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Or, THE MUTINY OF THE ADVENTURE.

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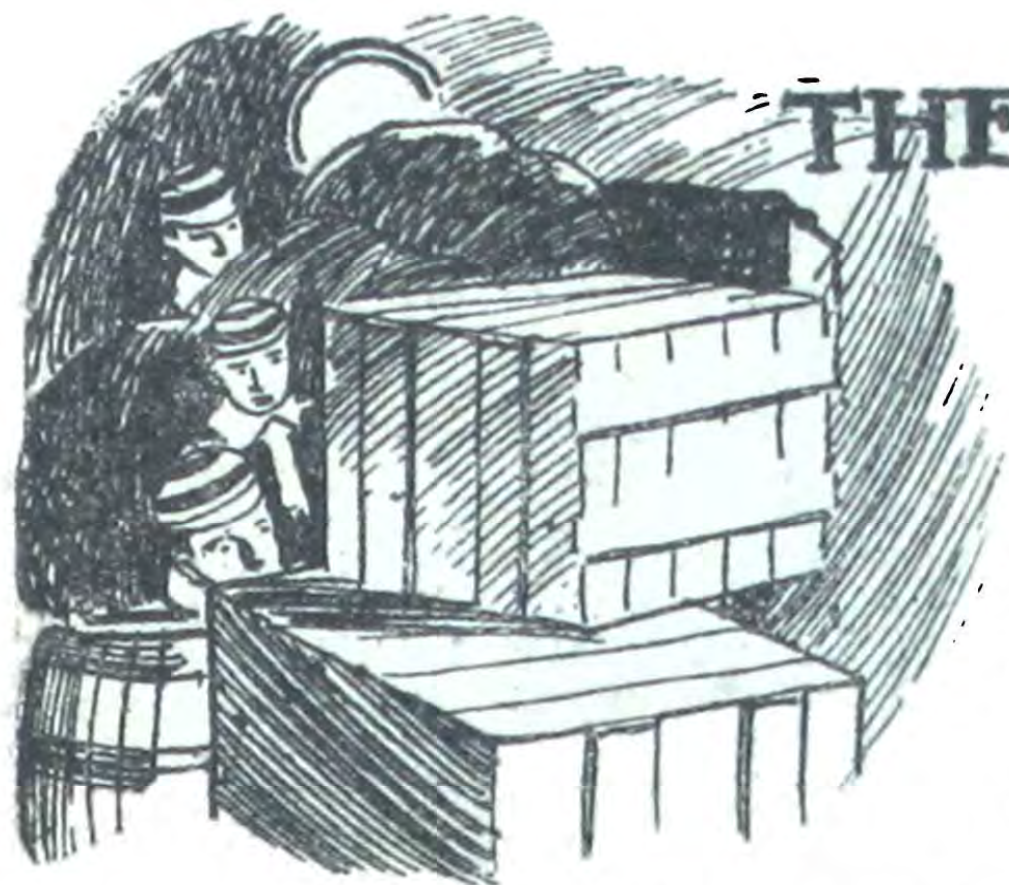
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THE SCHOOLBOY STOWAWAYS ;

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A Tale of School and Adventure, introducing **NELSON LEE, NIPPER, EILEEN DARE, LORD DORRIMORE, UMLOSI, and the Boys of St. Frank's.**

By the Author of "Captain Burton's Quest," and Other Yarns.

(The Narrative Related Throughout by Nipper.)

CHAPTER I.

A FAREWELL FEED IN STUDY C—WIRES FOR HANDFORTH AND CO.—THE GLOOMY THREE.

"**H**ERE'S to the health of the king!" I said enthusiastically. "May he live for many years, and may he engage in many great battles!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

And the king's health was drunk—in tea.

No, it wasn't a patriotic meeting. It was just an extra-special tea-party in Study C, in the Ancient House, at St. Frank's. The king sat at the head of the table grinning broadly and displaying his pearly white teeth. He was Umlosi, the King of Kutana-land, and as black as the inside of a coal-scuttle.

"Wau! Thou hast toasted me well, O Manzie—thou whose eye is even as the sparkling, shimmering water," rumbled the guest of honour. "For is it not my desire that I should live to fight many, many battles? Wau! My blood throbs!"

I grinned.

"You murderous old bounder," I said. "I don't believe you're happy unless you're looking for somebody to kill!"

"Thou givest me a violent character, but I observe that thou art smiling, O nimble Manzie," exclaimed Umlosi. "Thy words are those of fun, but is there not truth in them?"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West, "don't ask me!"

"I am a hunter—a warrior," went on Umlosi, his eyes shining. "The clash of steel is music to my ears, the cries of the foe cause my heart to beat swiftly. Much as I like this country of wondrous sights and amazing kraals, I am eager for the time when we shall cross the vast waters to the lands where the sun burns fiercely and where the stars gleam in myriads of fire-points."

"You won't have to wait long, my son," I said, comfortably. "We sail at dawn to-morrow morning."

"It is well, Manzie," rumbled Umlosi.

He helped himself to a cake, and the meal proceeded. Study C was packed with visitors. In addition to Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, there were lots of other fellows. Tom Burton sat next to me; De Valerie and Yakama and Farman were just opposite. Handforth and Church and Me-Clure lounged against the mantelpiece, and several other chaps were squashed in odd corners. The door was wide open, and the tea-party, in fact, overflowed into the passage.

It was a farewell feed, to tell the truth.

The summer holidays didn't actually commence until the following week; but a certain number of fortunate Removites—myself included—were being allowed to depart earlier. It was most essential that there should be no delay.

The facts were quite simple.

Captain Burton, the father of "the Bo'sun," of the Remove—one of the best of fellows—knew that "Mr. Alvington," of the Ancient House, was really Nelson Lee, and that I was Nipper—although I was known at St. Frank's as "Dick Bennett." The summer vacation was almost due, as I mentioned a minute ago, and Captain Burton had invited us to accompany him on a trip to the Pacific.

As a matter of fact, he was intent upon hunting for certain treasure, and, naturally, this made the whole thing far more interesting. It was not merely a pleasure trip; there was a definite object to be attained.

But events had not gone smoothly. An avaricious gentleman who rejoiced in the name of Captain Ebenezer Jelks knew all about the project, and he was just as anxious to get hold of the Spanish gold as we were. In brief, he had sunk Captain Burton's schooner in Caistowe Bay—which was three miles from St. Frank's—and had marched off with a copy of the precious plan.

As it may well be supposed, we began to tell ourselves that the trip was decidedly "off." But then the one and only Lord Dorrimore had come to the rescue in his own languid, good-natured manner. Being a millionaire, he owned a luxurious steam yacht, and this vessel was placed at the disposal of the Bo'sun's father.

She was fast, and we were confident that Captain Jelks was foiled. We should arrive at the treasure island long before the enemy, and the fact that he had obtained a map was of little or no importance.

Our party would be an interesting one. The St. Frank's section of it consisted of Nelson Lee and myself to begin with. In addition, there were six other members of the Remove Form invited—or, to be exact, five. The Bo'sun didn't need an invitation. Sir Montie Tregellia-West, Tommy Watson, Justin D. Farman, Beane Yakama, and Cecil De Valerie would all be with us on the voyage.

That's how the original party stood. But now that Lord Dorrimore had come upon the scene there were some very interesting people concerned too. Dorrimore and U'mloai would naturally be much in evidence. But the guest elite, to my mind, was Miss Eileen Dare. She and her aunt had promised to be with us. There is no need for me to say any more about Miss Eileen—everybody knows that she is about the most ripping girl one could imagine, and that she had helped the guvnor and I in scores of exciting detective cases.

The yacht, appropriately enough, was named the Adventure, and was a glorious vessel, appointed in the most luxurious manner. At present she was lying at a South Coast port, and would come along the coast to Calstone during the evening. Eileen Dare and her aunt were already on board, and we should meet them in an hour or two.

And then, in the morning, just after dawn, the Adventure would up-anchor and set out on her travels. That was the programme. Lord Dorrimore was at St. Frank's, and while U'mloai was taking tea with us in Study C, Dorrie and Captain Burton were the guests of Nelson Lee.

It was the last day at St. Frank's for us—for many weeks to come, at all events—and there was a general feeling of gaiety in the air. It wasn't very surprising that the majority of the Remove fellows were tremendously jealous. They were boys, and the idea of a lengthy sail to the Pacific appealed to their adventurous natures.

They were giving us a good send-off, and we were generally regarded as being lucky bounders. Handforth and Church and McClure, of Study D, were, perhaps, the most serious fellows of any.

Edward Oswald Handforth, in particular, was thoughtful and abstracted. He didn't seem to enjoy his tea at all—and I knew why. Handforth was a romantic youth, and he had set his heart on voyaging to the Pacific.

He hadn't been invited originally—we couldn't ask everybody—and his pride had

been hurt. It was quite an easy matter to hurt Handforth's pride, for he was a rummy sort of chap in many ways. He was generous to the point of being foolish, and a better-hearted chap didn't exist. But he was difficult to get on with, as Church and McClure knew only too well.

Only the day before Captain Burton suggested that Handforth and Co. should be invited, too—for the three juniors had done much to foil the rascally schemes of Captain Jelks. The fact that they had been too late on the scene made no difference to the situation—Handforth and Co. had done their best.

Dorrimore was the host, and he had characteristically replied that he didn't care if the whole hally Remove came—there was room for dozens of 'em! And so Nelson Lee had imparted the joyous news to Handforth and Co. that they could come upon one condition. This condition, needless to say, was that their parents sent their entire approval and permission.

Church and McClure were dubious, but Handforth scoffed at them. He suggested that they should all rush home, but there wasn't time for this, as their people lived hundred of miles from St. Frank's. Moreover, Handforth realised that once they were home, they would probably be kept at home. Parents are always so liable to be unreasonable. A full, explanatory letter, supplemented by another letter from the Headmaster himself, would undoubtedly do the trick. The Head had had no hesitation in writing that the boys would be in good hands and that the holiday would do them a world of good.

The previous evening and all this morning Handforth had been confident. But no word had come from home, and by now he was becoming uneasy. He deplored the fact that there was so little time; but it was most essential that we should start at once, in order to defeat the designs of Captain Jelks.

Handforth finished his tea and moved carelessly out of the study. Church and McClure followed him, and I guessed that they were intent upon waiting in the Triangle for any possible telegram. A telegram was the only hope now—and, personally, I hadn't much faith.

The other boys of the party had obtained permission long since, for this trip had been talked of months before. The parents of fellows like Farman and Yakama were thousands of miles across the sea, and this holiday saved them from the dreary weeks of passing the time at the silent and deserted school.

With Handforth and Co. it was different: they all had homes in England, and their people, naturally, had made arrangements of their own. If Handforth and his chums were confident, I wasn't. And nearly all of us were quite prepared to be told that Handforth and Church and McClure couldn't come.

"Begad! They're gettin' anxious," murmured Sir Montie, as Handforth and Co. left

the study. "I'm feelin' frightfully sympathetic, you know."

The three juniors in fact were getting anxious. If no news came to-night it would be too late. Out in the corridor Handforth glared at his chums in a helpless kind of way.

"Jolly nice people we've got, ain't we?" he growled. "Can't even send a wire! Your pater must be a rotter, McClure—and yours too, Church—"

"What about yours?" snorted the pair warmly.

"Mine ain't a rotter," replied Handforth. "He's thoughtless—that's all. I've written him for remittances score of times, and he's forgotten all about my letters for weeks! Do you know what I'm going to do?"

"We ain't thought readers!" snapped McClure crossly.

"I'm going to send a wire to my people," declared Handforth, sticking out his jaw. "A jolly sharp wire, too! I don't see why I should be humbugged about by my giddy pater! You'd better come down with me—"

"Here's Tubbs!" roared Church excitedly.

It wasn't the sight of the pageboy that caused Church to yell. It was the object that Tubbs held in his hand—a telegram! Handforth and Co. simply hurled themselves at Tubbs and surrounded him.

"Who's it for?" gasped Handforth feverishly.

"Oh, my lor'! You give me a fair start, young gents," said Tubbs in alarm. "There's three telegrams—"

"Three!" roared the trio. "For us?"

Tubbs nodded.

"One for Master 'Andforth, one for Master Church, an' one for Master McClure," he replied with unnecessary exactitude. "One come ten minutes ago, but I couldn't bring it up just then, an' afore I knew where I was, these here others were brought. Fair startled me, it did!"

Handforth and Co. were so excited that they couldn't say a word; they breathed hard and seized their telegrams. Handforth's fingers were shaking so much that he was only just able to tear the flap open.

"Now for it," he gasped, finding his voice. "I'll bet a quid I'm going, my sons. I'll bet—bet—What's this? Oh, my only hat! Well, I'm jiggered!"

Handforth stared at the telegram dazedly. Church and McClure hadn't got theirs open yet, and they paused. In strict truth, they were afraid to read the messages. And they craned over Handforth's shoulder.

"Hold it steady, you ass!" panted McClure, excitedly.

He grabbed the telegram, and Handforth allowed it to go, standing there dazed.

"Certainly not," ran the message curtly. "Don't be so foolish, Edward. You must come home at the end of term. Am surprised at you.—FATHER.

"Well, that's plain enough!" said Church. "Oh, crumbs! I'm—I'm afraid to look at mine! I know what it'll be—the mater's

frightfully afraid of the sea, and—and—Oh, rats!"

Church pulled himself together, and tore open his telegram with a steady hand. One glance was sufficient.

"We could not allow you to go, dear," said this telegram. "The risks would be so great. Please do not think we are hard. Father will come down for you next week —MOTHER.

Handforth grinned weakly.

"Hard lines," he said, with attempted sympathy, but utterly failing to conceal his satisfaction. "That's two of us!"

"Oh, mine'll be the same," said McClure. "As a matter of fact, I never expected to get permission. My pater's ill, and he's going off to Norway this summer, and he'll take me with him."

The third telegram was opened, and McClure was not in the least surprised when he read the fateful words:

"Norway trip arranged. Cannot give consent to your mad request.—DAD.

Handforth and Co. felt ready to drop.

"Well, it's settled, anyhow," said McClure. "I don't care much," he added, trying to make himself believe it. "Norway's jolly decent! And it's something to have all this uncertainty at an end."

