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By the Author of "The Valley
of the Unknown," etc., etc.

(The Narrative Related Throughout by Nipper.)

CHAPTER I.

THE DRIFTING BOAT—CAPTAIN JELKS'S SCHEME —LUCK FAVOURS THE WICKED.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM BARROW, owner and skipper of the schooner Aurora, swore choicely under his breath, removed his pipe from between his teeth, and spat overside with a neatness and precision borne of long years of experience.

"A blamed set of lazy swabs, that's wot they are!" he exclaimed in husky tones. "If they ain't careful, Ned, I'll smash some of their 'eads!"

"The cook seems to be the worst of 'em," remarked Mr. Ned Brown, the mate. "Not as it's much good smashin' their 'eads, cap'n. I've kicked the cook out of his galley more than once, but it don't learn 'im anything."

The skipper and mate of the Aurora were pacing the schooner's poop, and the night was mild and dark. The subject under discussion was quite a prosaic one, the cook being a cook in name only. The messes he served up, disguised by the name of dinner, had caused indignation both in the fo'c'sle and in the cabin. Drastic treatment only seemed to make the cook worse.

"I'll talk to the scum in the mornin'!" declared Captain Barrow, thrusting his pipe between his teeth again. "It don't matter a cuss to me wot the 'ands get, but I'll see that the cabin is looked after proper. You were a blamed fool, Ned, for signin' on that food destroyer when we started the v'yage."

"Why, I never seed the fool until after we'd bin at sea for twenty-four hours," protested the mate.

"No, you was too drunk!" remarked the skipper. "Any'ow, the cook's going to serve up proper grub in the cabin, or I'll know the reason why! I guess no darned sea cook is going to pizen me with his blamed swills!"

Captain Barrow was a formidable person when he liked. He was known as "Bully Bill" Barrow at 'Frisco and all along the Pacific coast, and it was generally acknowledged that no crew would join the Aurora

unless they were drunk at the time. For the schooner had a bad name—and not without reason. Practically every man aboard was a ruffian of the worst type, from the skipper downwards.

On this particular night the old vessel was sailing at a gentle five knots in the region of the Southern Atlantic. The breeze was light, and the patched old sails were fully spread. With a decent wind, however, the Aurora could show a clean pair of heels to most other sailing ships, for she was speedy in her way.

"Wot's that over to starb'd?" remarked the mate suddenly.

He was leaning against the rail, staring out across the smooth, dark sea. Captain Barrow stared also. And the two men faintly distinguished a small black spot upon the surface of the ocean.

"Looks like a boat," suggested the captain. "Just 'and me my glass, Ned."

With the aid of the glass Captain Barrow was able to state positively that the dark object was a boat. Furthermore, there were two figures in it—possibly more. And the little craft was being rowed towards the schooner.

Barrow gave the man at the wheel a brusque order, and the Aurora altered her course slightly, bearing down upon the strange boat. Presently a voice made itself heard in the still night air.

"Schooner ahoy!"

"They're English-speakin', any'ow," said Captain Barrow. "I'll just find out who they are, but I ain't carryin' no thunderin' passengers!"

The boat was much nearer now.

"Ease up, there!" came the voice again. "We want to come aboard—What nationality are you?"

"American, out of 'Frisco!" shouted the mate.

"Why, blame me, I'd swear that I know that voice!" exclaimed the skipper, staring into the darkness. "Who are you?" he asked, raising his tones. "What's your darned name—the chap who's just been speakin'?"

"I'm Captain Jelks—"

"By thunder!" roared Barrow. "Jelks! Rouse them lazy swabs, Ned; we're goin' to take these fellers aboard, I guess. Say, it's Jelks—my old pal Jelks!"

Ten minutes later the occupants of the boat were on board the *Aurora*, and Captain William Barrow was shaking hands heartily with Captain Ebenezer Jelks and Mr. Bill Larson, his mate. The other five men were for'ard hands, and they were sent down into the fo'c'sle.

"Well, I guess I'm a heap surprised," said Bully Bill frankly.

"Not so surprised as I am, old pal," said Captain Jelks. "Why, I never 'oped for meeting' you to-night, Bill. Wot do you say, Bill?"

"Never was so surprised in my life," declared the second Bill—alias Mr. Larson. "Fancy comin' acrost the old schooner in these latitudes. The world ain't so big, arter all!"

"'Ad bad luck, ain't you?" asked Captain Barrow. "I guess you don't look as though you've been in that darned boat for long. Wot was it—derelict, or fire, or wot?"

"If the positions was reversed," said Captain Jelks pointedly, "I'd ask you down into the cabin to 'ave a nip an' a jaw——"

"I guess I ain't slow to take a 'int," put in the *Aurora's* skipper. "Come right down, Jelks, old son. You too, Larson."

The three men descended to the cabin, where the stuffy air smelt strongly of spirits and stale, rank tobacco. The lamp was already lighted, and Barrow turned it up. Then the three men sat down and partook of whisky. Mr. Brown was left on deck.

"We've been 'avin' bad luck, Bill," said Captain Jelks, after he had emptied his glass. "Fair crool luck, as I might say. Me an' Larson are out for a fortune—at least, we was. Drat that blamed nigger!"

"Let's 'ave the yarn," said Barrow, eyeing his guests curiously.

"I dessay you've 'eard me speak of a man of the name of Cap'n Burton?" asked Jelks.

"'Im an' me 'ave 'ad more than one scrap, an' we ain't exactly wot you might call friends. Well, Cap'n Burton is a sly 'ound, an' some time ago 'e larned that treasure was to be found on some forsaken Pacific island——"

"Poof! I guess I've 'eard them yarns before!" sneered Barrow.

"Mebbe," was Jelks's reply. "I've 'eard 'em, too—more than I could tell of. But this 'ere yarn 'appens to be true. If it wasn't, you wouldn't see me wastin' time an' money on it. By ginger! Every penny I 'ad went, tryin' to get the better o' Burton. An' now I've failed!"

"I'm bound for the Pacific," remarked Captain Barrow. "But you wouldn't find me foolin' after some imaginary treasure, I guess. But you've surprised me, Jelks. I always thought you was a smart feller——"

"An' so I am!" snapped Jelks. "Luck was agin me, that's all. This Cap'n Burton set off from England in a steam yacht, owned by a dude named Lord Dorrimore. An' there was a whole crowd with 'em—schoolboys an'

ladies an' all sorts. A reg'lar party, holidayin'. Well, I tricked 'em about as neat as you can think of, got 'old of the yacht an' shoved the whole crowd aboard the dirty old tramp I'd been commandin'. A pretty piece o' work it was, Barrow."

"Why ain't you on the yacht now?" asked Barrow pointedly.

Captain Jelks scowled.

"Because of a blamed nigger from Africa, named Umlosi," he replied; "an' because my men was a set of thunderin' fools. This nigger an' some o' the kids managed to 'ide on board. And afore we'd got fairly out o' sight the nigger broke away, charged on deck, and slung a couple of men overboard. I fired at 'im, but there was somethin' wrong wi' my gun——"

"With your aim, I guess!" put in Barrow drily.

"I ain't denyin' it," admitted Jelks. "I was fair riled. An', afore I could fire agin, I'm blamed if the nigger didn't jump on to the bridge like a monkey an' sling me overboard, too!"

"An' I follered!" growled Mr. Larson.

Captain Barrow grinned.

"An' that's wot you call bein' smart?" he suggested.

"No, it ain't!" snapped Jelks. "It was bad luck—just that, an' nothing more. I 'ad the yacht in my 'ands, and everything was goin' smooth. Arter we 'ad been chucked overboard my crew 'adn't a spark of fight left. A boat was lowered with three men in it, an' the four of us was picked up. But the yacht was steamin' away—an' we're stranded."

"When did this 'appen?" asked Captain Barrow.

"Not more than two hours ago."

"Why didn't you get back to your own ship?"

"Well, I reckoned it was a bit too risky," said Jelks, shaking his head. "We should 'ave bin shoved in irons, likely as not, for Burton would 'ave collared us for sure. So we waited a bit, an' then saw this craft."

Barrow chuckled.

"Well, I guess you've had a heap of hard luck, Jelks," he remarked. "You're welcome to stay aboard this ship until we reach port. But your little game's sort o' sick, I reckon. Say, you're just about on your uppers?"

Jelks bent forward, his eyes gleaming.

"Didn't you say you was bound for the Pacific?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Anywhere near Zambua?"

"We shall pass within a 'undred miles, I dessay."

"By ginger!" exclaimed Jelks tensely. "Then we might——"

"Say, don't git no fool notions of that kind," said Captain Barrow, interrupting roughly. "I ain't likely to go chasin' around after some blamed treasure that don't exist. I thought you was a level-headed man, Jelks."

"Look 'ere, you can take it from me that this thing's a real cinch—as you'd call it," said Jelks earnestly. "It's the real goods,

Barrow. That treasure's worth every farthing of 'arf a million—pounds, not dollars. An' it's on a little island practically within a stone's-throw of Zambua."

Barrow removed his pipe impatiently.

"You ain't got no sense, Jelks," he snapped. "Wot the thunder can we do against a fast yacht? Why, this old hooker wouldn't git around them latitudes until these pals o' yours 'ad cleared off——"

"Well, that's to be seen," said Jelks shrewdly. "They're goin' to call at some port for coals, an' they'll likely stay there for a day or two, accin' the sights. That's one delay. If we strike fair winds we shall be able to get to this island about a week arter the yacht. It'll still be there, them bein' a 'oliday party, an' there's no tellin' but wot we could gain the upper 'and."

"Gee! A fight?" asked the American skipper.

"Why not?" said Jelks. "We've got guns aboard—revolvers, any'ow. We could sail up in the night an' surprise 'em. Down in them waters we can do as we like; there ain't such a thing as law. If one or two of 'em git killed, that's their fault. An' when we git the treasure, we'll share; you shall 'ave 'a third, Barrow. Wot do you say?"

Captain Barrow was certainly interested, and he proved this by making many inquiries and demanding further details. These were supplied at once. Jelks also produced a map, which had been executed by Captain Burton, and which Jelks had stolen. It gave the exact position of the treasure and how it could be reached.

"It'll be a chance—a sportin' chance," declared Jelks. "We might win, an' we mightn't. Any'ow, it won't make much difference to you, Bill, since the old boat won't be took far out of her course."

Captain Barrow extended his hand.

"Right!" he said. "I'll guess we'll try it on!"

And in that informal manner the compact was sealed. Barrow had stipulated, however, that he should receive half the treasure if it was obtained. Captain Jelks readily agreed, for he was quite helpless without the aid of the other skipper.

It was fully realised that the odds were against them. But luck favoured the wicked on this occasion, for the Aurora encountered fair weather and excellent winds. She travelled speedily, and the spirits of Barrow and Jelks rose accordingly.

"I guess luck's with us," remarked Bully Bill one day. "Why, say, we're shiftin' pretty near as fast as that darnation yacht."

The rest of the voyage was uneventful, and the Aurora arrived within sight of the island of Zambua one gloriously fine evening. At that particular time very exciting events were occurring on Holiday Island—as the treasure-hunt party had named the little coral islet.

If Jelks and Barrow had only known it, luck was favouring them to a far greater extent than they would have dared hope for. They could not have arrived at a more opportune moment, even if they had planned

and plotted for weeks—even if they had prepared their campaign in every tiny detail.

In this old schooner, going practically blindly to the island, they stumbled upon it at the precise moment when they could gain the mastery without even a fight! Not only that, but Jelks and Co. were the unwitting means of saving the lives of the holiday party—including myself.

It must be understood that I—Nipper—am telling this history. I wasn't on board the Aurora, of course, but I know all the principal points, and it's been easy to fill in the details from what transpired afterwards.

And the schooner dropped her anchor just opposite the lagoon to the south-west of the island. Unlike many coral islands, an anchorage was possible fairly close inshore, without fear of being drifted on to the reef. The newcomers had the advantage of Captain Burton's map, and recognised the little bay at once—even in the starlight.

Two boats were sent ashore at once, containing Jelks and Larson and eighteen men. Captain Barrow preferred to remain on board his own ship, believing, probably, that the trip would not be a very safe one.

A surprise awaited the party, for they found that the lagoon itself was as dry as a ditch in summer-time, and that, more astounding than ever, the yacht lay stranded high and dry!

It appeared to be quite deserted, and Jelks did not approach it. For one reason, he thought that perhaps the Aurora's approach might have been seen, and that an ambush had been laid. But the chief reason was that a curiously lurid glare lit up the sky from the centre of the island. The island itself was a tiny one, and the origin of the glare could only be a mile off at the most.

"Camp fires!" exclaimed Jelks. "That's wot they are, Bill. The whole party is campin' in some valley—havin' a high old time. We'll just go an' 'ave a look on, an' decide things when we've found out the lie o' the land."

"That's the ticket," said Mr. Larson, nodding.

"I'm blamed if I can git the 'ang of it," went on Jelks. "It might be best for us to board the yacht an' take possession. But Burton's a sly dog, an' I'm scared of an ambush. 'Igh an' dry! I reckon there must ha' been one o' them thunderin' earthquakes, or something!"

Feeling uncertain and decidedly curious, the party pressed on. Their boat had been left against a barrier of rocks which cut off the lagoon from the sea. And now they made their way inland, guided by the glare in the sky.

Luck favoured them again, for they were about to plunge into the undergrowth, with the intention of mounting a hill, when one of the crew noticed a gleam of light apparently in the centre of the hill itself.

It was then found that a tunnel opened up in a mass of rock, and a torch was burning just within the entrance. The thing was nearly out, and only glowed dully. But it served to show the invaders where they were.

It also revealed the fact that not a living soul was near.

Revolver in hand, Jelks led the way. The party proceeded through the tunnel with great caution. A bend was negotiated, and then a glow in the distance told them that the valley was within sight.

"Why, we've got 'em bottled up!" muttered Jelks exultantly. "We can hold this tunnel as easy as winkin'—"

"Let's see wot's 'appenin' first!" interjected Larson shortly.

They continued on their way, and at length emerged cautiously from the tunnel—and were amazed. For the sight before them was sufficient to make them wonder if this was not all a dream.

A deep valley lay before them, and hundreds of torches were blazing on every side. But the most astounding thing of all was the plight of Captain Burton, Lord Dorrimore, Nelson Lee, and the entire yacht's party—guests, officers, crew, and all!

For everybody lay on the ground—helpless! They were all bound hand and foot, and were unable to move an inch. There was one exception in Umlosi, for he was not bound. But he lay full length, utterly exhausted. Indeed, it seemed as though he were unconscious.

