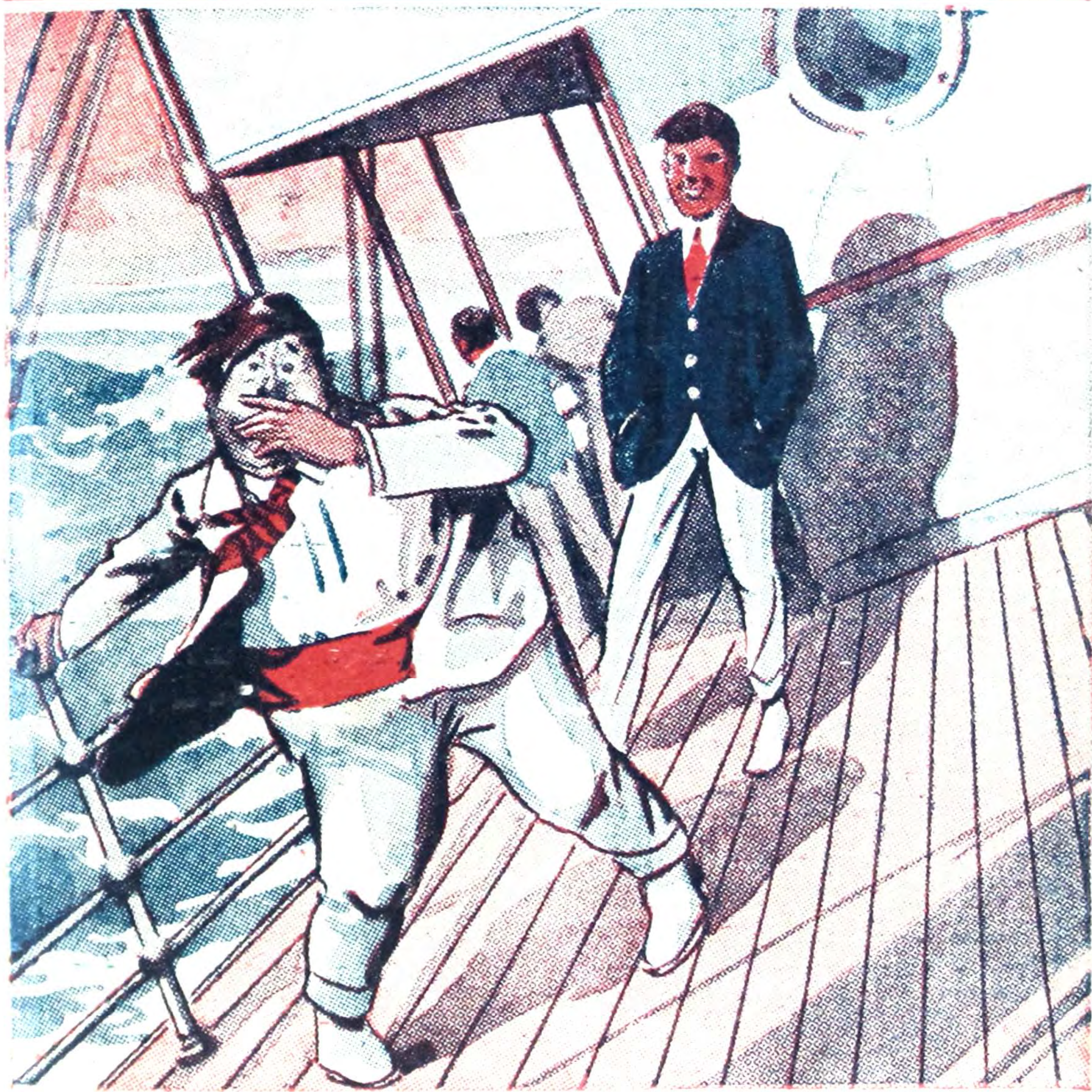


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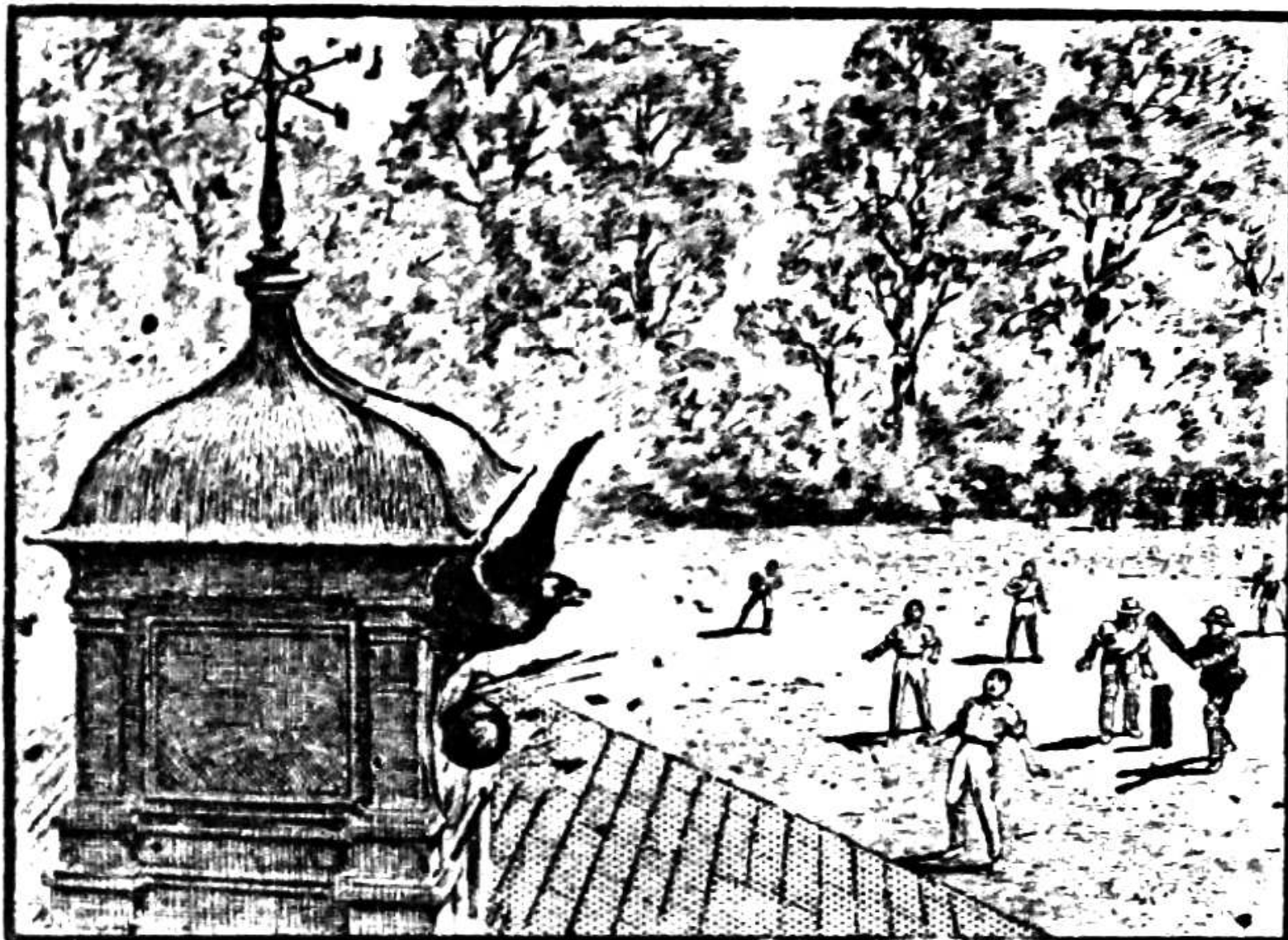
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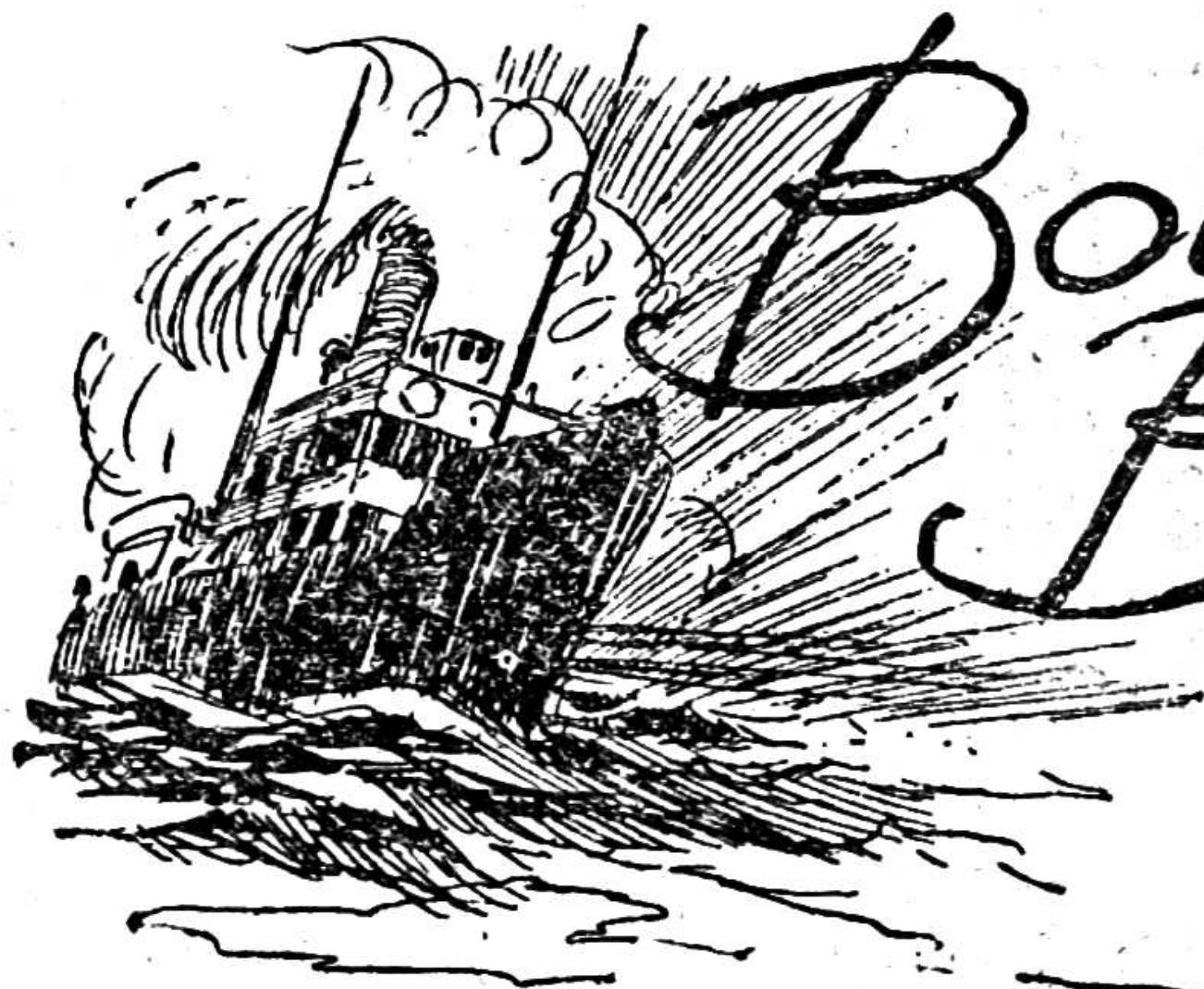
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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE STOWAWAY.

NELSON LEE tossed his cigarette away, and nodded.

"Yes, my boys, it's the last sight you'll see of old England for some little time," he remarked. "Before we return to these shores we shall probably have some wonderful adventures, and we shall certainly see many wonderful sights."

"I hope so, sir," said Tommy Watson. "We're bound for the Amazon, so we ought to have a pretty lively time of it. I've read lots about the Amazon, and I expect we shall have a gorgeous time!"

"You mustn't run away with the idea, Watson, that Brazil is a paradise," said Nelson Lee. "On the contrary, there are certain parts of the Amazon which are more or less hotbeds of fever. There are many terrible swamps, and the atmosphere is positively deadly."

"We shall have to miss those parts, sir," said Watson cheerfully.

"That's all very well, my son," I grinned. "We can't pick and choose, you know. Don't forget that we're going to South America with a special mission. We're looking for Kerrigan's father, assuming that that person is alive."

"Dear old boy, I have a feeling within me that the colonel is still in the land of the living," remarked Sir Montie Tregellis-West, with a wise shake of his head. "I haven't had any visions, like Aunt Janet, but, at the same time, I am feelin' frightfully hopeful!"

I think everybody on board—that is, all the members of Lord Dorrimore's party—had the same convictions as Sir Montie. Young Stanley Kerrigan, of the Third Form of St. Frank's, was with us, and he, too, had caught the fever.

It had been quite impossible to keep the truth from the youngster. He knew well enough that we were going out to the Amazon for the express purpose of attempting to find traces of the lost Colonel Kerrigan. Stanley also knew that Nelson Lee and Dorrie entertained lively hopes of finding the colonel alive.

We had only started out from England the day before, or, to be more exact, in the early hours of this same morning. We were now on the open sea, and the evening was simply glorious. The sun shone from a cloudless sky, and the beautiful white decks of *The Wanderer* were gleaming with freshness and cleanliness. The brasswork glittered beautifully in the rays of the sun.

She was a first-rate vessel, and we expected to arrive on the Amazon in quite record time.

Once upon the bosom of that mighty river, the party would proceed many miles upstream, and would then branch off up one of the many tributaries. But that was in the future. For the present we were keen on enjoying ourselves while making the voyage across the Atlantic.

Lord Dorrimore's party was quite a considerable one. There were a good number of fellows from St. Frank's, including Handforth and Co., the chums of Study D—Pitt, Grey, and Timothy Tucker—De Valerie, Somerton, and a good many others.

The only fellows who were really not wanted were Fullwood and Co. The Nuts of Study A had managed to get into Dorrie's good books, and just before the holidays they had fixed up things so that they would be able to come on this holiday trip with us.

They had not arrived until the last moment—until the boat was practically preparing to leave the Thames. It was too late to send them back, or to kick up any fuss. Fullwood, Gulliver, and Bell were the three worst young rascals in the St. Frank's Remove, and it was rather upsetting to find them included in this merry party. However, there was no sense in causing trouble, and we decided to make the best of a bad job.

At the same time, I had given Fullwood to understand that we were not prepared to stand any of his usual nonsense. At the first sign of his caddish ways, we would put our foot down heavily. Fullwood, of course, pretended to ignore my warning, and only sneered at me. But I think he was rather impressed.

There were a good many other guests on board. Lady Helen Tregellis-West, Montie's aunt, was presiding over the young ladies, including Violet Mason, Ethel Church, and two or three other girls who were known to all of us. Then, of course, there was young Stanley Kerrigan. He had been allowed to bring two other Third Formers with him, and these juniors were Owen minor and Chubby Heath. Morrow and Frinton, of the Sixth, were with us. Fenton, the captain of the school, had been asked to come, but other arrangements, made by his parents, had prevented him from accepting Lord Dorrimore's invitation.

Tom Burton, of the Remove, had a particular interest in being a member of the party, since his father was the cap-

tain of the yacht. We were a very lively crowd indeed, and we were anticipating plenty of fun and interest throughout the trip.

