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THE ISLAND OF FIRE!

A Story of Thrilling
Adventure, intro-
ducing the Boys of St. Frank's,
NELSON LEE, NIPPER,
EILEEN DARE, LORD DORRIMORE,
and **UMLOSI.**

By the Author of "Tricked by Wireless," and Many Other Yarns.

(The Narrative Related Throughout by Nipper.)

CHAPTER I.

THE ARRIVAL AT HOLIDAY ISLAND—EXPLOR- ING—THE OLD SPANISH GALLEON.

"**L**AND-HO!"

The cry came from the look-out, and it was one which had been expected for some hours past. Nevertheless there was an immediate move towards the rail, Handforth and Co. being first.

Lord Dorrimore's steam yacht, the Adventure, was gliding along smoothly and gracefully in a sea of deep, intense blue. The sky was cloudless, and the tropical sun beat down with a fierceness which made every inch of metal work scorching to the touch.

Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were lounging in deck chairs, and they were too lazy to rouse themselves at the look-out's cry. Umlosi reposed gracefully in a hammock, and for an hour past I had been fully expecting the whole structure to collapse under the giant Kutana chief's weight.

Boz, my little spaniel, sprawled at Nelson Lee's feet, panting heavily with the heat, his tongue hanging out and displaying inches of redness. Incidentally, Boz's dribblings were dropping upon one of the guv'nor's elegant white shoes.

"Land, guv'nor!" I exclaimed briskly. "Rouse up!"

"My dear Nipper, there's nothing to see yet," said Nelson Lee, sitting up in his chair. "I suppose it's the island, but you needn't get excited—Why, what the deuce! You infernal little slobberer!"

Boz was well aware that the last remark was addressed to him, but he merely winked at the guv'nor and lazily wagged his bushy tail.

"What are you grumblin' at?" asked Lord Dorrimore, grinning. "Those shoes wanted cleanin', anyhow. Nipper, if you love me you'll go below an' rout out several chunks of ice—"

"But I don't," I put in calmly.

"By gad! You don't love 'me?" said

Dorrie, in a pained voice. "There's base ingratitude for you! After all I've done, Lee, he doesn't love me. I think Nipper must have a hard heart—"

"There's a steward coming along the deck," I grinned. "Perhaps he loves you, Dorrie. Anyhow, I dare say he'll get the ice if you ask him nicely. Coming to the rail, guv'nor?"

"Not just yet, Nipper."

"All right, be lazy!" I retorted, and emerged from beneath the awning into the full glare of the sunlight for'ard. Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and the other fellows were standing in a group near the bows.

"The chap must be dotty!" I heard the one and only Handforth exclaim. "What's the good of calling out 'land-ho' when there ain't any land? It's a pity your dad doesn't put a decent man on the look-out, Bo'sun!"

"Souise me! My father's the captain of this ship, and he knows what he's about," declared Tom Burton. "If I were you, mess-mate, I wouldn't air my ignorance like that."

"What do you mean?" roared Handforth.

"Are you calling me ignorant?"

"Yes, certainly—"

"Why, you—you—"

"Begad! Don't squabble, dear fellows," complained Sir Montie. "It's too bally hot to squabble, it is, really. You wouldn't believe how red your face is getting, Handforth. Boiled lobster ain't in the same street with it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you comparing my face to a boiled lobster?" roared Handforth, commencing to roll up his shirt sleeves in a business-like manner.

"Dear boy, I apologise!" said Tregellis-West hastily. "I'd apologise for anythin' just now, rather than have a fight. The very thought of fightin' appals me. Of course, you'd win easily; I haven't any strength—"

"What's the giddy row?" I inquired.

"Oh, Benny, I'm glad you've come," said Sir Montie languidly. "Handforth is burstin' to fight me. I said his face was a boiled lobster, or somethin' like that. I really don't know how the argument commenced, but we weren't talkin' about boiled lobster to begin with, we weren't, really."

"It was the Bo'sun who began it!" snorted Handforth indignantly. "He told me I was ignorant——"

"Well, you must be told the truth sometimes, Handy," I grinned.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just the same as at St. Frank's!" said Handforth bitterly. "Even on a holiday like this you're jealous of me! It's the fate of all great men to be misunderstood!"

"That's why we can always understand you, Handy," I replied.

It was some few seconds before Handforth's mighty brain could grasp the meaning of my retort. And then he turned so red that Church and McClure, his staunch chums, thought it wise to grasp him gently but firmly from behind.

"Lemme go!" bellowed Handforth. "I'm going to punch his nose!"

"I never knew such a chap!" I said. "You're always wanting to punch somebody's nose, Handy. Let's have this matter out. Why did the Bo'sun call you ignorant? Look upon me as the judge, I'll decide the point."

"Why, the silly swab said that my dad didn't know what he was doing," explained the Bo'sun. "He said that the look-out man ain't capable of doing his work——"

"Well, it's right!" declared Handforth. "What's the good of a chap who calls out land when there ain't any land?"

I grinned.

"The verdict is guilty," I said calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are ignorant, Handy," I went on—"surprisingly ignorant."

"Why, you—you——"

"Did you expect to see land about half a mile away?" I asked, before Handforth could speak. "It's there, if you only look—right over to the sou'-sou'-west. I can see it even now."

"Souise me! And so can I," declared Tom Burton.

The other fellows shaded their eyes and gazed across the dazzling sea.

"I can't see anything except a smudge against the sky-line," snorted Handforth.

"That's it."

"Land?"

"Of course, you ass!"

"A smudge like that?" roared Edward Oswald Handforth.

"It won't be a smudge for long," I replied calmly. "If you go under the awning and come back in an hour, you'll see more than an indistinct blob. It's the island—Holiday Island! Hoop! We're at the end of our voyage!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to shout about!" grunted McClure.

"Say, Benny's right, an' I sure guess you'll be shoutin' good an' plenty when the island takes shape," said Justin B. Farman. "Gee! We'll be huntin' for the darned treasure to-morrow. Say, this is some dandy vacation!"

"Well, it's been fairly excitin'—what?" remarked De Valerie.

And, as a matter of fact, it had been exciting. Since leaving the shores of old England we had met with many adventures. And now our destination was practically within sight.

Putting it bluntly, we were on a treasure hunt. It was the summer vacation at St. Frank's, and the Bo'sun's father, Captain Burton, had invited the gov'nor and me to go with him to the Pacific to search for a treasure which the skipper believed to be concealed within the rotten planks of a sunken Spanish galleon.

The Bo'sun and Tregellis-West and Watson—all belonging to the St. Frank's Remove—were to come with us. Three other fellows were invited as well. Our departure had been delayed, however, owing to the villainies of a certain Captain Jelks, who also knew of the treasure. Poor Captain Burton's schooner had been sunk; but Lord Dorrimore, an old friend of Nelson Lee's, had come to the rescue with his yacht. And so we had started off in style, accompanied by Umlosi and two other guests, Miss Eileen Darc and her aunt.

The first bit of excitement was caused by Handforth and Church and McClure. These three determined youths having been invited to join us, but failing to obtain permission from their parents, boldly stowed themselves away, and didn't appear until we were right out to sea.

Nelson Lee and I, of course, had been at St. Frank's for some time—he as a master and I as a pupil. We had been forced to do this owing to the unwelcome attentions of a murderous Chinese secret society.

But on this trip everything was all serene—except for Captain Jelks. Jelks had done his best to delay us, so that he could reach the island first. He had even tricked us by wireless, and had seized our yacht by an act of piracy. But old Umlosi had turned the tables on that occasion, and everything had gone smoothly since. Jelks and his crowd had probably given the game up as hopeless by this time. We hadn't seen anything of him for weeks, and were not likely to.

Having coaled at a South American port, we set off for the Pacific and our destination. And now, on this flaming afternoon, the island was within sight. The skipper had told us during luncheon that we should strike the island within a few hours.

It was only a tiny place—a mere dot in the ocean. Some twenty miles further south there was another island, and this was the only one charted in those latitudes. Holiday Island, as we termed it—for it had no real name—was too insignificant to be noticed.

But Zambua, its big brother, so to speak, was inhabited by savages of the old style—that is to say, white men had scarcely ever visited the island, and the blacks had a very bad name. Many South Sea whalers could tell gruesome tales about the island of Zambua and its cannibals.

We should not visit the place, however, so we didn't concern ourselves with it. Handforth thought it rather "rotten" to miss seeing real live cannibals, but Dorrie and Captain Burton were both strongly against approaching the spot. Dorrie had travelled all over the world, and he knew a thing or two.

Holiday Island loomed up larger every minute. It had already taken shape, and we watched it with interest. Through the binoculars I could see that profuse vegetation grew some little distance from the shores. Many cocoanut palms were quite visible, and towards the centre of the island there were several craggy hills.

Nearer still we could see the surf breaking upon the outer reef, and Lord Dorrimore shook his head as he gazed upon the scene.

"Looks rippin'," he remarked. "You'd think we could steam right into the lagoon. But we can't, unless we want to become a wreck."

"Begad! What do you mean?" asked Sir Montie interestedly.

"Why, accordin' to Captain Burton, this island is just a little bunch of treachery," explained Dorrie. "I've seen islands far worse myself, an' it's necessary to be jolly careful."

"But the weather's beautifully calm——"

"Of course it is, an' it doesn't affect us much," replied Dorrie, lighting a cigarette, and waving his hand as though he were about to give a lecture. "It's sailin' ships that get into trouble. People who don't know much about the sea—especially the South Sea islands—would be surprised if I told 'em that these coral reefs are a heap more dangerous in a dead calm than during a gale."

"Why, how's that, Dorrie?" I asked.

"Coral reefs are the dread of the mariner," said his lordship. "They look pretty things, but by gad, I've had a taste of 'em myself! As a rule the water outside these barrier-reefs is so appallin'ly deep that you can't find an anchorage."

"But can't a ship lie off an island, becalmed?"

"Well, Nipper, they can—an' they do," replied Dorrie. But there are all sorts of deucedly wicked currents in these tropical seas. An' it doesn't take an hour for a becalmed vessel to drift on to a coral reef. We've got steam, thank goodness, so we sha'n't suffer those dangers. An' there are sharks, too—hefty fellows who don't respect human bein's as they ought to."

"Is there a barrier-reef round this island?" asked Handforth.

"The skipper says that it's a beauty," replied Lord Dorrimore calmly. "A regular blighter, to be exact. Nothin' can pass it—

not even a native canoc. But there's one openin' on the west coast of the island. This openin' leads right into the lagoon; an' that's where we shall anchor."

"Oh, well, if we can get in, it'll be all right," I remarked. "I should think this island would be a fine place to withstand a siege, Dorrie. Attackers could only approach it at one point."

"I suppose you're right; but who's talkin' about sieges, you bloodthirsty young bounder?" asked Dorrimore. "The skipper means to slip into the lagoon straight away, I believe. We might as well be nice an' comfy for the night."

I was quite content to leave myself in Captain Burton's hands. He was a very able navigator, and he had visited this island before. He was very cautious, however, and as the yacht approached the island soundings were taken constantly.

The break in the reef was quite visible, for the sea was calm there, while the surf boiled everywhere else. We entered very slowly and carefully, but at last the anchor was dropped.

Our voyage was at an end—the outward voyage, at all events. And the Adventure lay in the lagoon, snug and secure, safe from the most violent tropical storm. This stretch of water was always calm, no matter what the sea itself was like.

The shore lay some distance off, with tiny waves breaking upon the glistening sands. The lagoon was amazingly blue and transparent. The whole scene, in fact, was similar to some fairy paradise. Everything was so bright and gorgeous that it fairly dazzled one to look round. And it was not unnatural that we should all want to have a run ashore as soon as possible.

Until one has been on board a ship for weeks on end, one doesn't know the joy of setting foot upon land once more. Dorrimore was as keen as Handforth himself, and at once decided to have a couple of boats taken ashore.

"Hang it all, we might as well stretch our legs before the night comes down," he said languidly. "And I can see piles of cocoanut palms just handy—the boys will get busy on them, I'll warrant."

"It will be wise for us to carry firearms," said Nelson Lee slowly.

"Why, guv'nor?" I asked. "I thought the island was uninhabited?"

"I think so, too, Nipper," replied the guv'nor. "But precautions cost nothing, and we do not want to be taken at a disadvantage. In all probability we shall meet with no misadventure whatever. By the look of the island I should judge that it is quite uninhabited?"

We were not long in putting off from the yacht. Eileen was in the boat with Nelson Lee and Dorrie, and she was as merry as anybody, and looked lovely in a flimsy muslin frock of some sort. Aunt Esther preferred to remain on board, not being built in a manner which made the jumping in and out of boats an easy undertaking.

The beach was glorious, the sand being almost white and astonishingly fine. There was not a mark upon it, showing that the foot of man had not trodden this part of the island for long enough.

"My hat! Ain't it ripping?" shouted Handforth enthusiastically.

He raced up the beach towards the coconut palms, and we followed. Some of the palms were nearly sixty feet high, tall and graceful, with enormous leaves. To reach the nuts on the tree was a bit of a problem, but this wasn't necessary, for we found many lying beneath the trees.

I chose one of the best and prepared it for Eileen. Practically every junior was doing the same thing, but I got there first. The other fellows crowded round too late.

"Oh, I can't eat them all, boys!" laughed Eileen. "Even as it is I shall spoil my dinner. Oh, aren't they delicious?"

They were delicious. Coconuts from the tree are very different from those one buys in shops in England. And while we were busily devouring our spoils, Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Umlosi lost themselves—at least we couldn't see any sign of them when we looked round.

They appeared some twenty minutes later, and the gov'nor announced that, so far as all appearances went, the island was uninhabited. This was really a comfort, for a tribe of savage blacks might have caused us great trouble if they had been living here. Holiday Island was ours—just our own.

