric light to the full. It must be admitted, however, that lights were a certain drawback, for they attracted mosquitoes by the swarm, flies by the million, and every imaginable kind of flying beetle and other insect.

Supper was only just over when Nelson Lee appeared.

"I don't want to alarm you, boys, but I think it is most unwise to have these lights burning now," he said. "We do not wish to give the blacks any indication that we are here. And these lights can be seen for a very great distance. It would be safer, I imagine, to remain in complete darkness for the time being."

There was a great deal of truth in the gov'nor's words, and so we switched all the lights off except Fatty's—and this we shaded so much that there was not much fear of any reflection being seen.

"It's just like it used to be during the

giddy air raids!" exclaimed De Valerie. "Afraid to show a blessed light!"

"What's the good of fixing up the plant if we can't use it?" demanded Handforth. "I call it sheer rot! If we are attacked—all the better! Let it come, and get it over! That's what I say!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good for you, Handy!"

Handforth was rather surprised to find himself supported.

"I'm beginning to see that some of you have got some sense," he said, waxing enthusiastic. "This uncertainty is rotten, and I vote that we bring matters to a head. And we'll do it at once—to-night!"

"Bring matters to a head?" I repeated. "How?"

"Why, if the blacks won't come to us—we'll go to the blacks!" replied Handforth grimly. "Who's game?"

"Oh, don't be an ass——"

"It's the only thing to do!" went on Handforth. "It's no good trying to fool ourselves. The fight's got to come sooner or later. And it might just as well come now. Who's willing to invade the enemy territory?"

There were not many votes.

"Look here, we can't very well attack the blacks," I said. "But there's one thing we can do—and I think it would be just as well to do it to-night. We'll get up a real scouting party. We'll invade the enemy country and try to discover exactly how many blacks there are. That would be an end to all uncertainty, anyhow."

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm with you, Nipper!" said Pitt.

"Same here!"

"Good!" I exclaimed briskly. "We'll go at once——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Handforth. "What about me?"

"Well, I don't know!" I said dubiously. "You're a fine chap when it comes to a scrap, Handy—but I'm a bit uncertain about you as a scout. You're too jolly noisy! I think we'd better leave you behind."

"In that case, you'll have to think again!" snapped Handforth. "Huh! Likely, ain't it? Likely that the War Minister is going to stick behind——"

"That's the War Minister's place," I explained.

"Eh?"

"You never heard of a War Minister who went into battle," I said. "He's not a member of a fighting force—he's the chap who directs operations from the base. Therefore, it's up to you to stay here."

"Absolutely!" said Pitt.

Handforth looked rather dismayed.

"What's to become of the other chaps if an attack happens?" I went on, before he could speak. "Supposing you came with us on this scouting trip, and the stockade was attacked during our absence? What would the fellows do without you?"

Handforth stroked his chin.

"Well, of course, they'd be in a bit of a mess," he admitted, without the faintest inkling that I was pulling his leg. "The whole thing would be muddled up, and we should come back to find lots of dead bodies! Still, I think I ought to come with you. There won't be an attack—"

"You never know—there might be," I exclaimed. "Look here, Handy, you wanted to be War Minister, and we made you War Minister. You can't be a Field-Marshal as well! The whole crowd of chaps look to you to protect them while we're away—it's your job!"

Handforth reluctantly consented to remain—for, as he stated, if he came disaster would happen to those who were left behind. Those who were left behind had an idea that disaster would come in any case. Handforth was enough to bring disaster, single-handed.

"Look here," exclaimed Pitt; "it's all very well to talk about going on a scouting trip. But haven't you forgotten something?"

"You mean that precipice?"

"Oh, you haven't forgotten it?" said Reggie. "How do you propose to overcome the difficulty? We've got electric light and a steam engine, but we haven't got as far as aeroplanes yet!"

"We don't need an aeroplane," I said. "Some strong twine, and enough of it. In fact, the best thing would be to make a kind of rope-ladder. We can sling this at the top, and then climb down—and the ladder will be all ready for us when we want to go back."

This was considered to be an excellent idea—and, indeed, the only feasible one. A rope was all right, but when it came to getting up it, there would be some trouble. It's one thing to swarm down a rope, and another to swarm up it. But a ladder would be easily negotiable.

A large number of fellows, directed by Phipps, were soon on the job. We had large stores of creeper-like stuff which we had used for building purposes, and which was left over. A lot of it was something like rafia grass—such as gardeners use—only very much stronger. They were in immense long strands, and when several of these were bound together and plaited, the result was a rope of such strength that it would bear the weight of an elephant.

The ladder itself was made of this stuff, with rungs of cane. And, of course, it had to be extremely long owing to the fact that the drop was so great. But it was light, and could be easily carried.

And soon we set off—seven of us. The little party consisted of Reginald Pitt, Jack Grey, De Valerie, Bob Christine, Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West, and myself.

Our task was to penetrate into the enemy's country in secret, and to find out, if possible, exactly how many blacks there were, and what manner of people they hap-

pened to be. In this way we should get rid of all the uncertainty. We wanted to know the truth.

Handforth was left in charge of the fort—as we were beginning to call it. He considered himself in a very important position, and hardly realised that the chances of a disturbance were very remote.

I led the way through the moonlight and up to the canyon. I found it without difficulty, and having passed through that grim cleft in the mountain, we once again found ourselves upon the ledge. I stood looking out in silence for a few moments. And I could see that Handforth had been right.

The ledge was in deep shadow, and it was almost impossible to tell that there was a sheer drop just in front. It really looked quite safe to go forward. But we had been before—and we knew differently.

The coast line of the island was clearly outlined in the moonlight, and we could see the white line of surf on the broken reef.

But there were no lights of any sort.

"Doesn't seem to be very thickly populated!" said Jack Grey. "It looks to me as though the whole place is deserted. I shouldn't be surprised if those blacks were merely a canoe load from another island. I've heard these cannibals go from island to island."

"That's right enough," I agreed. "And you may be correct. Still, we mustn't take anything for granted, so we'll go down this cliff, and then press forward. And remember—there's going to be no talking, and we must be as silent as mice."

This warning was very necessary—even now we were talking in whispers—for the night was still, and the human voice carries far under such circumstances. Furthermore, the blacks were possessed of acute hearing. In some respects they are animal-like when it comes to smelling and hearing.

We found the descent of the cliff quite easy. The rope-ladder was secured firmly to a great boulder at the top—and, of course, it was tested before we trusted our weight over the edge.

The latter had been put to an enormous strain before we left the camp, and we knew that it would have accommodated three of us at a time, if necessary. And so we were confident.

After a little discussion, we decided that it would be a wise move to leave one of our number in charge of the ledge. We didn't want anything to happen to that ladder.

Of course, there was a bit of an argument, but it was settled in a way that could not cause trouble. I pulled seven pieces of straw out of my grass kilt, and made six of them exactly the same length, and the seventh short. Then I held them out to the others.

"The chap who draws the short one stays behind," I said. "If it's left in my hand, I stay behind."

The matter was soon decided. At the

third draw Tommy Watson gave a grunt of disgust. He had got the short straw.

"Just my rotten luck!" he growled. "All right—buzz off! I'll stay here!"

There was nothing to argue about, and we commenced the descent at once. It was not without a thrill that we went down that ladder. What should we find on the lower level? What danger should we walk into?

We went down one by one, and I was the first to descend. It was arranged that I should violently shake the ladder when I touched solid ground—this being a signal for the next man to descend.

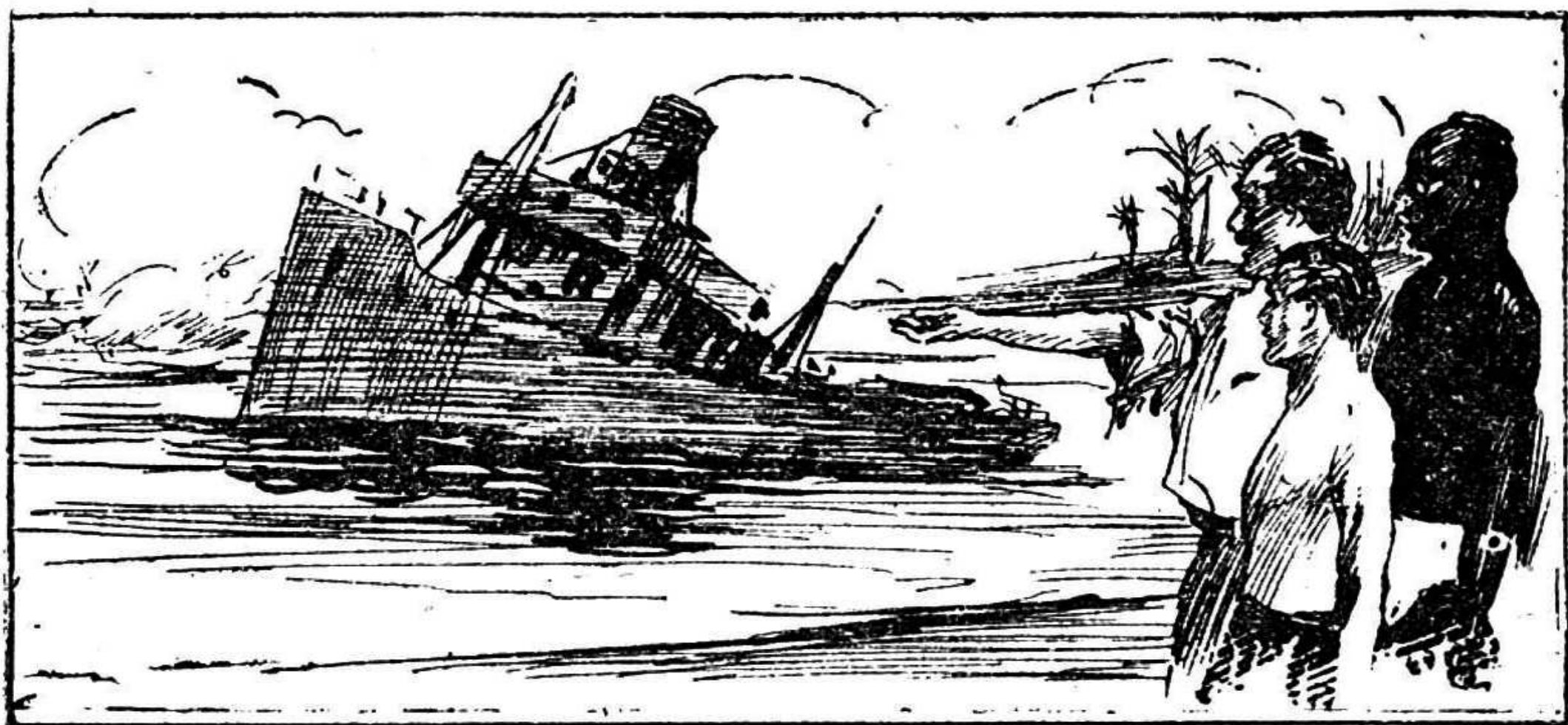
I went right down, and it was fortunate that the cliff was in deep shadow, or my figure would have been outlined against the cliff in the moonlight. At last I found

And right at the top there was a great mountain of rock—a curious-shaped pile like a pinnacle. No doubt it could be seen right away down in the lower section of the island.

We only had to make for this rock pinnacle, and we knew that the cliff lay behind, with the dangling rope-ladder in that exact spot.

Keeping close together, and unslinging our bows and arrows, we crept forward into the enemy country. We were well armed, each fellow having a bow and a dozen arrows. In addition, we carried clubs slung from our waists.

And we continued going downwards—passing through little meadows and valleys, where trees grew in clumps and where rivu-



"Well, I'm blessed!" I exclaimed in astonishment. For there lay the Wanderer, obviously aground and lying slightly over on one side.

myself passing through leaves and branches. And then the latter came to an end. I was just about ten feet from the ground—so our judgment had been pretty accurate, although we thought we had made it too long.

Fortunately, there were plenty of branches to climb on to. I soon made myself secure, and gave the signal. And in this way we all got down. From the ground itself there was not the slightest sign that any rope-ladder was there.

"Now, try to keep this spot in mind!" I whispered. "It'll be easy enough to lose it unless we're very careful—and then we shall be dished."

The warning was well needed, for we certainly did not want to get lost on this part of the island, and with our means of escape cut off. As it happened, however, we soon found an excellent landmark.

We had only passed a few yards through the trees when we came upon a bare hillside.

lets trickled merrily. And then, when we were nearer the coastline we entered into great groves of trees—where we had to be very careful to mark our way.

We were on the alert all the time for any sign of the enemy. But we heard nothing, and saw nothing, except for an occasional scamper in the undergrowth—no doubt caused by a wild pig, or one of the other minor animals that were to be found on the island.

The forest land was practically the same as the wooded country we were accustomed to on our own side of the island. We found the chapparel groves and every kind of other tree, including the breadfruit and the banyan and the artu, and the ever-present cocoanut palm.

These groves were delightful in the full daylight. And at night, although gloomy, there was something exquisitely beautiful to behold—particularly when a full tropic moon was sailing overhead.

The cavern-like fastnesses of the forest were filled with a greenish kind of light, which was at once weird and entrancing. Almost everything that grew could be plainly seen—the orchids lying in wild profusion, other flowers, the delicate vine tendrils, and the big tree boles. And the whole scene was illuminated by this greenish kind of luminescence.

It must not be imagined, therefore, that we were groping in darkness.

We could see where we went, and took care to remain in cover as much as possible. We progressed slowly—for there was no hurry. And undue haste on a mission of this kind might prove to be fatal.

At length we came out upon a little clearing. There were other trees beyond. And, through them, there seemed to be a faint murmur of water. It was not unlike the trickling of a brook.

"The lagoon!" I breathed softly.

"But the lagoon doesn't make a noise like that!" whispered Pitt.

"It would on this side—the reef is broken," I murmured. "That would cause bigger waves on the shore and a certain amount of surf. I believe the beach lies just through those trees. We shall have to go careful now."

Sir Montie suddenly lifted his head and sniffed.

"Dear old boys, can you smell anythin'?" he asked softly.

We sniffed the air, too.

"A faint smell of burning wood," I said, after a moment.

"Exactly," said Montie. "I caught a big whiff just now—I did, really!"

"That means a camp fire!" I said. "We're getting nearer—so we shall have to be extra cautious."

We continued on our way, and I took the lead. I had had a good deal of experience in woodcraft, and I was constantly on the look-out for any signs of human inhabitants. So far we had seen nothing.

Handforth's thousands did not seem to be materialising. At all events, the bush was certainly not swarming with blacks. We had quite satisfied ourselves on that point.

We were very cautious as we crossed the little clearing, but nothing happened. The smell of woodsmoke was now quite pungent and unmistakable. And when we entered the belt of palm trees beyond, we knew that the beach was only a short distance away. For we could hear the waves distinctly and clearly.

And we had only progressed a few dozen yards, when suddenly, just a little distance ahead, a wood spark went floating across a little clear space. I came to a halt on the second. The fire was quite close!

"Hist!" I breathed. "We've got to go like shadows now!"