"You wait!" said Handforth darkly. "You wait, my sons!"

"Why, this has settled it, you ass!" growled Church, with misery in his voice.

"Has it?" asked Handforth vaguely.

"Oh, has it?"

Church and McClure stared.

"You don't think we're going to tell any lies, do you?" he asked. "We can't tell Lord Dorrimore that we've got permission—it wouldn't be right. And they wouldn't let us go without seeing—"

"Of course they wouldn't let us go," snapped Handforth. "I know that, ass! And, as for telling whoppers, I'm surprised at you for thinking of such a thing! Let's go and show these wires to old Alvy and Lord Dorrimore at once, and get it over."

Handforth spoke briskly, and his dazed, miserable demeanour of a moment before had completely vanished. It almost seemed as though he had come to a positive decision, although what on earth he could have decided was beyond the powers of Church and McClure to imagine.

The thing was settled—finished. There was nothing more to be said or done. Church and McClure, although keenly disappointed, had suspected that this would be the result all along; and the blow, accordingly, was not altogether unprepared for. They rapidly resigned themselves.

But Handforth's resignation took them by surprise; it had been amazingly swift, and it seemed to his chums as though he had settled in his own mind upon some plan of action, impossible though it appeared to be.

They went along to Nelson Lee's study and found him there with Lord Dorrimore and Captain Burton. The news was received

sympathetically, Dorrimore expressing the opinion that it was "bally rotten."

"You must not be down in the dumps, lads," said Nelson Lee kindly. "I hope you will enjoy your holidays thoroughly, and we shall not forget you when we are far away in the Pacific. And in a month or two we shall all be together again."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth respectfully. "I was tremendously eager to go on this trip, but it's no use grumbling, is it?"

"By jings! That's the way to talk," exclaimed Captain Burton. "I'm sure that Lord Dorrimore would be only too pleased to make you welcome. But if your parents won't agree we cannot take you by force."

"That's so," said his lordship. "Hard lines, kids. You have my sympathy, by gad. I'm glad to see you're lookin' bright an' chirpy."

Handforth and Co. took their departure shortly afterwards, and Church and McClure looked at their great leader curiously.

"Blessed if I can understand you, Handy," said Church. "You are looking bright and chirpy, and that's a fact. I thought you'd be in the last depths of misery."

Handforth gazed at his chums steadily.

"You two chaps are resigned, ain't you?" he asked.

"We've got to be——"

"That's no answer. Are you resigned or not?"

"Of course we are," said Church, staring. Handforth nodded.

"Well, I'm not," he said grimly. "I may look it, but you can take it from me, my sons, that I ain't any more resigned than I should be if I'd been sentenced to penal servitude!"

"You're—you're dotty!" gasped McClure.

Handforth shrugged his shoulders and walked along the passage. Church and McClure gazed after him and then stared at one another.

What was working in the great mind of their leader?

CHAPTER II.

IN A WAPPING LODGING HOUSE—CAPTAIN JELKS IS CRAFTY—A BOLD STEP.

WAPPING is not exactly what I would call a select district.

Nelson Lee and I had been there many a time, and we had had quite a few scraps on different occasions. For Wapping, situated near the Thames, is the haunt of sailor men of all nationalities, and certain parts of the district are rough in the extreme.

The sunlight was streaming slantingly into a dingy apartment in a third-rate lodging-house not far from the riverside. Four men were sitting round a small table, and they were smoking and drinking. The beverage, it is needless to add, was not tea. Captain Jelks was drinking whisky, Mr. Larson favoured stout, and the other two gentlemen partook of bitter ale.

It was a meeting, in fact, and it had been

called by Captain Jelks. Mr. Larson was his constant companion, but the other two men had been strangers to him until twenty minutes ago.

"Wot I want you to do ain't so very much, speakin' generally," said Captain Jelks, setting his glass down. "I'm a straightforward man, and I allus believe in speaking in a straightforward way. That's me. Ain't it, Bill?"

Mr. Larson, thus appealed to, nodded.

"I never sailed with a more straightforward man in all my life, cap'n," he replied, slowly filling his pipe. "You an' me 'ave sailed together for this six year, and I never knowed you to go back on your word once."

Captain Jelks stroked his short beard.

"So you see, my dear fellers, we ain't brought you here to git up to no tricks," he explained. "You're both stewards on the Adventure, ain't you? A smart little craft she is, too. One o' the smartest as I ever see."

"I ain't grumblin'," said one of the other men. "I'm new, o' course—haven't been on the boat for five minutes, so to speak. Adams, here, signed on just arter me. The luckiest piece of work as ever happened."

"You're right, Hilton," agreed Adams. "I never thought as I'd git a stooard's job on a swanky yacht like the Adventurer. Owned by a lord, too. She's sailin' for the Pacific to-morrow."

"That's just what I'm getting at," said Captain Jelks. "You may not believe it, mates, but they're after treasure."

Adams winked.

"None o' your foolishness!" he scoffed.

"By ginger! It's true!" declared Jelks, leaning forward. "There's a 'ole party of 'em goin'—Lord Dorrimore and a crowd o' boys. The skipper is Cap'n Burton, an old pal o' mine, as you might say. Him an' me have had many trips together; ain't we, Bill?"

"Yes, an' fights, too!" said Mr. Larson.

"We ain't friends now, o' course," went on Jelks. "No, no! Cap'n Burton come into money, an' he don't want to associate with the likes of us. An' 'e's greedy, too. He ain't content with the fortune he's come into. The idea is to take this 'ere yacht out to some island in the Pacific, and they're going to search for treasure. That's as true as I'm a-sittin' 'ere."

Adams and Hilton were becoming impressed.

"Well, what about it?" said one of them.

"Well, you see, it's this 'ere way," explained Jelks, after a pause. "I don't want the Adventure to travel fast—see? If you two chaps can cause any delay, so much the better."

"You're up the stick!" said Hilton candidly. "How can we cause any delay? I s'pose you're suggestin' that we should——"

"I ain't suggestin' anything, yet," interjected Captain Jelks. "But if you'll do wot we want it'll be worth a good hit to you."

"Wot do you call a good bit?" asked Adams.

"Well, it'll be twenty quid down for each man, to start with," replied Jelks slowly. "If the thing goes through all right, you'll git another twenty quid each arter the voyage. That's plain speakin', ain't it?"

Adams and Hilton were both impressed even more.

"Strikes me you'll want a lot doin' for forty quid," said Adams, looking at the skipper closely. "You ain't a kind o' man to throw money about for nothin'. Can't you give us some details, cap'n?"

"There's one thing as you may be certain on," replied Jelks. "You won't sail in the Adventure agin, once you git back. This 'ere Lord Dorrimore is a pertickler kind o' bloke, and 'e won't take you on agin once you've been paid off——"

"Ho! An' why not?" demanded Hilton warmly.

Captain Jelks grinned.

"That's a easy one," he replied. "Why not? Becos you an' Adams ain't fust-class stooards—that's why not, mates. You wouldn't have signed on for this trip if you 'adn't been extra lucky. An' you can't deny that neither."

"We ain't tryin' to," growled Adams.

"And for why? Becos you know it's true," said Jelks comfortably.

As a matter of fact it was true.

Adams and Hilton were both common men; they had hitherto been stewards on very third-rate ships. This made it all the more surprising that they should have obtained berths on such a "swell" yacht as Lord Dorrimore's Adventure.

The explanation, however, was simple.

Captain William Sanders was a quick-tempered man; that was the explanation. He had commanded Dorrie's yacht for six months, and his lordship had proved him to be a capable navigator and a good ship-master.

It had been arranged that the Adventure should go on a voyage to the Mediterranean, and that she should start within three weeks. Then, without warning, Lord Dorrimore had changed his plans.

Captain Sanders was told, politely but firmly, that his services would not be required for the trip, as Captain Burton would command the yacht. It was only natural that Dorrie should want the Bos'un's father to take charge of things.

Sanders merely had to hurry a crew together, and bring the Adventure to Caistowe Bay, where she would be put into the hands of Captain Burton. To the mind of Sanders this was a bitter slight.

He felt that he had been insulted, and, being quick-tempered, he had "had his own back," which was a mean, petty thing to do. For, actually, Sanders had nothing to grumble at. Dorrie had told him that he could take a holiday, and that he would be paid full wages the whole time. This was astonishingly generous.

But Captain Sanders considered that he

had been treated badly—he had been ousted out by another skipper, who wasn't even known to him. And, in consequence, he had provided the Adventure with a crew of very questionable quality.

Dorrie had trusted Sanders to pick a crew of the best men, and Sanders had done just the opposite. He was amazingly short-sighted in his foolish pique, as he would find out later on. He would be very sorry that he had allowed his temper to get the better of his judgment.

The fact remained, however, that the Adventure possessed a crew of an undesirable type, and Dorrie wouldn't find this out until later on. Captain Jelks knew all about it, and he was striving to take advantage of the fact.

For he was alarmed at this fresh development. He had imagined that the field was clear for him now that Captain Burton's schooner was sunk. And this yacht, the Adventure, was a powerful, swift craft of the finest type.

Jelks couldn't sink the Adventure, but he could, at least, make an attempt to cause delay. It was with this end in view that he had got hold of Adams and Hilton, two of the new stewards.

"You won't git no more berths like this 'ere one," went on Jelks, "so you won't come to no 'arm, anyway. I'm goin' to pay you well, an' I want you to serve me well. When you're three or four days out I want you to start a mutiny——"

The two men rose abruptly.

"We'll be going," said Hilton angrily. "This 'ere fool talk——"

"Sit down," exclaimed Jelks. "Sit down agin, you ijits."

"Look 'ere——"

"Sit down," repeated Captain Jelks calmly. "You won't let a man speak, by ginger! Mutiny, I said, an' mutiny I meant. But you needn't look so darned scared. There's nothin' to be afeared of. It'll be as easy as splicin' a rope, if you'll only set and listen to me."

"We ain't pirates," said Adams sarcastically.

"Nobody never said you was," agreed Jelks. "You ain't got the pluck to be pirates, any'ow. This 'ere job is simple. Once you're at sea, all you've got to do is to git them on talkin'—sperad the yarn that the yacht is goin' on a treasure-'unt, and ——"

"Ho, so it is a yarn, arter all?" sneered Hilton.

"No, it ain't!" snapped Jelks. "It's as true as you're a blamed fool. Them fellers are goin' arter treasure, an' you've got to git the crew whisperin'. Make 'em send a deputation to the cap'n demandin' double wages. Of course, they won't git it, and then a mutiny can follow. It'll all develop in easy stages, if you go to work in the right way. Once you've got 'old of the ship, smash the compass an' all the navigatin' gear, so they'll be delayed for weeks. Arter

that you can cave in an' say you're sorry. They can't do nothin' if you all stick together; an' this 'ere Lord Dorrimore is a easy-goin' bloke. 'E won't 'arm you in the least."

The two stewards shook their heads.

"'Tain't good enough," said Adams slowly.

"Jest a little talkin' over will make it seem so good that you'll laff at yourselves for bein' so chicken-earted," said Jelks.

"If a mutiny's impossible, why, then you can try something easier. It don't matter wot it is so long as the yacht's delayed. An' don't forgit you git twenty quid each to start with, an' twenty quid when you've done the job—no, bust it. I'll make it thirty! It's worth fifty quid to me!"

"That's all very well," said Hilton. "How are we goin' to get this other thirty? It'll be fifty quid down, or we don't do the job—even if we do it at all! And I ain't particular struck with it, fifty quid or no fifty quid!"

"'Ave some more beer," said Captain Jelks calmly.

More bottles were opened, and there was a slight pause, during which the plotters partook of liquid refreshment. After that Jelks commenced talking again. His smooth tongue did its utmost, and at the end of half an hour he had succeeded in bringing Hilton and Adams round to his way of thinking.

"Why, I tell ye it's simply money for nothin'!" he concluded. "You can take it or leave it—I've said my last word. So's to bring it even, I'll make it twenty-five down an' twenty-five arterwards. It wouldn't be fair if you was to ask for the hull lot in advance. Why, you'd desert an' go on the drink. I reckon I'm too blamed generous as it is, jest for a little job like this 'ere. Wot do you say, Bill?"

"Generous ain't the word for it, cap'n," said Larson, shaking his head. "It's downright foolishness. But, there, you allus was free-anded."

There was some further talk, and, finally, Jelks produced fifty pounds and divided it between the two stewards. They took their departure soon afterwards, and Jelks very thoughtfully filled his pipe.

"Money chucked away," remarked Mr. Larson sadly.

But Captain Jelks grinned.

"Don't you make no bloomin' mistake, Bill," he said. "That money ain't chucked away—it's well spent. But they won't see the colour o' no more!" he added, with fine disregard of his promise. "I've worked 'em up proper, an' I'll bet you a fourpenny cigar the trick works."

"You allus was rash, cap'n," said Mr. Larson. "It don't do to make bets o' that sort. But you've paid the money now, an' I ain't sayin' as it wasn't wisdom. If the Adventure ain't delayed, we're done—fair done!"

"Time'll show," said Captain Jelks, sagely; "time'll show, Bill!"

CHAPTER III.

GOOD-BYE TO ST. FRANK'S—ALL ABOARD—HANDFORTH AND CO. ARE GRIM.

ST. FRANK'S was in a buzz.

It was still daylight, although the evening was getting on. The sky was clear overhead, and the air was delightfully mild; a perfect June day, in fact. And there was every prospect of a perfect morrow.

The Triangle wore an animated aspect. Crowds of fellows were standing about in groups, quite a number of seniors being amongst them. Two motor-cars were standing against the Ancient House, and any number of bicycles were all ready for use at a moment's notice.

I felt quite gratified. All this commotion was occasioned by the departure of the yachting party. Envious glances were cast at us, but there was a general feeling of good-nature abroad.

Perhaps this was partly due to the fact that the whole school broke up for the summer holidays in four or five days' time. It was considered the limit by some fellows that we should be allowed to go beforehand—but this was only because they couldn't participate in similar favours.

Everything was ready for departure. Word had been received that the Adventure was lying in Caistowe Bay, snug for the night. We were going aboard before dark, and should find dinner all ready to serve. Then a quiet night would be followed by the commencement of the trip in the morning.