And Jelks and Co. marched into the valley, too astonished and exultant to say anything for the moment. Not only had they landed upon the island without resistance, but they now found their enemies absolutely at their mercy!

The situation was extraordinary.

CHAPTER II.

A FEW DETAILS—LORD DORRIMORE IS IN NO HURRY—LYING LOW.

CAPTAIN JELKS did not notice it at first, but five members of the original party were not in the valley. They weren't so far off, but the situation was not quite so completely satisfactory as Jelks was led to believe. True, the advantage was with him, but there was still a loophole.

The five individuals who were not to be seen were the one and only Lord Dorrimore himself; Sir Montie Tregellis-West; Captain Burton's son, Tom Burton; Mr. Scott, the yacht's first officer, and myself.

We were not so helpless as the poor old gov'nor—Nelson Lee—and all the others. As a matter of fact, at the moment of Captain Jelks's entry into the valley, we stood at the top of a steep gully, gazing down upon the weird scene. And, needless to add, we were astonished and startled.

Now, in order to make things clear, I'm going to add a few details. They may not be interesting, but they're necessary. Certain things had been happening—certain things which had led up to this strange position—and there is no sense in denying that our party, as a whole, was in a tight corner.

Certainly, the corner had been much tighter a short while before, and perhaps we didn't feel quite so chagrined at Captain Jelks's appearance as we should have done under ordinary circumstances. To be quite frank, we almost regarded that pretty scoundrel as a saviour!

That sounds rather queer, I know, for Jelks was about our worst enemy. But it's a solemn fact.

Captain Jelks had made himself objectionable even before we left St. Frank's on this summer holiday trip to the Pacific. He wanted to get hold of the treasure, of course, and to judge by the determined efforts he had made, he was undoubtedly a man who believed in persistence.

We had had several adventures with him, including that affair in the Atlantic when he had succeeded in seizing the yacht. Umlosi had turned the tables on that occasion, but only by sheer brute force. Umlosi was a great pal of Lord Dorrimore's, and a big pot in his own way. For Umlosi was King of Kutanaland.

Well, we positively believed that Jelks had been swept off the map after that affray in mid-ocean. And we had practically forgotten him by the time we reached the island.

Other events had occurred which made things hum.

Almost upon our first day in the lagoon Nature had asserted herself in the most positive fashion. There was a volcano on the island, and it had done its utmost to smoke us off the horizon. At the same time weird volcanic changes had occurred. A great barrier of rocks had risen out of the sea, cutting off the lagoon, and, incidentally, bottling up the yacht.

But this wasn't the worst. During the ensuing night every drop of water had drained away from the lagoon and had left our proud vessel sitting upon the bed of the lagoon, high and dry—stranded. Now this was a pretty pickle, and no mistake.

Not only were we helpless upon the island, but we were at the mercy of any invaders who happened to come along. And they came all right! That's why Jelks had found everything so rosy.

With regard to the treasure, this had been within the old rotting timbers of a Spanish galleon, which had also been left high and dry by the volcanic disturbance. In one way, therefore, we were greatly assisted, although I'm afraid we weren't very grateful.

The treasure consisted of gold pieces and jewels to the value of about six hundred thousand pounds—roughly estimated. But what the dickens was the good of it to us, stuck helplessly upon this coral island in a part of the Pacific which was seldom, if ever, visited?

We had stowed it all on board the yacht, certainly, but the yacht was about as much use as a New York sky-scraper, so far as sailing away from the island was concerned. And while we were trying to think of some

means of escape, other excitement had come upon us.

The island of Zambua was situated about fifteen miles distant, and this island was the dwelling place of a tribe of savages who out-rivalled the head-hunters of Papua when it came to ferocity.

They evidently regarded the volcano as a kind of god, and visited this little islet at regular intervals after each eruption. Well, on this last occasion they had found us in possession, and then the band began to play!

War canoes by the score came along, and a great battle ensued. Luckily we had half a dozen excellent machine-guns, and these were mounted upon the rock-barrier which divided the lagoon bed from the sea. Without a doubt we could have kept the savages back if it hadn't been for an unfortunate incident. Lord Dorrimore's gun jammed in some way, and before he knew where he was the hostile blacks surrounded him, carried him off, and then threatened to kill him before our eyes unless we instantly surrendered.

It was impossible to see poor old Dorrie murdered in cold blood, and everybody, from the gov'nor downwards, agreed that the only possible course was to give in. And that's what we did.

Helplessly bound, we had been carried into the mysterious valley, and a wild dance had followed. We were all there—the yacht's officers and crew, Captain Burton, Handforth and Co., and the other St. Frank's juniors, Eileen Dare and her aunt, and the gov'nor and I—and, of course, Dorrie and Umlosi.

We fully believed that some dreadful fate awaited us. Poor old Umlosi was tied to a rock pillar in the middle of a pool, and the blacks danced round him. And while this mad ceremony was in progress I managed to free my hands.

After that, Dorrie and Montie and the Bo'sun and Mr. Scott were freed also. It was our intention to release everybody, if it could possibly be managed. But when the proceedings had reached that stage the blacks had ceased their dance, and we five had slipped away into the darkness.

Lord Dorrimore's idea was to get to the yacht and obtain large supplies of fireworks. Well, we had done this, and the fireworks were now concealed in a cleft amidst the rocks not far from the shore.

But when we arrived back, in order to see how things were going, we found, to our amazement, that Captain Jelks and his men were in the valley! And then we knew why the blacks had ceased their dance. They had become aware of the schooner's approach, and had believed that a superior force was advancing against them. And so they had skeddaddled away from the island at full speed.

Thus, when Jelks and his men arrived, the Zambuans had gone, and the main portion of the party were still prisoners in the valley. Dorrie's firework idea was unnecessary under the new circumstances, for Jelks

and Co. would not be frightened by some patent red fire and a few rockets.

It was necessary to readjust our focus, so to speak. We had to look at the thing in a new light. And it must be admitted that we were relieved. Jelks and his ruffians seemed to be very inoffensive people compared with the murderous cannibals. But they were formidable all the same.

Poor old Umlosi had been going through the mill during our absence. In short, he had had a fight to the death with a tremendous octopod—the inhabitant of the pool Umlosi had won, but he was completely exhausted.

And now we five at the top of the gully found ourselves looking down upon a strange scene. Our friends below were at the mercy of these new invaders. It was a galling position, but it had its good points. At least they wouldn't be sacrificed to the monster of the pool. And that, I am firmly convinced, was to have been our fate.

Having bored you to death with these details, I'll now get on with the yarn. Lord Dorrimore had taken everything very calmly, and he seemed to be in no way upset by this new discovery. But I was upset, and so was Sir Montie—to say nothing of the Bo'sun and Mr. Scott.

"Begad! It's shockin'!" exclaimed Tregellis-West. "We shall have to do somethin'—we shall, really!"

"Rather!" I declared anxiously. "It's no good sticking here, Dorrie. We must hurry down there to the rescue——"

"My dear, good Nipper, I wish you'd use those brains of yours," interrupted his lordship calmly. "You've got some, I know—heaps of 'em. An' if you did a good think you'd realise that we're helpless——"

"Helpless!" I echoed.

"Exactly!" said Dorrie. "I can see at least twenty men down there, an' you can bet your boots that they're armed to the teeth. There are just five of us—so work that out in your head. What chance should we have against twenty? What would happen if we blundered down there, bent upon doin' heroic rescue stunts?"

"I suppose we should get it in the neck!" I admitted.

"I don't suppose at all, I know we should!" said Lord Dorrimore placidly. "An' we should not only get it in the neck, but in other places as well. A fat lot of good we should do, showin' ourselves at this moment. Poor old Lee and the others are as helpless as trussed chickens, an' we should find ourselves in just the same position if we showed our hand. An' what then? Every man-jack of us would be at the mercy of Captain Jelks. As it is, we're free—five of us—determined fellows, who can do quite a lot of damage if we set about it in the right way. Oh, this game ain't finished yet! The fun's only just startin'!"

There was sound reasoning in Lord Dorrimore's argument, and I was well aware of the fact. We were all impressed by his

words. His coolness acted upon us like a tonic, and we looked at the situation in its proper perspective.

"Our best policy is to lie low," went on Dorrie. "We'll keep our eye on things an' see what's doin'. There's nothin' to grumble at, my sons. I don't like to acknowledge it, but the arrival of Jelks was providential. He's saved us from frightful things."

"I don't know so much about that," I objected. "We had escaped before Jelks came—"

"But it's not by any means certain that we should have got clear away if those infernal blacks hadn't scooted," put in Dorrie keenly. "If you want to know the truth, I was expectin' to be recaptured at any moment. Now I can understand why we weren't. The position's bad, but, by gad, it's not half so bad as it was! So look cheerful, you gloomy bounders!"

Lord Dorrimore's high spirits were infectious, and we all began to feel less alarmed. Sir Montie was looking rather puzzled, and he thoughtfully removed his famous pince-nez.

"Begad! I've been thinkin'——" he began.

"Don't hurt yourself, young 'un," said Dorrie kindly.

"I'm really serious," protested Montie. "I've been thinkin' about things in general, an' I can't quite understand, I can't really."

"What can't you understand?" I asked.

"Well, dear old boy, it's shockin'ly mixed up," declared Tregellis-West. "How did Jelks and Co. land without meetin' those frightful blacks? An' how did we get to the yacht an' back without seein' Jelks's ship? It's rather queer, you know, an' I wish you'd explain."

Lord Dorrimore stroked his smooth chin.

"Well, it was just a matter of chance, I suppose," he said. "Things do happen like that, Montie. I daresay the Zambuan gentlemen saw Jelks's vessel comin' along some little time before it got to the island. An' all the canoes had slipped off into the darkness by the time the ship dropped her anchor."

"But what about us?" asked the Bo'sun. "Why didn't we see Jelks's craft, sir?"

"Oh, that's easy," replied Dorrie. "By gad! I'm beginnin' to feel like Nelson Lee himself—deducin' all sorts of knotty points! It's dark, don't forget, an' when we crept aboard the yacht for the fifth of November articles we didn't think of lookin' beyond the barrier. But the ship must have been anchored there at the time. Jelks an' his merry men had come ashore, and it was only by a stroke of chance we didn't meet. Still, there it is, and, although our pals are catchin' it in the neck, we shall probably be able to turn the tables before the night's out."

"The Zambuan have gone, at all events, sir," remarked Mr. Scott. "I wonder if Umloa is still alive?"

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"Of course he is!" he replied. "I couldn't think of old Umloa bein' dead. There's nothin' like havin' confidence—and I've got heaps of it. We've got to wait, we've got to be patient!"

And so we remained at the top of the gully, lying low.

What was happening down in the valley, meanwhile?

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN BURTON'S OFFER—MAROONED—JELKS VICTORIOUS!

CAPTAIN EBENEZER JELKS laughed softly.

"Quite a pretty little fix, ain't it?" he exclaimed, with no attempt to conceal his exultation. "I never expected to meet you like this 'ere, Captain Burton. We can talk pleasant like—eh?"

Captain Burton scarcely knew what to say. His feelings were rather chaotic. It was enormous relief to know that the murderous Zambuan had left the island; but the appearance of Jelks and his men had rather taken the gilt off the gingerbread, so to speak.

Captain Jelks had recovered from his initial surprise. And he quickly grasped the fact that his enemies were at his mercy, and that all the advantage of the situation was with him.

He had come to this island as a kind of forlorn hope, hardly believing that the trip would be worth the candle. In his most optimistic moments he had been almost certain that a bitter fight would be necessary.

Instead of that he had landed with perfect freedom and was now aware of the fact that the yacht's party could do nothing. They had been trussed up by somebody or other, and were in a sorry plight.

"Well, things ain't so bad as they might have been," declared Edward Oswald Handforth, of the St. Frank's Remove. "Jelks may be a beastly rotter, but I'd rather face ten of him than one of those rotten cannibals!"

"Cannibals!" exclaimed Mr. Larson, starting.

Several of the men looked round them uneasily. They were confident enough whilst their position was secure, but the thought of cannibals rather alarmed them. Jelks turned quickly.

"No need to git scared, you fools!" he snapped. "There ain't no cannibals on the island now, or we shouldn't be 'ere. The fact that we've come all this way without bein' interfered with shows that everything's all right."

The cunning skipper, in fact, had been thinking. The torches and the whole aspect of this valley were familiar to Jelks, who had visited these seas on many occasions.

He knew that the yacht's party must have fallen into the hands of visiting Zambuan, since Zambua was the only inhabited island

In this region of the Pacific. Jelks knew, also, that the blacks had abandoned their prisoners before the schooner's arrival.

This was obvious. Had the niggers been on the island still, they would have made some move before now. Jelks was, therefore, confident that he had everything in his own hands—and his surmise, as it happened, was correct.

"We've just dropped into it nicely," he declared. "Luck's been with us for weeks past, an' now it ain't goin' to desert us. I'm rather sorry for you, Captain Burton, but it's the fortunes o' war."

"You have certainly got the upper hand at the present moment, Jelks," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I should advise you not to crow, however. Those infernal blacks may return at any moment, and, after all, we are all white people. We must fight together against the common foe."

"Ho! You want to be pally—hey?"

"Not at all," replied Lee. "I merely wish to warn you that this position may not be quite so rosy as you fondly imagine. If the Zambians come back you will share our fate, you will die with us. On the other hand we could easily repel their attacks if we called a truce for the time being and organised our defences thoroughly. Circumstances create strange situations, Jelks, and this situation is indeed extraordinary."

Jelks laughed coarsely.

"None o' your soft talk," he exclaimed. "D'ye think I'm fool enough to set you free? Why, I ain't quite loony. You'd just turn on me——"

"I'm afraid you judge our standard of honour by your own, Jelks," snapped Nelson Lee curtly. "Man alive! Our own differences can wait until this common danger is overcome——"

"Pah! There's no danger!" interjected the skipper. "Leastways, not for us. I shouldn't be surprised if there was danger for you. Wot do you say, Bill?"

"'Orrible danger!" said Mr. Larson solemnly.

"Ain't you goin' to set us free?" roared Handforth, losing patience.

"None o' your lip, boy——"

"Why, you—you awful rotter!" shouted Handforth, glaring. "If you don't set us free, we'll pulverise you when we get the chance!"

"That will do, Handforth!" said the gov'nor, turning his head. "You will not improve matters by stating your opinions."

