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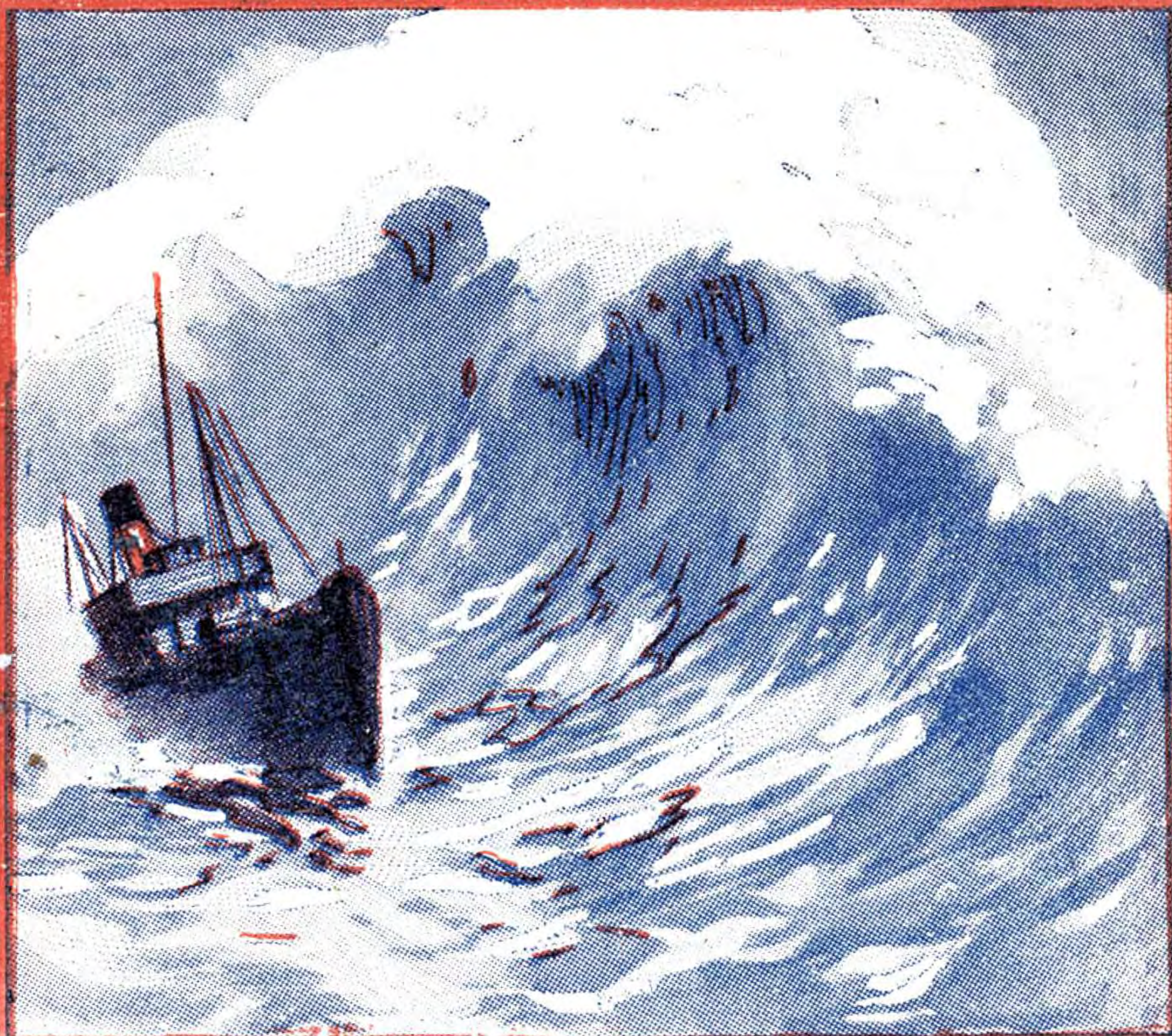
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J. SHAW AND A. MCNAIR

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These photos are superbly finished art productions,
and no collection is complete without them.



The "Wanderer" was lifted up like a feather by that vast wave.

THE SECRET OF THE PIRATE'S CAVE

A GRAND STORY OF SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURE IN THE SOUTH SEAS.



Those on the deck of the Wanderer gazed in awe and wonderment at the great belching flames that were bursting forth from the volcano, accompanied by thunderous reports.

THE SECRET OF THE PIRATE'S CAVE!

Another thrilling story of the famous South Sea Island series, featuring the Boys of St. Frank's, Nelson Lee, Nipper, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, and many other well-known characters. By the Author of "The Cannibal Horde," "The Black Invaders," "The Terror from the Sky," and many other fine stories.

**(THE NARRATIVE RELATED
THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)**

CHAPTER I.

HANDFORTH, THE CANNIBAL.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH opened the door of one of the cabins of the *Wanderer*, and peeped in. As he had expected, Church and McClure were there—just putting the finishing touches on themselves for dinner. They glanced up, and nodded to their famous leader.

"Better buck up, Handy!" said Church. "Dinner won't be long!"

"Shush!" said Handforth mysteriously.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Blow dinner!" said Handforth.

"It's rude!" said Church, shaking his head.

"What's rude, you fathead?"

"Why, for a chap to blow his dinner!" said Church. "If it happens to be too hot, he's got to wait until it cools——"

"You—you babbling lunatic!" snorted Handforth. "I mean, rats

to dinner! I don't want any! I've got a jolly fine idea, and I'm going to get busy on it. And it's a dead secret!"

"It won't be a dead secret long if you yell like that!" remarked McClure. "What's the dotty scheme now? I—I mean, what brilliant brain-wave has struck you this time, Handy?" he added hastily.

Handforth held up a finger, and carefully closed the door.

"I'm going to be a cannibal!" he announced in a whisper.

Church and McClure stared.

"A—a what?" gasped Church.

"A cannibal!"

"You—you're going to be a cannibal?" stuttered Church. "You're off your rocker! You can't eat human flesh—it's not done in the best circles! Besides, nobody would speak to you afterwards! And who are you going to start on?"

Handforth deliberately closed his fists. Then he raised the right one, and placed it immediately underneath Church's nose.

"See that?" he snapped ominously.

"I can't see anything else!"

"Well, if you try any more of your funny rot on me, I'm going to slosh this into your face!" said Handforth pleasantly. "I'm just warning you, so you'd better take heed. I'm not rotting—I'm serious. I've made up my mind to be a cannibal!"

And Handforth rolled his eyes in a peculiar way.

Church gulped, glanced at McClure, and then gazed anxiously at the door. For some time past Handforth's chums had frequently suspected their famous leader of being somewhat near the border line. Was it possible that Handy had gone dotty at last?

"Yes—yes, of—of course!" said Church uneasily. "A cannibal? Oh, that's a ripping idea! Queer thing I hadn't thought of it myself! Just stay here, Handy, and we'll pop out for a minute or two."

"You won't pop out!" said Handforth grimly. "I'm going to tell you chaps all about it——"

"But—but we're in a hurry!" exclaimed Church, edging towards the door. "Try to humour him!" he added huskily, appealing to McClure.

"What's that?" snorted Handforth.

"Nun—nothing!" gasped Church.

"Try to humour me!" snapped Edward Oswald. "Why, you silly fathead, what's the game? Do you think I'm mad? Just because I say I'm going to be a cannibal, that's no reason for you to act like this! I'm going to disguise myself——"

"Disguise yourself!" yelled Church.

"You roaring fathead!" bellowed Handforth. "Tell the whole ship! Go on—yell it out in the corridor! Tell everybody that I'm going to disguise myself as a cannibal, and go ashore."

"There's no need to!" said Church. "You're doing it."

"Well, it's your fault—you shouldn't be such a blithering idiot!" went on Handforth,

dropping his voice to a whisper. "Here I'm trying to keep the thing a dead secret, and all you can do is to make a mess of it! The idea came to me like a blow while I was on the promenade-deck. Hit me all of a sudden, you know. You both know that I'm the best scout on board——"

"Oh, of course!" said McClure faintly. "Go on!"

"Well, Lagoon Island is swarming with cannibals, isn't it?"

"Is it?" said McClure.

"Is it!" repeated Handforth. "What do you mean—is it? You jolly well know it is! Swarming with 'em!"

"There were a good few here a few days ago, but after that cyclone they seem to have vanished!" said Church. "I believe they're all dead. The storm must have killed them."

Handforth smiled contemptuously.

"That's just where you show your fat-headed ignorance!" he sneered. "Dead! Why, you ass, they're hiding—they're waiting for a chance to swoop down on us and wipe out the whole crowd! Nobody seems to know what's happened, and so I'm going to investigate."

"Oh, help!" groaned McClure.

"Eh?"

"I—I said we—we'll help!" gasped McClure.

"No, you won't!" said Handforth. "I generally take you chaps with me—much to my cost—but this time I'm going to be firm. I've come to the conclusion that you won't be able to disguise yourselves properly. It's a one-man job, so I'm going alone."

Church and McClure looked rather anxious.

"Look here, Handy, be sensible——"

"I don't want any of your attempts to choke me off!" interrupted Handforth. "I've made up my mind—and that's enough. I'm going to disguise myself as a cannibal, and I'm going to penetrate the island."

Church and McClure knew their leader quite well, and they were quite convinced that he was capable of attempting the reckless policy he had just outlined. Of course, it would be the end of Handforth if he went.

He would get into the interior of the island all right—but there were very grave doubts as to whether he would return. He considered himself to be an investigator of extraordinary ability. Everybody else knew quite well that he was a most hopeless duffer at the work.

And as for him disguising as a cannibal, the idea would have been quite humorous, if it wasn't risky. Church and McClure hardly knew what to do.

Lord Dorrimore's steam yacht, the Wanderer, was aground just off Lagoon Island—she lay, in fact, in the lagoon itself. But the water was so shallow that the yacht lay on the coral bed of the lagoon. She had been flung there in an intense tropical storm, weeks earlier.

And the twenty St. Frank's fellows on board had experienced all sorts of excite-

ments and adventures on the island. The most recent event had been the battle with a fierce horde of cannibals, who had been urged on to the attack by Chinese pirates. These pirates were under the leadership of a smooth-tongued rascal named Ho Liang. There were many Chinamen on the pirate craft—which was a large, powerful junk.

The attack by cannibals had come to nothing, although at one time it had seemed that everything was going wrong with Dorrimore and his party. Owing to an unexpected stroke by Ho Liang, we had been compelled to surrender—for I was there, of course, and had been through all the adventures. And when we surrendered we believed that all hope was gone.

But while in the hands of the savages, we had been struck by the most intense cyclone I have ever heard of. The fierce storm devastated a great part of the island, and wrecked every one of the cannibal canoes—to say nothing of casting the the Chinese junk on the coral reef and making her a hopeless wreck herself.

Since then we had remained on the Wanderer—quite safe and secure. But the blacks had apparently vanished into thin air. We knew they had not left the island, since their canoes were smashed to matchwood. And yet we had seen no indication of them. Either they were dead—killed by the cyclone—or else they were in hiding.

The Chinese had kept to their own vessel—which, although a wreck, was only partly submerged. Ho Liang, and his men, were in very much the same position as we were on the Wanderer.

And now Handforth, it seemed, was intent upon venturing out quite alone, with the object of discovering what had happened to the cannibals. His chums knew well enough that he would make an awful mess of it. But any attempt to dissuade him from his purpose would only make him more determined than ever.

"Well, of course if you've decided on this matter, there's nothing more to be said," said Church carelessly. "When are you going to disguise yourself, Handy?"

"Now!"

"Better not!" advised McClure. "You'll be missed at dinner, and then there'll be inquiries. I should wait until after dinner, if I were you, and then the coast'll be clear."

Handforth considered.

"Well, perhaps you're right," he agreed. "Yes, after dinner. I'll buzz down here, disguise myself as a cannibal, and then sneak off in the darkness. I'll slip overboard, and swim ashore. Then I'm going to explore, and find out exactly where the cannibals are, and come back and report." "What about the sharks?"

"Ass! The water's too shallow for sharks here, in this part of the lagoon."

"Well, what about when you get ashore?" asked Church. "Supposing you meet half a dozen real cannibals——"

"Supposing I do?"

"Well, they'll collar you, and eat you——"

"You hopeless chump!" said Handforth pleasantly. "You seem to forget that I shall be disguised. They'll immediately take me for one of themselves. I shall be disguised so well, that they won't know the difference!"

It was some moments before Church found his voice.

"Yes, of course!" he gasped, at length. "I—I'd forgotten that! You won't be half so big as the cannibals, but that's only a detail. I suppose you'll dye your skin with black lead, or something."

"Burnt cork!" said Handforth briefly.

"That'll look very nice after going through the lagoon," remarked McClure. "Still, I'm not interfering. You're a jolly clever chap, Handy, and you'll pull the thing off. You'll cover yourself with glory!"

"Thanks!" said Handforth. "You chaps know what I'm made of, and I needn't say any more. But don't breathe a word to the other fellows. Keep it dark. I want it to be a surprise when I get back!"

"Oh, you can trust us to do the right thing!" said Church vaguely. "Don't worry about that, old man. Shall we come and help you to get disguised after dinner? You'll need a hand——"

"No!" interrupted Handforth. "I'm going through with this thing on my own, and I don't want any help from anybody. I've made up my mind, and there's an end to it. Nobody seems to have any go in them on board—so it's up to me to set a good example."

"Right-ho!" remarked McClure. "We won't hurry ourselves after dinner, then. We'll let you come down here, and do the disguising by yourself——"

"You—you rotters!"

"What?"

"Leaving me on my own!" said Handforth caustically. "And you call yourselves my chums! You know I've got to black myself all over, and yet you calmly say that you'll let me do it alone!"

Church breathed hard.

"Didn't you just refuse?" he demanded. "We offered to come and help, and then you go on like this! The best thing you can do is to have a wash and get ready for dinner. Perhaps you won't be so keen on this giddy cannibal idea after you've had a good feed!"

And Church and McClure retired from the cabin. Sundry remarks floated through the doorway after they had departed—remarks of a most insulting nature—but they took no notice. As they paused, just before entering the saloon, they looked at one another.

"Well?" said Church.

"Impossible, of course!" said McClure.

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Church. "We can't let the ass go on with it—he'll simply go straight to an awful doom! Thank good—"

ness we didn't promise to keep the thing mum."

"But we did!" declared McClure.

"Did we?" said Church grimly. "I told Handy that he could trust us to do the right thing—and it'll be the right thing to tell Nipper and Pitt, and the rest. We shall have to stop the chap by force! He's an ass, but we don't want to see him converted into Irish stew!"

Shortly afterwards dinner was ready, and it proved to be quite a merry, enjoyable meal. We were all in the best of spirits, notwithstanding the apparently hopeless position.

Lord Dorrimore, indeed, was inclined to be somewhat merry.

"Well, boys, we ought to think ourselves jolly lucky to be sittin' down to a good meal!" he declared, from his position at the head of the table. "What do you say, old man?" he added, turning to Nelson Lee.

"Under all the circumstances, I heartily agree," said the gov'nor.

"I should think so," went on Dorrie. "We've been collared by cannibals, we've been in the thick of a cyclone which knocks spots off anythin' I've ever seen, an' we've been fightin' against the cunnin' of Ho Liang. An' yet, here we are, all together, on board the old Wanderer, an' everythin' in the garden's lovely."

"I wish I could agree with you there, my lord," put in Captain Bentley. "We're on board the Wanderer, but it's practically like being on dry land. She's fast aground, and the engineers haven't got much hope of getting her afloat."

"But she's sound, isn't she, sir?" asked Reginald Pitt.

"Sound as a bell, my boy," replied the skipper. "She's been thoroughly repaired, and the steering-gear is in fine trim again. But what's the good of it? There's not enough water in the lagoon to float a decent-sized barge."

"Well, it's no good worryin'," said Lord Dorrimore lightly. "Lookin' at things all round, we've got a tremendous lot to be thankful for. By the way, what's the matter with Handforth?"

"He looks as though he's dreaming!" grinned Tommy Watson.

Church gave Handforth a nudge—which was most unfortunate, considering that Handforth was at that moment conveying a spoonful of soup to his face. It splashed over his white trousers, and Handy gave a bellow.

"What the—— You—you——"

"Sorry!" gasped Church. "I—I thought you were asleep, or something."

"He seems to be awake now," grinned Dorrie. "Why the solemn expression, young

man? Why the deep furrows upon that manly brow?"

"Eh?" said Handforth, pulling up short, as he was about to go for Church. "There—there's nothing wrong with me, sir!"

"Good!" smiled Dorrie. "I thought you were in a state of deep thought or something. There must have been some reason for that pained look, young 'un."

Handforth pulled himself together, and gave a sickly smile.

"I—I'm all right, sir!" he said.

And for the rest of the meal he did his utmost to take an active interest in his surroundings. He had been thinking about his wonderful scheme, and he didn't want to invite any further inquiries. It was most important that the whole thing should be kept secret.

As soon as dinner was over Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore adjourned to the smoking-room with Captain Bentley and the yacht's officers. The juniors went on deck. Handforth vanished below, to his cabin. Church and McClure did not follow.

They held a grave consultation in the privacy of one of the bath-rooms.

"Yes, it's got to be done!" said Church firmly. "We can't allow the ass to kill himself. So we'll prepare things. But I think we might as well pop down and see how he's getting on."

McClure agreed, and the pair went to their cabin, and attempted to get in. The door was locked.

"Who's that?" came Handforth's voice sharply.

"It's all right—only us," whispered McClure.

"Rats to you!" snapped Handy. "Go and eat coke!"

"But look here, Handy——"

"I don't want you to interfere——"

"But when will you be ready to leave?" asked Church. "It's nearly dark, you know, and lots of fellows are on deck. If you can tell us when you're slipping about, we might be able to have everything nicely prepared."

"Well, yes, I'd forgotten that!" came Handforth's voice. "Right-ho, my sons. You see that the coast's clear in about half an hour's time—I sha'n't be longer. I'll slip out, and then get on deck and nip round the bridge to the port side, and buzz down the accommodation ladder. Mind there's nobody about!"

"You can trust us to work the thing properly!" said Church.

He pulled McClure away and they went down a corridor.

"Yes by jingo—we'll do it properly!" he said grimly. "Hopeless duffer! We'll teach him to dress up as a cannibal!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BLACK PRISONER!



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE adjusted his monocle and nodded.

"As you say, dear one, a most frightfully frightful scheme!" he observed languidly. "I mean to say, blacking the old hide, what? Gallivanting among the lads of the village in the cloak of a cannibal! Decidedly foul, and what not! Absolutely! As a matter of fact, absolutely, with several yards of emphasis."

I grinned.

"You expressed it in about the right terms, Archie," I said. "But it doesn't surprise me in the least. Handforth's one of the best chaps breathing, but he's a terrific duffer when it comes to ideas. He'll get the dottiest wheeze, and kid himself that it's the best thing that ever happened. And it's a certainty that if he goes off on this expedition he'll never return. We'll save his life by holding him back!"

"Rather!" agreed De Valerie.

"We shall have to watch and see that he doesn't sneak off," said Bob Christine.

"That's what we thought," remarked Church. "We shall probably go through the mill afterwards, but we couldn't let Handy buzz off, you know. And it wouldn't be any good us trying to stop him. So we thought we'd better tell you chaps."

We were all gathered together in a quiet spot aft. Darkness had descended, and the tropic sky—a sky of glorious, velvety purple—was studded with myriads of scintillating stars. It was a night to rave about. But we were well accustomed to such nights, and we took them as a matter of course.

The lagoon lay placid and peaceful, its surface only disturbed by the lightest of light ripples. Out towards the restless sea the surf broke with thunderous roaring upon the barrier reef. And the island itself lay shrouded in utter blackness.

Somewhere in that inky darkness lurked the cannibals, who had survived the cyclone. We felt convinced that considerable numbers of the enemy were still alive, although we had seen no evidence of them. It was impossible to think that they had all perished. They had certainly not left the island. Accordingly, we had to be very wary, and so far nobody had ventured ashore for the purpose of investigation.

We were under no misapprehension regarding the Chinese pirates under Ho Liang. For the junk lay a half-battered wreck upon the inner slope of the reef within view. Even now twinkling lights could be seen on the junk. The Chinese ship was quite a big one, as junks go, and she carried an exceptionally large crew—a crowd of murderous, cut-throat pirates, as heartless and bloodthirsty as any that sailed the Spanish Main in the old days.