"Are we getting near something?" whispered Pitt.

I didn't answer, for it would have been risky. We passed on in between the trees, and then—almost without warning—we found ourselves looking upon a little alcove of the beach. The palms grew almost out of the water, and here there was a kind of natural harbour.

In the centre of it a camp-fire was smouldering.

And, as we looked, we caught sight of a gigantic savage—a black, nearly naked, who carried a huge spear. The man was over six feet high, and his sole clothing was a kind of loin-cloth, with ornaments round his legs and arms. He drove the spear into the fire and stirred it up.

There was a blaze instantly, but we couldn't see much because our view was partly marred by creepers and undergrowth. The black passed out of range, leaving the fire. And we gazed at one another in the gloom.

"Well, that's settled it—the blacks are here all right!" whispered De Valerie. "But where the dickens are all the others? There's no need to be scared of one blessed cannibal!"

"Hush!" I breathed. "Don't talk!"

The only words we had uttered were so low that they could not possibly have been heard two yards distant. However, it was better to be on the safe side.

I made a move to go a little nearer. But just at that moment we all received the shock of our lives. For hardly had we taken a couple of steps when a nearly naked black sprang out from behind a tree just near by.

He faced me, his spear uplifted.

I gave one gasp, and wrenched at my club. Then, without hesitating a second, I struck with all my strength. I might just as well have tried to kill an elephant. The black grabbed my arm, and the club went crashing to the ground.

I was at his mercy—the spear was about to carve its way into me. And at the same second I could see, out of the corner of my eye, that the other juniors were fighting, too. For the palm grove had suddenly become alive.

This was the very thing I had feared.

From the very start I knew that there had been a possibility of our walking into an ambush. But I had considered that with proper care, there would be no danger of being trapped.

And now this had happened!

We were in the grip of the savages! I could not see what the other fellows were doing—I only knew that they were fighting desperately and fiercely. As for myself, I instinctively felt that my last second had come.

The spear was hovering—and I was unarmed!

CHAPTER IV.

A STAGGERING SURPRISE!



BUT death did not follow on the instant. As a matter of absolute fact, it didn't follow at all, or I shouldn't be writing this now. That, when you come to think of it, is pretty obvious. At the same time, I don't mind admitting that I gave up all hope.

Then the savage hurled his spear down and uttered a gasp of disgust. He threw himself forward, grasped me in his powerful hands, and whirled me over his head as though I were no heavier than a sack of straw.

"Great Scott!" I gasped, more surprised than anything else.

I fell to the ground like a stone.

For some extraordinary reason, the black dropped me as though I had suddenly become red hot. The fall was so unexpected that I fell heavily, and most of the wind was knocked out of me. I sat up, in pain, and dazed.

And the huge black man was bending over me. He extended his hands and picked me up. Then he pushed his own face right into my own, and I could see his eyes gleaming in that pale greenish light.

"Wau!" exclaimed the black. "Am I mad, or art thou really mine own little Manzie?"

Just for a moment I thought I had taken leave of my wits—I thought I was in some nightmare, in which I was hearing a voice from the dead. My breath came in gulps, and I seized the arm of the negro in a feverish grip.

"Umlosi!" I shouted wildly.

"Then, indeed, it is thou!" shouted the black. "Methinks my brains are deserting me. Or thou art the ghost of Manzie—since thou cannot surely be thyself in real flesh and blood?"

"Yes, it's right. Umlosi—it's me!" I gasped. "Oh, my goodness! I thought you were dead—I—I thought——"

"Even as thou sayest, Manzie!" said Umlosi. "I, too, thought that thou wert dead—for ever more——"

"Well, I'm hanged!" came a voice through the darkness. "Great heavens! It's one of the St. Frank's crowd! Absolutely one of the young beggars dressed up like a fighting Dervish! By the Lord Harry!"

In that second I could have wept for joy.

"Dorrie!" I yelled madly.

It's not often I get excited, but on this occasion I hardly knew what I was doing. It all seemed so impossible—so utterly and absolutely incredible. Dorrie! That voice had belonged to Lord Dorrimore! I would know it among a thousand other voices.

And we had all taken it for granted that

Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi were dead. I seemed to come to myself with a start, and I knew that a kind of pandemonium was raging. All the fellows were talking at once—shouting, in fact.

"They're not blacks at all!" came Pitt's voice. "Look, you chaps! It's Mr. Somerfield, and—and Lord Dorrimore! And these other chaps are members of the yacht's crew!"

"Begad!" gasped Sir Montie. "It's impossible, dear old boys."

I dashed through the trees frantically.

And there, standing with a crowd of others round him, was Lord Dorrimore. He was attired in spotless white ducks, and there was an expression of mild amazement on his face. It was Dorrie himself. I dashed up to him, and fairly hurled myself at him.

"Dorrie!" I panted. "Oh, thank goodness!"

"Here, steady—steady!" ejaculated Lord Dorrimore, with a gasp. "Don't knock all the bally breath out of me, my son. I'm hanged if it isn't Nipper! An' I'd given you up for dead long ago."

"Well I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed. "We thought you were dead."

The joy was so tremendous that for a time we didn't know what to say or what to do. We simply jabbered away, shouting to one another, and generally behaving as though we were half-demented.

But one thing was quite clear.

We had taken Umlosi for a cannibal—and at a distance he certainly looked like one. For he was carrying that big spear of his. And the others had not come into our line of vision.

We had, therefore, assumed that all these dim figures were blacks. And they, on their part, had come to the same conclusion. Possibly they had caught a glimpse of us as we stalked through the trees, and they could not be blamed for mistaking us for savages—attired as we were.

All sorts of thoughts flooded into my mind. I could now see, of course, that the lights which Handforth and Co. had seen the previous night were caused by Dorrie and his men—members of our own party—and not by savages at all.

That was the astonishing part of it.

All this time we had been labouring under a misunderstanding. And Dorrie and Co. had been exactly the same—which, after all, was quite natural.

After the first joy of being reunited, my first thought was for the safety of the juniors. Had they come to any harm during this misunderstanding? Had anybody been injured?

"It's all right, Nipper—you needn't get the wind up!" exclaimed Dorrie. "There's nobody hurt—not even a darned scratch. But if we'd filled the whole crowd of you with lead, you couldn't have blamed us."

"We shouldn't have been able to, sir," grinned Pitt.

"Well it would certainly have been rather awkward," agreed Dorrie. "I mean that we mistook you for a crowd of pygmies! We thought the island was inhabited by a race of savages a size smaller than usual. Hang it all, what else could we think? With those grass things, an' no other clothin', you look savages to the life!"

"We haven't got any other clothing!" I explained. "We had to wear something, Dorrie. But why didn't you fire on us?"

"My dear lad, we didn't want to bore holes through you until we found out what kind of an enemy we were up against," replied his lordship. "So we just sprang out on you by surprise to see what you would do. Then you made some yell or other—an' I recognised your voice in a tick."

"So did Umlosi!" I said, rubbing my elbow. "He dropped me like a stone!"

"Wau! Was not my surprise of the most wondrous kind?" asked Umlosi. "Indeed, Manzie, I was filled with wonder and amazement. For thou art alive—and we had mourned thee as lost!"

I looked from one to the other of them with gladness in my eyes.

"There's one thing I can't quite make out," I said. "You say you sprang out on us by surprise. How did you know we were near?"

Dorrie grinned.

"Don't ask me," he said calmly. "Umlosi's the chap who sniffed you out. He's got a nose like a bally bloodhound. An' he heard you, too—although I'm blessed if I know how! So we waited, an' then the scrap began."

"We thought that you were blacks—and you thought that we were blacks!" I exclaimed. "Well I'm jiggered! Then there aren't any cannibals on the island at all?"

"Well, we haven't met any of the gentlemen yet," replied Lord Dorrimore. "As far as we know the place is like Robinson Crusoe's island, an' there's been no sign of Man Friday."

"You see, Master Nipper, we took it for granted that you were dead," put in Mr. Somerfield—one of the officers of the Wanderer. "And we were ashore to-night, looking for some fresh meat, when Umlosi declared that there were strangers about. And that's what started it."

"It is indeed as thou sayest!" said Umlosi. "Wau! Mine ears did detect some strangeness in the atmosphere. Then I knew that we were not alone. But it is wondrous to find thee alive!"

"It's even more wondrous to find you chaps alive!" I exclaimed. "By jingo! And we'd been assuming all the time that the Wanderer had gone down with everybody on board. Where did she sink?"

"She hasn't sunk!" said Dorrie calmly.

"What!" I yelled

"The old tub is practically all right—except for the fact that she's sittin' on the sea bed!" replied Dorrie. "However, that doesn't matter much—because the water's only about as deep as a puddle."

We looked at him in amazement.

"Then—then you haven't been cast away on the island, sir?" asked Pitt.

"In a way, yes," replied Dorrie. "At the same time, there's no need for you to assume all sorts of rum things. We've got to sort matters out. An' to begin with, I vote we shift somewhere where there's a little light. I want to have a look at you fairly and squarely."

"And I want to ask all sorts of questions," I said.

"Even now, Manzie, we are filled with the great curiosity!" exclaimed Umlosi. "Mayhap thou wilt be able to relieve my anxiety concerning the great Umtagati? I fear that disaster has happened to my master."

"Yes, what about Lee?" put in Dorrie quickly.

"The gov'nor's all right——"

"Alive and well!" roared his lordship.

"Yes!"

"By the Lord Harry!" shouted Dorrie, leaping a yard into the air, and then grabbing my fist. "Nipper, they're the very words I was hopin' to hear. But, by gad, I was afraid to ask the question."

"You thought that Mr. Lee——"

"I thought he'd pegged out!" replied Dorrie. "You didn't mention him, and I was afraid to! Come on—let's get into the open!"

I had noticed some little restraint about Lord Dorrimore, and now I knew the reason why. He had believed that Nelson Lee was dead—but had not liked to put a direct question for fear of hearing the dread confirmation of his fears. Now he was changed—and danced about like a schoolboy himself.

We left the grove in a party, and soon emerged upon the beach—into the brilliant moonlight. The waves were breaking rather noisily on the sand, and there was a little bay with sharp, rocky headlands on either side.

The reef out beyond was very patchy, and the sea from outside came tearing in with full strength. There was no sign of the Wanderer.

Out in the clear moonlight we could see almost as though it were day. Dorrie himself was looking flushed and excited. Umlosi's great face had a grin on it of tremendous width—he was filled with joy.

All the other members of the party were dressed in their usual clothes, and they consisted of Mr. Somerfield and members of the yacht's crew. They regarded us with great amusement.

"Well I'm hanged!" said Dorrie. "Can you blame us for mistakin' you for a set of cannibals? Why, you look the part to the life! Bows an' arrows—clubs! Why, hang it all, you're the limit!"

I grinned.

"We had to make some kind of clothing, and we faked up weapons," I explained. "These bows and arrows are pretty effective, too."

"They look it!" said his lordship. "An' I shouldn't much care to try a dose from one of those clubs. The knob of that chap seems capable of administering a pretty decent sleeping draught!"

"Where's the Wanderer, sir?" put in Pitt.

"Never mind the Wanderer now," replied Dorrie. "I've got about a thousand questions I want to ask, an' I'm hanged if I know where to start. Still, here goes. How's the professor?"

"You mean Mr. Lee?" asked Reggie.

"Of course."

"He's getting on all right," I replied, before Pitt could speak. "You see, he broke his arm, and had a lot of nasty wounds, and then got fever, and some of the wounds became inflamed——"

"By gad!" said Dorrie. "He seems to have caught several nasty packets!"

"It was only Phipps who pulled him round," I said gravely. "It's amazing, Dorrie. Phipps is absolutely a wonder—I don't know what we should have done without him. He's turned up trumps every time."

"Phipps?" repeated Lord Dorrimore. "You mean the valet chap?"

"Yes."

"He didn't look particularly brilliant——"

"That's just the strange thing about Phipps," I put in. "To judge by his appearance, you wouldn't think he could do anything particularly clever. Yet he's chock full of ideas, and what he doesn't know about first-aid isn't worth knowing. All the other fellows are O.K. And we should have been as happy as sandboys if we had known that you were all alive."

Dorrie looked puzzled, and stroked his chin.

"But look here," he said. "I'm deucedly mixed. You were chucked into the laggon when the boat broke away. Remember? The old yacht was on the reef, and you went overboard—the whole crowd of youngsters—an' before we could do a bally thing, the Wanderer slipped into deep water, an' we gave you all up for lost. How have you been livin'?"

"Like wild men of the woods!" I grinned.

"Well, so it seems," agreed Dorrie, glancing at my attire. "An' how about grub?"

"Fish, birds, oysters, breadfruit, taro root, bananas, mangoes!" I replied, reeling them off in quick succession. "We've had tons to eat, Dorrie—and everything absolutely first-class. Fatty Little is the Food Minister, and he's done wonders!"

"And we built a house, sir, with a stockade, and we're all ready in case of an attack by blacks," put in Pitt. "We've got a steam engine that'll really go, and our

house is fitted up all over with electric light."

Lord Dorrimore stared.

"It's not the first of April!" he said shortly.

"I'm not kidding you, sir—it's true," said Reggie.

"True!" repeated Dorrie. "Look here, my lad, I'll swallow what you've told me about the taro root and the mangoes and the house—I can believe that part. But I'm hanged if I'm going to believe that you've got electric light and a steam engine. No, sir! My leg wasn't made to be pulled!"

We explained to Dorrie how we had found the packing-cases on the reef, and how we had faked up the machinery for our own uses. And then, of course, he was compelled to believe our words.

"Well, upon my soul!" he exclaimed. "I've heard that necessity is the mother of invention—but I'm dashed if you youngsters don't beat the band! You must have been pretty busy since you were cast ashore! Why, you've started a colony!"

"We didn't know what lay on this side of the island for a long time," I went on. "Then Handforth happened to find a canyon leading through the ridge. He did the trip at night, and saw lights. And, of course, we believed that you were blacks, and we hurried on with our defences. But, look here! We've been doing all the talking, Dorrie! Where's the Wanderer? How have you been getting on? It's up to you to begin now!"

"My dear kid, there's not much to tell!" said Dorrie. "Just come this way, an' I'll show you somethin'."

We walked along the beach to the point of the bay, where great masses of rocks jutted out in the moonlight. The place seemed to be deserted and barren. But then, rounding these rocks, we came to a sudden halt, rather startled. We stared, openmouthed.

For there, seemingly towering almost upon us, was the Wanderer, with electric lights gleaming from portholes and deck-houses! She was obviously aground, and lying slightly over to starboard, with her bows pointing straight to the beach.

"Well, I'm blessed!" I exclaimed, in astonishment.

CHAPTER V.

THE GATHERING OF THE CLANS!



IT was rather startling to come across the yacht so unexpectedly. And we could easily understand why we had not seen her during our daylight survey. For the coast here was high, with big cliffs, and the vessel had been completely hidden by these towering rocks.

"She's lyin' in about a cupful of water,"

(Continued on page 23.)