A somewhat tense silence followed for a few moments. Jelks and Larson were standing before their men. And the yacht's party lay helpless upon the ground, in the full glare of the flickering torch-lights. The members of the crew were somewhat stolid; the officers looked angry; the Remove juniors made no attempt to conceal their excitement and impatience; Miss Eileen Dare and her aunt remained calm and said nothing. And Nelson Lee and Captain Burton kept their heads completely. It was highly necessary that they should.

And Nelson Lee shrewdly realized that their danger was not quite so acute as it seemed. He knew that I had escaped, and that Dorrie and Sir Montie and Mr. Scott and the Bo'sun were with me. We five were at liberty, and Nelson Lee knew enough of Dorrie's character, and of mine, to be quite certain that we should not look on helplessly.

But it was as well to deceive Captain Jelks. That astute scoundrel would very soon notice that some members of the party were absent—and Lee did not want Jelks to guess that the absent ones were at liberty. It would be far better to delude the enemy into believing that everything was in their favour.

"I am afraid that Jelks will prove obstinate, Burton," said Nelson Lee, turning his head, and speaking so that Jelks could hear. "It will be a great pity if he does. Poor Dorrie and the others have gone——"

"Hey? Wot's that?" interjected Jelks sharply.

"I was saying, Jelks, that Lord Dorrimore and four other members of our party have already gone—the Zambians were not idle whilst they were here," replied Nelson Lee, framing his words in such a manner that, whilst being the actual truth, they deceived Jelks, but deceived none of his own friends. Eileen and the boys and the yacht's crew grasped the gov'nor's meaning at once.

"Umlosi would have gone, too, if it hadn't been for his enormous strength," said Captain Burton. "Poor fellow! I'm afraid he is quite exhausted."

Umlosi, indeed, was spent. His fight with the monster of the pool had sapped away even his enormous energy. And now he was helpless again, for Jelks had given his men orders to bind Umlosi once more.

The rascally skipper nodded slowly.

"So we missed part of the fun, did we?" he said callously. "Pity we didn't wait until you'd all gone the same way—it would have been a sight less trouble for us, anyhow. It's rather a pity Lord Dorrimore's been killed by them blacks, though; I should 'ave liked to 'ave 'ad a word with 'im. The others was boys, I suppose? H'm! They asked for it, comin' to this 'ere blamed island!"

Jelks had taken the bait; he and Larson and the others firmly believed that Dorrie and I and the other three had perished. It was jolly cute of the gov'nor, for Jelks was now off his guard.

"I don't reckon them niggers'll make any bother to-night," he remarked. "But we'll be on the safe side, Bill. All this crowd 'as got to be carried down to the boats—see? We'll entertain 'em on board—an' then dump 'em down in a nice little 'ome of their own!"

He laughed roughly, apparently tickled by his thoughts.

"Look here, Jelks, I want a word with you," said Captain Burton, after he had

spoken in a low voice with Nelson Lee for a few moments. "I wish to make you an offer."

"A hoffer, cap'n?" said Jelks. "Well, let's 'ave it!"

"We all realise that your intervention was probably the means of saving our lives," continued Captain Burton. "I needn't add that there were no humane intentions on your part—it was just an accident that you came when you did. By jings! It was lucky, though. And I'm going to show that I'm not a bitter man. In consideration of what's you've done—unintentional though it was—I'm willing to let bygones be bygones."

Captain Jelks grinned.

"Cringin', eh?" he suggested. "I never thought you'd whine——"

"Confound you!" roared Captain Burton angrily. "I'm not whining! Cannot you curb that tongue of yours? You came here with the idea of getting hold of the treasure, didn't you?"

"I ain't denyin' it," said Jelks.

"Well, there is no reason why we should not all benefit," went on Burton. "But for you we should probably have been dead by now, so it is only fair, in a way, that you should be compensated. I suggest that we call a truce in our little war and divide the spoils. That is a generous offer, Jelks. You and your men can share half the treasure between you."

There was a moment's silence. Captain Burton's offer was not merely generous, but munificent. Jelks had not the slightest right to a farthing after what he had done. But it could not be denied that his timely intervention had changed the whole aspect of affairs for the yacht's party. And if peace could be restored without trouble, it would be so much the better.

"By gosh! That ain't so dusty!" remarked Mr. Larson. "I reckon we'll accept that, cap'n. Why, Burton ain't such a mighty bad sort, arter all! Let's shake 'ands an' be pals!"

Captain Jelks swore.

"You allus was a fool, Larson!" he snapped. "D'ye think I'm goin' to agree to them terms? Why, everything's in my 'ands—I can do just as I like. 'Arf the treasure! Not me—not Ben Jelks!"

"But look 'ere, cap'n——"

"You're white-livered—that's wot's the matter wi' you, Bill!" snapped Jelks. "We've got the upper 'and, an' I don't see why we should put up with 'arf the treasure—think of old Barrow. Why, we shouldn't 'ave enough to divide if we only took 'arf of it! No, Bill, we'll 'ave the lot—an' we'll 'ave 'undreds o' pounds' worth o' stuff out o' that stranded yacht too!"

"You are rather foolish, Jelks," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Good heavens, man, why can't you realise that Captain Burton's offer is amazingly generous? If you refuse you will not get a farthing—you can take my word for that."

Jelks laughed.

"Your word ain't nothin' to me!" he exclaimed. "I'm finished with this fool jaw. I've got the whip 'and, an' I'm goin' to keep it. Now then, men, look lively. Bring these passengers aboard!"

"You—you silly idiot!" burst out Handforth.

"An' give that young cub a clout on the side of 'is 'ead!" snapped Jelks.

Handforth was rather sorry that he had spoken a moment later, for the clout he received nearly knocked him silly for a few minutes.

The whole position was humiliating in the extreme. Captain Burton and Nelson Lee had been thinking of Eileen Dare and Aunt Esther and the four feminine members of the crew when that offer had been made. The skipper rightly decided that almost any sacrifice was allowable if it saved the ladies from further violence.

But the offer had been rejected, and Jelks naturally believed that his victims were frightened. They weren't. Eileen, in fact, was about as cool and collected as anybody; and Aunt Esther proved her mettle wonderfully. As for Handforth and Co., and De Valerie and Farman and Tommy Watson and Yakama—well, they were too jolly wild and excited to be alarmed.

The yacht's officers and crew considered themselves lucky. To be in the hands of Jelks was almost pleasant to the former prospect; for everybody firmly believed that the Zambians would have thrown them to the octopus in the pool if the interruption had not come.

They did not know that Jelks had a scheme in his mind which would make the position every bit as bad as it had been before. For the rascally skipper cared nothing about his victims; indeed, he wanted to get rid of them.

Jelks was cunning. He realised that things might be awkward for him later on if any of these people were allowed to return to civilisation. Yet, scoundrel though he was, he did not possess the necessary cold-bloodedness to kill them outright. He looked at the matter in another way.

They had been in the hands of the Zambians. If they were killed by the cannibals it would be no fault of Jelks's. And it would be far better if the whole crowd simply disappeared. And the sooner this object was accomplished the better. There was quite a simple way out of the difficulty.

Captain Jelks had his eye on the main chance. Burton had referred to the treasure, thus plainly proving that the thing was no myth. Apparently it had been recovered from the galleon and was already on the yacht. Well, there was not only this treasure to consider, but the yacht itself. It was a luxurious vessel, with the most expensive fittings throughout. If Jelks couldn't take away the hull, he would strip the helpless vessel of everything of value.

Out of this venture alone a small fortune could be made. Two or three trips to the island might be necessary, but that wouldn't matter in the least—with Captain Burton's party safely out of the way. Jelks was a ruffian to his finger-tips, and the contemplation of what he proposed doing caused him no qualms. Could he have seen into the future, he would have been extremely alarmed.

His helpless prisoners were conveyed through the tunnel to the beach, and then to the schooner. The transfer was rather a long one, and two hours had elapsed before the captives were on board. They were treated roughly, and placed in a group upon the deck. Nelson Lee and Burton did not mind this treatment in the least, but it nearly drove them frantic when they thought of the ladies. But nothing could be done—they were forced to submit.

Umlosi, by this time, had practically recovered. His exhaustion had only been temporary. But Jelks was fully aware of the giant's strength, and he gave him no opportunity of escaping this time. Umlosi was bound cruelly—indeed, the precautions taken were really absurd—but Jelks meant to be on the safe side.

While all this was going on Lord Dorrimore and I and our three companions were looking for an opportunity to make ourselves useful. Above all, we wanted to effect a rescue.

But no chance came. More men had been brought from the schooner, and they swarmed about in such numbers that an attack on our part would have been madness. We assumed that the prisoners were being conveyed to the schooner so that they would be under the eye of their captors.

And Lord Dorrimore was quite hopeful.

"There's plenty of time before daylight," he declared. "We can't do anything now, but it ought to be easy to work the trick later on, when Jelks an' his cut-throats are snoozin' and off their guard. Just you wait in patience, my sons."

We waited, but we were scarcely patient.

Meanwhile, Jelks was intent upon a move we had not anticipated. When all his prisoners were on board he talked with Captain Barrow for some little time, and the latter, who had been drinking, was excited. He fell in with Jelks's plans and schemes at once.

And Captain Jelks stood before the captives on deck and lit his pipe. There was an evil glint in his eyes, and he chuckled coarsely as he gazed upon the victims of his villainy.

"I thought it might interest you to know wot's goin' to 'appen, Burton," he said pleasantly. "I don't intend to be bothered with no passengers—neither does Cap'n Barrow, the master of this craft. So we're just goin' to set you down, without 'armin' a hair of your 'eads, on the beautiful island of Zambua!"

Nelson Lee started.

"You surely cannot be serious, Jelks?" he said quietly.

"Ho! An' why not?"

"I think you know why not as well as I do," said Lee. "You have proved yourself to be capable of most scoundrelism, but I hardly thought that murder was in your line——"

"Who's talkin' about murder?" snarled Jelks.

"If you land us upon the island of Zambua, that act will constitute murder in cold blood," said the detective. "Good heavens! You know very well that the cannibals will kill us without the slightest mercy——"

"That's your look-out!" sneered Jelks. "I ain't responsible for wot them blamed cannibals do. I ain't goin' to touch you—an' if the Zambuans shove you in the cook-pot—well, that's your funeral!"

"You infernal ruffian!" roared Captain Burton, losing his temper. "You hypocrite! The act you contemplate may not be murder, but it amounts to exactly the same thing. You won't get out of the responsibility like that, Jelks."

Captain Jelks turned his back and walked away. In his heart he knew that Nelson Lee and Captain Burton were right, and he actually began to feel somewhat doubtful as to the wisdom of the move. Jelks, sober, was not a murderer, and he was able to realise the situation—he saw the affair in its true perspective.

Notwithstanding his doubts, however, the schooner set sail for Zambua without delay. And Jelks and Barrow went below into the cabin and partook of whisky. Under the influence of the spirit Jelks's doubts were dispelled, and by the time he had consumed his sixth dose he was quite ready to shoot every prisoner with his own revolver. The whisky made all the difference in the world—both to Jelks and to Barrow.

Nelson Lee quickly saw the difference when the two skippers came on deck once more. And any hope that Lee may have had of arguing with his captors was abandoned. This thing would have to go through—although the prospect was as black as night. To be cast upon Zambua was a fearful fate. Not only would they be in the hands of the cannibals, but they would be upon the cannibals' own soil—far away from help.

The breeze was stiff, and the schooner arrived at the island in good time. Two boats immediately put off with the captives, and the sandy shore was reached after a somewhat exciting experience through the surf.

Without ceremony the prisoners were dumped upon the beach in a heap. Jelks stood over them, laughing drunkenly. He pulled out his clasp-knife and bent over Nelson Lee.

"I ain't a 'ard-hearted man," he said, slapping at one of Lee's ropes. "I'll set you free afore we—— No, I'm durned if I will!"

he added suddenly. "If you want to git free, you can use your own wits! I reckon —"

"You base scoundrel!" put in Captain Burton hoarsely. "You can't leave us here like this, Jelks—you can't be such an inhuman dog!"

"Can't I?" snarled Jelks, suddenly blazing out. "By thunder! I've been waitin' for this minute, my fine Burton! Me an' you 'ave 'ad a few scraps in our time, but now I've got my own back!"

Without another word Jelks turned and walked to the boats. His men followed him, and the hapless party upon the beach saw the two boats putting out towards the outer reef, beyond which lay the schooner.

The blow had fallen!

Jelks had kept his word, and Nelson Lee and his unfortunate companions were left upon this savage island—helpless and alone. They had been marooned! They had been cut off from any possible help from Lord Dorrimore, and if any hope had existed, that hope was now dead.

The position was awful in every sense of the word.

CHAPTER IV.

DORRIE GETS BUSY—THE TREASURE CACHE—SETTING THE TRAP.

LORD DORRIMORE stood upon the rock barrier which divided the dry bed of the lagoon from the sea and murmured something rather forcible under his breath. Then he came down to where I stood with Mr. Scott and Sir Montie and the Bo'sun.

"Yes, she's gone—she's bunked," said Dorrie quietly. "I don't pretend to understand it, but it's nasty. It's more than nasty."

"Why on earth has the schooner sailed away?" I asked anxiously. "And they're all aboard, too. Oh, Dorrie, the fat's in the fire now! We haven't been able to do anything at all, and now they're out of reach!"

Sir Montie touched my arm.

"I was wonderin', dear old boy," he said. "Do you think that frightful chap, Jelks, is takin' Nelson Lee and the others to Zambua?"

I started.

"Oh, rot!" I said uneasily.

"By gad! I'm not so sure!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "Montie's hit the truth, or I'll eat my necktie! That's the game, my sons. Jelks is takin' the bunch over to Zambua—an' that's why he's left the island without lookin' round or examin'in' the yacht. The schooner will be back before the mornin', minus the passengers, so we shall have to get busy."

"But what about the guv'nor?" I shouted, almost wildly.

"I'm afraid old Lee's in a tight fix——"

"And—and Miss Eileen," I went on, catching my breath. "Oh, Dorrie, they'll be

collared by those awful savages again! What can we do—what the dickens can we do?"

Dorrimore looked grim.

"There's a lot we can do," he replied deliberately. "But I know what we can't do, Nipper. We can't go off to Zambua in chase—we can't build a ship out of notnin' in two seconds. We've got to stick on this island an' hope for the best. It's no good gettin' alarmed, an' it's no good askin' what we can do to help the others. Just at present we can't do anything—except get busy here."

"What's the good of getting busy here if the guv'nor and all the rest of 'em are eaten up by cannibals?" I asked wildly.

Lord Dorrimore sighed.