I mustn't forget to mention that the one and only Umlosi was also with us. The chief of the Kutanas was revelling in the fine weather, and he was thoroughly pleased to be away from British shores. Not that he had any dislike to the Old Country, but he was a lover of open spaces. He detested being hemmed in by streets, and by being worried by cars, motor-buses, and the hundred and one other disturbances of a great city. The giant black was in his element when he was under the blue skies, far away from the hustle and bustle of town.

But even now Umlosi was not perfectly content—he was not in that amiable condition until we reached the forests, until Umlosi was able to glory in the heat of the tropical sun.

At the moment he certainly looked content, for he was lolling back in a deck-chair, not far from where we were standing, and he appeared to be at peace with the world. I strolled over to him.

"How goes it, Umlosi, old son?" I asked cheerfully. "Feeling all serene?"

"Wah! It is indeed a wondrous pleasure to be here, oh Manzie!" rumbled Umlosi, in his deep voice. "Thou art a clever youth, and thou hast been using strange words, which come curious to mine ears. However, I gather thy meaning, oh Nimble One. I am indeed all serene."

"That's good then," I grinned. "I thought perhaps that you were a bit off colour, and was pretending to pass it off. You know—pains in the tummy, and all those sorts of things."

Umlosi nodded gravely.

"I have not been troubled by the pains thou hast mentioned," he said. "But it is not wise to speak too soon. Mayhap I shall be seized by a great illness ere long. Wah! It is a remarkable thing for me—Umlosi—the Chief of the Kutanas—to be stricken down by a malady which twists one up into knots, and that makes a man wish that he were off this earth!"

"Meaning seasickness?" remarked Handforth, who had just strolled up.

"I know not its name, oh Clumsy One!" said Umlosi. "Methinks that thou art right, however. Seasickness, as thou hast termed it, is indeed a malady

which one need be nervous of. While coming from mine own country to this great Empire of thine, I was stricken down, even as I have said. N'kose, my father, made light of it. But I will tell thee, oh white youths, that I was near unto death."

"Don't you believe it, old son!" I grinned. "You were lively enough; but seasickness has a way of making a fellow think that he is going to peg out. If we strike some rough sea before long, you'll probably have another attack—only worse!"

Umlosi looked rather alarmed.

"Thou art surely joking, O Manzie!" he said, in an anxious voice. "Art thou not attempting to play with me? Is it possible that any attack can be worse than the one I have already experienced? Wau! I do not think so!"

"Well, we shall see," I said cheerfully. "But don't worry, old son. If you have an attack of mal-de-mer this trip, we'll look after you!"

The black giant shook his head dolefully.

"Thou art making use of words which are beyond my comprehension, O Nimble One!" he said. "But, mayhap, it will be better for us not to discuss this subject, since I have noticed that when one discusses something unpleasant, that something generally comes to pass. It is better to be silent."

We chuckled, and strolled away, leaving Umlosi still shaking his head in a doubtful manner. A moment later a steward came hurrying past us, and he paused.

"Do you know if his lordship is about, sir?" he inquired, touching his cap.

"Yes; I think Lord Dorrimore is just behind the bridge," I replied. "Anything important? You look rather anxious."

"I'm not exactly anxious, sir," said the steward. "But there's something I'd like to tell his lordship right at once."

"You'd better follow me, then," I said briskly.

"Thank you, sir!"

We went along the deck, and within a minute or two came to the spot where Lord Dorrimore was chatting with the gov'nor. They both looked round when I spoke.

"This chaps wants a word with you, Dorrie," I said.

"He can have fifty if he wants," said

Lord Dorrimore obligingly. "Well, my good chap, what's the trouble? Higher wages or shorter hours?"

The steward grinned.

"It's nothing like that, my lord," he said. "We're too well paid on this yacht to be dissatisfied."

"Amazin'!" said Dorrie, looking mildly astonished. "Here is somebody who is satisfied with his job! Well, go on—what's wrong? What advice do you need? I'm willin' to dispense any amount of hot air free, gratis, and for nothing."

The steward grinned again.

"Well, it's this way, my lord," he said. "I didn't go to the cap'n, because I was expressly asked not to. But down below, in one of the spare cabins, there's a lady."

"A which?" said Dorrie, with sudden interest.

"A lady, my lord!"

"My dear man, there are a good many ladies on board——"

"Yes, my lord; I know that. But this lady isn't a member of the party," said the steward. "She is looking regular scared, too, and I don't exactly know what to do about it. I thought I'd come and report to you at once, my lord—especially as she asked me to."

"She asked you to?" asked Dorrie.

"What sort of a lady is she?"

"An elderly lady, my lord."

"Did she give her name?"

"No, my lord."

"Don't keep 'my lord-ing' me," said Dorrie irritably. "The best thing you can do is to call me sir. It's much shorter, and it doesn't sound so bally formal. Well, about this lady. You say she is in one of the spare cabins?"

"Yes, my lord—I—I mean, sir!"

"An' how did she come to be there?"

"I don't exactly know, sir," said the steward. "I went in that cabin in order to get something, sir, and I was quite thunderstruck when I found the lady there."

"I should think you were," said Dorrie. "Well, I suppose the best thing we can do is to go along an' investigate. What do you think, Lee?"

"It would be just as well, perhaps," said Nelson Lee.

"She wouldn't give no account of herself, sir," said the steward. "By what I could make out, she hasn't got any luggage on board, and she's really scared of seeing you or the skipper."

"A stowaway, eh?" chuckled Dorrie. "By gad! This thing seems to be gettin' rather interestin'!"

His lordship was puzzled, and so was Nelson Lee. Anyhow, they went along the deck with the steward, and I followed. I didn't see any reason why I should be out of this. We passed down the beautiful companion, and then went along one of the highly decorated passages, until we came to the sleeping cabins. The steward led us straight to one right at the end.

"This is the room, sir," he said, indicating it.

Lord Dorrimore tapped upon the panels, and we waited for a reply. It was not long in coming, for a somewhat nervous voice made itself heard.

"Come in!" it said.

"Why, that sounds like——" began Nelson Lee.

"By the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Lord Dorrimore, opening the door abruptly.

We passed in, and then we received a big surprise—at least, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrie did. But I was not aware of the identity of the lady who stood before us, for I had not seen her before.

"Why, good gracious!" ejaculated Nelson Lee. "Miss Kerrigan! I had no idea that you were on board——"

"Glory! This is simply great!" shouted Dorrie, rushing forward, and grasping Miss Kerrigan's hand with considerable warmth. "My dear Aunt Janet, I had no idea that I should receive such a pleasant surprise. I didn't know you were comin'—I didn't know anythin' about it!"

I began to realise the truth. Aunt Janet was the only relative of young Stanley Kerrigan, of the Third. It was owing to this lady, in the main, that Lord Dorrimore was taking this party out to the Amazon, for it was in quest of Aunt Janet's brother, Colonel Kerrigan, D.S.O. She had certainly not been invited to come on the trip, and it was therefore extremely surprising to find her on board when we were a good way out on the voyage.

"Oh, Lord Dorrimore, I'm afraid you will be terribly angry with me!" she exclaimed, rather nervously. "I—I don't know how to explain—I don't know what to say! I am sure you will think I am a terrible person!"

"Nothin' of the kind!" said Dorrie. "My dear lady, I am more than grati-

fied to find you here. I am certain that you have got a very fine explanation, an' I've got a feelin' that an apology is due from me."

"No! Nothing of the kind, Lord Dorrimore," said Miss Kerrigan quickly. "It is I who must apologise, and I really cannot hope for your forgiveness. I came on board last night, before the yacht sailed from Tilbury——"

"One moment!" interrupted Dorrie. "Please pardon me for buttin' in like this. But if you came on board last night, it stands to reason that you haven't fed to-day! You haven't had a bite of food!"

"It really doesn't matter," said Aunt Janet nervously.

"Doesn't it!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "We'll soon see to that, Miss Kerrigan! You'll come along with us at once to the saloon, an' I'll give orders that the best grub on the yacht is to be put before you—anythin' you fancy! The explanations can be left until afterwards. They are unimportant, anyhow. The main thing is to have you here with us. By gad! Young Stanley will be nearly off his head with delight!"

"But—but I have no right to be on board, and I feel awfully guilty," said Aunt Janet, looking really upset. "I would best prefer to explain now, Lord Dorrimore, if you don't mind. I want to know what you will think under the circumstances. Oh, I have been so silly!"

"We'll soon have everythin' square an' smooth, Miss Kerrigan," said Dorrie gracefully. "There's no need to be alarmed, an' there's no need to look worried, either. If you're anxious about tellin' us the yarn now—well, perhaps it'll be the best. Go ahead!"

"Sit down, Miss Kerrigan, and please do your utmost to keep calm," said Nelson Lee gently. "It is quite obvious that your presence on the yacht is due to some mistake or other, and if you wish to be put ashore on British soil, it will be quite a simple matter. So you may ease your mind on that point."

Miss Kerrigan shook her head.

"I'm not worrying about that, Mr. Lee; I'm not worrying about that at all," she said, with surprising vehemence. "But I will tell you the truth—I will confess everything."

"Dash it all, Miss Kerrigan, there's no need to talk like that," smiled Dorrie. "There's nothin' to confess, I'm sure. But I won't interrupt again."

"It is really very simple and very silly," said Aunt Janet, flushing slightly. "I am sure that you will laugh at me when I have told you everything, gentlemen. I came on board last night, during all the bustle, before the yacht had received all its passengers. I badly wanted to see you, Lord Dorrimore. I wanted to talk with you."

"That's very charmin' of you, Miss Kerrigan," said Dorrie. "I can't understand why I didn't see you, or why nobody told me you were on board——"

"Oh, that was really my own fault!" said Miss Kerrigan. "You see, when I came on board I was too nervous to speak to you, or, in fact, to speak to anybody just then. So I came below, and found this cabin. I thought I should be quite safe inside, and so I stepped in, closed the door, and sat down to wait."

"I quite understand," said Dorrie. "What happened then?"

"Oh, that is the very silly part of it!" said Aunt Janet. "I was tired with the heat and with a long, worrying day. And while I was waiting in there, I thought it would be just as well to sit down and take a rest. Well, I must have fallen asleep on the spot, for I did not wake up until it was quite dark, and then I was afraid to come out. I knew that I would be disturbing you, and I decided that it would be better to wait until the morning."

"I'm frightfully sorry you were so troubled, Miss Kerrigan," said Dorrie. "You ought to have aroused somebody at once, an' I should have come along, or the captain would have come along, or somethin' would have been done."

"No, I decided to wait until the morning, and I naturally went to sleep again," said Aunt Janet. "But this time I slept until late, and I knew that the yacht was under way—I could feel the throbbing of the deck, and, when I looked out of the porthole, I saw that we were far away from land. Oh, I was so frightened! I didn't know what to do, and I didn't know which way to turn. I just remained in here, worrying, and waiting for something to happen. I couldn't pluck up enough courage to come out and to face you!"

"Hang it all, Miss Kerrigan, I'm not an ogre, you know!" smiled Dorrie. "An' so I suppose you waited until that steward butted in?"

"Yes," said Aunt Janet. "And then, of course, I knew that I should find it necessary to explain my presence. I haven't done that even yet—I haven't told you why I came on board."

"To bid young Stanley good-bye, no doubt?" asked Dorrie.

"No—not that," said Miss Kerrigan slowly. "I—I was wondering if it would be possible for me to—to—— Oh, I really can't say it! It sounds so terribly impudent and—and——"

"Don't say it!" said Lord Dorrimore quickly. "I know exactly what you mean, Miss Kerrigan. The fact is, you want to come on the trip with us—and I am a shockin' brute for havin' failed to invite you. I really don't know what I can say to apologise. You must be thinkin' some frightful things about me!"

"Oh, no—I think you're simply splendid!" said Miss Kerrigan. "I came on board because I wanted to ask you if it would be possible for me to come—I plucked up my courage to have the necessary audacity. I really hope you will forgive me, Lord Dorrimore."

"I think it is for me to be forgiven, Miss Kerrigan," said Dorrie. "I ought to have realised that you would like to come to the Amazon—that you would care to accompany your little nephew on the trip. But I never gave the matter a thought—I assumed that you would prefer to remain in London, and that you would have no desire to take this long journey."

"I have always longed for such an opportunity," said Miss Kerrigan simply.

"Then we'll say no more about it," said Dorrie. "I only want you to forgive me for havin' been such a thoughtless bounder. I took it for granted that you wouldn't care to come, an' so I never asked you. It was shockin'ly remiss of me, an' I have no other excuse to offer."

Aunt Janet was immensely relieved. I couldn't help feeling somewhat amused, for the whole affair was certainly rather humorous. Miss Kerrigan had come on board for the express purpose of interviewing Lord Dorrimore; but somehow she had bottled herself up in that cabin, and the result was that we knew nothing of her presence until now. She was, in fact, a kind of stow-away.

"I understand, Miss Kerrigan, that

you have no trunks with you?" asked Nelson Lee, after a short pause.

"No, I am afraid not, Mr. Lee," said Aunt Janet. "You see, I really came on board to ask Lord Dorrimore's permission, and then it was my intention to send for my trunks afterwards. I am afraid I am causing a terrible amount of trouble."

"Not at all," said Nelson Lee. "Make yourself quite easy in mind, Miss Kerrigan. I am certain that Lady Helen Tregellis-West will fix you up with everything you need. Our little party is now quite complete, and I am sure that everybody on board will be very pleased to have you amongst us."

"It's awfully nice of you to say that, Mr. Lee," said Miss Kerrigan. "I really don't know how to thank you—or how to thank Lord Dorrimore—"

"That's jolly good, then," interrupted Dorrie. "If you don't know how to thank us, Miss Kerrigan, there's no need to attempt it. Please don't say another word—it'll only make me feel more of a brute than ever. I deserve it, no doubt, but I'm a thick-skinned sort of beggar!"

Aunt Janet was put quite at her ease, and shortly afterwards she came out on deck, and it was not long before young Stanley discovered that his aunt was on board. The fag came running up, flushed with excitement, and panting with delight.

"Auntie!" he exclaimed, throwing himself into her arms. "I didn't know you were here!"

"I didn't know that I was coming, Stanley dear," said Aunt Janet, with a suspicion of tears in her eyes. "I am sure that we shall be very happy together—and it is simply splendid to go out to the Amazon on this trip—to—to find traces of your poor father."

"We shall find him, auntie—I know we shall!" said the fag firmly. "I'm jolly certain that dad's alive—it's all rot to say that he's dead! I won't believe it!"

Aunt Janet shook her head.

"Stanley dear, you mustn't be too hopeful," she said. "I, too, believe that your father is still alive—but it is just as well not to count too much on it. We may not be able to locate him; it is just possible that we shall find no trace of him. So you must not be too eager, and too optimistic."

"That's all right, auntie," said Stan-

ley. "I know we shall find him—Mr. Lee's with us, and if Mr. Lee can't find anybody, it's a pretty certain sign that nobody on earth can!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Somebody, at least, has a high opinion of me," he remarked smoothly. "Well, Stanley, we will certainly do our best to find your father—and I really have an idea that our quest will not be quite hopeless. Your aunt is with us now, and that makes our party all the more complete. If it is humanly possible, we shall win through!"

And from that moment Miss Kerrigan was a member of Lord Dorrimore's holiday party.