It was really a good idea of Dorrie's, for we should feel settled down before we actually started. Eileen Dare and her aunt were on board ready to greet us. Captain Burton was on board, too, having gone over to Caistowe two or three hours before.

Lord Dorrimore had seen to all the matters connected with the authorities, and everything would be plain sailing.

Our trunks had been sent off earlier in the evening, and were already on board. And now Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Watson and I stood before the motor-cars chatting with a group of fellows. De Valerie, the Bo'sun, Farman, and Yakama formed the centre of another little crowd.

We were attired in holiday clothing—light flannels and Panamas. Etons were dispensed with for many weeks to come, and we were not sorry for this. Everything in the garden was lovely, in fact.

"Lucky bounders!" said Owen major. "Wish I was coming with you! I'm going to stay at Griffith's place——"

"Anything wrong with it?" demanded Griffith warmly.

"Oh, you know what I mean!" said Owen major hastily. "Now, then, Handforth, don't barge into me like that, you ass!"

Handforth forced his way through the crowd, and eyed us grimly.

"Hard lines, old son!" I said. "It's rotten for you——"

"You needn't be sorry for me!" inter-

rupted Handforth. "I've got over that disappointment by this time. It was all rot, of course, and I'm going to have a row with my pater when I get home. You're going to stay in the bay all night, ain't you?" he added carelessly.

"Yes," I replied. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said Handforth. "I was just wondering. It's a potty idea to hang about, once you're on board, ain't it?"

"I'm not the commander," I replied calmly. "There's a good reason, you can be sure. The chief engineer won't be able to join the ship until the morning, I believe."

"You're quite sure you'll stay at Caistowe till the morning?"

"Of course I am, you ass!"

"That's all right, then!" said Handforth absently.

I stared.

"All right?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, I was thinking of getting up early and rousing some of the other fellows," replied Handforth. "Might as well see the last of you, you know."

"When we sail, my son, you'll be snug in your bed," I replied. "I'd better say good-bye now, Handy," I added, as Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore appeared, with Umlosi looming in the rear.

By the time I had finished shaking hands with the fellows my arm ached. But at last we took our seats in the motor-car, and a cheer went up as we started towards the gates.

Nelson Lee was in the first car with Dorrie and Umlosi, the Bo'sun, Sir Montie, Tommy, and myself. The others came behind, all looking as happy as sandboys.

There was an immediate rush for the bicycles, and when we started down the lane fully thirty or forty cyclists came after us. It was an absolute procession, and the procession, as we glided through Bellton, was considerable.

The journey to Caistowe was accomplished without incident, and when we arrived in the dusk the Adventure looked glorious out in the bay, a mass of twinkling lights from stem to stern.

There was just a touch of sadness in the scene, however, for Captain Burton's poor old schooner was visible some distance away, submerged until only the masts and rigging clearly showed. She lay upon the sands, and it would be many weeks before she was raised.

A powerful motor-launch from the yacht was waiting at the jetty, and we all tumbled in and were soon gliding away. The jetty was thick with juniors, and they waved their hands and oaps enthusiastically.

"Hurrah!"

"Good luck!"

"Hope you come back all right!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Alvington!"

The cheers were given with a will, and Nelson Lee acknowledged them by standing up and cheerily waving his hat. Our send-off, at all events, had been a great success,

and after that we fell somewhat silent. We shouldn't set foot upon British soil again for weeks to come, and the thought was a sobering one.

But when we arrived at the yacht our good spirits returned. While we were mounting the accommodation-ladder we heard a silvery laugh from above, and a moment later we found ourselves facing Miss Eileen Dare.

The girl who had been the gov'nor's detective assistant for so many months was looking fresher and prettier than I had ever seen her before. She was attired in some dainty, flimsy, summery frock, and she greeted us with her usual charm and sweetness.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you again, Mr.—Mr. Alvington!" she exclaimed, taking the gov'nor's hand. "And here's Dick, too," she added, making me feel almost nervous by smiling at me and taking my hand also. "Oh, isn't it lovely? I'm sure we shall have such splendid times together!"

"Rather, Miss Eileen!" I said joyfully. "All these chaps are my pals, you know. Oh, I can't introduce 'em all!"

Nelson Lee came to the rescue, and the introductions were soon over. Tregellis-West and Watson, of course, had met Eileen before, but the others hadn't. She and Dorrie were also acquainted, but Eileen had never seen the one and only Umlosi until now.

The deck was brilliantly illuminated, and Dorrimore was talking to Captain Burton; Nelson Lee was busily greeting Miss Esther Gilbey, Eileen's aunt. So it was left to me to introduce the gigantic King of Kutaland. Eileen was just a little startled, I believe, but she held out her hand at once.

"Thou art honouring me too well, O wondrously beautiful White Flower!" rumbled Umlosi, with more reverence in his tone than I had ever heard before. "Wau! N'Kose, my father, has oft-times spoken to me of thee, describing thy superb charms——"

"Oh!" exclaimed Eileen, blushing somewhat confusedly.

"But N'Kose spoke words which were absurdly inadequate," went on Umlosi. "For do not my eyes see before me the most beautiful of all White Queens? O, fair lady, thy wishes are my commands. If ever thou hast a service to be performed, I pray that thou shalt honour me by giving me thy orders. I have spoken!"

And Umlosi, bowing with extraordinary grace, retired respectfully, leaving poor Eileen more confused than ever.

"Oh, Nipper!" she whispered to me.

"He meant it, too, Miss Eileen," I said. "Umlosi's a curious old beggar, and when he says 'I have spoken' it means that his words are absolutely sacred. If ever you're in trouble or danger, he'll do any blessed thing without question. And he's one of nature's gentlemen, too."

Lord Dorrimore came across.

"By gad! I hope that black rascal hasn't been saying anything?" he asked anxiously.

"He told Miss Eileen how you had described her to him," I replied cheerfully.

"Oh, glory!" gasped Dorrie blankly.

"It was too bad of you, Lord Dorrimore," laughed Eileen. "I'm afraid you have been saying all sorts of undeserved things about me. And Umlosi actually called me a white flower. Isn't he queer?"

"I'll talk to Umlosi!" said Lord Dorrimore grimly.

I grinned as he went off, knowing what his "talk" would amount to. Eileen took us across to her aunt, and we leaned against the rail, gazing over towards the shore, after greeting the comfortably proportioned old lady.

The jetty was practically deserted now, but I could faintly see three figures standing there, and I suddenly recognised them as Handforth and Church and McClure. Those three disappointed youths were evidently having a bad time of it, and I turned to Sir Montie.

"It's rotten for those poor chaps," I said softly.

"Dear fellow, I was just thinkin' the same thing," said Tregellis-West with a sigh. "Do you know, Benny, I feel shockin'ly mean. It almost seems as though we've played it low down on old Handy. After all, he's a decent chap, an' he's dyin' to come out to the Pacific."

"Oh, well, it can't be helped," I said, taking Montie's arm and reaching for Tommy Watson's. "Let's go and find out where the other fellows have got to. They're exploring the ship, I expect."

We went off, and were soon lost in other matters. But now and again I couldn't help thinking of those three forlorn-looking figures on the jetty.

Meanwhile, Handforth and Church and McClure came to the conclusion that staring at the yacht wouldn't bring them any nearer to it, and they reluctantly turned to their bicycles. Everybody else had gone long since. And Church and McClure wouldn't have stayed all this time if Handforth hadn't forced them to.

"She looks ripping!" said Handforth absently. "If they had gone on that old schooner, I shouldn't have minded so much. But just look at that yacht, you chaps! A floating palace, by George! They'll have the time of their lives, and we shall go back—Oh! I feel like busting!" he finished up desperately. "If you stand there much longer, McClure, I'll kick you!"

McClure shifted hastily, knowing that Handforth was quite capable of carrying out his threat. McClure felt like kicking somebody himself, but he was able to control his feelings. Handforth wasn't.

"Let's get back to the school!" growled Church gloomily. "My hat! I'll have a bust-up with my mater when I get home!"

And with that dire threat Church mounted his bicycle. The others followed his example, and they rode through the deepening dusk

along the dusty road to Bellton and St. Frank's.

Hardly a word was spoken during the ride. But Handforth was looking determined again, as he had looked after receiving the telegram. The gleam in his eye was now far more pronounced, and his jaw had set itself quite firmly. It was obvious that Edward Oswald Handforth had made up his mind.

And when that interesting event happened it generally meant that things were going to move. Handforth's mind was a weird and wonderful thing, and once he had decided upon a certain course of action, nothing short of earthquakes would shift him from his purpose.

The bicycles were stored away, and then the trio walked towards the Ancient House. Somehow everything seemed dull and dreary in spite of the fineness of the night. Undoubtedly our departure had had a big effect in the Ancient House; but by midday on the morrow, at latest, things would be normal. By that time we should have been practically forgotten. Junior schoolboys are not in the habit of thinking for long.

"Supper, I suppose," remarked Church as they entered the lobby.

"We don't want to go into Hall," said Handforth. "Come with me to the study. I've got something to talk about—I've been thinking."

Church and McClure followed their leader to Study D. Here the movements of Handforth caused them some little wonderment and uneasiness. He saw that the window was secured, pulled the blind tightly, locked the door, and even went to the length of glancing under the table.

McClure tapped his head significantly.

"You may be, but I'm not!" said Handforth, to McClure's confusion. "If you want to know what's in the wind, my son, I've made up my mind. Tain't likely I'm going to allow Benny and Co. to have all the best of it!"

"Oh, don't start again!" growled Church. "We can't go—"

"Can't we?" said Handforth grimly. "Well, I'm going!"

"Go-going?" stammered Church. "Going where?"

"To bed, of course!" snapped McClure.

"No, I'm going to the Pacific!" declared Handforth, with deadly determination. "And, what's more, I'm going to take you with me!"

Church and McClure stared.

"Dotty!" said the former. "Clean, raving dotty!"

"Of course, I expected you to say that," went on Handforth, as cold and calm as his chums had ever seen him. "I'm not raving, and I'm not dotty. We're going to the Pacific on board Lord Dorrimore's yacht!"

"You—you fatheaded idiot!" roared McClure. "You know jolly well we can't go! What's the good of talking rot like that? Our people have forbidden us to go, and there's no getting away—"

"I suppose you've heard of French leave?" asked Handforth grimly.

McClure thought he understood.

"French leave?" he gasped. "Why, you're off your rocker? I thought of that, but it couldn't be done. Lord Dorrimore may be good-natured, but he wouldn't allow anything like that. If we went to the yacht now he'd pack us back ashore in a couple of jiffs!"

"Well, we're going," said Handforth calmly. "And we sha'n't be packed back, either!" He bent forward towards his chums. "He can't pack us back if he doesn't know we're there, can he? A thing like this wants a headpiece to think it out, and I've got it all planned to the last detail."

Church and McClure were bewildered.

"You're talking out of your hat!" snorted McClure. "What do you mean—if he doesn't know we're there? How can we get on board without his knowing? And what would be the good of that, anyhow?"

Handforth gazed at his chums pityingly.

"Haven't you heard of—of stowaways?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"Stowaways!" panted his chums.

"Yes, stowaways!"

"Oh, my only Sunday topper!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

Church and McClure sat down abruptly on the edge of the table. Their faces were flushed, and they regarded Handforth with alarm in their eyes. But then Church began to grow angry.

"Of all the mad, dotty ideas!" he said huskily. "This is what comes of reading too many of those giddy pirate stories! Stowaways! Why, the thing's absolutely impossible!"

Handforth grabbed the shoulders of his companions fiercely.

"Look here, I'm serious!" he declared, with shining eyes. "No, I'm not dotty—and I'm not rotting. I mean it, every word of it! We can't go any other way, and so we'll go as stowaways!"

"But—but—"

"It's no good you raising objections, because I won't hear 'em!" interrupted Handforth. "Stowaways, I said. You two chaps are coming with me, or I'll punch you until you can't stand!"

McClure shook himself free.

"I won't go!" he panted. "It's mad, Handy—mad!"

"And I won't go, either!" said Church, backing away in alarm. "Why, we should be kicked off the boat in next to no time. Lord Dorrimore wouldn't put up with that sort of rot, I can tell you. Give it up, Handy—go up to bed, old chap, and sleep it off!"

"Do you mean to say that you'll desert me—desert your old pal?" asked Handforth bitterly. "I wouldn't have believed it of you!"

"But—but it can't be done!" panted McClure helplessly.

"It can be done, and it's going to be done!" exclaimed Handforth, pacing up and down the study with growing excitement. "We can get on board during the night, it'll be as black as pitch, and it'll be as easy as winking for us to slip below. We'll stay there until the yacht's been on the go for two or three days; and then it'll be too late to send us back."

"We must have grub!" said Church practically.

"Grub—grub!" Handforth's voice rose with indignation. "Can't you think of anything but your silly stomach? Blow the grub! If we starve for a day or two we can make up for it afterwards. The main thing is to get on board without being spotted. I tell you it can be done."

"Supposing we're collared——"

"There you go again!" snapped Handforth.

"We sha'n't be collared! I'm going to lead the way, and I sha'n't make any fatheaded bloomers. If we can only remain concealed until the yacht's out to sea, we shall be as safe as houses. And think of the joys after that," he went on enthusiastically. "We've been invited—invited, mind you! Lord Dorrimore won't care a hang—he'll enjoy the joke."

"Joke!" gasped Church.

"You dense idiot, we sha'n't be ordinary stowaways!" said Handforth. "They can't shove us in irons, or make us work. As soon as we disclose ourselves we shall be treated as guests, and everything will be lovely."

By this time Handforth had succeeded in imbuing his sceptical chums with some of his own enthusiasm. The idea did not seem so madly impossible, and there were features in the adventure which appealed tremendously to their schoolboy natures—the excitement of the thing!

"Oh, it's too—too hopeless!" breathed McClure weakly.

Handforth fairly shook.

"Are you going to back me up or not?" he demanded. "If you're funky, say so, and then I shall know what I'm doing——"

"Who's funky?" snorted Church.

"You are!"

"I'm not!" denied Church angrily. "If you're game I am! Hang it all, Handy, I ain't going to let you say I'm a funk! If you're absolutely set upon this wheeze, I'm with you—I'm with you to the end!"

"By Jupiter! So am I!" gasped McClure.