"Can't we go and explore, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"Not to-day, Handforth," he replied. "The darkness will shut down presently, with the usual tropical abruptness, as you have seen. To-morrow, perhaps, we will have a look round. But we came here, you must remember, to give particular attention to the lagoon."

"Where is the galleon sunk, sir?" asked De Valerie with interest.

"Well, I don't know exactly, my boy," said the gov'nor. "But I have gathered from Captain Burton that the old treasure-ship is quite close here—on this side of the island. Indeed, we shall probably pass over the sunken vessel on our way back to the yacht. This lagoon, unlike many, is very deep."

"I suppose that's why the treasure hasn't been collared before, sir?" asked Handforth.

"It is one reason, certainly, but the chief reason is because the matter has been kept a strict secret," replied Nelson Lee drily.

"Captain Burton was practically the only man who knew of it until Jelks got on the scent. But I don't think we need worry ourselves about Jelks."

"Oh, he's done for, sir."

"Begad, rather!"

"Absolutely out of the running!"

We were all settled upon that point. The very idea of Captain Jelks attempting any further trickery struck us as being somewhat humorous. Even Umlosi chuckled deeply

at the recollection of our last encounter with the villainous skipper.

"Wau! Thou hast seen the last of the white pig, thine enemy, N'Kose," he rumbled. "But nay! It would be unwise to speak too surely. Strange things happen, and we must be watchful. I would have settled the brute once and for all, but thou art too soft-hearted, my masters!"

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"Well, we don't happen to be warriors of your class, always thirstin' for somebody's gore," he remarked. "If Captain Jelks appears upon the scene I sha'n't care a toss! He can appear as soon as he likes—but, by gad, I'll bet a level quid he'll disappear a heap quicker!"

"Wise words, O N'Kose," said Umlosi. "We have the advantage in many ways. No other great ship could enter this wondrously blue stretch of water, for the channel is narrow, and easy to bar."

"An' all the more easy when you remember that we've got some rippin' little machine-guns stowed snugly below," said his lordship. "Machine-guns are persuasive beggars, an' we needn't be afraid of attack from any quarter. By the way, professor," he added, turning to Nelson Lee, "it wouldn't be a bad idea if we mounted a couple of those guns to-night. There's no tellin' in these latitudes. There may be savages on the island after all, an' we might as well be ready to give 'em a rousin' welcome."

"My dear Dorrie, you are late for the fair," smiled the gov'nor. "The captain and I discussed that point before we dropped anchor, and when we get on board again we shall probably find the guns already mounted."

Lord Dorrimore sighed.

"It's no good tryin' to teach you anythin', old man," he said. "Goodness knows, it ain't for want of tryin', either! If ever I make a suggestion, I always find that you've forestalled me. It ain't sporty!"

"Thou must remember that Umtagati the wizard is a man of mighty brain and wondrous cunning, N'Kose," exclaimed Umlosi softly. "In matters of skill Umtagati is even as the magic workers—whilst I rely upon my muscle and the quickness of my arm. But even thou art not such a sleepy one as thou wouldst have us believe, O Thou-Of-The-Shimmering-Eye!"

"All right, thou of the elephant's strength!" grinned Dorrie. "Well, hadn't we better be makin' a move? What the dooce is the matter with Charles Dickens? He seems half dotty with joy!"

Charles Dickens—Boz for short—was scampering about the beach in high glee. He enjoyed a run ashore as much as anybody—probably more than anybody. Handforth picked up a small stone and was about to throw it far into the lagoon.

"No, don't do that, Handforth," said Nelson Lee sharply.

"Why not, sir?"

"Because Boz is quite a nice little dog," replied the gov'nor. "We don't want to see

him sacrificed. It is more than probable that there are sharks in this lagoon—"

"Sharks!" gasped several juniors at once. "Those cheerful gentlemen with the business-like teeth," explained Dorrimore, as though the fellows didn't know what sharks were. "You may be right, Lee, old man, but I don't believe you are. Sharks don't believe in such restricted quarters, and they're more likely to be in the deep water outside the reef."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Exactly," he agreed. "But we cannot be too sure."

So Boz was not sent in after the stone, although he would have been perfectly willing to go. We tumbled into our boats again and were soon gliding across towards the yacht. Eileen was greatly interested in the astounding transparency of the water. Leaning over the boat's gunwale, we could distinctly see the sandy bed of the lagoon, with patches of bright weed here and there. All shapes and sizes of fish darted about. We forgot all else in the fascination of this new wonder. Such transparent water seemed almost unbelievable. And one does not meet with it in any other places but the lagoons of these coral islands in the South Seas. Unless a fellow sees it with his own eyes he can scarcely credit the miracle of it—for it almost seems a miracle.

"By jingo! What's that?" exclaimed Handforth excitedly, leaning over the boat's side violently and nearly causing an upset.

"Steady, lad—steady!" exclaimed Mr. Scott, the first officer, who was in charge.

"Look down there—look!" yelled Handforth.

We were all looking. And there, clearly visible far below us, right down on the sandy bed, lay the dark bulk of a strange old ship. It was visible with amazing clearness—the towering poop, the stumps of the mast—in fact, every line of the vessel was clear. It lay almost on an even keel, with rocks on either side, and was by no means a skeleton wreck.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed, with a deep breath. "It's the old Spanish galleon!"

CHAPTER II.

THE SHORE PARTY—HANDFORTH AND CO. CATCH IT HOT—THE SMOKE CLOUD.

NELSON LEE was as interested as anybody. The galleon was far down, for the water was deeper than it appeared from the surface. But the guv'nor was satisfied that diving operations could be easily undertaken.

Captain Burton was told all about the galleon's position as soon as we got on board, but it was no news to him. He knew the spot almost to a fathom, and he smiled in his great beard.

"We'll have that treasure, Mr. Lee," he declared confidently. "It's there—tens of thousands of gold pieces. We must get to

work to-morrow, if possible, for we can't afford to remain here for long."

"We shall start the work at the earliest possible moment," agreed Nelson Lee, nodding. "But to-night, I fancy, will be spent in celebrating our arrival in an adequate manner, eh, boys?"

"Rather, sir!"

And that evening we enjoyed ourselves as we had seldom done before. The yacht was a blaze of fairy lights, and the night was one of the most perfect imaginable. The stars were like a myriad lamps glowing amidst purple velvet. The tropical night was absolutely perfect—a night almost inconceivable to those who have never been out of England.

And there were dances and singing, and all sorts of jollity. Poor Eileen, being the only girl on board, was pretty nearly exhausted by the time the celebrations were over. She had danced till her little feet ached, but she seemed still as fresh and pretty and lively as ever. Even Lord Dorrimore did not possess the nerve to ask Aunt Esther for the pleasure of a dance!

And we all went to sleep that night feeling that life was worth living. The crew had a jollification for'ard, and they were all staunchly loyal to us. At one time certain men had been influenced by Captain Jelks's talk, for the villainous skipper had made active attempts to create a hostile spirit among the crew. This had been nipped in the bud. There were dances for'ard, too. Eileen's maid and Aunt Esther's maid and the two stewardesses had to work overtime in the dance line.

Morning dawned gloriously, and Sir Montie and Tommy and I were on deck before anybody else—before the other members of the "afterguard," I mean. The crew were already busy clearing up after the previous evening's entertainment.

Several men, too, were hauling up some big cases from the after-hold. These, I knew, contained diving apparatus.

"I'm not sure whether it'll be safe, you know," I remarked, leaning over the rail and gazing down into the clear water.

"Sharks wouldn't be frightened of a diving suit, and it'll be a pretty risky job for the man who descends."

"Oh, there ain't any sharks in the lagoon," declared Watson.

"Dear fellow, it's never wise to be too sure," said Sir Montie. "But I'm not worryin' at all. Begad, why should I? If Mr. Lee is satisfied, it's good enough. Supposin' we take a trip ashore before brekker?"

I shook my head.

"Better not," I remarked. "We don't want to displease the guv'nor, you know. We shall all go ashore after breakfast, and have a real exploring tour. So have patience, Montie."

"Anythin' you like, old boy," said Trevis-West languidly.

There was plenty to interest us from the deck of the yacht. Strange birds of brilliant plumage were to be seen on every hand, and the luxuriant vegetation on the

island stared at us in a riot of gorgeous colours. Personally, I had visited these seas with the gov'nor on previous occasions; but it was all new to Tommy and Sir Montie and most of the other fellows. Naturally, I felt an inclination to air my knowledge, and I was unanimously appointed guide to the junior party. The order of things was almost exactly the same here as at St. Frank's. At school I was the recognised leader of the Remove, and these fellows regarded me in the same capacity now.

During breakfast Nelson Lee outlined the morning's programme. He and Captain Burton and Mr. Scott would remain on board in order to superintend the preparations for the diving experiments. Everybody else could please themselves as to what they did.

"But there is to be no bathing, boys," added the gov'nor. "I know you are all longing for a swim, but we do not want any accidents, do we? Perhaps we shall be able to find a safe stretch of water later on, but we cannot waste any time this morning. Go ashore if you like, but don't lose yourselves."

"You needn't be afraid of that, sir," I grinned. "The island's not very big, and we sha'n't wander far, anyhow. I'm rather keen on taking some photographs."

"Oh, blow photographs!" remarked Handforth. "I'm not going to waste my giddy time in searching for pretty places to snap. I'm going to climb that whacking great hill, and get a view of the whole island from it. Church and McClure are coming with me."

Church and McClure had not been consulted in the matter, and, as a matter of fact, they had totally different ideas of spending the morning. But for the fact that we were at table an argument would have commenced then and there—concluding, in all probability, with a neat exhibition of fisticuffs. Handforth, needless to say, would have performed the latter part of the entertainment.

The three juniors sat at table, bestowing malevolent glares upon one another, and the storm did not burst until they mounted to the deck after breakfast was over. And then Church and McClure told their self-willed leader precisely what they thought of him in painfully plain language.

"If you think you are going to order us about, Handy, you're jolly well mistaken," said McClure warmly. "Rats to your fat-headed idea! I'm not going to swat up that rocky hill just to please you."

"Oh, ain't you?" exclaimed Handforth grimly. "We'll see about that, my son. Didn't you and Church agree to accept my leadership? Ain't I the chief member of Study D?"

"We ain't at St. Frank's now!" growled Church.

"That doesn't make any difference," said Handforth. "If you chaps don't come with me, I'll—I'll chuck you to the sharks!"

This appalling threat had no effect.

"I'm going with Benny and the others," said McClure firmly. "There's no reason why you shouldn't act the giddy ox if you want to, Handy. What do you say, Church?"

"Why, I'm with you," replied Church promptly.

There was no doubt that the two juniors were determined. Handforth knew their characters as nobody else did, and he knew that they could be obstinate when they liked. It was the limit, of course, but even the application of two huge fists would make very little difference. To Handforth's regret, Church and McClure had become uncomfortably independent of late. So the wily Handforth, who was set upon climbing that hill, tried different tactics.

"All right!" he said, with a bitter sneer. "Go your own way! If you think I care you're jolly well mistaken. Leave your old pal in the lurch—desert him just when he wants you most!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Handy——"

"I don't count," went on Handforth heavily. "Rats to me! Go your own sweet way, and leave your best pal out in the cold. I'm disgusted with you—I'm pained and disappointed!"

And Handforth stuck his hands into his pockets, walked to the rail, and gazed sadly overboard. Church and McClure looked at one another uncomfortably. They were simple youths and did not see through the subtlety of this move. Arrogance from Handforth would have been useless; but this attitude of pained regret worked the oracle at once.

"Oh, I say, Handy, don't be potty!" protested McClure awkwardly. "We'll come if you like——"

"Of course we will," put in Church.

Handforth regarded them with disdain.

"No!" he said firmly. "I don't want you now—I'll go myself, and get killed, or something! You wouldn't mind, of course. Jolly glad to get rid of me, I expect. Oh, it's fine to have two such staunch pals!"

Church and McClure became alarmed.

"We want to come. Handy—honest injun!" declared McClure.

"Oh, well, if you're sorry," said Handforth slowly, "I might be inclined to overlook your rotten behaviour this once. But if it occurs again I'll go off by myself, and you can find another leader! Even as it is, I'm a soft-hearted idiot!"

Church and McClure were not quite certain about Handforth being soft-hearted, but they had no doubts in their minds regarding the last word that Handforth had uttered. However, peace was restored, and that was sufficient.

Secretly, Handforth chuckled. In his own way he was deep, and he had overcome his chums' objections in the most cunning manner. Far from accompanying him under protest, they had actually begged of him to let them go!

Personally, I couldn't see any sensible reason for climbing the hill. Church and McClure couldn't, either. Whether Handforth could was a problem. But he was about the most obstinate beggar under the sun. If he had decided to climb Nelson's Monument in Trafalgar Square he wouldn't have been contented until he had reached the top.

We went ashore almost at once—ten of us. Dorrimore and Umlosi would probably follow later on, but at present they were interested in the preparations for diving.

Having reached the sandy shore we divided into three parties. Sir Montie and Tommy and I went off together, Handforth and Co. started off on their famous trip to the hill, and De Valerie, Farman, the Bo'sun, and Yakama decided to hunt for souvenirs.

Handforth was full of enthusiasm. He had a pair of binoculars with him, and meant to sweep the island from north to south and from east to west when he reached the summit of the hill.

He fondly imagined that he would be able to detect a cannibal village, if such a thing existed on the island. Handforth fervently hoped so, for he had read so much about cannibals that he wanted to come in close personal contact with a few. Incidentally, Handforth was destined to have more than his fill of cannibals before St. Frank's was reached again.

The hill-climb, although barren of result so far as cannibals were concerned, led to a discovery of another nature which was infinitely more startling. That's why I'm going to describe the adventures of the redoubtable Handforth and Co.