CHAPTER II.

MANY ON THE SICK LIST.

AUNT JANET had quite settled down by dinner time that evening. Everybody made her feel comfortable, and Sir Montie's aunt, particularly, had done everything possible to make Aunt Janet feel that she was more than welcome in the party.

This, in fact, was quite true. We were all pleased to have the elderly lady with us. She had been introduced to everybody, and during dinner she lost all her nervousness, and became quite a merry soul. When the meal was over, she went into the drawing-room with the ladies, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore seized the opportunity to go on deck for a stroll and a smoke.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie and myself, with most of the other juniors, went down into the gymnasium, which had been set aside for our especial use. This apartment was a magnificent place, and it made an excellent common-room for the juniors. In the gym. we could congregate, and shout, and cause as much row as we liked. On deck, Dorrie and the gov'nor were pacing up and down, chatting together. It was still quite light, of course, and the evening was fairly fine. A good bit of a breeze had sprung up during the night, and the effect of this was seen and felt.

For one thing, the atmosphere was by no means as warm and cheerful as it

had been. In addition, the sea was not so smooth; in fact, it was becoming rather chilly—not exactly choppy, but there was a roll on the water, which sent the yacht pitching rather boisterously. The captain was of the opinion that we should run into a little summer storm during the night.

"Seems to be making up for a bit of a blow," remarked Nelson Lee, as he tossed his cigarette over the rail. "What do you think, Dorrie?"

"Old man, it doesn't worry me in the slightest," said Lord Dorrimore. "It can blow as hard as it likes, and I shall go on just the same. This little packet is safe enough for any sea—we're as safe as eggs on board. As for having seasickness—well, I haven't been troubled with it for ten years—and I don't suppose I shall be troubled with it now!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, Dorrie, you're a hardened sinner, I believe," he smiled. "By the way, I was rather keen about having a word with you concerning Aunt Janet."

"For goodness sake, old man, don't start rowing me now," said Dorrie. "I know jolly well that I am to blame for not asking her——"

"My dear chap, I don't mean that at all," smiled Nelson Lee. "I don't blame you in the least for not asking Miss Kerrigan to accompany the party. You had no inkling that she would be so anxious to come along. Some people might imagine that she had pushed herself forward in coming on board the way she did, but I do not look upon it in that light. She was so anxious to be with us that her finer feelings got the better of her. Well, I'm rather glad, as it will be very interesting to have her on board when we reach the Amazon. But what were you going to say?"

"Oh, about her visions, you know," said Dorrie—"about her strange dreams. You remember how we interviewed her, some little time before sailing? She is really the founder of this trip, so we ought not to mind her being on board. I don't mind admitting that those dreams and visions of hers have impressed me more than I care to say. I'm not a susceptible chap, as you know, and it rather surprises me to find that I believe the yarn."

"Well, Dorrie, we can hardly do anything else but believe it," said Nelson Lee. "Aunt Janet is absolutely sincere in what she thinks, and, according to

her own story, she has had this dream, not once, but dozens of times. I cannot help thinking that there is some strange form of telepathy between her and her brother."

"Of course, I don't believe in that sort of rot as a rule," said Dorrie. "Spiritualism fairly makes me feel tired. It's nothing more or less than a form of mania—people who believe in Spiritualism are either dotty, or just on the verge of going dotty. That's my opinion, anyhow. It may not be worth much; but I am a Materialist, and you can't make me anything else."

"My dear fellow, I am sure I don't want to," laughed Nelson Lee. "But these dreams of Aunt Janet's come in a different category altogether. You must admit that Colonel Kerrigan is her twin brother—and it is by no means unusual for twins to have a kind of mental telepathy between them. One twin is able to know what the other twin is doing at certain times—even though they be hundreds of miles apart."

"That's quite right," said Dorrie. "It seems rum, and all that sort of thing—but there are rum things happen in this world."

"Now, let's analyse the affair thoroughly."

"Analyse it?" repeated Dorrie. "It's not a chemical sample!"

"Colonel Kerrigan went out to the Amazon four or five years ago," said Nelson Lee slowly. "It was known that he intended exploring the vast forests which lie beyond the Amazon. Well, he went into one of these places, but he never returned—although many people declared that he had died. Some, indeed, definitely stated that they had seen his remains. But you know, Dorrie, as well as I do, that all sorts of false stories get about in such cases as that."

"I ought to know it," said Lord Dorrimore grimly. "Why, once—two or three years ago—when I was out in Papua, I happened to sprain my ankle. Naturally, I couldn't walk for a week, and I was hung up in a little native village. Would you believe it, old man, that when I got back to the coast, I read reports of my own funeral, and there were scores of people who positively declared that I was under the ground?"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"I'm not at all surprised," he said.

"Well, something of the same kind may have happened in the case of Colonel Kerrigan. At all events, Aunt Janet is certain that her brother is alive. Her dreams have taken one particular thought—and they have recurred again and again. She always sees her brother—in these dreams—mounted on a kind of pedestal, his arms outstretched towards the outer world. Beside him lies a wonderful city—a city unlike any other on earth. The whole thing may be a hallucination—but we don't know. And because we don't know, we are going out to the Amazon to make sure."

"That's it in a nutshell," said Dorrie. "Even if we don't find him, we shall still have a ripping holiday—and that's really what we're out for. Personally, I'd give half my fortune if we could only lay hands on the colonel—alive. It'll be a splendid achievement if we can only find him and bring him back home. Do you think we shall be able to penetrate that forest?"

"Which forest?"

"Why, the Matto Grosso."

Nelson Lee looked rather grave.

"The Matto Grosso covers a large area," he said slowly. "Beyond, it is mostly unexplored territory, and the Matto Grosso is an impenetrable barrier. There have been dozens of expeditions into that tangled forest, and very few of them have returned; in fact, I might say that not one of them has returned. Its unknown recesses form an untraceable frontier."

"Yes, I think we've got a tough proposition before us," said Dorrie. "But that makes it all the more interesting. Anything simple is liable to become boring. I like a good tough game to have a go at—not a piece of child's play. And if Colonel Kerrigan is alive, we'll find him. You can bet your last dollar on that."

"Well, we shall do our best," said Nelson Lee. "It's not much good counting our chickens before they're hatched, Dorrie—so we had best say as little as possible and simply wait events."

"Jove! That was a rather heavy roll then!"

A heavy sea had struck the ship forcibly, and it heeled over in an unmistakable manner. The dusk was growing, and the sea on every hand was looking murky and forbidding. It was practically certain that we were in for

a rough night—for the time of the year. And the storm, if it could only be called a storm, would be slight, but would be quite sufficient for all on board.

It was June, and it was not likely that we were to have a real, genuine blow—just a little breeze, perhaps, which would clear up before the morning. However, it was quite sufficient to give the yacht a peculiar motion which did not agree at all well with a hearty dinner.

Nelson Lee was rather amused as he and Dorrie went below in order to join the ladies.

"I guarantee that many people won't be at the breakfast table to-morrow morning, Dorrie," he smiled.

"There will be a somewhat sad story to tell; Dr. Brett will be fully engaged."

Dr. Brett was the practitioner from Belton—and he had come. He had passed over his practice in the hands of a locum tenens, and had accepted Lord Dorrimore's invitation to come with us on the trip to South America. Dr. Brett was an old friend of Nelson Lee's, and he was positively delighted with the arrangements.

Meanwhile, the juniors were discussing particulars in the gymnasium below.

"This is great!" Handforth was saying. "I simply love this motion, you chaps. There is just a lovely swing about it, and it'll give us a terrific appetite for breakfast in the morning!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said De Valerie. "It might have the opposite effect, my son!"

Handforth sniffed.

"Nothing will affect me!" he declared. "Sea-sickness is only known by chaps who haven't got any stamina. I shall never be down with it!"

"Don't you be too sure of that, Handy," I said, grinning. "Sea-sickness comes upon a chap when he doesn't realise it. He thinks he is all serene, and then, suddenly, without the slightest warning, he gets an attack. And when he gets it, he knows it!"

"Don't you worry about me," said Handforth.

"I'm not worrying, my son—you're the chap who'll do that," I said. "I've had two or three doses of sea-sickness—and I know what it is. I'm pretty well hardened to it by this time."

"Well, it's not the first time I've been to sea, by long chalks!" said Handforth.

"What about the last holidays? Didn't we go to Africa? I had sea-sickness then, I believe, so this time I shall be all right. A chap doesn't have sea-sickness twice! It's like a dose of measles—he has one pretty big attack, and then he's all right for the rest of his life!"

Fullwood sniffed.

"All this sort of jaw makes me feel sick!" he said sneeringly. "I can't be sea-sick—I've got more bally strength! And the finest thing for that groggy feeling is to smoke a fag!"

I looked round sharply.

"You had better not start smoking on this yacht, you rotter!" I said grimly. "The next time I see you with a cigarette in your mouth, Fullwood," I said, "I'll give you a good hiding!"

"Oh, keep your hair on!" growled Fullwood. "I forgot to bring a supply with me, and I can't buy any on board!"

It was getting rather late now, and the yacht was certainly rolling far more than she had done. It was a steady, sluggish roll, which made itself felt very much. The Wanderer dipped up and down to the seas, and at each dip there was a curious feeling in the pit of one's stomach. To anybody well accustomed to the sea it was not at all disconcerting—indeed, it was not uncomfortable—but to a fellow who had not been to sea for some months the sensation was far from pleasant.

A good many of the juniors were looking rather pale already, although they certainly would not admit that they felt a little groggy. Fatty Little's face was the worst. This was not at all surprising, considering his occupation.

Fatty had eaten an enormous dinner, but even then his appetite was not fully satisfied. It was only in the natural order of things that he should have made great pals of the chief steward. The result was that Fatty could get some extra grub whenever he liked. His appetite was enormous, and it required a tremendous amount of grub to fill him up.

At the present moment he was sitting on the corner of a table, contentedly demolishing a pork pie. The interior was rather fat, and I noticed that many juniors—avoiding looking in Fatty's direction. That fact was by no means reassuring.

Not content with this, Fatty Little was also devouring a number of ham sandwiches.

"How the dickens do you manage it?" I asked, grinning. "You had an enormous dinner!"

"Enormous!" echoed Fatty, with his mouth full. "What rot! Why, I only just had a snack—a biting on. I don't suppose you call that a dinner, do you? I simply must have something before I go to bed, or I wouldn't be able to sleep a wink. There's nothing worse than a fellow going to bed hungry!"

"Considering the amount you've eaten, you ought not to feel hungry for a week!" said Tommy Watson. "As for those fat ham sandwiches and that awful-looking pork pie, you'll turn everybody in this room sick before long! I'm beginning to feel a bit off-side myself!"

"Yes, cut it out, Fatty!" said De Valerie. "I don't think I shall be sea-sick, but—but—well, that stuff makes me bad to look at!"

"I didn't ask you to look," said Fatty. "These sandwiches are ripping, and the pork pie is first-class. Would anybody care for a chunk?"

"Not me!" said De Valerie, holding his belt. "I—I feel a bit queer, I'll admit. Oh, my goodness! That—that horrible-looking fat nearly bowls me over!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

De Valerie was making no pretence of it now. He was not only pale, but he looked drawn and worried. And then, without the slightest warning, he made a dive for the door.

"Sha'n't be long, you chaps!" he gasped hurriedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old chap!" I grinned. "He's got a nice little dose, by the look of it!"

The other fellows yelled, and Fatty Little continued his meal—with greater gusto than ever. Anything of a fatty nature to a chap who is feeling slightly upset in his lower regions is like a red flag to a bull. Several of the juniors drifted casually out of the gymnasium, one after the other. They protested that they were quite all right, and that Fatty's meal was not affecting them in the slightest degree. But this was quite wrong. The fat junior's appetite was having its due effect.

"Haven't you eaten it yet, Fatty?" demanded Pitt.

"The pork pie was bad enough, but those sandwiches were simply awful!"

"Rats!" said Fatty. "They're rip-

ping! Best sandwiches I've tasted for months—plenty of fat, and——”

“Oh, my hat! Don't talk about fat!” groaned the Hon. Douglas Singleton. “I was feeling all right until I came in here, but the sight of you is turning me inside out!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Fatty laughed with the rest of the fellows, and he continued eating, with as much gusto as before. But I noticed that his face was getting paler, and I read the signs clearly. Fatty himself was sublimely unconscious of the coming catastrophe.

“Seasickness will never affect a chap who's got a good appetite,” he said, taking another sandwich. “Take me, for example. I shouldn't be sick if I was to drink quarts of oil!”

“Shut up, you fathead!” howled McClure, holding his waistcoat.

“Is it coming on?” I asked sympathetically.

“Well, I'm feeling a bit wonky!” said McClure. “What else can you expect, with a giddy porpoise in the room gorging himself on fat meat!”

McClure departed, and Fatty Little grinned broader than ever.

“I sha'n't be long now,” he said. “I've just got to finish these three sandwiches, and then I shall be all right until bedtime. I only need another snack, and then I shall be all right for the night.”

Fatty suddenly paused in his eating. He held the sandwich halfway between the table and his mouth, and a rather startled expression came into his eyes. He turned paler still, and he gave a curious little gulp.

“Anything wrong, Fatty?” I inquired.

“Nunno! I—I'm all right!” gasped Fatty. “I—I feel a bit——”

“Great pancakes! I—I——”

“Well, what's the matter?” I asked.

“I—I don't think I want any more of these sandwiches!” panted Fatty, looking round with a wild expression in his eyes. “They—they don't taste so nice, you know! Oh, great-bloaters! I—I feel awful!”

Fatty doubled in, and held his waistcoat, while he writhed in anguish. He had been attacked suddenly—not at all surprising, considering the enormous amount of sickly stuff he had just demolished.

“You'd better get out on deck, quick!” I advised. “Buck up, Fatty!”

“Ow! By chutney! Yaroooooh!” gasped Fatty painfully. “I—I feel horrible, you know! I—believe it's worse than seasickness, you chaps! You're grinning, and I'm in mortal agony!”

“You shouldn't be such a fat gorger!” said Fullwood sourly.

“It serves you jolly well right, Fatty!” sneered Gulliver.

“Yes, rather,” said Bell, with relish. Fatty glared at them.

“You—you rotters!” he roared. “I'll—I'll—— Oh, help!”

He staggered towards the door, but paused when he got near it. He looked round, with an expression on his face which was full of alarm and concern.

“It's not seasickness, you chaps!” he panted. “That—that pork pie must have been squiffy, or something! I—I believe I'm poisoned!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Don't waste any more time down here, Fatty!” I said sharply. “You'd better go on deck at once—and say good-bye to that great supper of yours.”

Fatty Little took the advice, and he staggered out of the room, amid a general roar of laughter. Certainly there were not many fellows left in the gymnasium to laugh. Well over half of them had already gone on deck, many of them pretending that they wanted a breath of fresh air. But I knew better. The rolling motion of the yacht had made itself felt, and the juniors were not quite equal to the ordeal.

“I'm blowed if I'd let seasickness affect me in that way!” said Ralph Leslie Fullwood contemptuously. “I don't want to boast, but I'll bet nothing affects my stomach! I'm healthy, and a healthy chap's never troubled by sickness.”

Handforth strolled across the gym, and faced Fullwood.

“What about McClure?” he asked.