"What a chap you are for imaginin' things," he said. "We'll take it for granted that our friends are bein' put ashore on Zambua. Well, what about it? It doesn't mean to say that they'll be gobbled up within sixty seconds—or sixty hours. Keep cool, my lad, an' reason the thing out."

"What's the good of reasoning——"

"Every good," said Dorrie. "Jelks is fond of his own skin, you can take it from me. He ain't a pal of these cannibals, an' he won't visit a part of the Zambuan coast which is populated. Lee and the others will be chucked ashore at some quiet spot. An' it's quite on the cards that we shall be able to go to the rescue before many hours are passed."

"How?" I asked bluntly.

"Never mind how—wait till the schooner comes back," replied the imperturbable Dorrie. "An' you've got confidence in your guv'nor, I suppose? He's not quite a fool, Nipper, an' there are some determined chaps with him. The Zambuans won't collar that crowd very easily, an' before things reach a crisis we'll be on the spot."

I made no reply. Dorrie, of course, was doing his best to comfort us. It was his character all over. When things were looking their blackest he always tried to make them seem the opposite. But, apart from this, there was sound sense in his argument.

"You were talking about getting busy, sir," said Mr. Scott. "What can we do on this island?"

"What can we do?" echoed Dorrie. "Yogods! We can do tremendous things, Mr. Scott. An', what's more, we're goin' to do 'em. Put worry out of your heads for the time bein' an' devote yourself to the task of takin' a rise out of Jelks. We ain't dead, thank goodness. An' Jelks'll know that when he gets back!"

I felt half choked.

"What's the good of doing anything?" I muttered miserably. "It's horrible, Dorrie! We might as well chuck it all up at once——"

"Well, I'm hanged if I expected that from you, Nipper!" interrupted his lordship. "Chuck it up! Why, you young idiot, this is just the time when we've got to work ourselves until we're ready to drop. Quite

apart from the others, we've got to think of ourselves. I ain't selfish, but, by gad, I'm not goin' to let Jelks triumph over me! If we can restore the whole situation, so much the better; but we sha'n't do it by talkin'."

"I'm sorry, Dorrie," I said, quietly. "I was an ass. Let's get to work at once. I suppose you're going to shift the treasure out of the yacht?"

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"Yes, an' a few other things as well," he replied. "Our defences are as intact now as ever they were—all six machine-guns are still in position. But they're not goin' to be left there for Jelks to grab!"

"Souise me! He's right, Nipper," muttered the Bo'sun. "I'm just as anxious as you are, goodness knows! My dad's been taken away, and I simply daren't let myself think about him. But there's a lot to be done here—and we've got a fine opportunity, messmate."

Upon the whole, the position was not quite so rosy for Captain Jelks as he fondly imagined. He was not having everything his own way. Not without reason, he assumed that Hollday Island was completely deserted. But Lord Dorrimore and we others were not dead by any means. On the contrary, we were fully alive and had complete liberty.

Looking at the affair in one light, Jelks was completely defeated. For it was in our power to rob him of the fruits of his triumph. He had gone off, full of bombast, convinced that all the advantage was his. If it hadn't been for the uncertainty of the fate of our friends, we should have hugged ourselves with sheer delight.

But we couldn't do that, under the circumstances. We simply meant to defeat the enemy so far as the treasure was concerned. If Captain Burton could not live to gain the benefit of it, then Jelks shouldn't!

We had no time to worry after that little conversation, for we worked like Trojans. We worked until we were running with perspiration and panting for breath. The treasure, consisting of gold pieces, had been packed away in small wooden cases, and every one of these was removed from the yacht and transferred inland to a secret cache amidst a pile of rocks.

It was a stiff task, but we accomplished it at last. There were the diamonds and other precious stones, too. When Jelks returned he would find nothing—and the thought of this spurred us on to further efforts.

The yacht's chief valuables followed the gold—things that were easily portable, I mean. Clothing and all manner of other things were taken on to the island and hidden also—to say nothing of case after case of food.

Considering that there were only five of us, we did wonders. Five of the machine-guns had been also transferred to the cache and supplemented by some thousands of rounds of ammunition. A dozen rifles and a case of cartridges followed. One machine-gun

had been left hidden on the rock barrier, in case of emergencies.

I suggested that we should keep Jelks and Co. away from the island by means of the machine-guns, but the astute Dorrimore had a much better idea. As he pointed out, we wanted to get the better of the enemy by stealth and cunning. It was the only way it could be done, in fact. The odds were so uneven that we were compelled to resort to a trick.

"My idea is to lay a trap," said Dorrie, as we stood upon the yacht's deck. "It's not far off dawn now, an' the schooner will return before long. If it doesn't return we shall know that our calculations were wrong. But we've got to prepare for 'em all the same."

We were all dead tired and well-nigh exhausted. But not one of us thought of resting, excepting in a brief style like this. There were already signs of dawn in the sky, and the island was looking strangely peaceful after the strenuous events which had been happening.

"We've got to get hold of that schooner," said Dorrie calmly.

"Eh?"

"Get hold of the schooner, sir?"

"Exactly," said his lordship.

"How the dickens can we do that?" I demanded.

"Well, I've got a wheeze," replied Dorrie. "I don't say it'll work, but there's no tellin'. It's so simple that you'll grin when you hear it. But simple wheezes are the best in the long run."

"Begad! I'm frightfully puzzled—I am, really," declared Tregellis-West. "I can't see how five of us can get the better of a shipload of artful scoundrels. It doesn't seem possible!"

Lord Dorrimore stroked his chin.

"When Jelks comes on board this yacht he'll probably bring a dozen men with him," he said. "Some of 'em will go down into the saloon, and some of 'em will have a look at the fo'c'sle. What do you think, Mr. Scott?"

"I should think you're about right, sir," said the first officer.

"And what will Jelks do to commemorate the occasion?" asked Dorrie.

"Drink some whisky, I suppose," I growled.

"Exactly—you've hit it on the nail!"

"But—but I can't see——"

"We'll be obligin'," went on Dorrie. "We'll put a couple of bottles of whisky an' some clean glasses on the saloon table. An' we'll leave some rum down in the fo'c'sle. When the party comes on board they'll have a drink within the first five minutes. Savvy?"

We all stared.

"Are you going dotty?" I asked politely.

"Well, I've often been told that I'm in that state already, Nipper," said his lordship calmly. "It's a shockin' libel, of course, but I'm a peaceful chap, an' I don't mind. But there's method in my madness, Nipper."

"Then I wish you'd explain it!" I growled. "I'm blessed if I can see any method in leaving whisky and rum for those murderous rotters to guzzle as soon as they come on board! I suppose the idea is to make them drunk?"

"Not quite that," replied Dorrie. "Down below there's a whackin' great medicine-chest. If old Lee was here we should be in luck, because he knows all about medicines an' physic an' all that rot. I don't; but we'll be able to muddle through, perhaps."

"But what——"

"Hold on a minute. Let me finish the explanation," said Dorrie. "In that medicine-chest there are heaps of drugs. My idea is to doctor the whisky and the rum—dope it, you know—an' then place it temptingly handy."

"By George!" said Mr. Scott slowly. "That's a splendid idea, sir!"

"Dope the drink!" I gasped. "You—you mean—— Oh, Dorrie, you're a wonder! Why, they'll drink the stuff down and be drugged in no time! We might be able to gain the upper hand like that!"

"Precisely!"

"Begad! You're amazin'ly clever, sir," said Sir Montie admiringly.

"Thanks!"

"You're a marvel, sir!"

"When you've quite done amusin' me, we'll get to work again," said Dorrie. "I ain't clever, an' it's rot to call me a marvel. The idea's as old as the hills—it's got whiskers on it! Dopin' people is one of Jelks's favourite pastimes, by the way, an' it'll be rather rich if we can work the trick on him. Anyhow, it's about the only thing we can do at the moment."

We were all filled with enthusiasm, and, without delay, we descended the companion and routed out the medicine-chest. In spite of Dorrie's professional ignorance of drugs, he knew quite a lot about them, and very soon he was holding up a small bottle marked "Poison" and eyeing it lovingly.

"This is the stuff," he declared. "It's got a name calculated to crack anybody's jaw at the first go, so I sha'n't attempt to pronounce it. But it's rippin' fine stuff for sendin' people to sleep. The only danger is that it might send 'em off for good an' all, bein' poison. But we shall have to chance that."

Whisky and rum were obtained by Mr. Scott, and then Dorrie carefully measured out the right proportions of the drug, and it was thoroughly mixed into the spirit. Neat, the stuff was somewhat pungent, but was completely drowned in the whisky.

"Now we'll lay the bait," said Dorrie.

The whisky was placed upon the saloon table in decanters, and a number of glasses were placed upon a tray near by. In the fo'c'sle the rum was left in its keg, and several mugs were laid handy.

"I think the saloon trick will work all right, sir," said Mr. Scott; "but I'm not so sure about this rum. Surely the men will

suspect something? They'll know that a keg of rum isn't allowed to be on draft in the fo'c'sle, so to speak."

"Those ruffians ain't so shrewd as 'all that," said Lord Dorrimore. "They'll see the keg, sniff the rum, and all other thoughts will be driven away. I've sailed in ships times enough to know the weakness of sailormen, takin' them as a whole. Let's hope Jelks and his crowd are no exceptions. Judgin' from Jelks himself, they must be swillers of the first class!"

It was quite daylight by now, and the sun was over the horizon, sending shafts of brilliant light across the island. Birds were calling on every hand, and a more peaceful scene could scarcely be imagined.

Although dog-tired, we did not think of sleep. And, as it happened, we were allowed no respite. For when we mounted to the deck again we received a surprise. The schooner was within full sight—quite near, in fact.

"Don't show yourselves!" hissed Dorrie sharply. "They've got telescopes, an' it's more than likely they're squintin' in this direction. We shall have to remain on board now—an' it's just as well, perhaps. We shall be able to see the result of our little experiment."

As Dorrie said, we could not leave the yacht without risking being spotted—and if those on the schooner saw us they would be on their guard at once. Besides, we could easily conceal ourselves within the vessel.

We found hiding-places quickly, and then remained quiet. Dorrie and I got immediately beneath the saloon, in a kind of storehold. From there we should be able to hear everything which was being said without our presence being known. The others were in various places of concealment.

It was a long, trying wait. But, at last, after what seemed hours, voices were heard. And then we recognised the tones of Jelks and Larson. There were several others with them, and they were laughing and joking continuously. They didn't know that the treasures had been removed!

"All ours, Barrow!" I heard Jelks exclaim. "By ginger! We've got a prize this trip. The Spanish gold alone is a fortune, and the stuff in this yacht will be worth a nice few thousands."

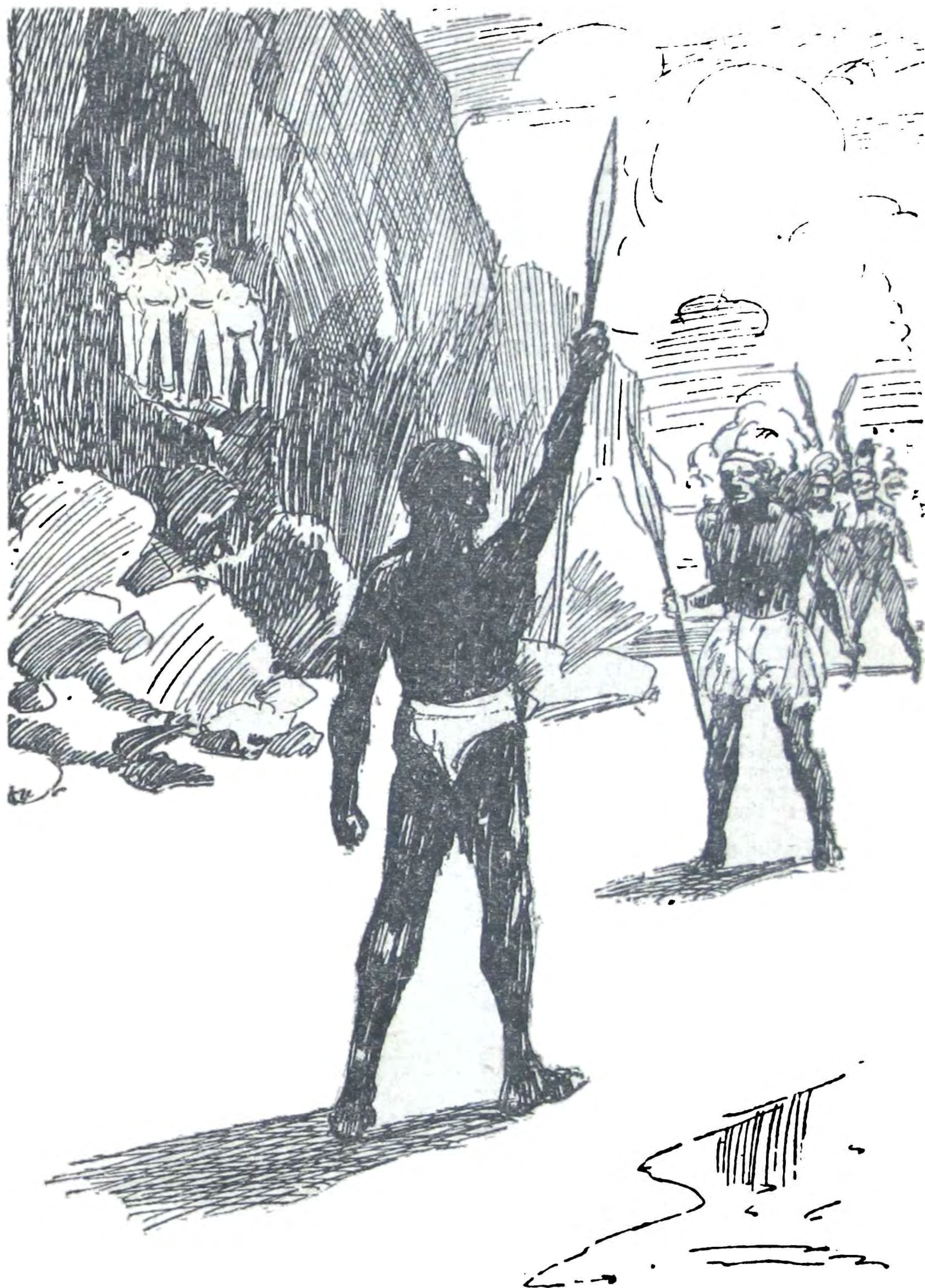
"I guess you're dead right, Jelks," said another voice, strange to us. "By gee! I'll allow I was doubting you at first, but—Waal, say, this is sure hospitable on the part of our late friends. Guess they've left us drinks all ready to celebrate!"