They commenced their journey through the dense masses of trees. Far from grumbling, Church and McClure were delighted with all they saw. Handforth had some little difficulty with McClure, however, that youth having strong inclinations to dart off at every minute of the journey. McClure was a keen butterfly hunter, and he was filled with amazement and delight at the numbers of wonderful butterflies which abounded on Holiday Island. They were of great size, and gorgeously coloured and marked. Even Handforth, who regarded butterflies with contempt, was interested. He condescendingly allowed McClure to capture a few specimens. They emerged upon a rocky piece of ground, where the trees were not so profuse. A stretch of grassland led upwards to the base of the hill—tall grass which practically reached to their waists. The flowers, which grew in thousands here, were so brightly coloured that they were almost dazzling to look upon.

"I say, is it safe?" asked Church suddenly.

"Safe?" repeated Handforth. "What do you mean, ass?"

"Well, snakes——"

"Snakes!"

"I've heard that snakes have a fancy for tall grass," explained Church. "It wouldn't do us any good if we trod on a nest of them!"

"A nest of snakes!" snorted Handforth. "What do you think they are—birds? Snakes don't live in nests, you fathead! And if we come across one or two we'll deal with 'em all right—trust me!"

His faithful chums were somewhat dubious about trusting him, but they had plenty of faith in themselves. If they were to think of snakes and other dangers they would never move a yard. So it would have to be left

to chance. The flies and other insects were somewhat troublesome, but at last the trio reached higher ground, where insect life was not so profuse. They climbed over the rocks and mounted the hill in the glaring sunlight. All three were soon perspiring freely. The heat absolutely radiated from the ground.

"Phew!" gasped McClure. "We'd better chuck it up, Handy!"

"Rats!" was all that Handforth replied.

They proceeded, and, strangely enough, the higher they got the hotter it seemed. Even where masses of rock shadowed the ground the heat radiated upwards in exhausting waves. It was almost uncanny. The rocks, too, were very curious in aspect, being high, coloured and streaked in the most surprising manner—almost as though they had at one time been molten, impossible as it seemed.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Church suddenly. "What's that?"

He came to a halt and pointed to a spot ahead. There was no grass here, everything was bare and barren. And there, rising out of the very ground itself, was a distinct jet of steam! There could be no mistaking the character of that vapour-jet, and Handforth and Co. were astounded.

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

"What the dickens is it?" exclaimed Handforth, approaching the spot. "Looks like steam more than anything else."

"You ass! Of course it's steam!"

Handforth put his hand over the jet, and then gave a yelp. He gazed at his fingers tenderly.

"It's—it's boiling hot!" he panted. "Well, this is about the queerest thing I've ever struck! There must be some boiling water down there——"

Church made another surprising discovery.

"Feel these rocks!" he shouted. "They're hot—as hot as the dickens!"

His companions placed their hands upon the ground. The whole surface was almost burning to the touch. It could not have been on account of the sun's action, for a mass of overhanging rocks high above shaded the spot completely. And, most astounding of all, the heat was more apparent when a piece of rock was pushed aside. For the space left thus vacant was almost burning with interior heat. Handforth and Co. stared at one another in a somewhat scared manner. The phenomenon was quite beyond them.

"We'd better shift!" muttered McClure uneasily.

"Not likely!" said Handforth. "I'm going to find out what this means, my bucks. And there are other jets of steam further up, too. Let's go to the top and have a squint from there."

"Don't be potty, Handforth," said Church. "It ain't right to play about with these things—we don't know what might happen. Let's go down and tell Lord Dorrimore or Mr. Lee. They'll understand."

But Handforth's obstinacy came to the surface.

"Rot!" he said bluntly. "Let's get to the top!"

Church's advice was quite sound. Both he and McClure felt that there was some weird natural force at work here, and they did not want to "monkey" with it. To find the very ground steaming beneath their feet was sufficiently startling.

Handforth's chums did not protest further; they knew that their efforts would be useless. And as for returning without him, the very thought was out of the question. Even though they were scared, they had no intention of showing the white feather. It wasn't courage on Handforth's part, but obstinacy and curiosity.

They climbed up slowly, and the higher they mounted the hotter became the rocks. The heat came actually through the soles of their boots and ascended from the ground in waves. Handforth and Co. were almost wet to the skin with perspiration; and Church and McClure, at least, felt that they were walking on thin ice. That sounds rather queer applied to these circumstances, but you know what I mean.

At last they reached the summit itself. There was no cool breeze, as they had hoped; nothing but choking waves of burning air. And, to make matters worse, they felt a curious catching in their throats, as though sulphur fumes were arising. Handforth and Co. had never experienced anything of a volcanic nature, or they would not have been so mystified.

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped McClure huskily. "Look down there—just look," muttered Handforth.

They had reached a point where it was possible to gaze down the other side of the hill—at least that's what they imagined. But now that they were actually on the spot they looked into a deep basin of irregular shape, with blackened rock walls. The heat which arose was suffocating.

Church leaned over, but staggered back, choking and coughing.

"It's—it's on fire!" he gasped.

This was not exactly the truth, but all three boys could see that the bed of the basin was bubbling and hissing jets of steam and wisps of smoke were rising lazily. There was something awful in the whole affair. All round, on every side, the island stretched out below them, a glorious paradise of colour. And beyond, the pure blue of the sea.

"I know what it is!" exclaimed Handforth suddenly, as though struck by an inspiration. "It's a volcano, my sons!"

"A—a volcano!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"What else can it be?" demanded Handforth, wiping his perspiring brow. "I've never seen a volcano, but I've heard of 'em. I suppose this is an insignificant little thing, really, but it's—"

And then, at that moment, Handforth was interrupted in a most dramatic manner. Without the slightest warning a sound came from the crater like the report of a gun. A

dense mass of utterly black smoke surged up in a cloud and swallowed the three juniors up in its enveloping folds!

CHAPTER III.

SOME EXCITEMENT—IS A DISASTER IMMINENT
—URGENT NEED FOR HASTE.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS - WEST
chuckled.

"They've got there, dear fellows," he remarked amusedly. "Just have a look, Nipper, old boy——"

"Shurrup!" I interrupted. "You'll disturb that giddy bird!"

It was just like Sir Montie to interrupt with some inconsequent remark at a very critical moment. We were standing in a clear space not far from the shore. There were cocoanut palms here, and several breadfruit trees, and all manner of tropical ferns and bushes.

A most gorgeously coloured bird was squatting on the branch of a tree near by, regarding us quite calmly, its curiosity overcoming its fear. And I instantly focused it, intending to take a snapshot.

Snap!

The shutter clicked, and I smiled.

"Splendid! Couldn't have been better," I remarked. "Now, what's the matter with you, Montie? Why can't you keep this ass quiet, Tommy?"

"I've got something better to do," replied Watson, who was sampling a cocoanut.

"I was just referrin' to Handforth and Co., dear boys," said Tregellis-West, waving his hand vaguely. "They've got to the top of the hill, an' I don't envy them. The sun must be burnin' frightfully up there."

Tommy and I looked. Through a break in the trees we could easily see the summit of the craggy hill. Three figures were clearly outlined against the sky. The air was so clear and transparent that I could recognise Handforth and Co. with perfect ease. But there was something queer about them.

"Can you see anything rummy?" I asked, shading my eyes. "They seem to be all quivery, as though they were standing on the top of a gigantic bonfire. My hat! The heat must be fearful on that hill!"

It was evidently great, for Handforth and Co. were somewhat distorted occasionally, as though the heat came and went in waves. One of the figures moved, and then an astonishing thing happened.

Boom!

It was just like the report of a big gun, only far more subdued. And a terrific cloud of inky black smoke arose from the hilltop. Handforth and his chums were swallowed up in a second; they simply vanished, enveloped in the dense clouds of smoke. I nearly dropped my camera in amazement.

"Oh, begad!" ejaculated Sir Montie.

"What's—what's happened?" gasped Tommy Watson, his face going pale. "Was—that an—an explosion?"

I gave a whoop.

"Why that hill must be a volcano!" I yelled. "Oh, Cæsar! And Handforth and Co. were there! They must have— Let's rush to the place as quickly as we can," I added, pelting away as I spoke.

I tossed my camera into a bush, careless as to where it went or what damage it sustained. Tommy's coconut went flying, and Sir Montie, having dropped his pince-nez in the intensity of the moment, made no attempt to recover them.

A horrible fear was in my heart. Handforth and Church and McClure had been standing right on the lip of the crater. I was positive that the hill was a volcano—there was no other explanation. Volcanoes are as common as flies among certain South Sea islands.

It was my intention to rush up to the rescue with all speed. But as I broke into another clearing, with Tommy and Montie at my heels, we spotted Lord Dorrimore and Miss Eileen and Umlosi. They had apparently just landed.

"By gad!" exclaimed Dorrie. "What the dooce is the matter with you? Are there tigers and things on this island?"

"Didn't—didn't you hear it?" I gasped breathlessly.

"Oh, Nipper, whatever is the matter?" exclaimed Eileen, grasping my arm. "Yes, we did hear something—a bang. Oh, you look so startled!"

"That hill's a volcano, Miss Eileen," I shouted frantically. "Handforth and two other chaps were right at the top when that bang occurred. We saw it all. A great cloud of smoke smothered them up, and I believe—I believe—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Eileen, in horror. "Oh!"

"I don't suppose it's done the poor kids any good," said Lord Dorrimore grimly. "We'd better make a move. It may be a case for an ambulance; so if you'll be a real sport, Miss Dare, you might pop down to the shore and signal to the yacht for bandages and things. It's best to be prepared."

"Oh, I'll go at once!" said the girl quickly.

"Wau! This is indeed a dramatic surprise," rumbled Umlosi, as Eileen hurried away. "But I am in the dark, as thou wouldst say, N'Kose."

"My dear old Umlosi, we can't stop to explain now," exclaimed Dorrie briskly. "You come along with us; you'll probably be able to lend a hand. Three of those fat-headed boys have landed into a heap of trouble, and we've got to haul 'em out!"

Dorrie, for all his languid ways, was a man of action when it came to an emergency. In many ways Lord Dorrimore and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were identical in their habits, and I had often been struck by this similarity.

We hurried away towards the hill with many misgivings. The island seemed to have lost its beauty. The very thought of a

tragedy was appalling. We had been so happy—so merry—

"Oh, by glory!" exclaimed Dorrimore abruptly.

He came to a dead halt, and we all followed his example. For three extraordinary figures had just burst into view from between two clumps of highly coloured bushes. They came charging towards us wildly.

"Handforth and Co.!" I gasped, with relief.

But, at the same time, I was filled with alarm. The three juniors were unrecognisable, and I feared that they were badly burned. They could easily have run in their intense excitement even if they had been fatally burnt.

"Handy!" I shouted, running forward. "Are you hurt?"

Handforth and Co. came to a halt, panting heavily.

"Hurt!" bellowed Handforth, in a voice more powerful than usual. "You—you silly ass! Don't we look hurt?"

"By gad! You don't sound like it," remarked Dorrimore calmly.

Church panted heavily—at least, I believe it was Church, although I couldn't be certain. He waved his hand towards the rear.

"There's—there's a volcano up there," he gasped hoarsely. "Oh, my hat! A great cloud of smoke came out and half-killed us! But I don't think we're hurt!" he added, in direct contradiction of his previous words.

"We're choked—we're half-blinded and scorched to cinders!" roared Handforth, with such gross exaggeration that I obtained great relief. "Oh, my only Uncle Peter! I've never had such a game in all my life!"

By this time we had all become convinced that Handforth and Co. were far more alarmed than injured. In fact there was nothing wrong with them but what soap and water would remedy. Eileen's quest for lint and bandages was fortunately unnecessary. And then the humour of the whole thing struck us all at once.

Our natural relief to find that no harm was done caused us to regard the affair in a different light. And Handforth and Church and McClure looked weird specimens of humanity indeed. They had been wearing white flannels—no coats at all—and they were now as black as though they had been climbing up chimneys for hours.

Their faces were inky, except where the perspiration had run down, making white streaks. And not only their faces were in this plight, but their necks and hands—and, indeed, every exposed part.

"We saw that cloud of smoke, Handy," I said. "We were just coming up to pick up your shrivelled remains. By jingo! I'm glad to see that you're all right! What the dickens did you go there for?"

Handforth nearly choked.

"We didn't expect that smoke to come, did we?" he bellowed. "I tell you we're half dead! That smoke simply surrounded us, and if it hadn't been for me Church and

McClure would have fallen into that giddy crater!"

McClure seemed on the point of choking, too.

"Why—you—you awful bounder!" he gasped. "Didn't we tell you to shift away? Didn't you nearly fall down the crater yourself? Why, you ass, if Church and I hadn't grabbed hold of you——"

"Oh, rot!" snapped Handforth. "It was a fatheaded thing to go up there at all! If you'd taken my advice——"

"We did!" groaned Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We took your advice, and this is what's come of it!" went on Church. "It serves you right, that's all I can say. I hope you'll learn a lesson by it. I'm fed up with your exploring wheezes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The young white chiefs have fared badly," exclaimed Umlosi, grinning from ear to ear. "But I am sorely puzzled, N'Kose. How came this miracle? They have been through much smoke, but I think mayhap the damage is only visible to the eye. My young masters would look the better for a plunge into the blue waters of the lake. Wau! I am tickled, as thou wouldst say."

"Tickled!" snorted Handforth. "And that's all the sympathy we get! Umlosi's tickled! What do you think of that, you chaps?"

"Well, I ain't surprised," snapped Church. "If we don't look like a set of scarecrows, what do we look like?"

"Sweeps!" grinned Tommy Watson.

"I'm surprised at you!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore severely. "What do you mean by gettin' yourselves into this shockin' mess? You wait until old Lee sees you! By gad! You'll get five hundred lines apiece and detention for a week!"