“Ain't McClure healthy? He's got it, and pretty bad, too. Health hasn't got anything to do with it, you ass! I sha'n't be affected, because I've got a strong digestion. Fats don't trouble me at all. Now, look at margarine, for example. I could take a pound of margarine now, and eat it by the spoonful!”

“Dry up, you ass!” said Church, swallowing hard.

“I don't see why I should dry up!” said Handforth. “It's true, ain't it? Then, again, what about sardines? They're fatty, oily things. The rich,

juicy oil out of a sardine-tin is jolly fine stuff to drink!"

"Oh, shut up, you silly rotter!" growled Fullwood, changing colour slightly.

"There's no harm in talking about grub, I suppose?" asked Handforth calmly. "And what about cod liver oil? That's fine stuff, taking it as a medicine. It may not be very pleasant, but it does your inside a jolly lot of good!"

"Can't you dry up?" roared Fullwood savagely. "All this talk about cod liver oil and sardines is makin' me feel bad!"

"I thought nothing would affect your tummy?" grinned Handforth.

"Oh, don't be a fool!" snapped Fullwood. "I'm strong enough, but I can't stand that sort of rot!"

"I—I'm goin' on deck!" muttered Gulliver, in a queer voice.

He made a charge for the door, and disappeared at record speed. Bell was only a few seconds after him, and Fullwood gazed at the door longingly.

His face was pale, and, not only that, but there was a sickly kind of look about it. In spite of all his boasts, it seemed that seasickness was not such a remote possibility with him, after all. Yet he would not admit it.

"Talking about fat," went on Handforth, "there's a jolly fine stuff people make pastry with. I'm talking about lard. Now, lard is all very well used in certain ways, but I shouldn't like to eat it by the spoonful."

"Can't you dry up?" howled Fullwood savagely.

"Why should I?" asked Handforth. "Lard's fine stuff——"

"Oh, by gad!" gasped Fullwood hastily.

He dashed to the door, tore it open, and flung himself into the passage at full speed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's the way to do it!" grinned Handforth. "I thought I'd make that ass do a dance, you know. Talking about lard and dripping and margarine and sardine oil——"

"Dear old boy, I think we've had quite enough about it!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "I'm not gettin' seasick, but the very thought of those things makes a fellow a bit groggy—it does, really!"

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "There's nothing wrong with sardine oil and cod liver oil, and all those other sort of things."

The yacht was heaving rather more vigorously now, and Handforth staggered once or twice as he crossed the gymnasium. As a matter of fact, his own words were beginning to tell their due effect on himself! Although he tried to put everything from his mind, he kept picturing tins of sardine oil and pounds of margarine, to say nothing of dozens of bottles of cod liver oil. The whole conglomeration arose before his mind in a most disconcerting manner.

"I—I think I'll go for a stroll on deck," he said casually. "I'll have a look for McClure. You'd better come, too, Church."

"But I'm not feeling seasick!" said Church.

"Do you think I am?" roared Handforth. "Do you think I'm suffering from seasickness, you silly ass? There's nothing wrong with me—— Ow! Garoooh! Oh, my goodness! I—I——"

Handforth could wait for no more. He placed both his hands over the lower region of his waistcoat, and fled.

CHAPTER III.

THE S.O.S. CALL!

NELSON LEE smiled as he entered the breakfast-saloon on the following morning.

"My prediction was not far wrong, Dorrie," he remarked calmly. "I think there will be many seats empty during this meal."

"Looks like it, old man," said Dorrie. "Just over a little bit of a rock like that, too! Why, it was nothin' to speak of! It's still blowing a bit, but the glass is risin', an' we shall have glorious weather before the day is out, you mark my words."

Lord Dorrimore turned, as a huge figure hove into sight.

"Hallo, Umlosi!" said his lordship. "How goes it, you lump of animated lamp-black? Feelin' sick?"

Umlosi smiled broadly.

"My feelings are of the best, O N'Kose, my father," he rumbled. "The strange sickness has not seized me, although methinks it will be as well not to speak too soon. Wau! It is a wondrous bad sensation, my father!"

"It certainly lays a fellow out flat," agreed Dorrie, nodding. "Hallo, Nipper, my worthy son of mischief, how goes it? Where are the others?"

I had just strolled up with Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

"Oh, the others?" I repeated. "They're mostly on the sick list!"

"Just as I thought!" grinned Dorrie. "Think what a savin' of grub! In these days of economy, it'll mean——"

"Oh, dry up, Dorrie!" I grinned. "You're a fine chap to talk about economy—when you generally splash your money about as though it were so much sand. We had quite a pantomime down in the gym. last night. Fatty Little was gorging himself with pork pies and other things, and he suddenly succumbed——"

"I shall probably succumb if you start talking about horrid things like pork pies!" said Dorrie severely. "Dry up, you young ass! I want some breakfast this morning!"

I grinned, and dried up. Only a few other fellows turned up for breakfast, the others being still in their cabins, in the throes of anguish. Young Stanley Kerrigan was as lively as a cricket, and he was not affected at all. Neither was his aunt, for she appeared, looking the very picture of health and strength.

Morrow, of the Sixth, was all right, but Frinton had deemed it wiser to remain in his bunk. Breakfast, to his mind, was a horrible concoction, unfit for any human being.

Watson's sister, Miss Violet, was looking as fresh and dainty as ever that morning. Seasickness had certainly not affected her, although one or two of the other girls had decided to keep to their cabins until later in the day.

During the morning the weather was somewhat cold and rough. The wind was still fresh, and the sea remained rather heavy.

But by noon the sun had broken through the clouds, and the day was rapidly becoming a glorious one.

In fact, by teatime one would have imagined that such things as dull skies and high winds were impossible.

After tea the air was hot and sunny, and the sea had calmed down considerably. Only one or two fellows remained in their cabins during the evening. The others got over their slight attack of seasickness, and appeared, vastly relieved at the change in the weather conditions.

The evening was well advanced when we sighted a dirty old tramp steamer ahead. She lay almost directly on our course, and appeared to be stationary, for some reason or other. We soon found out what this reason was.

For, when we got close, we discovered that the old tramp steamer was disabled and unable to proceed on her journey. Captain Burton brought The Wanderer to a standstill, and signalled if any help was required.

The tramp replied that everything was all right. The vessel had come to a standstill because the propellor-shaft had developed a defect, and the engine-room staff was busily engaged upon repairing it. Until this repair was effected, the tramp would have to remain in her present position.

"There's no need for us to hang about, of course," said Dorrie. "The old tub's all right—he wouldn't have accepted our offer of assistance, in any case. It's a pity these ships can't do without propellor-shafts; they are always breakin', or bendin', or doin' something silly!"

"Some steamers get on without propellor shafts, Dorrie," I remarked.

"Impossible, my son!"

"What about cattle steamers——"

I was unable to proceed any further, for Dorrie made a rush at me, and chased me down the deck.

After dinner, Miss Violet expressed a desire to have a look into the wireless-room, so Tommy Watson and I offered to show her round. Montie, of course, came with us. It was growing dusk, and when we went into the wireless-room the operator switched on the electric light, and was only too pleased to describe everything in detail to Miss Violet. I knew practically everything about it, and so I was quite capable of operating the instrument myself.

Anybody on the yacht was perfectly willing to leave anything in order to grant a favour to Miss Violet Watson. She was certainly the belle of the whole party. The prettiest of girls, she was, at the same time, extremely dainty and wonderfully attractive. This was especially true at night time, when the girl was attired in some gorgeous evening gown of a silky material. It was an undoubted fact that Miss Violet was the pick of the whole bunch.

"You see, Miss Violet, there's nothing particularly complicated about

it," I said, after she had been told everything.

"It seems terribly complicated to me!" she laughed. "All these wires, and instruments, and motors! Why, I should be dreadfully confused if I were left in here alone! What should I do if another ship tried to communicate with us?"

"Why, you'd simply do this. Miss Watson," said the operator, a cheerful young fellow named Mr. Green. "It's as simple as A B C—really!"

Miss Violet did not appear to think so, but she was greatly interested in everything that was shown to her. And we were just about to leave the wireless room when something of a somewhat startling nature occurred.

The instruments began "clicking, sparks appeared, and Mr. Green lost no time in getting down to his bench. I stood quite still, listening—for, of course, I was well acquainted with the code. And I read the message that came through with the greatest of ease.

"Oh, this is quite interesting!" exclaimed Miss Violet, clapping her hands. "Some other ship is speaking to us! I'd love to know what they are saying!"

"It's something important, Miss Violet!" I said quickly. "That's the S.O.S. call they're giving!"

"Begad!"

"The—the which?" gasped Watson.

"It's S.O.S.," I repeated. "It's an appeal for assistance, Miss Violet! Some ship must be in distress!"

"Oh, dear!" said the girl, looking grave.

We all stood by tensely, watching while Mr. Green took down the message—while he communicated with the ship which was appealing for help. It was not long before he turned round to us, with a flushed expression, and with his eyes gleaming animatedly.

"She's not far off, Nipper!" he exclaimed. "They've given me the latitude and longitude, and we ought to be able to reach the place within two or three hours. It's that old tramp steamer we passed early this evening!"

"But she wasn't sinking then?" said Tommy Watson.

"No; she's developed a leak, or something," said Mr. Green. "They said something about an explosion, or a breakage—I couldn't quite make it out.

Anyhow, they're in distress, and need help immediately."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Watson. "What the dickens shall we do?"

"That's for the skipper to say," I replied quickly. "I'll take that message, if you like, Mr. Green—you'd better stop here in case they call again."

The operator was agreeable to this, and I lost no time in hurrying out, and then I rushed along the deck, and made for the bridge, where Captain Burton was presiding. Watson, and his sister, and Sir Montie came after me, but at a more sedate speed.

I found Captain Burton on the bridge, chatting with Lord Dorrimore. He looked round quickly as I called him by name.

"Yes, Nipper?" he said. "Is there anything wrong? You seem to be rather excited, my boy——"

"It's a distress signal, sir—just come by wireless!" I said rapidly.

"Let me see it!" said Captain Burton, in crisp tones.

He took the sheet of paper which I was carrying, and he glanced at it rapidly. Lord Dorrimore removed his panama, and scratched his head.

"Distress signal, eh?" he murmured. "That's frightfully interestin', you know. The S.O.S.! Are we required to do the rescue stunt?"

Captain Burton looked up.

"This seems to be very serious, sir," he exclaimed. "You remember that tramp steamer we passed early this evening—the vessel that was disabled?"

"Yes, I seem to remember it," said Dorrie.

"She's sinking," declared Captain Burton. "The S.O.S. message has just been received from her. It appears that they have had a breakage on board, owing to the damaged propeller. They are asking for assistance to be sent at once, and they are not more than twenty or thirty miles away. We must alter our course at once, sir."

"Well, rather!" agreed Dorrie. "If there's any ship in distress, we'll go to the rescue, and do what we can. Full speed ahead, captain!"

Clang! Clang!

The engine-room telegraph rang out, and Captain Burton gave some brisk orders. Very shortly afterwards The Wanderer had practically doubled back on her course, and she was speeding

away to the rescue of the disabled steamer at full speed.

Everybody on board knew that something unusual was happening, for not only had the yacht altered her course, but she was now going all out—she was no longer travelling along at her even pace, but was using every effort to make speed.

The dusk was now rather deep; the hour was certainly late, and, under ordinary circumstances, most of the guests would be preparing for bed at about this time. The juniors were particularly excited, and they declared that they had no intention of turning in until the disabled steamer was found. However, this plan was soon knocked on the head.

"It's no good you boys waiting about now," said Dorrie, strolling along the deck. "There'll be nothing to see!"

"But I thought that we were going to the rescue of a sinking ship?" asked Pitt.

Dorrie nodded.

"Well, so we are," he admitted; "but you mustn't think that we shall sight the vessel within a few minutes, my lad. It's a good distance away, and there's no hope whatever of reaching the place until one or two o'clock in the morning."

The fellows were rather disappointed, but they realised that it would be far better to go to bed as usual, and to get up at the first sign of activity. Certainly, I suspected that Dorrie had been drawing the long bow, for I was almost certain that we should sight the old tramp steamer shortly after midnight.

We received no further wireless message, although Mr. Green sent out inquiries at frequent intervals. What this portended we did not know, but it was rather significant.

There was nothing to do but wait, and I did not see the fun of waiting on deck, when there was a comfortable bed below. So I went down with Sir Montie and Tommy, and we were soon fast asleep. But I had made up my mind to wake between one o'clock and half-past, and my chums had made me promise that I would arouse them at the same time.

Sure enough, I woke up at a quarter-past one. It's rather a handy habit to get into—to be able to awaken when one likes. Nelson Lee had taught me that little trick, and it was so engraved

into my nature that I very seldom failed. It was a kind of second nature to me.

I awoke my chums, and we lost no time in slipping some clothes on and going up on deck. The short, summer night was soon showing signs of coming to an end. Over in the East, the sky against the horizon was red and flushed with the first gleam of a summer's day.

We met Mr. Hudson just coming down from the bridge. He nodded and smiled at us.

"Well, boys, what's the meaning of this?" he asked. "You ought to be asleep——"

"We've come up to hear about the ship, sir," said Watson. "You know—that one that sent out the S.O.S. message. Has she been sighted yet?"

"Not yet, Master Watson," said Mr. Hudson. "The captain is on deck at the present moment, and the fact is, he is rather worried."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because we have already reached the spot mentioned in that wireless appeal," said the first officer. "We've been here for some little time, pottering about. Personally, I think the ship has sunk—it's very possible that we shall see some of the lifeboats as soon as the light gets stronger."

"Look here! But everybody might have gone to the bottom," replied Sir Montie.

Mr. Hudson shook his head.

"That's hardly likely," he replied. "The sea is quite calm, and the crew had plenty of time to get into the boats and to put out before the vessel had fully sunk. I expect we shall find them knocking about somewhere in the vicinity."

But Mr. Hudson's prophecy did not seem a very excellent one. As the daylight grew stronger, we looked about us with interest, but the sea was clear and absolutely bare on every side. There was no sign of a sail, no sign of a steamer, and no sign of a lifeboat.

But, just as we were beginning to fear the worst, the look-out man in the bows—who had been placed there by special orders—gave a sudden hail, and the next moment there was a wave of subdued excitement passing over The Wanderer's decks.

For something at last had been seen. The other fellows gazed around them eagerly and excitedly, but I did not do

this. I gave my full attention to Captain Burton, who was on the bridge, and I saw that he was using his binoculars, and he was gazing at one spot away over the starboard bow, with fixed intentness.

This was good enough for me.

I soon focussed my own binoculars, and I stared out in the same direction. Almost at once I was rewarded.

Something could be seen low down in the water, and a considerable distance from the yacht. With the naked eye, the object was nearly invisible, but the binoculars brought it up in sharp relief, and I was very soon able to see what the object was.

A man was lying on a small portion of wreckage, which I could not quite make out; but the man was evidently alive, for I saw signs of movement.

The yacht, meanwhile, was steaming at full speed towards the spot, and, as everything grew nearer, it was altogether easier to make out the details.

The man was now standing up—or, at least, leaning, and waving a handkerchief. The piece of wreckage seemed to be the cover of a hatchway, and the man was quite alone upon it. There was no sign of any other object in the vicinity, and there was certainly no boats.