Brief Notes about Our "FOOTBALLERS"

Being a short account of the careers of the famous footballers whose photographs we are presenting to readers with this number. Specially written for "The Nelson Lee Library" by "Rover."

W. E. RAWLINGS.

E. LONGWORTH.

THE most prominent player in the Third Division of the League last season, was undoubtedly William Rawlings, the prolific goal-scorer of the Saints of Southampton, and the man who was tried on two occasions as England's centre-forward. On a rough average he scored a goal in every club match in which he played, and with the exception of the Grimsby Town champion goal-getter, J. Carmichael, finished up at the end of the season as the highest scorer in the English League.

Rawlings was born at Andover, in Hampshire, and played for the Andover F.C. until 1914, when, answering the call of King and Country, he joined up in the Field Ambulance and went to France. Coming through the War successfully, he joined up in the ranks of Southampton in 1918, and has been one of the most distinguished men on the side ever since.

He was awarded his first honour on March 13th, when he played for England against Scotland. His form on that occasion was not great, but so well did he do in club matches afterwards, that the selection committee could not very well leave him out when it came to picking the side against Scotland.

Though not yet fully-developed, there is no doubt that Rawlings is about the best man for the centre-forward position that England can find to-day, and it is more than probable that we shall see him in his country's colours next season. Height 5 ft. 9 ins. Weight 11 st. 6 lb.

ONE of the most discussed players towards the end of last season was Ephraim Longworth, the stalwart captain and full-back of the League Champions, Liverpool F.C.

Longworth is a Lancashire man by birth, having first seen the light of day in Halliwell, near Bolton. Almost since he was able to toddle he has been keen on football, and he commenced his career when at school by assisting Bolton St. Luke's, and also playing in representative games for Bolton Town. From Bolton St. Luke's, Longworth moved up later into the Senior St. Luke's, a team which played in Lancashire Combination matches, and there he gained a great reputation. After playing with the Seniors some time, he moved his quarters to High Street St. George's, with whom he took the plunge into professionalism. Ephraim did well with the St. George's club, and it was with quite a good reputation that, in 1907, he left to join Bolton Wanderers. With the Wanderers, however, he was not a complete success, for he did not get many chances to show what he could do. He spent only one season at Burnden Park, afterwards moving to Leyton, whence his present club secured him.

Ephraim has had a successful time with the Liverpool club. In 1914 he was a member of the Cup team which met Burnley, and after the War he represented England in two "Victory" International matches. To this list of honours must be added the distinction he gained last season in leading Liverpool to victory in the League Championship. Height, 5 ft. 8½ ins. Weight, 11 st. 8 lb.

Nipper's Magazine

No. 32.

EDITED BY NIPPER.

July 1, 1922.

Editorial Office,

The Beach, Lagoon Island.

My Dear Readers,—This has been, indeed, a week of surprises. The finding of Lord Dorrie, Umlosi and the yacht's crew after we had given them all up for lost has put new life into us. The whole party is now complete again and we are all delighted beyond measure at the re-union.

The drawbacks of being marooned on an uncivilised island are now completely removed by the fortunate reappearance of the Wanderer. Life on the island will henceforth be a real holiday experience.

Of course, there are dangers, the worst of which, is the menace from our cannibalistic neighbours. Those that we have beaten off are sure to return with hosts of others, and I am very doubtful whether we shall be so fortunate next time.

Your sincere friend,
NIPPER. (The Editor).

EXTRACTS FROM MY DIARY.

By REGINALD PITT.

SERIOUS trouble to-day between the War Minister and the Food Department. We thought the Prime Minister would have to be called in, but managed to settle the matter. Fatty Little got up early and raised steam in the Rocket. The engine had been garaged at the rear of the house, near Fatty's kitchen. He thought it a great wheeze to raise steam, and use the boiling water for brekker, and washing up. Then Handy got busy. Engine belongs to his department, and Fatty knew it. Handy left him alone after he had tried for about ten minutes to knock him down. Then we dragged the War Chief away, and peace was restored.

Have been thinking. That affair this morning between Fatty and Handforth gave me an idea. Why not run pipes from Geyser Valley and always have a supply of hot water from the geyser? Can't be done, because we haven't got any pipe.

But we might make a kind of trough. Shall have to get busy and survey the ground, and see if it's possible.

Archie in trouble. Has been complaining that he's lost Phipps. Now that Phipps is Prime Minister Archie is left out in the dashed cold, and what not! Rough on Archie. He doesn't get any attention, and has to work like the rest. Archie is inclined to believe that home is best, after all! Poor chap, he misses his morning cup of tea and his soft lounges. Still, the life is doing him good. He'll be another fellow when we return to civilisation. When? Goodness knows!

Christine's on the injured list. Had a bathe in the lagoon to-day, and mistook a whacking great crab for a chunk of coral. Very foolish. And the water's so clear, too. Not content with standing on the thing, he had to dive down and handle it. Result: Christine suffering from severe wound on left wrist—all bandages and pain. The crab was a whopper, and gave him what-ho! Nipped his wrist in a terrific manner, and carved into the flesh. These tropical crabs are strengthy.

Modern magic amid primitive surroundings. We've got electric light laid on, owing to Nipper's cuteness. Jolly fine. Lights in the living-room, and everywhere. Even on the verandah. But there's a catch in everything. The insects that buzz round the lights are enough to make a chap go dotty. Millions of 'em! Moths, mosquitoes, flies of every kind, beetles, and goodness knows what else. The only relief is to switch off. And when you switch off, then you get a tremendous lot of other insects that like the darkness! Living in the tropics may be lovely, but it isn't all honey.

The monkeys are getting cheeky. There's one little beggar which hangs round the Food Department. He's always there, ready to grab bits of grub, and Fatty can nearly handle him. Fatty's going to tame him if possible, and make a pet of the little chap. Some of the chaps say that this monkey looks just like Handy—and Handy heard 'em! Ructions. Black eyes, etc. Handy says he's going to drown the monkey when he catches it. Perhaps he's jealous!

WONDERS OF THE TROPICS!

By **BOB CHRISTINE.**

No. 3.—CREEPY-CRAWLIES.

It Has Its Drawbacks.

LIFE on a South Sea island has its drawbacks. You may get glorious wild flowers and sunny skies and blue lagoons, and all the rest of it, but you can't have your bread buttered on both sides, as it were.

In England we have moderate weather all the year round. No extremes of heat and cold, except on very rare occasions. And we have a few grass snakes and vipers in the forests, and beetles and things generally. But, by Jove, we don't have creepy-crawly horrors like they have in the tropics! So the stay-at-home people have something to be thankful for.

Mosquitoes, Beetles and Ants.

I'm not a naturalist and I don't know the names of the things that crawl about Lagoon Island—so I sha'n't bother. I know a lot, of course. Ants, for example. And mosquitoes and beetles. But there are thousands of others.

We haven't been in our log-and-cane house long, but the ants are getting busy already. The little beggars crawl everywhere, on the walls and the roof and the floor. They're having a go at the house itself, I think. In time they will completely eat the logs away! They get into the food, and generally make themselves unpleasant.

Nocturnal Nuisances.

The mosquitoes are awful in the evening. They bite terribly, and when a fellow only wears a kind of grass kilt, he knows all about it. And if there's a camp fire, or any other light, then swarms of other things arrive. They come in armies—regiment after regiment.

Moths of all shapes and sizes and colour flutter round your head in such numbers that it is almost impossible to dodge them. And flies—Flies! Little tiny midges, about a quarter of an inch long. They appear by the million. They fill the air with a soft buzzing sound, and they fill your eyes and mouth too, if you're not careful. They settle on every inch of

exposed skin, and make life miserable. Oh, for mosquito nets!

Centipedes and Scorpions.

Beetles are everywhere. They are big and small, for some of them are enough to scare a chap. They come droning through the air—the flying kind, I mean, and then—flop! They hit you with a fearful whack, and fall. And we've got to be careful of centipedes. They're about a foot long—and they bite! And scorpions. Going about bare-footed and bare-legged is no joke.

Why It Is Unlucky to Kill Spiders.

Spiders seem to be harmless on Lagoon Island—although they don't look it. Some of them are as big as a saucer, and others quite small. There are quite a number of the smaller ones in the house already. We don't kill them, because they make war on the flies. It is enormously interesting to see these spiders stalking the flies—and trapping them.

Hermit Crabs.

But the most interesting crawlers about the house are the hermit-crabs. We wondered what the dickens they were at first, and how they came to the house so soon after it was finished, I can't tell. The first we knew was at night, when we heard all sorts of knockings and a general kind of a racket.

Investigation led to the discovery of these hermit-crabs, with their top-heavy borrowed shells. They're queer beggars, some of them being quite tiny, and others of a considerable size. These larger hermit-crabs can give you a very nasty nip if they like.

At first the fellows wanted to drive the things out. But Nelson Lee advised us to let them remain—as the hermit-crabs sniffed out and destroyed all sorts of insect eggs. They would act, in fact, as scavengers. So we just let them stay on in residence. And at night we don't need telling that they are still lodging with us.

A Cabinet Meeting of the Lagoon Island Government.

By Our Parliamentary Representative.

Cabinet Ministers Present :

PHIPPS, Prime Minister.

NIPPER, Defence Minister.

REGINALD PITT, Housing Minister.

E. O. HANDFORTH, War Minister.

FATTY LITTLE, Food Minister.

THE meeting took place beneath the large palm tree to the left hand side of the house. The subject under discussion was connected with the Defence Department, and dealt mainly with the various kinds of weapons that could be employed in the event of an attack by savages.

The PRIME MINISTER, in a short opening speech, urged the necessity for immediate steps being taken. He pointed out that it would be folly to assume that Lagoon Island was safe merely because no blacks had actually been seen. He told the meeting that not a moment was to be lost in completing the defences. He concluded by saying that he would be glad of a debate on the matter, and praised the whole community in the highest terms for the manner in which the Government had succeeded. (Cheers.)

The PRIME MINISTER resumed his seat, and the DEFENCE MINISTER at once rose, but before he could open his mouth the WAR MINISTER jumped up and waved a hand aloft. In a voice which could have been heard as far off as Palm Tree Island, he declared that it was up to him to make the chief speech.

It so happened that the DEFENCE MINISTER had commenced speaking at the same time, and it was therefore necessary for the PREMIER to intervene, in order to restore peace. For some little time there was a great commotion, amid many cries of "Order!" At last, however, the DEFENCE MINISTER was allowed a hearing.

He suggested that the entire forces of the Government should be placed at his

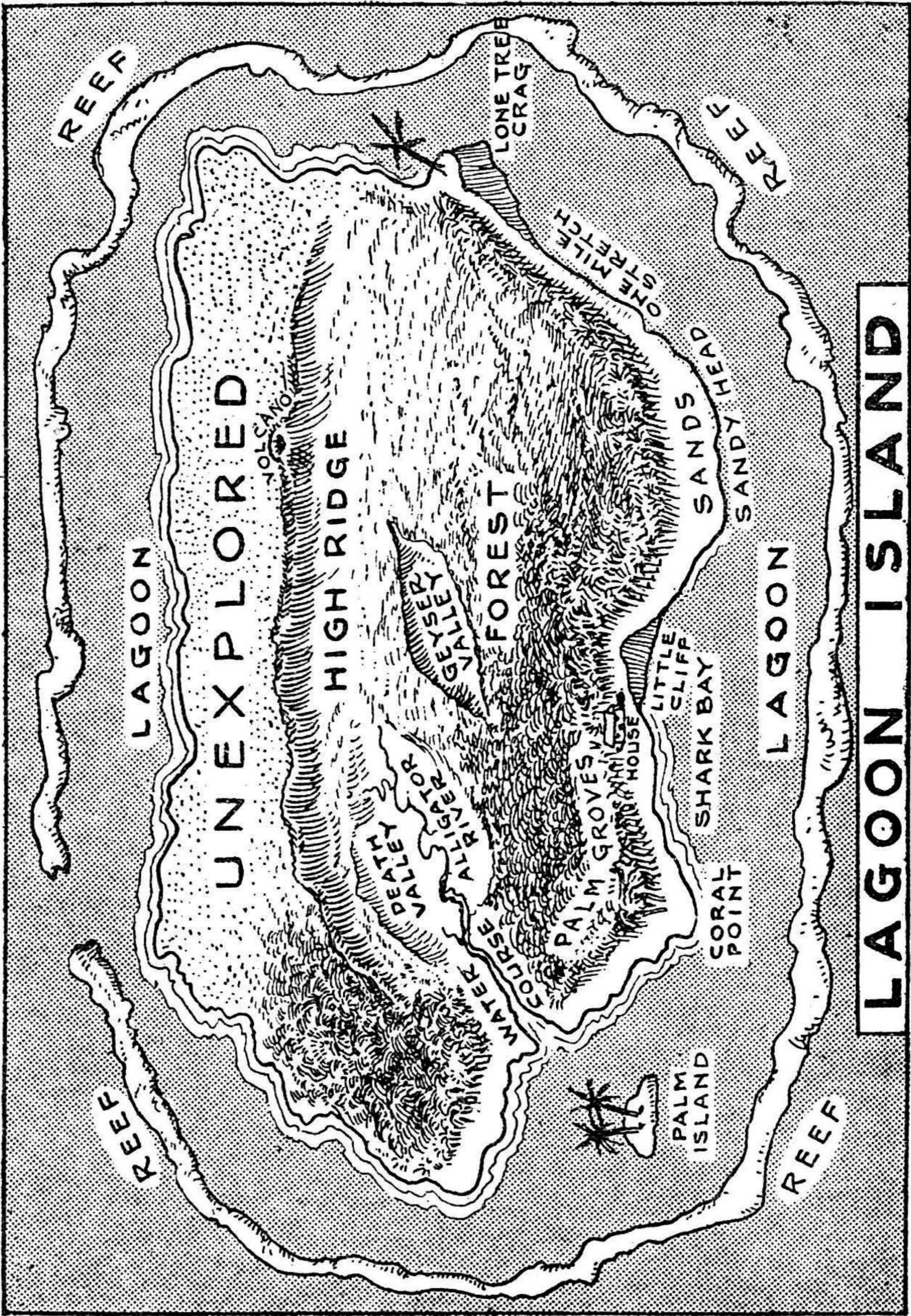
disposal (shouts of "Not likely!" from the WAR MINISTER). He proposed that large primitive catapults should be constructed within the stockade, and went on to describe the nature of his device. It would consist of a sling, capable of hurling a stone weighing anything up to 14 lb. The spring for this contrivance would be provided by means of certain young trees, which the DEFENCE MINISTER went on to detail in particular. (Hear, hear!)

The PREMIER approved the scheme, and proposed that it should be set into operation at once. At this point, however, the WAR MINISTER again jumped up, and glared round. He said, in the plainest of plain terms, that the idea was rotten. He had a far better suggestion to make. And, in any case, it was his job, as he was the Chief of the War Department.

The WAR MINISTER went on to describe his own method of defence, which appeared to consist mainly of a reliance on bare knuckles. He declared that it was only necessary to fight hand-to-hand, and any number of blacks could be defeated.