"It's workin'!" breathed Dorrie, grasping my arm.

"Listen!" I hissed, quivering.

We heard the men moving about, and then came the unmistakable clink of glasses. I couldn't quite believe that the trick would work—it seemed too good to be true. The whole thing was so ridiculously simple.

"About the easiest game we was ever in, Barrow," came Jelks's satisfied voice. "Me an' you 'ave 'ad a few ups an' downs, as



Umlosi ran forward until he faced the chief of the Zambuans.
"Thou art a man" he bellowed, shaking his spear on high. "We will
fight, thou giant!"—(See page 19.)

the sayin' is, but, by ginger, we're up this time!"

"Pity we can't take this craft away with us, cap'n!" said Mr. Larson. "She's a pretty boat, if ever I see one."

"It don't signify nothin'," declared Jelks. "Why, wot could we do with 'er? She'd be a durned trouble. We couldn't take 'er into port without a lot of orkard questions bein' asked— Well, 'ere's love!"

"Just to seal our friendship, in a way o' speakin', Jelks," came another voice. "An' good 'ealth to them fellers on Zambua!"

There was a hoarse, throaty chuckle from the men above—but Dorrie and I welcomed the remark, in spite of its callousness, for we then knew positively that Nelson Lee and the others had been taken to Zambua.

There was a short, tense silence.

"Waal, I guess them dudes knew wot whisky was!" exclaimed one of the men, smacking his lips. "It's a heap better than the doggone swill they pizen your vitals with around 'Frisco!"

"'Ave another fill?" asked Jelks.

"Waal, I should smile!"

"By gad! They'll kill themselves if they have four or five goes," murmured Dorrie. "But they'll never do it, young 'un—unless I've made a ghastly bloomer, they'll topple over within— There you are!"

He paused, and we both listened.

"Wasser marrer?" came Jelks's voice, his words running together thickly. "Blamed if I can understand wot— Here, hold up, Barrow—"

A heavy thud followed. Several others sounded immediately afterwards. There were one or two gasps, and one man's voice was heard for some few moments. But then came another thud, followed by complete silence.

"Great Scott!" I breathed.

"Well, I never expected it!" declared Dorrie frankly. "I've had a shockin' fear that the ruffians would sniff somethin' wrong, you know. But it's worked, Nipper—it's worked!"

"What shall we do?" I gasped.

"Why, we'll pop up an' see how the land lies," replied his lordship. "It wouldn't do to stay down here too long—another party might be boarding the yacht, and we want to gain the upper hand."

So, without delay, we mounted to the saloon. A curious sight met our gaze, and for a moment I was somewhat awed. Captain Jelks and Mr. Larson sprawled full length upon the floor, silent and still. Smashed glasses lay everywhere. Another man—Captain Barrow—lay half across the table, and lolling in a chair was Mr. Ned Brown, the mate of the Aurora. Three other men had collapsed in a heap near the doorway.

"I—I say, are they dead?" I whispered huskily.

"About as dead as I am!" replied Dorrie. "Why, you young ass, I can see 'em breathin'. They'll be safe there for a couple

of hours, anyhow. And, with luck, we can work wonders—"

At that moment Mr. Scott appeared, followed by Sir Montie and the Bo'sun.

"Oh, you're here, sir!" exclaimed the first officer. "By George! These rascals have fallen into the trap, too—"

"Why, are there any others?" I asked quickly.

"Six of them!" said Mr. Scott. "They are for'ard hands, and they went down into the fo'c'sle immediately. That rum did the trick within a minute, sir—just as you predicted."

"Good!" said Lord Dorrimore, almost hugging himself. "That's thirteen of 'em helpless—and all the officers among 'em! Why, we shall be able to get on board that old schooner as easily as steppin' into a motor-bus!"

"And what then?" asked the Bo'sun quickly.

"Why, then," replied Dorrie calmly, "we'll set sail for Zambua—an' we shall be in time to rescue the rest of the party!"

"Begad! I hope so, sir!" exclaimed Montie fervently.

And without a moment's delay we prepared for our onslaught upon the Aurora. With two revolvers apiece, and, with a machine-gun, we reckoned to subdue the remainder of the crew without the slightest difficulty.

Despair had left us and hope filled our breasts.

CHAPTER V.

ON ZAMBUA—BOZ PROVES HIS WORTH—THE RESCUE OF EILEEN!

NELSON LEE was perfectly calm as he lay upon the beach on the sandy Zambuan coast. He was, perhaps, much calmer than the other members of the party, for he realised the awful nature of this predicament.

They had been marooned!

They were quite out of reach of help, and Lord Dorrimore and his four companions—left upon Holiday Island—would almost certainly meet with disaster as soon as the schooner returned. Whichever way Nelson Lee looked at the position he could see no ray of hope—no gleam of light.

Handforth and Church and McClure were talking together somewhat heatedly—for the indefatigable Handforth was arguing, even under these strenuous conditions. Handforth would have argued on the scaffold—if ever he came to be in that unfortunate position.

Eileen Dare and Aunt Esther were also talking; but the others sat quiet, busy with their own thoughts.

Nelson Lee felt something smooth rub against his arm, and then a warm, wet tongue licked his cheek.

"Why, Boz, how on earth did you manage to get here?" murmured the detective, turn-

ing his head. "I'm afraid your number's up, old man. It's only a question of time before we're all finished."

The little spaniel wagged his tail cheerfully, happy to be in the presence of his friends and sublimely unconscious of the peril. Boz was a most determined little beggar, and he had come with the party of his own accord.

On Holiday Island he had followed the party to the boats unmolested by Jelks's men, and had jumped into one of them immediately after Nelson Lee. And he had been hoisted up in style, crouching beneath one of the rear seats. Once the boat was swinging from its davits Boz remained under the seat, still coiled up. He was there when Zambua was reached, and went ashore with the rest.

The cunning little beggar seemed to know that something was wrong, and he took care to jump ashore with his friends. But now he probably believed that everything was all right. It was only a trifling matter, of course, and of no importance. Whether Boz remained on this island or the other was immaterial—at least, so it would seem.

In reality, Boz was to prove himself absolutely invaluable.

The schooner was still visible, making away from the island under a full spread of canvas. And then something occurred which caused complete consternation and alarm amongst the party.

Three black figures, as silent as shadows, came from a clump of palms which grew near the shore. They crept down the beach, and stood over Eileen and her aunt. The latter, poor old soul, was unable to stand this sudden shock, and she fainted, with a subdued shriek.

The sound probably scared the blacks. But they bent down, seized Eileen by the arms, and dragged her away with them into the gloom. The whole incident had occurred so quickly that the others scarcely knew what had taken place. Only Nelson Lee and Captain Burton actually saw it.

"Great Heaven!" muttered the skipper, horrified. "Poor girl! Poor young lady! It's cruel that she should be the first!"

Nelson Lee was like a madman. In spite of his coolness, in spite of his clear head, he went frantic for a few seconds. To see Eileen snatched away in that fashion by murderous savages was more than flesh and blood could stand. And they were helpless—unable to follow!

Nelson Lee used every ounce of his strength, attempting to burst his bonds. Even whilst doing so he realised the hopelessness of it. But one of the ropes snapped like a cotton, and Lee's wits returned.

He knew why this had happened. Jelks had been about to cut the ropes, and had already parted several strands of one when he changed his mind. Under the enormous pressure, so suddenly exerted, the rope snapped.

But five precious minutes had elapsed be-

fore Nelson Lee succeeded in getting his hands free. Then he whipped out his clasp-knife.

"Wau! I am afraid thy efforts will be useless, O Umtagati!" came a rumbling voice from near by. "Those accursed black men have carried the beautiful White Flower far into the forest, and we are strangers on this devil's island. My heart is heavy within me, O my master!"

"How do you feel, Umlosi, physically?" asked Lee briskly.

"Thou art referring to my strength?" said Umlosi. "Am I not even as the lion? My exhaustion was but of a temporary nature; I fought, and I won. True, my strength was sapped, but I feel fit for work again, Umtagati, although, in truth, there is little enough work to be done."

"It all depends, old friend — it all depends!" said Nelson Lee tensely.

He jumped to his feet—free. And within three minutes everybody else was excited and preparing to receive liberty. But Lee did not wait until they were all freed from their bonds.

He hurried off towards the palms, accompanied by Captain Burton and Umlosi. But a search revealed nothing; Eileen had completely disappeared, and there was no sign of her captors.

Probably it was mere chance which had led the blacks to seize Eileen; she happened to be nearest. Nelson Lee was well aware of the fact that hundreds of other Zambuanians might be lurking near; he realised that every member of his party would probably share Eileen's fate within an hour.

Yet he feverishly desired to rescue the girl. Truth to tell, Nelson Lee had been thinking; he felt almost sure that this part of the Zambuan coast was only thinly populated, otherwise Jelks and Co. would never have ventured ashore.

"Those brutes who took Miss Dare are probably the only blacks within miles," said Lee grimly. "By James! If we can only rescue her we shall be a united party—and we can fight, Burton. I have not given up hope yet!"

"By the Lord Harry!" muttered the skipper, "I wish I could share your optimism, Mr. Lee. Personally, I am hopelessly at sea. What can we do? This country is strange to us, and a forest stretches out before us. How can we follow Miss Dare into that wilderness? Man alive! We don't stand a dog's chance!"

Nelson Lee drew his breath in.

"A dog's chance!" he echoed. "By Heaven, Burton, I wish we had a dog here, so that we could give him his chance! A bloodhound would soon pick up Miss Eileen's trail——"

"There's Boz," interrupted the skipper.

"Boz!" ejaculated Lee sharply. "Boz! Oh, he'll be no good——"

"Thou art surely mistaken, Umtagati," put in Umlosi. "Do I not remember the

nimble Manzie playing the harmless game with Boz, the curliest of beasts? He would hide, O my master, and Boz would smell him out——"

Nelson Lee did not wait for any more. He hastened down to the beach, where everything was in a subdued uproar. Nelson Lee knew well enough that Boz would probably prove utterly incapable of performing the task expected of him. At the same time there could be no harm giving him his chance.

The yacht's third officer was left in charge on the beach with the main party, for they could not all go hurrying through the forest. Nelson Lee tied a piece of rope to Boz's collar, and then hurried over to the spot where Aunt Esther was sitting, carefully attended by the two maids.

One of Eileen's shoes, which had been jerked off when she was dragged backwards, lay upon the ground, and Lee was very thankful for this. It would serve to give Boz the scent at once, and the dog was shown the shoe.

Contrary to Nelson Lee's expectations, the little spaniel sniffed eagerly, gave several excited barks, and then commenced running round in circles, his nose to the ground. Abruptly he started off for the trees at full speed, dragging Lee with him.

"By James!" shouted the detective. "He's hit it!"

"It is even as I said, O Umtagati," rumbled Umlosi. "Had this experiment failed I would have tried other means, for I am a master of woodcraft, and thou art aware that I am not boasting. But I fear that my efforts would be hopeless in this case, for these dogs of blackmen are possibly even craftier than I. They know the country, whilst I am a stranger."

Umlosi said most of that to himself, for the others were keen upon the chase. Nelson Lee and Captain Burton were leading, Umlosi came next, and three tried members of the yacht's crew followed in the rear.

"By jings!" muttered the skipper. "He's got the trail, Mr. Lee."

There could be no doubt of this at all. It was not merely a flash in the pan, for Boz was scurrying through the trees with all the confidence of a trained bloodhound. It was a surprise—about the most welcome surprise Nelson Lee had ever experienced. He had never believed Boz to be possessed of such an acute nose.

Very soon they were pressing through dense undergrowth, but Boz did not falter once. The darkness was now intense, for the trees overhead formed a complete canopy, blotting out the stars.

So far they had seen no trace of hostile savages, or, in fact, any form of human or animal life. The island in this region was apparently unpopulated. Nelson Lee assumed that the three blacks who had seized Eileen were scouts, or spies, left upon this bare shore by the chief, after the flight from Holiday Island. And the men had hurried off

to report the landing of a white party, taking Eileen with them as proof. This, at all events, seemed a likely theory.

As Boz continued on his way, never once faltering, Nelson Lee's hopes rose higher. He and his companions were making rapid progress, whilst it was only reasonable to suppose that Eileen's captors were comparatively slow. The fact that the girl's trail was easily picked up by Boz proved that her feet had been released and that she was walking. This had been expected, since the Zambuanians would scarcely have gone to the trouble of carrying her bodily all the way.

The chase continued relentlessly.

A full hour passed, but the little spaniel still kept on his way, eagerly and with no signs of exhaustion. The atmosphere was warm and humid beneath the trees, and Nelson Lee and his companions were already perspiring freely.

Lee was very careful to note the nature of the country through which they passed, and he knew that he would be able to find his way back to the coast. If he went wrong, Umlosi wouldn't. The great Kutana Chief had never been known to lose himself in any forest, no matter how tangled!

After the first hour the forest thinned, and the party passed through one or two clearings. The dawn was breaking, and almost before they were aware of it, full daylight had come. As they mounted the brow of a somewhat rugged hill they could see the sea far away to their right.

But their attention was immediately called to the valley in front by a low, excited bark from Boz. There, in the hollow, four figures were distinctly visible—three great savages and Eileen Dare!

"Wau!" roared Umlosi. "This is a great moment, my master!"

At the same second Boz tore his leash away from Nelson Lee's hand, and he streaked down the hill like a greyhound. Umlosi was running with fleet footsteps, and Nelson Lee made a good second.

A clump of intervening trees concealed Eileen and her captors for a time, but when the clear ground was reached again, it was found that the Zambuanians had not moved. They were, in fact, staring up the hill, apparently puzzled. They had not seen the rescue party, but had heard unusual sounds.

A moment later the storm burst.

Umlosi dashed straight at the enemy. It was a critical moment, for three spears whizzed through the air, and would have entered Umlosi's great chest had he not dodged with amazing agility.

Before any other spears could follow, Umlosi was at handgrips. Eileen had fallen to the ground, apparently exhausted. And the next second Nelson Lee and Captain Burton rushed up.

The fight was short and sharp.

The three Zambuanians were well-built fellows, and they put up a determined fight during the first minute. But a couple of spear thrusts from Umlosi settled one of

the savages for all time. Another received a punch from Nelson Lee's fist, which certainly smashed several of his teeth, and sent him reeling back, dazed and frightened.

The third savage had fled, and it was only a moment before the injured one followed. Umlosi would have sent a spear hurtling after him, but Nelson Lee stayed his hand.

"Nay, old friend," he panted. "They are beaten."

"As thou wilt, Umtagati," said Umlosi, lowering his arm. "But is it not well that these vermin should be killed?"