"This is rather queer, my sons," I said, addressing Sir Montie and Tommy. "It'll be pretty awful if there's been a tragedy—if all the other members of the crew have gone to the bottom."

"Dear old boy, it'll be simply shockin'," said Sir Montie, shaking his head. "I sincerely hope that nothing so dreadful has come to pass."

By the time the yacht drew right up and had come to a standstill, there were a good few other juniors on deck. We all watched with great interest as a boat was lowered and quickly launched into the water. At the last moment Tom Burton came rushing up to the group with whom I was standing.

"Are you coming, Nipper?" he asked eagerly.

"Eh? Coming where?" I asked.

"Well, souse me, in the boat, of course!" said the Bo'sun. "They've given me permission to go, and you can come as well if you want to!"

"I'm your man!" I said promptly.

Some of the other juniors wanted to come, of course, but this was impossible. So Tom Burton and I hurried into the boat, and we were soon pulling

away towards the wreckage, on which the man was now lying quite leisurely. Our boat contained two sailors, Lord Dorrimore, Mr. Hudson, Tom Burton, and myself. Nelson Lee had remained on deck, chatting with Dr. Brett, who had everything ready in case of emergencies.

Lee said very little as we left the yacht's side and pulled away towards that insignificant little scrap of flotsam upon which a human being rested. What were we to discover? What story would this castaway have to tell?

CHAPTER IV.

FULLWOOD, THE CAD.

"TAKE it easy, old man—take it easy!" said Lord Dorrimore kindly. "There's no need to exert yourself in the slightest degree; neither is there any reason for getting excited."

"Thank Heaven you've come, sir!" exclaimed the castaway fervently.

His voice was weak, and he looked up at us with an expression of gratitude in his eyes. Only a moment or two before we had rescued him from the floating hatch cover, and he was now in the boat, supported by Tom Burton and Lord Dorrimore.

Judging by his uniform, the man had been an officer, and he was not really exhausted. His period of exposure had not been of long duration, and he was not really soaked through, the sea being comparatively calm.

When we arrived back at the yacht, the fellow was hoisted on board, and taken below, in Dr. Brett's charge, where he was soon wrapped in warm blankets, and made comfortable. Hot beef tea and other stimulants were given to him.

Captain Burton came down to the cabin after the man had been made comfortable, and the skipper was quite satisfied that nothing further could be done at the moment. He smiled down at the castaway, and nodded.

"You're all right there, my friend," he said. "Just go to sleep, and have a good long rest—you can tell your story afterwards. All we want to know at

present is whether there are any boats belonging to your ship cruising about—

"I'm afraid not, sir," interrupted the castaway sadly.

"What?" I exclaimed. "You—you don't mean to say—"

"I think the worst has happened, young gentleman," said the man. "As far as I know, every soul on board, with the exception of myself, went down with the old hooker."

"Good gracious!" said the captain.

"This is shockin'," said Dorrie, looking grave.

"It's worse than that, sir," said the man. "I'm feeling almost fit now—thanks to the doctor's splendid services. I want to tell you all about it at once—there's no reason why there should be any delay. I don't want to sleep—I couldn't close my eyes just now. The poor old tub has entered port for good!"

"How did it happen?" asked Nelson Lee quietly.

"Well, sir, I hardly know—and that's the truth," replied the man. "My name's Robertson, and I was third officer on board the poor old Copperfield. She wasn't much of a boat at the best—a saucepan with an engine in her, the skipper used to say—but it's bad to think of her going down like that."

"I judge that the disaster occurred suddenly?" asked Captain Burton.

"So suddenly, sir, that there wasn't a chance for the crew to get away," said Mr. Robertson. "You remember passing us last night, just before it got dark?"

"Of course," said the skipper. "We asked your captain if he wanted any help, and he said that he could manage. It's rather a pity he didn't take advantage of my offer."

"It is, sir," agreed the third mate of The Copperfield. "You see, at that time we were repairing the shaft—it had broken, and the chief engineer reckoned that he could put it right. Well, sir, fairly late in the evening, the chief sent up word that she was all ready to resume her voyage, and that's when the accident occurred."

"What happened?" asked the Bo'sun eagerly.

Mr. Robertson shook his head.

"That's just it, young gent," he said.

"Heaven knows what happened—I don't! I was on deck when the skipper

rang down to have the engine started. I can remember the telephone clanging, and I can remember the engine starting. The poor old tub vibrated in every plate, and then there was a terrific crash below, and everything stopped. We could hear the water rushing in—thousands of gallons at a time. Those below must have been caught like rats in a trap."

"Shockin'!" said Dorrie seriously. "Well, go on."

"The skipper was on the bridge, and he was shouting out wild orders to everybody," continued the castaway.

"There's no sense in keeping back the truth, so I may as well tell you that the old man was rather full up with rum—a habit of his. The first officer wanted to have the boats launched at once, but the skipper wouldn't hear of it. He said that the old Copperfield would never sink. All this, you must realise, happened in the course of a minute or two—the whole appalling business was over, from start to finish, within five minutes."

"She didn't sink at once, sir," said Mr. Robertson. "What happened was really worse. The boilers blew up, and the old boat simply rolled over—she turned turtle completely. Everybody below decks was trapped, and I think those who were on the bridge and on deck were sucked down. I don't exactly know what happened to me, because when I went overside I hit my head against a piece of wreckage. Everything else is rather hazy—at least, until the first sign of dawn."

"And then?"

"Well, then I found myself on that hatch cover, alone," said the castaway. "There wasn't a sign of a boat in any direction. It's pretty clear that everybody went down, and I believe I'm the sole survivor. It's a great blow to me, because my brother was on board. It's a bad business, sir, and one result of having a drunken skipper."

The castaway was unable to tell us much more, and presently we left him to sleep, acting under Dr. Brett's instructions. It was now broad daylight, and the sun was shining brilliantly.

We were all feeling rather affected. Mr. Robertson's story had been a terrible one. We could not help thinking of those poor souls who had been sucked down into the Atlantic when the old tramp steamer took her last dive.



We pulled over towards the scrap of floream, on which stood a man signalling for help.

Captain Burton decided that it was quite useless to remain in the vicinity, since we had proved that no other survivors were about. The yacht resumed her voyage, and by dinner-time the fatal spot was well in the rear.

Mr. Robertson had almost recovered, too. Being summertime, the exposure had not affected him much. Moreover, he was a hardy, thick-set individual, with a wiry frame and a constitution of iron. He didn't like being an invalid, and during the afternoon he insisted upon getting up and walking about just the same as the others. He was a very willing fellow, and he anxiously inquired if he could be of any use—if he could be put to some work or other.

Captain Burton did find something to do, and Mr. Robertson was highly pleased. He made himself at home, but it was easy to see that he was very sad, and that he was thinking constantly of the companions he had lost only a short while before.

We were all affected by the incident, and there was not the same gaiety and laughter during the evening as there had been before. It was fine and warm, and under ordinary conditions we should have spent a very happy evening indeed—dancing, singing, and all the rest of it.

But this time we took it quietly. We stood about chatting or reading, or doing anything that was quiet.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood seemed quite callous, which was, of course, in keeping with his character. He made no attempt to sympathise, and he expressed the opinion that we were making altogether too much fuss.

He set himself in a deck-chair, got a book, and lolled there in ease and comfort. But he only did this after we had positively forbidden him to engage in a sing-song at the piano with Gulliver and Bell.

He was rather incensed about it, and I could see that he was sulky as he sat there in the chair, pretending to read. He didn't actually read—he was simply doing it to show off, and to make us think he was quite indifferent.

Violet Watson, by pure chance, happened to come along that portion of the deck just when Fullwood was sitting down in his deck-chair. There were no other juniors on the spot, the majority of them being below in the gymnasium; and the main subject of conversation was, of course, the disaster to the steamer

Copperfield, and the rescue of Mr. Robertson.

Miss Violet was looking for Ethel Church, and she was rather warm and out of place, having been chasing about for quite a time. The girl was looking particularly charming that evening. Attired in a glorious crepe-de-chine frock, with white shoes and stockings, she was certainly a very alluring young person.

The air was quite still and rather humid. Miss Violet caught sight of Fullwood, and she smiled to herself. She felt very much like enjoying an ice-cream at that moment, and she saw no reason why she shouldn't ask Fullwood to fetch her one. She had had very little to do with him so far, mainly because Tommy had warned her not to be friendly with Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

But Violet had seen nothing very dreadful in Fullwood's character. He was not a bad-looking fellow, he always dressed very smartly, and she believed that her brother had a boyish prejudice against him. In any case, there was no reason why she should not ask Fullwood to fetch her an ice-cream.

She walked up to his deck-chair, and stood there for a moment or two before speaking. Fullwood, of course, was quite aware of her presence, but it pleased him to take no notice of her. Being Watson's sister, he considered that she was no class. Fullwood regarded Miss Violet as a second edition of Tommy himself. He sneeringly referred to her as "Tommy's echo."

"Isn't it dreadfully warm this evening?" asked Violet, breaking the silence.

Fullwood took no notice—deliberately.

"There seems to be something dreadfully humid in this air," went on Violet, knowing full well that she was unwise to address Fullwood in this way. But it rather pleased her feminine nature to go direct against the warning that her brother had given her.

Had Fullwood possessed any sense of decency at all, he would have jumped up at once, and would have offered his chair to Miss Violet, as there was no other chair near by. In fact, the two had that portion of the deck to themselves, and Fullwood was lolling back with ease, while the girl was standing. In that respect alone, the cad of the Remove was acting up to his reputation.

"I'm speaking to you, Fullwood," said Violet, raising her voice slightly.

Ralph Leslie lowered his book, and glanced up.

"Eh? Speaking to me?" he drawled languidly.

"Yes, I was."

"Awfully sorry!" said Fullwood. "I was so bally interested in that story that I hardly noticed you, Miss Violet."

Fullwood yawned widely, and Miss Violet flushed.

"I was only going to ask you to fetch me an ice-cream," she said quietly.

"Will you please do so?"

"That's rather queer, you know," said Fullwood, with studied indifference.

"Fetch you an ice-cream, eh? Why, I always understood that there were stewards on the job. If you only look around, you will soon find one."

Violet flushed even more.

"Yes; I suppose I shall," she said simply. "Thank you very much, Fullwood. It is awfully good of you to tell me."

"Oh, don't mention it," he remarked, with a wave of the hand. "I am always ready to oblige a young lady, you know. But I shouldn't advise you to eat too many ice-creams. They are liable to make one's complexion look a bit sick. Your complexion even now ain't as good as it might be. I'd be careful, if I were you!"

"I'm very sorry that I spoke to you at all!" said Violet coldly. "I've been told that you were a cad—and I know it now!"

"Oh, you've been told, have you?" sneered Fullwood. "By your bally brother, I suppose? It's just like him to tittle-tattle. Not that I care two-pence, Miss Violet. I value the opinion of a pretty girl very highly, but your remarks don't affect me in the slightest degree."

Fullwood leaned back in his chair again, and began to read his book. His words had been directly insulting, although there was nothing in them to actually complain of. He had implied that Violet was far from good-looking, and that he did not value her opinion at all.

The girl turned on her heel and walked away, very red.

"Oh, what a dreadful boy!" she murmured to herself, filled with indignation. "I don't think I have ever met anybody who talked to me so rudely. Tom was quite right, and I felt like slapping his face!"

Miss Violet certainly would have slapped Fullwood's face, but she did not want to cause any unpleasantness, particularly on such an evening as this. She decided that she would say nothing at all. But she knew well enough now that it was quite hopeless to have anything to do with Fullwood.

The girl was just going down the companion, when she ran into Tommy Watson himself. The lights were on bright here, and Tommy had at once noticed that Violet was looking unusually flushed. She could not conceal the fact that she had been inwardly boiling the moment before. Her dark eyes flashed with suppressed indignation.

"Hallo, sis!" exclaimed Tommy. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all, Tom!" said Violet, attempting to push past.

"Rats!" said Watson. "There is something wrong—you can't kid me, sis! Somebody's been upsetting you, or something. You look frightfully wild, you know."

"Why, don't be silly, Tom!" protested Violet. "I'm not wild at all. Please don't ask me any more. I can't say anything."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I can't—that's all!"

"Rot!" said Tommy bluntly, and wearing a brother's privilege of speaking straight from the shoulder. "Rot, Sis! Now can't you tell me? Somebody's been upsetting you—and if it's one of the fellows, I'm going to punch his nose!"

But Violet would not tell her brother anything, and, try as he would, he could not get a word of the story from her. He was finally compelled to give it up, and he went on deck wondering what on earth could have been the matter with her. He didn't quite like it, and he meant, if possible, to find out the truth as soon as he could.

But this was a rather difficult proposition. Watson did not exactly know how to go to work. He had found out that it was quite useless asking Violet anything—she had positively refused to say a word in explanation of the matter which had upset her so obviously. It would be equally hopeless to ask Ethel Church, or any of the other girls.

Tommy, therefore, would find it necessary to look about him, and to find other signs. He could not exactly picture to

himself, any fellow such as Pitt, De Valerie, or Singleton acting in any way that would upset his sister.

Watson was not absolutely dull, although, as a rule, he was rather a stolid sort of individual. But on this occasion he realised that the only fellows on board who could possibly upset Violet—or who would have the nerve to do so—would be either Fullwood or Gulliver or Bell. Therefore, Watson kept his eyes open for Fullwood and Co.

As it happened, his task was not such a difficult one.

He was just walking down the deck in the hope of meeting somebody whom he could question when he caught sight of Fullwood and Co. over by the wireless-room. They were standing together and talking—and, far more significant, they were chuckling in a manner which proved that they were enjoying some rich joke.

Watson's suspicions were aroused on the instant. He walked up determined, meaning to tax them there with the question point-blank. It was just Watson's way. He always liked to have a matter out on the spot, without any beating about the bush.

He really didn't mean to walk up quietly, or to overhear anything, without them knowing that he was there. But he happened to be wearing rubber-soled shoes, and his approach was, therefore, quite noiseless. He came up in the rear of the Nuts, and, as the evening was very dim, the three juniors had no knowledge of Watson's presence. Their backs were towards him, and he paused for a moment before speaking. And during that moment he heard quite sufficient to convince him of the truth.

"Yes, by gad!" Fullwood was saying, with a chuckle. "I gave the little snob something to think about! Coming to me, swanking about ices! What does she think I am, a giddy servant? It's likely I'm goin' to take her ices to her, ain't it?"

Gulliver, who had some decency of feeling, shook his head.

"Well, I don't quite agree with you, Fully," he said bluntly.

"Don't agree with me?" repeated Fullwood.

"No, I can't say that I do," repeated Gulliver. "Hang it all, man, you might be decent to a girl, anyhow! There was nothing much in her asking you to fetch

an ice-cream for her. It's what any girl would do to any fellow!"

Fullwood grunted.

"Well, any girl's not going to do it to me," he said grimly. "I'm not going to be the rotten lackey of Watson's sister, I can tell you. If she wants an ice-cream, she can get a steward to get it for her, or go and get it herself! What's more, I gave her something to think about, too—about her good looks!"

"Well, she's jolly pretty, if you ask me," said Bell. "I've tried to be nice to her several times, but I don't seem to manage it. It's a pity if you can't be nice to the only really pretty girl on board, Fully!"

Fullwood scowled.