Finally, the WAR MINISTER was shouted down. Indeed, in order to make an absolute accurate record of the meeting, it must be stated that the WAR MINISTER was finally seized, carried down to the beach, and dumped into the lagoon. He was forbidden to further participate in the Cabinet Council.

The HOUSING MINISTER having seconded the proposal put forward by the DEFENCE MINISTER, the meeting was declared closed. No heed was taken of the FOOD MINISTER's demand that new regulations should be applied regarding the members of his staff. One gathered that the FOOD MINISTER was indignant because his staff insisted upon having tasters before meal-times, and while his back was turned. The matter was adjourned until the next meeting of the Cabinet.



(Continued from page 17.)

observed Dorrie. "The lagoon is shallow, an' how the deuce she managed to poke her way into it is a mystery. All sorts of queer things happen in a storm. Well, there she is—an' if we ever get her afloat again it'll be time to cheer!"

"And I suppose you've been living on her just the same as usual?" I asked.

"Absolutely," replied Dorrie. "Of course, we should have been dressed in black, if we had had any—in mournin' for you youngsters and Lee. We thought you'd all taken your last trip. Umlosi was the only fellow who lived ashore. He built a camp for himself among the palms, an' revelled in the mosquitoes! There's no accountin' for tastes!"

This explained another point—the camp fire at night. But we were so astonished by the whole affair that at the time we didn't pay much attention to small details.

We were all excited.

"Well, you'd better come on board," said Lord Dorrimore.

We all agreed at once, and the prospect seemed quite novel to us. After living in the wilds for only a short space of time, ordinary civilised surroundings seemed quite strange.

"We can't stop long," I said. "And then we shall have to buzz back to our camp, Dorrie—and you'll have to come with us. By jingo! Won't there be a sensation when we arrive!"

"Rather!" grinned Pitt. "They all believe that we came out on a scouting trip to see how many blacks there were!"

"Well, you weren't exactly wrong—you found one!" smiled Dorrie. "But, somehow, I don't think Umlosi is a cannibal!"

"Thou art pleased to jest, N'Kose!" rumbled Umlosi. "Methinks my young masters would have fared badly had this part of the island been peopled by cannibals. Greatly would I like to tell of the joy that fills my heart!"

"We're all feeling pretty bucked, Umlosi," I remarked. "Well, let's get on board and have a look round. This is great! I thought we had looked upon the old Wanderer for the last time!"

There was a boat pulled up on the beach, and we soon piled into her and rowed away over the lagoon. The Wanderer was soon reached, and we climbed noisily up the accommodation-ladder.

There was a commotion at once.

One or two members of the crew had been smoking with ease on deck. But as soon as they heard our voices, and saw us, they shouted excitedly to their companions. And in a few moments we were surrounded by various members of the crew, who shook our hands, and grinned with delight at seeing us all safe and sound.

"Why, young gents, we all reckoned that you'd gone to Davy Jones's locker!" ex-

claimed one of the sailors. "Crikey! What a blinking surprise!"

There were all sorts of exclamations and congratulations, and not merely the sailors, but the stokers and engine-room staff crowded round and gazed at us as though we had suddenly arisen from the dead.

Then at last we found ourselves down in the saloon—same old saloon, absolutely unchanged. There had been no damage done to the vessel's interior. But there was a very serious wound in her bows. Here, beneath the water-line, the plates were torn and twisted, and the entire lower portion of the vessel was flooded.

But, so far as we could see, there was nothing wrong. It was not until we went down into the bowels of the yacht—later on—that we were able to realise the grave nature of the catastrophe.

But, of course, the most amazing thing of all was that the Wanderer had escaped at all. Her captain had given her up for lost, and had never even hoped that she would be driven ashore. She was disabled—she was stranded—but she was far from being a wreck.

In the saloon we partook of biscuits and lime-juice—quite a novel diet to us in these days. And Lord Dorrimore sat and smoked, and regarded us with full and complete satisfaction.

"By gad, but it's good to see you again!" he exclaimed. "I never knew how much I'd missed your unhandsome faces! Things may seem all right, but you mustn't be too optimistic. As a matter of fact, the whole position is simply fearful. That's the bald truth."

"It doesn't seem very fearful to me, sir!" said one of the fellows.

"That's because you don't realise the mess we're in," replied Dorrie. "This island is—well, goodness knows where it is! But we know where it isn't! No ships ever come this way, an' it might be a couple of years before an old whaler happens to nose her way across the horizon."

"But what about the wireless, sir?" inquired Pitt.

"N. G.!" said Dorrie briefly.

"But can't it be repaired?" I asked.

"It's no good askin' me; I'm only goin' by what I'm told," said his lordship. "The wireless is busted—most of it was washed away while we were on that bally reef. Anyhow, we can't send any messages."

"But, how the dickens did you get to this side of the island?"

Dorrie shrugged his shoulders.

"One of the tricks of these tropical storms," he said. "We slid off the reef stern foremost, an' at first I thought we were goin' clean under, an' I began sayin' my prayers. But we floated, after all, an' seemed to be in a kind of general whirlpool of spray an' wind an' water!"

"Was she sinking, then?" I inquired.

"Not actually sinkin', but water was pourin' in at about five hundred gallons a

second!" said Dorrie calmly. "The captain couldn't do anything. With the steerin'-gear out of action, an' everythin' else gone wrong, we were at the mercy of the storm. An' then before we knew anything else, there was a frightful bump an' a thud, an' we'd arrived! In other words, we were here, calmly sittin' down on the coral and the crabs!"

"I expect some hidden current got hold of the yacht!" I said. "These islands are queer things, Dorrie. It was only by pure luck that you happened to push through that opening in the reef and sank in the lagoon."

"Lucky!" repeated Dorrie. "My dear kid, it was providential! Just beyond the reef the water's as deep as mid-ocean. We should have sunk like a stone, with all hands."

"Thank goodness you didn't!" I exclaimed.

"That's what I said, too!" observed Dorrie. "Well, in the mornin' it was all bright an' gay, an' we started to have a look round. Our chief anxiety, of course, was about you fellows."

"Didn't you think it likely we might have been cast ashore on the other side of the island?"

"That's just the point," said Dorrie. "We didn't know we'd come round to another coast! In the darkness, we thought we were still in about the same spot. But now it seems that we must have come all the way round. Of course, the first thing we did was to get some boats, an' row round the lagoon. But we couldn't go far, because the coral sticks up almost to the surface in places—so shallow that we nearly smashed the bottom out of two boats before we knew where we really were."

The whole thing was becoming quite clear to us now, and we were anxious to get off back to camp, so that we could spring our glorious surprise on the others. I could just picture the scene.

We had gone off on a mere scouting expedition—and we should come back with Dorrie and Umlosi, and with the glad news that the yacht was safe and sound. The fellows would go dotty with delight. And there was Nelson Lee.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed, clenching my fists. "This'll be better than all the medicine in the world for the gov'nor! When he sees your face, Dorrie, he'll dance with delight."

"Does my face have an effect like that?" inquired Dorrie. "Gad! I'm simply longin' to see the dear old Professor once more!"

"Even as thou sayest, O N'Kose!" exclaimed Umlosi. "I, too, am waiting with great anxiety to grasp once more the hand of the mighty Umtagati—he of the magic eye! Wau! Let us be on our journey, my father!"

"As thou sayest, my son!" said Dorrie briefly. "We'll push off!"

He jumped up, and in a very short space of time a party had been organised. It consisted of Dorrie, Umlosi, Mr. Somerfield, and

seven members of the yacht's crew. There were ten altogether, as well as our own party.

"Might as well take a crowd, to create an impression!" remarked Dorrie. "By the Lord Harry! I'm lookin' forward to this surprise just like a blessed kid! Won't we give 'em a jump, eh?"

In many respects Lord Dorrimore was merely a big, overgrown schoolboy. His face was aglow with pleasure and his eyes sparkled, and he was all eagerness to be off.

We started away from the yacht, and then commenced to march through the palm groves, and the wooded country beyond towards the great cliffs near the centre of the island.

"I suppose you youngsters know your way back!" exclaimed Dorrie, as we walked. "It's no good relyin' on me—or any of us. We've tried two or three times to get over that ridge, but that cliff stopped us every time."

"It won't stop us to-night, Dorrie," I said.

"You needn't worry."

We marched on quickly, at times passing through the curious subdued green light of the forest glades, and at other times marching across brilliant, moonlit patches of open country.

"I did not make any mistake, but led the party straight up to the cliff, and then to the very tree under the rope ladder, which, it will be remembered, was too short to reach to the ground."

We paused there, and I turned to the others.

"I'll go up first!" I said briskly. "If you go, Dorrie, Tommy will be so surprised that he will fall head first over the ledge."

"Is that the kind of effect my face has?" asked Dorrie. "I knew it was pretty bad, but I'm shocked to hear this! Well, make haste—up you go! We can't wait here all night!"

I quickly climbed the tree, and found the rope ladder without difficulty. I mounted the rungs with caution, but as speedily as possible. And when I hauled myself over the edge of the rock ledge, I found Tommy waiting there with an anxious look on his face.

"Thank goodness, you've come back!" he exclaimed. "You've been a fearful time! I—I thought something had happened!"

"Something has happened!" I replied.

"What!" said Tommy. "Any of the chaps hurt—or—or—"

"No, you needn't jump to conclusions!" I replied cheerfully. "One look at my face ought to be enough to tell you that everything is all serene. Tommy, old man, get ready to cheer!"

Watson stared at me.

"Do you mean there aren't any blacks?" he asked.

"I mean there's only one—and he's Umlosi!" I replied impressively.

"Um—Umlosi!" gasped Watson. "You—you must be dotty!"

"I'm not!!" I yelled. "Now then—cheer! They're all safe, Tommy—Umlosi and Dorrie and all the rest!"

Tommy Watson didn't cheer. He hadn't got any breath for cheering. He could only stand there and gape at me. At first he turned pale, then he flushed, and then he looked at me with eyes that blazed with excitement.

"I—I don't believe it!" he panted. "It—it can't be true, Nipper! Oh, it's rotten to kid me like that——"

"Kid you?" I chuckled. "Look there!"

Lord Dorrimore had just climbed on to the ledge, and he stood up. Tommy Watson rushed at him and grabbed his arm.

"Oh!" gasped Tommy. "It—it's true, then! You're alive!"

"Yes—by a piece of luck!" replied Dorrie. "Strictly speakin', I ought to be dead—you nearly chucked me over this bally ledge, my son! Whoa! Steady on! Don't forget we're standin' on the edge of a precipice!"

Tommy Watson nearly went off his head with excitement, and I looked at him with amusement. And when I came to think of it, I realised that I must have acted in just the same way, earlier.

"Well, thank goodness I'm here!" said Dorrie. "I was expecting that apology for a ladder to collapse every minute."

"It's strong enough to carry half-a-dozen men! We gave it a thorough testing, Dorrie!"

One by one the others came up, until we were all on the ledge. And then we started our journey through the gloomy canyon, and then, once more in the open, down the hill-sides towards Shark Bay, and our part of the coast. We went with all speed, and our hearts were light.

When we grew near to the camp I called a brief halt.

"I think I'd better go in first!" I said. "I'll spread the news——"

"No you won't!" interrupted Dorrie firmly. "Not likely, young 'un! This is goin' to be a surprise—an' we're not goin' to be left out of it!"

"But it'll be such a shock——"

"All the better!" said Dorrie. "Lead on, Macduff!"

We almost broke into a run when we came to the palm groves, and went through the greenish twilight. Then we came upon the open beach, and just to the left lay the stockade, and the log-house within.

"Who goes there?" came a challenge suddenly.

"All right, Handy!" I shouted. "It's only us."

"Oh, good!" came Handforth's voice. "All safe?"

"Yes," I shouted, running up to him. "Rush inside, and switch all the lights on!"

"What the dickens——"

"Quick—it's important!" I interrupted. "Switch every light on you can! Make the place a blaze!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I'm not going to do that! It'll only bring hordes of blacks down on us! What's the game——"

"All right—blow you!" I said quickly.

I pushed past him, without giving him any satisfaction—and then met Church. I told him to go and switch the lights on, and he agreed at once. Church wasn't the kind of fellow to ask unnecessary questions.

He dashed in, and a bit later the log-house was gleaming with electric light. The stockade was clearly visible, and the light on the verandah stood out like a beacon.

Church's action had roused all the fellows, and they came crowding out. And I saw that Nelson Lee and Phipps were sitting on the veranda; the gov'nor was asking Church if he had gone mad.

And then I flung the gates of the stockade wide open—and in we marched. Dorrie and Umlosi were in the forefront.

The effect was somewhat staggering.

At first there were one or two gasping cries, then a wild yell from Handforth, followed by terrific shouts from the rest of the juniors. But I was watching the gov'nor.

Suddenly Nelson Lee stood up. His right hand had dropped limply to his side. Then he caught his breath in sharply, gave one leap from the veranda, and came across the stockade at a run.

"Dorrie!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Dear old Dorrie!"

"By gad, this is worth waiting a lifetime for!" exclaimed Dorrie fervently.

They stood there, their hands clasped, just gazing at one another. Nelson Lee's face was flushed with pleasure, and in that moment he looked better than he had looked ever since the disaster.

After that there wasn't much chance of getting a word in edgeways, for all the juniors were shouting at once. They were clinging round Dorrie and Umlosi, and generally behaving as though they were insane.

Umlosi was grinning from ear to ear. Nelson Lee shook his hand again and again. And then, after the excitement had died down a bit, we all went inside, and talked. Goodness, how we talked!

It was just a repetition of the other reunion on the other side of the island. Lord Dorrimore repeated to the excited juniors and to Nelson Lee and Phipps all that he had told us.

And he could see for himself how we had been faring on our side.

The clans had gathered together once more—and the general joy was great. But even in this glad time of joy there were storm clouds gathering.

CHAPTER VI.

THE REAL ENEMY APPEARS!



NOBODY got much sleep that night.

We were still talking, in fact, when dawn broke. And those fellows who did go to their hammocks were too excited

to slumber much.

At breakfast-time Fatty Little surpassed himself. He produced a feed which fairly amazed Dorrie and all the others. It was so delicious that his lordship declared that we were having the best of it.

"No wonder you youngsters are lookin' so merry an' bright!" he exclaimed. "Why, hang it all, you've been livin' like lords, an' feedin' on the fat of the land! An' this stronghold of yours is a real masterpiece!"

"It is certainly a wonderful piece of work, Dorrie," agreed Nelson Lee. "I have congratulated the boys on their achievement on several occasions. They have done very great things."

"Hold on, sir—don't forget Phipps!" I put in. "Phipps thought of nearly everything, and organised the whole business. He's the chap who ought to be congratulated most."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I mean to say, Phipps is positively the real goods. A bally mass of brain fitted with legs, don't you know! Absolutely! A frightfully heady cove is Phipps!"

But Phipps was modest, and denied it.

"That's all very well; but you're the Prime Minister!" I said. "That's enough in itself."

