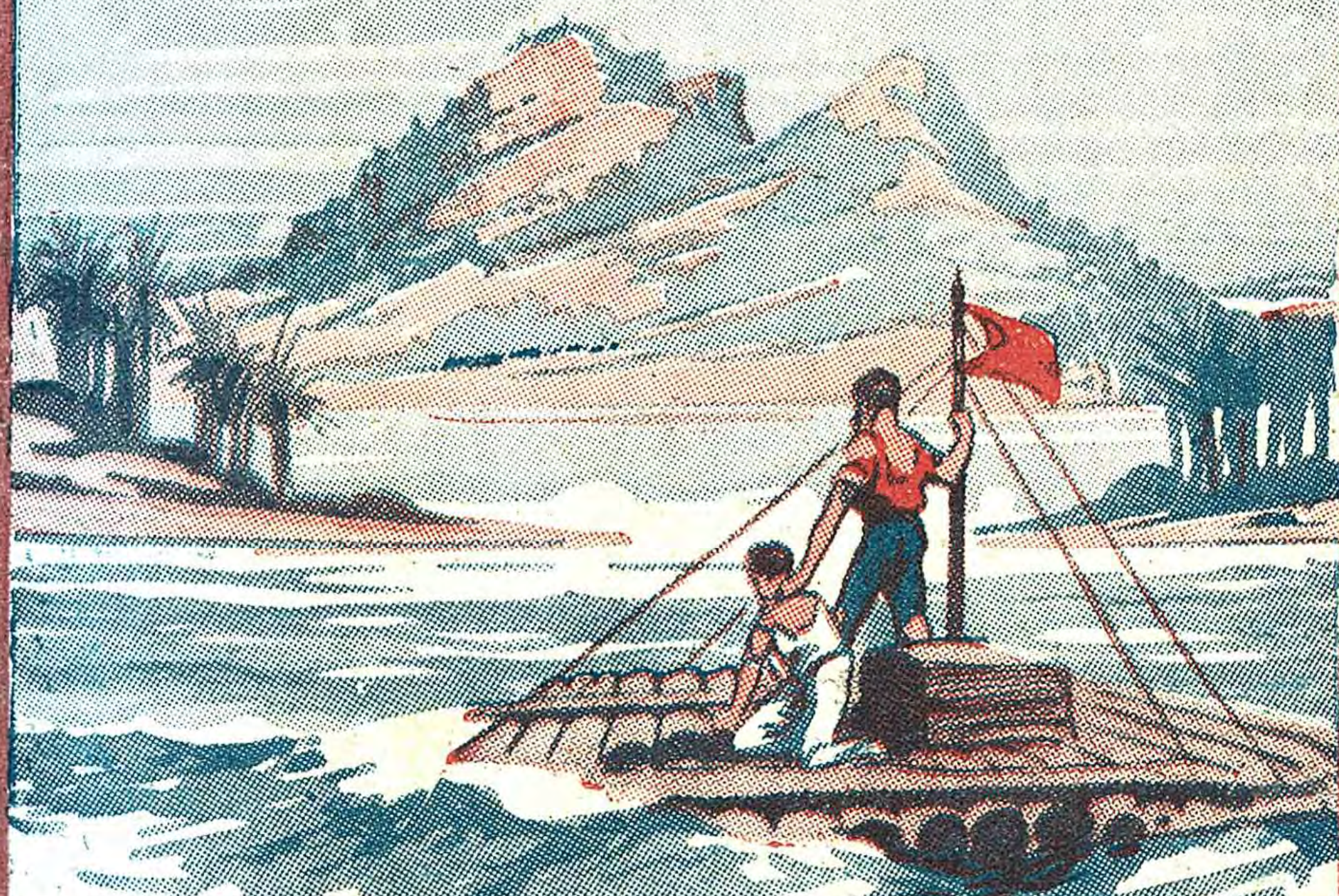


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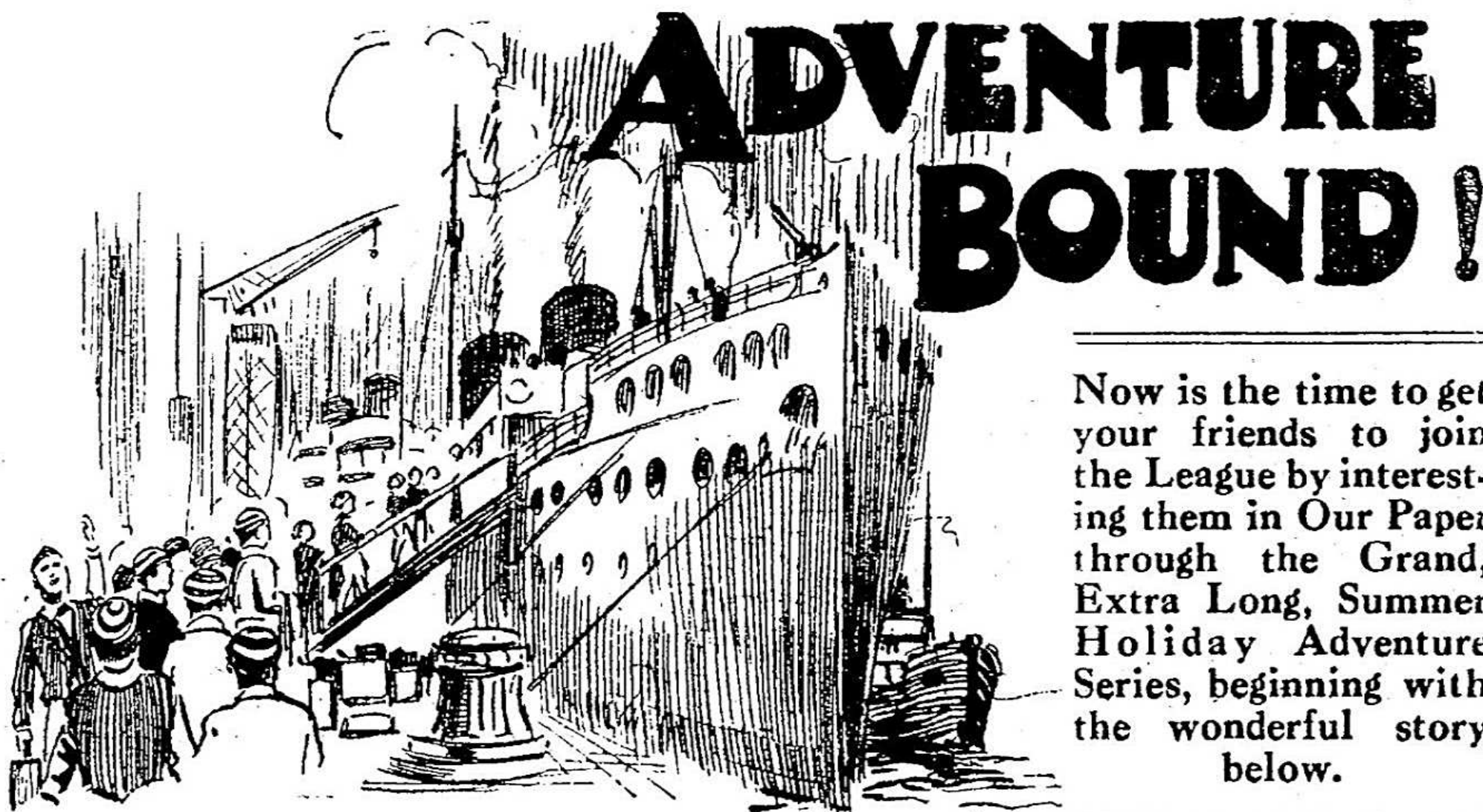


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By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

THE PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

A NIGHT IN 'FRISCO.

"TROUBLE?" said Lord Dorrimore keenly.

"Sounds like it, sir."

His lordship moved nearer to the gangway of the Wanderer, and stood peering into the mist and darkness. He could see nothing. The water front was enshrouded in the gloom of midnight.

The steward joined Lord Dorrimore, and they stood there, gazing into the murk and listening intently. San Francisco was half-blotted out in the night mist, and although it was real summer-time, there was a raw nip in the atmosphere.

The Wanderer was in dock, and across the bay a few of the lights of Oakland could dimly be seen struggling through the uneven fog patches. A ferry-boat, on its way across, showed up ghost-like with its will-o'-the-wisp lights.

But neither Lord Dorrimore nor the steward were looking in this direction. Their attention was attracted ashore—to the water front, where everything was dim and mysterious.

The famous explorer had come up on deck for a breath of air before turning in, and had been rather surprised to find the night

so thick and chill—particularly as the day had been blazingly hot. Even for 'Frisco, where cold nights are usual, the sudden change was out of the common.

Dorrie had found one of the stewards on deck, indulging in a pipe—Russell, a man who had only signed on a few days earlier. He was a quiet, refined, gentlemanly fellow, and Dorrie already liked him.

"I'll warrant there's trouble over there," declared his lordship, as he tossed his cigarette-end away. "There's no tellin' what goes on in this infernal quarter! 'Frisco's a tough town, Russell, an' the water front is the toughest part of it."

"By Jove, you're right, sir," replied Russell grimly.

Dorrie gave him a keen look for a moment. There was something about the steward which singled him out from all other members of his calling. Dorrie felt sure that the man had a story—he had been something better than this.