"You ought to have heard me telling her off about her complexion!" he said unpleasantly. "There's nothing wrong with it really, but I gave her a bit of a fright. Not only that, but I told her, in as strange words as I could, that she's not a bit good-looking!"

"Phew!" whistled Gulliver. "That was a bit too bad, Fully——"

"You—you rotten cad!"

Fullwood and Co. turned round, and found Tommy Watson facing them, with clenched fists, blazing eyes, and burning cheeks.

"What the thunder do you want?" demanded Fullwood, backing away hastily.

"That's what I want!" roared Watson fiercely.

Crack!

Tommy's fist thudded into Fullwood's face, with a slap that sounded all over the deck. Fullwood staggered back, howling.

"Yaroo!" he roared, holding his nose, as he sat down on the deck. "You—you——"

"Get up! Get up, and I'll give you another slog!" roared Watson, beside himself with rage. "You unmannerly brute! You insulting cad! If you dare say another word to my sister while you're on board this ship, I'll give you a thrashing that'll make you sore for the rest of your life!"

Fullwood scrambled to his feet, his face disfigured with fury.

"Hang you!" he snarled. "I'll make you pay for this, you—you——"

But he was unable to say any more, for Tommy Watson, already feeling in a

desperate mood, to wipe Fullwood up, rushed in, and the next moment the two were fighting hammer and tongs. But it did not last long.

Gulliver and Bell stood by, without offering to help, for they probably felt that Fullwood deserved a good thrashing. For, after all, they were not quite such cads as he was. Under no circumstances would they go out of their way to insult a young lady. But there were other juniors on deck, and they had already heard the sounds of strife.

Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey and De Valerie came hurrying up, and close beside them was the Bo'sun and Singleton and Handforth.

"Hallo!" said Handforth. "What's the trouble here? Go it, my sons!" he added, as he saw what Watson was doing. "That's the style! Now bash him in the left eye! Good! You can easily give him one on his jaw now—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Pitt. "This won't do, you know!"

"You mind your own giddy business!" said Handforth sharply. "This is a fight! Watson's got every right to punch Fullwood. He deserves a punching about twenty times a day, on the average. He escapes as a rule, but now he's getting what he deserves. Go it, Watson! Don't ease off!"

Handforth, of course, was always ready for a fight, and he simply revelled in this present scrap. The other juniors realised that it would not look nice if Lord Dorrimore happened to come on deck, or if any of the ladies were present. A fight was only to be indulged in down in the gymnasium, where the juniors would have the place to themselves.

So Tommy was dragged off, and Fullwood was allowed to go free. He was boiling with rage, and he was already marked severely.

"You will pay for this, you madman!" he gasped. "By gad! I'll make you pay for this!"

"What's happened, anyhow?" asked Pitt. "What's the trouble about, Watson?"

"That—that beastly rotter has been insulting my sister!" gasped Watson fiercely. "I haven't finished with him yet!"

Handforth looked grim. "Insulting your sister, has he?" he said. "By Jove! If that's the case,

I'll give him a darned good hiding on my own account—after you've done with him! Why, your sister's the prettiest girl I've ever seen! She's absolutely lovely! She's the finest girl on board! She is—she is a girl that any chap could fall in love with—"

"According to your statements, you've fallen in love with her already, Handy!" chuckled Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Handforth turned red.

"I don't want any rot!" he roared. "Just because I speak the truth about Miss Violet, that doesn't mean to say that I'm in love with her! As a matter of fact, I've got a very great regard for her, and I think she's one of the best girls in the world! But that doesn't mean to say that I'm full of silly, sloppy rot!"

"Quite right, old man," grinned Pitt. "I'm sorry if I got your rag out. Miss Violet is certainly a peach, and if Fullwood said anything about her, he's a bigger cad than I ever took him for!"

A considerable number of juniors had come by this time, and I strolled up, having just come on deck. I wondered what the trouble was about, and with me was Fatty Little, Timothy Tucker, and Tregellis-West.

"Great bloaters!" exclaimed Fatty. "What's all this about? Anything to do with grub?"

"Oh, dry up about grub!" said Handforth. "All you live for is grub—all you think about is grub—all you can talk about is grub! Give it a rest, my son!"

"I don't see why I should," said Fatty. "There's nothing better to talk about than grub, and there's nothing better to think about than grub—and, as a matter of fact, I often dream about it!"

"You would!" said De Valerie, with a chuckle.

Fullwood, by this time, had slunk off, and Gulliver and Bell had gone with him. We all stood in a knot round Watson, and he briefly explained to us what the trouble was. He did so with flashing eyes, and his voice filled with indignation. By the time he had finished, we were nearly all affected as he was, and we certainly came to the conclusion that Ralph Leslie Fullwood had not received sufficient punishment.

"Why, the chap ought to have been horse-whipped!" said De Valerie

fiercely. "Fancy him treating Violet like that! I never thought that Fullwood was so absolutely bad!"

"I hope we get the rotter and give him a frog-march round the deck!" said Handforth, who was always ready to do something practical. "After that, we can shove him on a line and chuck him overboard!"

"That's a jolly sensible idea—I don't think!" said Pitt. "The frog-march might have been all right, but we couldn't put the rotter overboard. He might get mixed up in the propeller—and then there might be another casualty!"

"Well, we've got to do something

"You're quite right," I put in. "We have got to do something, Handy. Watson has given Fullwood a few punches, but that doesn't meet the case. This is an affair for serious consideration, and we can't very well do it here."

"Then we'll go down in the gym and have a confab!" said Handforth firmly.

"That is exactly what I'm about to suggest. Fullwood needs a sharp lesson—and he's going to get it. He must be made to understand, one thing for all, that he cannot insult any of the young ladies on board this ship, without being severely punished. Come on, my sons."

"Good!" said Handforth. "That's the ticket!"

And, all of us looking rather serious, we went down the deck in a body, descended the companion, and made our way to the gymnasium.

Fullwood's punishment was to be decided upon!

CHAPTER V.

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT.

TOMMY WATSON looked impatient.

"I don't see the reason for all this business!" he declared. "All I want is Fullwood down here, and I'll give him the thrashing he deserves. That's about the shortest way out of it—he deserves a hiding."

"That's exactly what I suggest," said Handforth. "And don't forget that

I'm going to give him a second hiding on the top of yours!"

"Fullwood won't be fit to take any second hiding!" said Tommy Watson grimly.

I shook my head.

"What we've got to do is to be calm," I said. "There's no sense in doing anything in a hurry. To begin with, Tommy, we don't want your sister to know that we've become aware of this business—it wouldn't be nice for her. And if she sees Fullwood going about with a beautiful pair of black eyes, a swollen nose, sundry thick ears, and one or two teeth missing—well, she'll guess it."

"I suppose she would!" grinned Watson, in spite of himself. "But I sha'n't do so much damage as all that!"

"Well, in any case, you'll make a pretty bad mess of his face, once you get really started," I said. "And that won't do. It's hardly right to Dorrie, is it, to come to that. What we've got to do is—think of some scheme that will punish Fullwood, but won't leave any signs."

"I've got it!" said Handforth brilliantly. "We'll go and fish out a cane, one of you chaps can hold Fullwood down, and I'll lam into him as hard as I can go. There'll be marks, I dare say, but not where they can be seen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's all very well," I chuckled; "but even that isn't severe enough. Corporal punishment is all very well in its own way, but I want something more lasting. I want to do something that will give Fullwood time to think—something that will make him hesitate before insulting Watson's sister again; in fact, I've got an idea already."

"What is it?" asked a dozen voices.

"I'll tell you in a minute, when I've got it quite clear," I said. "Just let me think it out."

"What's wrong with shutting Fullwood up with T. T., and letting Tucker give him a lecture on anthropoid apes?" asked Pitt humorously.

"Oh, don't rot!" said Handforth. "Let Nipper think of something sensible!"

"My dear sir, I fail to see the reasonableness of your suggestion, in any case," remarked Timothy Tucker, blinking at Pitt in a puzzled way. "Surely it would be no punishment for Fullwood

to listen to one of my lectures on anthropoid apes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No punishment at all!" repeated Tucker; "in fact, it would be a highly educative half-hour—or I might even make it an hour. The position is this—"

"Blow the position!" roared Handforth. "Shut up, you ass!"

"Really, my dear sir, I don't see why I should shut up," said Tucker. "You must also allow me to remark that your face frightens me—your face positively frightens me. And your voice, my dear sir, closely resembles a fog-horn—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There'll be another fight in a minute!" chuckled De Valerie.

"No, there won't!" I said grimly. "Shut up, Handforth—don't start making a fuss now. Listen to this wheeze of mine, and tell me what you think about it."

"Go ahead!" said De Valerie. "We're all here!"

"Speak for yourself!" said Handforth. "Your ears may be like an elephant's, but ours aren't!"

"When you cease trying to be funny, I'll get a word in!" I said. "Now, my idea is this: Fullwood deserves a lesson, and he deserves a strong lesson. I think we ought to allow him to imagine that we've overlooked the whole affair, and that everything is all serene. He'll go to bed to-night, feeling comfortable—and then he'll get a shock."

"What shock?" asked Watson.

"Well, at midnight exactly, several of us will get up, and we shall commence the sinister deed," I said mysteriously. "You see, the thing has got to be done in secret—without the ladies knowing anything about it—without the gov'nor or Dorrie knowing anything, if possible. So we've got to move cautiously. If you fellows will only give me your help, we can do the trick fine—and we can make Fullwood grind his teeth with fury, and make a resolve never to make a cad of himself again."

"He can't help being a cad!" said Handforth bluntly. "It's born in him!"

"Well, he won't insult Tommy's sister—or any of the other girls—that's what I mean!" I said. "Listen to me—and don't keep interrupting."

The juniors did listen, and by the time I had finished they were nearly all quite

in league and agreement with my suggestion. There was not one fellow who voted against the idea. Tommy Watson himself thought it was pretty good, but he considered that Fullwood ought to be given a good thrashing in addition to my own form of punishment. But, as I pointed out, this was the very thing we wished to avoid. We did not want Fullwood to show any marks of the fray in the morning.

The details were soon settled, and then it only remained for the party to be chosen. This was not a very long job. Naturally, Watson would be there, and Tregellis-West, and myself. Handforth was determined to come, Pitt wanted to be there, and De Valerie was equally insistent. In the end we chose about two other fellows, and left everything else until the moment arrived for action.

We didn't see any more of Fullwood that night. He probably thought it would be far safer for him to keep out of our way, and he evidently went down to his own cabin with Gulliver and Bell—for they, too, were conspicuous by their absence. They were certainly missed very particularly.

When I saw Violet Watson, just before turning-in time, she had recovered her spirits, and was her own sunny self again. She evidently meant to let the matter pass without making any fuss, and without telling anybody about it. Fullwood had insulted her grossly, but she was not the kind of girl to complain about anybody else.

It was left for me, of course, to awaken just before midnight—for the juniors knew that they could rely upon me to get them all up at the appointed time. They regarded me as a sort of human alarm clock.

Sure enough, I awoke just about ten minutes to twelve. It did not take me long to arouse Sir Montie and Tommy—Watson, in fact, was only dozing. He had not fallen off soundly to sleep, for he took a very keen interest in the affair—a grim sort of interest. He fully intended to make Fullwood pay.

We only slipped on a few things, and then we went and aroused the other juniors. They were only too eager to take part in the little escapade. Fullwood had been a rotter, and he would have to pay.

"Now, my sons, we must do the job quietly," I said, in a low voice. "It's

just possible, of course, that the officer on duty might catch sight of us, and one or two members of the crew, too—but that won't matter a jot. They won't interfere with us, and we can carry on all serene."

The cabin occupied by Fullwood and Co. was just near by, and we lost no time in going to it and opening the door. I entered first, and I noiselessly switched on the electric lights, and looked round.

Fullwood and Co. were all fast asleep in their bunks.

"The youthful innocents!" I murmured. "Fully will have a bit of a shock in a minute, my sons—just wait till he knows what we're going to do!"

"Well, let's get busy!" said Handforth impatiently.

I walked into the cabin, seized Fullwood by the shoulder, and shook him. He awoke after a moment or two, blinked at me, then sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes.

"What the dooce are you doin' in this cabin?" he said tartly.

"You'll find out soon enough!" I said. "Just keep calm, and you'll have the minimum amount of trouble."

Gulliver and Bell were awake by this time, and they both sat up and looked on with interest and with a certain amount of apprehension.

"I say," protested Bell, "what's the idea of this? We've done nothin', Nipper!"

"Oh, you needn't be afraid," I said. "We're not goin' to touch you—we've come here for Fullwood."

"For me?" said Fullwood, his voice unsteady with nervousness. "What do you mean? What the dickens is the good of comin' here for me—"

"A lot of good," I interrupted. "We want you, Fullwood—and if you don't come quietly, we shall be reluctantly compelled to gag and bind you. So you can take your choice."

He didn't like it at all, but he saw that he was hopelessly outnumbered, and that any kind of resistance would be quite useless.

"Well, what are you going to do?" he demanded.

"You'll see that before long," I said. "Just come along with us, and don't make any more noise than you can help."

"But I don't believe in these mad

japes!" interrupted Fullwood. "You can do without me—"

"I don't think so," I said. "You're the most important fellow here, Fullwood—without you, this little game of ours would be quite pointless. Now then, buck up—don't waste any more time!"

Fullwood sulkily put some clothes on, and then we took him outside on deck. As it happened, Mr. Hudson came along at that moment, and he smiled at us as he paused.

"Why, boys, what's the meaning of this?" he asked good-naturedly. "Midnight, and you are out of your bunks, and roaming about the decks!"

"Yes, sir, I wish you would say somethin' to these asses!" said Fullwood sourly.

"It's all right," I put in. "Don't you worry, Mr. Hudson. Just a little joke—that's all. Leave it to us, and everything will be all serene."

The first officer grinned, and passed on, leaving us to our own devices. I led the way down the companion, and then we went through a maze of passages, down further ladders, until we were right in the bowels of the ship—almost down to the keel.

Everything down here was dark and silent, except for the throbbing of the engine, which reverberated throughout the whole frame of the vessel.

Once below, Fullwood was properly gagged and bound. He protested with all his might, but it made no difference. When he was quite helpless, he was taken into an old store-room—a place that had a lock on the outside, in addition to bolts, and which was quite empty within.

We all entered, I switched on the electric light, and the door was closed.

Everything was very solemn, and not one of us smiled as the gag was removed from Fullwood's lips. He glared at us helplessly.

"Now, prisoner at the bar, hear your sentence," I said grimly. "You have been guilty of insulting conduct to a young lady on board this ship. You have acted like a cad and a brute—and you are now going to be punished. It is quite simple. You are sentenced to remain in this store-room for the period of twelve hours—alone, and unattended. At twelve o'clock noon, to-morrow, you will be released."

"You—you fool!" shouted Fullwood

thickly. "You wouldn't dare to leave me here all that time! What will everybody say at breakfast? Why, I'll have you up before the captain if you dare to—"

"My dear chap, you won't do anything of the sort," I interrupted. "We can easily account for your absence during the hours of the morning—not that anybody will be so considerate as to inquire after you. Well, that's all. We'd better leave you now!"

Fullwood persisted, but it was in vain. We had carried out our task, and there was nothing further to do but retire. There was no sense in remaining in the store-room, gazing down at Fullwood, and gloating over his defeat.