Handforth and Co. tried to grin feebly.

"It's all very well to joke, sir," said Handforth. "If you were smothered with awful blacks you wouldn't—— Oh, corks! Run, you chaps—run!"

At that moment Eileen Dare had appeared, accompanied by Mr. Scott and Aunt Esther's maid. The thought of facing Eileen in that condition sent cold shivers down the backs of the unfortunate trio. They fled, helter-skelter.

"Oh! You found them, then?" exclaimed Eileen, coming up rather breathlessly, her pretty face flushed and her eyes anxious.

"Found them?" grinned Dorrimore. "Why, bless your little heart, Miss Eileen, they walked into our arms. No, there's no harm done. Judgin' from their energetic conversation, I should say they were perfectly O.K."

"I am so glad," said Eileen thankfully. "They'll find a boat on the beach. But whatever has happened to them? I just caught a glimpse——"

"It seems that there's a volcano close handy," I put in. "Handforth and Co. sampled it, and they ought to think them-

selves jolly lucky for getting off so lightly. I suppose this isn't serious, Dorrie?"

Lord Dorrimore tossed a cigarette-end away.

"Well, I don't know, young 'un," he said. "Volcanoes are queer merchants. They have beastly, nasty habits of gettin' angry all at once. They've got frightful tempers, an' once they get fairly goin' there's no knowin' when they'll put the brake on. It's concentrated energy," he added. "They store it up for years, the beggars, an' then let it out with a rush. Suppose we go up an' have a squint at this gentleman ourselves?"

"Oh, is it safe?" put in Eileen quickly.

"Not for you, Miss Dare," was Dorrie's prompt reply. "I wouldn't let you come, although your presence would make things a heap brighter. There may be danger, but those youngsters came off all right—so why shouldn't we? I should hate to see your lovely frock made as black as Handforth!"

"Oh, you are absurd," laughed Eileen.

"It's surprising how people get to know my character," said Lord Dorrimore lightly. "But, seriously, Miss Dare, I shouldn't advise you to come. I sha'n't let these energetic youngsters go too near—so you needn't let that wrinkle mar your brow any longer."

"You mustn't be rash—oh, really you mustn't!" said Eileen.

We promised that we should use every precaution, and then we started off, Dorrie and Umlosi and myself. Sir Montie and Watson decided to come with us, although Tregellis-West was somewhat dubious. He wasn't nervous, but he had seen Handforth and Co!

We made our way up the hill, and kept a sharp look-out. But there was no more black smoke, and the scene was as peaceful as before. Like Handforth and Co., we noticed the steam-jets at once and felt the heat of the ground. Dorrie was rather serious.

"This crust must be pretty thin," he remarked critically. "There's all sorts of fiery things goin' on beneath us, my lads, an' I'm not sure that we're sensible in goin' any further. But we'll be like those three misguided youths, an' chance it. Takin' chances is rare sport!"

We arrived at the summit in a sweltering heat. The crater was bubbling ominously, but there was an entire absence of lava. We had seen no sign of lava whatever, so it was fairly certain that this volcano was not in the habit of throwing it up. If it belched forth nothing more formidable than smoke, we could easily snap our fingers at it.

But Dorrie shook his head with gravity.

"I remember standin' on a crater just like this one two or three years ago," he remarked. "That was on one of these little islands, too. The volcano had been silent for donkey's years, an' the first intimation the natives had of activity was a burst of smoke. A week later there were hundreds of poor people lyin' dead. No, sonnies; I don't like the look of this fellow."

"Thou hast spoken the words that were about to pass my lips, N'Kose, my father," exclaimed Umlosi. "For I, too, like not the appearance of this strange hill. Wisdom tells me that we are unduly reckless. I fear not a dozen armed warriors, but—wau! this wondrous hill of heat turns my blood to water. It is not natural, O, N'Kose. I am sorely troubled."

"Then we'll make a move," said Dorrie promptly. "If you're troubled, Umlosi, it generally means that things are goin' to happen!"

"And we thought the island was such a giddy paradise!" I remarked.

"Don't grumble, Nipper. We can't have everything our own way," said Dorrie. "We'll ask Captain Burton about this—he'll probably know all about the volcano, having been here before. It may be as harmless as I am myself."

"Then I am sorely afraid, N'Kose," said Umlosi. "For art thou not a man of strength, to be feared when angered?"

"We won't go into details, Umlosi," replied his lordship. "The main thing is to get back to the yacht. By Jove, talk about stokeholds! They're as cool as the Arctic compared to this!"

The heat was appalling, and we were glad to get down into the comparative cool again. Yet, even here, the tropical day was blazingly hot. The waters of the lagoon were wonderfully refreshing, and we bathed our heated hands and faces before rowing across to the yacht.

We found Nelson Lee and Captain Burton talking together. They had not seen the burst of smoke from the volcano, but they had heard about it. And the gov'nor was interested as Dorrie gave a description.

"But you know about it, captain, surely?" asked his lordship.

"Not a thing," replied the skipper. "I hadn't the slightest idea that an active volcano was situated on this island. Let's hope the infernal thing doesn't break out while we're here."

Nelson Lee looked grave.

"We must not neglect these warnings," he said slowly. "It would be foolish for us to remain here a moment longer than is necessary. Having raised the treasure from the galleon we will make our departure at once."

"Oh, that's rotten!" I ejaculated.

"Very possibly, Nipper; but it will take us all our time to get back to St. Frank's for the commencement of the new term. Good gracious! You wouldn't mind if we arrived back at Christmas time!"

"Not a little bit, gov'nor!" I grinned.

"Begad, we should like it, sir!" remarked Sir Montie candidly.

"You young rascals!" chuckled Nelson Lee. "What would Dr. Stafford say? We must make all haste, and, as a commencement, I intend to descend to the sunken galleon immediately after luncheon."

"Why, are you going down, sir?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes, my boy."

"But—but there may be sharks!"

"It is not likely," replied Lee. "And, in any case, can you tell me why we should send one of the men down just because there may be danger? No, Nipper, I shall certainly undertake the work myself."

And, as soon as luncheon was dispensed with, active preparations were made for the gov'nor's descent in search of the treasure.

It was to be an afternoon of peril!

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE BED OF THE LAGOON—A TERRIBLE FIGHT—UMLOSI TO THE RESCUE.

EVERYTHING was ready.

The Adventure had shifted her position slightly, so that she rode at anchor practically over the spot where the galleon lay upon the bed of the lagoon. So transparent was the water that we could see the sunken ship with startling clearness. This was a great comfort, for we should be able to follow the gov'nor's movements until he disappeared into the vessel itself.

I had been present at many diving operations in the past, so this affair was not exactly novel to me. The other fellows, however, were greatly excited and interested. Eileen stood by the rail with us, and watched with just a shade of anxiety in her glorious eyes.

There had been no further activity from the volcano. It really seemed as though the thing had belched forth that puff of smoke as a kind of protest against Handforth and Co.'s intrusion. Those three adventurous juniors were not harmed in the least; the black being removed, they proved to be whole, with no burns or scorches.

Now that it was all over, Handforth was inclined to boast about the incident. I could picture him, on our return to St. Frank's, telling all the other chaps how he had braved the dangers of the volcano crater, and how he and Church and McClure had been enveloped in clouds of smoke. By the time the yarn got to St. Frank's there would probably be sparks, and liquid fire, and all sorts of other things included. Handforth had rather a weakness for exaggerating, and the tale would grow enormously after continual repetition.

"Oh, I hope he will come up safely!" exclaimed Eileen softly.

"Trust the gov'nor!" I said. "He'll be all right, Miss Eileen."

Nelson Lee was dressed in readiness, and he grinned at us cheerfully just before the heavy helmet was twisted into position.

"I'll bring up some samples, if I can get hold of some," he said lightly.

"Pity you can't do it all in one go, old man," remarked Dorrie. "I don't see the fun of goin' down two or three times."

"It may be necessary to descend five or six times," said the gov'nor. "It all depends upon the position of the booty."

"By gad, are you searchin' for mermaids?"

"Mermaids!" echoed Nelson Lee.

"What's that you said about the beauty—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You old idiot!" grinned Lee. "I said booty—and you know it!"

"Oh, I thought it was your pronunciation," said Dorrimore calmly. "Well, get down with you. Don't stand there all day!"

We were all smiling, and several members of the crew grinned broadly. They liked Dorrimore tremendously; he was always ready to joke, but could be stern when the occasion demanded.

Nelson Lee's face disappeared into the helmet, and the air-supply pumps commenced working. The apparatus was a new one, of the most modern pattern.

At the gov'nor's belt hung a great hatchet, with a blade like a razor. He carried a revolver, too—one that could be fired under water. It was very effective at point-blank range. Not content with these weapons, I had urged the gov'nor to take a long dagger, too.

He passed overside, descended the ladder, and plunged slowly into the clear water of the lagoon. In spite of the bubbles which rose to the surface, we could see his figure distinctly as it descended the ladder.

It was a curious spectacle. The diver looked stunted and distorted out of all human shape. He went lower and lower, but remained clearly in view. Once he turned his face upwards, and waved his hand.

"Begad, can he see us?" asked Montie wonderingly.

"No, you ass!" I replied. "But he knows that we can see him."

"Jolly interesting," declared Handforth. "Wish I was down there! I'd give quids to get into one of those diving-suits. It must be ripping, walking along the bed of the sea!"

Nelson Lee reached the galleon at last. At this depth everything was greeny-grey in hue, but he could see quite well. Fish, large and small, darted about, frightened by this strange intruder.

It was Lee's intention to locate the exact position of the treasure—if it actually existed and then come to the surface again. This descent was just a preliminary investigation.

He stood upon the deck of the aged vessel, but the boards were rotten, and they collapsed beneath his feet. With a swing, Lee moved over towards the stern, intending to examine the interior. But he found it difficult to move; the life-line refused to give in the slightest degree.

The explanation was simple. The line had become jammed in the wreckage and required freeing. It was quite an easy matter to accomplish this, and he moved back laboriously—for movement far beneath the surface of the sea is by no means easy.

It was just at this moment that Eileen gave a sharp little cry. We, leaning over the yacht's rail, had not been able to follow the gov'nor's movements accurately; we did not

know that his line was wedged. We could just see his figure through the crystal water, but it was impossible to see the life-line.

"Oh!" exclaimed Eileen, with a catch in her voice. "Oh!"

"What's the matter, Miss Dare?" asked Dorrimore sharply.

"Look! Oh, look!" cried Eileen.

And then we saw!

There, right down in the water, a long shadow was moving towards the wreck. A shark! I went as pale as death, and uttered a hoarse cry.

"Pull!" I shouted madly. "Pull him up!"

But Captain Burton had already given the order. Lord Dorrimore stood near me, with a keen look in his eyes; but he still puffed at his cigarette.

"It's all right, young 'un!" he said, placing a hand on my shoulder. "Sharks ain't always aggressive. Some of 'em—sand-sharks—are as harmless as kippers. This fellow may be just curious. If he's had a decent meal recently he'll do no damage. He'll fight shy of a human bein'."

"What's the matter?" I demanded impatiently. "Why don't they haul him up?"

It was Captain Burton who supplied the answer.

"Great heavens," I heard him exclaim in a low voice. "can't you shift the line, Mr. Scott? Has it really jammed? Try, man—try!"

"Oh, my hat!" I gasped. "The life-line's jammed!"

A few moments later there was no doubt left upon this point. It was impossible to haul Nelson Lee to the surface! The stout rope had somehow become jammed below—it was quite free on the surface—and the gov'nor was trapped beneath the sea! And a man-eating shark was hovering near!

I dare say I exaggerated the peril in my own mind, but I somehow felt sick with fear. From what I could see, I judged that Nelson Lee had become aware of his danger. And this actually was the case.

He, too, had seen that ominous shadow. The shark was some distance away—a huge brute. But it made no attempt, as yet, to attack. In all probability it was somewhat scared. The tiger of the sea, although appallingly ferocious, will not always attack blindly. This was probably the first human being it had seen—and a queer-looking specimen at that!

Nelson Lee knew very well that he was in a tight corner. At any moment the shark might swirl towards him, snapping with its formidable jaws. In that event he could do nothing except dodge and attack to the best of his ability. Had the line been free he would have been hauled to the surface without delay. And I'm not sure that this did not actually save him. The man-eater might have been more bold nearer the surface.

Nelson Lee thought about seeking refuge within the wreck. It would, at least, be a temporary respite. But as he moved towards the nearest opening the shark approached rapidly. Nelson Lee was standing on the deck of the galleon, near the bulwarks, where the



Without the slightest warning a sound came from the crater like the report of a gun, and a dense mass of black smoke swallowed the juniors up in its folds!—(See page 8.)

anks were fairly firm. He could only move in one direction, owing to the jammed life-line.

The shark swooped towards him, and he pulled the revolver from his belt and fired. The bullet went home—that was very evident. The shark shot away at express speed, evidently scared out of its wits.

Probably it was as much frightened by the commotion caused by the discharge as by the bullet itself. But the weapon was undoubtedly effective. We, above, saw the affair distinctly, and I gasped out a sigh of relief.

Nelson Lee was attempting to free the life-line, but it had become tangled badly, and he was greatly hampered by the masses of wreckage which littered the deck. And once again the shark approached. It had become savage now, and not merely curious, and was therefore ten times more dangerous.

"By gad!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "We're asleep—we're mad! Where the dooce is that other diving-suit? I'll shove it on in five minutes, and——"

"Thou art truly mad, N'Kose!" interrupted Umlosi, in his deep voice. "Within the space of five minutes Umtagati will be killed! If action is to be taken, it must be taken at once—this second! Wau! There is but one thing to do, my father. See! I, too, will fight this great fish that is even as the tiger in ferocity!"