But they knew better than to attack us,

for we were in a far stronger position than they. The elements had made our safety assured. Moreover, the Chinamen were too busy looking after themselves to interfere with us.

Church and McClure had told us all about Handforth's project. And, of course, we agreed with their view at once. The whole scheme was dangerous and recklessly absurd. And it had to be stopped.

"Of course, we could go down and yank Handforth up at once, and keep him here by force," I said. "But I've got a better plan than that. We'll teach the fathead a lesson—we'll scare him. Listen!"

I outlined the idea which was in my mind, and the juniors all listened with great interest. They smiled, they chuckled, and finally they would have roared—but I pulled them up.

"Don't yell like that, you asses!" I said sharply. "Handy's got sharp ears, and he's bound to hear—and he'll jump to the truth. Leave all the laughing until afterwards—it won't matter then."

"It's a great wheeze!" grinned Reginald Pitt. "And if Handy wants to dress up as a cannibal again, I shall be surprised."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I mean to say, it positively staggers a chappie, don't you know. Dashed clever to think of a priceless scheme like that! Nipper's a dashed brainy lad! Gadzooks! He must have a set of thinking ears of about five-hundred-and-seventy-six horse power!"

I chuckled, and proceeded to tell the fellows exactly where to post themselves. Archie was allowed to keep out of it. Pitt and De Valerie and Armstrong, and all the rest, concealed themselves in various dark corners.

Anybody coming on deck would assume that the coast was clear. Of course, there were look-outs stationed fore and aft—for we never relaxed our vigilance, in case of a surprise attack.

But these look-outs had no eyes for what happened actually on deck. And it was quite probably that Handforth would be able to slip overboard without his movements being noticed. We had to prevent that.

One of the juniors was leaning well over-side, keeping close observation of the port-hole of Handy's cabin. And at last the electric light snapped out.

"Hist!" called the scout. "Be ready!"

We all held ourselves in readiness for the next move. A shadowy figure appeared at the top of the saloon stairs, and came out on deck. It slipped instantly into the darkness in the vicinity of the bridge.

And just at that moment Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey and De Valerie strolled briskly along the deck, as though on their way forward.

They had previously spotted the shadowy figure.

"Yes, we shall have to get up a game of cricket, to-morrow!" Pitt was saying. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to rig some nets—"

Why, hallo! What the— Quick! Grab him!"

"Why, what on earth—"

"Can't you see?" yelled Pitt. "There's somebody crouching down there—"

The shadowy figure gave a gasp of dismay, leapt up, and made a dash down the deck. But Pitt flung out his foot, and then the other juniors dashed into the fray.

It was all over in a few seconds.

The shadowy figure was tripped up in a flash, and it crashed to the deck, and was instantly held down. He kicked and struggled wildly, and there was a decided odour of burnt cork in the air.

"Great Scott!" gasped De Valerie. "It's a cannibal!"

"What!"

"A cannibal!" shouted Pitt. "Then he must have just come on board."

"Better give the alarm—"

"No!" I cut in. "I expect this chap is simply a spy!"

We had already given the tip to the men on watch, and they knew that we were up to some little game on our own. Otherwise, of course, they would instantly have buzzed round, making inquiries. Searchlights would have blazed out, and all sorts of other events would have happened.

The "cannibal" was held down with difficulty. He gave several expressive grunts, and his voice bore a remarkable resemblance to Handforth's. But he took care not to utter any words.

"Well, we've got him all right!" I panted. "Come on—yank him to his feet, and we'll take him into the light, where we can see him. We'll teach cannibals to climb on board like this!"

Handforth, the first alarm over, forced himself to become calmer. He ceased struggling, and realised that it would be better to submit meekly. By doing this he might be able to escape. Besides, his colour might come off if he was rubbed a bit too much.

Inwardly boiling, he was yanked to his feet, and forced along the deck to a spot opposite the saloon skylight. Here there was plenty of illumination, for the skylights were not shaded, and the deck was quite brilliant.

How on earth the fellows refrained from going off into hysterics I don't know. With manly efforts they held themselves in check, and kept solemn faces. Even Archie was somewhat staggered.

He strolled up just as we had got the prisoner into the zone of light. And he came to a dead halt, and gazed at Handforth with such wide-open eyes that his monocle lost its grip, and dropped.

"I mean to say!" he gasped. "Dash it all, don't you know? What-ho! In other words, how about it? What, to be exact, is this frightful looking ob.? Gadzooks, and so forth! The eyesight is somewhat strained, don't you know!"

"Buzz off, Archie! We're dealing with a cannibal!" said Pitt crisply.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "A bally old cannibal, what? Enough to give a chappie a dashed bad turn! The kind of thing to make the old thatch become somewhat bleached, if you grasp my meaning. Absolutely! I mean to say, a cove simply can't stand too much all in one fearful blow!"

"Yes, he does look awful!" said Church, shaking his head.

The prisoner opened his mouth, gave one gasp, and then closed it. And we stood round, looking at him with stern faces. Those who couldn't quite manage it, turned their backs.

For Handforth was enough to make the proverbial cat laugh.

He was practically naked, except for an abbreviated kilt made from dried grasses. There were strings of cheap beads round his ankles and arms. And he wore a necklace of similar ornaments.

This was all right, so far. Any cannibal might have been so decorated. But the prisoner was apparently piebald. He was black in patches. His chest was deep brown, but towards the sides the colour tailed away considerably, and in one or two places the skin was quite pink. His legs were similarly patchy. And, most remarkable of all, his colour was of such a nature that it distinctly showed finger-marks where the fellows had grabbed him.

His face, however, was the most remarkable feature.

First and foremost, it was the face of Handforth. No amount of disguise could alter that aggressive jaw, and the distinctive nose. He looked about as much like a cannibal as a peacock resembles a chicken.

His face was smothered with black disguise, and there were all sorts of smears of grease paint. Red lines ran down his cheeks, and the end of his nose was decorated in green. He had false eyebrows of a rich blue, and upon his head was jammed a kind of brass ring.

Handforth evidently thought that these decorations were necessary. And he really kidded himself that he looked exactly like a South Sea Islander, and would be accepted as one by a crowd of the genuine articles.

And we kept up the amusing fiction.

"One of the worst-looking specimens I've seen so far!" said Pitt critically. "Look at his eyes—look at his mouth! Anybody can see he's a cannibal! He must have eaten dozens of poor chaps in his time."

"Rather!"

"He's got the face of a brutal savage!"

"Ha, ha— Ahem!" gasped Pitt. "Quite so!"

The prisoner gulped once or twice, and I noticed that his fists became convulsively clenched. It required an almost superhuman effort to keep himself under control. These insulting remarks made him boil at first—until he realised that they really amounted to a compliment.

The fellows had mistaken him for a cannibal! They did not have the slightest idea

of his real identity! He had disguised himself as a cannibal, and, after all, he had tried to make himself look ugly. So he ought to feel quite pleased, strictly speaking, to find that nobody guessed the truth. So Handforth calmed down a bit, and glared round defiantly.

"Walla burra woohoo jamjee!" he exclaimed.

"What!" yelled Pitt.

"Wonky wangy wallamalloo!" said the cannibal fiercely. "Humjum jinko jango binky ballooloo!"

"I mean to say!" protested Archie. "Foul language, and what not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The chappie appears to be letting it fly pretty freely!" went on Archie. "I don't suppose he's feeling extraordinarily braced,

The cannibal looked very startled.

"Walla boola jaski junk!" he said excitedly.

"Not at all!" said Pitt. "It can't be done!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grab him!"

Handforth was more firmly seized than before, and he found himself being dragged forcibly towards the rail. Things were beginning to look exciting, and Handforth quite forgot himself.

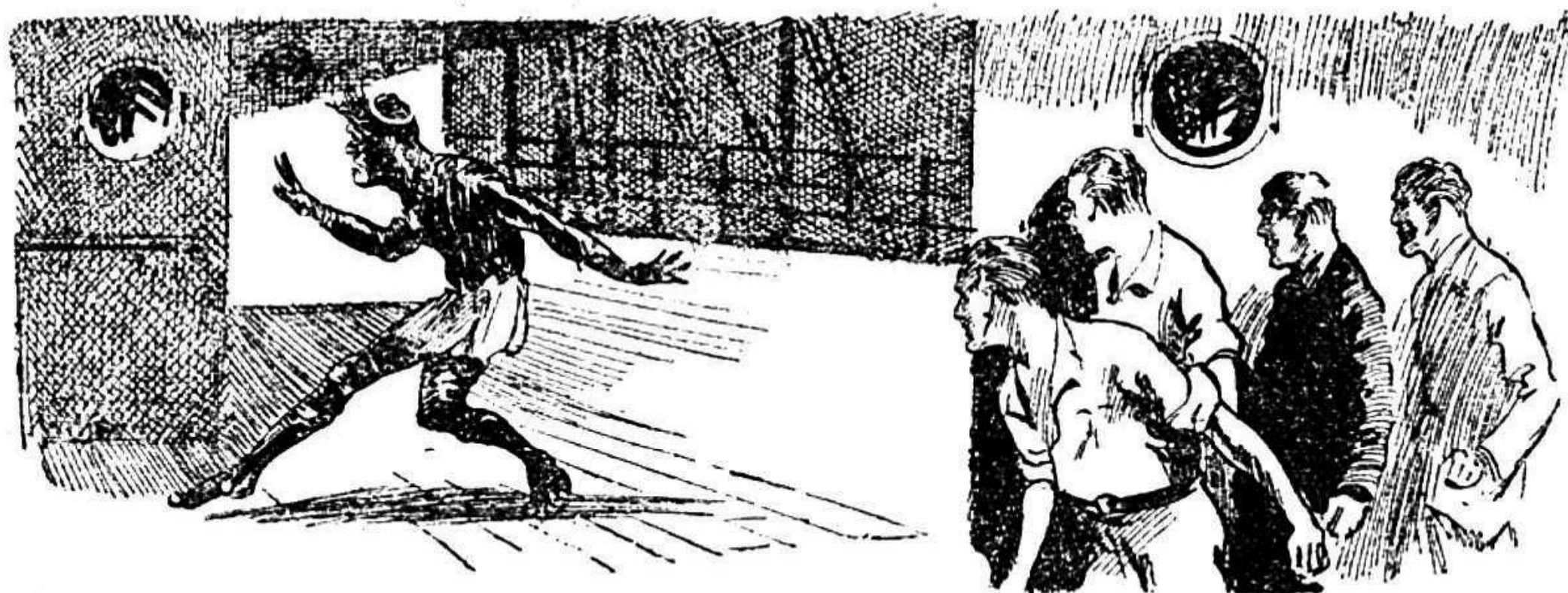
"Lemme go, you blithering fatheads!" he roared violently.

The juniors staggered back.

"Great Scott!" gasped De Valerie. "He talks English!"

The cannibal started, and gulped.

"Jimbo jango snooker!" he panted.



A shadowy figure appeared at the top of the saloon stairs and came out on deck. It slipped instantly into the darkness in the vicinity of the bridge.

as it were. This painted cove looks like a bally Hottentot bandit, so to speak. In other words, a dashed juicy specimen! Absolutely!"

"Hush! He's a man-eater!" I said. "Unless you're careful, Archie, he'll grab hold of you, and bite one of your ears off!"

"What-ho!" said Archie. "I mean to say, hardly the right kind of stuff, what? I should have the most strenuous objections, old scream. The old ear flaps, to be exact, are not for sale!"

"Dry up, Archie! We want to question this black scoundrel!" said Pitt. "Of course, we'll shove him in irons, and take him below—that's the first thing. He's one of those black rotters who helped in the battle. Perhaps the best thing will be to put him to death straightaway."

"Hear, hear!"

"Absolutely the stuff to present him with!"

"Rather!" agreed Christine. "There's no sense in adopting any half-measures. Cannibals aren't human beings at all—they're like animals. We can't be bothered with this ugly looking bounder. Pitch him straight overboard!"

"Billiards, what?" observed Archie mildly.

"Fifty up, old dear——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, it's going to be snooker, as the cannibal says," put in Pitt. "Come on, you chaps—we'll pot the black!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth gulped again.

"I'm not a cannibal!" he hooted. "I—I mean, I am a cannibal! If you don't lemme go, I'll slaughter the whole crowd of you!"

"Talking about slaughter, you're the chap who's going to be demolished!" I exclaimed.

"Queer how you know English, but that's only a detail. It simply proves that you're more dangerous than we first thought. What have you got to say for yourself before we carry out the execution?"

Handforth glared at me ferociously.

"You wait!" he growled. "Just wait until I'm free——"

"But you won't be free!" I interrupted.

"We're just going to tie you up and shove you overboard. Cannibals can't expect any better treatment. I say, you chaps, queer how his voice sounds like Handforth!"

"Marvellous!" said Jack Grey solemnly.

"He looks like Handy, too!" put in Pitt.

"But that's only our imagination, I suppose. Handforth's ugly, goodness knows—but this fellow is about fifty times as ugly! He's absolutely a sight!"

"Enough to make a chappie go all of a dither!" observed Archie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth fairly let himself go. He came to the conclusion that the game wasn't worth the candle. After all, to be tied up and chucked into the lagoon was not a very nice prospect. He would have the laugh afterwards, anyhow. All these idiots took him for a cannibal—they never suspected the real truth.

But it was getting rather too warm.

"You—you blind asses!" he roared. "Can't you see I'm Handforth? I'm disguised as a cannibal—I'm not black at all!"

"Rot!" exclaimed Pitt. "Not black? Why, you fathead, you can't spoof us like that! I'll admit you look a bit like Handforth, and you talk like him, but you're a spy!"

"The penalty for spying is—death!" exclaimed Armstrong fiercely.

"Death!" echoed the others.

"But—but I'm Handforth——"

"If you were Handforth we should recognise you!" I said. "It's simply a part of your game to get free. But a cannibal like you can't be allowed to climb on board and spy out the land, and get away with the goods. Come on, you chaps—bring the ropes!"

Handforth raved at the top of his voice, but it was quite useless. He was alarmed now. His disguise was so perfect that the fellows wouldn't believe him! At least, this is what Handy thought.

In spite of all his protests, he was bound tightly. Ropes were passed round his arms and legs, and round his waist. Then, as he continued to roar, he was pushed overboard, and lowered. We still held the ropes, and in the darkness we heard Handforth's body plunge into the water.

"This—this is murder!" he bellowed. "I'm not a cannibal—Gug—gugg—ouch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Up with him!" I said briskly.

The ropes were raised, and Handforth came clear of the water. There was no danger of sharks here. Neither was there any danger of doing any harm to Handforth's nervous system. With many a fellow a trip like this would be harmful, but Handforth had positively asked for it, and he was as strong as an ox.

Again and again he was plunged into the water. But he never remained under for more than six or seven seconds. And we pulled him about, this way and that. Then, at last, he was hauled up.

He came on a level with the deck, and was yanked over the rail. The juniors took one look at him, and then fell in all directions. Some almost went into hysterics. And they could hardly be blamed.

The dripping figure which had just come on board was an extraordinary sight.

Most of the burnt cork had vanished, and Handforth looked himself, except for streaky lines all over his body, black ears, and a face which would have done credit to a nightmare.

The grease paint had remained on, and the red and green and blue streaks were left all over his features. He was gasping, too, and his hair was like rats'-tails.

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Pitt. "What is it?"

"Why, it's Handy—it's really old Handy!" yelled Church, dashing forward.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handforth!"

"The man eating cannibal from Borneo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He thought he'd spoofed us, and we've spoofed him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth felt too weak to move. He wasn't weak because of his recent ducking—but all the strength oozed out of his limbs as he realised that he had been the victim of a practical joke. They had known all along that he was no cannibal! And they had deliberately pulled his leg!

His ropes were cut, and he was allowed to get to his feet. Church and McClure came forward to assist their leader. And, somehow Handforth regained his strength with the most surprising speed.

Biff! Crash!

His two fists shot out, and Church and McClure grunted as they each received a blow on the body. Fortunately for them, Handforth had not been able to reach their faces. They fled.

"You—you traitors!" howled Handforth. "You must have told all the chaps, and this is the result! By George! Just you wait!"

He charged after his chums like a second edition of the cyclone. And some little time later loud and prolonged yells, accompanied by bumps and bangs, floated up from below.

I think I'd better let you guess what was happening!

CHAPTER III.

THE TIDAL WAVE!



HANDFORTH was quite himself in the morning. He looked slightly more aggressive than usual, perhaps, but he had no further desire to go ashore dressed up as a cannibal. That marvellous idea was killed for good.

There were other signs of activity, however.

Quite a large party of men were got together under Mr. Somerfield, the second-officer. They were all fully armed, and

they even carried a light machine-gun with them.

They were going ashore to have a look round, and to see if the cannibals were really on the island. Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee decided that it was better for them to remain on board—in case anything happened. They were always thinking of the juniors.

It would never do to leave the fellows unprotected, and so the shore party consisted of a dozen men, under the second-officer. The Chinese still kept to their junk, and through binoculars we could see that they were tremendously active.

The vessel lay a considerable way down the lagoon, but from the extreme stern point of the Wanderer—that is to seaward—we could take observations of everything that occurred on the junk.

The Chinamen were working like a lot of ants.

They were doing everything possible to repair their vessel. This seemed a fairly hopeless task, for she was a wreck, by all appearances. And it was extremely doubtful whether the junk could be refloated.

The Chinamen, in fact, were in very much the same condition as ourselves—only the Wanderer was now absolutely intact. Repairs had been made, and she was good for a thousand-mile trip. But how could she move? She was stranded, hard and fast, upon the coral bed of the lagoon.

There was no particular excitement for us.

We simply lounged about the deck getting under the awning out of the sun, and longing for a trip ashore, where we could seek the shade of the graceful palms, and bananas and mangoes.

But we were prisoners on board. Nobody was allowed to go on shore, and under no circumstances could we disobey this order. For all we knew, the cannibals were lurking near the shore, awaiting an opportunity to spring out and destroy any unwary party which was rash enough to expose itself.

We half expected to see the sailors under Mr. Somerfield subjected to a deadly fire. But no sound of shots came. The shore party disappeared among the palms. And then we simply had to wait.

"It's all rot!" declared Handforth. "I don't believe there are any cannibals at all. If I'd had my way, I should have proved it by this time. Anyhow I'm jolly well going ashore later on."

"It all depends upon Mr. Somerfield's report," said Pitt. "Personally, I've got an idea that the blacks are still swarming in big numbers. But they're lying low—simply because they know it's no good making an attack. Anyhow, we shall know the position of things when the scouting party returns."

"I wish we could go ashore!" growled Handforth. "It's rotten being stuck here. Why, it was a lot better when we were on the other side of the island!"

"In many ways, yes," I agreed. "But

there are more dangers now, and you can't expect the gov'nor to let us do just as we like. He's got to see that you chaps don't get into any trouble."

As it happened, our wait was not destined to be a very long one, for only a short time later we caught sight of figures breaking through the trees further along the shore. And then the whole of Mr. Somerfield's party came into view. They were marching back in good order.

Handforth sniffed.

"There you are!" he said triumphantly. "What did I tell you?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Why, you ass, didn't I say that the cannibals were all dead?" demanded Handy. "This proves it! There's no doubt about the matter! If the cannibals were alive, they'd have killed Somerfield and all those other chaps."

"All right—wait!" said Reggie Pitt.

We did wait, and very shortly Mr. Somerfield came across in one of the small boats, leaving his men on the shore. The second officer came up the accommodation-ladder, and met Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore at the top.

"The cannibals are in strong force in Geyser Valley, sir," announced Mr. Somerfield.

"Oh, they are, are they?" exclaimed Dorrie. "Good! So there's some prospect of excitement later on?"

"Quite probably, sir," said the second officer. "As far as we can see, the blacks have not suffered many losses, but they are completely confining themselves to the valley. We were not molested in any way."

"I am not sure whether to be pleased or otherwise," said Nelson Lee. "These blacks are very cunning, and it may be merely a blind. They wish to make us believe that we are in no danger from them. And then, at the crucial moment, they will swarm round and make a strong attack."