"Prime Minister!" repeated Dorrie. "By glory! I've heard somethin' about this before! So you've got a Government over here?"

"Complete in every department, sir," grinned Pitt.

"Bally smart!" said Dorrie. "At the same time, it's all finished with. Because, of course, you'll all pack up your little kit-bags, an' come along with us to the yacht."

"What?" exclaimed Handforth, startled.

"Of course!" went on his lordship. "I suppose we shall have to stay on board for several weeks; but the engineers are working like niggers, an' they hope they may be able to get the old tub afloat by the end of a month. So until then we shall have to twiddle our thumbs on deck!"

"Yes, we shall certainly return to the yacht to-day," agreed Nelson Lee:

But a little later on all the juniors gathered together in a secluded spot on the beach. The word had been passed round, and not a fellow was missing. Even Fatty Little was there.

"Of course, you all know why we're gathered together!" I exclaimed. "According to the present arrangements, we shall chuck up this camp, and return to the yacht to-day. Are you all agreeable to that?"

"No!" said Handforth promptly. "We're all terrifically pleased to know that Dorrie and the others are alive—and we're pleased to know that there are no blacks here. But we're jolly well not going to give up the fort!"

"We can't live in two places at once," said Armstrong.

"Of course not," remarked Christine. "The thing is, shall we go, or shall we stay?"

Handforth looked round grimly.

"Now we've got to decide this matter pretty quickly, so there's no sense in wasting time. Shall we go back with Dorrie and the rest, or shall we stay here? What's the answer?"

"Really, dear old boy, I think we ought to go back to the yacht," said Sir Montie. "We shall be able to get proper clothin' again, an' we shall be able to sleep in beds, an' all the rest of it. Begad! It's been very good here—it has, really. But when there's a chance of returning to civilised ways, I don't think we ought to hesitate."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie.

"Look here——"

"I mean to say, the whole thing is absolutely ob.!" went on Archie. "Kindly consider, dear old turnips! Here we are, as it were—in fact, here we absolutely are! Positively on the priceless old spot. And we're waltzing about attired in all kinds of grasses and what not!"

"Well?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, dash it all!" said Archie. "The old lounge suit—what? That is to say, if we return to the yacht, everything will be all serene. Clothing—beds—tables and chairs—knives and forks, and all that kind of rot! We leave the primitive life behind, and stagger forth once again into the jolly old civilisation. Do you gather the trend?"

"Yes!" said Handforth—"and you're an ass!"

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "Somewhat terse, as it were——"

"I meant it to be terse!" retorted Handforth. "Look here, before we go on I want to ask one question."

"Ask away, fair one," said Pitt.

"Well, is this matter to be decided by the vote of the majority, or shall we separate, and go our different ways," asked Handforth. "There are twenty of us altogether. Supposing six of us decide to stay here, and the other fourteen want to go to the yacht. Shall we divide up?"

"No," I said. "I think everybody ought

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to bow to the vote of the majority. That's my idea, anyhow."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good for you!" said Handforth. "We've got to bow to the vote of the majority. That is to say, if eleven of us elect to stay in this camp—the other nine will have to stay, too—whether they like it or not!"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie.

"I mean to say—what?" ejaculated Archie, startled.

"It's all very well for you chaps to talk like that—but it won't do!" went on Handforth. "This thing goes by the vote. Now I'm going to give a few reasons why we should stay here. Personally, I think it's absolute rot to go back to the Wanderer."

"Well, hardly that, Handy," I said. "Looking at the matter fairly and squarely, it seems to be the most sensible thing. At the same time, it'll be rather a pity to leave this house, and to abandon it. We've got everything fixed fine—electric light, and everything else."

"That's just my argument," went on Handforth. "Haven't we been happy here? Haven't we jolly well enjoyed ourselves?"

"Rather!"

"Then what's this talk about going back?" roared Handforth. "Just because the yacht happens to be on the other side of the island, it doesn't mean to say we've got to run to it!"

"I agree with Handy!" said Armstrong.

"So do I!"

"Good!" said Handforth. "It would be a different matter if the yacht was afloat. In that case we should have to go—because we should sail away. But Dorrie says that the yacht is beached in the lagoon—in other words, sunk! The engineers are trying to fake up some means of pumping the water out, and I expect they'll succeed. But, according to them, it'll be at least three weeks before they finish their operations."

"Three weeks or a month!" said Pitt.

"Then we might as well stay here for that three weeks!" declared Handforth. "We should only be in the way on the yacht. Just think. Twenty of us crowding about, and getting in the way of the crew! And with nothing to do—not a giddy thing! Why, we should be bored stiff in a couple of days!"

"I agree with Handy every time!" exclaimed Pitt, jumping up. "And I think the majority of you fellows are with us. It's absolutely obvious that we've got to stick on the island until the yacht's ready. Well, why not let everything go on in just the same way? It's a novel situation—and we've all enjoyed it tremendously. It would be a pity to chuck all this place up now. We've only just completed it—and yet it is suggested that we should abandon the whole camp!"

"No, we might just as well stay," I declared. "That's it! Mr. Lee can return to the yacht—because he'll have a lot better treatment there, and will mend rapidly. But

we'll stay here—wearing these grass kilts, and catching our own food, and living the simple life."

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "How frightfully poisonous!"

"I think we ought to let Archie escape!" I went on. "He's different from us, and he'll be miserable all the time. But the rest of us must remain——"

"No!" exclaimed Handforth. "The thing goes by the vote of the majority!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie, waving his hand. "I mean to say, kindly leave me out of it, dear old lads! In other words, if the bally old majority decides on staying—good enough for Archie! I mean to say, I'll stick it, and what not! Absolutely! No dashed backing out—what?"

"Good man!" I grinned.

"We might just as well let everything go on in the same way," said Pitt. "I mean, about the Government. We'll be left here by ourselves—Dorrie and the others can do as they like. But the Government of Lagoon Island remains intact, with Phipps still at the head."

"Hear, hear!"

"And all the various departments won't be interfered with," continued Pitt. "We'll work together in just the same way—Phipps as Prime Minister, Handy as War Minister, and all the rest of it."

"Right!" said Handforth. "Hands up all those who decide to stay."

Sixteen hands went aloft at once. The four hands which were not raised belonged to Sir Montie, Archie, Griffith, and Talmadge. There was a howl at once, and Handforth yelled.

"We don't need to take any other vote," he grinned delightedly. "Sixteen for staying! All serene! We stay!"

"Hurrah!"

The meeting broke up on the spot, and it had been finally agreed that the Lagoon Island Government was to carry on. Personally, I was quite pleased. There was really no reason why we should return to the yacht.

We shouldn't be of any use there, and, as Handforth had pointed out, we were more likely to get in the way. There was no need for us to return to civilised ways until the time came to leave the island.

And, after working so hard, and making our own home, we wanted to enjoy the benefits of it.

All the fellows—excepting the four—preferred the primitive life of this delightful island. We had sampled it—and we liked it. In such a sunny climate clothing was a nuisance. It was glorious to be free, and to go about in nothing but a grass kilt.

We couldn't wear things like that on the yacht—but here we could.

I went to Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore at once, and gave them the decision of the fellows. They were not surprised.

"Just as I expected!" said Dorrie. "A parcel of young savages—that's what you

are! Boys are always savages—they can't help bein' like a pack of cannibals! If we leave you too long we shall come back an' find two or three of the tender ones eaten up!"

I grinned.

"I don't think so, Dorrie!" I chuckled. "Oh, isn't it great! We're all here—the whole party! We shall be able to enjoy ourselves fifty times as much now! And there aren't any blacks on the island, after all! We've got the whole place to ourselves, and we can roam about and explore just as we like."

"You can carry on with it!" said Dorrie. "Personally, I prefer to lounge about under the deck awnin', with long phizzy drinks, an' other comforts. The simple life doesn't suit me!"

"I should have been surprised if the boys had elected to return with us," smiled Nelson Lee. "Well, we will let them stay. If it pleases them, there is no reason why they shouldn't enjoy themselves. And Phipps?"

"Phipps remains Prime Minister, guv'nor," I grinned.

"Good old Phipps!" grinned Dorrie.

"When will you be starting back?" I asked.

"As a matter of fact, we were preparing to leave almost at once," replied Lee. "And there is no reason why we should not go. We can easily make the other side of the island by the evening, and you can remain here in peace and quietness. I hope you enjoy yourselves!"

"You bet!" I replied. "And you can expect a crowd of us over to-morrow."

"Oh, what for?" asked Dorrie.

"There's a telephone set on board, isn't there?" I asked. "A private line with heaps of wire?"

"I fancy there's somethin' of the kind," said Dorrie.

"Well, it's my idea to rig this up across the island," I said. "It'll give the chaps something to do, and it'll be interesting. Within a couple of days we shall be in direct telephonic communication with you. If there's anything we want, we'll be able to ring you up and ask for it!"

"Oh!" said Dorrie. "So that's the scheme, is it? I expect we shall be bothered about twenty times a day, an' half the bally crew will be used up in carryin' things to your camp!"

"It won't be so bad as that, Dorrie!" I smiled. "I don't suppose we shall want anything in the way of stores. The telephone will be mainly for the purpose of calling you up in the case of an alarm. It'll be a lot better for us to be in direct communication with one another."

"Quite so!" agreed Nelson Lee. "A good suggestion, Nipper."

"There's one other thing, too," I went on. "Do you remember how we used to enjoy ourselves on board in the evening?"

"Playing leapfrog?" asked Dorrie.

"You—you chump!" I said. "We never played leapfrog! I mean that home cinematograph! It's a self-contained apparatus, and makes its own electricity, and everything else. We might just as well have that here, so we can enjoy a picture show after dark!"

"Why not bring the whole yacht over?" inquired Dorrie blandly.

But I took no notice of his pleasantry. And, very shortly afterwards, the party was ready for departure. Nelson Lee and Dorrie were leaving with the members of the yacht's crew who had come over. All the rest of us were to be left behind at the fort.

Phipps was quite agreeable.

"If you desire me to stay, young gentlemen, that is sufficient," he said, in his suave way. "I am honoured to know that you still require my leadership in the Government. Personally, I am quite enjoying the experience. When we return to England there will be a big story to write!"

"Yes, and I'm going to write it!" I said pleasantly. "But we don't need to talk about that now. The others are going, and we want to give them a good send-off. The Island Government for ever!"

"Hurrah!"

There was much laughter and excitement as the yacht party left.

Archie and Montie looked somewhat sad; but they were quite firm in their determination to remain. Under no circumstances would they go off on their own, and break up the party.

"Absolutely not!" declared Archie. "I mean to say, Archie isn't showing the white feather, and all that kind of rot! If the rest stay, I stay! Every time, as you might remark!"

"Good old Archie!"

"Besides, what about Phipps?" asked Archie. "Dash it all, how the dashed dickens should I get on without Phipps? I'd be like a freshly landed whale, don't you know! Absolutely flapping my fins, and doing nothing!"

So Archie was to stay with all of us. And it was only a short time afterwards that we found ourselves alone.

The camp was as before—except for the single fact that Nelson Lee had gone. The Lagoon Island Government was to carry on as before. But there was a big difference, after all.

For now that dead weight had been lifted from our minds, we knew that all the rest of the party were safe and well. And so we should be able to carry on with light hearts and enjoy ourselves to the full. There would be no anxiety—only joy and laughter and fun.

At least, so we thought!

But things don't always happen exactly as a fellow imagines. And before so very long we were destined to discover that Fate had a very big surprise in store. It was a surprise that took us all the more aback

because we had not been anticipating anything of the kind.

But that's just the kind of thing that Fate always does. Just when you believe everything is rosy, a whacking great clump of black clouds come up, and then large assortments of trouble proceed to pour down. It was exactly like that in this case. We soon found it out!

An hour or so after the others had left, we partook of the evening meal, and it was a very jolly feed, too. Fatty had prepared something extra special in honour of the occasion, because he was particularly delighted. He had feared that his reign would come to an end that he would be compelled once more to be a mere item on board the Wanderer.

Here, at the fort, he was a person of very great importance. He was the Food Minister, and he not only saw to the tummies of the whole Government, but he took very good care to keep his own interior fully stocked. Fatty had never had such a free hand in all his life.

And he didn't want to give it up.

Many of the fellows declared that he had put on three or four stone since our arrival on the island. And it was undoubtedly a fact that Fatty had never before been able to fully satisfy his appetite.

Here he was lord of the whole Food Department. There was nobody to criticise him if he consumed more than anybody else. And there was such a plentiful supply of grub it didn't matter how much Fatty ate.

When tea was finished we all lounged on the beach, in the glorious moonlight. The night was perfect, warm and exceedingly pleasant. A good many of the fellows decided to partake of a bathe after digestion had been allowed its normal course. It wouldn't do to bathe just yet.

And we were lounging there, chatting, and generally congratulating ourselves upon the good times that were coming, when Reginald Pitt came rushing down the beach. He and Jack Grey had been for a stroll.

We had seen them in the moonlight, and they had stood for a little time at the end of the bay. From this point they could look round upon the other stretch of the lagoon—which was invisible to us.

They came tearing along, Pitt in advance. I jumped up, for I could see that something was amiss.

"What's up?" I demanded quickly.

"Savages!" yelled Pitt.

"Savages!" roared Handforth, leaping to his feet. "Where?"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Armstrong. "It's not the first of April! You can't fool us!"

"I'm not trying to fool you!" gasped Pitt, as he dashed up. "Jack and I were just looking across the lagoon—and there are about six great war canoes stealing along in the moonlight!"

"War canoes?"

"Yes!"



**"Just as I expected!" said Dorrie:
"A parcel of young savages—that is
what you are!"**

"But—but it's impossible" gasped Griffith.

"Impossible or not, they're coming!" put in Jack Grey.

"Perhaps they're the yacht's boats——"

"That's what we thought at first," interrupted Pitt. "But they're too big for that—great long canoes with pointed prows and sterns. And they're filled with men all paddling softly! They're coming in this direction!"

"We'll have a look into this!" I exclaimed grimly.

I looked round quickly.

"Tommy, dash indoors and switch off all the electric lights!" I exclaimed. "We don't want to give these blacks any help. Some of you others come with me and we'll look——"

But I broke off.

For at that moment I caught sight of some black shapes nosing round the end of the bay. Black shapes which glided silently and in a ghostly manner into our part of the lagoon—into Shark Bay.

They came, one after the other—six of them.

And I did not need any telling what they were. I had seen war canoes before in the South Sea Islands. These craft slid through the water without a sound, and they were coming straight towards our part of the beach.

Two of them slid out of the black shadow

cast by the palm trees, and were revealed in the full moonlight.

And we could see that each canoe was filled with painted savages—awful-looking fellows, with ugly faces and extraordinary headdresses. And they were armed to the teeth.

It seemed that some excitement was coming!

CHAPTER VII.

THE BATTLE!



"GADZOOKS and what not!" observed Archie.

He adjusted his monocle and gazed at the oncoming fellows with mild interest. He was in no way

alarmed, to judge by his appearance.