"Good!" Handforth clapped his chums—upon the back forcibly. "It's a go, then. We may not succeed, but we'll have a jolly good try. It's worth it, my sons, and we can't be slaughtered even if we're collared. Give us your fists!"

And then and there Handforth and Church and McClure shook hands upon their compact. Handforth was overflowing with confidence and tremendous enthusiasm, but his chums were still just a little dubious.

But the die was cast, and there could be no backing out.

CHAPTER IV.

AT DEAD OF NIGHT—SUCCESS—THE STOW-AWAYS OF THE ADVENTURE.

SILENCE reigned for perhaps two minutes. During that time all three juniors thought with great rapidity. Church and McClure found that all sorts of difficulties were cropping up already. But Handforth's enthusiasm was so overpowering that difficulties were nothing to him. He swept them aside as soon as they arose.

"When—when are we going to start?" asked Church. "Now?"

"No, you ass! Not until after midnight," replied Handforth promptly. "We'll steal out when everybody's asleep—when the yacht's all quiet. Don't you realise that everything's in our favour? The yacht will be lying in the bay in the darkness, waiting, absolutely waiting for us to get on board!"

"But—but I was thinking——" began McClure.

"Thinking what?"

"How about our people?" went on McClure. "It's all very well, Handy, but we can't go off like this. My mater and pater would simply worry themselves to death; and so would yours. You hadn't thought of that, I suppose?"

"I've thought of everything," replied Handforth. "We're going to sit down now and write letters home. See the wheeze? We're going to point out, gently but firmly, that we intend to go on this trip. We sha'n't post the letters until the morning—until after midnight, rather, and that'll be the same thing—and they can't possibly reach our homes until we're far out to sea and beyond recall. That's the idea."

"You—you deep boulder!" said Church admiringly.

Handforth grinned.

"They'll know where we've gone, and so they can't worry," he said. "If it comes to that, it's all their own fault, they shouldn't be so jolly unreasonable. It's likely we're going to miss a trip like this after we've been invited! Parents are too jolly inconsiderate over these sort of things!"

"We shall get into frightful rows——"

"Rot!" interrupted the schemer. "You chaps don't seem to understand the thing at all. When our people get the letters they'll be raving—they'll be ready to whop us into next week."

"That's what I meant" said McClure.

"But we sha'n't be there to be whopped!" said Handforth comfortably. "Did you think of that, my sons? By the time we get back, in seven or eight weeks' time, is it likely that our parents will still be angry? Why, bless your hearts, they'll be bubbling over with joy to see us again!"

"Deep ain't the word for it!" panted Church.

"Well, I've always prided myself that I was a bit deep," said Handforth modestly. "My dear chaps, it was a bit of a shock at first, but the whole thing's dead easy. We

sha'n't be going off without letting everybody know; we'll even ask our people to tell the Head, so that he won't be worrying. And Lord Dorrimore will burst his sides laughing when he knows all about it. But we mustn't show our faces until the yacht's well out to sea."

Voices along the passage caused Handforth to start up.

"And mind," he warned, "not a word of this to a soul. Don't look so jolly excited either. Control yourselves, you chumps. We can pack up our things after midnight, when everybody's asleep."

Handforth deftly unlocked the door and strolled out into the passage. His chums followed him, and found that the Remove would have to go up to bed in another fifteen minutes. So after having a word or two with Owen major and Griffith, they went back into their study.

There was a good supply of grub in the cupboard, and they partook of supper while they wrote their letters home. As Handforth remarked, it was just as well to get as much food inside them as possible.

The fateful letters were completed, stuck into their envelopes, and stamped. Handforth took the three and pocketed them. By this time it was the hour for bed, and they went upstairs with the rest of the Remove, trying to look unconcerned. The other fellows knew how disappointed they had been, and no comment was caused when Handforth and Co. snuggled down into bed without having said a word.

The fact was, they felt that it would be dangerous to talk, fearing that they might give themselves away, or, at least, cause unwelcome curiosity. The other juniors discussed the events of the day for some little time, but the voices gradually trailed away until at last everybody slept.

Everybody, that is, with the exception of Handforth and Church and McClure. Sleep to them was impossible. In their present state of mental excitement they lay with wide-open eyes in the darkness.

Eleven o'clock struck after hours of waiting—so it seemed—and then followed another interminable time until midnight boomed out. As the notes sounded Handforth sat up in bed.

"You chaps awake?" he breathed.

"Yes!" came two voices excitedly.

"Then dress yourselves at once!" whispered Handforth. "Don't shove your Etons on—get out your cricketing flannels. We can take some extra things in our handbags. Pack everything you jolly well can!"

The three conspirators moved about as quietly as possible, and they were so successful that nobody else in the dormitory was aroused. And at last, with a certain number of clean collars and shirts and ties, socks, etc., packed in their bags, they crept downstairs. Church and McClure were every bit as enthusiastic as their leader now, and they admired his forethought when he suggested raiding the Remove studies for grub. They would need all the food they could get hold

of, for there was no telling when they would get another square meal.

The Remove studies, however, greatly resembled a certain famous cupboard belonging to Mother Hubbard, for they were disgustingly bare. The searchers only found a few scraps, and their own study was empty.

"What about the larders?" asked Church, thinking ahead.

"We can't bother——"

"But we sha'n't get any grub for days!" protested McClure.

"Can't be helped," broke in Handforth. "We ain't going to risk being collared by messing about the school larders. We've got some biscuits and some stale cakes, and we can ration ourselves."

Handforth had been ready enough to raid the Remove cupboards, but he wasn't taking any chances. Penetrating into the domestic quarters of the Ancient House would be not only rash, but foolish, for their whole scheme might be endangered by so doing.

They crept back to Study D, had a last look round, and then made their exit by means of the window. There was something thrilling in this night escape from the school, with the prospect of stowing themselves away on board the Pacific-bound yacht. It smacked of real adventure.

The next step was to get to Caistowe as quickly as possible. The three determined juniors, gripping their suit-cases firmly, moved across the Triangle to the bicycle shed.

"No lights, of course," whispered Handforth. "We can light up just before we get to the village——"

"But, I say——" put in McClure uneasily.

"Well, what do you say?"

"We can't take these bikes on board, I suppose?"

"Who said we could, you ass?" snorted Handforth.

"Well, if we don't take 'em on board, we shall have to leave them on the jetty!" went on McClure. "They'll be pinched, then, Handy!"

Edward Oswald Handforth breathed hard.

"What's a mouldy old bicycle compared with a trip to the Pacific?" he demanded wrathfully. "What does it matter if we do lose 'em?"

"Well, I don't suppose it does matter if you lose yours," snapped McClure. "It wants losing, as a matter of fact—ramshackle old iron like that! But mine's a new one, and I don't see why——"

"Oh, you potty idiot!" interjected Handforth. "The people of Caistowe ain't thieves, and we'll leave our bicycles on the jetty, with labels on 'em—stating that they are to be taken to St. Frank's. Some old fisherman will find them, I expect, and he'll take them to the school just for the sake of the reward. Anyhow, we shall have to chance it."

Church and McClure realised that Handforth was right. They couldn't walk to Caistowe without endangering their project, for they would scarcely arrive before dawn on

foot. So they started out on their bicycles and hoped for the best.

In the village Handforth called a halt, and he slipped the three letters into the box at the post-office. Then they remounted and continued their way. The night was perfectly still and quiet, the stars gleaming overhead, and the light breeze rustling the trees in a soft, ghostly fashion.

"They won't go before the morning," remarked Handforth, referring to the letters he had just posted. "By the time they're delivered, my sons, we shall be well out to sea—very likely admitted into the fold."

"I've got a horrible feeling that Lord Dorrimore will turn the yacht round as soon as we're discovered," said Church. "We shall be put ashore at Falmouth, or in Ireland, or——"

"Timbuctoo!" snorted Handforth sarcastically. "Don't be so potty. Lord Dorrimore won't trouble to send us back when he understands the position. There'll just be one big bust up, and then everything will be all serene."

"We haven't got on board yet!" said McClure practically.

Handforth made no reply. To tell the truth, he had certain misgivings on that point himself. Now that the time was rapidly approaching, it didn't seem half so easy to board an anchored yacht as it had done earlier. If they were seen or heard their whole scheme would be ruined. And Handforth knew well enough that it would be touch and go. In fact he even realised—although he tried to cast the thought aside—that the odds were overwhelmingly against them.

Everything would depend upon the events of the next hour. It would be a most anxious time, and Handforth advised his chums to keep absolutely silent. Talking would only attract attention. All they had to do was to get a boat, row out to the yacht, creep on board, and stow themselves away below.

"Yes, that's all!" repeated McClure. "A jolly big all, too! We sha'n't do it, Handy: we shall be collared before we're fairly on deck!"

"Rot!" retorted Handforth. "It'll be dead easy."

Caistowe was reached at last, and here the would-be stowaways received a pleasant surprise. The bay was enveloped in a thick white mist! It would clear away at dawn, of course, and it was only a local affair, but this mist caused Handforth to give a chirrup of delight.

"Ripping!" he murmured. "Couldn't be better."

"Where's the yacht?" asked Church uneasily.

"Ass! She's lying out there, of course," said Handforth. "We shall spot her as soon as we row across. By George! Our luck's in, my sons! This is where we get busy in earnest!"

They dismounted from their machines on the jetty, and left them standing against a post. The labels were already attached, and it would have to be left to chance whether

the bicycles were taken back to St. Frank's or not. In all probability they would be.

A boat was soon found. There were many to choose from, for there were eight or nine hitched to the jetty. Handforth and Co. tumbled into a light boat, and were soon rowing out into the white blanket of the mist.

The night could not have been more favourable, and the hopes of the three adventurous juniors ran high. They knew that only one man would be on watch—and he would probably be within the chart-house. There was no reason to suppose that several members of the crew would hover about the decks.

Handforth and Co. were anxious for some little time, for they continued rowing, and saw no sign of the Adventure. Everything was enveloped in the white mist, and they seemed to glide along noiselessly, shut in by themselves. To tell the truth, Handforth and Co. came precious near to being lost. If Church had not suddenly caught sight of a dullness in the mist over to starboard, they would have rowed straight on out into the open sea—and the project would have failed utterly.

"That's the yacht, ain't it?" breathed Church tensely.

Handforth lifted his oars out of the water and gazed through the mist. It was impossible to distinguish anything, but they edged nearer, and then the familiar shape of the Adventure loomed within sight. The yacht lay in total darkness, and not a sound came from her decks. She was like a ship of the dead.

To tell the truth, everybody was asleep with the exception of the look-out. And this individual was not at all keen. Otherwise he would certainly have heard sundry faint sounds from the direction of the accommodation ladder.

Handforth and Church and McClure, in fact, succeeded in creeping on board without being seen or heard. They picked their way forward cautiously, found an open hatchway, and crept below.

In spite of all their misgivings, the thing had been simplicity itself. They met nobody, and descended to the bowels of the ship, and succeeded in finding a hiding-place with very little difficulty.

The great project had been a complete success!

Would they be able to remain undiscovered until the yacht was well out to sea? That was the burning question now.

CHAPTER V.

OFF FOR SUNNY CLIMES—WATSON ISN'T WELL —THE GHOST OF HANDFORTH!

LORD DORRIMORE grinned cheerfully. "Gad, there's a glorious breeze blowin'," he exclaimed, taking in deep breaths with sheer joy. "It's splendid to be on the move again. I'm dead sick of hanging about in England."

"We shall see the last of England before the day's out, Dorrie," I said, gazing over towards the coastline. "For several weeks to come, at least."

"Thank goodness!" murmured his lordship.

"I say, sir, that doesn't sound patriotic, you know!" protested Sir Montie.

Dorrie chuckled.

"Sorry if I've offended you, young 'un!" he grinned. "I'm patriotic enough when it comes to the real thing, but England always bores me to death. There's nothin' doin', by gad! London's the most wretched hole on the face of the earth, an' I'm jolly thankful that we're well away on this trip. It promises excitement—and that's the main thing."

Umlosi showed all his white teeth.

"Thou art a roamer, N'Kose," he exclaimed in his deep voice. "It is great men such as thou——"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Dorrie. "Don't start on that tack, you black idiot! What do you mean by calling me a great man?"

"I meant not in the sense that thy frame is large," explained Umlosi. "Thou art great in other ways, O thou of the Shimmering Eye! Thou hast explored many places which were wild and fever-stricken, and thou hast performed wondrous things in the service of thy country——"

"Look here," interrupted Lord Dorrimore aggressively, "if you're going to eulogise me in this way, I'll clear off!"

"I know many words of thy wondrous language, N'Kose, but that word is surely new to me," said Umlosi, with some show of anxiety.

"Thank goodness!" said Dorrimore. "It's no good you looking at me like that, old man, because I'm not going to explain. I've caught you out, an' you can toddle along an' start eulogising old Lee! He deserves it heaps more than I do. Where is Umtagati, anyhow? Hasn't the lazy beggar turned out of his state-room yet?"