"Well, we're ready for 'em, even if they do," said Dorrie. "I've been thinkin' too. The best thing we can do is to fix up several machine-guns on the beach, an' have them fully manned, day and night. In that way, we can beat off any attack before it really develops."

"There is something in the idea," agreed Nelson Lee.

Soon afterwards Lord Dorrimore went ashore with Mr. Somerfield, leaving Nelson Lee on deck with us. The gov'nor was looking very thoughtful.

"What do you think of things, sir, I asked."

"Well, Nipper, I am by no means filled with elation," replied the gov'nor. "If there was any prospect of getting the yacht into the open water I should be very light-hearted, indeed. But, so far as I can see, we are destined to remain here, whether we like it or not. And we can be quite sure that the savages and the Chinese will soon combine in another general attack."

"But they can't hope to—"

I broke off suddenly, for just then there was a most curious sensation on the Wanderer's deck. The whole vessel shivered from stem to stern. I could even feel the deck-planks quiver under my feet.

And the lagoon, all round, shook in the most extraordinary way—just the same as water in a pail will shake if the pail is touched. And, accompanying this phenomenon, there was a low, indefinite rumble.

"What on earth was that, sir?" I gasped.

Nelson Lee stood quite still.

"An earthquake 'hock!" he replied grimly.

"Oh!"

"I hadn't time to say any more, for there came a thunderous report from the volcano right in the centre of the island. I saw a puff of yellowish smoke shoot upwards into the air, and there it hovered.

The juniors came running up from all directions.

"There's going to be an eruption!" said Armstrong excitedly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"And what was that funny shake just now—"

"It was an earthquake, my boys—but I judge the actual centre of the shock to be some considerable distance away," said Nelson Lee. "In all probability the earthquake occurred at sea."

"All the same, guv'nor, I've got a feeling that we're sitting on a bomb!" I exclaimed. "And any moment it might go off and bust us to smithereens. These volcanic islands are glorious places while the volcano is quiet. But what's going to happen if a terrific eruption starts?"

"There is no sense whatever in supposing things, Nipper," smiled Nelson Lee. "I dare say these minor shocks occur at quite frequent intervals throughout the year. There is no reason why we should assume that a really disastrous eruption is coming. In any case, the matter is entirely beyond our control."

The junior collected against the rail, and stared over the low-lying valleys and hills towards the high ridge in the centre of the island. The volcanic peak lifted its head high above all else.

And yellowish vapour was belching forth in considerable quantities. It came out in puffs, and with every puff there was a faint, far-away concussion.

"There's going to be some trouble soon!" declared Handforth grimly. "I don't want to be pessimistic, or anything like that, but I'll bet my giddy boots that we shall have tons and tons of red-hot lava pouring down the mountain before long. Then the island will catch fire, and we shall all be burnt to cinders!"

"Oh, you don't mean to be pessimistic—of course not!" said Church sarcastically.

"We're all tremendously cheered at the thought of being burned to cinders!"

Handforth glared.

"We've got to be prepared for the worst!" he said. "I've got an idea! A first-class gilt-edged number one wheeze!"

"Something like getting disguised as a cannibal?" grinned Christine.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, you ass!" snorted Handforth. "And the idea would have been all right if I'd had my way. This present scheme is to separate a big chunk of the lagoon—make a kind of swimming-bath of it."

"What the dickens for?"

"Why, you fathead, it's obvious!" said Handy. "When the lava comes pouring down we can all get into the lagoon and keep there until the outbreak's over. We can't come to any harm in the water."

"No?" said Pitt. "Personally, I can't see much difference in being roasted to a cinder or being boiled alive! And that's what would happen to us if we got into the lagoon."

"Boiled alive?" repeated Handforth, staring.

"Yes!"

"You dotty chump!"

"My dear chap, if a really serious eruption takes place, and the island gets on fire, and lava flows in huge quantities, the lagoon will be boiling like a cauldron," declared Pitt grimly. "No, my son. If an eruption comes, we shall be wiped out, as far as I can see; but there's not much chance of anything like that!"

"Clever, aren't you?" sneered Handforth. "Huh! What rot! Boiled to death! There'll be plenty of water outside the reef, I suppose? Can't we all escape in a boat? We've got three or four boats, anyhow—"

"Well, of course, there's that," agreed Pitt. "And at the very first sign of a serious eruption we shall take to the boats, and—"

"Great Scott!" yelled De Valerie. "Look—look out there!"

"What?"

"Out to sea!" roared De Valerie. "Oh, my goodness!"

De Valerie's attention had been called to seaward by a sudden hail from one of the petty officers in the bows. And now all the juniors stared out over the sunlit sea. And they held their breath.

"I grabbed at Nelson Lee's arm, but could say very little. For I was absolutely startled and amazed.

The day was not quite so brilliant as usual. The sun had a coppery kind of appearance, and the wide ocean, beyond the foaming reef, looked oily and smooth. There was a heavy feeling in the air, too.

But right out to sea, on the horizon, something had appeared.

It was a great, sweeping wave, capped at the top with billowing foam. This gigantic wave stretched as far as we could see, and it was racing towards the island at incredible speed.

At first it had seemed only a low ridge in the distance, and anybody would have assumed that the wave would peter out in a very short space of time. But it was just the opposite in reality. As the great wave came surging towards the island it appeared to grow in proportions—until, almost before we knew it, the thing was like a great mountain of water. And it had come so suddenly—so unexpectedly—that we simply stood still and stared.

In the tropics disaster will appear unheralded. At one moment everything would be peaceful and glorious. And then, without a hint of a warning, fearful trouble will arise. At home, in England, we don't get these abrupt changes. But in the South Seas one never knows what is going to happen.

"I don't suppose the wave actually did increase in size, but it appeared to do so, owing to the fact that it was rushing across the ocean, and getting nearer every second. It is no exaggeration to say that the wave towered up for scores of feet, and was likely to sweep into the island, and cause tremendous havoc and destruction.

"What is it, sir?" I yelled, finding my voice at last.

"A tidal wave, Nipper," replied Lee. "At least what is commonly called a tidal wave. I have no doubt that this extraordinary phenomenon is a result of the severe earthquake shock we felt a few minutes ago."

"How do you mean, sir?" asked Pitt breathlessly.

"The shock was at sea, and possibly a great chasm was caused in the ocean bed," replied the gov'nor. "Or there might have been an upheaval—it really doesn't matter. We now see the result. The sea was so violently disturbed that a towering wave was caused—and here it comes now, with the island directly in its path."

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"What a wonderful thing, sir!"

"Not at all," said Nelson Lee. "When one throws a stone into a stagnant pond a series of waves immediately follow until they reach the very end of the water. It is the same here, only on a gigantic scale. This vast wave is circular, no doubt, and its effect will be felt many hundreds of miles away. But we, being near the scene of the disturbance, will receive the full shock of this wave."

"My hat!" said Pitt. "It ought to be interesting!"

Never for a moment did we suspect that we should be in any peril. We regarded the Wanderer as a place of absolute security. We had not the faintest idea that a ghastly danger might be in our midst during the next few seconds. And we lined the rail, waiting for the wave to crash upon the barrier reef. We were eager to see the turmoil of foam and spray.

But then, towards the end, we began to get a little nervous.

"It's—it's a fearful size!" exclaimed Jack Grey huskily.

"Yes, it's getting bigger and bigger!"

Captain Bentley was now roaring out some orders, and men were running in all directions, carrying out the instructions that had been given. And now it was rather difficult to hear distinctly. For, accompanying the tidal wave there was a tremendous roar of foam and sea. It filled the whole air. And the wave itself was dashing onwards towards the island like some all-destroying demon.

And then—crash!

The wave hit the coral reef. I simply clung to the rail, and caught my breath with a gasp.

This great disturbance of nature was far more terrible than we had suspected. The wave struck the reef, but did not break up, as we had assumed. A mountain of spray rose to an incredible height. It went up and up, and then, almost before we knew it, we were drenched to the skin. The spray came surging down on us like a vast shower-bath.

And there were great thuds in all sections of the deck. Fish were falling—fish of every description! And we were just yelling out amazed exclamations when the full force of the wave came upon us.

Crash—crash—boom!

The Wanderer did not remain solid as we had believed. She was lifted up like a feather by that vast wave. A great green body of water swept over the stern and came charging up the deck in one solid mass. Men were picked up like feathers. The next second I was lifted off my feet, and I found myself struggling and gasping in a mass of foam and spume.

CHAPTER IV.

FATE'S DECREE!



WHEN I come to think of it afterwards, I am rather staggered half of us were not killed outright when the tidal wave struck the island.

The force and power of the wave was almost beyond description. And it is impossible for me to tell exactly what did happen. All I know is that everybody on deck was lifted up as though by some giant hand. The yacht herself was lifted up in just the same way. The sea surged round her, and she simply bobbed about like a cork caught in a gutter after a summer shower.

But now nobody was left on deck—even the officer on the bridge had been carried away. Big damage was caused. The rails were bent and twisted. The bridge supports were weakened, and a portion of the chart-house was smashed to fragments. Great ventilators were battered in as though they were made of cardboard. And the sea

rushed down into the saloon in one solid sweeping mass of water. Cabins were flooded, and even the engine-room received its share of water.

But, on the whole, the damage was comparatively slight.

I couldn't know all these facts at the moment. For I was struggling for my life in the angry sea. I hardly knew what happened, but I found myself in the middle of the palm grove! The sea surged right up, sweeping over the sandy shore, tearing the palm trees up as though they were mere twigs.

And the force of the tidal wave made itself felt along the whole coast, completely altering the aspect of the shore-line.

At last, battered and breathless, I was flung into the midst of some bushes. I hardly knew whether I was dreaming or awake, and I lay there breathless and exhausted. The fact that I had been thrown so far inland was so extraordinary that I half believed that I was experiencing a particularly vivid nightmare. And then I noticed that Handforth and Church were crawling through the bushes near by.

"Great pip!" gasped Handy. "Are—are you chaps all right?"

"I—I'm drowned!" said Church feebly.

Their voices brought me back to full realisation of the position. I struggled out of the bushes and stood for a moment staring through the incredible wreckage of the palm grove.

Many trees were down having been torn up by the roots. Others still stood upright their foliage practically gone and looking forlorn and drooping. And through the trees I could see the beach and the lagoon—at least that section of foreshore which had originally been the beach.

But now everything was changed.

The lagoon was like the sea itself with great waves tossing about and with the reef almost invisible under the surface.

Then I gasped and stared harder.

The Wanderer was not there!

"Good heavens!" I panted huskily.

I ran forward blindly—madly. The first dreadful thought that came into my mind was that the yacht had been crushed to pulp upon the beach. Then as I rounded a mass of wrecked vegetation, I gave another yell. This time it was a yell of relief and surprise.

For the Wanderer was out at sea—far beyond the reef!

"Well, I'm hanged!" I shouted. "Oh, this—this can't be really happening!"

As far as I could see, the yacht was almost herself. And she was floating on an even keel, and one or two figures were moving about on her deck.

We never knew the exact truth regarding what happened, for everybody on deck had been swept off when the tidal wave struck—and those below knew nothing of what happened until it was all over.

But there cannot be the slightest doubt

that the yacht was lifted up by the surging mass of water, and carried off. One would suppose that the vessel would be flung straight ashore, right among the trees of the island. But in all probability she was caught in a vast whirlpool, caused by the tidal wave meeting the cliffs to the south.

Repulsed by this cliff the water had come rushing back with even greater force than before. And the Wanderer, helpless in this mighty flood, was carried completely over the reef in safety, and then out upon the open sea. But it was all over almost before we could gather our wits together.

The Wanderer might have been flung ashore and wrecked—but she wasn't. She might have been hurled upon the reef and splintered to scrap-iron and matchwood—but she wasn't. Fate had decreed to save her!

And now the very thing we had hoped for had happened. The yacht was afloat, in deep water! Our term of imprisonment on the island was apparently at an end! Fate can be amazing in her actions.

But what of the fellows?

How had they fared? And how had the sailors fared? My heart sank as I realised that this disaster must have cost many valuable lives. It was impossible for everybody to have been saved.

But I was stunned by the whole occurrence.

And as I turned I caught a glimpse of the Chinese junk. This vessel was in an apparently hopeless predicament. She, too, had been swept out beyond the barrier reef, but her bows were practically under water, and her stern pointing skywards at an acute angle. She was evidently sinking rapidly.

Then, still dazed and befuddled, I looked back at the land, and along the coastline. Very few people have experienced a tidal wave, and such a one as this was practically unknown. Lagoon Island had been struck by the full force of that deep sea disturbance.

No doubt the wave was still careering on its way across the wide sea, with just a disturbed gap to mark the place where the island had come into its path. But the havoc left in the rear was stupendous.

The water having surged up the beach, and far inland, receded almost at once—except in hollows beyond the palm grove. Here considerable lakes of sea water were formed. The foaming mass had been flung there, and there was no outlet for it to get back. Fish of every description lay strewn over the land, many still alive, and flapping about vigorously. Fish large and small, and of every colour.

But I didn't take much notice of them now. I gazed round, and found that Handforth and Church were not the only fellows in sight. McClure had appeared from a fallen palm tree. Blood was streaming from a nasty gash in his hand, and there was another cut on his left cheek. He looked half stunned.

A little further away Pitt and De Valerie were struggling to get out of a jumble of twigs and leaves. They succeeded, and stood upon firm ground, both practically unhurt.

"Great Scott!" gasped De Valerie. "That—that was pretty swift!"

"I should say it was!" agreed Pitt. "I've never come ashore so quickly in all my life. Why, only a minute ago we were on the yacht's deck!"

This was a slight misstatement. Three or four minutes, at least, had elapsed. But to the juniors it seemed as though the whole affair had taken place in a couple of shakes. Just that fearful, thunderous rush of water, a blank period of utter confusion, and—they were ashore.

Of course, we had been swept clean off the yacht, and straight on the very crest of the wave to the land. The Wanderer had caught the stupendous backwash from the cliff, and had been swept back to the sea. If any of us had shared her fate we should certainly have perished. But, being light atoms, as it were, we were on dry land almost before we knew it.

"I—I can't understand it!" muttered Church dazedly. "I thought we were all going to be killed, you know! Oh, my goodness! Where—where are the others? What's happened to them?"

"Heaven only knows!" said Pitt huskily. As a matter of fact, there had been many acts of bravery performed during these, tense minutes.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West, for example, found himself flung deep into a gully just beyond the trees. He was struggling for his life, for here the water was deep, and foaming, and littered with every kind of flotsam and jetsam. And near by Bob Christine was struggling feebly.

He had been half-stunned by coming into forceful contact with a tree. And now he was on the verge of sinking, and going to his death. Montie himself, although hardly knowing where he was, struck out and went to Christine's rescue.

"It's all right, old boy—it is, really!" gasped Sir Montie. "Nothin' to worry about—just hang on to me. Good! That's the way, dear fellow!"

"I—I'm done!" panted Christine feebly.

They were the last words he spoke for nearly two hours. He lapsed into unconsciousness, and if Sir Montie had not been on the spot he would undoubtedly have perished.

Some little distance away Lord Dorrimore was caught in the midst of some broken branches and leaves. He had a very severe gash in his left thigh, and a nasty scalp wound, which was bleeding profusely.

Umlosi was quite close to him, and even the giant Kutana chief was half-dazed and helpless. He had been flung against a tree trunk with sufficient force to have killed a white man outright. Umlosi was only slightly hurt.



First and foremost, it was the face of Handforth. No amount of disguise could alter that aggressive jaw and the distinctive nose. He looked about as much like a cannibal as a peacock resembles a chicken.

There were other juniors in various parts of the beach—some absolutely unharmed, others staggering about drunkenly, and in a hopelessly dazed condition. And there were also sailors here and there.

I might as well state at once that nobody was killed. By some apparent miracle, all those who had been on the yacht's deck were alive—and not only alive, but merely suffering from superficial wounds. There were cuts and grazes and any amount of bruises.

But there wasn't a single one of us who had received any fatal injury. Under all the circumstances, this was an extraordinary piece of luck—for which we were truly thankful.

Nelson Lee had come through unscathed, and without a minute's delay he set about collecting together all those who were fit. And this party went up and down searching for missing members.

Doyle and Griffith were found in a huddled heap in the midst of some smashed branches. They were both unconscious, and at first Nelson Lee thought that they were dead. But they were only stunned, and suffering from shock.

Gradually, one by one, all the injured juniors and men were collected together, and placed on high ground. The upheaval of Nature was now over, and the island was perfectly peaceful once again—except for an

occasional quiver of the earth, and a booming report from the volcano.

But we took no notice of this. We were doing everything possible to give succour to the injured.

And one by one they recovered—after treatment from Nelson Lee and Mr. Somerfield and others. We were all doing our best. Fortunately, Nelson Lee had his pocket medicine case on him, and this proved invaluable.

But we did not possess a weapon among the whole lot of us. We had been swept off the yacht's deck without a moment's notice. Many of the men were wearing nothing but shirt and trousers. And we were completely cut off from the yacht. The boats which had been drawn up on the beach were smashed to tiny atoms. Indeed, the only traces of them ever discovered were numerous scraps of matchwood.

And at last we were able to realise that the disaster was not half so bad as we had first imagined—and, indeed, it looked like proving a blessing in disguise. For there had been one good result.

The Wanderer was afloat—and practically unharmed.

"Why, hang it all, the thing's positively toppin'!" declared Lord Dorrimore. "The old tub's sailin' serenely on the ocean blue once again. We'll be on board in next to no time—an' then ahoy for the realms of civilisation."

"Hurrah!"

"It's—it's almost too good to believe!" gasped De Valerie. "Think of it! Only a half an hour ago we were marooned on this island with no prospects of escape! And now the Wanderer is fully afloat again, and as soon as they get steam up we'll be taken on board. It's glorious!"

"Rather!"

"It—it seems like a dream!"

"By the way, what's become of Archie?" asked Tommy Watson, looking round rather anxiously. "I haven't seen him. I hope he hasn't—"

"Don't worry about Archie," I interrupted. "He was below when that wave struck us, and it's pretty certain that he's all right. Phipps was below, too—and lots of others."

"Captain Bentley is on board, isn't he?" asked Handforth.

"Yes; and so is the chief engineer, and all the stokers," said Pitt. "Thank goodness for that! There are plenty on board to get steam up, and to control the yacht. Nothing could have happened better."

"But are you sure the yacht's all right?" asked Jack Grey.

"Of course we're sure!" I replied. "I saw her with my own eyes; and if you go through those trees, and on the beach you'll see her, too! I don't know how it came about, but there you are. Such a lot of queer things have happened on this island that I'm beginning to get resigned."

"It's marvellous, when you come to think about it!" said Pitt. "All of us on deck like that, and being swept off! That wave was coming along at a terrific speed, and we were chucked ashore almost before we knew it."

"But if we came, why didn't the yacht get chucked ashore, too?" asked Watson.

"Because the yacht's lot heavier than we are," I replied. "You see, we were caught up by the very top of the wave. But the Wanderer was able to withstand that first blow, and when she floated up another terrific wave rebounded, as it were, and pitched her right out to sea."

"It's a wonder she wasn't smashed to bits on the reef."

"The tidal wave made the water rise so much that she was able to float completely over the reef in safety," I explained. "It's quite easy to understand what happened, but it's amazing all the same. Why, we might all have been killed, and the yacht battered to scrap-iron."

"But we're not, and so we'll keep smiling!" said Pitt cheerfully. "As far as I can see, everything is all serene now."

But was it?

Little did we realise that just when things were looking at their brightest, they were really as black as thunder!

CHAPTER V.

HO LIANG SEIZES HIS CHANCE!



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE was in his own cabin, below, when the tidal wave surged over the reef and lifted the yacht from the lagoon bed. He wasn't indulging in "forty of

the best," as we had imagined. He was talking to Phipps.

"Well, old bird, what about it?" Archie was saying, as he lounged in an easy-chair. "I mean to say, we've got to gather the old wits together, and see about some glad rags, what?"

"You wish to change, sir?" asked Phipps.

"Well, dash it all, a chappie can't wear the same suit all day!" replied Archie. "And these white things are most frightfully unclean, and so forth. Unless I can be spotless, Phipps, I'd rather wear the old flannels!"

"The grey, sir?"