"Let us be thankful that we have succeeded in our object," said Nelson Lee, kneeling on the grass beside Eileen.

"Oh, Mr. Lee!" whispered the girl. "Oh, I am so thankful you have found me! Somehow, I was sure that you would follow—but—but I had almost given up hope when I heard Boz's bark."

"That little chap is worth his weight in diamonds!" exclaimed Lee fervently. "By James! I never believed he could do it. All right, old fellow, you'll be rewarded some day!"

Boz was capering about, wildly excited, and as pleased as Punch. He was apparently well aware of the fact that he had acquitted himself well, for his tail was wagging vigorously, and his head had a cocksure tilt.

And Eileen lay back with her head resting upon Lee's arm, feeling perfectly secure in the company of her rescuers.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORM BREAKS—UMLOSI'S GREAT FIGHT—THE UPPER HAND.

EILEEN recovered rapidly under the careful ministrations of her companions. Nelson Lee had brandy, and Umlosi ran off somewhere and fetched a huge leaf filled with sparkling water. The treatment was immediately successful and the girl recovered her colour.

For, to be frank, Eileen had been nearly on the point of exhaustion at dawn. This was because her Zambuan captors had forced her to run nearly the whole distance. Strong as she was, Eileen had been unable to stand the strain, and when daylight came she had been upon the verge of collapse.

"There is practically nothing to tell you, Mr. Lee," she said. "You saw me dragged away, didn't you? Well, those terrible savages merely released my feet as soon as we were amongst the trees, and then they forced me to run between them, holding my arms cruelly."

"The brutes!" exclaimed Captain Burton grimly.

There was reason for his remark. The sleeves of Eileen's delicate gown were torn in many places, and her well-shaped arms were visible, dark bruises showing upon the white skin.

"Oh, they are nothing!" she exclaimed,

seeing that the skipper and Nelson Lee were looking at them. "Bruises are only trivial, and I don't mind anything now that I am with you again. Oh, but how did you manage it, Mr. Lee?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Boz managed it," he replied.

"But you were all bound up——"

"My master was like the raging lion after thou had been taken, O thou beautiful White Flower!" put in Umlosi. "Wau! I am inclined to think that Umtagati's strength is even as great as mine. He burst his ropes as though they were mere threads——"

"Oh, come! I shall have to relieve you of that impression, Umlosi," said Nelson Lee. "One of the ropes was nearly slashed through by Jelks, and a little extra pressure did the rest. But really we must not stay here a moment longer than is absolutely necessary."

"I am ready, Mr. Lee," said Eileen, rising steadily to her feet.

"By jings! You must have come all this way with one foot practically bare!" exclaimed the skipper gruffly. "What a careless brute I was not to bring that shoe along——"

"Oh, I am not hurt in the least," interrupted Eileen, somewhat untruthfully, for her foot was very sore. "It really doesn't matter, captain."

"As it happens," put in Nelson Lee, "I brought the shoe myself, but I must confess that I was thinking more of Boz than of you, Miss Eileen. I wanted to renew his scent if he lost it."

It was painful for Eileen to walk with the shoe or without it, but slightly less with it on. So having had it placed upon her foot by Nelson Lee, she bravely declared that she was ready to return to the coast as rapidly as they pleased.

"I am afraid we must be cruel, Miss Eileen," said Nelson Lee. "It is necessary for us to rejoin the party as quickly as possible. Those blacks are hastening to give the warning, and the storm will burst before so very long."

"Fear not, my master," said Umlosi. "The storm will be severe, but we shall triumph. It will be idle for you to ask me how I know, for I could not explain. But my snake tells me that all will be well. Fear not, O my brave mistress!"

"I don't fear at all, Umlosi," smiled Eileen.

"It is well," rumbled the black giant.

Somehow they all felt confident. Yet in all truth the position was about as bad as it could be, even now. Their party, numbering everybody, was merely a handful, and hordes of Zambuan would soon come to the attack. Yet the adventurers felt in their hearts that disaster would not come.

The return journey commenced at once.

As Nelson Lee had said, they found it necessary to test Eileen's endurance to the utmost. But she was strong and did not falter once. Boz preceded the party, his tail very much up. He was very tired him-

self, but seemed to know that no time must be lost in returning. Box was a most intelligent little animal, and he had certainly proved his sterling worth on this occasion.

Nelson Lee found no difficulty in following the trail back to the coast, and in due course the sea came within view. Before the beach was reached several figures came running through the trees. They belonged to Handforth and Co. and De Valerie and Farman.

"Great pip!" roared Handforth suddenly. "Here they come!"

"And they've got Miss Dare, too!" yelled McFlure. "Oh, thank goodness!"

"Hurrah!"

The boys rushed round the returning party and showered questions upon Eileen and the others.

"You can see that Miss Dare is quite well, boys," said Nelson Lee, after Eileen had spoken for herself. "I gather that everything is still all right here?"

"Nothing's happened, sir," replied Handforth.

"We've been terribly anxious," put in Tommy Watson, who had come up with Yakama at the sound of the shouting. "It's ripping to see Miss Dare again—we all thought that those blacks had got her for good!"

"I am afraid there is every reason to be anxious still, my boy," said Nelson Lee gravely. "We have got Miss Dare back, but the breathing space will only be a short one. We must search about for a natural refuge, for it would be madness to await an attack in the open."

"We've already found one, sir!" put in Handforth eagerly.

"Oh, indeed!" said Lee.

"Rather, sir!"

"A splendid place!"

"We could hold it against thousands!"

"I am afraid what you say is too good to be true, boys," put in Captain Burton. "Where is this wonderful refuge?"

Tommy Watson pointed along the beach.

"Why, just up there, sir, there's a kind of cliff," he exclaimed. "Handforth and I and some of the other fellows explored it just after dawn. There's a narrow ledge running along the cliff about ten feet from the ground, and it's only possible to get up to it in single file."

"Splendid!" commented Nelson Lee. "And what about the summit, Watson? Couldn't the Zambians attack from above?"

"The cliff overhangs, sir," replied Watson. "The blacks would have to be flies to get down that way. And there's a kind of crack in the cliff where we can all hide easily. It's protected from the top by the overhanging rocks, and nobody can get up to it without climbing over the boulders one at a time. Why, one chap with a pile of stones could keep hundreds of blacks at bay for hours!"

This was good news, indeed. Nelson Lee had been thinking of finding a place of refuge, and it was good to learn that the

boys had made themselves so eminently useful.

Eileen's return to the main party was greeted with many exclamations of relief and pleasure. Aunt Esther, who had recovered, and had been inconsolable, now nearly fainted a second time through sheer joy. She declared that with Eileen by her side she was willing to face any odds. And it was really a fact that Eileen's coolness gave everybody a feeling of confidence. She even caused the maids to lose their panic and collect their wits together.

Nelson Lee lost no time in inspecting the cliff which Tommy Watson had referred to. Captain Burton and Umloai went with him, and the rest of the party followed behind.

The boys naturally led the way. And it was found that Watson's description had by no means been exaggerated. The place was a natural refuge of the first class. For, not only was there shelter in the wide cleft, but it could only be approached by one route.

From the beach itself Lee climbed over a mass of rocks. This was a slow job, and the ledge which ran along the face of the cliff was no more than a foot wide. Only one man at a time could proceed along it, and then he would be constantly in danger from the defenders. A massed assault was absolutely impossible.

Everybody negotiated the ledge in safety. Some little difficulty was experienced with Aunt Esther, but she bore up bravely, and at last managed to reach the safety of the wide cleft.

"I am beginning to feel that Umloai was right," said Nelson Lee, taking a deep breath. "Why, we shall be able to hold out here for days on end; our only difficulty is the question of food and water."

The skipper nodded.

"And it's a difficulty which we can't overcome," he remarked. "It'll be starvation in the end, unless something turns up—"

"Hold on, sir!" interrupted Tommy Watson. "Look up there!"

Captain Burton and Nelson Lee looked towards the far end of the great cleft, which lay in deep shadow. Nelson Lee started, took a step forward, and then caught in his breath.

"Whose idea was that?" he asked quietly.

"Mine, sir," said Watson modestly.

Lee laid his hand upon Tommy's shoulder. "My lad, you deserve the highest praise," he said. "Upon my soul! you realised the full seriousness of the situation, and prepared accordingly. But you cannot expect me to believe that you boys carried that enormous pile up here alone?"

"The crew helped, sir," put in Handforth.

Nelson Lee turned again and surveyed the enormous pile of cocoanuts which lay at the end of the cleft. They were large nuts, and all in prime condition, as far as he could see.

"Some of us stood up on the ledge, sir," explained Watson, "and the other fellows remained below. The nuts were thrown up

and passed along, so it didn't take so very much time."

"Why, with strict rationing, that lot will last us for ten days or a fortnight," declared Captain Burton. "By the Lord Harry! These boys are proving their worth, Mr. Lee—they have proved it, by jings!"

Naturally, the juniors felt greatly pleased with themselves. They had every reason to, for they had sized up the situation as soon as daylight came, and, in Nelson Lee's absence, had started work on their own account.

The gloom vanished and the whole party felt bucked up. Jelks's evil scheme had missed fire so far, for the party had certainly not fallen into the hands of the Zambuanas, and they were not likely to for many days to come.

There would be trials and difficulties by-the-score, but they seemed trivial in comparison with the prospect which had previously loomed before them. Faces were only down-cast when Lord Dorrimore and his companions were remembered.

Tommy Watson was particularly depressed. His two chums, Sir Montie Tregellis-West and myself, had been left on Holiday Island, and Tommy didn't know what had happened to us. And we, on our part, didn't know what had happened to him. But events were shaping themselves—unknown to either party—in a manner which was totally unexpected and surprising.

Umlosi was not exactly pleased with the arrangements.

"I am not easy in mind, Umtagati," he declared. "What chance shall we have of fighting these black dogs? Wau! I am anxious to pit my agility against the spearsmen of this accursed tribe. I have seen the red mists before my eyes, and I know that blood will flow!"

"That's all very well, Umlosi," said Nelson Lee. "You may be dying for a fight, but we couldn't afford to remain in an exposed position. I am as eager to fight as you are, but we can't face overwhelming odds with any prospect of success. The position was bad enough when the Zambuanas attacked on the other island, but here we are in their own territory."

"True words, O my master," said Umlosi. "But I am sore in mind, nevertheless. Wau! Mayhap a fight will come yet. Even now I hear the sound of approaching hordes. The enemy will soon arrive, Umtagati."

"I can't hear anything," said Handforth bluntly.

Umlosi showed all his teeth.

"Thou art not of such good hearing as myself, O white youth," he smiled.

It was several moments, in fact, before the other members of the party could hear any unusual sound above the continuous thunder of the surf on the barrier reef. And then the shouts of natives became audible, growing louder and louder.

Nelson Lee and Umlosi stood at the entrance of the cleft, watching. Along the beach came hundreds of Zambuanas, all carrying spears, and led by a gigantic savage attired in the most grotesque fashion and

painted until he was scarcely recognisable as a human being.

"The chief," murmured Lee.

"Thou art surely right," said Umlosi. "Wau! He is indeed a man, to judge by his figure. A fight with such a giant would be joy to me, Umtagati!"

The blacks saw the party upon the cliff at that moment—at least they saw Umlosi and Nelson Lee. And a great roar went up and hundreds of spears were raised. The chief turned and shouted something. The whole crowd came to a standstill.

Then the painted giant strode forward and raised his spear.

"We give you battle!" he shouted in his savage tongue.

"Well, you can start as soon as you like!" murmured Nelson Lee. "The old ruffian can see that we're beyond his—What the dickens are you up to, Umlosi?"

Umlosi had strode forward out on to the narrow ledge. Just for one moment he turned, and his eyes were gleaming brightly.

"I go to challenge, my master!" he roared.

"You old idiot—"

Nelson Lee paused, realising that words were useless, for Umlosi sprang down on to the sand below—a considerable drop. Lee and the others expected to see their Kutana friend speared instantly. But he ran forward until he faced the chief of the Zambuanas.

"Thou art a man!" he bellowed. "We will fight, thou giant!"

It was a tense moment. The Zambuan chief could not understand Umlosi's words, but there was no mistaking his meaning. In his own way the chief was something of a sportsman, for he gave a great cry and raised his spear as a sign that he was willing to give combat.

His men fell back, lowering their weapons, and stood in a great semicircle, twenty or thirty deep. And Umlosi and his opponent faced one another squarely. The fight was about to commence.

"The cheek of the thing!" murmured Nelson Lee. "What do you think of it, Burton?"

"I think Umlosi's mad!" growled the skipper.

"I'm not so sure. I've never met the man who can touch him in a spear fight yet, and I believe he'll win on this occasion—"

"And what then?" snapped Burton. "What's going to happen if he kills their chief? They'll cut him to shreds before he can move a yard. He's done for himself, whichever way the fight goes!"

There was something in the argument, as Nelson Lee was fully aware. But Umlosi had chosen his own course—and Lee knew why. He would much prefer to die fighting in combat than to be murdered by a party of maddened savages. A fighting death was all that Umlosi desired, and the thought of remaining up in the cleft was quite contrary to all Umlosi's instincts.

"They've started!" muttered Watson excitedly.

"Let's have a squint!" shouted Handforth. Somehow or other nearly everybody crowded

to the front and managed to witness the fight. It was a spectacle to be remembered.

Umlosi soon discovered that the Zambuan chief was an excellent match for him. And the pair were fighting furiously and without pause. Umlosi was in his element; as he afterwards declared, he had not enjoyed himself so much for many months. A fight to the death was joy to him. If he fell himself, and if he remained conscious for a few moments before dying, he would have stated that he was perfectly happy. For Umlosi was a warrior, every inch of him.

Clash!

The spears met and crossed in such a bewildering fashion that the onlookers found it difficult to find who was gaining the mastery. At present it seemed as though the pair were measuring one another's prowess.

The Zambuan chief was on the offensive continuously, his idea being to polish off Umlosi in record time. If this was the case he was very disappointed, because Umlosi refused to be polished off.

His guard was perfect, and not a single thrust reached home. On the other hand, Umlosi inflicted a graze upon his opponent's arm within the first minute of the fight, and now the Zambuan's shoulder received a bad gash.

"Thou art a great fighter!" shouted Umlosi. "But I am thy better!"

There was nothing boastful in his cry; it was merely the truth, and Umlosi knew it. That shoulder-cut seemed to drive the Zambuan chief into a frenzy, for he fought like a madman.