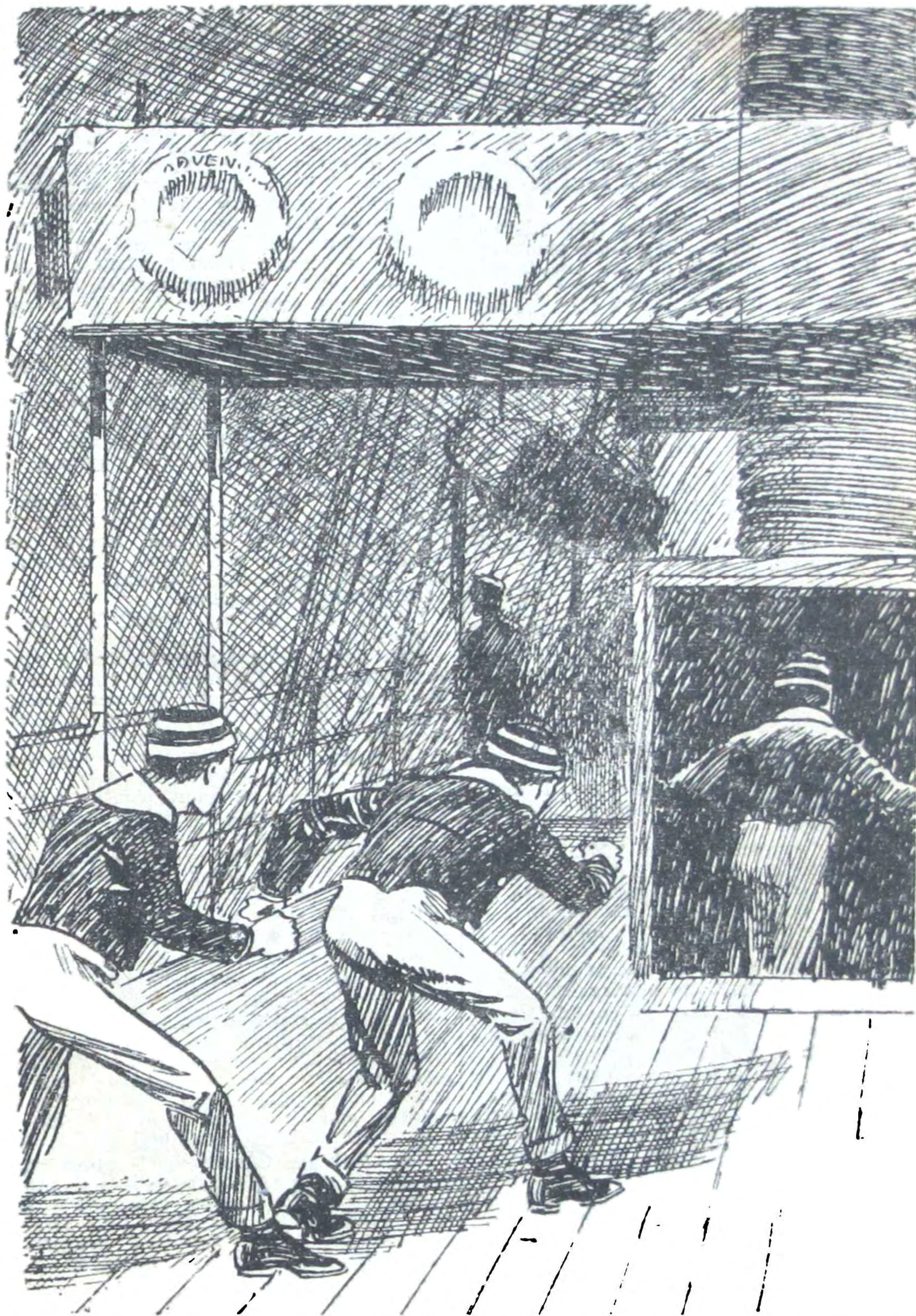
"He was on deck ten minutes ago," I replied, grinning. "He appeared long before you, Dorrie, as a matter of fact."

We were leaning against the rail in the sunshine—Dorrie and Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I. Umlosi lounged near by, and there was a welcome bustle going on for'ard and in different portions of the ship.

The Adventure, in fact, was at sea. The voyage had commenced—we were off for sunny climes. The day could not have been more favourable, for the sky and the sea were of a deep, deep blue, and the breeze was astonishingly refreshing.

We had got under way two or three hours since. It was eight o'clock now, and the rest of the fellows had not appeared on deck. Eileen and her aunt were also still in their state-rooms. Of course, it was early, and breakfast wouldn't be served until eight-thirty.

Nelson Lee was looking happy and care-free. He came along the deck, smoking a



The stowaways succeed in getting on board without being discovered, and make their way to an open hatchway.—(See page 12.)

cigarette, with a springy tread, and with a smile of genial contentment upon his face.

"You managed to rouse yourself, then?" he asked cheerfully.

"My dear man, I was just askin' about you," replied Dorrie. "Hallo! Here comes the skipper, an' there's a frown on his manly brow. There's somethin' wrong. I'll bet a quid! We must have dropped the anchor, or somethin' equally as appallin'. Let's hear the terrible truth!"

Captain Burton, to be quite truthful, was looking rather worried. He came along the deck from the bridge just as the Bo'sun appeared, and he was so preoccupied that he scarcely acknowledged his son's cheery greeting.

"That's all right, Bo'sun," he said absently. "I just want to speak to Lord Durrimore."

"I'm here, waitin' patiently," said his lordship, tipping his Panama back.

"Anything wrong, captain?" asked the gunner.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know how to broach the subject," said Captain Burton, rather awkwardly. "I understand, Lord Durrimore, that this ship was in charge of a capable man before I took her over?"

"Captain Sanders is capable enough, I believe," remarked Dorrie.

"Is he responsible for the crew of this yacht?"

"Yes, I believe so."

Captain Burton rubbed his beard thoughtfully.

"Perhaps it's rather early for me to say anything," he went on, "but, so far as I can see, we've got a pretty rough crowd for'ard. They're not the kind of men I should have expected to find on a craft of this class Lord Durrimore."

"Kough?" repeated Dorrie. "Well, by gad, now you mention it, I noticed somethin' of the sort myself. But I thought it was my ignorance. Some of these fellows do look rather third-rate—what? I'm annoyed. If there's one thing I hate, it's havin' a shady crew. Sanders will get a piece of my tongue all for himself when I see him again."

But this, of course, was poor consolation for Captain Burton. Now that the subject had been opened, he was ready to own that he had been a bit surprised. Many of the for'ard hands were ruffianly looking fellows, and two or three of the stewards were common men in every way—and not the smart, alert individuals one would associate with a magnificent yacht of this class.

"Well, it's too late to make any alteration now," remarked Nelson Lee. "Perhaps the men will be all right, captain. We must give them a trial, at all events. But it's rather a pity. On a trip of this sort we needed men of the best quality."

"Well, it's no good meetin' trouble half-way," remarked Dorrie, lighting a cigarette. "We must be careful—that's all. Keep it dark, boys, that we're huntin' for treasure. It won't do the men any good to let 'em

know that. Pass the tip along to your pals when you get the chance."

"I've warned 'em against that already," I replied. "Treasure? Why, we're simply going on a pleasure cruise. Who said any thing about treasure?"

"Begad, what rot!" grinned Sir Montie.

"That's the way!" chuckled Lord Durrimore, slapping my back with unnecessary violence. "We've never heard of treasure, have we? Don't know what the word means, in fact—Hallo! Here come the ladies!"

Eileen Dare and her aunt had appeared on deck, and there was an immediate rush to surround them. I got there first, of course, and we were soon exchanging "Good mornings." Eileen was dressed in a light summer frock, and she looked just perfect in it. Her aunt was, of course, attired more sedately, but she was looking happier and more contented than I had seen her for many months.

"Oh, I'm sure it will be a lovely cruise!" she exclaimed, beaming upon all and sundry. "But we sha'n't experience any storms, shall we?"

"Storms?" echoed Dorrie, as though he hadn't heard of them. "Why, my dear Miss Gilbey, I've given Captain Burton strict instructions to steer a course where storms don't exist. Haven't I, skipper?"

Captain Burton laughed.

"Well, I'll do my best," he replied cautiously.

Aunt Esther looked relieved, and a minute or two after that De Valerie and Farman and the others came on deck. The party, indeed, was in the highest of high spirits, and when we went down to breakfast we hadn't a care in the world. We were out to enjoy ourselves this trip, and meant to do so.

After breakfast we found plenty to occupy us, what with getting our cabins straight and watching the shores of Old England, and various other matters. We shouldn't consider the voyage fairly started until we were out of sight of land.

Meanwhile, other passengers on board the yacht were not having quite such an easy time. The presence of these passengers was unknown to us at the time, but they were there all the same.

Handforth and Co. were stowaways, and they were far below the decks, hungry, but triumphant. They had managed to stow themselves away in a kind of storeroom for'ard. It was some distance down, reached by iron ladders, and that quarter of the ship was seldom visited by any members of the crew.

Handforth and Church and McClure, having found this hiding-place, concealed themselves behind some piles of cases and went to sleep. When they awoke the yacht was steaming through the water, and they didn't know where they were, or how many hours had passed.

They didn't own a match between them, and the store-room was in darkness. As a matter of fact they awoke at about eleven o'clock—famished. Being healthy juniors, it was only natural that they should feel hungry, and the little food they had brought

with them was demolished in a very few minutes—all thoughts of rationing being abandoned.

"I'm hungrier than ever!" declared McClure plaintively. "And what about something to drink, Handy? We were asses, you know. We ought to have brought some bottles of water or ginger-pop!"

"We couldn't bring everything!" whispered Handforth. "And don't speak so loud, you ass. We might be heard, and hauled up on deck. By George! We've started on the trip now, and we ain't going to give up. Don't you realise it, my sons? Don't you realise that we're stowaways?"

"I realise that I'm jolly hungry!" said Church.

Handforth snorted.

"What's hunger?" he demanded witheringly. "Supposing we go without grub for two whole days? It won't do us any harm, and we shall enjoy a square meal all the better afterwards. We've done the trick, my bucks—we've triumphed!"

Church and McClure were not quite so enthusiastic as their redoubtable leader.

"Of course we've triumphed!" remarked McClure. "It's my belief that the yacht's been at sea for twelve hours and more. We must have slept like logs. Anyhow, I vote we go on deck and confess——"

"Rot!" snapped Handforth. "And be put ashore? Not likely! We're going to stay down here until we're too hungry and thirsty to stay any longer. Talk about chicken-hearted bounders! Why, you haven't got enough staying-power——"

"Oh, all right!" growled Church. "We'll stick it as long as you do. I suppose we're jolly lucky, really——"

"Shush!" hissed Handforth. "I heard something!"

The others heard something, too. Human voices were audible, and the dull thud of boots upon an iron ladder. Almost immediately afterwards, to the great consternation of Handforth and Co., the store-room became flooded with light! The switch had been turned on at the door, and the electric bulb glowed upon everything.

It was lucky for the stowaways that they had felt their way behind the big cases, for they were invisible from the doorway, and would only be discovered in the event of an actual search.

"We shall be all right here," exclaimed a voice. "Can't be too careful, Adams. It wouldn't do for anybody to overhear what we're goin' to talk about. Mutiny's about the biggest crime one could commit at sea."

Handforth gazed at his chums dumbly.

"It won't come to that, Hilton," said Adams uneasily. "I don't like the thing at all, if you want to know the truth. Hang Jelks and his fifty pounds!"

"That's all very well," said Hilton. "We've got to carry out our part of the bargain. I reckon it's a pretty hopeless job, but we've got to make a start. Some of the men are pretty rough, and that's all in our

favour. The idea is to get them whispering, to begin with."

"About the treasure, you mean?"

"Of course," said Hilton. "Mind you, I'm not sure they're really going for treasure, but it looks a bit like it. Anyhow, we've got to send the yarn round and then work up to a mutiny."

Adams shook his head.

"Mutiny ain't possible nowadays," he exclaimed. "A disturbance, maybe, but it ain't possible to do anything more than that. But still, if we delay the yacht, that's all Jelks wants. I reckon a strike is the best thing of all. Mutiny's a mad idea."

"Well, it's the same thing," replied Hilton. "There's no need for us to be violent—that would let us in for chokey. But if we just get all the hands to demand double wages, it'll be good enough. We sha'n't get the rise, of course, and so we'll all go on strike—stokers and deckhands and everybody. The old tub will simply lay helpless—and we can keep it up for a week. That'll be carrying out our part of the bargain, anyhow. Jelks wants delay."

"Well, supposin' we get busy to-night?" suggested Adams.

"My idea exactly. Just send the whisper round to begin with—if the men think the yacht's on a treasure-cruise they'll be ready enough to demand extra wages—an' even more ready to strike if they don't get them. A strike is really mutiny, but we won't call it that."

The men continued talking for two or three minutes in the same strain; and Handforth and Co., hardly daring to breathe, crouched behind their boxes, quivering with excitement and wonder.

The light suddenly went out and the door closed. The men's footsteps were heard outside, and then came complete silence. Edward Oswald Handforth made a sound which was something between a gasp and a whistle.

"Did—did you hear?" he panted, clutching at Church and McClure.

"You ass! Do you think we're deaf?" snapped McClure. "And keep your silly hands to yourself! You've got a grip like a vice, Handy—— Yow! Leggo my arm, you silly fathead!"

Handforth, in his excitement, was pinching McClure's arm in the most painful manner, and he only relaxed his grip with that hand in order to tighten his other fingers upon Church.

"Mutiny!" he breathed huskily. "By George! I never heard—— What the thunder's the matter with you, Church?"

"There'll be mutiny down here, if you ain't careful," hissed Church fiercely. "I never knew such an excitable fathead as you are! Strikes ain't anything unusual, are they? They seem fairly popular nowadays. If an employer is good-natured and pays his men well they turn on him and demand more wages. That's what's going to happen on this yacht."

"I vote we bunk up on deck at once," said

McClure, looking the slack condition of his waistcoat. "Lord Dorrismore ought to hear of this—this edition—"

"This which?"

"Edition," repeated McClure firmly.

"You're jolly pal with your long words, ain't you?" snapped Handforth. "Why can't you speak in plain English. I don't believe in the habit of using these silly French words—"

"French!" yelled McClure. "It's English, you see. It means stirring up strife against authority, and all that sort of rot. Lord Dorrismore ought to hear of it, I say, and we'd better let him know as quickly as possible. And we might get off scot-free—"

"No; we'll stick down here until to-morrow," interrupted Handforth firmly. "Those rhaps mentioned something about getting busy to-night, which shows that it's just midday now. I looked at my watch while the light was on."

"And do you suppose we're going to go without any grub for nearly twenty-four hours?" demanded Church fiercely. "I'm not going to, anyhow!"

Handforth glared into the darkness miserably.

"Was ever a chap burdened with such funky companions?" he exclaimed bitterly. "I'm disgusted with you—I'm disgusted and disappointed. I thought you had more grit, and I'm cut up!"

Church and McClure shifted uneasily.

"Don't talk like that, Handy!" muttered Church.

"Now else shall I talk?" snorted Handforth. "We've managed to get aboard as stewaways, and everything's going beautifully. We've even overheard some rotten strike talk, and we shall be able to do Captain Hurton and Lord Dorrismore a good turn. But it would be potty to act now. Don't you realize that we're still within easy distance of English ports—such as Weymouth or Plymouth or Triguemouth or Falmouth—"

"There seem to be a lot of mouths about it," muttered McClure.