"Absolutely," replied Archie. "Kindly buzz about and get extremely busy. In other words, yank out the flannel articles, and prepare them for the young master. I wish to—"

"There appears to be some unusual noise, sir," interrupted Phipps.

"Now, that's bally rude, don't you know?" said Archie. "Absolutely! A chappie is talking, and you calmly butt in with some

fearfully unnecessary remark. Kindly refrain from such habits, Phipps."

"I'm sorry, sir, but—"

Phipps paused, and stood quite still. He had glanced out of the porthole, and, to his amazement, he could see a towering white mass of foam rushing towards the yacht at an unbelievable speed.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Phipps hoarsely.

Archie started.

"I mean to say, what?" he asked faintly. "Something is wrong. Something, as it were, is absolutely and positively wrong! Phipps, old scream, I've never seen you give a start like that before! Just like a dashed mustang, don't you know! You're absolutely gone pale! The old cheeks are blanched!"

"Quick, sir!" shouted Phipps. "We must get on deck! There's not a second to be lost, or we are doomed!"

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "Don't rush me, Phipps! Why, you make me go all of a dither! Absolutely! Absolutely in about five different positions. I mean to say, it's bally awk. when a fellow— Whoa! Help! S.O.S. in large quantities! Kindly fling out the old life line!"

Archie and the easy-chair were lifted clean off the floor and flung with a crash to the other side of the cabin, Phipps vainly endeavoured to keep his balance, but rolled over backwards and the rear portion of his head struck the floor with a bang that half-stunned him.

The tidal wave, in fact, had just struck the yacht.

She reeled right over, and the damage caused in that brief space was almost incredible—not fatal damage, but superficial smashes. In the stewards' quarters and the pantry, crockery was shattered to atoms by the hundredweight. Furniture was wrecked, and other damage of a similar nature caused.

In Archie's cabin practically all the furniture was turned upside down in the first heave. The *Wanderer* seemed as though she was turning turtle. But then, just at the last moment, she reeled back, and assumed an even keel. The first tremendous shock of the tidal wave had done all the damage. Afterwards there was nothing but litter to clear up.

And now, tossing about wildly, the yacht was sweeping along at a terrifying speed—fairly caught in the full flood of the receding water. With everybody on deck swept away, the vessel was utterly beyond human control. She was like a cork in a stream. And all the men below had been pitched this way and that, some receiving severe injuries.

Archie had an idea that he was dying. The heavy chair had collapsed on the top of him, and for a few moments he was imprisoned beneath it. Then as the yacht lurched to one side, Archie was released.

He sat up, dazed and bewildered, and he feebly clutched at the air.

"Phipps!" he gasped. "I say! What—ho, there!"

"Grrrrrh!"

That was the only reply that Phipps made—a groan.

"My sainted aunt and co forth!" breathed Archie. "This, don't you know, is the end! Absolutely the old finish! Archie passes out of this dashed life for good! Phipps, old lad—Phipps! Say a few words to the young master before he breathes his last!"

"Are—are you all right, sir?" came a voice, faintly and dimly.

"All right!" echoed Archie. "What? What? Dash it all, old dear, what next! Why, I'm expiring! Pray, give instructions that no flowers need be shoved upon the old mound of earth! The old spirit within me rebels at the thought—absolutely! And, besides, we shall be at the bottom of the ocean deep!"

Phipps staggered to his feet, holding his head tenderly. He was dizzy and in agony, but he was rapidly recovering.

"Let me help you, sir!" he muttered.

"Too late!" said Archie, in a hollow voice. "The old finish is approaching, Phipps! I can feel it, don't you know! Absolutely frightful! A chappie hardly likes to imitate a bally candle, and snuff out!"

"I do not think you are in any danger of that, sir," said Phipps, bending down, and assisting Archie to his feet. "You have received a nasty blow, but the effects will soon pass. I am hurt myself."

"Really?" said Archie. "Good! I—I mean to say, that's most fearfully rotten, Phipps. We're both in the same old boat, what? But what's happened? How many earthquakes happened all at once?"

"I haven't the faintest idea what took place, sir," said Phipps. "I only know that the yacht nearly overturned. And we appear to be floating, sir."

Archie started, and gazed round.

"So we are!" he exclaimed. "Absolutely, don't you know! Positively floating! But that's dashed queer, Phipps! Only a minute ago we were hard and fast on the old beach, so to speak. Stranded on the foreshore, and what not! Things appear to have been happening!"

"Very much so, sir," agreed Phipps grimly.

At the same time he was aware of a feeling of strange excitement. It only seemed a few seconds ago that the first tremendous upheaval had come. And now the yacht was tossing about in a manner which could mean only one thing. She was no longer aground—she was afloat, and in deep water.

And after such a long period of complete stillness the sensation seemed strange. For weeks the yacht had rested upon solid ground, and had seemed like a building rather than an ocean-going vessel. But now

it was all different. The motion was unmistakable.

"I think we had better go on deck, sir," said Phipps.

"But, dash it all, that's quite impos.!" protested Archie. "Out of the ques., and all that sort of rot! I need rest Phipps—I need several large consignments of peace and quietness. In other words, I shall indulge in forty winks of the old dreamless!"

Phipps shook his head.

"Most unwise, sir," he said firmly. "I should advise an immediate move from this apartment."

"But, dash it all——"

"The yacht may be sinking, sir."

"Now, that's a bally brainy scheme!" observed Archie. "Sinking, what? I shouldn't have thought it, Phipps. But you're right, old lad—absolutely! It would be quite poisonous to feel the sea rush up and overwhelm us. We'll go on deck! Kindly lead the way and the young master will follow."

Archie had really been hurt. He was bruised considerably, and it was as much as he could do to walk. It caused him great agony to use his left leg, and his head was throbbing very painfully.

However, he accompanied Phipps outside. But as soon as they got as far as the saloon they paused, and they both stared round in fresh consternation and surprise. The saloon was a picture of wreckage.

Furniture lay strewn about the floor, and was intermingled with broken glass and crockery and ornaments. The rich saloon carpet was soaked, and a murky mess of water was surging up and down the floor to the motion of the vessel. And everything was soaking, dripping wet.

"I mean to say, this is somewhat near the limit!" said Archie. "Floods, what? Absolutely! There appears to have been a large quantity of rain!"

"This is sea water, sir," said Phipps.

"Why, so it is!" ejaculated Archie. "Most extraord., Phipps!"

They went on deck, and then found that Captain Bentley was there. The skipper was giving orders to a number of men, and everything appeared to be orderly, with no sign of panic.

The men on deck were not the usual sailors, but members of the engine-room staff. There were stokers, too. And they all looked startled and just a bit scared. But there was no excitement.

"It's bad, men—infinitely bad!" Captain Bentley was saying. "I'm afraid they're all lost! They were swept off when the wave struck us, and there's no chance whatever of picking them up!"

"It's terrible, sir!" said Mr. Maitland, the first officer. "If we hadn't been below at the time we should have shared the same fate."

"Undoubtedly," said the skipper grimly. "It's a terrible disaster, and we can't

really gauge the extent of it yet. All we can do is to save the yacht, and do everything in our power to help those who were swept off. The engine-room staff must get to work at once."

And the skipper proceeded to give orders for the furnaces to be lighted and steam to be raised in record time. It was one blessing that the Wanderer was afloat—although this was poor compensation for the loss of so many lives. Captain Bentley believed that we had all perished when we were swept off the deck. There was nothing else to think.

Archie grasped the meaning of Captain Bentley's dread words.

"Phipps!" he whispered, his colour going. "I say, Phipps! It—it can't be true, don't you know! All the lads of the village, so to speak! The chappies, and all that kind of thing! What about it?"

"I'm afraid they are dead, sir," said Phipps huskily.

"Oh, that's imposs.!" exclaimed Archie blankly. "Absolutely imposs., Phipps! Nipper—Reggie Pitt—Mr. Lee—in fact, all the dear chappies! It can't be that they are drowned, old tulip! It—it's too poisonous for words! It's too foul to be even thought of!"

Phipps did not reply. He felt that he could not speak. For the ghastly nature of this tragedy seemed all too apparent. The Wanderer was a good way from the shore now, and the white reef lay between the vessel and the island. The foreshore could be plainly seen, with trees laying in all directions. But no human figures could be distinguished.

In any case, those on board the Wanderer had more than sufficient to engage their attention now. Captain Bentley was filled with great anxiety for his ship. He was more delighted than he could say to find that the Wanderer was floating on an even keel, and that she was sound in the main. The smashing of crockery and furniture was a mere detail.

Her engines were in perfect condition, her boilers were sound, and not a single plate had been started in her hull. The repairs effected by the engineers were absolutely satisfactory.

But what was the good of it? Without steam, the yacht was little better than a bulk at the mercy of the sea. Her steering-gear was in perfect order, it is true, but once the vessel grew near to the deadly coral reef, no skill of Captain Bentley's could save her.

She would founder on the reef, and then things would be ten times as bad as they had been formerly.

But, fortunately, there was no sign that the yacht was getting nearer to the reef. She drifted slowly parallel with the shore. And there was something else to occupy the attention of all those on deck. For close at hand lay the sinking Chinese junk.

She, too, had been caught in that rebound

from the island, and, waterlogged though she was, had been flung over the reef into deep water. But the junk was sinking with deadly certainty.

And now some fickle current of the ocean was causing the yacht and the junk to drift nearer and nearer together. Captain Bentley, from the bridge, could see that the deck of the junk was swarming with Chinamen—all of them in danger of their lives. For at any moment the stricken vessel might plunge to her doom. And the sea was infested with sharks.

With every minute that passed the wreck grew lower in the water—but she was creeping nearer and nearer to the Wanderer. It seemed inevitable that the two vessels would meet and collide. Not that the Wanderer would be damaged. The sea was calm, and there would be no severe shock at the moment of impact. And it really seemed that this collision would be the best thing.

For the Chinamen were signalling in all sorts of frantic ways for assistance. They knew well enough that their ship was going down, and the only chance of help was from the Wanderer.

"We shall have to do something, sir!" said Mr. Maitland, as he turned from the rail. "We can't allow these yellow dogs to go to the sharks. I suppose we shall have to take them all on board, and feed them until we can put them ashore."

Captain Bentley grunted.

"Humanity demands it!" he replied gruffly. "We'll do everything we can, Mr. Maitland. I wouldn't let a dog go to the bottom if I could help it. These Chinks are a rotten crowd, but we shall have to look after them."

The two vessels were now so close together that all further doubt as to whether they would touch were at an end. They were drifting nearer and nearer, and the scared Chinamen could be seen. With eager, anxious faces, they were staring towards the yacht—towards safety.

And high up upon the junk's poop stood Ho Liang. He waved continuously, and at length sent out a hail.

"Can you take these men on board," he shouted, in perfect English. "We're sinking—we may go down at any minute. Can't you send help?"

"Impossible!" replied the skipper. "We have one or two boats, but there are no members of the crew available to man them. But we shall touch soon, and we'll throw lines down to you. It'll have to be quick work when the time comes, but I think you'll all get on board."

"Good!" shouted Ho Liang. "We sha'n't forget you, captain!"

Captain Bentley smiled grimly.

"There's just one other thing!" he called. "If any man tries to get on board carrying a weapon, he'll be pitched overside! If we save the lives of your crew, we'll do it without taking any risks! You'd better give

orders that all weapons are to be thrown away."

Ho Liang bowed.

"This is no time for fighting!" he replied coldly.

The two vessels were now almost touching, and Captain Bentley gave one or two quick instructions to Mr. Maitland. The latter hurried down from the bridge at once, and proceeded to give orders to some men below. They could ill be spared, for every available hand was required in the stokehold, and at the engines—for the majority of the men on board belonged to this section of the ship's company. Nearly all the deckhands had been swept overboard by the tidal wave. There were several stewards who could help, and they were immediately brought up. Archie and Phipps, too, promised to lend all the assistance they could.

Long lengths of rope were procured, and all the Wanderer's men waited by the yacht's side. They were half expecting to see the junk sink before their eyes. The crippled vessel was certainly in a very precarious position.

And now the Chinese crew—a disorderly horde—were in a state of panic. They were whimpering and screaming and howling to be saved. Mr. Maitland's lip curled as he surveyed the scene.

"Yellow dogs!" he growled. "They haven't got an ounce of fight left between the lot of them! A set of schoolgirls would show more courage!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie, who happened to hear the words. "I mean to say, these bally chappies have fairly got the wind up, what? Somewhat perpendicular, if you grasp my meaning. Absolutely!"

"They do not appear to be very courageous, sir," said Phipps.

"The reverse, old bird—absolutely the reverse!"

Crash—thud!

Captain Bentley looked anxious, and hurried to the extreme end of the bridge as the junk thudded alongside and grazed heavily against the yacht's plates. The two vessels were rubbing together now, held in position by the force of the current. If the sea had not been smooth some damage might have been caused. But there was little prospect of any harm being done.

The junk now looked much larger. At such close quarters Archie and Phipps could look right down upon the Chinese ship's steeply sloping deck. And the yellow crew were now fighting fiercely to get on the Wanderer.

They appeared to be out of hand, and swarmed up every rope with the agility of monkeys. They were shouting and screaming in a state of the utmost panic. The Chinese skipper, and some men who were apparently officers, were yelling out orders.

And these orders were obeyed, in spite of the disorganisation and the panic. Before the Chinamen scrambled up the ropes they

pulled long, wicked-looking knives from their belts, and flung them into the sea. Others who had carried rifles cast these weapons away.

"They're tricky cusses!" said Mr. Maitland. "I'll keep a close eye on them—but I don't fancy they'll cause much trouble."

The Chinamen came swarming up to the rail—which was smashed down in many parts. They hauled themselves on board, chattering, and showing every indication of infinite relief.

Archie and Phipps were almost overwhelmed by the flood of surging humanity. The Chinese were extremely numerous. They had swarmed on the junk like bees in a hive. If they had not been rescued by the *Wanderer*, an enormous number of casualties would have occurred.

"Dash it all!" protested Archie, backing away. "Rather the limit, don't you know! A bally old invasion, what? I must remark, Phipps, that the laddies do not appear to be exceedingly handsome. Quite the reverse, in fact. I have never seen such an absolutely foul selection in all my little puff!"

"They are certainly an unsavoury crew, sir!" said Phipps.

"Oh, absolutely, in fourteen different tones!"

The decks of the *Wanderer* were overrun with the Chinamen. They were a scared-looking mob. But Captain Maitland meant to be on the safe side. And all the stokers and engineers and the stewards who were in charge, made a big display of rifles and revolvers.

Ho Liang came on board very soon, and the Chinese skipper accompanied him. And then, when there were only about fifteen of the yellow men left on the junk, the vessel drifted away from the yacht's side, and a peculiar rushing noise sounded.

Then, with startling suddenness, the stricken junk plunged to its last resting-place. A foaming vortex of water was all that remained—a vortex filled with wreckage and screaming human figures.

"We were only just in time!" said Ho Liang.

"That's about all!" declared Captain Bentley. "You ought to consider yourself lucky, my friend—a great deal more lucky than the poor souls who were washed off this vessel when the tidal wave struck us."

"I gathered that you had suffered severe losses," said Ho Liang, waving his hand, and indicating the absence of the usual crew."

Big efforts were being made to rescue the poor wretches in the water. Ropes were flung down, and every available lifebelt was cast overside. But there was little prospect of these men being saved from the sharks.

And it was at this moment that Ho Liang played his trump card.

"I must thank you, captain, for coming to the rescue of an enemy!" he said quietly. "We have fought in the past—we have

been the opposite of friends. And you have acted in the true British spirit of chivalry. I thank you on behalf of myself and my fellow countrymen."

"No need to talk that way!" growled the skipper.

"At the same time, we require this yacht for our own purposes!" went on Ho Liang. "Up with your hands!"

The skipper was so staggered that he could only stare. His jaw dropped slightly, and his eyes dilated. At the first he had been half suspicious of treachery on the part of these yellow pirates. But when he had seen them flinging their weapons away—when he had observed their panic—and when he had realised that they were seeking sanctuary from death on the yacht—he came to the conclusion that any possibility of attack was out of the question.

And now, like a blow in the face, the attack had come.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Several sharp revolver shots rang out. They had been fired by members of the yacht's crew the instant they saw that trouble was coming. But the Chinese were evidently trained, and they knew exactly what they had to do. The change within a few seconds was astonishing.

The cringing, whimpering crowd sprang to attention on the instant. Every yellow man flashed out a revolver from some hidden pocket. And without waiting, they commenced blazing away.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Bullets sang everywhere, and Archie and Phipps were lucky not to be hit!

Two stewards went down, shot in the legs. Other members of the yacht's crew were hit, and they fell—but not before they had done some damage on their part. As quickly as they could pull the triggers, they emptied their revolvers into the yellow crowd. And a dozen Chinamen fell screaming to the deck. In that brief spell the place was like a shambles.

And it was all over at once.

The defenders had no chance. After that first bout of firing, the Chinamen fell upon their victims, and forced them to the deck, holding them down firmly. Archie looked at the scene in horror.

"This—this is most frightfully frightful, Phipps!" he gasped. "I mean to say, we're—we're somewhat in the midst of it, as you might say! Much flowing of blood, and all that sort of rot! Hallo! Hallo! What, as it were, is this? Gadzooks! Poor old Phipps has caught a large-sized packet!"

Phipps, in fact, was fighting desperately with four Chinamen who sprang upon him. He was hurled to the deck, and held down. The Chinamen took no notice of Archie after one glance. He was so obviously helpless and useless that he was not given any attention.

And within ten minutes Captain Bentley and Mr. Maitland and all the other men on deck were helpless captives—bound up with

their own rope! And then a yelling swarm of Chinamen went below—to deal with the rest of the white crew.

In brief, the *Wanderer* had been seized!

She was in the hands of the Chinese pirates—in the hands of Ho Liang and his villainous, cut-throat crew!

The treacherous nature of the affair was incredible. These Chinamen had been saved from a terrible death by the *Wanderer*—and as soon as they were on board they turned on their saviours and captured them!

Captain Bentley was nearly mad with rage.

"You infernal yellow scum!" he shouted thickly. "By Heaven, you shall pay for this, Ho Liang! You shall——"

"Why waste your breath in this way, captain?" interrupted Ho Liang softly. "You are beaten—all the trump cards are in my mind. Knowing that my own vessel was doomed, I saw no reason why I should not kill two birds with one stone. I have secured the safety of my men, and I have taken command of this yacht. Excellent! Events could not have happened more to my liking."

Captain Bentley nearly choked, and suddenly held himself rigid. He said no more—it was an insult to address this murderous hound.

But it was a bitter blow for the skipper. At the very outset he had suspected treachery, and he had done his best to guard against it. He realised now that he ought to have allowed the Chinese crew to sink with their vessel—like so many squealing rats.

But common humanity had demanded something different. Captain Bentley could not stand by and see so many human beings flung to the sharks. They were murderous pirates, it is true—but they were human. And the skipper had never withheld a helping hand when a stricken ship was in danger.

This disaster, therefore, had come about because of Captain Bentley's humane determination to save life. He had feared treachery at the very first, and had rescued the Chinamen against all his better judgment. And now he was reaping the reward for his decision.

The capture of the engine-room crowd was easy.

Mr. Wilson, the chief engineer, had absolutely no chance. With his men he was caught down in the engine-room of the yacht, and had no chance to offer the slightest resistance. For there were no arms kept down below, and when the Chinamen appeared with levelled revolvers, Mr. Wilson and his men were compelled to surrender, or they would have been murdered in cold blood.

In less than fifteen minutes the *Wanderer* was entirely in the hands of the Chinese pirates.

Instead of being a private pleasure yacht, she was now a pirate ship! And every



Quick as a flash, the Chinaman stopped Captain Bentley, and then gave a loud, shrill command in Chinese.

member of her crew lay below—bound and helpless. Only one white person was still allowed to walk about the ship unchallenged.

This person was Archie Glenthorne.

The Chinese invaders had given him but little attention. He was the only boy on board, and he was apparently half-witted. For when Ho Liang spoke to him, Archie looked dazed and blank.

"You must realise, my lad, that this ship is now in my hands!" said Ho Liang. "You will be imprisoned with your companions——"

"I say! I say! Dash it all!" protested Archie. "In other words, dash it all! What? Absolutely beyond the old limit, and all that kind of rot! A chappie can't allow himself to be imprisoned."