Umlosi received two nasty grazes, but he avoided all the other's heavy thrusts, turning his spear with such swiftness and dexterity that even Nelson Lee was held spell-bound, and Lee had witnessed many a fight of Umlosi's.

"By James!" he muttered. "Dorrie would like to see this!"

"He'll win, Mr. Lee—he'll win!" declared Captain Burton, becoming excited.

Everybody was feeling the tenseness of the moment. They forgot that Umlosi would probably be killed as soon as he settled his opponent. They were awed by the terrific ferocity of this combat.

Again and again Umlosi thrust, for he had now assumed the offensive. But the painted Zambuan held his own for some time. Then he threw all caution to the wind, and charged, either maddened with recklessness, or rendered desperate by his growing weakness, for both fighters were becoming exhausted by this time.

His spear came straight at Umlosi's heart. But it was turned in the nick of time, and merely sliced the skin of the black giant's shoulder. At the same second Umlosi's spear rammed itself right through the Zambuan, killing him on the second. He fell without a sound.

"Hurrah!" roared Handforth, his voice cracking.

Umlosi stood over his vanquished foe, and there was conscious pride in his attitude. He fully expected to be killed on the spot.

But something of a totally different nature occurred.

The hundreds of savages sent up a great cry—a roar which swelled and quivered on the air. And then, without a single exception, they prostrated themselves upon the ground before Umlosi!

"We serve you, O chief!" they chanted again and again.

What could it mean?

Nelson Lee drew his breath in sharply, and when he looked at Captain Burton there was an expression of excitement in his eyes; and it was a very rare occurrence for Nelson Lee to be excited.

"Don't you understand, captain?" he shouted.

"No, I'm darned if I do!" said Captain Burton bluntly. "Why in thunder are those infernal cannibals kow-towing to the chap who's just killed their chief? By jings! I'm flummoxed!"

"Why, there can be only one explanation," exclaimed Nelson Lee. "It looks very much to me as though we are saved. These heathen have a custom similar to others I have seen amongst other savage tribes—Umlosi has vanquished the chief, and so he becomes chief himself!"

"By the Lord Harry!" said Captain Burton tensely.

It was the truth; Nelson Lee's surmise was absolutely correct. Umlosi, the victor, was, by the Zambuan custom, automatically elected king, and the savages were ready to obey his every order.

At a single blow the Zambuans were friendly instead of hostile!

This change in the situation was so great—it possessed such enormous possibilities—that the victims of Captain Jelks's villiany could scarcely realise what it really meant.

But it meant—well, heaps!

CHAPTER VII.

A MISCALCULATION—THE DRUNKEN MADNESS OF JELKS—IN THE NICK OF TIME!

WHILE all this excitement was happening to Nelson Lee and the rest of our friends on Zambua, a great deal was also happening at Holiday Island—but it wasn't what we had planned.

Lord Dorrimore's object, as I mentioned before, was to take command of the schooner and to sail to Zambua in order to rescue the others of the party. Considering that Captain Jelks and Captain Barrow were lying unconscious, and that eleven of their ruffians were in a similar plight, we considered that our task would be fairly simple. But it wasn't!

The sun was mounting higher, and beat fiercely upon us as we crossed the dry bed of the lagoon. We half expected to meet other members of the shore party, but did not do so. It was apparent, therefore, that the thirteen unconscious men on the yacht comprised the whole force who had come ashore.

The Aurora did not belong to Jelks, but to Captain Barrow, and it was pretty certain that no officer had been left in charge on board. And, with a machine-gun and revolvers, we reckoned to get on board the schooner with very little difficulty.

Sir Montie was enthusiastic, and so was the Bo'sun. He wanted badly to get away, being anxious about his father. I was no less anxious concerning the gov'nor, but I managed to conceal my feelings better than the Bo'sun did.

Dorrie was frankly exuberant. The success of our scheme had been so marked that we were perhaps a trifle over-confident. Anyhow, we soon received a check, and that made us realise the true position.

Mounting the rock barrier, we discovered that the schooner was fairly close, and that two boats were practically beneath us, for the sea was very quiet, owing to the curious formation of the rocks, with practically no surf.

"I reckon we'd better give 'em a hail, an' tell the blighters to surrender," said Dorrie. "I expect they'll fall over themselves in their eagerness to do so. It would be rather risky to row out without comin' to some arrangement first. They're a tough crowd, I expect."

"No chance of catching them by surprise, I suppose?" asked the Bo'sun.

"My dear kid, we've been spotted already," replied Dorrie.

Several shouts had come from the schooner, and we could see figures running about upon the decks.

"Hi, you fellows!" roared his lordship. "You'd better shove up a white flag. Your lovely skipper an' all his pals are helpless, an' we're goin' to take command of that old hooker. If you want to avoid trouble, you'd better better knuckle under——"

Crack!

The sharp report of a rifle sounded, and a puff of white smoke appeared on the schooner. At the same second I distinctly heard something whine past my ear.

"By gad!" exclaimed Dorrie grimly.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three other shots rang out, and this time one of the bullets ripped a furrow in Dorrie's sleeve and grazed his arm. He gave the word, and we dropped behind the protection of the rocks.

"The infernal beggars!" snapped Dorrie. "So that's the game, is it? Resistance, by gad! We'll teach 'em somethin'!"

"It's a frightful nuisance, these chaps resistin', sir," exclaimed Sir Montie anxiously. "It'll delay us——"

"We'll give 'em a taste of the machine gun, my lad!" said Dorrie, his voice assuming a hard note. "They've asked for trouble, an' it'll give me great pleasure in handin' it out to 'em!"

"Why the dickens don't the silly idiots surrender?" I growled.

"Well, messmate, you wouldn't surrender if you happened to be in the same position," said the Bo'sun, shaking his head. "They've

got guns aboard, and I daresay they feel safe."

Dorrie was manipulating the machine-gun, and fixed it into a crevice of the rocks so that the muzzle projected over the top. During all this time a steady fire was kept up from the schooner's deck.

Then the machine-gun commenced. The bullets spattered the masts and rigging liberally, Dorrie aiming high on purpose. He only wanted to scare the crew to start with.

The effect was immediate.

Looking up, we beheld a white flag waving frantically, and saw several men crouching on the poop. Lord Dorrimore ceased fire at once, and grinned.

"Thought that would do the trick," he said pleasantly.

We mounted the rocks once more, and were about to descend when Sir Montie gave a sharp cry.

"Down!" he yelled. "Begad! They're getting ready to fire again, the treacherous rotters!"

We had not suspected such Hun trickery, but Dorrie shaded his eyes and gazed over to the schooner. As he did so the rest of us jumped back to cover and yelled to Dorrie to follow. That sign of surrender had been very prompt—suspiciously prompt, in fact, and I realised it now. The scoundrels were evidently attempting to draw us into the open so that we could be potted at.

But they had acted too swiftly; Montie had seen them levelling their rifles. Had they waited until we were near the ship they could have annihilated the five of us without trouble.

Crack! Crack!

Several shots rang out. Lord Dorrimore staggered, uttered a sharp cry, and fell headlong backwards. It's a wonder he didn't break his neck, but the rocks were sloping just here, and he rolled down rather than fell.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Scott, aghast.

Dorrie lay upon the sand, face upwards, silent and still. An ominous trickle of blood came from his forehead, and I gave a hoarse cry.

"Oh, the devils!" I gasped furiously. "After they had shown the white flag, too!"

Just for those first few moments we all believed that poor Dorrie was dead. But a hasty examination told us that the damage was comparatively slight. A bullet had grazed his head, scarcely doing more than opening a furrow in the skin. But the shock had stunned him.

"Thank goodness it's nothing worse," I said fervently. "Rush to the yacht, Bo'sun, and get some lint——"

"It's all right!" interrupted Mr. Scott. "There's plenty here."

He had come prepared for emergencies, and pulled out a first-aid box in tabloid form, something after the style airmen carry. Without delay Dorrie was bandaged and attended to.

After about three minutes he opened his eyes.

"Hullo!" he mumbled. "What the dooce — Who's been bashin' me on the head? I feel frightfully sore — Oh, I remember!"

He sat up, looked rather bewildered for a moment or two, and then glared at us all in turn.

"Did I faint?" he demanded.

"That bullet knocked you senseless, Dorrie," I replied.

"Impossible!" he snapped. "I was senseless before that, Nipper. I ought to have known that those brutes would try that kind of dodge. How long was I unconscious?"

"About five minutes, sir," said Mr. Scott.

"Disgraceful!" said Dorrie, scrambling unsteadily to his feet. "That's what I call it—disgraceful! What the dooce is the matter with me? I've been hit scores of times, an' I've never been bowled over before. By gad! We'll make those dogs pay for this!"

Judging by his talk and the strength of his voice there was nothing much the matter with him. And he soon showed us that he was as active as ever. The machine-gun recommenced its bark.

Our fire was returned, and this game went on for about twenty minutes. By the end of that time Lord Dorrimore was getting fed-up. We had wasted a lot of ammunition and nothing had resulted. The schooner's crew was as obstinate as ever.

"This won't do!" growled Dorrie impatiently. "We're making no headway at all! Confound the brutes!"

"I'm blessed if I can see what we can do," I put in.

"We've been too jolly considerate, that's what's the matter," said his lordship. "Look here, we'll try another game. We'll sweep the decks with machine-gun fire, and drive the whole crowd below. While you're working the gun, Nipper, Mr. Scott an' I will take the boat an' get on board——"

"Too risky!" I interrupted.

"Rot!" snapped Dorrie. "We shall be protected by the barrage, an'——"

"Hands up—every blamed son of you!"

The voice was harsh and firm, and came from the rear! All five of us had been paying too much attention to the schooner, and this interruption came as a complete shock. We spun round, startled.

Captain Jelks stood before us, covering us with two revolvers. Six men were on either side of us, and they were armed also. All thirteen were looking somewhat groggy, but there was no doubt that they were fully conscious, and that they were grim.

"Hands up, you dogs!" snarled Jelks savagely.

"Well, I'm hanged!" exclaimed Dorrimore.

He put his hands up at once, since there was nothing else to be done, and we followed suit. If Dorrie had pulled one of his revolvers we should probably have been shot down on the instant.

"I don't know how you've managed it, but you're a smart scoundrel, Jelks," said Dorrie calmly. "You must have crept up like a lot of shadows. Well, I know when I'm whacked!"

"Thought you'd get the better of us, didn't you?" grated Jelks. "By thunder! I'll make you pay for this! We was told that you'd been eaten by them blacks, an' afore I've done with you you'll wish you 'ad been!"

"That's very cheerin'," said Lord Dorrimore smoothly.

"How—how did they recover?" I panted. "I thought that stuff was strong, Dorrie? Oh, what asses we were not to have bound them!"

"Your vocabulary is too limited, young 'un," replied Dorrie. "We were worse than asses. But this is what comes of knowin' nothin' about drugs. I thought the beggars were safe for a couple of hours."

Disaster had befallen us, and we did not blind our eyes to the fact. And it had come about because Lord Dorrimore had made a miscalculation; there was no question of carelessness at all: it was sheer misfortune.

Getting down to rock-bottom facts, we were now prisoners in Jelks's hands because Dorrie was too considerate. He had had no wish to kill his victims by an overdose of the "dope." But he had been too cautious; the stuff hadn't been doped sufficiently. It was a perfectly natural mistake, but it meant everything in the world to us.

In our eagerness to get on board the schooner, so that we could hurry to the rescue of Nelson Lee and the others, we had also neglected to bind our prisoners, feeling confident that they would not recover for hours.

All our advantage had been lost, and the position was far worse than it had ever been before. But what was the good of growling? We could do nothing but submit quietly to the misfortune.

"Take them weapons away, Larson," said Jelks harshly.

Mr. Larson came forward and relieved us of all our firearms, including the machine-gun.

"I guess that's the way to treat them doggone guys!" said Captain Barrow. "Hully gee! It's a wonder we weren't marooned on this durned island ourselves! We'll teach these galpots a lesson, I guess!"

At the point of the revolver we were compelled to get into one of the boats. And then, still powerless to resist, we were rowed out to the schooner and were forced to climb on board. The second mate at once reported our attempt to capture the schooner, and Jelks was more furious than ever.

"String these 'ounds up!" he ordered sharply, after having spoken with Captain Barrow for a few moments. "String 'em all up so's they can't move an inch!"

The instructions were carried out to the letter. The crew fell upon us and bound us so tightly that we were in continual pain. Then, absolutely at the mercy of these brutes, we were left in a clump upon the deck, amidships.

The change in our fortunes had been so dramatic and so unexpected that even Dorrie was silent. He had lost his optimism, and looked moody.

"I'm awfully sorry, you fellows," he said at last.

"Why, it wasn't your fault, Dorrie," I put in, trying to remain calm.

"Yes it was—all my fault," declared his lordship. "Wasn't I in charge? Didn't I allow those rotters to creep up behind without spottin' 'em? Oh, great glory! What a hopeless muddle we've made of it! If we ever get free from this fix—and I'm frightfully doubtful—I'll give you permission to kick me round in circles until you're tired of the game. If ever a fellow deserved kickin', I do!"

"If it comes to that," I said, "we're all in the same boat. I wonder why Jelks didn't shoot us down at once?"

"He's got somethin' better in store for us, I suppose," said Dorrie. "Oh, don't talk to me! I'm fed up with myself! There's only one consolation—Jelks won't find that treasure, even if he searches for twenty years!"

"That's a fat lot of consolation to us!" I growled.

We fell silent after that, for there seemed very little to talk about. Meanwhile, Captain Jelks and Bully Barrow were doing their best to recover down in the cabin by partaking of much whisky.

Half an hour later they came on deck, and I saw in a moment that both men were reeling drunk. They had taken so much spirit that they could not walk steadily, and their eyes were gleaming with a madly furious light.

"Come aft, you lazy guys!" roared Captain Barrow, addressing his remarks to his own crew. "Say, shift them blamed fools, Ned!"

A dozen men hurried aft, and Barrow glowered at them.

"Rig a plank overside!" he snarled thickly. "Don't stand there like a set of doggone apes! Get a move on!"

He turned to us with a leer.

"There's sharks in these waters, I guess," he said. "Say, you're goin' to walk the plank—every darnation son of you! Savvy? You're goin' to walk the plank, an' I guess the sharks 'll 'ave a good feed!"

The crew were startled, but knew better than to resist the orders of their drunken skipper. Barrow and Jelks were not joking; in their drunken frenzy they fully intended to carry out their diabolical threat.

The plank was rigged outboard rapidly, and was very soon in position. Captain Barrow grinned cruelly.