"They're names of English ports, ain't they?" snapped Handforth. "What's the good of trying to be funny at a time like this? If we showed our faces now, we should be shored ashore at one of those places, and then what would you say? By to-morrow we shall be in the open sea and it will be safe to emerge. As for grub, I'll hop out late to-night and try my luck."

No Church and McClure had to be satisfied. They realized, too, that Handforth's policy was a wise one. It would be much better to remain in hiding until the shores of Old England were out of sight.

The stewaways accordingly tried to get some sleep, but were awakened towards evening by the rolling of the yacht. McClure began to feel that food wasn't so very appetizing, after all.

The breeze had freshened and the sea was inclined to be somewhat rough. In the saloon that evening two or three juniors were not at all anxious to partake of din-

ner. Tommy Watson, in fact, positively declared that dinner was a most ridiculous meal, and he preferred to remain on deck.

Personally, I suffered from no inconvenience, and enjoyed the meal heartily. We were already making for the open Atlantic, and had taken our last look at the shores of the Old Country some hours before.

After dinner I found Watson leaning against the rail, looking as though he would much rather be in Study C at St. Frank's. The sky was leaden and the sea cold and grey. But I knew that the change was only a temporary one; there was no sign of really rough weather coming along.

"Yachting ain't so very nice, after all, Benny," murmured Tommy Watson miserably.

"You'll get over it by to-morrow," I grinned. "Farman's looking pretty green, and I believe De Valerie will take to his bunk before long. Yakama and the Be'sun are as fit as I am."

"Lucky bouders!" grunted Watson. "There's old Montie, too; he doesn't seem to feel anything. I'm going to bed jolly soon."

He was as good as his word, and several others followed his example. It was only a slight touch of sea-sickness, of course; but it was just as well that it should come at once.

Montie and I shared the same state-room with Tommy, and we tumbled between our blankets fairly early. We fell asleep at once, but Watson rolled about uneasily, and at about eleven o'clock he decided that the deck was the best place for him.

He tumbled out and then staggered out on deck, feeling that life was scarcely worth living. I've had that feeling myself, and I know all about it.

Watson found everything very quiet. An officer was on the bridge, and somebody was at the wheel, but they were hidden by the yacht's superstructure. And Watson wandered forward aimlessly, feeling an intense desire to "get out and walk."

He passed an open hatchway. Something white appeared—a face. Watson stared at it miserably, and then gave a little yell. The face belonged to Handforth! And it disappeared like the head of a Jack-in-the-Box.

Tommy Watson rushed forward; but the face had vanished and all was quiet. He stood for a few moments with quickly beating heart; then he turned and raced towards his cabin again.

"Benny—Benny!" he hissed, shaking me vigorously.

"Wasser matter?" I mumbled, blinking at him.

"I've—I've just seen Handforth!" gasped Watson.

I sat up, gazed at Watson in a bewildered kind of way for a moment or two, and then grinned.

"You've been having nightmares," I said soothingly. "It's all right, old chap—I can

sympathise with you. Get back to bed, and

"I tell you I saw Handforth!" exclaimed Watson huskily. "Nightmare he blowed! Don't you think I know Handforth's dial when I see it? He popped his head up through one of the hatchways, but when I got to the spot he'd vanished."

I grinned again.

"You've got it rather bad!" I said, turning over sleepily. "Get back into bed, you ass, and don't be so funny. I'm not interested in Handforth's ghost, I can give you my word. Blow Handforth!"

I composed myself for sleep again, and Tommy Watson felt too queer inside to continue the argument. He switched the light off, crawled back into his bunk, and continued suffering misery.

I fell asleep within the first minute.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTURED—HANDFORTH AND CO. ARE ALARMED
—A TIGHT CORNER.

TOMMY WATSON had not been suffering from nightmare, as I suspected.

As a matter of fact he had actually seen the one and only Handforth. For that young gentleman, prompted by certain feelings beneath his waistcoat—and by Church and McClure—had decided to venture forth on a vague search for food.

It was necessarily vague, because he hadn't the slightest idea of where to go, or how to obtain that which he sought. His fellow-stowaways had become restive, and Handforth thought it a wise policy to make an attempt. Even if unsuccessful, Church and McClure would at least be resigned.

Handforth had mounted to the deck without mishap. But then, as soon as ever he projected his head above the level of the hatchway, he found himself staring Tommy Watson in the face!

This was decidedly disconcerting, and Handforth had slithered down the ladder with more haste than elegance. He reached the hiding-place in a breathless condition, and at once commenced scolding his innocent chums.

"I knew what would happen!" he declared crossly. "The fat's in the fire now!"

"Where's the grub?" demanded Church.

"Grub—grub!" snorted Handforth. "Why, you ass, I ran bang into Watson! I know he spotted me, and we shall be hauled out before another five minutes have passed! This is what comes of—"

"Oh, rats!" interrupted Church. "I don't care if we are hauled out. I'm fed-up with being a stowaway!"

It was rather curious that Handforth should have mentioned that they would be hauled out within five minutes; for something happened which led the boys to suppose that Tommy Watson had informed the skipper.

To be quite exact, Adams saw Handforth as he hastily descended to the lower store-

room. Adams was off duty, of course. Being a steward, he took no part in the watch-keeping, and he should have been in his bunk.

But he and Hilton were determined to do their utmost to earn Captain Jelks's money. Adams caught sight of Handforth just as the latter was slithering down the lower hatchway. Adams followed, and listened outside the door to the brief conversation between Handforth and his chums.

"Stowaways!" he repeated, catching in his breath. "By the Blue Peter! This don't look very healthy for Hilton an' me! I'd better rouse him out at once an' have a jaw!"

The man was somewhat alarmed. He remembered the conversation he and Hilton had had during the afternoon. They had actually discussed the projected mutiny in the very hiding-place where the schoolboy stowaways were concealed! They must have overheard everything.

This was a most disconcerting thought, for the success of the whole project depended upon the mutiny being kept secret until the actual time for striking. Accordingly, Adams roused Hilton at once, and the two men went forward into the bows to discuss the situation.

"You must have been dreamin'!" declared Hilton uneasily.

"I tell you the boy went down there!" exclaimed Adams. "And, by the sound of it, there were two or three others with him. They're stowaways, Hilton, and we're the only men on board who know that they're here. I reckon we'd better keep the young brats down there until after the strike!"

"How can we do that?"

"Easy!" replied Adams. "The young fools will be scared out of their wits, and we can lock 'em in. If we don't, we shall find ourselves in a queer fix. They must have heard what we said, mate—they must have done!"

The two men discussed the situation further, and quickly came to a decision. It was highly necessary that drastic action should be taken at once, for their own safety depended upon it. Handforth and Co. must be kept silent—they must be imprisoned below until it suited Hilton and Adams to release them.

It seemed, therefore, as though Handforth's prophecy had come true when footsteps were heard approaching. The next moment the electric-light was switched on and a man's face appeared round the pile of cases.

"Now, then, out of it!" he exclaimed gruffly. "What's the idea of this, hey? Stowaways, ain't you?"

"That's all right," said Handforth, with perfect composure. "We were expecting you, as a matter of fact. Where's the skipper?"

The man looked grim.

"None of your lip!" he snapped. "The skipper, indeed! You won't get no gentle treatment aboard this craft, I can give you

my word! He can't abide stowaways at no price!"

"Look here, don't you have such a jolly lot to say!" exclaimed Handforth, looking dignified. "We ain't ordinary stowaways, and the skipper will understand as soon as he sees us. You go and say that Handforth and Church and McClure are on board—or, better still, take us to Captain Burton at once!"

Adams scowled.

"This high-handed tone won't do you no good, my lively shavers!" he sneered. "Take you to the skipper, hey? Not so much o' your blessed lip! I'm goin' to fetch the first officer—he'll know what to do!"

The man turned and left the apartment, closing and bolting the door after him. Church and McClure looked rather scared, but Handforth grinned.

"There's nothing to worry about, my sons," he said. "The 'first' officer is just the chap we want to see. He'll understand in a tick, and we shall be taken to Captain Burton within ten minutes. I didn't want to let the cat out of the bag until to-morrow, but it's just as well."

They waited, and after some little time had elapsed the door was unbolted and Adams again appeared. With him was another man. He was not Hilton, but an engine-room hand, named Fraser, who had entered into the plot with the others—and who had now been pressed into service. He was attired in an officer's uniform—borrowed especially for this occasion from the third officer's locker while that individual was on duty on the bridge.

"All right, Adams, I'll attend to them!" said Fraser briskly. "Now, boys, what does all this mean?"

"Are you the first officer?" asked Handforth steadily.

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose you'll take us up to Captain Burton at once?" went on Handforth. "He knows us well, and it's only like a joke. We're not ordinary stowaways, and Lord Dorrimore—"

"Adams reported the matter to me, and I immediately consulted with Captain Burton and his lordship," said Fraser sternly. "You are Handforth, I believe? And these other boys are Chapel and McTavish?"

"McClure!" grinned that junior.

"My name's Church—not Chapel!" snapped Church crossly.

"Well, Captain Burton has sent me down to inform you that he cannot possibly allow you to mix with the other boys on board," said Fraser calmly. "You are stowaways, and the skipper is always harsh with cubes of your sort!"

Handforth and Co. stared blankly.

"Cap—Captain Burton said that?" gasped Handforth.

"He did," was Fraser's grim reply. "He also ordered that you should be fed on bread-and-water only, and that you should be kept in this hold until the yacht reaches port. Stowaways need to be punished."

"Oh, my only aunt!" panted McClure faintly. "I—I knew what it would be, Handy! This is what comes of taking your advice—"

"You—you ass!" shrieked Handforth. "It's a joke—it can't be true! I want to see Lord Dorrimore!" he added fiercely.

Fraser laughed.

"Lord Dorrimore is just as angry as the captain," he said; "and he is quite satisfied with the punishment decided upon. If you create any disturbance or noise, your food supply will be stopped for twenty-four hours!"

Fraser turned to the door and went out, Adams following him. Handforth and Co. heard the bolts shot, and they stared at one another dazedly. Naturally, they believed that Fraser was really the first officer. But this treatment was absolutely astounding. It seemed impossible.

"Bread-and-water!" whispered Handforth weakly. "Oh, my only sainted aunt! We've got to stick in here until we reach port! That'll be weeks and weeks!"

McClure set his teeth.

"It's all rot!" he declared shrewdly. "I don't believe it. In fact, it looks to me as though the whole thing's faked up!"

"What do you mean—faked up?" asked Handforth.

"He couldn't have been the first officer—it ain't possible!" said McClure, jumping to the truth. "We know Captain Burton, don't we? Use your common-sense, Handy. Would the captain do such a thing as this?"

"You—you fathead!" snorted Handforth. "He's done it!"

"I don't believe the captain knows anything about it," said McClure firmly. "Don't you remember that jaw about mutiny? Those chaps must know that we overheard them, because they found us in here. And it's all a put-up job, just to keep us prisoners. Captain Burton and Lord Dorrimore don't know anything about it!"

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "You're right, Clury!"

"Of course I'm right—it's as plain as your giddy face!"

"I had an idea like that myself," said Handforth, recovering himself rapidly. "As a matter of fact, I tumbled to the thing at the beginning—"

"Naturally!" said McClure. "If you remember, you called me a fathead, and said that Captain Burton had done it!"

Handforth waved his hand.

"I was a bit knocked over just then," he explained. "But of course it's all piffle. We're in a fine old hole now, and no mistake. The giddy door's locked, and we can't get out!"

The position was indeed a desperate one. The realisation of the truth did not help Handforth and Co. in the least. They were prisoners, and they knew that they were quite helpless against the rascally members of the crew.

Their escapade had led them into a tight fix!

CHAPTER VII.

TOMMY WATSON IS STUBBORN—SEARCHING THE YACHT—AS LARGE AS LIFE.

JUSTIN B. FARMAN grinned broadly. "Say, that was sure some nightmare, Watson!" he exclaimed. "I guess you had a heap dandy night——"

"I tell you it wasn't a nightmare!" roared Watson indignantly. "How many more times have I got to repeat it? If you don't want to believe me, don't. I don't care a jot!"

I chuckled.

"Don't get in a huff, you ass!" I exclaimed. "We'll believe you, if you like, Tommy. But——"

"Really, Benny boy, you must not include me," put in Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "I have a great respect for Watson—he's a stunnin' chap—but I positively refuse to believe that he saw Handforth durin' the night. It ain't possible, it ain't really. Tommy was ill——"

"I wasn't ill!" snorted Watson.

"Say, you don't look kinder well even now," put in Farman. "I guess you're heaps better than you were last night, but this dog-gone motion ain't doin' you no darned good. Say, I've been kinder queer myself. I guess my internals have been chasin' one another around good an' lively!"

We were lounging on deck near the rail in a group. It was morning, and the yacht was steaming over blue seas with a cloudless sky overhead. The breeze had died away and the weather was again glorious.

"I don't know anything about your internals!" snapped Watson. "I was a bit queer myself—everybody knows that. But I wasn't so jolly queer that I didn't know what I was doing! I came on deck in the middle of the night and saw Handforth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cackling idiots!" roared Watson wrathfully.

"Begad! It's rather funny," grinned Sir Montie.

Naturally we all disbelieved Tommy Watson. How was it possible for us to credit his statement that Edward Oswald Handforth was on board the Adventure? It was rather too thick to be believed.

"I suppose it's rather unfeelin' of us," remarked De Valerie, "but we can't help it, Watson. You must have been dreamin'——"

"I'll ask Old Alvy!" snorted Watson.

Nelson Lee had just appeared on deck, and Watson marched up to him with a grim expression on his face. We followed, and stood round in a grinning circle. The guv'nor was rather puzzled.

"Is there anything the matter, Watson?" he asked smilingly.

"Yes, sir!" growled Watson. "These chaps are dotty!"

"Indeed!" said the guv'nor. "That is a rather strong statement, my boy!"

"They won't believe me, sir," went on the indignant junior. "I was a bit queer last

night, and I happened to come on deck for some fresh air. And while I was walking about I went near one of the hatchways forward. There was a face looking up at me, and I recognised it as Handforth's. He's on board, sir!"

Nelson Lee removed the cigarette from his lips.