And before anybody could stop him, Umlosi had snatched up a long dagger from the deck—a similar one to that which the guv'nor carried—and he leapt to the rail. There was an instant outcry.

"Don't be a fool, Umlosi!" roared Dorrie furiously. "You'll never be able to dive that depth without a suit. Man alive! It's madness——"

"I go to assist my master, Umtagati!" rumbled Umlosi.

He dived cleanly and neatly. Down he went, right into the crystal depths, and struck out with all his force towards the bottom. Umlosi was a famous diver in his own country, and I knew well enough that he was capable of wonderful feats. But this affair was altogether startling.

Umlosi had gone down to cut the life-line, so that the guv'nor would instantly ascend—with Umlosi's assistance. But, at the best, it would be touch and go. Not a word was spoken on the decks; we were all attempting to follow the course of the startling events which were occurring far below us.

Umlosi's dive was far more successful than even he himself had hoped for. He knew very well that he could only remain at that depth for a few seconds only. And it was a great surprise for Nelson Lee to find the Kutana chief down with him. Umlosi simply slashed at the rope and grasped the guv'nor's shoulder. At that very moment the shark swirled down in a deadly rush.

Nelson Lee fired three shots in rapid succession. The water was churned up, and the sea-tiger's massive jaws snapped perilously near by. The water became discoloured, and

everything was confused during those fateful moments.

Umlosi's long knife flashed in the water as the shark turned and made a deadly rush. The keen blade was held as though in a vice, and the whole of the shark's body was slashed open deeply as it met the knife.

The black giant always declared that it was a matter of luck, and that he displayed no skill. But this was merely his natural modesty; actually, Umlosi had used the most amazing skill.

Whether the shark was done for or not he did not wait to see. Both he and the guv'nor came cleaving through the water towards the surface. Umlosi's lungs were on the point of bursting, but he had accomplished his object successfully, and he was filled with joy.

Below, two black shadows approached the spot from different directions. They were other sharks; but whether they devoured their unfortunate brother we couldn't tell. At all events they did not approach the surface.

And both Nelson Lee and Umlosi were hauled on board, safe and sound. A great shout of joy and relief went up, and I felt like rushing forward and hugging Umlosi. He had saved the situation at the crucial moment.

The peril had come, and had passed.

CHAPTER V.

OMINOUS SIGNS—NATURE IN A REBELIOUS MOOD—THE OUTLET BARRED.

NELSON LEE was none the worse for his thrilling adventure. It was Umlosi who showed the effects of the battle beneath the surface of the lagoon. But he was as strong as an elephant, and recovered rapidly.

"Wau! It was a good fight, Umtagati!" he exclaimed. "I would prefer to make battle in the open air, but one's wishes cannot always be granted. Thou art safe, and that is sufficient."

Nelson Lee took Umlosi's huge fist.

"Thanks, old man," he said simply. "If you hadn't come down I should have been finished by this time. That infernal line was jammed and tangled badly, and I was at a disadvantage. You worked wonders, Umlosi."

"Thou art pleased to be humorous, O Umtagati," said the King of Kutaland, shaking his head. "Is it wonderful to dive into the waters? Is it wonderful to stab at a ferocious fish? Nay! It was merely a commonplace."

"That's your way of puttin' it," said Lord Dorrimore, slapping Umlosi's back heartily. "Why, you ton of coal, I'm jolly proud of you! Everybody's proud of you! Hang it all, why doesn't somebody cheer you?"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Umlosi!"

There was quite an amount of enthusiasm. I roared at the top of my voice, and the

other juniors let themselves go with a will. The crew joined in lustily. And Umlosi, showing all his white teeth, bowed graciously.

"Thou art making much of little," he exclaimed modestly. "Mayhap I shall be permitted to render some service more deserving of praise ere long. I am a fighter of men, but not of fish. And I am sorely troubled, N Kose, my father. For is not Nature giving ominous signs?"

Umlosi was quite correct. Nature was giving very ominous signs indeed. A great change had taken place during the last half-hour, although we had been too occupied to heed it. But the peril was over now, and we were able to look round.

The air was heavy and perfectly still—so still that the smoke from a cigarette rose upwards in a straight column. Not the faintest breath of wind stirred, and the sky itself, instead of being intense blue, was changing into a drab, coppery hue. The sun, as fierce as ever, blazed down upon us like a disc of molten bronze.

The island itself looked unreal. I don't exactly know how to describe it, but the effect was almost weird. Gazing upon the sandy shore, the thick, tropical vegetation, and the hill beyond, it seemed for all the world as though the whole scene was a picture—flat and unreal. The entire absence of movement probably accounted for this.

No sign came from the volcano, but somehow we all believed that a display of some sort was imminent. The lagoon itself was just like a great sheet of plate glass, without a single ripple upon its surface. The air was sultry and heavy, and it made one hot to walk across the deck. There was a choky feeling in my throat, and I discovered that the other fellows were feeling the same sensation.

"Dear fellows, it's mysterious," declared Sir Montie, shaking his head. "There's a feelin' of disaster in the air—there is, really. Even Boz can detect it!"

The black-and-white spaniel, true enough, was obviously disturbed. He moved about the deck with his tail tucked between his legs. Now and again he would gaze towards the island, and would then lift his head and give vent to a melancholy howl. He was usually such a bright little beggar that I was irritated; that howl of his sounded awful.

"Shut up, you little fathead!" I growled.

He came towards me, looked up into my eyes, and howled again. Lord Dorrimore, who was standing near, shook his head.

"I don't like the look of that little bounder," he remarked. "He knows more than we do—and he's frightened."

"The little beast of the long hair is wise, N Kose," said Umlosi. "He is possessed of a sense which we lack, strange as that may be. He, a mere dog, is permitted to know more than we ourselves. But it is so, my father. The young animal is in fear—and not without reason."

The sky was becoming more coppery every minute, and we stood on deck, vaguely expecting something to happen. Eileen had gone

below with Aunt Esther, and several members of the crew were busily stowing away the diving apparatus. Captain Burton had been in consultation with Nelson Lee for some minutes, and now they strolled over towards us.

"We're rather at a deadlock, Dorrie," said the gov'nor. "It is obviously impossible to continue our diving operations in this shark-infested lagoon. It is quite easy to understand why the Spanish treasure has been allowed to lie undisturbed through all the years."

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "Are you suggesting that we should go back without the treasure, sir?"

"Not exactly that, Handforth," replied Nelson Lee. "But we shall have to think of some other means——"

Boom! Boom!

Two hollow-sounding explosions came from the island. They were full and resonant, as though a gun had been fired inside a vast cavern. We all stared at the volcano, and two enormous puffs of pitch-black smoke shot into the air to a height of several hundred feet, hanging there like something solid.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie.

"I say, it's—it's jolly queer!" muttered Tommy Watson.

It was more than queer, and nobody else made any comment. We just stood there, watching. The great smoke-cloud scarcely moved a yard. It was of such blackness that I can scarcely describe the remarkable appearance of the phenomenon. Everybody had seen black clouds of smoke, of course, but this was so altogether different that nobody could picture it adequately from these words.

And then, again, three other booms thundered out. More smoke belched forth, and the cloud trebled its size. And now we saw that it was spreading, slowly and almost imperceptibly, like a black pall over the island.

And a change had come about. The smoke had not ceased this time, but was rolling from the crater so thickly that it looked like black liquid—although the simile is a poor one.

"Man alive! There's somethin' doin'!" muttered Lord Dorrimore.

"I don't like it, gentlemen—and I don't understand it," said Captain Burton. "I have sailed these seas, on and off, since a boy, but I have never witnessed such a remarkable occurrence as this."

"It's rure some dandy volcano!" remarked Farman lightly.

But his tone was forced. He, like all the rest of us, felt the depressing nature of the afternoon's events. The beauty of the island had completely vanished. Instead of being a paradise, it looked sinister and awful. That's the only word—just awful.

The pall of smoke was now spreading with great rapidity, being fed in a continuous stream from the crater. The smoke did not rise higher, but settled at a certain level and then spread out. A large part of the island

lay in deep shadow, and the effect was most astonishing. Here we were in full sunlight, but there the trees lay in almost total darkness.

And before long it was quite evident that the lagoon itself would soon be covered by the inky canopy. Captain Burton had come to a decision in consequence of these sinister signs. It was deemed by all that it would be far safer to seek the space of the open sea. We were hemmed in here, and it was only possible to emerge from the lagoon in daylight. The passage through the barrier-reef could never have been accomplished in darkness.

"We'll steam away to a safe distance," remarked the gov'nor. "It is quite probable that nothing of a serious nature will occur, but it is as well to take precautions. Smoke can do no harm alone."

"Let's hope there's nothing worse, gov'nor," I said.

"Oh, rot!" put in Handforth, in a low voice. "I want to see flames shoot up, and all that sort of thing. I've heard that volcanoes send out showers of molten lava and red-hot cinders and goodness knows what else!"

"So they do," I replied. "But you can thank your stars that this one isn't treating us to a display of that variety. Why, you ass, this yacht would catch fire from stem to stern if showers of red-hot cinders came down!"

"Oh, corks! I never thought of that!" said Handforth tamely.

"You'd think of it quickly enough if it happened!" I retorted. "You're never satisfied, Handy—you always want something fiery and blood-curdling. I'm afraid you read too many 'dreadfuls'!"

Handforth turned red and glared at me. But before he could frame a suitable reply I strolled away with Sir Montie and Tommy. Eileen had just appeared upon the deck, and we went to her side.

"Oh, boys, what can it mean?" asked the girl gravely. "Isn't the air terribly close? And that cloud up there frightens me!"

I laughed.

"No, it doesn't, Miss Eileen," I said calmly. "It would take more than a cloud of smoke to frighten you. At the same time, it's queer, and all our nerves are on the jump. We're going to slip out of this lagoon as soon as possible and get into the open sea. We shall feel safer out there."

Eileen nodded, and gazed at the volcano wonderingly. The crew were tremendously busy at their various tasks. But it was not possible to steam out of the lagoon yet awhile. The fires had been allowed to die out in the furnaces—for we had expected to remain at anchor for several days. Only one furnace was kept alight, and this was for the benefit of all the auxiliary machinery—the dynamos for the electric light, many cooking appliances, the evaporator, etc.

Before we could raise sufficient steam to set the screws turning, two or three hours would have to pass, for you can't get steam up in a yacht as though it were a tin kettle.

And, meanwhile, the pall of smoke grew larger and larger. Before long the sun would be blotted out. The skipper was becoming somewhat anxious, and he cast his eyes towards the sky continuously.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

A series of appalling reports came from the volcano. But nothing further happened; smoke, and only smoke, arose into the sky. The volume had increased, however, and the gloom became thicker. The sun disappeared completely.

At the end of thirty minutes it was scarcely possible to see one another across the deck. Everybody who wasn't working stood about, gazing towards the island and towards the sky. When we spoke we spoke in whispers. I don't exactly know why, but it was the case. We all expected something dreadful to occur.

Fortunately, the smoke did not descend; it hung overhead like clouds of ink and made everything dark. To seaward the sky was clear, and the effect of this was most remarkable.

And the heat became so oppressive that it was a positive labour to breathe. Captain Burton had almost decided that it would be unsafe to raise the anchor. Before we could get beyond the reef we should be in total darkness. Nature had developed her forces so rapidly that she had found us unprepared.

I leaned over the rail and gazed down upon the lagoon. It was no longer transparent—or, at any rate, it did not appear so. The water stretched away from the yacht's hull like a great pool of black treacle. It seemed no longer liquid, and I could scarcely believe that the whole thing was not a particularly bad nightmare.

And then I uttered a gasp.

"Montie!" I muttered sharply. "Come here—quick!"

Tregellis-West joined me.

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

"Can—can you see anything rummy about the water?" I asked tensely. "It's rather dark, and it may be an optical illusion."

Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez and gazed down searchingly.

"Oh, I must be seein' things!" he exclaimed after a few moments. "It can't really be—"

"What can you see?"

"Well, if it wasn't so mad, I should say that the lagoon was steamin'!" replied Sir Montie calmly. "But I ain't quite dotty, Nipper—"

I gripped Sir Montie's arm.

"The lagoon is steaming!" I muttered. "Great Scott! What the dickens can it mean? The water's hot!"

"It can't be, Benny—really it can't!"

I pulled his arm, and we hastened to the accommodation ladder. Quickly descending, I plunged my hand into the water. The temperature was distinctly hot! Not unbearably hot, of course, but hot, nevertheless.

"This is just about the limit, Montie," I said gravely. "There's some volcanic disturbance going on that we can't imagine."

"We shall have to get out to the open sea by hook or by crook!"

"Begad! Rather!"

Sir Montie was as startled as I was myself, and we both hurried up the ladder and ran to Captain Burton. We told him of this extraordinary development, and he shook us almost roughly.

"Don't be silly, boys!", he exclaimed. "You mustn't allow these imaginings to take a hold——"

"It's true, captain—it's true!" I insisted.

"What's the matter over here?" asked Nelson Lee, strolling across.

"The lagoon itself is getting hot, sir—it's steaming!" I exclaimed breathlessly.

"Nonsense!" said the gov'nor.

"All right, go and feel it for yourself!" I shouted. "Go and look at the steam! I tell you the lagoon's getting hot, sir!"

Two minutes later both Captain Burton and Nelson Lee were convinced.

"I'm sorry, Nipper," said the gov'nor quietly. "But, really, the thing is so astounding that I could scarcely credit it. The captain means to leave the lagoon at the earliest possible moment—darkness or no darkness. We cannot remain here."

As he finished speaking another series of explosions came from the volcano. They were deep and powerful—far more violent than any previous booms. The yacht quivered, and a hot wave of air surged across the decks.

"Oh, isn't it awful?" murmured Eileen. "Isn't it terrible!"

"Blessed if I like it now!" said Handforth uneasily. "All this smoke——"

"Look!" interrupted McClure.