"It is not a question of allowing yourself—you must submit to our dictation!" said Ho Liang. "I have no time to waste on you——"

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie promptly. "Pray proceed with the business, old sport! Archie will take a short rest and think of this and that. The old tissues, in fact, are becoming somewhat languid."

Ho Liang turned his back.

"The boy is half-witted!" he said in Chinese, to the junk's captain. "Quite harmless, and incapable of causing trouble."

"Shall we place him with the rest, your Excellency?" asked the captain.

"No," said Ho Liang. "Let him move about as he likes. I wish to question him later. He can do no harm."

And so Archie was permitted to wander about the yacht without being molested.

Ho Liang was not taking much of a risk by allowing this. Archie was not only unarmed, but he couldn't have used a weapon even if he had got one. And he was one against scores.

He wandered about for some time on deck, regarding the Chinamen with disdain and strong disapproval. Then he went below, and retired into his own cabin. He lay on his bed, and gazed at the ceiling.

"The position, as you might say, is somewhat foul!" he observed. "The old ship is positively overrun with these yellow insects! Swarming in large chunks, in fact. Something must be done—something, to be exact, must be bally well done! And, by Jove, it's up to Archie to get dashed busy!"

And Archie, assuming a fierce expression, tried to bring his wits into play. It was a tremendous effort, and for the life of him he couldn't think of any means by which the Chinamen could be frustrated. At last he got up and paced restlessly up and down.

"I mean to say, rather beyond the old capacity!" he muttered dejectedly. "This is where Phipps is required. But Phipps is elsewhere. The old brain department refuses to get going. That's dashed awkward! Why ain't I a chappie with huge assortments of schemes?"

Archie shook his head, and heaved a sigh.

When it came to ideas, his mind was a blank. And it is hardly surprising that the genial ass of St. Frank's failed to evolve a plan whereby the Chinese invaders could be frustrated.

It was a task for dozens—not merely one. But Archie did not give up hope.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PIRATE'S CAVE.



NELSON LEE lowered his binoculars.

"Dorrie, it's true!" he exclaimed huskily.

"I couldn't believe it at first, but there can be no doubt now!"

"True!" exclaimed Dorrimore, his voice sounding thick and fierce. "You mean that those yellow brutes have got the yacht?"

"Yes."

"By the Lord Harry!" snapped Dorrie. "Then we're done—the position is ten times worse than it was before! An' we were kiddin' ourselves that everythin' was all serene! By gad!"

His lordship clenched his fists, and then suddenly seized the binoculars from Nelson Lee, and levelled them out over the lagoon. His expression was one of fierce anger.

We, on the island, had been assuming that practically all danger was over. We had taken it for granted that the yacht would soon have steam up, and then she would return to the break in the reef, and boats would be sent ashore. Boats that

would carry us all to the Wanderer and safety.

But then, like a smash in the face, the blow had fallen.

For we had seen the junk, battered and sinking, touch the Wanderer—we had seen the swarming Chinamen get on the yacht's deck. We had not cared for this at all, but we assumed that Captain Bentley was rescuing these luckless pirates.

Then, without any mistake, we came to the conclusion that the Chinese had taken command of the yacht.

For certain signs on the yacht's deck could not be mistaken. Half a dozen figures swarmed on the bridge. This was the first indication of the disaster. We knew that Captain Bentley would never have allowed the Chinese to go on the bridge. So the fact that six of them were there hinted that something was wrong.

When Nelson Lee had been cast ashore by the tidal wave his binoculars had been in his pocket—and they came through the ordeal without damage. And one look at the yacht through the glasses told the guv'nor the truth.

And it wasn't long before we all knew it.

"The yacht seized!" yelled Handforth. "Great pip!"

"It's—it's awful!" exclaimed Pitt huskily. "Just when everything was lovely, too! This is the very worst thing that could have happened! Those Chinamen will take the yacht away, and we shall be marooned on the island for good! We shall never be rescued!"

"Rescue won't be necessary," I said grimly. "Have you forgotten the blacks?"

"The blacks!"

"Yes!" I said. "They're on this island in big numbers—and you have apparently forgotten that they are completely armed, and we're not! Why, we haven't got a decent weapon among the whole crowd of us."

"My hat, no!"

"Of course, if the yacht had come back for us everything would have been just glorious!" I went on. "We should have been taken on board, and in less than an hour we should have left Lagoon Island for ever. But now the whole aspect of things has changed. We're stranded—marooned. And those rotten Chinks have pinched the yacht, and will clear off on it!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "How frightfully rotten!"

"But—but can't something be done?" roared Handforth, glaring round. "Have we got to stand here and look on?"

"What else can we do?" asked Church. Handforth had no answer.

For, as a matter of fact, nothing could be done. We had no boat—we had no weapons. Many of us were seriously crocked. Cuts and grazes and ugly bruises were distributed pretty freely throughout the whole crowd of us. As a fighting force we were about as useful as a bird without wings.

"It's impossible to know what to do!" I went on. "We shall have to trust to the

guy'nor to give directions. But there's the Wanderer—manned by these Chinamen. And it's a dead certainty they won't take us off!"

"Of course they won't!" agreed Pitt. "Their game will be to clear off, and leave us here for ever—at the mercy of the cannibals. There you are! They're getting steam up already."

Smoke was curling lazily from the Wanderer's cream-coloured funnel. And steam soon began to appear. The furnaces were alight, and steam was being raised as quickly as possible. This was necessary, too, for, sooner or later, the yacht would be driven upon the reef by the tide.

The only chance of safety was to get steam up, and sail clear of the island. We had no doubt that the entire engine-room staff was being forced to work at the point of the revolver.

And, as a matter of fact, this was true.

Ho Liang could not get his own men to attend to the engines or the stokehold. They were ignorant of such mechanical marvels. And the only course was to force the engineers to do the work. Every man was guarded, and every man knew that the slightest hint of resistance would mean sudden death.

And we, on the island, looked on helplessly.

And at length the Wanderer gave a triumphant hoot from her siren. After weeks of inactivity, she was alive again—throbbing with vitality. And then the water began to churn in her rear. And she swung round to seaward—her smoke-stack belching forth volumes of steam and smoke.

"There she goes!" said Handforth bitterly. "This means our finish!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Of course. I knew it all the time!" said Handforth. "I told you yesterday that we should be marooned, and that the Chinks would get the best of us! You can't say that I didn't give you a warning!"

Church and McClure didn't feel inclined to argue the point.

"What a dirty trick!" said Pitt fiercely. "What a filthy piece of luck! I never thought that Fate could be so absolutely rotten! Just when things looked the brightest, this blow falls!"

"It's enough to make a chap say things!" exclaimed Christine. "First that tidal wave comes, and we're swept ashore. By a miracle we're not killed, or even badly hurt. Then we find that the yacht is afloat, and unharmed. So we cheer like the dickens, and think that everything is all serene. And now—now! Just look out there!"

Christine was too disgusted to finish, and he pointed with a shaking finger.

The Wanderer was steaming off. By rescuing those Chinese demons from certain death, Captain Bentley had delivered the yacht into the hands of the enemy. He could not be blamed for this catastrophe. He had acted as any humane man would

act. And Ho Liang's villainous crew had stabbed him in the back—not literally, but it amounted to the same thing.

"It's no good grumbling or shouting!" I said quietly. "We're here—and we ought to be thankful that we're alive. Ever since we've been on this island we've never known what would happen during the next twenty-four hours. And although things look black now, there may be a change before long."

"A change for the worse!" growled Handforth.

"Oh, dry up, you old pessimist!" said McClure. "What's the good of growling?"

"Who's growling?"

"You are!"

"Well, isn't it enough to make anybody growl?" demanded Handforth. "I'm sick of it! Every time we think we're O.K.—then something happens to bust all our hopes. I shall be surprised if I'm alive by to-night! We'll all be dead—murdered!"

"You must not speak like that, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "The position is certainly bad, and it is possible that it will have become more grave by this evening. But we must not look upon the dark side. There are many staunch men on board the yacht. Perhaps they will get the better of these treacherous Chinamen."

"Anyhow, we can trust the skipper to do everythin' in his power," said Dorrie. "But I'm afraid that our poor chaps have been shot down. An' in that case we sha'n't see the Wanderer again."

All the juniors were silent and thoughtful. The tidal wave had left them rather stunned, and they could not fully realise the enormity of this catastrophe. Things happened so suddenly on the island that we were hardly allowed breathing space. And the continual rumbles from the volcano did not tend to make us feel any the more secure.

The sun was still shining, but not with the clear brilliance we knew so well. And the sea itself had a heavy leaden aspect. We felt certain that some disturbance of Nature was on its way. There was no indication of a storm, and we could only believe that the volcano was responsible.

Not that we were allowed to think much on this subject.

We were on the beach, just clear of the pitifully battered palm grove. In all directions the stately palms were shattered and broken. The force of the tidal wave had caused enormous damage to the trees. And no matter which way we looked, we could see dead fish lying on the beach, and amid the trees, and in piles of debris. The tidal wave had penetrated to an astonishing point inland.

We knew that this part of the island would be almost uninhabited by the next day. For the fish would soon turn bad in the sun—and then the air would become absolutely poisoned. But it did not seem that we should be alive by the morrow. We could not forget that the cannibals were in Geyser Valley—large numbers of them, only too eager to attack us.

They had refrained from doing so hitherto, because the yacht was impregnable. But now the whole situation was changed. We were practically at the mercy of even a minor section of the enemy. For we possessed no weapons, and were in no mood for fighting.

We hoped that the blacks were in ignorance of our position, and that we should be allowed to find a refuge in comfort. But we hoped in vain. For while the *Wanderer* was still in sight, one of the yacht's crew shouted out a warning, and pointed into the bush.

For a brief space a black's face was seen, and then it vanished. A quick investigation was fruitless. The cannibal had gone—apparently back to his companions, to tell them of our hopeless predicament.

Nelson Lee wasted no time.

"Boys—men!" he shouted, addressing us all. "There is no sense in trying to delude ourselves. The position is desperate. We are without arms, and these savages will shortly make a determined attack. That is an absolute certainty. We must seek a refuge without a moment's delay."

"But where can we go to, sir?"

"Further along the beach there is a cave," replied the *gub'nor*. "It is a deep cavity among the rocks which penetrates right back into the cliffs. This cave has been used by the Chinese pirates as a hiding-place for their ill-gotten booty, and if we can gain admittance, we shall be comparatively safe for the moment. For the entrance is narrow, and can be guarded with ease."

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"One moment!" shouted the *gub'nor*. "Don't be too optimistic. The tidal wave has caused enormous damage, and it is quite likely that the cave entrance will be blocked. We can only hope for the best."

"Oh, it's bound to be open for us!" said Pitt. "Fate's been unkind enough already, without adding a further blow. But, by jingo, we shall have to look sharp, or we shall never do it!"

As he spoke, one or two rifle-shots rang out at a distance. Turning, we saw a number of cannibals approaching along the beach. Fortunately they were in the opposite direction to the cave—so our retreat was not cut off. For all we knew, other blacks would appear, however.

Umlosi uttered a savage growl.

"Wau! My blood boils within me, my master!" he rumbled. "Methinks 'twould be as well if thou wert to let me attack these heathen ~~dogs~~. I will cover thy retreat—"

"Nay, old friend," interrupted Nelson Lee. "We cannot spare you."

"Thinkest thou these jackals would kill me?" asked Umlosi scornfully. "I have my trusty spear—"

"Ay, but your spear would be useless against a hail of bullets!" interrupted the great detective. "At close quarters you

are a fine fighter, Umlosi. But your skin is not of armour-plate, and bullets will kill you even as they would kill me. It would be folly to stay."

Umlosi's eyes flashed. His fighting blood was up, and he did not care a straw for the odds. All he wanted was to dash into the fray, and if he fell—well, he would die fighting.

In some strange way, Umlosi had brought his spear ashore with him; he had clutched it as he was caught up by the tidal wave. Umlosi and his spear were never parted.

"Thou art in command, O my master!" he said. "I will obey!"

"It is well," said Nelson Lee. "We shall need you, Umlosi, if we succeed in getting to the cave. We shall need you very badly, for your spear is the only effective weapon we possess."

"Thou art right, Umtagati," said Umlosi. "Thou art always right. Thy ways are the ways of a wizard, and thou art of wondrous judgment."

And then, without any more delay, we hastened off. The cannibals were not making any attempt to approach quickly. But it would have been madness for us to remain in our present position—exposed on the beach. Just a little nearer, and the aim of the blacks would be effective. And then we should begin to fall, wounded or killed—without any means of retaliation.

At first we went unhurriedly—for Nelson Lee was afraid that the blacks would gain courage and swarm round in force if they detected that we were beating a hasty retreat.

But it very soon became apparent that we should have to run for it. For the blacks improved their speed, and grew nearer and nearer. And at intervals they fired their rifles. It was lucky for us that their aim was atrocious or we should have suffered some casualties.

"My hat!" exclaimed Pitt. "We shall have to bunk soon!"

A bullet had sung over his head. Nelson Lee heard it, too, and he looked grave.

"Come—we must go at the double!" he shouted. "They know that we are unarmed—and our only chance now is to outstrip them."

We all broke into a run. Some of the fellows were slow—and so were some of the sailors. For several had received ugly bruises and cuts on their legs, and these did not improve their running powers.

However, when a chap's life is threatened, he is capable of performing quite unusual feats of endurance. And after the first moment or two we made good speed. We dashed along the beach as hard as we could pelt.

And we hoped against hope that no other cannibals would appear in sight—ahead. So far we were only menaced from the rear, and it was just possible that we should be able to reach the sanctuary of pirates' cave without any of us falling. But it was touch and go.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The cannibals began to fire more swiftly, and one of the sailors gave a sharp cry as a bullet plunged into his arm. It was only a flesh wound fortunately, and not vital.

And by now we were able to put a mass of rocks between us and our pursuers. This gave us a good respite. We dashed along as hard as we could pelt, all attempts at dignity now being cast to the winds. We were running for our lives—running for the cover which the pirates' cave would afford us.

And the cannibals, in the rear, knowing that we were weak, were yelling with gloating victory. We discovered that this pell-mell flight was far safer than we had imagined.

For the blacks were unable to take any sort of aim while running. They simply loosed off their rifles at intervals—and, in fact, at least three of the blacks were killed by their own comrades in the general excitement. Not that they cared. Human life had little value to these savages.

And now we were running with mad haste, for the pirates cave was now within sight. We could see the frowning rocks towering up from the beach. The formation was a little different to what it had been formerly, and my heart gave a leap as I thought of the possibility of the entrance being closed. We should be caught like rats in a trap, and shot down as we stood.

Then, at last, we rounded the rocks—and there yawned the black opening of the cave. Safety was within sight!

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET OF THE CAVE.



"HURRAH!"
"We shall do it—we shall beat the rotters!"

"Oh, good!"

We simply flung ourselves into the cave entrance. The juniors went first—for Nelson Lee had seen to it all along that the boys were not heavily exposed to the fire from the enemy.

And after we had crowded in we found ourselves in inky darkness—after the brilliance of the day. The sailors from the *Wanderer* came in after us, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Umlosi brought up the rear. We heard one or two bullets ping against the rock as the last member of our party got within cover.

"Hurrah!"

"We're safe now!"

But this was by no means a certainty. The savages were swarming round the cave entrance, and such was their excitement, that they came right to close quarters—evidently intending to yank us out by force. And this was where Umlosi seized his chance. He was not going to be swindled again.

He gave a tremendous shout—the war-cry of the Kutanas—and leapt out into the full daylight. Then his spear got to work. It flashed to right and to left, and for a few moments there was a most unholy battle.

The savages came at Umlosi in twos, threes, and fours, thinking to overwhelm him by sheer weight of numbers. But Umlosi seemed to bear a charmed life, and his spear was wielded by a magic hand.

"Die, thou beasts of the forests!" he thundered. "Die, thou scum!"

Black after black fell—until, at length, the main body of the enemy cringed back with awe and wonder. They could not understand this astonishing black man, who could kill with impunity, and yet could not be killed. They regarded him with superstitious awe.

And yet, as a matter of fact there was nothing miraculous about Umlosi's immunity from death. It was nothing but sheer recklessness and indifference to his fate. He went into the fight with every ounce of his skill—and he was renowned as being the most deadly fighter of the whole Kutana tribe.

These cannibals were mere amateurs against him, and they fell at the first thrust. They had no chance of getting a blow home when Umlosi was really at the full pitch of his fighting form.

And the blacks fell back, and resorted to rifle-fire from a distance. As soon as they started this game, Nelson Lee and Dorrie dashed out, and dragged Umlosi into the cave by sheer force. He was indignant at first, but the move saved his life. He could beat the enemy at close quarters, but against rifle-fire he was just as vulnerable as any other flesh and blood.

"You have done well, Umlosi!" exclaimed Dorrie. "Infernally well, in fact. And now we've got to see about shovin' up some kind of protection. We don't want bullets to come flyin' in here every minute."

"Look, sir!" I said. "The rocks seem to be loose!"

"By gad, so they are!" ejaculated Dorrie.

This, no doubt, was one result of the tidal wave. The rocks had been loosened, and many displaced. And we found that by a little heaving, we could practically block up the cave entrance.

It was a risky job, for those who performed the work had to expose themselves every now and then. The sailors nevertheless, were only too eager to get busy. They assisted Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Umlosi to dislodge the rocks, and to set them up so that they formed a barrier.

Very soon the cave entrance was completely filled, and no rifle-fire could hope to penetrate. And if the blacks attempted to pull the barricade down, Umlosi was there—ready to deal death.

There were only one or two slight casualties sustained during the blocking up process. One man had a severe furrow dug in his cheek, and another was shot through

the foot. Both received attention later from Nelson Lee. But there was no doubt that we were in a fearful predicament.

We had no water, no food, and no weapons. By luck and by energetic activity we had gained this haven of refuge. But how long could we last out? When should we be compelled to surrender?

We were besieged—and could only hang out for a day or two.

And then?

We did not care to contemplate what would happen when we were forced to give in. We could not believe that such a disaster would occur. Something would happen—something must happen! Fate had been unkind to us already, and it would never allow matters to grow worse.

"Well, you chaps, we're jolly lucky!" I declared.

"Lucky!" echoed Handforth. "Oh, very!"

"I mean we're lucky to find this safe spot," I went on. "I was expecting that we should all be shot down. And yet here we are—still alive and kicking, and there's no reason why we should fear the worst."

The juniors were not particularly elated.

They were crowded together in a part of the cave where all was darkness. There were bales and boxes littered about—for this was the pirates' treasure cavern. Not that we cared anything about treasure now. The treasure of our own lives was of far greater importance.

The Wanderer's men were gathered together on the other side of the cave, and they were taking a rest after their strenuous work. Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Mr. Maitland talked together in low tones near the blocked entrance.

And right at the rear—in the deep recesses of the cave, Handforth and Co. had gathered by themselves. They were discussing the situation, and did not appear to be very cheerful about it.

"Of course, we shall never get out!" said Handforth. "This'll be the finish, my sons, so you might as well resign yourselves to it."

"What do you mean?" asked Church.

"Why, we shall never see the Wanderer again—we shall never get back to England again!" said Handforth. "We're doomed to be eaten alive by these cannibals! That'll be our fate!"

"Jolly cheerful, ain't you?" growled Church.

"Well, he's not far wrong," put in McClure. "I'm just about fed up, you know. I sha'n't be so very sorry if the end does come—only I hope it'll be short and sweet. I don't want anything lingering. We're finished—as soon as the cannibals rout us out we shall be eaten alive!"

Handforth glared in the darkness.

"You—you pessimist!" he snapped.

"What!"

"Can't you do something better than growl?" demanded Handforth. "You don't hear me talking like that! We're jolly well

going to beat these blacks, and get back to civilisation——"

"But you just said that we had no hope!" exclaimed McClure indignantly.

"Never mind what I just said!" growled Handforth. "And I don't believe in being inactive, either. We might just as well be doing something. And I suggest that we explore the cave."

"How do you mean?"

"I spoke in plain English, didn't I?" said Handforth. "We'll explore the cave, and find out exactly where we are. For all we know there might be all sorts of queer things in here. I'm jolly certain I can feel a draught on the back of my neck. And that's curious."

"How is it?"