Handforth was not quite satisfied. He could see no earthly reason why Fullwood should not have been punched, and he would have liked to have punched his head on the spot.

However, this sort of thing wouldn't do. Fully had to be punished without any violence—and this was a certain way of doing it. We left the room, and I locked and bolted the door. Fullwood himself would never dare to hammer and make a noise, for he would fear the ridicule which would follow his release.

We crept away silently, and made for the iron ladder which would lead us to the more frequented part of the yacht—although, as a matter of fact, far down below here, not a soul was about, even in the day-time. We were right below, as far down in the ship as it was possible to get. I led the way, for the others were not familiar with these strange passages and iron ladders; but I had come down earlier, in order to find out the lie of the land.

"This way, my sons!" I said softly. "Go easy—we don't want to wake everybody up!"

We had been speaking in whispers all the time, but now we crept cautiously along the passage, and made for a ladder at the end. The floor was of iron, but our feet made no sounds whatever, because we were wearing rubber-soled shoes.

Handforth wanted to argue over some small point, and he remained behind with the other fellows, who were attempting to bring him along. Meanwhile, I went on in advance, and suddenly I came to a pause.

A curious sound was in my ears. I looked round rather wonderingly. The

dim passage was deserted, except for the knot of juniors at the end. Before me an iron ladder led up to the middle portion of the ship. But this strange sound was coming from below, and I was puzzled.

And, just as I was beginning to tell myself that I had imagined something, I noticed an iron ring in the flooring, almost at my feet. There was a trap-door, and, what was more to the point, it had recently been raised—as I could tell by the disturbance of the dust.

What could it mean?

CHAPTER VI.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

I DID not waste any time.

Hurrying along, I soon put a stop to the argument, which was progressing rapidly. Handforth, in fact, had just rolled up his sleeves, and was preparing to punch somebody on the nose.

"Pack up all this rot!" I whispered. "Don't make a sound; come along with me, and be as quiet as ever you can!"

"Why, what's wrong, Nipper?" asked Tommy Watson, looking at me in surprise.

"I don't know," I replied, "but there's some queer sound going on right beneath this passage—down in the bilges! A trap-door just along here has been disturbed, and I believe there's somebody down there."

"Only a member of the crew, doing some job or the other," remarked Grey.

"It's a queer time to be doing a job down in the bilges," I said significantly. "I'm going to investigate, my sons, and what you've got to do is to just stand by—and be absolutely quiet!"

I walked off, leaving the others to follow out my instructions. There was no time for any long argument, and I was anxious to look into the matter at once.

In fact, I had a suspicion in my mind—a suspicion which somewhat startled me.

The other juniors remained some little distance down the passage, while I went to the trap-door and slightly raised it. I did this with extreme caution, and I

got the door higher, until I was able to glance below into the black depths.

During the very first second I saw something which almost confirmed my suspicions. Down there, right on the keel of the ship, clinging to the heavy ironwork, was a figure. Near him stood a small electric lamp, casting a small light on one particular place.

The man was Mr. Robertson—the castaway from *The Copperfield*!

I looked down at him grimly. What was the meaning of this? What was that man doing here, down in the bowels of *The Wanderer*, at midnight? The whole affair was suspicious, to say the least of it. But the man's actions were even more suspicious.

He was placing a small tin box between two of the girders, and from this tin box projected a long piece of string—at least, it seemed to be a piece of string, and Mr. Robertson was simply setting the box into position. I did not remain looking at him for long, for I realised that here was something that demanded instant attention—not from us, but from the skipper.

I closed the trap-door, and stood up. It was a signal for the other juniors to approach. But I held my hand to my lips, as a sign for them to be silent, and we all mounted the ladder until we reached the next deck. Then they all grabbed hold of me and demanded to know what I was having a game at.

"I can't explain now!" I said rapidly. "I want to find the skipper at once—and Nelson Lee, too, and Dorrie! You chaps remain here, and if anybody comes up, collar him—keep him a prisoner!"

I rushed off, leaving the juniors staring after me rather blankly.

But I knew how urgent the case was, and it was perfectly ridiculous to remain there, explaining things to the juniors, when every second was of importance; in fact, I really blamed myself for coming up at all—I felt that I ought to have taken some action on my own account.

But, anyhow, I wanted to see the guv'nor—and I wanted to tell Captain Burton. I hardly liked taking the responsibility on my own shoulders.

By a piece of luck I found the skipper on deck, just about to make his way up to the bridge. I rushed straight up to him, and grabbed him by the lapels of his coat.

"Why, Nipper, what's the matter?" asked Captain Burton.

"Quick, sir!" I panted. "There's a man right down the hold—that fellow we rescued from the sea!"

I lost no time in explaining the details to the skipper, and he listened with a face which expressed surprise at first, but then it took on a grim look. I had only just finished when Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee came on deck, both of them lighting cigars.

They had been indulging in a game of billiards, and it had taken rather longer than they had expected. And they were just coming up for a breath before turning in. They, too, heard the news, and they at once realised the significance of the occurrence.

Nelson Lee lost no time.

"Come!" he exclaimed briskly. "We will have a close look at this matter immediately. I do not think it will be wise to waste any time."

"Why, old man—what do you suspect?" asked Dorrie.

"I don't know exactly, but I am very much afraid that Mr. Robertson is a traitor!"

Nelson Lee hastened down into the bowels of the ship, and Dorrie followed him. I went, of course, and Captain Burton brought up the rear. We found Handforth and Tommy Watson and the others still standing in the same position, and they reported that Mr. Robertson had not come up; there had not been a sign of any person, in fact.

Nelson Lee quietly descended to the lower portion of the yacht, and I pointed out to him the trap-door. The guv'nor made no attempt at secrecy; he lifted up the cover, and stared down.

As he did so, he flashed a powerful electric torch downwards, and a startled gasp came up to our ears. The castaway was standing there, a match in his hand, and he was about to apply it to the long piece of string which I had seen, and which I knew to be a fuse.

"You scoundrel!" shouted the guv'nor angrily.

He simply dropped down into the bilge, and the next moment he and the castaway were fighting fiercely. The fellow had attempted to set light to the fuse at once, but he had failed. He was using all his strength to defeat the guv'nor, but he was like a baby in the great detective's hands.

Almost before he knew what had hap-

penced, he was lying flat on his back, and he was pinned down. By this time I had dropped by the gov'nor's side; Dorrie was there, to say nothing of Handforth, and sundry others. The castaway was made a prisoner. His face was distorted with rage and disappointment, and he glared at us balefully.

"Well, you nearly got it, anyhow!" he snarled. "By thunder! Another minute, and it would have been all up!"

The members of the crew were soon on the spot, and Robertson was taken away and put in irons, and locked in a cabin. It was only too clear that his whole story had been a fake. The wireless appeal for help had been a fake, too—it had been a put-up job, in order to get the man on board. There had been no wreck; this man had simply been left on the hatch-cover for the especial purpose of being found by the yacht. Taken on board as a castaway, he had had ample chances to work out his nefarious scheme.

The little tin box contained explosive of a very dangerous character, and if that fuse had been lit, and if the charge had exploded, a hole would have been blown in the yacht's bottom, which would have disabled her completely. She would have sunk ultimately; but there would have been ample time for everybody on board to get away without loss of life.

Who was this mysterious enemy? Who was this man who had plotted against Lord Dorrimore? Before we had left Tilbury, an attempt had been made to blow up the yacht, and now, in mid-ocean, came a second attempt! It was clear that the strange enemy had no intention of doing any bodily harm—he merely wanted to sink the yacht. It seemed, therefore, that his main object was to prevent us going to the Amazon.

It was altogether a puzzle, and we hardly knew what to think. However, we were not likely to be caught napping again, after these two experiences. The rest of the voyage to South America would probably be quite peaceful and uneventful.

We didn't get to bed until after three o'clock, and, naturally, breakfast was somewhat late. And during the morning the sole topic of conversation was the treacherous behaviour of Robertson. We were so engrossed in the discussion, in fact, that when twelve o'clock came we

forgot all about Fullwood down in his prison.

It was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that Gulliver came to us and wanted to know what we had done with his leader. Then we remembered.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was released, and he was completely cowed. The lesson had been a severe one, and he promised that he would be different in future. Whether we could rely upon that or not remained to be seen. I had an idea that it was rather hollow.

And so, after this little bit of excitement, the voyage to the Amazon continued. Nothing further of an exciting nature took place, and day after day the weather grew finer, the sun became hotter, and the yacht steamed on into tropical zones.

CHAPTER VII

THE MIGHTY AMAZON.

THE flaming sun shone down with bristling intensity from a sky of deep, deep blue. Here and there a few fleecy clouds flicked the heavens.

The air itself was as hot as a glass-house, and all of the brasswork on The Wanderer was hot to the touch.

The Amazon!

I stood against the yacht's rail with Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Watson. Close by, Umlosi was gazing out over the water, with an expression of pure joy on his great black face. Young Stanley Kerrigan was standing close to his arm, and the pair of them were looking with eager, longing eyes over the great forest, which lay in the distance.

Flies buzzed incessantly. The very air quivered with the intensity of the heat, and The Wanderer made her way up the river leisurely and comfortably.

It was midday, and we were all feeling rather excited. This was not our first sight of the Amazon by any means. A good many days had passed, and we had been on the Amazon for quite a time. Our journey was nearly at its end.

For we had not only reached the Amazon—we were hundreds of miles up the mighty river; hundreds of miles above Manaus, that being the Brazilian

city of fifty thousand inhabitants, which lies on the banks of the Rio Negro, a few miles above the junction of that river with the Amazon.

At Manaus we had taken in fresh supplies, and we had done everything possible to obtain information about Colonel Kerrigan—not that we had been very successful. Try as we would, we could find no trace of him—except that he had died over four years earlier.

But Aunt Janet was not convinced. Now that she was on the spot—on the Amazon itself—she was more than convinced that her brother was alive; that he was imprisoned somewhere, far beyond these great forests, which bounded us on both banks of the enormous river.

We were all bronzed and sun-dried, so to speak. The tropical heat was almost stifling; but we did not care about that—we were eagerly watching the river—we were scanning the mighty trees, which were plainly visible on the banks.

It was impossible to obtain any cooling. Even under the canvas deck awning, the deck-plates were hot to the touch, and everything was uncomfortably moist.

For the atmosphere here was by no means dry—on this particular day, at least. The heat was of a clammy kind, and the sun only seemed to make it more enervating. It was really an effort to walk from one side of the deck to the other, and we found that it was best to keep quite still, and to watch everything with as little effort as possible.

"Begad!" said Montie, speaking in a hushed voice. "Isn't it grand, old man— isn't it simply appalling!"

"Appalling?" I repeated.

"Yes, dear old boy. All this greatness, you know," exclaimed Tregellis-West. "It—it seems so frightfully big— begad! I feel like a little insect—I do, really. Just look at those trees over there—they're a shockin' size!"

"Everything grows large in this region," I said. "Trees, or bushes, or flowers, or creepers—they all grow to a terrific size, Montie. You'll find out more about it when we get ashore. Then, of course, there are thousands of insects—"

"Dear old boy, you needn't mention it," said Tregellis-West, with a sigh. "I have seen all the insects I want to see for the rest of my life! They are frightful. The flies are bad enough without anything else!"

"You'll have worse troubles than these flies before you've done, Montie," I smiled. "By thunder! Look at that place over there. Did you ever see anything so impressive in all your life?"

The juniors were already looking, and they were fascinated.

The river was vast, the northern bank being far distant, and studded with those huge trees, like a Spanish lime. The Wanderer was ambling easily against a sluggish current, and making easy work of it.

The river was quiet and solemn, and the mighty waters were moving down to the sea nearly two thousand miles distant, slowly and deliberately—one fast rolling body of water.

Yes, we were over two thousand miles out in the Amazon already, so it is easy to picture that we had been in the tropics for some considerable time. Our journey was nearly at an end.

We were now on that portion of the river where Colonel Kerrigan had last been seen, and before long it would be necessary to make a landing, and to institute inquiries.

Dotted about, here and there, were rubber plantations, wheat farms, and all sorts of other enterprises—many of them run by British capital. Then, of course, there were plenty of Brazilian concerns, to say nothing of a good many Yankee affairs. We thought that it would not be so difficult to obtain information if we only persevered.

I have purposely neglected to leave out the details of our voyage up to the Amazon, as far as Manaus, and then farther along to the spot where we were now situated.

There was plenty to interest us, but I am afraid that it would not make very readable matter. My object in recounting these facts is to set down the history of our search for Colonel Kerrigan. It is not merely a travel book.

All the juniors were vastly impressed by what they had seen. They felt carried away by the tremendous grandeur of it all.

Everything on this river was so huge—so enormously large. Even the flies themselves were terrifically fat.

Trees and flowers and shrubs in Europe were puny compared with life on the Amazon. It seemed as though nature herself had taken on a mighty spurt and had caused everything to grow at treble the speed.

The trees which lined the banks were of an enormous size. They appalled one if the yacht happened to approach. The height itself was like a terrific whirl, and hardly varied a foot in its thickness. It presented a great, vast green frontage to the river which seemed impenetrable.

It was an endless rampart, and mysteries lurked between the recesses. Wild animals, snakes, and goodness knows what else, lay hidden among those mighty trees and masses of creeper.

It is impossible for me to tell everything here, but later on I shall find it necessary to describe the wonders of the Amazon at a greater length.

For these are wonders—the greatest collection of marvels in the world.

Towards evening Captain Burton decided to make a stop. We had just drawn level with a little settlement—a rubber plantation—on the left bank of the river. There was life here, and it was probable that we should find some information. We never dreamed that luck was to be with us right from the very first moment.

Aunt Janet was very excited, and Stanley was thrilled. He seemed rather subdued by it all, and he kept his feelings to himself.

Umlosi, of course, was absolutely in his glory. He was himself again; but he wanted to get ashore—he wanted to get into the forests, his native element.

Before we had been anchored long, one or two boats came out from the little landing jetty towards us. One of the boats contained the owner of the rubber plantation—an American—his wife, and daughter.

They were welcomed warmly by Lord Dorrimore, and we were all invited to go ashore on the next day. But meanwhile, a little incident which happened was destined to alter the whole course of our arrangements.

Round about the yacht there were several native boats, manned by Indian boys, for the most part. Their canoes were laden with nuts and fruit of every description. And they were selling it at a certainly low price.

One of these Indian boys was induced to come on board by Fatty Little, who promptly proceeded to purchase his entire stock. Not only that, but Fatty proceeded to transfer the stock into his own interior.

Everything came to him as a matter of course.

Fruits that he had never tasted in his life before went down beautifully. He revelled in it, and everything was satisfactory. Fatty was certainly enjoying himself.

The little Indian boy was a queer fellow—only a small, wiry individual, even smaller than Stanley Kerrigan himself—and Stanley was only a fag in the Third.

The Indian had a brown face, and his teeth were like pearls, his eyes gleamsome and merry, as if he found it difficult to keep his face straight.

It wore a tiresome grin—a grin which made everybody else want to grin with it.

"Plenty fruit," he kept repeating. "Allee same cheap! Dis you like um, eh? Heap plenty good stuff, I guess."