A tongue of red flame had shot into the sky, and we all expected a terrible eruption at any moment. But the flame disappeared, and did not show itself again. Providentially, there were no burning cinders and no lava. We all knew, however, that the volcano might burst forth into full fury at any second.

An uncanny silence hovered over everything, and the darkness had now become intense. This was all the more remarkable because at this hour of the day it ought to have been clear sunlight.

A hissing, bubbling noise came to our ears. It was subdued at first, but rapidly grew in intensity. And then we discovered that the lagoon was boiling—as though it were a giant cauldron over a giant fire.

But the water was not boiling actually; the bubbles were caused, possibly, by strange gases which were being released from the bed of the lagoon. Breathing became more difficult than ever. The smoke almost choked us, and our throats were parched.

Eileen went below, and several juniors followed her. They were not exactly frightened, but the air was purer below, and they could obtain cold drinks, too. I thought about going down for a drink myself, but I was fascinated by this wonderful upheaval of nature.

It was awe-inspiring and terrible. Even a severe thunderstorm makes a fellow realise how puny we human beings are; but this dreadful affair brought the fact home to us with ten times the force. We were helpless—we were just insignificant little mites.

"Wondrous happenings are these, my nimble Manzie," exclaimed Umlosi, his figure towering over me. "I like it not, and shall be pleased when this floating kraal, with the strange engines that use steam, glides out upon the bosom of the vast waters. Wau! Were this to happen in my country, my beloved Kutanaland, even my greatest warriors would prostrate themselves with abject fear."

"You seem calm enough, anyhow," I remarked.

Umlosi chuckled deeply.

"Have I not travelled afar?" he asked.

"Have I not seen many wondrous happenings in different parts of this great world? Have I not lived for long with N'Kose, my father? My mind is broadened, Manzie, and I fear not these marvellous happenings. It is to be. We cannot prevent the hand of Nature, my young master. It would be as well to remember how small we are amidst these great things."

"I was just thinking that way myself," I replied. "Let's hope we come out of this alive, Umlosi. I can understand a volcano all right, but I'm blessed if I like the appearance of this lagoon. I reckon—— Whoa! What the——"

I broke off in confusion. For at that moment it seemed as though pandemonium itself had been let loose. Some curious thudding reports sounded, as though from far below. And then came so many wild noises that I can't even attempt to describe them. I only know that the yacht lifted like a cork upon a wave.

"Grab hold!" I roared desperately.

Nobody heard me, for the thunderous noise was appalling. I managed to grip the rail, and what happened after that nobody exactly knew. We were choked, blinded, and deafened. In fact, I really believe everybody on board became partially stunned and dazed.

At all events, not one of us could give any detailed account of what took place. I do know, however, that the yacht rolled and surged in the most alarming manner. Her rail must have dipped beneath the water's edge, for at one time I was half-drowned in a blinding rush of hot water. The waves surged across the decks, carrying all manner of litter with them. Fortunately, everybody was hanging on like grim death, and there was no tragedy.

Exactly when the convulsion ceased is as hazy as the rest, but after hours—according to my own calculations—the yacht assumed an even keel again and quietness was restored.

The whole occurrence was really over in about three minutes, I believe. We certainly could not have lived through a longer

period. And the yacht would probably have been wrecked had it not been for her anchor. So, in a way, it was fortunate that we had not commenced the trip out into the open sea.

Somebody grabbed hold of me.

"Begad! Who's that?" came a husky voice.

"Montie!" I gasped. "You're still alive, then?"

"Oh, thank goodness, I've found somebody!" exclaimed Mr. Montie. "It's you, Nipper, ain't it? You know, I ain't sure whether I'm alive or dead. I didn't think I was frightfully wicked, but, really, it seems to me that we've descended into some place shockin'ly like Hades!"

"It's not so bad as that, Montie," I said, hucked up by his jocular tone—for Tregullis-West couldn't be serious under any circumstances. "The first round's over, anyhow. Do you know what happened?"

"Dear fellow, I'm all in a fog."

We cautiously moved away from the rail, and then bumped into somebody who was coming towards us. It proved to be Lord Dorrimore, although we couldn't see him. The darkness was now so intense that we were shut in completely. The blackness reminded me of the interior of an Egyptian pyramid.

"Hallo, youngsters," exclaimed Dorrimore. "You haven't been washed overboard, then? I was hangin' down the side for about two minutes, but I managed to get back again. Quite excitin', ain't it? I'll bet half our best crockery is busted up! What a life!"

"Is the gov'nor all right?" I asked.

"My dear chap, I don't know where he is—I don't know where I am!" replied his lordship vaguely. "I don't know whether I'm aft or for'ard. These games of Nature are a bit off-side, you know. She has no consideration for anybody! I wonder when the second act will begin?"

"The first act was enough for me," I growled. "But, I say, Dorrie, can't you breathe easier now?"

Dorrimore took in a big gulp.

"Hy gad! Now you come to mention it, the air does seem more like atmosphere, doesn't it?" he asked. "I'd been wonderin' what the change was for some minutes. It's cooler, by Jove!"

That dreadful choking sensation had vanished and the heat was by no means so marked. A cool breeze—positively cool—came wafting across the side out of the blackness. The lagoon was still disturbed, and the yacht swayd to and fro regularly.

And then, with astounding abruptness, daylight came. It was just as though we were in a darkened room and somebody had raised the blind from the window. The black pall lifted in the most miraculous manner. I saw Lord Dorrimore and several other figures distinctly.

"Great Scott!" I shouted.

There were many other yells. We had not suffered the fate of Handforth and Co., for nobody had been converted into temporary

niggers. The only black one amongst us was Umloot—and he couldn't help it. But we were grimy and streaked with fine dust. The yacht, apparently, had come through the ordeal unscathed.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Dorrie. "I'm tired of bein' shut in the cupboard. It's good to see somethin' again. So you're all right, Lee, old man? I really thought you'd obliged that shark, after all."

"It was a near thing, Dorrie," said the gov'nor, coming over to us. "I really cannot imagine why the yacht did not turn turtle."

"But what caused us to boil over, so to speak?"

"There can be only one explanation," replied Nelson Lee. "A great volcanic disturbance occurred on the bed of the lagoon, or somewhere near by. We must not congratulate ourselves yet, for this affair may only be a prelude to the actual upheaval!"

"Oh, glory!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "Don't say that, old man! Just as I was beginning to feel cheerful, too——"

"Fear not, N'Kose," interrupted Umloot. "I have had a strange vision, and my snake tells me that the sun will shine once more ere long."

Dorrimore gave a whoop.

"Good!" he said. "I'll take your word Umloot."

By this time daylight had returned to such good purpose that we could actually see the island and all the details of the shore. The huge black clouds still hung over the volcano, but to seaward the blue of the sky was showing near the horizon, and the sight was one which filled us with joy.

But then a further astounding discovery was made—a discovery which filled every one of us with consternation, complete and absolute. But for the evidence of our own eyes we should never have believed it possible.

For there, right upon the stretch of water which had marked the only outlet from the lagoon rose a towering mass of drab, slate-coloured rocks! They were steaming visibly, and stretched right round in a semicircle.

In short, the yacht was imprisoned within the lagoon—our only means of escape into the open sea had been cut off!

CHAPTER VI.

A NIGHT OF HORROR—WHAT THE MORNING REVEALED—CAN IT BE REAL?

SHOUTS of wonder and amazement rose on every hand. Everybody on deck could hardly believe the evidence of their own eyes. During that period of darkness the aspect of the lagoon had undergone a complete change.

The great semicircle of rocks had reached round in an irregular line to the very shore itself. This portion of the lagoon was formed by a small bay, with two jutting headlands. And, from headland to headland, the barrier of rocks formed an impossible bar. It was as though the Adven-

ture lay floating in a hand-basin. The rocks had appeared as though from nowhere, and there was no outlet at any point—not even a crevice. On the average the rocks towered to a height of twenty or thirty feet, jagged and cruel-looking.

"Great heavens!" shouted Captain Burton. "We are imprisoned!"

"I knew somethin' frightful was happenin'," declared Lord Dorrimore, keeping calm with some difficulty. "Well, this is a pretty game, ain't it. We ought to have been on the other side of that barrier."

I stared, my heart in my mouth.

"How—how can we get the yacht into the open sea?" I gasped.

"It's no good askin' me conundrums," replied Dorrie. "It looks as though we shall have to swim back to England!"

"This is no joking matter, Dorrie," put in Nelson Lee gravely. "These rocks have been thrust up by volcanic action, and we must face the situation. By all appearances the yacht is of no more use than a house of bricks. It will be impossible to get the vessel beyond the bar."

I felt too startled to speak. But this affair was not so extraordinary as it seemed to us at the moment. There are cases on record where islands have appeared in a single night. Out here, in the Pacific, marvellous things occur, and the world hears nothing of them. In a similar way islands which have been inhabited by industrious people have mysteriously vanished off the face of the sea, leaving no trace. This disturbance, therefore, was comparatively a minor one. It was of quite sufficient magnitude for us, however!

It was soon found that nobody had suffered any serious injury during the upheaval. Eileen and her aunt had been flung from one side of the saloon to the other, but, fortunately, they were unhurt. Several members of the crew were scratched and bruised, but nothing serious was reported.

And, before we could collect our thoughts together Nelson Lee's prophecy came true—to some extent, at all events.

For the period of daylight was only a short one. The blackness had lifted for just sufficient time to enable us to see the rock barrier, and then it descended again. It was as though Nature had deliberately gloated over her victory, and meant to let us see how she had triumphed.

The darkness was as thick as before, and soon after it fell the volcano boomed forth continuously. The explosions were sharp and short now, and there was scarcely a minute's interval between each. In addition, the waters of the lagoon recommenced their hissing and bubbling.

"Oh, my goodness!" muttered Watson. "It's going to start all over again. It'll be worse this time!"

"Don't get into a panic——"

"Who's getting into a panic?" demanded Tommy shrilly.

"Keep your hair on," I said, patting his arm. "I don't suppose you feel very settled in mind—I don't, anyhow. It's no good being

nervous, for there's no telling what will happen. We must just do what a certain famous Prime Minister advised the nation to do—wait and see!"

"Wait, and hear, you mean!" said Sir Montie. "Begad! We can't see much!"

The respite had been short, and our high hopes were banished. There wasn't a soul on board who did not firmly believe that a worse disaster was to come, except Umlosi. He still adhered to his conviction that everything would come all right and that the sun would shine! He darkly hinted that dreadful things might occur in the meantime, but none of us would be harmed, and yet another dramatic surprise would await us when the blackness ascended again.

Umlosi was fairly safe in making those prophecies. But I must admit that he was somewhat uncanny in the way he foretold of future events. On many occasions he had proved that he possessed some strange faculty for sniffing danger from afar, and more than once Lord Dorrimore had been saved from disaster by Umlosi's queer instinct.

The most remarkable change now was the appalling heat. It surged over the decks chokingly, and there was something in the smoke which parched our throats and made our heads swim. Nelson Lee advised the whole ship's company to get below, and, accordingly, we sought refuge in the saloon and other apartments.

There was nothing wrong with the electric light supply, and down below everything seemed fairly normal except for the terrific heat and the hazy fog, which filled every apartment.

The hours went by, and still the volcano thundered and roared. We were entirely at its mercy, come what would.

But no red lava descended, and no boiling mud. Many volcanoes have a nasty habit of sending dense showers of boiling liquid over the surrounding district, but this specimen was well-behaved, on the whole. His bark was far worse than his bite.

At about seven o'clock in the evening Lord Dorrimore, who had ventured on deck, reported that the volcano was shooting up livid flames into the sky.

A party of us at once went up to have a look for ourselves. The spectacle was most weird and terrible. The black fog still hung in the air, and the flames in the distance were consequently subdued until they were deep red and orange in colour. Probably they were actually pure white, but the black smoke transformed them at this distance.

We felt our helplessness keenly. Preparations were made, of course. Every hose the yacht possessed was lying ready. In the event of a fire, caused by falling sparks, we should be ready to battle with the flames to the best of our ability. There was no sense in waiting until the danger actually came.

Now and again the yacht quivered from stem to stern, plainly proving that earthquakes were troubling the island. And on two occasions some curious bumps were felt, as though the yacht had grounded.

But this could not be the case. Captain Burton was positive that the vessel had not shifted an inch from her moorings. What amazing thing was happening, then?

We could not tell until the light came once more.

Dinner was a mere farce. It was served as usual, in order to restore our calm as much as possible. But appetites were at a premium, and scarcely any food was touched—although the chef had heroically provided an excellent meal.

Between nine and ten we learned that the blackness had lifted somewhat, for the flames from the crater were more clearly visible. Again we went on deck, and we were awed by the terrible scene. We could fairly distinguish the bridge and the masts now, for they were outlined in ruddy, flickering light. But the air was so stifling that we went below again very shortly.

Quite exhausted, we sought our cabins and attempted to sleep. On my part it was quite a successful attempt, for I did not awake until seven o'clock in the morning. And for a moment I lay in my bunk, wondering what the dickens was the matter with my throat. It felt as hot as a lime kiln, and I sat up dazedly.

Then, in a flash, I remembered the events of the night.

They seemed unreal—fantastic. For there, streaming in through the window, was the pure tropical sunlight! It was not thick or hazy, but the glorious sunlight we had often called nasty things some days before. This morning it was the most welcome sight imaginable.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson were lying in their own bunks, sound asleep. They were fully dressed, and this fact alone convinced me that I had not been suffering from a nightmare. I was clothed, too, and I tumbled out of my bunk and made a grab at the water carafe.

A good draught eased my throat, although the water was lukewarm. Whilst I was guzzling in this fashion Sir Montie opened his eyes and blinked at me. Then he sat up and blinked again.