"Why, it proves that there must be an outlet somewhere," said Handforth shrewdly. "Don't you understand? How can there be a draught if there isn't some other air space?"

Handforth rose to his feet as he spoke, and groped his way towards the very rear of the cave—and where the rocks narrowed down, until there was only a kind of tunnel. This apparently came to an end after a few feet.

But Handforth had only moved a short distance before he gave a sudden gasp. Then there came the sound of slithering and sliding.

"Whoa! Help!" howled Handy. "What the dickens—— Yaroooh!"

He set up an appalling din, and the last yell sounded faint and far away. A curious scuffling sliding noise sounded, and Church and McClure stood stock still. Then came a dull plop, like the sound of a big object falling into the water. And afterwards complete silence.

"Handy!" gasped Church.

Silence.

"Quick—quick!" shouted Church wildly. "Handforth's vanished! He's fallen down a hole, or something!"

I came dashing up, with Nelson Lee and Dorrie close behind. We had no matches—and even if we had they would not have been of any use. But Nelson Lee had something far more valuable—a tiny electric torch. It was still in working order, but he had not used it, because he wanted to preserve the battery.

Now, however, he switched it on, and a tiny beam of brilliant light illuminated the end of the cavern. And there, at the far extremity was a hole in the rock! A deep kind of shaft led downwards into utter blackness.

Nelson Lee leaned over anxiously.

"Handforth!" he shouted.

"Great pip!" came a voice, from far below. "Is—is that you, sir? I'm nearly drowned!"

"Where are you, my boy?"

"Goodness knows, sir!" panted Handforth's voice. "I slid down about a hundred feet, and flopped into some water!"

But it's only about four feet deep, and I can stand up all right. And it seems to be a river, because there's a distinct current, and plenty of fresh air."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Lee keenly. "An underground river!"

The very knowledge of this made him pause and think. This stream, far below the surface, undoubtedly led to another part of the island—and probably passed right beneath the high central ridge. The possibilities in the situation were fully apparent.

If we all went down the shaft we might be able to get to another part of the island altogether—a part where the cannibals would never come. Thus we should completely escape them. But, first of all, it was necessary to see if Handforth was right. And the gov'nor lost no time.

He entered the hole, and allowed himself to slide free. If Handforth could do the trip without injury, so could he. But he shouted down a warning for Handforth to get out of the way first.

Nelson Lee plunged down at great speed, and then struck the water. The distance, actually, was only about fifteen feet, and there was no danger in the descent. Switching on his torch, Nelson Lee found himself in a low tunnel. The stream was flowing silently and smoothly, and the tunnel went straight into the distance on both sides.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Handforth. "This is rummy, sir!"

"Very peculiar, my boy," said Nelson Lee. "But it is a wonderful discovery. It may lead to ultimate salvation for all of us!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ARCHIE DOES THE TRICK!



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE rose from his easy-chair in his cabin, and yawned.

"It seems to me that something has got to be done," he murmured. "I mean to say,

the whole bally position is dashed foul. The dear chappies are in a most frightful con-dish!"

Archie had been wandering round the ship just recently. Nobody had molested him, for the Chinese were in such strong numbers that there was no possibility of this foppish schoolboy doing any damage. Moreover, Archie was cute enough to affect an air of cringing fright all the time.

Whenever a Chinaman came near him he fell back, and seemed scared out of his wits. It was all a part of his plan to make the enemy believe that he was not worth worrying about.

Even now he couldn't understand why he had been allowed his freedom. Ho Liang had made a mistake—a very grave mistake—for Archie was not such a fool as he looked.

But the cunning Chinaman had impri-



Archie drew level with the Chinaman, and—crash! The heavy paper weight descended with a smashing blow upon the Chinaman's head.

soned Captain Bentley and the other officers. The engine-room staff and the stokers were kept below—closely guarded by armed Chinamen who were ready to kill at the first show of defiance. For the sake of their own lives, Mr. Wilson and his staff were compelled to obey.

As for Archie he was not even considered. He couldn't do any harm, anyhow. The Chinese, therefore, thought it quite unnecessary to rope him up, and confine him with the other prisoners.

Ho Liang was mad with the lust of victory and triumph. In a way he liked to think that Archie was witnessing the defeat of his own party. But Archie, although several kinds of an ass in many ways, came up to the scratch now.

He realised that if there was any chance of regaining possession of the yacht, it was up to him to get busy.

And so, after thinking matters out, he had come to a decision.

An idea had been started in his mind by seeing a Chinaman outside in the passage. This man was armed and seemed to be on guard in that section. He was a man who had been recently hurt—probably in the fighting of the island. At all events, the greater part of his face was bandaged up. And this circumstance set Archie thinking.

"Yes, old bird, things have got to be jolly well accomplished!" Archie told himself. "In other words, darling, it's absolutely up to you to get going. I mean to say, there's no dashed time to be lost!"

Archie looked round his cabin and calmly selected a heavy paper-weight, which had been reposing on the little table. He closed his fingers round this object, and then sauntered languidly towards the door.

"Something drastic!" murmured Archie. "It absolutely must be done—frightfully frightful, and all that kind of rot, but there you are! There's no getting away from it, laddie—these things must be done!"

He went down the passage, and saw that

the bandaged Chinaman was still there. He had a revolver in his hand. He took practically no notice of Archie as he came up, apparently on his way to the saloon.

Archie was quite calm. He had made up his mind, and there was an end of it. The thing had to be done—and it had to be done properly.

Archie drew level with the Chinaman, and—crash!

Without a second's warning his fist shot out, and the heavy paper-weight descended with a smashing blow upon the Chinaman's head. It was so unexpected that the fellow never had the slightest chance of defending himself. And it was really only by sheer luck that no other members of the enemy crew saw the incident.

The Chinaman collapsed in a heap, without a sound.

"Absolutely!" said Archie, adjusting his monocle. "Gadzooks! The chappie has expired! Murder, what? Absolutely not! A bally cove like this ain't so valuable as an earwig!"

Quick as a flash, Archie was at work now. The usually languid junior became imbued with tremendous energy. He seized the unconscious Chinaman under the arms, and dragged him swiftly down the passage to the door of his cabin. A few moments later the pair were inside, and the door was closed.

"A perfectly ghastly proceeding, but it's got to be done," muttered Archie. "I mean to say, it's enough to make a chappie feel shocking, but there you are! Archie to the old rescue, what? Every time!"

With deft fingers he commenced to pull off the Chinaman's loose, cotton clothing. He could see that the man was breathing, and that he was only stunned. And as soon as he had removed the unconscious man's garments, he proceeded to don them himself. Even this change of clothing had a startling effect, for Archie was about the same size as his victim.

He had his bandage already prepared, and after a little adjustment he had it fixed to his satisfaction. He had cunningly used a dirty piece of cotton cloth for this purpose, and it closely resembled the bandage which the injured Chinaman wore round his face. The only drawback, as far as Archie could see, was the possibility of him being addressed—for he would not be able to answer. And failure to answer any question might be disastrous.

However, this had to be chanced. Archie proceeded to rope up the unconscious man, and then he tied a scarf round the senseless man's mouth. But there was not much fear of the fellow regaining consciousness yet awhile.

(Continued on next page.)

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"And now for the bally old stunt!" murmured Archie. "The thing's going to be a priceless frost, but nobody shall ever accuse Archie of failing to do his bit. Absolutely not! A kind of forlorn hope, what?"

If an experienced man—somebody who could speak Chinese fluently—had essayed this project, he would probably have failed. Archie was a rank amateur—and the chances of success were extremely scarce. And yet he went right through with it without a hitch. Chance is a very fickle thing.

Archie had armed himself with the Chinaman's revolver, and he kept this concealed in his sleeve. Then, with his head bent down, and with his cap pulled over his eyes, he passed down the passages towards the engine-room. Now and again he passed other Chinamen, and he expected to be exposed at any moment. But he was not even challenged.

Arriving at the engine-room, he entered without difficulty, and stood looking on. The yacht was steaming at a moderate speed, and all the machinery was working smoothly and with rhythmic movement.

Mr. Wilson was in charge, and he had a fierce, sullen expression on his face. Several Chinamen were lounging about making a big display of revolvers. The engineers knew well enough that they had but to make one attempt at attack, and they would be shot down on the instant. And they could serve no good purpose by getting themselves killed.

Archie decided that there was no need to hesitate. There were two Chinamen near him. Quite calmly he jerked out his revolver, grasping it by the barrel. Crash! He brought the butt down with fearful force upon the man's head, and as the fellow rolled over, Archie grabbed his revolver. He threw it to Mr. Wilson with accurate aim—and the chief caught it deftly.

"Now then—hands up, you frightful bounders!" shouted Archie, displaying his own weapon. "I mean to say, up with the filthy old digits! Absolutely! Kindly oblige, old chappies!"

He didn't know exactly what followed—it was like a nightmare.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Those shots came from Mr. Wilson's revolver. Quick as a flash, the chief engineer had grasped the situation. He knew that success could only come by instant action. He was a fine marksman, and three Chinamen fell writhing.

"Quick—seize their guns!" roared the chief.

The engine-room staff dashed at the fallen enemy, and gained the weapons. In two minutes the engine-room was theirs. The few other Chinese were disarmed, for they had no pluck to fight against determined men. Archie stood looking on in amazement and inward excitement.

"Well, done, lad—well done!" shouted

the chief, flashing a glance at Archie. "By thunder! You've saved the ship."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I—I mean, what priceless rot, old thing!"

The stokehold was entered next, and the Chinese there put up no fight. Their weapons were seized, and the entire engine-room and stokehold staffs went on deck in a body. At the first sight of a Chinaman they fired—they didn't wait for any arguments. And the yellow pirates, terrified by this determined attitude, fled for cover. In fifteen minutes the Wanderer was in the hands of Captain Bentley—and the Chinese, cowed and scared, were flung into the forecastle, and locked up there. Ho Liang, white with fury, was among the prisoners. Solely owing to Archie's action, the enemy had been defeated.

And then Captain Bentley made full speed for Lagoon Island. And as the yacht sped across the ocean, Archie—now attired in flannels—stood against the rail with Phipps. And at last the island came in sight—but, strangely enough, it was changed.

Lurid flames were shooting towards the sky, and a dense pall of smoke overhung the whole scene. Phipps clutched at the rail as he bit his lip, and then he stared towards the island in amazement and growing horror.

"What—what can it mean?" he exclaimed huskily.

"There's only one explanation, Phipps," said Captain Bentley. "The volcano is in eruption—active!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Phipps. "Then—then we are too late! We have regained possession of the yacht when it is no good to us! We shan't be able to rescue the others in time!"

Captain Bentley clenched his fists.

"It can't be so bad as that!" he growled. "I suppose it's only a small outbreak—not much fear of the whole island being involved. Anyhow, we're nearly on the spot, and we shall soon know the absolute truth."

Archie had nothing to say. He was undoubtedly the hero of the hour, but it was appalling to realise that even now it might be too late to rescue those who had been left behind.

And as the Wanderer steamed at full speed towards the island, those on her deck gazed in awe and wonderment. It was nearly evening, and darkness was creeping down rapidly. Great belching flames were bursting forth from the volcano—accompanied by thunderous reports.

And over the whole island hung a vast inky cloud. The volcano was in active eruption. There was no doubt about the question. And everybody on the Wanderer was filled with fear for the safety of those who were still on the island.

At length the yacht grew quite near to the lagoon. Captain Bentley had no intention of risking the ship by taking her through

the break in the reef. In any case, he could not have approached.

For suddenly a startling thing occurred.

Ashes began to fall on the deck—burning, red-hot ashes! And where they struck the deck smoked and smouldered. Several men were severely burned, and the ashes fell upon their clothing.

In a moment hoses were at work—but it was absolutely hopeless to beat Nature by the water from a couple of hosepipes. The red-hot ashes fell in even greater quantities. They splashed into the sea on every side, hissing and steaming.

The island was an inferno!

And the Wanderer could not remain—for in less than ten minutes the whole ship would be a mass of fire, and would be burnt to atoms. And so she steamed away with every ounce of speed possible—until she lay beyond the zone of danger.

And then night fell.

In the distance lay Lagoon Island—lurid, ghastly, and terrible. What was happening to those who had been left on her shore?

It seemed to Captain Bentley that all hope was lost. But, as a matter of fact, things were not quite so bad as this. We were destined to have many more adventures yet—but we had no idea what startling times were to be encountered.

THE END.

Editorial Announcement.

IMPORTANT.—All correspondence relating to "The Nelson Lee Library" should be addressed to The Editor, "The Nelson Lee Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

MY DEAR READERS,—The activity of the volcano on Lagoon Island indicates the beginning of a violent eruption and grave peril to those of the party ashore. Unless Nelson Lee and those with him can get clear of the island in time they will be smothered beneath the molten lava from the burning crater. There are few sights more appalling yet more brilliantly spectacular in Nature than a volcano sending up to the sky its columns of red-hot lava.

The story of the volcano in fiery eruption, ending in the destruction of Lagoon Island, and the fate of Nelson Lee and his brave companions will be graphically described in next week's narrative, "THE WINGED DELIVERERS!" It

will be the final story of the island series, and, without doubt, the grandest and most thrilling of them all. How the holiday party are eventually saved from a terrible end on the island inferno, and how it leads up to another and even more remarkable series of adventures in another part of the world are fully explained in next week's story.

In addition to the above there will be another short, complete detective story of Nelson Lee and Nipper, entitled, "THE BANK CAR PUZZLE!"

There will also be GIVEN AWAY two more splendid photographs of famous footballers.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

Nipper's Magazine

No. 36.

EDITED BY NIPPER.

July 29, 1922

Editorial Office,
Cabin C,
The Wanderer.

MY DEAR READERS,—The tidal wave, which so kindly lifted the Wanderer into the open sea, was really due to an earthquake or an upheaval in the bed of the ocean. Why it should be called "tidal" when it has nothing to do with the tides is more than I can fathom. It has naturally led to many arguments about waves in general, and as none of the fellows seem to know much about this very interesting subject theoretically, I hope this week's article will enlighten them.

Ever yours,
NIPPER (THE EDITOR).

SEA WAVES.

OF the hosts of people who renew their annual acquaintance with Old Father Neptune at this time of the year, few really understand him, though they have watched him often enough in his varying moods. The sea to the holiday-maker is a health-giving tonic, in which one paddles or bathes and sometimes sails upon. The tides come in and go out at certain fixed times which are regulated by the moon. There the matter ends.

CAUSE OF WAVES.

One curious thing about an open sea is that it is never still. It may be only a ripple, or a series of rollers or breakers, or merely a gentle heaving swell, but always there is wave-movement. This perpetual disturbance of the sea's surface is mainly due to the wind, although of course, the lunar tides are a contributory cause.

AN OPTICAL DELUSION.

The movement of the water produced by a wave is not a forward movement as it appears to the eye, but an up and down motion. If a cork be floated in the water, it will be seen to rise and fall, and not to move forward with the wave. In fact, the water itself no more travels forward than does the corn in a field of waving corn.

HEIGHT OF WAVES.

Waves vary in height according to the force that produces them and the depth of the sea. In the shallow waters of British seas waves are

never more than fifteen or twenty feet high. In the Atlantic or Pacific waves frequently attain double this height. Some observers say that they have seen waves over one hundred feet high, but this is most likely an exaggeration. The maximum height of wind-raised waves is probably not more than between fifty and sixty feet. Breaking waves may burst in surf and spray to much greater heights.

CORRESPONDING WIDTH.

The width of a wave from base to base can be determined from its height, or vice versa; for, on an average, a wave is fifteen times as wide as it is high. For instance, a wave five feet high is approximately seventy-five feet from trough to trough; and a wave fifty feet high is roughly 750 feet from trough to trough.

VELOCITY.

The speed with which waves move over the sea depends partly on the width of the wave and partly on the depth of the water. The bigger the wave and the deeper the sea, the faster does it travel. Storm waves in deep seas may move as much as forty miles an hour.

DEPTH.

The depth at which a wave is felt is not more than 600 feet. Below this depth absolute calm prevails during the wildest storm. As a rule, there is very little disturbance below 300 feet. Thus a submarine caught in a storm at sea can easily take shelter by diving well under the surface.

EARTHQUAKE WAVES.

Earthquakes will sometimes produce waves of enormous length and amazing speed. A wave of this kind measured at San Francisco in 1854 was 210 miles in length, and was found to be travelling at 6.7 miles per minute. It had travelled across the Pacific at this astonishing rate from Simoda, in Japan, where an earthquake had occurred.

POWER OF WAVES.

The power of waves is tremendous. Blocks of masonry weighing thirty-six tons have been thrown for eleven and thirteen yards. In the Isle of Reunion there is to be found in the middle of a savannah a massive piece of stone, 510 cubic yards in size. This huge block of stone had been detached from a reef by the waves and carried by them across the land. One could quote many more instances of the great power of the waves. Some day, perhaps, our engineers will discover a means by which this power, instead of running to waste, can be used to serve mankind.

Brief Notes about OUR FOOTBALLERS

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

J. SHAW.

A. McNAIR.

ONE of the most likeable chaps I have ever met among the hosts of Metropolitan League footballers, is Joe Shaw, the captain of the Arsenal. We often read of a footballer being modest and unassuming—though, as a general rule, that is not a failing of the fraternity—and with Joe Shaw this is true to a marked degree. Joe never says much about anything, and the hardest subject of all is to get him to talk about himself. Down at the Gunner's ground he is revered and respected by fellow players and spectators alike.

No player did more last season to help the Arsenal to stave off the grim spectre of relegation than did their popular captain. In the closing stages of the competition Joe worked as hard as any man on the field, and it was mainly his ideal football generalship that brought the team through the ordeal.

Joe was born at Bury, and came to London to play for the Arsenal in 1907, and he has rendered the team consistent and valuable service ever since. His first club, as a lad, belonged to a Sunday School, from which he went to Bury Athenæum. After a time with the Athenæum he transferred his affections to Accrington Stanley, and it was there that the manager of the Arsenal discovered him, and secured his transfer. Apart from football his favourite sport is cricket, while for other recreations he seeks amusement in the somewhat surprising arts of singing and music and amateur theatricals. He is a brother-in-law of Billy Hibbert, of Bradford City. Height, 5 ft. 9 ins. Weight, 11 st. 10 lb.

IF you asked any football enthusiast round Glasgow way whom he considered to be the best full-back playing in Scottish football to-day, I am willing to wager that the response, in nine cases out of ten, would be "Alec McNair," of Celtic. For, though others may have different opinions, Glaswegians swear by Alec—he is not only "it" at the present time, they will tell you—he is the "greatest ever!"

And there is no doubt they have some grounds for their opinion. At least I can find nobody in Scotland to surpass McNair, though I think I know one or two who might favourably compare with him. In many respects Alec has claims to be considered the best full-back that Scotland ever produced, and his record bears out that claim.

Up to date he has fifteen—or is it sixteen?—full international caps in his wardrobe, his "victory" honours are maximum, and he has appeared in Scottish Inter-League matches on no less than 14 occasions. Truly a wonderful record, my friends!

McNair's birthplace is Stenhouse-muir, and it was with the club of that name that he graduated ere being signed on by Celtic many seasons ago. He originally played at half-back, but it was speedily found that full-back was his proper vocation, and he has held that position ever since. He is a fine thrustful player, with an invigorating style, and is a master in the art of position play.

Height, 5 ft. 8 ins. Weight, 11 st. 11 lb.

The 11.45 p.m. to South Shields.

A Thrilling Complete Detective Story, featuring the great detective, Nelson Lee, and his clever assistant, Nipper.

AFTER the solution of the golf-course mystery, Inspector Anderson, of the Durham County police, had become one of Nelson Lee's staunchest friends and admirers.

In fact he had come to rely upon the famous private detective to an extent which was embarrassing, and even inconvenient.

The matter of the death of Charles James Whittaker is a case in point.

It was between midnight and one o'clock at the Golden Lion Hotel, in South Shields, when Nelson Lee was aroused from a sound sleep by the apologetic Inspector Anderson, and implored to lend his powers to the solution of a problem which promised to baffle the police.

Having swallowed some very forcible remarks regarding the intelligence and manners of the police force in general, and Inspector Anderson in particular, the good-humoured private detective climbed into his clothes, and allowed himself to be conducted to the North-Eastern railway terminus.