"I mean to say, things appear to be getting somewhat fearful!" he remarked.

"Unless I am dashed mistaken, old tops, we shall soon be in the thick of a most foul encounter! Yards of bloodshed and rivers of gore!"

"Don't be an ass, Archie!" said Pitt. "These blacks may not be hostile. There's no telling. Although they look savage enough, it's quite possible that they are as meek and mild as a set of girls."

The other fellows were not quite so sure.

And we were all amazed. Why had these savages come? Where had they sprung from so dramatically. How was it they had appeared without any warning—and just when we had been kidding ourselves that we were absolutely safe, without any prospect of being attacked?

But, as I have said, that's generally the way of things.

We had expected the blacks, and none had appeared! We were not expecting them—and they arrived! Queer thing how arbitrary Fate seems to be. And now there was no doubt about the question.

Under no circumstances was it possible to mistake this horde for members of the yacht's crew. There were six canoes, and each canoe contained nothing less than twenty men. This meant to say that we were up against a force of a hundred and twenty or even more. And there might be other canoes coming along, too.

Obviously, they had entered the lagoon by means of one of the breaks in the reef on the other side of the island.

Did those on board the Wanderer know about it?

I was inclined to think that they were in ignorance. There were many breaks in the reef which were not visible from the yacht. And if these blacks had seen the yacht, they would have attacked it. Instead, they had come straight round to this part of the island. It was quite possible that they did not know of our presence. So I warned the chaps.

"We've got to keep quiet and still!" I said. "These savages may simply come and go, without interfering with us at all. In any case, our best policy is to get straight into the stockade and barricade ourselves in. If there's going to be a fight, we might as well be ready."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's get behind the stockade at once!"

"Rather!"

There was no panic, although the fellows were excited and alarmed. This was only natural, considering the dramatic suddenness of the savages' appearance. And every chap half believed that his life was in grave danger.

For long we had known that there was a peril of being surprised by blacks. But, at the same time, we all really believed that no such peril could ever materialise. And now it had done so just when we were believing that nothing of the kind could possibly happen.

We retired into the stockade in good order. Phipps was everywhere at once. He was advising the fellows to keep cool, he was directing them in preparing stacks of arrows and a hundred and one other things.

And then Pitt came forward with a suggestion.

"Look here, it seems that there's going to be trouble!" he said. "And Mr. Lee and Dorrie probably know nothing about it. It's a pity we haven't got that telephone rigged up now!"

"Rather!" I said grimly. "We could just do with it!"

"I think somebody ought to hurry like the wind to the yacht and bring help!" said Pitt. "What do you say, Nipper? These blacks may not attack for an hour or more. And if the chaps know that help is on the way, they'll fight with a better heart. And if Umlosi arrives with Dorrie and the yacht's crew—all armed with rifles—they'll be able to send these blacks about their business!"

"That's a fine idea!" I declared. "Who'll go?"

"I will, but I'd rather not!" said Pitt. "I want to be here—I've got an idea that I might be useful. There's no danger in running to the yacht—it's simply a straightforward thing."

"We'll send Montie!" I declared. "He'll do!"

Sir Montie didn't quite like it—but, as Minister of Defences, my word was law, and Montie did not question it. He wanted to stay behind to participate in the fighting, if any occurred.

But he didn't stay—he hurried off.

He knew the way, and in the moonlight there was no possibility of his getting lost. The rope-ladder at the cliff was still in position, and Montie's task was a straightforward one.

As soon as he had gone the fellows felt a lot more comfortable. And it became apparent almost at once that there was to be no immediate attack.

"They're landing!" whispered somebody.

"That means a battle!" exclaimed Handforth, with relish. "Good! Now, I vote we sally out with our giddy bows and arrows and—"

"We don't do anything of the sort!" I interrupted. "We remain here, behind cover."

"But it'll be ten times more effective if we spring a surprise!" declared Handforth. "The blacks will be so staggered that they'll run like the dickens! Just you let me try it and see!"

"We won't put it to the test!" I declared. "I've got an idea that the blacks would be only too pleased. They might not like to open an attack—but if we started, they'd enter into it with gusto. These savages are always on the look-out for a scrap. It's their one pleasure!"

"Well, we'll give 'em a scrap!" said Handforth. "Do you think we can't beat 'em?" he added contemptuously. "A crowd of rotten cannibals! Why, I'll jolly well go out single-handed—"

"Hold him!" I said grimly.

"You—you rotters!" gasped Handforth. "Ain't I the War Minister?"

"You are!"

"Then what's the idea of keeping me from declaring war?" demanded Handy.

"We'll leave it to the blacks to declare war!" I said. "We don't want to start the thing. If we did that we should place ourselves in the wrong—and wouldn't be able to grumble at the consequences. We'll wait."

Handforth didn't like it, but he had to submit.

Already I was afraid that his voice had been heard. And we could now see that the blacks had drawn up their canoes on the beach, and many of them were engaged in a wild kind of dance on the sands.

Others were penetrating into the trees just near that spot, which was a good distance from the stockade. And they soon returned with large bundles of twigs and wood. And in less than ten minutes a fire had been started.

It was soon blazing up—and fresh twigs and logs were thrown on until the fire was leaping up in great flaming masses.

The scene was a weird one.

In the lurid light, the blacks danced round the fire. They seemed to let themselves go as the flames roared higher. Wild and horrible cries rent the air, and the savagery of the dance increased as the minutes sped by.

We watched, rather awed.

And it was certainly very impressive. It was not to be wondered at that many of the fellows were looking rather pale. The very appearance of these blacks was sufficient to make a chap realise how deadly they could be when they were thoroughly worked up.

These cannibals would not care if they were killed. In the mad frenzy of warfare they would hurl themselves against our de-

fences without caring whether they lived or died. And, providing they made a really determined rush, they would break the defences down.

We had already decided what to do if anything dreadful like this happened.

We would not stay and fight—we would flee.

In the forest we might be able to escape—some of us, at all events. It was far better to be prepared for the worst.

The roaring camp-fire served one purpose, at least. Our house, and the surrounding fence was clearly lit up, and it was impossible for the savages to have missed seeing us. But they offered no sign—they made no move in our direction. We were absolutely ignored.

The fire grew in size, and the blacks became more frenzied. They had brought some kind of food with them, and evidently something to drink contained in skins. For we could see them eating and drinking. I believed that the drink was intoxicating—and this accounted for the increasing frenzy.

And we watched, fascinated.

The uncertainty was almost worse than anything else. We half hoped that the cannibals would begin their attack—and thus finish with this uncertainty. But nothing happened.

The natives still continued their orgy.

And I found myself wondering how they had come here. It seemed to me that they were visitors from another island. We couldn't understand why they had come—but that was not strange. These blacks are always doing things which are unaccountable to the outsider. It was possible, of course, that they were not cannibals at all. But there was not the slightest doubt that they were savage.

I was pleased at the delay—for the longer it lasted, the better. It was giving Sir Montie a chance to get to the yacht—it was giving Dorrie and Co. a chance to rush to the rescue.

And then—unexpectedly—the attack began.

Just the same as before, we had half-begun to hope that the blacks would finish their orgy and then depart. But then the unexpected happened.

Without the slightest warning—without any indication of their purpose—about half the savages suddenly made a rush towards us.

They came tearing across the sands, screaming and yelling and waving their arms wildly. They all carried spears—and they looked a deadly lot. There was not one much smaller than six feet. They were warriors of the most fierce kind, and they were bent on dire mischief.

"Now!" I exclaimed. "We've got to get busy!"

"At last!" roared Handforth. "Take that, you rotter!"

He let fly with an arrow, and it went nearly half way up into the sky—for Handy,

in his excitement, did not trouble to take aim.

And now all the loopholes in the wall were open, and the juniors were at their posts. Other fellows were at the mortars—those big catapult arrangements which we had made for the purpose of slinging stones.

"Artillery—get ready!" I commanded. "Fire!"

One after another, the mortars were released.

Whizzz—whizzzz!

Great chunks of rock shot from the holders, and went hurtling across the high fence. I was watching through a loophole, and I saw one of the stones fall with a thud upon the sand. Another struck one of the blacks in the chest, and he went over and lay still. Another stone hit two men in the legs, and they went down, howling and screaming.

But the attack did not waver.

Right up to the fence the blacks came in surging masses. It was clear now that they had been working themselves up for this moment. They had known that we were there—although they had given no indication. And, having primed themselves by their preliminary dance, they had now embarked upon the real battle. Their intention, evidently, was to wipe us out in one rush.

"Now then, you chaps—don't waver!" I roared. "Pump the arrows into the rotters as hard as you can. Keep it up!"

"Hurrah!"

"St. Frank's for ever!"

"Long live the Island Government!"

The fellows yelled nearly as much as the blacks. The excitement of the battle had taken possession of them, and all thoughts of fear and nervousness vanished. They were thrilled through and through. They entered into the fight with heart and soul, and worked like Trojans.

Whizzzz—whizzzzzz!

Flights of arrows left the various loopholes with every second that passed. The savages were caught fully, and there was no prospect of their escaping, for they were massed in front of the palisade.

Only a few of the arrows proved deadly. The vast majority merely caused flesh wounds, or whizzed harmlessly away.

But the savages were being made to understand that they were not going to take the fort without a decided show of resistance. They came right up to the surrounding fence—and this was the thing we had feared. Once at close quarters the fort could never hold out.

Our bows and arrows were useless, and the mortars were just as good. These weapons were for fighting at a distance.

Certainly, we all had clubs, but what could nineteen juniors expect to do against over a hundred raving blacks?

I realised at once that we should have to

(Continued on next page.)

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(Continued from page 32)

adopt some other means, and, in a flash, I rapped out some orders to Handforth, Church, and McClure. And, strangely enough, even Handforth didn't think of arguing. Now that the crucial moment had arrived, Handy was reliable.

"Right!" he exclaimed. "I'll do it!"

He and Church and McClure dashed off.

We were deprived of three good defenders, but I considered the thing was worth it. And we couldn't afford to take any chances.

The battle went on with savage force.

The blacks came rushing at the fence, and many of them succeeded in climbing to the spiky top. Once they came over in force there would be no hope for us. Our only method was to keep them out.

And so we stood back, and as the blacks appeared over the top we let loose flights of arrows.

The majority of these arrows went wide, but there were so many sent that some were bound to take effect.

Black after black fell back, screaming.

But others succeeded in jumping over. At one period there were three of the savages rushing towards us with spears unlifted. I really thought that some of the fellows were going to be killed.

But we did not lose our heads.

While a number of juniors hurled stones with all their strength, other fellows used their bows.

Whizzzz—whizzzz!

The three savages, just as they were rushing forward, fell groaning and howling. They were not killed, but injured so seriously that they could no longer fight. But while we had been repelling them, others were conquering the palisade.

And I began to see that we should never hold them back.

It had been three last time—and now it was a dozen! While some blacks were getting over, the others hurled spears. It was only by retreating into the house itself that we escaped death or injury.

Leaping to the top of the fence, the blacks hurled their spears with deadly effect. But by now we were within the building, and comparatively safe. And every moment I was filled with anxiety—waiting—waiting!

It was too early to expect the rescue-party to arrive. If we escaped from this attack it must be by our own efforts. The blacks were determined, and did not seem to know what fear was.

And now there were over a dozen within the stockade. But, instead of rushing the house, as we had expected, they proceeded to do a wild war-dance. They evidently believed that they had stormed the fort with success.

And now we were only able to let fly our

arrows from the windows, and they were not effective. The blacks swarmed over the palisade by the dozen. Others joined in the demoniacal dance.

And at any moment now the end would come.

I could picture it. The blacks would make one determined rush for the house, and before we could escape they would mow us down. Our original plan to get away at the rear was our only course. And I was just about to give the order for retreat, when the blacks began their attack.

With truly appalling yells they rushed towards the veranda.

And, curiously enough, at the very same moment, I was able to play my trump card—through the agency of Handforth and Co. I had not dared to go towards the rear to investigate, although I had been hoping against hope that Handforth would be in time.

There came a wild hissing and snorting from somewhere at the rear. Steam appeared in masses—and then, with a clanking, clattering roar, the Rocket came round the stockade!

This was why I had sent Handforth and Co. off.

I had instructed them to get steam up in our queer engine. For I believed that this snorting monster, in action, would drive terror into the hearts of these unsophisticated savages.

It was, indeed, our only hope.

The Rocket had got a terrific head of steam up, and, snorting and puffing in the most violent manner, she rumbled round from the rear, right into the midst of the savage horde.

Handforth was at the steering lever, and Church grasped the throttle. They were absolutely exposed, and the first spear thrown would have slain one of them. But in the general excitement they did not think of danger.

In the darkness the Rocket was a terrifying spectacle.

Sparks were roaring out of her funnel, and clouds of steam rose from almost every inch of her. And Church did not throttle down. He kept the engine going at full speed. Whether he did so by design or accident I don't know. Possibly he was so excited that he was held in a trance, and didn't even know how to stop the thing.

At all events, the Rocket dashed at full speed across the stockade, gathering itself together, as it were, for a tremendous charge.

And, like some monstrous demon, it rammed into the surrounding fence!

Crash!

The fence simply went to pieces like a wall of cardboard. The Rocket trampled over the remains, and hurled itself out into the open!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROUT!



"HURRAH!"

"They're scared—running!"

The juniors were shouting at the top of their voices—and so were the blacks!

But while the defenders were wild with joy, the attackers were wild with terror. I had expected the savages to be somewhat scared—but I never believed that they would show such blank terror as this.

Immediately the steam engine got into action they ceased their attack. They stared at the monster in wild horror for a moment or two, and then broke into screams of fright. They dashed off in every direction. Those inside the palisade fell flat on the ground, beating their hands upon the sand. But as soon as the Rocket had charged through the fence they rushed out.

The other blacks were dashing along the beach as hard as they could possibly go. It was a stern chase, and the blacks won.

They reached their canoes, leapt in, and pushed off from the shore. The Rocket, in the meantime, like a snorting fiend from the very pit, was dashing along the beach near the water. By the time it reached the place where the canoes had been the savages were well out in the bay, paddling for dear life.

"Come back, you rotters!" bawled Handforth. "Yah! Cowards!"

He brought the Rocket round, and if Church hadn't throttled down the whole thing would have upset. And now the rest of us, led by Phipps, were swarming out on to the beach.

We surrounded the Rocket, which had now come to a standstill, and Handforth stepped down from the driving-seat with an air of quiet calmness which would have been amusing at any other time.

"Good for you, Handy!" I exclaimed, clapping him on the back. "That was a great stunt to drive clean through the fence. I shouldn't be surprised if it was that action alone which caused the blacks to flee!"

"Rather!" agreed Handforth. "You can trust me to do a thing properly."

"Why, you ass, I did that!" said Church. "I was going to pull the throttle over, but I missed it. And before I could do anything else, we were through!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Church!"

The fellows were so relieved that they laughed at the smallest thing. And they were flushed with victory, too. One or two of us had received slight scratches and flesh wounds, but nobody was really hurt. Considering how narrow our escape had been, this was really remarkable.