"Nonsense, Watson!" he smiled.

"Why, don't you believe me, sir?" gasped Watson.

"How can I credit such a ridiculous statement, my boy?" asked the guv'nor. "You know as well as I do that Handforth was left behind at St. Frank's. But you need not look so indignant, Watson. I can quite understand how the thing occurred. If you were not actually dreaming, you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Watson simply shook with indignation.

"Dreaming!" he roared. "That's what these chaps keep saying, sir! I wasn't dreaming. I'll swear I saw Handforth——"

"Come, come, Watson, you must not speak so strongly!" said Nelson Lee sharply. "You are talking nonsense!"

"I'm not, sir!" gasped Watson. "Oh, my hat! Won't anybody believe me? I was as wideawake as I am now, and I saw Handforth. I know it was Handforth—I'd stake my life on it. Who's got a face like Handforth, anyhow?"

"Well, it is a bit of a novelty, I'll admit," I grinned. "But my dear old Tommy, Handforth was left behind."

"He must have got on board!"

"Oh, that's rot!"

"Of course it's rot, I know that," said Watson obstinately. "But I know jolly well that I saw Handforth and nobody else. I'm just as amazed as you are, but—but there it is. I can believe my own eyes, I suppose?"

There was something dogged in Watson's persistence, and we lost our grins. Could there possibly be something in it? Handforth was an ass, of course, but—— Oh, it was too idiotic to suppose that he had sneaked aboard——

"Tell me exactly what you saw, Watson," said Nelson Lee quietly.

Tommy repeated his statements, and Nelson Lee nodded.

"All right, Watson, we'll see about it," he said, and strolled along the deck, leaving Watson glaring at us triumphantly.

The guv'nor went down into the saloon, where Lord Dorrimore was setting his tie straight in front of one of the mirrors.

"Hallo, old man," he exclaimed cheerily. "Just caught me finishin' my toilet. Where's Umlosi? The black scoundrel was rolling about all night, I believe. I tremble to think of what'll happen if we strike a really decent storm."

"He'll probably enjoy it," said Lee, smiling. "But look here, Dorrie, Watson declares that he saw Handforth on board during the night."

"I wouldn't dare to question it," said his lordship languidly. "Who is Handforth,

anyhow? Ain't he one of those young bounders of St. Frank's?"

"What a memory you have!" chuckled Nelson Lee. "Handforth and his two chums were invited to accompany us—you invited them yourself, you duffer—but their parents refused them permission."

"Oh, yes, I remember!" said Dorrie. "Poor kids!"

"Watson was rather bad during the night, and he seems to be suffering from some delusion," continued Nelson Lee. "He is quite positive that he saw Handforth, and I can see that he is really concerned and troubled. Just to set his mind at rest I think it would be as well to have a search made."

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"Any old thing you like," he said. "There's half an hour before breakfast, so we may as well make use of it. By gad, it'll be rather excitin', searchin' for somebody who's hundreds of miles away!"

"I greet thee, N'Kose—I greet thee, Umtagati!" exclaimed a rumbling voice from the rear. "The morning is good, and it is well."

"Selfish bounder!" exclaimed Dorrie, looking up at Umlosi, who had just appeared. "All you think about is your own comfort. How's your tummy? Still chasin' itself up and down?"

"Wau! The great waters are wondrous miracles, O my father!" said Umlosi solemnly. "They cause this vast floating kraal to heave, and the sensation is not to my liking. Much good food has been wasted!"

Lord Dorrimore chuckled.

"You always were a wasteful beggar, Umlosi," he said. "I'm surprised at you, throwing good suppers away. You'd better not have any breakfast unless you can take good care of it. But look alive—we're just goin' to search the yacht for Handforth!"

Umlosi hadn't the slightest idea who Handforth was, but he followed the others on deck, and they approached the spot where I was chatting with my chums. The guv'nor soon explained what was in the wind.

"Good!" exclaimed Watson. "Now we shall learn the truth, sir!"

"Quite so, my boy," said Lee drily.

We were all quite certain that the truth would be very different from what Tommy supposed. Mr. Scott, the first officer, was button-holed as he was on his way to the bridge, and he quickly ordered several men to direct different parties into different quarters of the ship. It would take too long to search the yacht with only one party.

The guv'nor and I and Dorrie and Watson made for the hatch where the face had supposedly appeared, and we commenced exploring. The only one amongst us who was really eager was Watson himself.

We went down into the very bowels of the yacht, but our search was fruitless. There was no sign of Handforth or anybody else.

"What's that door down there?" asked

Watson, gazing along an electrically-lit passage.

"That's nothing, my boy," replied Nelson Lee. "It contains stores, I believe, but we need not waste time in looking there. The door is bolted on the outside, so it is quite obvious that Handforth cannot be—"

"Listen, sir!" I gasped suddenly.

"Rescue!" came an unmistakable voice. "Rescue, Remove!"

Tommy Watson simply yelled.

"There you are!" he shouted, nearly bursting with excitement. "I knew it—I knew it! That was Handy!"

"Upon my soul, I believe it was!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Well, this is most astounding! Can it be possible that Handforth, in his enthusiasm, came aboard as a stowaway?"

Lord Dorrimore roared.

"By gad! That's rich!" he grinned. "A stowaway! This is gettin' quite excitin'. This Handforth chap seems to be a bit of a nut!"

We all hurried along the passage, and the guv'nor unbolted the door. The hold was well lighted, and standing before us, looking excited but extremely sheepish, were Handforth and Church and McClure!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I gasped faintly.

"Three of 'em!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore with a yell. "Well, this beats the band!" He suddenly became very stern. "What's the meaning of this, you young bounders?" he went on. "Do you know that you can be made to walk the plank for a crime like this? It's a shockin' offence!"

"I—we—that is to say——" gasped Handforth feebly.

"I always admire people who are lucid!" said his lordship.

"You had better come up on deck, boys," said Nelson Lee, his voice somewhat severe. "You need not tell me that you concealed yourselves on board deliberately. I am inclined to be very angry with you."

Handforth and Co. had nothing to say, and they followed us up to the deck with fast-beating hearts. They were somewhat pale, but Handforth, at least, was looking as determined as ever.

"Now, boys!" said Nelson Lee sternly.

We were standing on deck, and all the other search parties had been informed. A crowd surrounded the three stowaways, but I was not very fearful regarding the fate which awaited them. Lord Dorrimore was about the most good-natured individual on the face of the earth.

"There's—there's nothing much to say, sir," exclaimed Handforth. "We—we were invited to come, and—and we've come!"

"But your parents positively forbade you to accompany us on the trip, boys," said Nelson Lee sharply. "Have you had the audacity to disobey your parents? Good gracious, what will they think! We shall have to put back——"

"Oh, don't do that, sir!" pleaded Handforth anxiously. "We—we wrote letters home explaining all about it, and we thought

that once we were on board you wouldn't mind. We badly want to go, sir—oh, don't have us put ashore!"

Between the three of them they managed to supply all the details concerning their flight from St. Frank's—how they had stolen away in the middle of the night, how they had written to their parents, and all the rest of it. They ended up with a concerted appeal for leniency, Handforth being amazingly humble for once.

"Well, I hardly know what to do," said Nelson Lee, his eyes twinkling. "I am no longer in authority over you, boys, and it is hardly for me to decide the matter. It must be left for Lord Dorrimore—since he is the host. What do you say, old man? Do you intend to let the young rascals stay on board?"

Lord Dorrimore looked fierce.

"I'm goin' to drop 'em overboard!" he declared. "Stowaways on my yacht! Why, I've never heard of such disgraceful— Oh, glory!" he went on with a yell of laughter. "What the deuce do I care?"

"Can—can we stay, sir?" gasped Handforth breathlessly.

"My dear kid, you can do just what you like!" replied Dorrie blandly. "I'm blessed if you don't deserve a medal each for this business! The more the merrier, I say. If anybody's going to worry it'll be your people!"

"Oh, thank you, sir!" panted Handforth and Co. in unison.

Lord Dorrimore fled, and Handforth and Co., scarcely able to believe their good fortune, were at once surrounded by the other juniors. I couldn't exactly blame them for coming aboard as stowaways, and I wasn't sorry. Handforth was a decent old stick in his way.

But he had some other information which was of very great interest—and he told us all about it without any delay. Lord Dorrimore and Captain Burton and Nelson Lee heard it, too, and they were very concerned.

In short, the advent of Handforth and Co. was accompanied by the news that agents of Captain Jelks were on board, and that an active propaganda was in progress with the object of arousing the crew to mutiny!

CHAPTER VIII.

MATTERS REACH A HEAD—DORRIE IS VERY CALM—ALL SERENE.

CAPTAIN BURTON was inclined to be sceptical.

"I think you must be mistaken, lads," he said slowly. "Adams and Hilton, you say? They are stewards, I believe—the names of all the men are not familiar to me yet."

We were in the captain's cabin, and everybody was looking serious.

"How could we be mistaken, sir?" asked Handforth. "The men mentioned Captain

Jelks, and talked about earning fifty pounds—a bribe, I expect. They're going to incite the crew to mutiny."

"It's unheard-of," muttered the skipper. "Mutiny was fairly common when I was a nipper, of course, but conditions were different then. Mutiny nowadays is almost unknown—on yachts of this class, at any rate."

"Jelks is anxious to cause delay, that is quite clear," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "And a mutiny, or a 'strike,' would certainly have the desired effect. If the crew refused to work we should be helpless."

"That's the idea, sir," put in Handforth eagerly. "Those awful rotters meant to keep us down there for weeks—that's why we were locked in. They've been talking to the crew already, and they've spread the yarn that we are going in search of treasure. Do you think you'll be able to prevent the mutiny, sir?"

Captain Burton frowned.

"By the Lord Harry!" he exclaimed fiercely. "There'll be no mutiny on board this craft if I can help it!"

"You must act promptly, captain," said Nelson Lee.

"Good lord! You don't expect any action before breakfast?" asked Lord Dorrimore anxiously. "I'm shockin'ly hungry—"

"My dear Dorrie, this is not a light matter," interrupted the governor, with some impatience. "It seems to me that these two men, Adams and Hilton, are the ring-leaders. They must know by this time that Handforth and his chums have joined us. They are also aware, therefore, that some action will be taken."

"And so they'll start the mutiny at once, you mean?" I asked quickly.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Unless they act immediately it will be impossible to act at all," he replied. "It is my firm belief that the rascals are even now stirring up other members of the crew to make a move. It is necessary, Captain Burton, to show your hand at once. You must deal firmly—"

There was a tap at the door, and Mr. Scott, the first officer, appeared.

"Can you come, sir?" he asked urgently.

"What is it, Mr. Scott?" asked the skipper sharply.

"The chief engineer has reported that the men have left the furnaces and the engine-room, sir," replied the first officer. "I don't know what's wrong, but there seems to be some dissatisfaction. The deck-hands have gone for'ard, and I can get no orders obeyed."

"What about the cooks an' stewards?" asked Dorrie anxiously.

"They have ceased work, too, my lord."

Dorrie groaned.

"That means no breakfast!" he exclaimed resignedly. "It's altogether too bad—that's what it is. The infernal rascals might have waited until after breakfast, at any rate!"

His lordship was quite calm, but his words were only light on the surface. His eyes

were gleaming rather dangerously, I noticed. Captain Burton took a very deep breath.

"It's mutiny!" he thundered. "By ginger! I didn't expect the dogs to act so quickly as all this. I'll teach them——"

"I don't want to interfere, captain, but I'd like a word in here," put in Dorrie quietly. "I should hate to butt in when I'm not wanted. You're skipper, an' I leave everything in your charge. But before you start any violence may I just have a word with the men myself?"

"I don't want to use violence, I can assure you," replied Captain Burton. "If you can bring the men to their senses, Lord Dorrimore, I shall be only too pleased. But drastic measures are necessary. A mutiny at sea is a great crime!"

"Well, we'll see what we can do," said Dorrie calmly.

We passed out on deck and found Miss Eileen and her aunt looking rather worried. The third officer had just been speaking to them, and Eileen came forward quickly and laid one of her little hands upon my arm.

"Oh, Nipper, what is the matter?" she whispered.

"There's nothing to worry about, Miss Eileen," I replied. "It seems that two of the stewards have been kicking up a row, and the crew have gone on strike."

"Oh!" said Eileen gravely.

"But I expect Lord Dorrimore will soon bring the idiots to their senses," I went on. "If he doesn't, Captain Burton will use stern measures. If once the men get out of hand they might cause real trouble."

I passed along to where Sir Montie and the other fellows were standing. Handforth and Co. were quite forgotten in this new excitement, for there was no doubt that the situation was very grave. Hilton and Adams, of course, had been forced to act really before their time, but matters were sufficiently serious.

"Oec whiz! I guess this is a licker!" exclaimed Farman excitedly.

"It's rotten, dear old boys," complained Sir Montie. "I can't make out why the crew are so frightfully dissatisfied. Just as we were startin' off so well, too. Perhaps they're jibbin' because of Handforth——"

"You—you ass!" roared Handforth indignantly.

"Shut up!" I broke in.

Umlosi was standing near me, and his eyes were gleaming in a dangerous kind of way. He would have regarded it as a tremendous favour if Dorrie had given him permission to charge in amongst the crew and give them something to remember. But such drastic measures were not necessary—as yet.

The affair had reached a head far more quickly than we had bargained for, and it was therefore all the more essential that it should be settled at once. The men had collected for'ard, and were standing in an excited group, listening to the voluble Adams.

Several men were not amongst them—for the whole crew had not gone on strike, so to speak. But the majority were backing up

Adams and Hilton in their scoundrelly scheme. Frankly, I couldn't understand it—but I should understand a little later on.

Lord Dorrimore calmly lit a cigarette, thrust his hands into the pockets of his white flannel trousers, and strolled forward. At the same time Adams came towards him. There was a hush from everybody on deck. Dorrie was the owner of the yacht, and it was with him the mutinous crew had to deal.

"Now, my lads, what's the trouble?" asked his lordship languidly.

Adams looked grim.

"We've come to a decision, sir," he said truculently, and deliberately neglecting the usual "my lord." "We refuse to——"

"One moment," interrupted Dorrie. "Are you speakin' for the whole crew?"

"Yes."

"Good," said his lordship. "Go ahead."