The station was deserted and almost in darkness. Drawn up opposite the barrier was a train, engineless, and, save for one first-class coach, unlighted.

Before a certain compartment of the coach in question were a railway porter and a police constable in uniform; and their air of importance betrayed that here some extraordinary event had taken place.

And the event was extraordinary indeed.

Accustomed as Nelson Lee was to scenes of bloodshed, he drew back appalled on the threshold, and made an obvious effort to collect himself before entering.

A small, clean-shaven man, well on in years, and dressed in clothes of decent style, was lying half under the seat. His open eyes were already glazing, and his attitude was unnatural; but one did not need these things to prove that he had ceased to breathe. The skull above the left ear had been smashed in. It was impossible that any man should receive such an injury and live.

"There you are, Mr. Lee," said the inspector. "I've told you nothing, because there's nothing to tell. This porter here found things just as they are now when he came to close the windows, for the train to go into the siding for the night. The only thing I've done was to empty the victim's pockets to find proof of identification."

"H'm." Nelson Lee was already kneeling beside the dead man.

"And did you find it?" he questioned, over his shoulder.

"I did. Name, Charles J. Whittaker. Profession, engineers' merchant. Residence, Morpeth, Northumberland."

"Excellent. Now let me see the inventory of the dead man's pockets."

"Here it is, Mr. Lee; but, except that it proves the motive not to have been robbery, I am afraid it does not tell us much."

The private detective carefully scrutinised the exact list.

Therein the personal possessions of the dead man were set forth, pocket by pocket. With the possible exception of an important contract which lacked the signatures of the contracting parties, they were all perfectly usual. A pocket knife, smoking material, a bunch of keys, visiting cards used in his business, pencil, memorandum book, cheque-book, fountain-pen, a small bottle of aspirin tablets, and two handkerchiefs, all these were carefully specified. In addition there were a gold watch and chain, seventy pounds in treasury notes, and a quantity of silver coin.

"I am inclined to agree with you," said Nelson Lee, at length, "that this poor fellow is the victim of murder."

"Inclined to agree!" exploded the inspector. "That much is obvious, I should think!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"By no means," he said. "Consider this possibility. A passenger feels faint, leans far out of the window hoping that the cold air will revive him, and strikes his head upon some object which the train is pass-

ing. He then falls back into the compartment with just such an injury as this.

And the private detective pointed to the dreadful fracture of the skull of the dead man.

"Good heavens! And do you suppose——"

"I have told you," said Lee, "that I believe this to be a case of murder. I will go further. I know it to be a case of murder."

"But, Mr. Lee, how do you mean you know? I am disposed to agree that it might have been a case of accident."

"I know," said the private detective, "because, as it happens, this unfortunate gentleman has been robbed as well as murdered."

"Robbed?" ejaculated the inspector. "Surely not! Here is his money, here is his watch, there is a valuable pin in his tie, there are——"

"His rings, and all the rest of it? Yes, I know. The murderer did not take those, because, presumably, he was in no urgent need of money; but he took something which, in the circumstances, was considerably more useful."

"Mr. Lee," pleaded the inspector, "I must ask you not to talk in riddles. What is there which you—a complete stranger, find lacking in this man's possessions?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Merely a railway ticket. This man carried one railway contract, and one only. That was between Newcastle and Morpeth. For this journey which has ended so tragically for him, he needed another. Where is that other? You saw me carefully searching his pocket-book, and scrutinising the floor. I was looking for that most important clue, his railway ticket. Now we will ask our friend here——" And he indicated the porter who remained at the door of the compartment.—"to let us see the tickets which were surrendered by the passengers who left the train at this station."

Lee took the tickets, which, fortunately, had remained in the possession of the man addressed, and rapidly sorted the firsts.

There were seven in all. Each of the seven was the half of a return ticket; but, whereas six were second halves, completing the journey; the remaining one was a first half, belonging to a ticket issued at Newcastle Central station.

"Anderson," he said, impressively, "you will do well to note the number of that ticket; for, unless I am very much mistaken, a half of it remains in the possession of the murderer."

The inspector obeyed, but at the same time, he asked a very pertinent question.

"If you are so sure," he said, "that this poor chap Whittaker would have to have a ticket, how do you account for the fact that the murderer did not have one of his own?"

"I suggest to you," replied the private detective, "that the murderer's ticket

lapsed at one of the intermediate stations, or else was third-class, probably the former. Knowing that his crime would be discovered within a few seconds of the arrival of the train, he would not dare to pause at the barrier for the purpose of paying excess. Hence his theft of his victim's ticket.

"This," he continued, "informs us of several useful facts. As the murderer had no contract—or season, as we call them in the South, he was not a native of Shields. As it is probable that his own ticket was not available to this station, it is also probable that he had no intention of spending the night here. We must search the hotels for an unexpected visitor who arrived late and had little or no luggage."

With this suggestion, Inspector Anderson completely agreed.

At the routine work of criminal investigation, Inspector Anderson, like most of his colleagues was a highly-trained specialist. Within two hours he had not only inspected the visitors' book of every large hotel in the town, but had verified that no weapon lay beside the railway-line between there and High Shields, the distance wherein, as Lee saw reason to believe, the crime must have been committed. He had set the police telegraphs buzzing between there and Newcastle, and had elicited the useful fact that the booking-office clerk at Newcastle Central knew the dead man by sight, and remembered selling him the return ticket to South Shields about eleven-thirty.

All this was very satisfactory, except that the inquiry at hotels, from which Nelson Lee had expected much, produced only a disappointing negative.

The news was brought to the private detective himself when he was on the point of turning in for the second time.

"Of course," said Anderson, who acted as his own messenger, "we inquired here first of all; but, as the night porter will tell you, they have no late arrivals."

"No," agreed the night porter, who was within hearing, "we haven't had anybody in since eleven-thirty. There was a room kept for a gentleman, Mr. Whittaker by name, but he hasn't turned up, and I don't expect he will now."

Here the detectives exchanged a significant glance. The night-porter's assumption was startlingly correct.

"So," the man went on, "we've given his room to Mr. Barbeque."

With this, the man turned away to make himself comfortable for the night.

"Wait a moment," said the alert Inspector Anderson, "who is Mr. Barbeque?"

"Oh, he's all right," the man asserted, with complete confidence, "been here off and on for years. You needn't worry about him."

Inspector Anderson accepted the night-porter's assurance disappointedly, and, promising to be round first thing in the

morning, went back to arrange for removal to the mortuary of the unfortunate Mr. Whittaker.

"Now," he told himself, as he tramped through the darkened streets towards the railway station, "I suppose Nelson Lee is back in bed, and well on the way to a sound sleep. Nice to be a private detective."

But he was making a mistake.

Nelson Lee had been sufficiently interested to ask a further question about the man named Barbeque, and this question had led to another.

Yes, Mr. Barbeque must have travelled on the last train down, such was the information he received. Did he have any luggage? No, the porter thought not. Was he expected that evening? No; but, of course, being such an old visitor—

Lee gave the man a cigar, and embarked upon further questions.

What was Barbeque by profession? A contractor. What sort of contractor? The night-porter did not know. Roads, and that sort of thing, he supposed. Wait a moment, he could find one of Mr. Barbeque's cards. That might give the information.

He disappeared into the office, and returned with a large business card, which he handed to Nelson Lee.

It advertised, with many flourishes of copper-plate, that Wm. Chas. Barbeque, of such-and-such an address at Side, Newcastle-on-Tyne, was a contractor and merchant. It stated, at the right-hand bottom corner, that the card was presented by William Barbeque, and indicated that his was the Farmers' Club.

But what interested the private detective more than all this was a notice on the back, that he, Barbeque, was a contractor for every description of road-making material, and a list of the said materials ending with whinstone, limestone, tarmac, and slag.

He remembered that the one important thing in Whittaker's possession was an unsigned contract for rights over all slag-heaps along the Tyne.

He sent the porter for a building-trades directory, and turned to manufacturers of tarmacadam.

Whittaker and Barbeque were both there. Clearly, the men had been business rivals.

He went to the telephone-box, rang up the police, and gave them Barbeque's name and address.

"I want to know all about that man," he said, "and within the next hour. Particularly, I want to know whether he was interested in the contract which Whittaker was making with the Pelaw Dry Dock, Limited."

Such are the resources of our excellent police-force, that, although it was nearly two o'clock in the morning, they were able

to satisfy him while the stipulated hour had still a few minutes to go.

"Hello," he said, when the porter called him to the telephone, "yes, I'm Mr. Lee. Carry on!"

Then he repeated, after the precise droning voice of the station superintendent at the far end of the wire: "Mr. Barbeque was interested in the contract, and if Whittaker had not obtained it, Barbeque would have done so. Whittaker was boasting of this at the Farmers' Club, before departing to catch his train. Good enough. You've given me all I want. Now if you'll ask Inspector Anderson to call here at the Golden Lion Hotel at seven-thirty to-morrow morning I shall not worry you any further to-night. Thanks. Good-bye."

And he replaced the transmitter with a thrill of excitement.

A certain amount of luck; and, as he might or might not have admitted, a certain facility for putting two and two together and making four, had led him to find and follow a hot scent.

"The Train Murder," as the Newcastle Chronicle called it on the following morning—from being an almost impenetrable mystery had begun to afford a nearly unassailable chain of circumstantial evidence against one man.

And the connecting link, the clue which would hang the guilty man—if anything did, was the murderer's really brilliant idea of stealing his victim's railway ticket.

That minute square of pasteboard, as Lee finally realised, was the corner-stone of his evidence. If they arrested Barbeque, and failed to find the return half in his possession; then, unless some weighty and unexpected evidence came to light, they would have committed a grave indiscretion.

They might absolutely know that Barbeque was guilty; and yet, being unable to prove it, be reduced to apology, or even payment of damages. Such things have happened.

As the great private detective turned to seek his room for the remainder of his night's sleep, he passed the rack where certain coats and hats belonging to residents were hanging.

"So," he said, pausing in front of a grey chesterfield, "that is Mr. Barbeque's overcoat?"

"It is, sir," admitted the porter, with some surprise.

"I thought so. It wasn't there when I went up to bed; so I naturally concluded that it had been placed there since. You told me yourself that only Mr. Barbeque had come in, so I deduced that the coat belonged to Mr. Barbeque."

He turned the hanging garment about, and lifted each sleeve.

"H'm! Man of strong nerve. Skilled motorist. Pipe smoker. Careless in habits. Extravagant—"

How long the detective might have continued this string of deductions it is impossible to say; for at this point the night-porter was unable to resist giving expression to his curiosity.

He was of course acquainted with the reputation of Nelson Lee; and saw in this incident a fund of conversation which would make of him a local celebrity.

"Pardon me, sir," he ventured, "but is it possible that you can find out all those things from merely looking at the gentleman's coat?"

Fortunately for the night-porter, Nelson Lee was in one of his talkative moods.

"Most certainly!" replied the detective. "There's no cleverness in it. You can do it yourself. Come here!"

The detective lifted up the sleeve of the grey overcoat.

"Do you see where the knap is worn off the underside of that left sleeve? Can you imagine anything which would wear a sleeve like that, except the steering-wheel of a car? The right sleeve, however, is unworn. Hence our deduction that he is a skilled motorist—he drives with the left hand only, which is the correct way.

"From the fact that the worn part is a long way down the sleeve, we may deduce a large wheel, and a heavy car. He habitually drives a heavy car with one hand—ergo, he has a strong nerve.

"Here, inside the coat, we find a hole burnt by a tobacco pipe. Through the hole thus burnt, we catch a glimpse of a one-pound Treasury note in that same pocket, that he is careless in his habits. Do you follow all that?"

"Yes, sir," agreed the porter; "now you explain it like that, it doesn't seem so wonderful, after all."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"No," he said, "there's nothing in it."

"And," he added, "the only reward I ask for revealing the tricks of the trade, is that you call me to-morrow morning at seven o'clock sharp. Good-night!"

Taking another cigar from his case, the detective wandered thoughtfully up the stairs.

His investigations of that night had left him just three and three-quarter hours in which to sleep. Yet, before he turned in, not only that particular cigar, but another also had disappeared in perfumed smoke.

From which the reader may deduce, in his turn, that Nelson Lee was seeking, with

indifferent success, to reconstruct the train murder, and devising how to bring home the crime.

Yet, when he descended the stairs at seven-thirty, to meet the waiting Inspector Anderson, nothing of this appeared in his face.

"What a man!" thought the inspector. "Must sleep like a baby, to look as fresh as that!"

"Anderson," said Lee rapidly, "Barbeque's now coming down the stairs, and I've made arrangements to share his table for breakfast. Are you ready to make an arrest?"

"Yes."

"Good! Wait till I give the word, and I'll get you proof of guilt; but don't do anything before then."

"Now," continued Lee, "just one question. That agreement between Whittaker and the Pelaw Dry Dock people—did you find that in the dead man's pockets?"

"Why, no. It was upon the floor of the compartment, and half open."

"Good again! Now I want to have another look at that agreement. Have you got it with you?"

The inspector had. Nelson Lee took a watchmaker's glass from his pocket, and scrutinised it carefully.

"This is important," he said.

Barbeque turned out to be a man of middle-age, broad, bronzed, and vigorous.

When Lee apologised for taking seats at his table, he accepted the situation with perfect good humour.

"That's all right," he said. "I'm expecting a business acquaintance to join me; but, if you don't mind, I don't. And, any way, there is a chair left."

He reserved the remaining chair by tilting it forward, and the three of them—Barbeque, Lee, and Inspector Anderson, entered into conversation, after the genial custom of the North.

"Dreadful thing," said Lee, after a remark or two about weather and trade, "this murder on the train last night!"

"Eh? What's that? I hadn't heard anything about it."

Lee had deduced that Barbeque was a man of strong nerve, and it certainly seemed like it.

"A man named Whittaker," Lee told him, "murdered on the last train from Newcastle."

"Whittaker!" gasped Barbeque. "Good heavens! Not Charlie Whittaker?"

"Charles J. Whittaker," Lee assured him, "the engineers' merchant."

"Charlie Whittaker!" repeated Barbeque, as if dazed. "Well, well! I'd known old Charlie Whittaker for—ten years, I should think. Have they got any idea of the guilty party?"

"Yes," replied Lee; "and I understand that they are about to make an arrest."

"I hope," said Barbeque humorously, "that they are not after me. My relations

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2:

with Charlie Whittaker were not of the sweetest, and I travelled by that train last night."

"Doubtless," said Lee politely, "you would be able to produce an alibi?"

"As a matter of fact," acknowledged Barbeque, rather more seriously, "I don't think I could. You see, I was alone in my compartment."

"First-class?" asked Anderson.

For the first time, Barbeque seemed to perceive that his table companions were seriously interested in his remarks.

"Yes," he replied, "first class."

His manner had become defensive.

"Return or single?" continued Anderson.

"Single," was the reply. "I am travelling back on my car."

The inspector looked interrogatively at Nelson Lee. This reply was almost an admission of guilt. As the reader will remember, no single ticket had been surrendered by the passengers leaving the train in question.

But Nelson Lee did not yet give the word; and their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Barbeque's guest.

"Heard the news?" said the latter, as soon as he was seated.

"You mean about Charlie Whittaker?" asked Barbeque. "Yes, these gentlemen were just telling me. Strangely enough, I was on the train myself."

The new-comer, a spare, dark man, named Rackham, looked strangely at Barbeque, on hearing the last remark.

"You were, eh?" he said.

There was a slightly uncomfortable silence.

After a moment, Barbeque's guest began to make conversation about affairs in general. Barbeque himself replied in monosyllables. Nelson Lee and Inspector Anderson had nothing further to say.

As the meal ended, however, Anderson scribbled the single word: "When?" on the menu card in front of him.

He was asking Nelson Lee, who was the only other member of the quartette, who could see what he had written, at what moment he should make the arrest.

"Five minutes," murmured the private detective. And with that reply the inspector had to be content.

That he was willing to make the arrest at all argues much for his faith in Nelson Lee; for, as the reader will perceive, the evidence against Barbeque was purely circumstantial, and weak at that.

Then, as the five minutes neared its end, Inspector Anderson noticed a curious thing. Rackham had deposited his attache-case on the floor between himself and Nelson Lee, and the private detective was surreptitiously undoing the clasps which prevented it from opening.

What foolery was this? It was very unlike Nelson Lee to play a practical joke, especially at a moment when a man was about to be arrested for murder. What interest had Lee in the contents of Rackham's attache case?

The inspector was soon to know.

Hardly had Lee completed his strange task, when both Barbeque and Rackham rose from the table.

Without looking down, the latter caught his bag by the handle, and lifted—

A number of papers fell in all directions, and, with them, a short length of iron bar.

Suddenly, surprisingly, Rackham screamed. He seized the iron bar, and attempted, with clumsy fingers, to thrust it into his breast-pocket. His face had turned ashen grey, and his expression was that of a hunted animal.

Then, before any of the others could move or speak, his fit of hysteria passed. He became the calmest man in that astonished room.

"I must apologise," he said, and, as he spoke, his glance wandered from face to face until he looked into the accusing eyes of Nelson Lee.

"You know?" he muttered wonderingly.

"Yes," the detective said, "I know."

It was not until some hours later that Nelson Lee explained the meaning of this strange scene to Inspector Anderson.

By that time Rackham had confessed his guilt, and been safely escorted to Durham gaol.

"What saved Barbeque," the private detective explained, "was a trace of fountain-pen ink upon the agreement which you found in the railway carriage."

"When I went to bed last night, I was half convinced that Barbeque was guilty."

"Then, while I thought it over, in company with a cigar, I remembered that agreement."

"I had noticed that, in the space where the representative of the Pelaw Dry Dock people should have signed, there was a tiny speck of ink, as if someone had put a pen to it, with the intention of signing."

"Further, right across the document, were a number of tiny smudges in the same ink, which at first I did not understand."

"Then it came to me that if a leaky fountain-pen had been allowed to roll across the paper, it would have made just such a series of smudges."

"From that I attempted to reconstruct the crime."

"Someone—necessarily one of the signatories of the agreement—had put pen to the paper; and then, in the act of signing, dropped his pen, and allowed it to roll across the typescript."

"The agreement was dated for that day, and you told me that you had found it upon the floor, open. If you remember, I confirmed this when I saw you."

"Was it during that fatal journey that the signature had been begun and never finished? I thought it was."

"If so, it was reasonable to suppose that both the contracting parties were present. The ink smudge did not begin at the space

for Whittaker's signature, you must remember.

"Assuming, then—and I grant you that it was only an assumption—that the ink smudge was made an instant before Whittaker met his death, the signatory for the other side—for the Pelaw Dry Dock—was present. In other words, he was either the murderer, or an accessory.

"I learnt that Barbeque had a business appointment at breakfast, and that his appointment was with the representative of the Pelaw Dry Dock. This being so, I determined to rely on opportunity to confirm my suspicions.

"Once I set eyes on Rackham, I was fairly certain that he was guilty.

"But it is one thing to believe a man guilty, and another to prove it. It was Rackham himself who put the proof into my hand.

"Halfway through breakfast, he was talking to Barbeque about some papers, and extended his hand, obviously for the purpose of lifting his attache case.

"Then, as I watched him, he checked himself. At the same time, he turned pale to the lips.

"That was decisive. If he turned pale at the bare thought of what would happen if his attache case were opened in public, I knew that its contents must be interesting.

"As you know, I set a trap, and the man gave himself away."

"Yes," said Anderson; "I'm half sorry for the chap. That fellow Whittaker had

got a hold over him, and was using his advantage to force him to sign. At the very moment when he had put pen to paper, he was seized by a fit of rage, snatched up that sample length of steel rod from his attache case, and hit out."

Lee nodded.

"That's the way I sized it up," he said.

"Lucky for Barbeque," admitted the inspector, "that you were on this case. I don't mind owning up that, otherwise, Barbeque would be under arrest for wilful murder at this moment. That statement of his, that he took a single ticket, when no single ticket was surrendered——"

"Was absolutely correct," finished Lee. "Last night, I had an opportunity of inspecting Mr. Barbeque's overcoat, unknown to him, and I noticed a white railway ticket, sticking out of his ticket-pocket inside. Barbeque is a careless man, and no doubt walked through the barrier without noticing that he had omitted to surrender his ticket."