"I guess you'll go first," he said, pointing an unsteady finger at Dorrie. "Cut 'is ankles free, Ned, an' then blindfold 'im——"

"That's not necessary," interrupted his lordship calmly. "I'm not afraid——"

"Stow your blamed lip!" roared Barrow coarsely.

Lord Dorrimore, to our horror, was jerked to his feet as soon as his ankles were freed. A length of dirty cloth was bound round his eyes, and he was led blindly to the plank. Resistance was impossible, since his arms were still bound. We all gave up hope then: it seemed as though nothing in the world could save us from the ghastly fate these drink-sodden brutes had outlined.

And then came a cry.

"Native canoes in sight, sir!" came the frantic hail. "There's scores of 'em——"

"Wot's that?" bellowed Captain Barrow.

He rushed up into the rigging, but came down at once.

And then pandemonium was let loose. The crew was ordered to get the anchor up and to set sail without a second's delay. Barrow, drunk as he was, knew that he could do nothing against hordes of blacks. The canoes had approached whilst the preparations for our fate had been proceeding, and it was not until too late that the alarm was given.

As for Lord Dorrimore, he found himself left alone, and he staggered over to us blindly, directed by our calls.

We were numbed by the series of mishaps. Perhaps it would have been better, after all, to have been cast to the sharks than to fall into the hands of the cannibals again.

I know that I was dazed by the shock of it all. The very fact that these blacks had returned proved conclusively that our friends had met with a terrible fate. That fate would now be shared by us.

What happened afterwards was confusing. Rifle-shots rang out, but were almost drowned in the yells of the blacks. The canoes swarmed round, and the Zambians poured on to the schooner's decks like so many gigantic ants.

In less than three minutes the vessel was theirs, although, strange to say, they had killed nobody; most of the crew had been driven below, terrified, but Jelks and Larson and Barrow were held prisoners.

And then an amazing surprise came.

I really thought that I was dreaming for a moment. But Umlosi himself—the one and only Umlosi—appeared over the bulwarks, and leapt down to the deck. He saw us on the instant, and let out a great hail of joy.

"It is well, N'Kose, my father!" he shouted, swinging over to us. "Wau! My joy is great to see thee once more! Do thou shout with joy, for victory is ours!"

We knew it a minute later, for Nelson Lee and Captain Burton climbed on board, and we were released. And then we saw Handforth and Co., and Eileen Dare, and all the rest of them in other canoes which floated near by.

I was so choked with emotion that I couldn't say a blessed thing. But I silently thanked Heaven for our deliverance.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

MAGNIFICENT NEW SERIAL!

The Chums of Littleminster School.

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

The First Chapters.

BASIL HOOD is a new boy at Littleminster School.

On his arrival he makes a friend of

JOHN CHALLIS, a Senior in the Fifth Form.

MYERS and **COGGIN** are two bullies, and on the very next morning Challis hears the new boy cry out as he passes their study. He wrenches the door open and leaps into the room.

(Now read on.)

THE DEPUTATION.

COGGIN, who was about to seize the new boy by the collar, started back. John Challis, taking in the situation at a glance, saw that young Basil was bleeding from the mouth. The poor little chap had evidently been badly used.

"Myers," cried Challis sternly, "what's the meaning of this?"

"You mind your own business, Challis. Get out—"

Challis advanced further into the room and looked solemnly down at the fag.

"Who cut your mouth like that, young 'un?" he asked.

Basil hesitated.

"If he blabs I'll thrash him," shouted Myers furiously.

"Speak out, youngster. Don't be afraid. How did it happen?"

Somehow the presence of his friend soothed the new boy, and he answered in a low voice:

"He threw a book at me, Mr. Challis."

"And hit you in the mouth—eh?"

"Because the little beast wouldn't do what he was told," stormed Myers.

"I did my best," whimpered the new boy, his face as white as a sheet.

"All right," said Challis, "that settles it. Myers, he shan't fag for you. I'm going to take him away. If you object we'll let Mr. Evans judge, and if that don't suit you, we'll go before the Head. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for bullying a new kid like this."

"What—you cad——" shouted Myers, rushing at Challis. "Would you dare——"

He struck at Challis, who set the blow aside. Then, while Coggin looked on in amazement, Challis seized Myers and flung him heavily across the room with a show of strength that was surprising.

Myers stumbled, and fell on to his knees.

"If you want me," said Challis, in icy tones, "you know where to find me, Myers. And if you want a quarrel, Coggin, I'm at

your service. Now, young 'un, come with me."

Basil Hood looked up into Challis's face with a wondering stare.

"Kid," said John, as he set his arm about the new boy's shoulders and drew him gently towards the door, "you shan't fag for these chaps. If you like you shall fag for me."

Having rescued Basil Hood from the hands of the bully Myers, John Challis conducted the fag to his room, and telling him to go in, closed the door upon him.

Then flinging himself into a deep-seated chair, he regarded Basil ruefully, the tips of his fingers pressed together.

"It seems to me, young 'un," he declared, after a thoughtful pause, "that some chaps are born to trouble. I'm one of 'em. You may be another. Now, tell me all about your row with Myers."

The small boy, his face flushing hotly, hesitated, and then, feeling that the confidence would not be regarded as sneaking by Challis, whom he instinctively felt to be a generous and large-minded friend and not a prig, the youngster burst into a torrent of explanation.

His story, in a few words, was that he had been collared by Myers, set to clear up the latter's room, and had been bullied and chivvied from the very first moment of his apprenticeship.

From the start Myers had found fault with him. He'd been made to sweep up, then to dust, to rearrange the books, and was found fault with because they'd not been placed in their proper order.

"I expect," commenced Challis, frowning, "that Myers got his knife into you because I tried to stand up for you. I wouldn't have done it, only I know what sort of a brute he is."

Then he added, with sharp glance:

"Why did he throw that book at you?"

"Because he said I was slow."

Challis's frown deepened.

"Oh, well, kid," he said, "I'll keep you with me, if you're willing. I've never had a fag. Never wanted one."

He didn't explain that from the first moment of his arrival at Littleminster onward he'd been the butt of his school mates, had been more or less sent to Coventry always, and that even the small boys regarded him with awe, slightly tinged with disrespect.

"Thank you. I'd do anything for you, Mr. Challis——"

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

"All right. No misters, mind. And I say, remember this, I'll have no tale-bearing or sneaking, either one way or the other. That's taboo."

Basil Hood's eyes brightened. His little boyish heart swelled with gratitude to the only boy in the school who'd attempted to make things easy for him. He was feeling horribly homesick and down.

Yes, he felt he'd do anything for John Challis. In a few broken sentences he tried to convey as much to his friend.

Challis rose, returned to his desk, and sat down.

"That'll do," he said, without even looking at the boy. "You're my fag, then. Sha'n't overwork you. Don't want you now. So run along and amuse yourself."

Just then the school bell rang for breakfast, and with a sigh Challis put his books up. His studies hadn't progressed much that morning, and he felt that he was terribly behindhand with them. Well, he'd have to make up later on.

The morning went swiftly. There was an air of concentration in the various classrooms one seldom saw at Littleminster. It was as if the boys had made up their minds to start well.

Afterwards came the dinner and afternoon school.

Then the boys were free to enjoy themselves in the playgrounds and sports fields. Amid a perfect babel of sound they rushed to their rooms and changed, and then went to the athletic ground, the cricket fields, the nets, the fives courts, or the swimming bath, as they felt disposed.

Only a few of the boys refrained from participation in the games.

Challis was one of them. In the seclusion of his room, with the window open and the blind drawn down to keep out the sun, he worked, concentrating on the task before him and trying to make up the ground he'd lost in the early morning.

It seemed as if he were destined to interruption, however, for without warning the door was wrenched open and Myers entered the room, followed by Chalfont, Digby, Ponsonby, and Ryder, all of these being of Evans's House save Ryder, who was captain of the cricket club in Hales's House.

Challis, with cry of astonishment, looked up, and as he saw the grin of savage self-satisfaction on Myers's face, his brows came together in a frown of annoyance.

He did not rise, but leant back in his chair, his pen poised in his hand.

"Hallo!" said he. "What do you want?"

Myers advanced serenely. He loved to annoy Challis. He felt he could do so with impunity with so many chums to back him up.

"Oh!" he sneered. "we've come to have a bit of a talk with you, Challis."

"H'm. Can't you wait till to-night?"

"No time like the present. We've been talking things over. Fact is, we've come to ask you to join the clubs."

Challis laid his pen down, and crossing his legs, glanced thoughtfully at them without replying immediately. He was thinking things over.

CHALLIS REFUSES TO JOIN THE CLUBS.

IT was a half minute or more before the answer came, and the intruders, grinning, exchanged meaning glances.

"Well," cried Myers impatiently, at last. "What do you say?"

Challis's frown vanished. He looked down at his books with a contemplative glance. His pen tapped the desk.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly, a hot flush gradually mounting from chin to forehead.

"But—I can't—"

"I knew you'd say that," sneered Myers. "I told the other chaps so. All the terms you've been here you've not paid a ha'penny towards the upkeep of the clubs. And you're the only boy in the school who hasn't."

"And that's why no decent chap will have anything to do with you," growled Ryder, of Hales's House.

"Evans's has been pretty poorly represented all round, in cricket, football, swimming, athletics, boxing, and all the rest of it," chimed in Chalfont warmly. "And you, one of the biggest of the boys here, haven't lifted a finger to help us. No wonder you're sent to Coventry."

"Why the deuce don't you join the clubs?" asked Digby persuasively.

"I'm not popular," flashed Challis, glancing fearlessly at him. "And—I should have thought that you wouldn't have wanted me."

"If you're not popular, whose fault is it?" snarled Myers, who remembered the incident of the morning, and hated Challis.

"Aren't we wasting time?" asked Ryder impatiently. "Either he'll join the clubs or he won't."

"Now," cried Chalfont, "which is it to be, Challis?" The ultimatum was put very abruptly.

Challis rose at last, and standing with his hands in his pockets, regarded each of the intruders in turn with an earnest and appealing glance.

"I'm sorry, but I can't join," he said.

"I knew it," stormed Myers. "That settles it, let's cut and leave the cad to himself. It's a blot on the school to have an outsider like that at Littleminster—"

He could afford to speak his mind, could Myers, with so many to back him up.

"—I can't join the clubs," Challis went on, ignoring the interruption, and speaking in clear though low tones. "Because I can't afford it—"

Myers burst into a peal of derisive laughter.

"You see"—Challis evidently meant to be frank with his schoolmates for once in a way, and had thrown aside his habitual air of reticence—"my father is a poor man."

(Continued overleaf.)

It's as much as he can do to pay the fees and rig me out. There's nothing left for clubs and games, you see. If things were otherwise, you'd find I'd be one of the first to join." He was very pale now, and his hand straying to the task books, rested there. "As it is, I have to devote every moment of my time to study. I want to get through as soon as I can. If I can save a term or two's school fees, it'll help my dad a good deal."

He paused suddenly and looked at them to see what effect his explanation had had upon them. It was plain that he hoped for some friendly response to his frank statement. If so he was doomed to disappointment.

"Bah!" said Myers. "Come on, you chaps. Let's leave the dirty pauper to his books."

"Well, Challis," said Chalfont in a tone of deep disappointment, "it'll do you a lot of harm; that's all I can say. You're in bad odour as it is. The club fees aren't so heavy, and if you couldn't afford to buy everything, some of us could lend you a few things——"

"Thanks; but I don't like sponging on others for my working tools," replied Challis stiffly.

"And it comes to this," said Myers hotly. "Challis is here under false pretences. Littleminster is supposed to be a high-class school. That's why the fees are stiff. Paupers aren't wanted here. If Challis's father can't afford to pay his way, he oughtn't to have sent him here. It's not fair to us chaps."

There were murmurs of approval, though the others didn't like the tone of rank snobbery with which the sentiments voiced by Myers were uttered.

"But we can send him to Coventry. We really don't want a cad like him in the clubs, though it was only fair to give him the chance. We now know where we stand. I vote that none of us has anything to do or to say to him——"

Challis took a step forward.

"Ryder, Chalfont, Digby, Ponsonby," he appealed. "Don't you understand? I spoke frankly because I thought——"

"Oh, I think we understand!" remarked Ponsonby coldly. "You can't tell me your father wouldn't pay your club fees if you wished him to. Come on, you fellows. Let's leave him to himself."

Myers stepped up to Challis. His face beamed with triumph, and his lips were curved in a smile of delight.

"You thought you were smart this morning, cad Challis," he jeered, "but you see we're more than your match. Before the term ends you'll be sorry you ever came to Littleminster. We're going to put you in your proper place——"

A short, inarticulate cry burst from Challis's lips. His face flamed crimson with shame and anger, and his eyes darted fire.

"Get out," he cried. "Get out——"

Myers did not budge, but laughed the louder.

Then with a spring Challis was on to him. He seized him, and though his enemy tried to struggle, turned him about. With arm twisted into the small of his back, and the irresistible impelling force applied by Challis urging him towards the door, he went, screaming with rage.

He was as powerless as a child in Challis's grip, and the others looked on in amazement. They one and all saw that Challis had not applied that hold by accident. He knew.

Once in the passage Challis flung Myers from him, and the bully, reeling, lost his balance and fell. Turning his back upon him, Challis re-entered the room.

"Go," he cried to the others, and they went, slamming the door to behind them.

Somehow they felt undignified, small. In spite of their joint antagonism they could not help feeling that there was something about Challis that almost compelled respect, poor though he was.

MR. EVANS INTERVENES.

THE result of that afternoon visit was a period of drawn-out misery to Challis. When Basil put his head in at the door and inquired whether he wanted anything, he gruffly answered "No."

Bending over his task, he tried to concentrate, but without avail.

His thoughts were all jumbled up, and when he wrote, to his amazement he found himself making endless mistakes, even in spelling.

His brain was in a state of angry revolt, and nothing he could do in such a mood would be right.

At last he closed his books, stretched his legs, and leaning back in his chair, drifted into a brown study.

Outside the sun began to lose its power, and, turning an angle of the schoolhouse wall, vanished. The day was drawing in to its close, and shadows came swiftly.

Still Challis sat and thought and thought, the cries of the boys from the playing-fields joining in with the loud ticking of the clock that rested on the mantelpiece, a cheap clock which Challis had brought from home, and which he set daily by the big timepiece that adorned the Littleminster Tower.

How long he would have remained a victim to bitter and conflicting thoughts it is hard to say, but there came a sudden rat-a-tat on the door.

"Come in," cried Challis with a start, and the door, swinging open, admitted Mr. Evans, the master of the house.

(To be continued.)