We were quite amused by the Indian boy's talk. At first we couldn't understand it—I mean, we couldn't understand why he could speak English so well. But then we learned that he was constantly in contact with the American servant of the rubber plantation, and he had been able to collect many of his sayings. Not only this, but there were one or two Chinamen on the plantation, and the little boy had picked up pidgin English, too—to say nothing of a few Spanish words, put in here and there. His conversation, on the whole, was quite a scream, and we were delighted to listen to him.

He kept us in roars of laughter. "The kid's a nut, and no mistake!" grinned Handforth.

"Kid!" echoed Pitt. "I'll bet he's nearer twenty than sixteen, my son!"

It was really impossible to gauge the Indian boy's age. He told us his name, but it was of such an unpronounceable character that we never attempted to say it. We decided that we would give him one of his own—that is, of our own manufacture. But we couldn't think of one on the spur of the moment that was exactly suitable.

While we were talking with the boy, Aunt Janet was dragged along the deck by Stanley, who wanted her to see the native.

Aunt Janet was quite amused—until about one minute had passed. Then, with strange suddenness, her expression changed, and she stared hard at the Indian boy's neck.

She walked forward, and she took a deep breath.

"Where—where did you get that?" she asked, her voice quivering.

She pointed, and we saw that the object of her interest was a small charm, which was hung round the Indian boy's neck on a piece of string.

The charm was a curious little object—a little white elephant, no bigger than a penny, and with little green glass eyes. And upon it were engraved the letters "S. K."

I had not noticed them before.

"Where I get um?" said the Indian boy, grinning. "He give to me. Allee same—present, fine lady. I get sure dandy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, auntie," shouted Stanley, "this little elephant used to belong to dad!"

"Begad!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The Indian boy grinned broader than ever.

"Him give to me by very fine white gentleman!" he said, with a nod of his head. "I guess that gentleman big um chief. His big nice man. I guess so, kids! Allee same lucky charm. Me no part with him for no price!"

Dorrie and Nelson Lee strolled up, and they soon understood what the excitement was. Bit by bit, the story was dragged out of the Indian boy. And we learned that Colonel Kerrigan had given him the charm four or five years before. He had prized it highly, and had never taken it from his neck.

And, what was more to the point, the Indian boy positively declared that he knew the exact spot where the colonel had been last seen—where he had been struck down by the fever. This spot was a good distance up a small tributary of the Amazon—a river which was never negotiated by any of the river steamers. It was, in fact, in the heart of unexplored territory.

Before the evening was out, everything was fixed—and the Indian boy became a member of our party. It was the biggest piece of luck that had happened to us. The boy promised to act as our guide; he would show us the way to the spot, and then our chances of success would be far greater.

But something else occurred that evening, too—and it was mainly connected with the visit of the Indian boy to The Wanderer. And the chief actor

in the little affair was no less a person than Fatty Little.

We first became aware that something was wrong when we heard sundry strange noises proceeding from behind the wireless room. I was standing with Montie and Tommy against the rail, discussing the latest addition to our party, and at first we did not fully understand the nature of the extraordinary sounds.

But at last they became so ominous that our attention was fully claimed.

"Dear old boys, I'm fearfully afraid that somethin' is wrong," remarked Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez, and glancing round. "Can't you hear some weird noises comin' from behind the wireless room?"

"Yes, there is something there," I remarked. "Somebody seems to be in pain."

"Fatty Little, I'll bet!" said Watson. "Don't you remember how he was slamming into all those giddy fruits? I've been expecting him to have tummy trouble for an hour past. The fat ass simply choked himself with the stuff."

I grinned.

"As a matter of fact, I didn't see much of it," I said. "I knew that Fatty bought a lot of fruit, but I thought he had laid in a week's supply. You can't mean to tell me that he demolished the whole lot at one sitting?"

"Every scrap!" said Watson.

"Well, if there isn't a funeral to-morrow, it'll be a queer thing!" I said. "We'll see what we can do—and if our efforts are fruitless, we'll fetch Dr. Brett."

"I'm not so sure about them being fruitless!" said Pitt, who had joined us. "According to what I can understand, fruit seem to be the main cause of the trouble."

We passed down the deck, and went round behind the little wireless room. And there, sitting on the deck, was Fatty Little. It cannot be truthfully said that he looked happy.

On the contrary, there was an expression on his face which gave me the impression that he was on the verge of collapse. Both hands were fully occupied in holding that region of his anatomy which lay immediately below his belt.

"What's wrong, Fatty?" I asked, bending down.

"Ow!" said Fatty lucidly. "Yow — Oh, great pancakes!"

"That's no answer!" I said grimly. "You've been overeating yourself, you glutton! I'd better fetch Dr. Brett to you at once——"

Fatty looked up, with a pitiful expression on his face.

"Don't!" he gasped. "I—I've seen Dr. Brett already!"

"You've seen him?"

"Yes—this is the result!" groaned Fatty, doubling himself up. "I felt a bit queer, and I told the doctor what I'd been eating. He gave me some horrible stuff, and said it would do me good. Great bloaters! I—I think I'm dying!"

Pitt grinned.

"It'll take more than a hundred-weight of fruit to kill you, Fatty," he said cheerfully.

"It's not the fruit, you ass!" said Fatty, looking up again. "The fruit didn't hurt much—it was the stuff that Dr. Brett gave me."

"Don't you believe it," I said. "If the doctor hadn't dosed you, you might have been dead by this time. What did you eat, anyway?"

"Only a few melons, about two dozen bananas, and a lot of berries that looked like plums, but didn't taste like plums!" said Fatty. "Then there were some other things—I don't know what they were. They looked like apples, but the flesh was a pinky kind of colour, and they tasted ripping."

"How many did you eat?" I asked.

"Why, only about two dozen!" said Fatty.

"Then it's just about time you were dead!" I said. "I think I saw those bananas, too. They weren't fit to eat, you ass—they were green."

Fatty groaned.

"Well, they tasted all right!" he said.

"A bit dry, perhaps; but I was hungry. A chap must have something to keep his strength up in a country like this. I didn't have much for tea, you know——"

"Only about two loaves of bread, a

pound of jam, and a few dozen pastries!" remarked Pitt drily. "How on earth you can get through such a lot of stuff is a constant puzzle to me, Fatty! And all that fruit on top of it—well, you jolly well deserve to have pains in your tummy."

"I—I feel awful!" said the fat junior.

"Take my advice, and go straight to bed," I said. "That stuff that Dr. Brett gave you will do you a world of good, and once you get to sleep you'll be all serene. In the morning you'll wake up with an appetite that'll practically clear the yacht from all her supplies. Get up, my son!"

Fatty crawled off to his cabin somehow, and I had an idea that his lesson would not sink very deep. On the morrow he would probably repeat the performance—for when he was particularly hungry he never considered the consequences.

But, with the exception of Fatty, everybody on the yacht was feeling in the best of spirits. We had arrived up the Amazon, and we had almost reached the spot where we could find definite information.

What trials and troubles were we to go through in the near future? What excitements and dangers were we to pass through?

The whole adventure had taken on a more interesting aspect, and we looked forward eagerly to the trip up that little tributary—we anticipated plenty of life, and plenty of excitement.

And we were not wrong!

For, from that moment onwards, our sojourn in blazing Brazil was destined to be one long round of thrilling adventures and wonderful escapes. Moreover, we were shortly to find that we were not alone in that region. The identity of our mysterious enemy was not to be kept from us for very long.

On the morrow we were due to start the trip into the unexplored region of the mighty forests!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY:

THE RIVER OF WONDERS!

Will be the beginning of the remarkable series of adventures which befall the boys of St. Frank's on the mighty Amazon.

YOU CAN BEGIN READING THIS SPLENDID SERIAL TO-DAY!

Three Boys in Canada.



by S. S. Gordon.

A Tale of Life and Adventure in the North-West.

INTRODUCTION.

Two brothers, Jack and Teddy Royce, with their chum, Gerald Telford, are trying their luck in the wilds of North-West Canada. A plan of a gold mine is stolen from them by ruffians. In the attempt to rescue this plan Teddy and Gerald are captured, but eventually rescued from a terrible death by Jack Royce.

(Now read on.)

The Trap for Snaith and Olesen.

"I still puzzles me," said Teddy Royce, the following morning, "how you managed to be on the spot just when we needed you most."

"Old Jack always seems to be where he's wanted most," said Gerald Telford, gripping the big Britisher's arm affectionately. "My only dat! Where on earth should I be without him?"

"You wouldn't be on earth at all," Teddy grinned; "neither of us would. Hard to say where we'd be," he added.

Despite all he and Gerald had gone through prior to their rescue from the falls by Jack Royce, Teddy, after a good night's rest and plenty to eat, was feeling pretty much his old self again. Teddy was a youngster it was impossible to keep depressed for long, and he had a wiry frame that was capable of standing a great deal of rough knocking about.

Telford grew serious on hearing the younger Royce's somewhat flippant words.

"Teddy's right," he said solemnly. "We shouldn't be on earth at all at this moment. And that's twice you've saved my life, Jack. When am I going to get the chance to repay you?"

"Who wants any repayment?" said Jack Royce awkwardly. "You talk as if I was a sort of dealer in life-saving stunts, or that I'd lent you something, or—or something. Now, shut up about it. How did I happen to be on the spot? Well, that's easy. The surveying party kept right on in a straight

line, and, as you came down by river—which is about the waviest river in Canada—we got here just about the time you did. Jolly glad we did."

They had finished their breakfast by now, and they knew they had the whole of this day to themselves, for, according to what Jack said, there would be no more surveying done for some time to come. Having struck the Little Slave River at this point, Simpson, the surveyor, was puzzled as to what to do next. To cross the river would mean the erection of a very expensive bridge. But to swerve away and follow the course of the river would add many miles to the railway track they were spying out."

"So you found out that that black-faced blighter—Johnson, or Smith, or whatever his name is—was actually after you, Gerald, did you?" said Jack, with interest.

"Yes—the brute. But I still can't think why my guardian, Mr. Cardone, should have offered him a thousand pounds to get me out of the way. And yet Teddy and I distinctly heard him saying that to Connell, the cook. Why should Mr. Cardone want me out of the way?"

Jack Royce did not answer for some time. He was thoughtful. His mind went back to that night not so very long ago, when he and Teddy had rescued Gerald from the gang of roughs that had attempted to injure him. He remembered again the strange light he had seen in Mr. Cardone's eyes when the fact of Gerald's wanting to come to Canada had been mentioned.

"Mr. Cardone had charge of your money till you were twenty-one, hadn't he?" said Jack Royce.

"Yes, but it all got lost before I was twenty-one," said Gerald. "That was rough luck, because I could have done such a lot of good with that cash."

"You only had your guardian's word for it that it had been lost," said Jack.

Gerald started. "By Jove, yes," he said. "You never got a lawyer's opinion on things," Jack went on.

(Continued on page III of cover.)

"But Mr. Cardone is a lawyer," Gerald said.

Jack nodded. "That, perhaps, makes the matter all the worse," he observed. "As a matter of fact, I've suspected something like this all along, ever since we left the old country. I did know for a fact that that fellow Snaith shadowed us out all the way, and that he made one or two deliberate attempts against us. It was Snaith who chucked you off the train and nearly got you drowned in the Devil's Falls. Before then Snaith was trying to get you separated from us—I suppose because he thought you'd be easier to handle alone than with two pals. Well, here's my candid opinion: Your guardian didn't lose all your money quite in the way he said. The money's still there, and he's got hold of it. Then, to keep you from asking too many questions about it, he encouraged the idea of your going to Canada, with that bound on your trail to do you in. Dead men tell no tales."

Gerald's face went red, his eyes sparkled, and he clenched his fists fiercely. Neither of the Royces had ever before seen him look quite so angry. He did not look a boy just then; he looked a man, and a very stern man at that.

"If I thought that were true," said he, "I'd—I'd go back to my guardian, and I'd accuse him to his face of attempting to get rid of me, of conspiring to murder me. I'd get him imprisoned for it! And—and I'd ask him some questions about my fortune, too."

"Well, I'll bet it's true, just the same," said Jack Royce. "I have a scheme in my head, which we might be able to work out some day. When we've finally got hold of Snaith—and, by gad! I mean to get my hands on him yet!—we'll send a fake telegram home to your guardian, reporting that Snaith had accomplished his purpose, and demanding the money. When that comes along, we'll have Cardone by the short hairs, and it'll be jug for him, as well as Snaith."

"I think it'll be the rope for Snaith," put in Teddy. "Don't forget that we think he murdered Connell, the cook."

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, as you said, Snaith and the big Swede will be coming along down-river to-day, confident that you two are finished, and not aware that the surveying party is camped here. So we'll just wait for them and snaffle them. I've talked to Simpson about it, and he's agreeable to lending me two or three men."

"What shall we do with 'em when we've collared 'em?" asked Gerald. "It isn't as if we were in civilisation, and could hand 'em over to a policeman."

"No," Jack admitted. "It isn't. What we'll have to do will be to hand 'em over to the care of the first Indians we find. There's sure to be a Mounted Policeman or two within a hundred miles of here. Well, we'll instruct the Indians to look after those two beauties until we can find that mounted

man, give him our report, and get him to collect his prisoners. That's the only way. Simpson says he won't be bothered with them near his party. Can't say I blame him much, either. They're an unlovely pair of blackguards."

"My hat!" Teddy chuckled. "The face of Hank Olesen, when he sees us alive and kicking, will be better than a cinematograph show. I wouldn't miss it for all the gold in Dead Breed Lake. By the way, Jack, I suppose you are aware that this Little Slave River runs into Dead Breed Lake? How far down the lake is yet, I don't know."

"Yes, Simpson told me it did," Jack answered. "But it's a couple of hundred miles yet—some distance!"

"At the same time, when are we going to prospect for the Mad Prospector's gold?" Gerald asked.

Jack looked at him with a smile. "Still as keen as ever on the old Mad Prospector's amazing lode?" he asked. "Oh, you boys! Well, we might as well have a look for it, when we get nearer the place. The surveying party will be working up in that vicinity in another two or three months' time."

"Oh, I say—so long to wait?" cried Teddy. "Can't we break away from this party now, get canoes, and start off at once?"

"No, young fellow, we can't," said Jack. "For one thing, we've no provisions, and Simpson wouldn't give us any. Another thing, I'm chain-foreman of this gang, and I've got the work Sanderson's paying me to do. Another thing—I don't mind looking for old Mervyn's gold-mine, when we get near the spot, but I'm not going to put myself about to all that extent of making a special trip of two hundred miles down river, and two hundred miles back up river, just to find that old Mervyn did as we always told him—chased a rainbow trail."

Teddy looked disappointed. He had come to Canada to make his living by hard work. But he had also come for adventure—and he had not been disappointed in that respect, either. But, also, secretly he had come in the hopes of making a fortune soon.

"I think you're a bit of a mule, old chap, the way you look on the Mad Prospector's gold mine," he said. "Surely you don't think old Mervyn pulled our legs before he died?"

Jack Royce shrugged his shoulders. To be quite frank, he did not believe there was any gold to be found up there at Dead Breed Lake. Old Mervyn, before his death, had always been chasing gold, and never had found any. He was stolid and matter-of-fact, was Jack. He did not believe in embarking on wild adventures without some favourable prospects in view.

"But two or three months are such a time!" said Teddy. "And by the way we came down river ourselves the last few days, I think we could get to Dead Breed Lake in ten days if we travelled light—the three of us in one canoe."

(To be continued.)

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