"Begad! I've had a shockin' dream, Benny," he muttered dazedly.

"It wasn't a dream, old son," I replied. "You mean that volcano, and all the rest of it?"

"So you dreamt it, too?"

"I tell you it wasn't a dream, you ass," I repeated. "But it seems to be all over now, Montie. The sun's as glorious as ever."

Tregellis-West passed a hand over his eyes. "I'm all muddled, I am, really!" he complained.

Tommy Watson, aroused by our voices, sat up.

"Hallo! Risin' bell yet?" he murmured dreamily.

"You ain't at St. Frank's now!" I said briskly. "You're on Holiday Island, Tommy, and some jolly queer things have been happening. We'll go on deck and have a look round. Perhaps that rock barrier has subsided into the sea again."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Watson. "I remember now!"

He gazed at the brilliant sunshine excitedly.

"It's all over, then?" he asked. "What's the time, Nipper? What's been happening? Where are all the others—"

"We'll go and see," I said. "Come on."

"Really, dear old boy, I couldn't dream of goin' up on deck in this frightful state," protested Sir Montie.

"I don't want you to dream of it," I retorted.

"But Benny, I'm shockin' grimy—"

"Oh, you ass!" I roared.

Tommy and I took hold of him, and were just about to yank him out of the state-room, when something thudded violently against the door, and the latter burst open with such force that the knob caught me in the small of the back and sent me flying.

"What the dickens—"

"Come up on deck!" bellowed an excited voice.

The intruder was Handforth.

"You clumsy idiot!" I shouted. "You've bruised me—"

"Rats to that!" shouted Handforth, his eyes goggling with excitement. "There's something marvellous happened. I don't know whether I'm sane or dotty!"

"I do!" I growled. "I've known it for months!"

Handforth grabbed me violently.

"I believe I am dotty!" he said pantingly and with astonishing candour. "It's too mad to believe! I want somebody else—"

"All right—we'll come!"

I could see that Handforth was nearly off his head, and the only way to quieten him was to do what he requested. We therefore hurried out and rushed up to the deck. Captain Burton and Nelson Lee were talking, and I could see that their expressions were not only grave but amazed. But there was nothing out of the common that I could see. The sun was shining as it had always shone in those latitudes. The air was pure and transparent, without a trace of the blackness of the previous evening.

Except for a film of grime which was deposited over the decks and bridge and everything else, the yacht looked the same as ever. But Handforth dragged me to the rail.

"Look at that!" he panted hoarsely.

I looked, a hoarse cry left my throat, and I rubbed my eyes in a stupefied fashion. But this made no difference. The miracle had happened, and it was not merely an hallucination.

"Great Scotland Yard!" I gasped.

That's all I could say. Other words failed me. I just stood there and stared—stared with incredulous amazement. And why was I so thunderstruck?

The yacht lay in exactly the same position as on the night before. But the island looked altogether higher; it seemed to tower above us. The explanation of this was as simple as it was extraordinary.

For the yacht was no longer floating placidly in the lagoon—because the lagoon had ceased to exist! Don't think that I have suddenly gone off my head. I am just setting down the plain, simple truth.

The lagoon had vanished!

We were resting upon the weed-strewn sand which had, twelve hours before, formed the bed of the lagoon itself.

The water had drained away in some mysterious fashion during the night, leaving only a few pools here and there! The rock barrier, thrust up by Nature's mighty forces, acted like a dam, preventing the sea from entering the enclosed basin.

And the yacht was high and dry, utterly helpless and useless, as though she had been cast up upon the very beach itself!

The disaster was so appalling that I was stunned.

CHAPTER VII.

AN AMAZING FREAK OF NATURE—A HOPELESS POSITION—WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

SIR MONTIE spoke first.

"Dear fellows," he said calmly. "I've heard of queer things, an' I've read of queer things, but begad this is about the most amazin' happenin' that could—that could happen! I ain't capable of muddin' the words I want to say. I'm just staggered—I am, really!"

"Where's it all gone to?" asked Tommy Watson, staring wildly. "Where's all that water? Oh, my only hat! I can't believe it!"

I found my voice at last.

"It's awful when you come to think of it," I said soberly. "All this change in one night! We ought to think ourselves amazingly lucky to be alive, that's all I can say. We might have been swallowed up with all this water if the gap had been big enough."

"Which gap?" asked Watson.

"The whole thing was due to an earthquake or a volcanic disturbance—practically the same thing, anyhow," I replied. "That great barrier of rock was forced above the surface by hidden forces far below the island, and a wide crevice must have opened in the bed of the lagoon."

"Oh, that's too thick!" protested Handforth warmly.

"My dear chaps, this isn't the first time such things have happened," I went on. "I reckon that a crevice opened—or perhaps a dozen small crevices—and the water simply trickled away during the night. Under ordinary circumstances the level would have been maintained, because of the sea. But the sea's cut off by those terrific volcanic rocks, and the lagoon just drained away."

"What about the sharks and the other fishes, you ass?" asked Watson.

"Well, they didn't fly away, did they?" I said. "I expect they scented danger, and escaped into the open sea before the barrier rose up. The heating of the water by subterranean fires must have given them the tip.

Either that or they were sucked down into the earth with the water."

"But why isn't the yacht on her side?" asked Handforth wonderingly.

"I'm blessed if I know," I replied.

We soon learned, however, that Nature had been kind in one respect. Having delivered such a stunning blow, she evidently decided not to go too far. For the Adventure had settled down firmly between two masses of rock, and, although it was possible to walk right round her with dry feet, she maintained an even keel.

The rocks formed a gigantic cradle, and the yacht lay there snugly, unharmed, and perfectly secure. This was amazingly fortunate, for we should have been in a bad way if the vessel had settled on to one side of its hull.

Gazing over the rail, we looked far down upon sand and seaweed. And almost touching our stern lay the wreck of the Spanish galleon. It was so close that we could have jumped down upon her high poop without difficulty.

Nelson Lee walked over towards us.

"This is rather startling, boys—eh?" he said quietly.

"It's terrible, sir," I replied.

"I think you are right, Nipper," said the gov'nor. "Terrible is the correct word. We are completely marooned upon this island. No effort of ours will succeed in floating the yacht again. She is of no more use than a five-storey building. Nature has perpetrated an amazing freak."

"What does Captain Burton say, sir?" asked Handforth.

"The captain is rather stunned by the whole affair," said Nelson Lee. "I am not at all surprised. He knows that we are helpless. We cannot even launch the motor-boat—or any boat at all."

"Oh, but there's the wireless, gov'nor."

"The wireless apparatus is useless, Nipper," put in Nelson Lee quietly.

"Oh! How can it be useless, sir?"

"This great volcanic and electrical disturbance has wrought havoc with certain coils and wires," said the gov'nor. "I cannot explain fully, but there is no chance of appealing for assistance by means of the wireless."

"Then—then we're cut off from the rest of the world?"

"Exactly."

"Oh, my goodness!" murmured Watson.

"How—how are we going to get back to St. Frank's, sir?"

"My dear boy, I cannot possibly tell you," replied Lee. "I do not suppose that you fully realise the nature of this disaster yet; but you will do after you have thought it out. We are marooned completely."

I gazed over at the island in a dazed kind of way. Even now I found it difficult to believe that the Adventure was no longer afloat, and that we had no means of getting away from this tiny Pacific coral island.

The sky was as blue as ever; the island was dazzling with colour; the volcano

showed no sign whatever of having been in eruption only a few hours before. To judge by appearances, the whole business had been a wild dream, until I gazed at the lagoon bed and the rock-barrier.

But although the situation was little short of appalling, I couldn't feel downhearted. I think this was because of the reaction after the horrors of the previous evening.

To wake up and find the sun shining again and everything normal was such a relief that all else seemed fairly unimportant. The awful feeling of being hemmed in by the dense smoke-clouds, and the fear that further disastrous disturbances were to occur, had vanished.

There was the blue sky again; the sea beyond the barrier looked fresh and crystal; search where I would, I could find no trace of the night's happenings except in the lagoon itself.

It was as though some unknown horror had been staved off. And nearly everybody else on board, the crew included, shared my feelings. We were safe and sound, the volcano had done its worst, and everything was all serene—at present. There was no reason why we should worry our heads about the future just now.

Handforth, I am quite convinced, was delighted at the prospect. He wouldn't care a toss if he didn't return to England for months on end. He preferred life on a glorious Pacific island to lessons at St. Frank's. And I'm not saying that I was down in the mouth. There was a prospect of adventures and excitements which had hitherto been absent.

We were to have remained at Holiday Island a few days only, which was voted by all the junior members of the party as being distinctly rotten. But now we should have to remain until Fate came to our assistance in some shape or another. We might be able to think of some means sooner or later, but I didn't worry in the least.

As regards grub, we had enough stores on the yacht to last eight or nine months, to say nothing of the food on the island itself. We could have lived comfortably without any food from the yacht at all.

As it was, the yacht was there—a perfect home in every way. And the more we reviewed the situation, the more it appealed to us. In fact we boys were inclined to be decidedly elated. From our point of view there was nothing whatever to be alarmed about.

As for Lord Dorrimore, he was a boy himself. Added to which, he loathed civilised countries and preferred the wilds any day. It would be no hardship to him to remain on Holiday Island.

But there were the officers and crew to think about. They had wives and families, and naturally wished to return home as soon as possible. The fact that they would receive full pay right through, however, and a percentage of the treasure in addition, made them regard their lot without much anxiety.

Nelson Lee was worried, however. He was

not at all keen upon living on a Pacific Island for an indefinite period. And the same applied to Eileen and Aunt Esther—particularly to Eileen. She was engaged, and it was only natural that her fiancé should be anxious at her prolonged absence. But Eileen was a girl in a thousand. She didn't utter a grumble of any sort, but accepted the situation with a light-hearted laugh and a hope that we should soon overcome the difficulty.

The whole matter was discussed at length during breakfast. We were all full of wonder at the weird tricks old Mother Earth had played upon us. But, as Nelson Lee explained, even stranger phenomena had occurred.

"The really extraordinary thing about the position is that the rock barrier should be so complete," said Nelson Lee. "It would take years, and hundreds of labourers, to build a wall that thickness and height across the lagoon; and here it was raised by Nature's mighty hand in but a few minutes. The wall is complete, and the sea is barred out."

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"An' we're barred in!" he said. "We're like a choice collection of Robinson Crusoes. By gad! I wouldn't have missed this adventure for worlds! If that infernal volcano doesn't start in business again we shall be as happy as sandboys on this island."

"That's all very well, Dorrie," smiled Nelson Lee. "You wouldn't like to remain here for three or four years, would you?"

"I don't care if we remain here ten!" replied Dorrie calmly. "As long as we're not in London it doesn't matter a toss. I'm a lazy bounder, an' this kind of life suits me down to the ground."

"We are not all built like you, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "These boys, I am sure, are most anxious to get back to St. Frank's in time for the next term."

"Oh, rather!" grinned Sir Montie. "Frightfully anxious, sir!"

"Well, I'm not!" said Handforth bluntly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth always took people literally, and his mighty brain did not perceive that both Nelson Lee and Montie had been joking.

"Oh, so you are not, Handforth?" said the gov'nor smoothly. "If we are compelled to remain on this island for long I shall have to turn the saloon into a school-room and give you lessons——"

"Oh!"

"You—you ain't serious, sir?"

"Rather not!"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"Well, we need not enter into these matters at present," he said lightly. "It seems to me that you are in no way dismayed by what has occurred. I shall certainly make no attempt to destroy your good spirits, and I trust that matters will adjust themselves smoothly before long."

"What about the treasure, sir?" I asked.

"In that respect we ought to feel thankful," said Lee. "But for this extraordinary happening I am afraid we should have been

compelled to abandon our plans for the recovery of the Spanish gold. But now of course the matter is simplicity itself. We need only walk into the galleon and help ourselves."

"Oh! Shall we start after breakfast, sir?" asked McClure.

"Yes, we may as well satisfy ourselves at once," said the gov'nor. "What do you say, Captain Burton?"

"By all means, Mr. Lee—by all means," replied the skipper. "I am quite anxious to learn the truth regarding the treasure. My officers and men are anxious, too, I believe."

So when we went up on deck again we were not in a gloomy mood. The first shock was over, and we had grown accustomed to the new order of things. At the same time it was remarkable to come on deck and know that we could walk straight down the ladder on to dry land. There had been a big addition placed to the ladder, of course.

"Say, I don't care a darned thing what happens!" grinned Farman delightedly. "I guess this is a dandy holiday. Gee! I hope we don't get the yacht afloat for a month or two. How do you say, pard?"

"Why the longer we're here the better—what?" said De Valerie calmly. "I've no objection, and I don't believe anybody else has."

The Bos'un grinned.

"Shiver my bowsprit!" he exclaimed heartily. "I'm just thinkin' what luck we're having. Last night things looked pretty bad, but, by hokey, they're all right now, mess-mates!"

"Sure!"

"Begad! I ain't grumblin' at all," was Sir Montie's remark.

We were all eager to discover if Captain Burton's treasure was a reality or a myth. And this point was soon settled. Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Captain Burton donned mechanics' overalls—borrowed from the chief engineer—and then we all descended the ladder and walked along to the galleon.

"It's queer—it's doocedly queer!" said Dorrie. "Fancy you fightin' a shark just about this very spot yesterday afternoon, Lee! The world's full of queer things, an' no mistake!"

"Wise words, O N'Kose," said Umlosi, who was with us. "I am lost in amazement at these strange occurrences. We have wondrous

things in Kutaland, but none to compare with this."

The galleon was simply a mass of rotten, water-soaked woodwork. It was rather a ticklish business getting inside. And here there were many pockets of water still left. But Nelson Lee led the way in slowly and carefully. Captain Burton and Dorrie disappeared after him, and we saw nothing of them for some little time.