"Which piece of carelessness," supplemented the inspector, "might have cost Barbeque his life—but for you. And I don't suppose he has the least idea how much he owes to you."

But there Inspector Anderson was making a mistake, as was proved by the very agreeable little dinner to which Barbeque invited them both, on the night when Nelson Lee left the North to take up more important matters in the region of Gray's Inn Road.

THE END.

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Mr. Achilles Chopps, the new tutor, arrives at Wrasper's School. There is something mysterious about him, for he will allow no one to enter his room, where he plays sweet music at night on a kind of harmonium. Since the new usher's arrival there have been strange appearances of a phantom hearse. Considerable interest is aroused at the visit of Mr. Chopps' uncle to the school.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XVI.

Perks's Queer Movements.

IN a few minutes the police-inspector arrived.

"'Morning, Baynes!" he said.

"What's all this about a cart with a false bottom?"

"Look for yourself," said Baynes, pointing.

"Well, it seems solid enough," said the officer.

"But it ain't solid!" replied Baynes, a trifle irritably. "I don't make silly mistakes, inspector."

"You made one going down that well in a hurry!" said the inspector drily.

A general laugh rewarded the officer for his mild witticism, and put him in a good humour.

"I dare say you're quite right, Baynes," he said patronisingly. "Get some tools, and open the thing up for me—will you?"

"What's that flat-headed nail in the centre?" asked Tom, pointing to a small, circular piece of iron. "It looks like a spring of some sort."

"It certainly does," agreed the inspector. "I must have a closer look at that."

He got into the cart, and pressed the iron disc with his thumb.

Instantly one of the planks at the bottom of the cart divided in the middle, each end rising about six inches.

The bottom of the cart was hollow. But it was not empty.

In an iron tray, about two feet square, were a number of soap-like cakes of a greyish colour, and attached to the tray itself was a small machine of wheels and springs, with a hammer so placed that when released by the machinery it would strike these greyish cakes.

Embedded in them were a number of percussion-caps.

The inspector turned pale.

"Stand back, all of you!" he cried.

"Don't touch the cart for your lives! Baynes, get me a box and some sawdust."

"What is it?" asked Tom.

"Dynamite, I fancy," replied the inspector.

As the dread word fell from his lips the spectators fell back, most of them with livid faces.

Baynes had not heard the word, for he had gone to look to his shop.

He came back with a box half-filled with sawdust.

"What is it?" he asked. "A new sort of soap?"

"Yes," replied the inspector; "soap that will clear a lot of dirt away and leave no suds. Let it alone, man, and don't so much as sneeze when you are near it."

"What is it?" asked Baynes, with a gasp. "Not—not—"

"Yes, it is," said Tom, "or it looks like it. But it won't go off without a blow."

"I'll just see what's doing in the shop," said Baynes hurriedly.

"What's the good of your doing that?" said the inspector. "There is enough dynamite here, if dynamite it is, to blow the whole village right away over the quarries. But let us keep cool over it."

With great care he placed the cakes in the box, covering each with a layer of sawdust, and when all were taken out of the bottom

of the cart he proceeded to examine the little machine.

He discovered that there was a wire cord communicating with the front of the cart.

It was made very secure, and unless deliberately released the prospect of the hammer falling was very remote.

The inspector furthermore discovered that even when the cord was released the wheels made a great many revolutions ere the hammer fell.

Fully three minutes' grace was given to the party letting it loose.

Tom had already stayed too long, and he was obliged to hurry away without having a desired talk with the inspector.

Whoever had driven that cart had something to do with the hearse affair.

Of that Tom was sure.

But why dynamite?

Why should that dread explosive be used in connection with such vehicles as a hearse and ordinary cart?

It was, indeed, mysterious—incomprehensible.

"Things are getting lively," thought Tom, as he hurried back. "I wonder what share Chopps has in this business, if any?"

Tom had an idea of questioning Perks, but on second thoughts he saw it would not do.

Perks was not an ordinary boy.

Any accepted method of pumping would, in his case, fail.

And failure on Tom's part might effectually stop his career as a discoverer of mysteries.

So Tom decided to say nothing to Perks.

Peddleton had narrowly escaped disaster; for, according to expert opinion, the whole village would have been blown sky-high, had the contents of the false bottom in the cart exploded.

But what on earth was that cart doing there?

All the efforts of the police to fathom that mystery came to nothing, and although Tom had a theory that Uncle Josiah and Achilles Chopps were somehow involved in it, he could find out nothing to prove the correctness of such a theory.

It was on the fifth day after the strange affair that something else occurred that was of some interest to Tom. He was in the class-room alone, just before dinner-time, writing a letter home, when the door suddenly opened, and Jane, the housemaid, thrust in her head.

"Hallo, Jane!" said Tom. "Looking for anybody?"

Jane came into the room, closing the door behind her.

"I thought Mr. Wrasper was here, Master Tartar," she said; "but p'raps you'll do instead."

"What is it you want?" asked Tom, in surprise.

"There's such a curious noise in the lumber-room," Jane replied—"in Solitary, where you used to be shut up. It sounds like rats, but I don't think it is."

"I'll come with you and see what it means," replied Tom, as he laid down his pen.

He accompanied Jane, who was in a very nervous state, to the lumber-room.

On the way there she explained that she had been looking for an old box to send something away to a friend, when she heard the noises.

"There was a sort of scratching and knocking," she said, "and I fancied I heard somebody speak."

"Hardly likely," replied Tom; "nobody is ever shut in that room."

As Tom and Jane entered the room, the panel entrance to Solitary, which, the reader will remember, was close to the ground, slid up, and Perks came half-way out.

He stopped short on seeing Tom. His face was a study.

"Hallo!" said Tom. "What on earth are you up to, Perks?"

"I—I just went in to see what it was like," gasped Perks, "and I got shut in. I—I couldn't find the fastening."

"But how did you ever learn it?" asked Tom.

"Oh, Master Smith one day showed it to me!" replied Perks.

"How long have you been here?"

"Half an hour."

"Come out! You might have been there all day and all night."

Perks came slowly out, and as soon as he was clear of the panel he pulled it down.

"It is a horrible place," he said. "I don't know how you stood it in the old days."

And without another word he darted away.

What was Perks doing in Solitary?

As for experimenting on himself, that was all nonsense.

"Two and two make four and one more is five," thought Tom "I'm getting nearer and nearer to what I want."

He returned to the school-room finished his letter and was placing it in the outgoing post-box in the hall when the dinner-bell rang.

He had no opportunity to communicate with his chums until the meal was over and then he only spoke to Sam Smith about what he had seen.

"Why did you ever explain Solitary to him?" Tom asked.

"I never did" replied Sam.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes! I never talk to Perks—I don't like him. He is neither man nor boy, but something uncanny to my thinking."

"I wonder if he is hiding anything away in Solitary?" said Tom.

"We can see."

"Let it be in the evening, then. After tea we'll have a look around."

This they did.

About seven o'clock they stole softly to the lumber-room, and with the aid of a short piece of candle and a match with which they had provided themselves, tried to open the secret panel.

But, although they pressed the secret spring again and again, it would not stir.

"That fool Perks has put it out of order," said Sam Smith.

"It seems likely," replied Tom. "I wonder whether he did it intentionally?"

"Why intentionally?" asked Sam.

"Oh, it is an idea of mine!" returned Tom. "I will tell you what it is by-and-by."

Disappointed, they blew out the candle, and departed.

A few seconds later Perks crept out from behind a lot of empty boxes, and stole to the door.

Then he peeped out to see if anybody was outside.

The coast was clear, and he boldly went into the hall.

"Intentionally or not!" he muttered. "That is what you won't know just yet, Mister Tartar!"

With stealthy step he ascended the stairs, and, gliding down the corridor, entered Mr. Chopps' room, without knocking or giving any sign of his presence.

CHAPTER XVII.

Mr. Ralston Appears on the Scene.

ACHILLES CHOPPS was always buoyant, but of late, under his buoyancy there was a distinct appearance of anxiety.

Mr. Wrasper remarked to him that he did not appear as well as usual.

To which Mr. Chopps responded:

"I am as well, and I am not. This uncle of mine troubles me."

"How is that?"

"He promises to wear out his welcome as country people say. Finding himself very comfortable here, he does not seem inclined to go; and I begin to fear that you and Mrs. Wrasper must be finding him something of a nuisance."

"Oh, not at all, Chopps!" replied Mr. Wrasper. "Your uncle gives us no trouble."

"He is anxious to make some return," said Chopps uneasily, "and is well able to do it. He has some splendid lace in his possession—very old—and he wishes Mrs. Wrasper to accept it."

"Mrs. Wrasper would be much gratified," said Mr. Wrasper; "but is he not overpaying us?"

"Not at all," said Chopps, seemingly relieved.

So the lace was presented; and as it was really first-class Mrs. Wrasper was delighted, and Uncle Josiah lengthened his stay.

It was two days later when Peddleton received an addition to its population in the form of a stranger, who came and took up his abode at the Widow Blake's as a lodger.

He gave the name of Ralston, and announced himself as a bachelor possessed of moderate means, and desirous of enjoying a country life.

He had a decided "City" look about him, and it soon leaked out that he had been clerk in a firm that had pensioned him off after twenty-five years' service in the counting-house.

He admitted he was fifty years of age, but looked younger—not more than forty. But that could be accounted for by his being one of those cheery, good-tempered fellows, who look on the bright side of life, and take everything pretty well as it comes.

When Mr. Wrasper heard of the arrival he said to Mrs. Wrasper:

"I really think I ought to call upon him. If we do not like him we need not have too much of his society."

Mrs. Wrasper agreed to the proposal.

There was not too much social intercourse in the village, and a little addition to it would be welcome.

So Mr. Wrasper and Mr. Chopps called on Ralston, and found him to be a nice sort of fellow.

They took to him immediately, and he took to them—especially to Chopps.

There was something in these men that brought them together, like the needle and the magnet.

Ralston returned the call, and before a week was out he was considered to be a close friend.

Being a bachelor, he had plenty of time on his hands, and, as it seemed, he was very fond of boys.

He took a strong interest in their doings, and was never tired of talking to them.

As for the old school house, he declared he had never seen such a place.

He was, by his desire, shown all over it, and commented like a member of the British Archæological Association on the many quaint bits of architecture, in and out the house.

Mr. Wrasper naturally was reserved about the secret places which had had once served for solitary confinement.

They brought back memories he would fain have forgotten. So he said nothing whatever about them.

Ralston rather took to Perks.

He was courteous even to Wooden Jerry, but to Perks he was kind.

But he did not take much to Uncle Josiah; nor did Uncle Josiah take to him.

After a first interview, which consisted of bawling on Ralston's part and misunderstandings by Uncle Josiah, they showed no inclination to extend their acquaintance into friendship.

Possibly the fact that Uncle Josiah about this time caught a cold and was confined two days to his room had something to do with it.

Certain it is that they afterwards exchanged nothing in the way of social courtesies but a nod and the conventional smile.

Ralston one day asked Mr. Wrasper if

he might invite some of the boys to his rooms to tea.

Permission was readily granted and the guests invited were Tom Tartar, Sam Smith, McLara, Turrell, Hammerton, and Willie Grey. By some means, Ralston had gathered that these boys were chums. He gave them a glorious feed; for it was a high-tea, with game-pie, chicken, tongue, ham, and jam-tarts galore.

When they had done full justice to the good things, they gathered round the fire—for it was a chilly evening—and talked.

The talk changed from one theme to another, and finally reached the subject of ghosts.

That, of course, led to the story of the hearse, and Ralston was exceedingly interested. So much so, indeed, that he asked innumerable questions, to which Tom and the others freely responded.

In short, they trusted him with all they knew, and with their suspicions about Uncle Josiah, and the occasionally strange conduct of Chopps.

"Of course, it is in confidence," Tom said, "you won't let it go any further?"

"Not without your permission," was Ralston's reply. "Now, as to this Perks. He seems to be a strange sort of boy?"

"He isn't a boy or a man," replied Sam Smith.

"What is he, then?"

"A mixture."

"About this solitary room," said Ralston. "How big is it?"

"Oh, it is little more than a big, old-fashioned cupboard," replied Tom.

"You say it is closed up?"

"One side is. There are two places, one on either side of the fireplace."

"But the one Perks came out of is closed?"

"He damaged the spring."

"Are you sure?"

"Weil," replied Tom, "it would not open."

"But, for all that, it may be only secured in some additional way outside—a screw or a nail in the upper part of the panel might do it."

"We never thought of that," said Tom; "but we can have another look and see."

"Do so," nodded Ralston. "It is just possible that some strange work has been going on."

The boys bade their genial host "Good-night" at about nine o'clock, and started off for the school.

CHAPTER XIII.

Uncle Josiah Loses his Wig.

THERE were lights in some of the cottage windows, and also at the inn, from whence came sounds of rustic harmony in the tap-room.

As soon as the boys were past the inn

everything before them seemed absolutely black.

"It is a good job we have not far to go," said Sam Smith, softly.

Nobody answered him, for none were in the humour for talking, and they had also to carefully pick their way.

It is very easy to take a wrong step in the dark, and if a ditch happens to be handy—why, there you are—in it!

They made very little noise as they went along, but Tom, who led the way, counted the steps he took until he reckoned they were near the gate.

He expected to find a light visible, but nothing could be seen.

He found a reason for this when he put out his hand and touched the blank wall.

"I have not come far enough," he thought.

And as the thought came into his head he heard somebody breathing near him.

Knowing all his companions were a step or two behind him, he felt sure it was a stranger.

Out went his hand, and he touched the brim of a hat.

Whoever that somebody was, he was stooping.

"Who is it?" cried Tom, making a grab at him.

The hat was knocked off, and Tom's hand grasped the hair of a man's head.

Determined to know who it was, he held on to that.

But although he grasped it tight, the owner slipped away, leaving it in his hand.

"Hanged if I haven't got hold of a wig!" exclaimed Tom.

He cried out for his companions to stop whoever it was, but the owner of the wig was already clear away, and running down the road.

"What's the row?" asked George Hammerton.

"Nothing much," replied Tom, as he put the wig into his pocket.

He groped his way along another half-dozen paces, and then he came to the gate.

A light was burning in the hall, and the rest of the way was easy.

The other boys were almost ready for bed. Perks was just lighting the candles in the hall.

Tom took the one for his dormitory, and went upstairs without saying a word about the wig.

It was not until he got into the dormitory and had closed the door that he mentioned it.

"Now, boys," he said, "don't say anything aloud or give way to any exclamations. I think I have made a discovery."

He drew the wig out of his pocket and held it up.

It was a grey one—almost white.

"Whose wig is that?" he asked.

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

(Continued from page 40.)

"Uncle Josiah's," they all answered.
 "But whoever thought he wore one?" said Sam Smith.

"I half suspected it," said Tom, "but I never knew for certain until I took it off."

"And when did you do that?" asked Laurence.

"To-night. He was lying close against the wall when I was feeling for the gate."

"Whew!" said Sam. "Here's a discovery."

"Yes," said Tom, "but we must not make too much of a song about it. Indeed, I do not see how we can mention it. It proves nothing in itself, although I think it's mighty suspicious."

"What was the old man doing there?" asked George.

"Ah! That's the point," said Tom. "He may say he was doing a hundred harmless things so I vote we say nothing whatever about it, but just keep this thing until by-and-bye."

They all had a good look at the wig.

It was a splendidly-made article, with springs, so as to fit the head closely.

It was about as good a wig as money could buy.

Mr. Chopps was in his usual mood the next morning—cheerful and buoyant—as he took his seat at the breakfast-table.

He asked the boys how they had enjoyed themselves at Mr. Ralston's, and was glad to hear they had a pleasant evening.

"I went out with my uncle for a walk," he said, "and it was so dark that we actually managed to lose each other."

How they succeeded in doing that he did not venture to explain.

"The poor old gentleman had quite an adventure near here," he went on. "He was groping about for the gate when he was robbed."

An exclamation escaped those boys who knew nothing of the affair.

Tom and his friends kept silent.

"And what do you think they robbed him of?" asked Mr. Chopps.

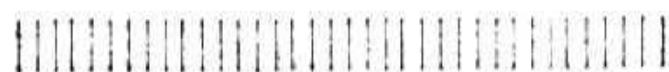
"His money, sir," suggested Pubsey Wrasper.

"No; they only succeeded in getting his wig," said Mr. Chopps, laughing heartily.

"My uncle," he proceeded to explain, "has worn a wig for some years. It is made of his own hair, which came out when he had a fever. He feels the loss of the wig very much, and will gladly pay a reward of five pounds for its recovery."

The bait held out was not taken. Tom had his own opinion of the story he had just heard, and inwardly determined that fifty pounds would not tempt him to relinquish possession of that wig!

(To be continued.)

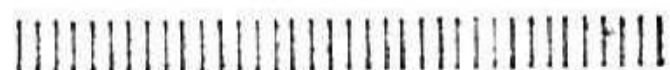


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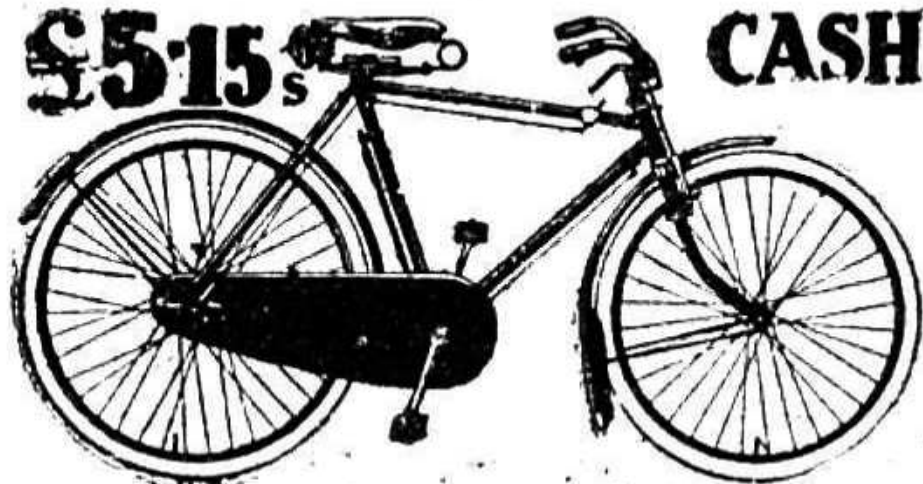
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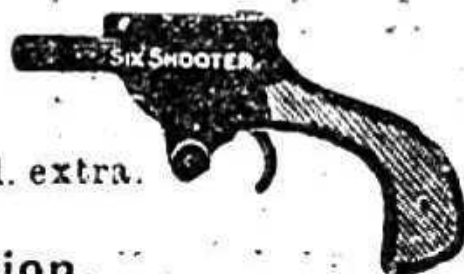
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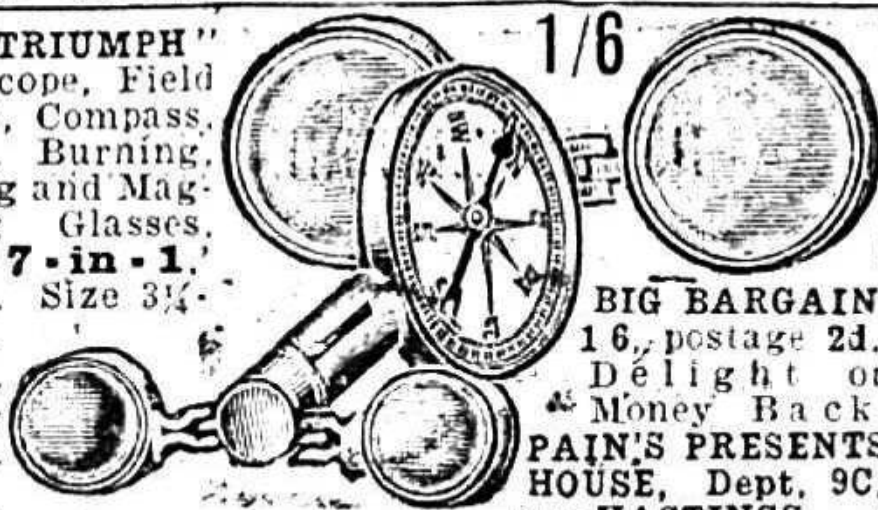
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