"We refuse to do any further work until the wages of the entire crew are doubled," said Adams. "If you don't agree to those terms, we shall remain for'ard until you do. We all want double pay for this trip."

"Hear, hear!" came a growling chorus from the others.

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"I should like to point out," he said calmly, "that you are now receivin' higher wages than any yacht's crew you could think of. I don't happen to be a mean chap, an' I believe in payin' good wages. If you're not satisfied, you'll have to be unsatisfied. I sha'n't increase your money by a penny!"

"Good!" I said involuntarily.

Hilton strode forward angrily.

"All right!" he shouted. "If you won't increase——"

"Ah, you're the other ringleader, aren't you?" said Lord Dorrimore smoothly. "If it hadn't been for your infernal tongues, the crew would never have thought of mutiny. It's the skipper's job to quell this affair, an' I'm goin' to leave it to him. But you can take it from me that there'll be no extra pay. I'm generous, but I'm not exactly a fool!"

"You'll be sorry for this!" snarled Adams insolently.

Lord Dorrimore laughed and threw his cigarette away.

"I shall not be half so sorry as you," he said, still remaining perfectly cool. "I intend to thrash the pair of you at once. It's a frightful bore, but it's necessary. Who'll take the first dose?"

Adams and Hilton stared.

"You're—you're going to fight us?" asked Adams huskily.

"Exactly!" said Dorrie, leisurely removing his coat. "I'd get Umlosi to do it, but my blood happens to be up, an' something's got to go. Now, my lads, you'd better make up your minds quickly."

Hilton laughed coarsely.

"Why, I can knock you down with one finger!" he jeered.

"Try it!" said Lord Dorrimore smoothly.

He was not at all a big man, and Hilton simply towered over him. Everybody watched

with bated breath. There was something sporting in the way Dorrie was dealing with the matter. Even the dissatisfied crew did not approve of the barefaced insolence of their leaders, and they offered no objections.

Hilton, taking Dorrie at his word, charged at him like a bull. The next moment we were treated to as fine a display of boxing as I have ever witnessed. Dorrie was simply a wonder with his fists—as Hilton found out to his cost.

"Oh, Nipper, isn't it terrible?" whispered Eileen to me.

"Terrible!" I echoed. "Ye gods! It's glorious!"

Dorrie was going ahead beautifully. Hilton attempted to deliver a terrific drive which would have laid his lordship out flat. But Dorrie side-stepped in the most lazy manner possible, and his right went home on Hilton's mouth with a thud which was heard all over the deck.

"Bravo!" I yelled.

"Hurrah!" roared the others.

Hilton staggered back, but did not lose his feet. He lost his temper completely, charged forward, and gave Dorrie a splendid opportunity of delivering an upper cut which finished him off finally.

Hilton lay upon the deck, groaning.

"I'm a bit fagged, but I believe I can manage you, old man," said Dorrie genially, turning to Adams. "Get busy as soon as you like. It may interest you to know that I'm waitin' for my breakfast."

Adams backed away hastily.

"I—I won't fight!" he growled, turning pale.

"Then, by gad, I'll give you a thrashin'!" roared Lord Dorrimore, striding forward.

He hit out right and left, and drove Adams round and round. The man attempted to hit back, but his blows were feeble and ineffective. As a matter of fact, he was simply shivering with fright, and tumbled down before he had received even a fair-sized punch.

Lord Dorrimore looked at him in disgust.

"So you're the leader of this mutiny?" he inquired quietly. "By gad! It's a pity the crew couldn't find somebody better suited for the job!"

The members of the crew stood in a sheepish crowd, for the dramatic defeat of Adams and Hilton had taken all the wind out of their sails. One man—he was Fraser—came forward awkwardly.

"We've got a reason for asking for double wages, my lord," he said sullenly. "We ought to have been told, when we signed on, that we were going to be taken to a fever-stricken island. It ain't fair to us, but we're willing to take the yacht out if our wages are doubled—"

"My dear man, will you explain what you mean?" asked Lord Dorrimore patiently. "I

haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about. What's all this rot about, a fever-stricken island?"

"Adams told us that we were bound for a Pacific island which is infested with deadly fevers, my lord, and that's why we left off work—"

"Hold on a minute!" said Dorrie quietly.

He walked forward into the midst of the crew, and looked round him calmly as he lit another cigarette.

"So Adams and Hilton spread that yarn, did they?" he asked. "Well, you can take my word or theirs—whichever you like. We're bound for an island, certainly, but it's as sweet and clean as this yacht itself, to the best of my belief. There's no fever there, and you won't come to any harm."

"But Adams said—"

"Adams is a liar!" said Lord Dorrimore quietly. "You weren't signed on under false pretences, and you've got nothing to grumble about. I've thrashed Adams and Hilton, and I hope the lesson will do 'em good. I'm a sportsman, and I'm willin' to let the matter rest as it is if you all go back to your duties at once. You've been misled by a couple of lyin' tongues, so you're not so much to blame. I daresay you'll know better another time. Now, I give you just one minute to decide."

Fraser turned to the other men.

"What's it to be, mates?" he shouted. "His lordship is a sport, and there's only one thing for us to do!"

"Hear, hear! Back to our jobs, mates!"

"Hooray!"

"Three cheers for Lord Dorrimore!"

The crew sent up three terrific cheers, and Adams and Hilton disappeared below in record time. But we all knew that they would be severely punished by the other members of the crew for spreading their malicious lies. The crew went forward in a body, and offered a humble apology to Captain Burton for leaving their posts. The skipper, under these circumstances, could do nothing but accept it.

The mutiny had ended as abruptly as it had started, and everything was all serene. Lord Dorrimore was highly complimented by Nelson Lee for the masterly manner in which he had dealt with the trouble.

As for Handforth and Co. and De Valerie, and all the rest of us—why, we couldn't say enough in favour of old Dorrie. In fact, he begged us not to mention the matter again—being of a very modest disposition.

And so, after this little excitement, the voyage to the Pacific commenced in earnest. The schoolboy stowaways had been admitted into the party, and, in Handforth's own words, "Everything in the garden was lovely."

But we hadn't done with Captain Ebenezer Jelks yet!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

In the Grip of the Huns.

A Magnificent Tale of Thrilling Experiences in Germany.

By CLEMENT HALE.

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

The First Chapters.

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

(Now read on.)

THE FIRE!

ONCE or twice Levinsky was heard to mutter threats against the Germans, and to hint darkly at the revenge he would have on all his enemies one day. No notice was taken of him, as he was a man of slight physique, who would stand no chance against the majority of the prisoners in a stand-up fight. Some held the opinion that he was mad.

The wretched character of the food in the camp now caused universal grumbling, and the complaints became so persistent that even the enemy could no longer ignore them. Besides, the stables were getting in a bad state. The bedding wanted renewing. The straw in the sacks, one could hardly call them mattresses, had crumbled to dust.

The continual walking in and out from the stables in wet weather had covered and loaded everything with dust, there being no means of cleansing the mud from their boots until they removed them, so that even their bedding was permeated with the noxious stuff.

At last, after much striving, the authorities acknowledged the complaint, and sent a company of guards and a body of officers to investigate.

And what a time the interned prisoners had of it then, to be sure!

They were paraded, the roll call was made,

they were examined at great length, and, after hours had been wasted, the stables were visited and the bedding was examined.

For this purpose some of the sacks were opened and the straw heaped upon the floor.

As it fell the dust rose in a cloud. Some of the judges declared that it was good enough for dogs of Britain to sleep on.

Others condemned the straw and the sacking. The argument was a lengthy one, and at times not a little heated.

In the midst of it George's friend, Carl Hoffmann, arrived.

He entered the stables, saw George, Jack, Wilson, and some of the other prisoners standing there, and approached them with an unaffected smile.

"Jorge," he whispered, "what is all the fuss about?"

George told him, and while talking to his German friend noticed that Carl wore on his breast the Iron Cross of the second class.

Since they saw him last he had been decorated by the Kaiser, and from what George knew of Carl there was one hero at least who deserved the German decoration for valour.

He informed the wounded officer in a whisper of what had happened, and Hoffmann nodded understandingly, whilst a grim smile curved his lips as he saw the officers storming and fussing about the stables, giving their orders in the usual bullying tone, whilst the men obeyed them with mechanical alacrity.

As his eyes searched the stables Carl saw the Pole Levinsky standing in the background.

The expression of malice on the fellow's face made him start and utter a low cry.

The Grays, following the direction of his glance, saw what had moved him. Levinsky was apparently absorbed in thought. He looked almost fiendish, and his eyes followed the movements of the bullying officers with a malevolence he did not attempt to disguise.

"That man means mischief," said Hoffmann. "He is not to be trusted. It is a pity you cannot get him removed to another part of the camp, my friends."

The presence of the wounded officer here attracted the attention of the others, who

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

turned and spoke to him. Hoffmann having explained, the Grays and Wilson were regarded with more friendly feelings by the hectoring Prussians.

"There is nothing like having a friend at Court," said one of them with a laugh, and then the order was given for the lofts above to be examined.

Up the ladder leading to them the officers climbed, some of the men following them.

The lofts were illuminated by hanging lamps, and by the aid of these the business of examination went on.

They revealed a state of dirt and chaos which reflected little credit upon the authorities who ruled the camp, and none upon the prisoners who occupied the place.

In spite of the supervision and urging of the Prisoners' Camp Control Committee and its vigilance, the aliens interned there could not be got to clean the place as they ought. They seemed to be blind to the need of cleanliness, and opposed to even the thought of work.

Lazy, loafing, idle rascals, they earned for themselves, without a single exception, the contempt of every Englishman who came in contact with them.

As the loft was stirred up and the dust-clouds rose, the powdery fog began to descend into the stables below.

"Let's go outside," said Carl Hoffmann, and they all went out into the pure air and sunshine of the open, remaining near the door to talk, whilst all about them were gathered groups of prisoners discussing the improvement in camp conditions which was likely to follow upon the visit of the authorities to Ruhleben.

Goodness knows, they had enough grievances to redress. Yet what could the prisoners expect out of it other than an addition to the innumerable restrictions and regulations which bothered them every day?

Carl inquired in friendly fashion into the nature of the latest complaint and laughed at the indignant outburst that followed, but sympathised with them in their trouble.

"Stick to it. Insist that the American Ambassador shall visit you again. Make them render your living rooms more comfortable. Some that I have seen are no better than pigsties even now."

So they remained talking, the Hun soldiers under arms, who stood easy some distance away, watching them languidly.

Jack Gray stayed with his brother and Carl for a moment, then strolled lazily back to the entrance of the stables.

He looked in, and as he did so a sharp cry broke from him.

"You villain! You villain!" he roared, darting towards the door.

His cry attracted the attention of his brother, and also caused the man whose action had been the cause of it to turn and face the boy.

What was it Jack Gray had seen? Why was it the lad's pale face had lost even the slight vestige of colour that had showed a moment ago?

Just this. That as he looked carelessly in at the door he saw Levinsky the Pole stooping over the pile of straw and heap of mattresses, with a burning match in his hand.

As Jack caught sight of him the flame touched the straw and the dry rubbish burst into a blaze.

Up leapt the flames, devouring the sacking like magic. Smoke rolled towards the ceiling in a dense cloud, and the incendiary, caught in the very act, charged at Jack with murder shining in his eyes.

"Let me pass!" he howled, striking at Jack's face.

Jack caught him and held him a moment, but the rascal wriggled like an eel, disengaged himself, threw the young footballer aside, and dashed on.

"Stop him! Stop him!" shouted Jack.

George Gray ran to his brother's side.

"What's the matter, old man?" he asked.

"Matter? That scoundrel has set the stables on fire! I saw him do it. Look, the place is well alight, Jack, and it will burn like matchwood!"

"Oh, it's non-inflammable material! The wood is impregnated. It won't burn," said George.

But even as he spoke the wood started burning like the rest and the flames from the straw roared higher and higher.

George fell back a pace, and looked up into Carl Hoffmann's face, aghast!

"The place is doomed!" he cried.

"And," said Carl, as white as Jack Gray now, "there are German officers and soldiers up in the loft! Ach! Gott in Himmel! They'll burn, too!"

THE RESCUE.

GEORGE up till that moment hadn't given a thought to the German officers. He did so now.

"What's to be done?" he muttered, hesitating for the first time in his life perhaps.

Carl Hoffmann, with one sound arm, answered for him.

"We must save them!" he said, and forthwith he blundered into the cloud of dense black smoke which came rolling out of the open door.

"He's gone to his death!" said George, as he felt in his pocket for his handkerchief and began to tie this round his face to cover his mouth and nose.

"I'll save him, at any rate, George!" cried Wilson.

The plucky footballer plunged headlong into the billowing mass, and, groping there with the red tongues of flame leaping before him, for a sight of Carl Hoffmann, at last caught a glimpse of him as a gust of wind blew the smoke right back.

He had fallen at the foot of the ladder leading to the loft, and lay there, apparently unable to rise.

Wilson, with a cry, staggered towards him.

(Continued overleaf.)

Then, headlong down from above jumped and scrambled the soldiers who had gone up into the loft. Some fell upon Carl where he lay, beating him into insensibility with their nail-studded boots.

Another sent Wilson flying on to his back, and all of them, giving never a thought to the officers above, bolted for the open and safety.

All they thought about was saving their own precious skins.

Wilson was dazed. He lay for a moment, and was conscious of other forms scrambling down upon him. They were some of the officers coming down the ladder from above, thoroughly alarmed by the crackling of the flames and the uprush of the smoke.

They, too, careered into the open.

Wilson set his teeth.

"I must save Carl Hoffmann at any cost!" he thought, and so he staggered with him

through the stables to the open door, and literally fell through it on to the ground beyond, where the pure air soon gave him renewed life and vigour.

Eager hands rushed to tear the officer free of Wilson's grasp, and others helped the footballer to his feet. At the same time a rousing cheer burst from the throats of the prisoners of the camp, as they came rushing up from all sides.

The German officers who had escaped from the burning stables smiled sulkily. They had witnessed the rescue of their brother officer, and had grudgingly to admit that he owed his life to Wilson's prompt action.

The flames had cracked the stable windows now, and were roaring from the opening. The smoke rolled densely onward, upward.

(To be concluded.)

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