Then Nelson Lee emerged, carrying a small brass-box in his hands. At least, I supposed it to be brass at the time, for it was tarnished to such an extent that the colour was scarcely recognisable. It was actually made of gold, and when the gov'nor opened it we saw scores and hundreds of oddly sized pebbles.

"Well, that's a fat lot to find, sir!" exclaimed Handforth in disgust.

"You are quite right, my boy," said Nelson Lee. "The contents of this casket are worth some hundreds of thousands of pounds."

"Those—those pebbles!" gasped Tommy Watson.

"They are uncut diamonds, Watson, and some of them are superb stones," said the gov'nor calmly. "This treasure alone was well worth the finding."

"But I thought there was a lot of gold, sir?" asked Handforth.

"There are no less than ten chests of gold pieces within the wreck," said Nelson Lee. "They are all full, and the value of the find is certainly well over half a million sterling."

"Phew!"

There was joy amongst the crew when the news leaked out. Their proportion would be quite large for each man. At least five hundred pounds would go to every member of the crew, and more in proportion to the officers. This was very liberal indeed, but it only represented a very small percentage of the whole.

Nelson Lee and Captain Burton and Mr. Scott made a survey of the rock barrier, and found that nothing could be done. The sea was cut off as effectively as though miles of land separated it from us.

But unknown to us, the rascally Captain Jelka was by no means finished with. He was indeed on his way to the island, and his arrival would be the signal for many further stirring adventures and excitements.

THE END.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE IRON WAY," etc., etc.**SAM CARVER'S PLUCK.**

"**W**HISTLE the level, Sam," cried Bob Burton to his fireman, Sam Carver, as the heavy locomotive engine he drove approached a crossing.

Sam did as he was ordered; then, seizing his shovel, commenced replenishing the engine fire.

A minute later an ejaculation of alarm from the engine-driver caused Carver to look up.

"Jam on the brakes, Sam, for all you are worth! Look ahead!" cried the driver.

And, glancing through the circular look-out, Sam's heart almost stood still as he saw the baby form of a two-year-old boy chasing a butterfly along the metals, right in the track of the onrushing train.

There was no need for the engine-driver to repeat his order. Working until the veins stood out on his forehead, the fireman twizzled round the wheel of the brake, but it was of little use. The lines were slippery, the heavy load of minerals shoved her onward, and the engine was bearing down upon the unconscious youngster almost as quickly as before.

Suddenly a woman's shriek rang out in the distance, and the next moment a lovely girl of about eighteen rushed from the gatekeeper's cottage, looked wildly around, then flew to the rescue of the baby, whilst a young man, leaning against the posts of the big gates, watched on, too terror-stricken to move.

"We'll never do it. We'll never pull up in time!" cried Bob Burton, hastening to his comrade's assistance.

"Stick to her, Bob! I'll save them if I can," cried Sam.

And the next moment he was scrambling along the running-plate to the front of the engine. Then, throwing himself at full length across the bogey, he grasped the plate with one hand, whilst with the other he raised the baby from the ground, just as the fender touched its tiny frock.

Then, with a sigh of relief, he drew the child towards him, and, trembling in every limb now that the need of action was over, clasped the little mite to his panting breast, too shaken by his recent terrible experience

to dare the hazardous journey back to the footplate.

Shortly afterwards the engine came to a halt, and, springing from the bogey, Sam hastened along the permanent way towards where the young man he had before noticed was raising the frightened girl in his arms.

Even as Sam Carver drew near she opened her eyes, and, with an ejaculation of contempt, thrust the man from her.

"Gently, lass—gently!" he said, a dull flush of resentment dyeing his face. "Don't you know me? I am Josh Bluett, your promised husband, lass."

"I know you, not for what I thought you, but for what you are—a coward, who would let a woman and a child perish without stirring a finger to help them!" she cried, casting a glance of withering contempt upon the not ill-looking but sullen-faced young man.

The next moment she had turned to Sam Carver, and, taking the baby boy from his arms, repaid him with a glance so full of gratitude and admiration that he felt the warm blood coursing through his veins as it had never done before.

"Thank you, sir! Thank you a thousand times! But for you my baby brother and myself would be lying mangled beneath the engine's wheels. You are indeed a man!" she cried gratefully.

"I am very glad I happened to be there, miss," returned Sam Carver, blushing furiously.

Bending down, he kissed the frightened face of the baby boy, and held out his hand to his sister. Then the next moment, with an indescribable feeling of triumphant joy not unmingled with a sort of bashful terror, he felt the girl's disengaged arm flung round his neck, and her full, ripe lips pressed to his own.

"There, that's how I reward a brave man! I am Fenn's daughter, who keeps the crossing. Come and see me as soon as you can," she cried, as, scarcely knowing whether he was walking on his head or his heels, Sam made for the engine, the driver of which was whistling impatiently for his fireman to rejoin him.

As he swung himself on to the footplate of the engine he looked back, to see Kitty Fenn turn her back on Bluett with a contemptuous toss of her pretty head as she hastened towards the cottage.

Having a day off shortly afterwards, Sam Carver thought he could not do less than visit the gatekeeper's cottage and ask after the baby boy.

Strange to say, although Sam had travelled fifty miles on purpose to see the youngster, after the first greeting he scarcely spoke to him, but confined his attentions to Kitty Fenn, until at last the gathering darkness warned him that it was time to take his departure.

Scarcely a week now passed without Carver calling at the Fenn's cottage, until one happy evening he plucked up sufficient courage to

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

JUST IN TIME

put his arm round Kitty Fenn's waist and to whisper the words of love which had so long hovered on his lips, for Kitty had taken care to inform him, at his first visit, that she had sent Josh Bluett about his business and, as plainly as a woman could intimate, that she was quite willing Sam should take his place.

A happy man indeed was Sam Carver when he returned to the large Midland town from the running shed of which his engine, he now being a driver, emerged every morning to take its load east or west, north or south, according to the will of those above him.

"Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing," and a few weeks later he had persuaded Kitty Fenn to name Christmas Day as the day on which she would become Mrs. Carver.

To be near his work Sam had hired a little house near Belminster, the Midland town to and from which his engine hauled its valuable freight of minerals.

The morning before Christmas Day Sam Carver received orders to proceed light to a colliery on the main line of the Midland Union system to bring back a heavy load of coal.

As with only a guard's brake behind him the engine flew over the rails, his fireman asked if he had heard that a special train, containing one of the crowned heads of Europe, who was on a visit to the King, would pass over the loop-line connecting the Midland Union with the Great Northern, which passed through Belminster.

Sam, with his head too full of Kitty Fenn to trouble about anyone else in the world, crowned or uncrowned, made some laughing reply, and forgot all about the fireman's information, although ere he returned to Belminster he would have it brought back to his mind with fearful force.

BLUETT'S REVENGE.

ARRIVED at his destination, Sam found that, owing to the Christmas traffic, he would be delayed at the colliery. However, although he had promised Kitty to get back as quickly as he could, he was too happy to trouble much about the delay, and about four o'clock, coupled on to as heavy a train of minerals as his engine had ever drawn, he puffed out of the colliery siding, crossed the main line, and commenced his homeward journey.

As is often the case with loop-lines, the gradients were in some places exceedingly severe—in fact the line between the collieries and Belminster was known as the "switch-back," and the driver of a heavy train required no little judgment to drive his engine up and down the stiff inclines.

Ere leaving the colliery a waybill had been given him, by which he saw that he had to take his engine into a siding some ten miles from Belminster, there to await the passage of the Royal special.

As he approached the signal-box commanding the siding against which he expected to

be shunted whilst the special passed, he shut off steam in obedience to the red light shining from the top of the semaphore.

His fireman spoke to him, but Sam Carver did not answer; his face was glued against the look-out, watching, with contracted brow, the brilliantly lighted box he was rapidly approaching.

"What's up, Sam?" asked his fireman.

"The pointsman is larking about in the box with somebody or other. He'll get into trouble for breaking the company's regulations one of these days," was the reply.

"What are they doing?" asked the fireman, leaning over the side and gazing towards the box.

"Nothing now," returned Sam, as his engine came to a halt. "But a minute ago he seemed to be wrestling with a tall, dark chap. Hallo! What the dickens is the meaning of this?" he added the next minute, as he saw the white light of safety shining where the red had been a minute before.

Instinctively he placed his hand on the starting-lever; but the next moment it dropped to his side.

"Look here, Jack, there's something wrong about this, unless the special has been countermanded, and we would have heard of it before we left the collieries if it had been. Jump off, and see what's up, will you?"

The fireman nodded, and, springing from the footplate to the permanent-way, Sam saw him pass the headlights of the engine, then disappear in the darkness.

Five minutes went by, and Sam, unwilling to leave his engine to open the points leading into the siding, and yet conscious of the danger of remaining where he was, had his hand on the whistle-chain preparatory to summoning the signal-box, when a man loomed from out the darkness into the circle of light cast by the open furnace door.

"Get on ahead, driver! The special has been delayed!"

Sam looked searchingly at the speaker. He wore a cloth cap drawn down over his eyes, with the collar of a rough frieze ulster turned up to his ears; and yet there was something familiar in the man's speech, and also in the glitter of the dark, flashing eyes which looked into his.

"Where's my fireman?" he demanded. "And who are you?"

"Your fireman has sprained his ankle. I'll take his place," said the man, springing on the footplate.

More certain than ever that mischief of some kind was in the wind, Carver closed with his antagonist, but ere his hands could grip the other's throat a blow from behind stretched him, dazed and strengthless, but still conscious, on the footplate.

For some moments he heard, without understanding what was said, a whispered conversation being carried on by two or three men.

Then Bluett took the rope a man threw him, and passed it swiftly round the engine-driver's ankles and legs.

(Continued overleaf.)

"Now, then, hurry up! You will have the special here ere the mineral gets under way!" cried a foreigner a few minutes later.

"All right, sir. I'll bundle him off the footplate, then start the engine, and jump off myself!" cried Bluett, looking stealthily to where his fellow-conspirators were talking eagerly on the six-foot way.

The next moment he stooped down, raised a huge lump of coal from the engine, and sent it crashing into the fence by the side of the road—the prearranged sign; then, throwing off the brakes, he thrust open the lever to its utmost extent, and, stooping for a moment, cried in a hoarse whisper in Sam's ear:

"Good-bye, mate! Don't worry about Kitty. I'll take care of her when you are smashed beyond recognition!"

And as the engine, with a full head of steam on her, bounded like a spurred horse along the metals, he sprang off the footplate towards his comrades.

But the next moment a loud shriek of despair re-echoed through the night. Thinking only of revenge, Bluett had not looked where he was jumping, with the result that he struck against a telegraph-post, then rebounded to his death beneath the wheels of the heavily-laden trucks.

The blow he had received, the quick succession of events which followed each other with bewildering rapidity, all served to confuse Sam Carver's brain, until at last, realising that the engine with its load of coal-trucks was dashing on to meet the special, he pulled himself together with an effort and tried to risk, that he might shut off steam and sound his whistle to warn the driver of the special that all was not right.

But ere he had sprung from the footplate Bluett had passed the ends of the rope round the engine's reversing-lever, with the result that, strain his utmost, wriggle, struggle as he might, Carver could not rise to his feet, until at last, worn out and breathless, he lay with his head amongst the coals, his feet against the firebox, panting, despairing, and breathless, waiting for the crash to come, which would hurl the lighter special off the rails.

It was terrible, maddening, being tied there, bound hand and foot, as powerless to stop the engine as though a hundred miles away.

Suddenly an idea entered his head—an idea which might perhaps prevent a fearful accident, but at the cost of his own life.

A moment's hesitation; then, with a groan of "Good-bye, Kitty!" he drew back his feet and kicked the glass of the water-gauge with all his force.

The next instant the roar of escaping steam struck upon his ears, a white cloud swept over him, and a cry of agony, as the boil-

ing water fell upon his legs, burst from his lips as the gallant driver lost consciousness.

"Hallo! Where am I?"
Sam Carver opened his eyes and looked around him.

"What's happened? Warn the special!"

"It's all right, Sam. Don't you recognise me? I'm Kitty."

"Kitty—"
Sam Carver could say no more; his head fell back, and, with a cry of "He's dying!" Kitty Fenn thrust her arm beneath his head and raised it from the splendidly upholstered lounge of the special saloon to which he had been carried.

Presently she looked up.
"Oh, sir," she implored, turning swiftly to a tall, dark man by her side, "he risked his life for you—save him!"

"My physician will do all he can," replied the gentleman who was none other than the foreign monarch.

Jack, his fireman, who had been knocked senseless by the side of the line against the signal-box, had recovered consciousness soon enough to scramble, unseen, upon the train. Passing from truck to truck, he reached the engine just as Sam Carver broke the water-gauge, and had pulled him out of danger. Then, as it was impossible to reach the regulator for the steam and boiling water which was shooting like a fountain from it, he had dragged his mate to safety and awaited the approach of the special.

As the reader will remember, the single line had many gradients, and, fortunately, the engine, unable to draw her heavy load up the next incline, stopped ere she reached the dip, and was drawn back by the weight behind her, until she was rushing, with constantly increasing speed, back whence she had come, carried by her own momentum over the switchback-like line.

Then the driver of the special, seeing the headlights of the engine before him, was able to stop before he overtook the runaway, which came to a halt at the bottom of a dip not far from the signal-box where the attack upon the engine had been made.

Then the fireman had carried his mate into the saloon, and the special backed to Belminster, where Sam was found badly scalded, but otherwise uninjured.

Needless to say, the anticipated wedding was postponed; but not for long. Six weeks later, instead of the quiet wedding they had anticipated, a very grand function took place, for the fame of Sam's heroic action had been carried far and wide, and a large crowd had assembled to see Kitty Fenn united to the hero of the hour.

THE END.