"We can't waste time now!" said Phipps briskly. "Young gentlemen, we must see

how many wounded there are, and make sure that they are harmless."

"Pitch 'em into the lagoon!" advised Handforth.

But this suggestion was rather too drastic. When we searched round we found that there were only half-a-dozen blacks to be seen. This seemed to indicate that many of the wounded had fled with the others. So great was their terror that they had forgotten their hurts.

Those who were still lying about were in a bad way, and we sat them all in a row, and and Phipps lost no time in doing everything possible to relieve their sufferings. Two of the blacks had been killed outright. We found them to be fierce, brutal fellows, and they did not seem to welcome Phipps' attention.

Pitt was out on the beach, watching.

And he returned shortly to report something which was not very good hearing. The blacks, it seemed, had returned! Being out on the lagoon had made them recover their composure to a certain extent. Their fright was over, and they now came back to the beach at the far end of the bay. They landed, and commenced their savage war dance once more. It now seemed pretty evident that they were determined to make another attack as soon as they had got their courage up. And I could easily see that this time they might succeed.

"Don't let steam go down in the engine," I exclaimed. "That's our only hope now. If these blacks attack once more, we've only got the Rocket to rely on. And even that may prove a broken reed!"

"What do you mean?" asked Christine.

"Why, they found that the engine didn't hurt them," I replied grimly. "It scared them, but that's all. Once having got over their scare, they may ignore it, and attack just the same."

"By jingo, yes!"

"It's quite likely!" said Pitt. "But I'm hoping that Sir Montie will soon come back with a crowd of the others."

"We mustn't be too hopeful," I said. "It seems a tremendous time since Montie went, but, strictly speaking, it isn't. There's been such a lot happening that we've really lost count of time."

Just then Armstrong came running up.

"I say!" he gasped. "There are more canoes coming!"

"What!"

"About half-a-dozen!" panted Armstrong. "I've just seen 'em shooting round the lagoon. They're all filled up, and they're coming straight towards the beach! What shall we do?"

"Reinforcements!" I exclaimed grimly. "My hat! That's about put the lid on it! They won't care for our old engine now; they'll probably swarm to the attack, and finish us up. The best thing for us to do is to retreat!"

"Retreat!" shouted Handforth.

"Yes!"

"Never!" said Handforth. "I'm not running away——"

"Look here, Handy, be sensible!" I said sharply. "There are twenty of us here, including Phipps. And over there are about two hundred fully-armed savages. It won't do to rely too much on the Rocket. She saved the situation once, but that's no guarantee that it'll happen again."

"Hear, hear!"

"And so, while we've got a chance, we'll get away!" I said. "When the situation becomes too acute it's a sign of good generalship to retreat. There's no sense in absolutely asking to be killed."

"You are quite right, Master Nipper,"

tried to get it through. There was no way.

He could only retreat, and that was useless.

And so, greatly to his chagrin, he was compelled to leave the Rocket there.

And we all took to the forest trail, and made all haste into the interior of the island. Our idea, of course, was to meet the others on their way to our rescue. Once we did that we should feel safe.

For Dorrie would bring men with him, men armed with rifles and revolvers. And that would put a different complexion on the whole matter.

We had not been going more than ten minutes before Phipps uttered an exclamation. He was in advance, with me. And he



While a number of juniors hurled stones with all their strength, other fellows used their bows.

said Phipps. "Retreat is our only course!" Handforth snorted.

"Yes, and as soon as we've gone they'll come along and burn up the house!" he declared warmly. "They'll destroy everything we've been working for, including the electric light, and all the rest of it! I vote we stay behind and defend our property!"

But Handforth was overruled.

And, of course, our policy of retreat was a sound one. Under the circumstances, it was the only thing we could do. But Handforth would not abandon the Rocket. He jumped into the driving-seat, and ordered Church and McClure to be on the platform. Then the steam-engine rumbled away.

Handforth steered it through the palms with considerable skill, and at last it was blocked against two big trees some little distance behind the fort. In vain Handforth

paused, and pointed to an adjoining hillside. I looked in that direction.

"They're coming, sir!" said Phipps.

And there, clearly in the moonlight, we could see numbers of figures hurrying down the hill. They were not savages—as we could tell in this clear light. We could even see Lord Dorrimore in his white suit at the head of the column.

"Hurrah!"

"They're coming!"

"Rescue—rescue!"

The figures on the hill broke into a quicker run. And we broke into a run, too. And, five minutes later, we met. Lord Dorrimore was looking anxious and concerned, and I could see his eye darting over us all.

"Anybody killed?" he asked briskly.

"No," I replied.

"Anybody hurt?" snapped Dorrie.

"A scratch or two, that's all!" I replied.

"We've had a tremendous battle, and it's a marvel we weren't all killed."

"It was the engine that put the blacks to flight!" said Handforth. "By George; you ought to have seen it!"

"If you put the blacks to flight, what are you doing here?" asked Lord Dorrimore. "I'm jolly glad to find that you're all right—that's the main thing. But let's hear all the details!"

"Right!" I said briskly. "Here you are!"

As quickly as possible, I explained what had happened. Then, to my surprise, I observed that Nelson Lee was there, too. Once more he was dressed as a gentleman should be dressed, and his arm was in a sling.

He had only come as a spectator—and not to take any part in the expected fight. Dorrie wouldn't allow him to do that. For Nelson Lee was still weak, and in no fit condition to fight.

They listened intently to what we said.

"Oh, so that's how the thing stands, is it?" exclaimed Dorrie at length. "All right! We'll soon change the complexion of matters. We're not goin' to let these savages have their own way if I can help it."

"Wau!" My spear is itching for work, N'Kose!" rumbled Umlosi. "Even as I stand here, I can see the red mists floating before my eyes! Blood is flowing in streams. Wau! I long for battle!"

"Don't worry—you'll have your fill!" said Dorrie grimly. "We're goin' to attack these blacks—an' send them about their bally business. We don't want these fellows loose on the island!"

"Hurrah!"

"You boys had better keep in the background!" went on Dorrie. "You've done your bit, and you'll only be in the way now. This is a man's job. I've got twenty trustworthy chaps here, an' they're all armed with repeaters. We'll see how the savages like 'em!"

Without any delay we retraced our steps, and we were strictly instructed to remain absolutely in the background—among the palm trees. Lord Dorrimore and his men would go forward to the attack. They would not wait for the invaders to attack on their own account. It would be far more effective to drive them off the island.

When we arrived at the beach we found—to our relief—that the savages had not yet approached the fort. They were still doing a wild war dance at the other end of the bay.

And Dorrie and his men went forward at the double, shouting at the top of their voices, and fully determined to do big things. We watched eagerly and intently, wondering what the result of this action would be.

It seemed to us that there could be only one ending. The blacks would be compelled to flee. They would never be able to withstand the attack of a party of men armed

with deadly repeating rifles. Small as Dorrie's force was, it was quite capable of putting these blacks to rout.

Crack! Crack!

The rifles spat out fire and lead. And on the instant the savage war dance came to an end. With wild cries, the blacks grabbed up their spears and rushed to the attack.

They came forward in a solid mass.

"Down!" roared Dorrie. "Down on your knees, my lads, an' let 'em have it!"

The yacht's men were still out of range of the spears—but the blacks were not out of range of bullets! A shattering volley was fired, and the front rank of the blacks simply went down like grass before a mower.

But those behind came on.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The rifles spoke again, and more blacks fell. But still they advanced, never seeming to realise what the danger was. They were wild with the lust of battle and absolutely reckless as to their own safety.

Even now, as I watched, I realised that our fate hung in the balance.

If the savages did not waver—if they continued to rush on—within a few minutes they would overwhelm Dorrie and his party. And then—then we should be lost indeed.

But just then a new factor in the fight arose.

There came from the rear a well-known snorting and hissing. And the next moment the Rocket charged out from the trees—with the warlike Handforth yelling at the steering lever.

"Come on, you chaps!" he roared. "I'm blessed if I'm going to stand by and look on! This is where we do things!"

The Rocket did not go direct to the point of battle. Handforth took the engine right near to the water, and then sent it hurtling along the beach with two wheels actually splashing in the waves.

He was making a flanking movement.

And it was a good policy. For he would avoid all bullets and would not inconvenience Dorrie's party. At the same time, the presence of the engine charging forward might turn the tide.

It did!

The blacks seemed as though they were determined to continue their deadly charge. Already they were within spearshot. And they were hurling their spears even as they fell, riddled with bullets.

Two of Dorrie's men were badly hurt, and lay groaning.

Others were likely to get wounded at any minute. And then the Rocket went charging on to the scene—travelling at a speed which I had never thought her capable of.

She was simply one mass of vibration and rattle and roar.

And the horde of blacks wavered, broke, and then fled. On the instant Dorrie gave an order, and his men followed up—firing revolvers as they went. They had dropped their rifles now.

Screaming with fear, the blacks swarmed into their canoes and pushed off. There was no doubt about the issue this time. The enemy would depart, and in all probability would not dare to return.

Church closed the throttle of the engine, but Handforth roared.

"Open her up again," he howled. "Go at full speed!"

Church obeyed, although he didn't know why. Handforth steered the steam-engine down the beach—full tilt at the nearest canoe—which was just filling with frightened savages.

The Rocket arrived at the spot—and every black leapt out of the canoe and ran for life—finally jumping into the other canoes which were a little further away. This solitary canoe was left stranded and empty.

"Got it!" roared Handforth triumphantly. "A giddy trophy of war!"

Church throttled down now, and Handforth leapt out. He pulled the canoe high up the beach—as far as he could. Then he opened two or three taps on the Rocket—and leapt for safety.

Steam roared out with fearful force—and the spectacle was an extraordinary one. Handy was quite sure that the blacks would not venture near the roaring monster. And they didn't.

Within ten minutes the canoes had filled up and were gone. And such was the fright of the blacks that they made round the lagoon, and then breasted the rollers of the open sea and went through the opening in the reef.

They left Lagoon Island and paddled away.

The excitement was over—and the battle was won.

.

Dawn broke, and nobody was asleep.

Several of Dorrie's men had been sent to the high points of the island, to keep watch in case the canoes returned. But, by a system of signalling, we learned that all was clear.

The blacks had been driven off, and had gone.

They had left about a dozen injured and about twenty dead. The fellows were not allowed to go near these. Dorrie and his men saw to their burial—a distasteful task, but one which had to be done. Umlosi was absolutely disgusted with the whole affair.

He had hardly had a look in. He had hoped to be able to dash amongst the blacks and to wield his trusty spear. But the nature of the fight had not permitted him to do anything of this kind.

"Don't worry, old man, your chance will come soon!" said Dorrie. "It's quite likely we shall have some more scraps before long—and you'll be able to get busy!"

"Wau! I trust that it is even as thou sayest, N'kose!" growled Umlosi. "But my heart is even as lead. Not one drop of blood is there on my spear!"

He went away, looking utterly fed up.

As for the rest of us, we were pretty well exhausted with the excitements of the night. And now that the dawn had come all the fellows went to their hammocks, and were soon in a sound sleep.

By the time they awoke, the sun was high, and all signs of the fray were concealed. The dead had been buried, the wounded taken away to the yacht—where they could be properly tended—and kept in submission.

Our camp was undisturbed—just the same as before.

But now that feeling of security which had been ours was destroyed. We knew for certain that savages lived within a canoe ride of Lagoon island. What was the most likely result of this battle?

I did not deceive myself.

The savages would return, and take stories of their defeat to their fellow-islanders. And one result could be fully expected—another attack? And this time the blacks would come in tremendous hordes.

When would that attack materialise?

We wondered vaguely—and there was no doubt that events of a startling nature were in store for our party on Lagoon Island!

THE END.

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FROM LAST WEEK.

Mr. Achilles Chopps, the new tutor, arrives at Wrasper's School. There is something mysterious about him, for he will allow no one to enter his room, where he plays sweet music at night on a kind of harmonium. One evening, Tom Tartar is invited to take coffee in Mr. Chopps' private sanctuary.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER V.

The Stolen Letters.

"WE will give our tongues a short rest," he said. "Of course, you don't smoke"

Tom shook his head.

"I asked the question to stop you in case you did. It is a pernicious habit for the young, but to lonely men a boon."

He tossed the end of his cigar into the grate and lighted another. Resuming his seat, he fixed his eyes on Tom, who was examining the contents of the drawer with unflagging interest.

There was a strange, earnest look in the eyes of the tutor.

He seemed as if he would read Tom through and through.

Presently Tom's interest began to flag, and, leaning back in his chair, he yawned.

Tom felt a drowsy feeling overcoming him, and he fought against it at first; but it was so pleasant, and he felt altogether so very comfortable, that presently he yielded to it and fell asleep.

He was awakened from a dreamless slumber by a hand being pressed upon his shoulder.

"Tartar," Mr. Chopps was saying, "there is the supper-bell ringing. We must go down, I suppose?"

Tom sprang up and stared about him.

"I have been asleep," he said. "How beastly rude of me!"

"I have been asleep, too," replied Mr. Chopps, with a laugh.

He unlocked the door and they went out together, Mr. Chopps carefully relocking the door behind him.

Tom did not feel very hungry, and he was as tired as if he had travelled a long journey. As a matter of choice, he would rather have gone to bed, but he thought it would seem odd to his friends.

"Remember, Tartar," said Mr. Chopps, laying a hand upon his shoulder as they descended the stairs, "you are to say nothing about what you have seen in my room, not that there is anything really to conceal, but I am a quiet man, and detest being bothered. You understand?"

"I think I do," replied Tom; "but whether I do or not I shall not gossip about what I have seen."

"Quite right. You are a boy gifted with discretion," said Mr. Chopps.

"For all that," thought Tom to himself, "I should like to have seen the instrument he plays—what is it, and how does he do it?"

That was the drop of disappointment in the cup.

He was thoroughly satisfied with what he had seen, but he sorely wanted to know the source of those melodious, mysterious sounds which had a powerful spell-like effect on himself and friends.

Miss Smatterly kept such a sharp eye on the pretty pupils of the Cecilia School for Young Ladies, that Lottie Fenn, Dolly Siffkins, and Winnie Brown had few opportunities of meeting their respective admirers—Tom Tartar, Sam Smith, and Larry Turrell.

But if they could not meet very often, they could at any rate correspond; and this they did, using the empty biscuit-tin in Widow Blake's shop as a letter-box.

It was with the two-fold object of buying "tuck," and seeing if any missives awaited them, that Tom, Sam, and Larry entered the little village shop one afternoon.

At sight of them, Mrs. Blake burst out with:

"It wasn't my fault; indeed it wasn't! He came into the shop and he took it, and marched off as bold as brass. Then, just as I was going for the police, he opens the door and throws it in again."

"Who—what is it?" asked Sam Smith.

"He must have been peeping in at the shop window," returned the widow, wringing her hands, "and see what was put into it, which, as it wasn't lawful, but just done to oblige, I don't see how he can be persecuted by the police."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Tom. "Has anybody stolen your till?"

"No, not that," said the widow, with a sob. "I could ha' borne that better, for I never keeps anything over change for a shilling in it. No, it was worse than that. It was the biscuit-tin."

"The what?" exclaimed Sam.

"The tin—your tin!" said the widow. "And the young ladies put something into it not an hour ago, which it is not lawful. I know, but having been young once and courted twice, I don't see so much harm in it as some people."

"But who took it?" asked Tom excitedly.

"Who should take it," returned the widow, "but him with the goggle eyes and no end of impudence, which his name is Snacks."

"Phew! So that Bouncer chap Snacks has boned the post-office," exclaimed Sam.

"Or what was in it," said Tom, with a set face. "That's going beyond a joke, and when I meet Snacks I'll give him something to remember me by. Have you any idea, Mrs. Blake, how many letters were put in?"

"I always shuts my eyes and never looks at what is being done," replied the widow, tearfully, "seein' it isn't lawful; but just for once I saw that there were three letters put in by the tallest and purtiest young lady, and they did seem so pleased, and went away laughing. And just to think that a feller like Goggle-eyes—"

"Never mind, Mrs. Blake," said Tom, "we don't blame you; we will settle the matter with Goggle-eyes! Please don't say anything about it."

Tom had never been more exasperated in his life, and yet there was sufficient of the element of the ridiculous in it to mingle a smile with his frown.

Sam Smith's face was a sight, so rueful was it; and Turrell, knowing that the third letter must have been for him, looked sour.

"We can't stand that kind of thing!" declared Tom angrily. "It has to be stopped. Confound the beggar! I reckon he doesn't know the sort of fellows he is running against."

"Let's go and look for him," said Sam Smith.

They went on to Bouncer's place, to which access could only be gained by a high wooden gate, and could neither hear nor see anything of the offender, or any of his fellow-pupils.

So, looking somewhat disconsolate, they returned to the school, vowing vengeance against the big, lanky, goggle-eyed youth who rejoiced in the name of Hautleboy Snacks, and whose bullying ways made him a terror to the smaller boys at Bouncer's Academy.

CHAPTER VI.

Perks's Mysterious Warning.

ON the following Wednesday afternoon Mr. Wrasper, in fulfilment of a long-outstanding promise, took his wife and the whole of his pupils to Sir Claude Freshley's great house. The baronet had arranged a sort of garden-party in honour of his guests, and it was not expected that they would return to the school until late in the evening.

At the last moment, Mr. Achilles Chopps had asked to be excused from accompanying Mr. Wrasper's party to the Park. He pleaded a bad headache.

"I get these attacks at intervals," he explained with a wry smile, "and while they last the pain is abominable. Only one thing affords me any relief."

"What is that?" asked Mr. Wrasper.

"Music—soft, soothing music, in solitude," the tutor replied.

Being in a hurry to dress and get away, Mr. Wrasper did not attempt to pursue the subject, although he thought it the most peculiar cure for a headache he had ever heard of.

When the time came to depart he could hear the weird music going on in the tutor's room.

It was peculiarly sad, not to say mournful.

"It sounds like a funeral dirge," said the schoolmaster to his wife. "Chopps is a peculiar fellow."

"He is more than peculiar," remarked Mrs. Wrasper, quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, a peculiar man is understandable, because you can see his peculiarities; but Mr. Chopps is an incomprehensible being."

"He seems a good sort of fellow."

"Oh, he is not a Foster Moore."

Mrs. Wrasper spoke lightly, as if the peculiarities of Chopps were a matter of no moment to her, and the subject dropped.

About half an hour after Mr. and Mrs. Wrasper and the boys had left the school-house, Wooden Jerry came in by the back way, apparently in a great hurry. He did not say where he had been as he hastened into the kitchen and sat down, but simply asked:

"Everybody gone?"

"Yes; all but Mr. Chopps," replied Jane.

"Mr. Chopps not gone?" exclaimed Jerry.

"No; he is playing that strange instrument upstairs. Can't you hear him?"

"I hear something," Jerry said.

Rising, he went to the door and opened it. Now he could hear the music clearly.

"Was he playing when I came in?" asked Jerry.

"Yes; half an hour before," Jane answered. "What are you bothering about—is it any affair of yours?"

"No, it is nothing," muttered Jerry; "but it's precious queer!"

"What is?" asked Jane.

"Oh, nothing to speak of!" said Jerry. "I've learnt a lesson not to talk about other folks' affairs."

"Won't you tell me, Jerry?" put in Peggy, the younger servant, coaxingly.

"No; not you—nor nobody," said Jerry.

He left the kitchen softly whistling, and sauntered into the hall.

Then he softened down his windy strain and listened.

Now he could hear the music very plainly, but not being blessed with an ear for music he did not detect any peculiarity in it.

One tune was about as good as another to Wooden Jerry.

Dropping the whistling altogether, he crept upstairs to the door of the tutor's room.

Then he knelt down and listened.

While in this position he was surprised by the uniformed Perks, who came down from the upper story with an empty tray in his hand.

The moment Perks espied Jerry, the youth's face took on a very wrathful expression, and, stealing up behind him on tip-toe, he dealt the unsuspecting Jerry a blow on the head with the tray.

The sudden shock and the clang of the tray caused Jerry to utter a yell of terror, and to drop prone to the floor.

He lay there for a moment, rubbing his cranium, and gaping open-mouthed at Perks.

"What was you a-doin' at that there key-hole?" demanded Perks sternly.

"Only listenin'," replied Jerry.

"And what right have you got to listen?"

"I—I've seen you doin' it!" stammered Jerry.

"What I does ain't nothin' to you!" retorted Perks. "Get up! Don't stay grovellin' there!"

Wooden Jerry slowly rose to his feet, keeping a wary eye on the tray, which Perks still held in his hand.

Meanwhile, the music was still proceeding in Mr. Chopps' room. Evidently the tutor had neither heard the bang of the tray nor the colloquy between the pair outside his door.

"Foller me!" said Perks mysteriously, as Jerry rose to his feet.

Wooden Jerry obediently followed the tyrannical youth to the end of the corridor. There Perks halted, looked Jerry straight in the face, and said:

"You think that there Mister Chopps is a quiet man—eh, Jerry?"

"'E suttin'ly appears so," answered Jerry.

"Well," said Perks, "a quiet man he is—until he's roused!"

"Wot d'yer mean by that?"

"Just what I say! You'd think Mister Chopps couldn't hurt a fly! You'd think butter couldn't melt in his mouth! But, my word, he can be a fair demon when he's roused!"

Perks rolled his eyes and breathed hard. Then he continued:

"Take it from me, Jerry, you've had a narrer squeak! If Mister Chopps had copped you kneelin' at the keyhole of his door, he'd have——"

Perks broke off, and rolled his eyes in terror again.

"What would he have done?" faltered Wooden Jerry.

"Most likely half-killed you!" replied Perks hoarsely. "I tell you he's a terror when he's roused! Take my tip an' don't start your spyin' games again. You bottle up your curiosity, or you'll be sorry for yourself one o' these days! I'm speakin' as a friend—as one who knows! Don't forgit it!"

And, nodding his head portentously, the mysterious Perks went away without another word, leaving Wooden Jerry to ponder over the warning given him.

CHAPTER VII.

In pursuit of the Phantom Hearse.

DUSK was just gathering, and the garden-party at Sir Claude Freshly's was drawing to a close, when into the midst of the guests there suddenly dashed a wild-eyed, hatless man.

It was Wooden Jerry!

"The hearse—the hearse!" he shrieked.

"What is that man of mine doing here?" cried Mr. Wrasper, hurrying forward.

Jerry had fallen into a sitting position on the ground, and half a dozen seconds sufficed for a small crowd to gather round him.

"Jerry," said Mr. Wrasper, sternly, "what are you doing here?"

"I thought I would come and have just one peep at the garding-party," groaned Jerry, "and then go home. I little thought I should see it."

"See what?" asked Sir Claude impatiently.

"The hearse!" groaned Jerry.

"This fellow has been scaring himself," said the baronet.

"No, indeed, Sir Claude," said Jerry. "I was coming along quietly by the south drive when I sees it."

"Standing still?" said Mr. Wrasper.

"No; but coming towards me from the quarry way."

"And then you ran off," said Sir Claude, "the moment you fancied you saw it?"

"No, sir," said Jerry. "I couldn't run, but stood still—oh! oh!—and let it go by so slow and mournful like, and turn into the road. It's gone on to the village."

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

(Continued from page 40.)

"How long was this ago?" asked Sir Claude.

"Can't be mor'n twenty minutes, sir," said Jerry. "The moment it was past I found I could run again, and I come on here like a hare."

"Was it travelling fast?"

"No; just a-crawling, Sir Claude."

"Wrasper," said the baronet, "am I to believe this man?"

"I know him pretty well, Sir Claude," replied Mr. Wrasper, "and he certainly is not attempting to deceive us now, even if he has deceived himself."

All that was said passed from mouth to mouth, and the excitement was very great.

Wooden Jerry had created a fever of terror which would not be allayed that night.

Suddenly, high above the babel of tongues, was heard Sir Claude's voice.

"I want a dozen plucky runners, who are not afraid of a sham ghost," said Sir Claude.

"One here!" cried Tom Tartar.

"Another here!" roared Sam Smith. Then George Hammerton, Berrill, and McLara struck in, and in a few seconds the dozen volunteers were ready to start.

"Off you go, and run as far as the village," said Sir Claude. "If you hear anything of this sham hearse, then come back at once."

Off sped Tom and the others, keeping close together, right up to the village, which they found deserted, save for the one policeman of the place, who was, to their astonishment, seated on Widow Blake's doorstep with his face in his hands.

Tom went up to him and touched him upon the shoulder.

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h!" he gurgled.

"What's the matter with you?" cried Tom. "Wat's up? Don't you know us?"

He looked up, and muttered a few incoherent words.

"He's been drinking," said Sam Smith.

"No," said Tom, "he has been thoroughly scared. Now, try and wake up. What ails you?"

"I see it!" was the hoarse reply. "It come on me sudden—sprung out of the ground!"

"Don't talk nonsense," said Tom. "Which way did it go?"

The man motioned with his arm up through the village past the schoolhouse.

"Come on," said Tom. "It hasn't long been gone, or he would not be in this state."

The brief rest had given them all their second wind, and away they started again, running like hounds in pursuit of the deer. On past the schoolhouse down to the bend of the road, on to the heath without stopping.

Leaving the old, deserted mill, where Powner had once stalked away from the police, they struck the high road across the great waste land.

"I can see it," cried Tom. "There it is!"

It only looked a black speck to them then, but it was something moving. Yes; there were two dots—the hearse and the carriage!

"Come on!" cried Tom. "We will know to-night whether it is a ghost or not!"

And now the race, if not to the swift, would be to those who were the strongest in nerve.

Tom was only mortal, and his pulse naturally beat quicker as he found himself outpacing the rest. Not so much because he was the swiftest of foot, but because some of the others showed a disposition to lag behind.

Although they could not believe there was anything spectral in the hearse, they were nevertheless unwilling to test it.

And now a strange thing happened.

A long way ahead, by the roadside, stood a small clump of trees.

The hearse disappeared behind this clump, and did not reappear—as it ought to have done in the ordinary course of events—upon the other side.

But the mourning coach did reappear, and was seen travelling at a great rate, so great that it would be hopeless to attempt to pursue it.

Only a few moments before Tom had seen both vehicles with tolerable distinctness, and the disappearance of one without the other was queer.

(To be continued.)

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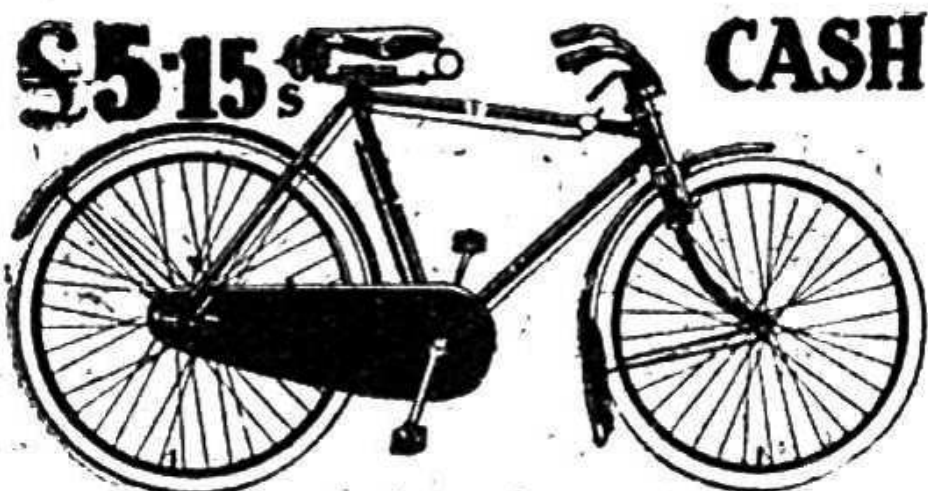
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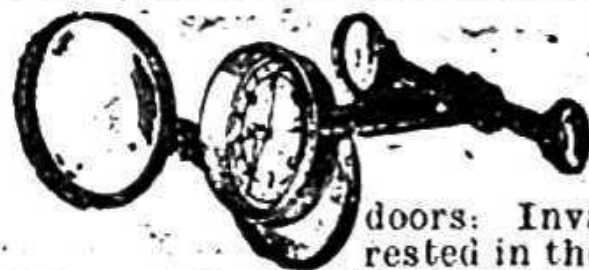
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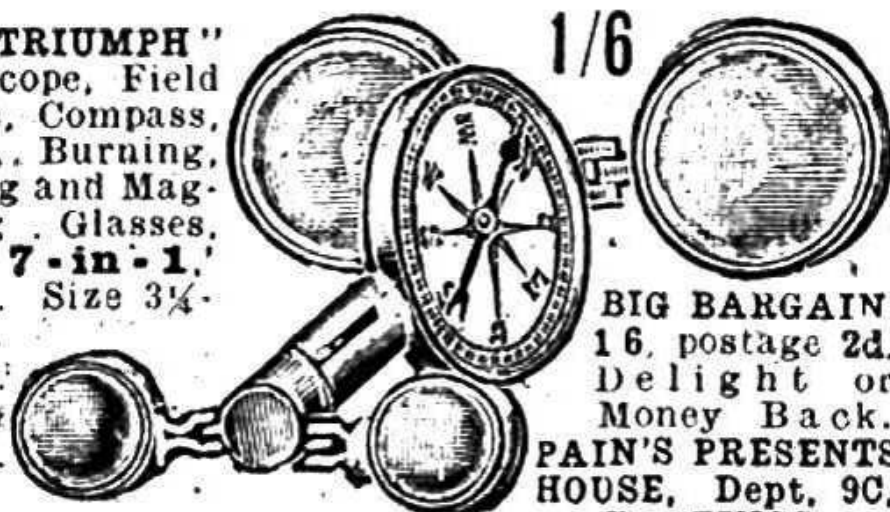
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