The sound which had attracted him in the first place had been a sharp, piercing cry, obviously from a girl or woman, cut off suddenly and significantly. There was nothing particularly unusual in this—in such a quarter—but Dorrie was nevertheless interested.

"Some brawl or other, I dare say, sir," remarked the steward. "We're not so very far from Chinatown, and the whole district



is infested with toughs and such like characters. I shouldn't worry, sir."

Dorrie always insisted upon being addressed as "sir" by all the members of his yacht's crew. He was a true democrat, and had no particular love for his title.

"I'm not worryin', Russell," he said lightly. "But I happen to have a considerable curiosity. I always like to know— By gad! Did you hear that?"

The steward had certainly heard it—another feminine cry, this time desperate and plaintive. And although the two men could see nothing, they instinctively knew that the sounds were proceeding from a spot comparatively near by. Lord Dorrimore made a move down the gangway.

"Better not go, sir!" said Russell earnestly.

"Rubbish!" retorted his lordship.

"Take my advice, sir——"

"Nothin' doin'!" interrupted Dorrie, as he leapt ashore. "You stay there, Russell—I'll deal with this."

He vanished amid the gloom along the dock, and ran lightly forward, instinctively clenching his fists as he did so. Dorrie was a hunter by nature. He didn't know the meaning of fear, and danger of any kind always attracted him. He had lived amid perils for years, and liked them.

Skirting one of the water front buildings, he suddenly came upon a confused little group in the gloom. There were three men by what he could see at first glance, and one of them was trying to wrench something from the hands of a girl while the other two stood looking on.

She was Chinese, and the men were toughs of the worst type. Dorrie reduced his pace, and walked up leisurely.

"What's the trouble here?" he asked calmly.

The men turned upon him, surprised at the interruption. The Chinese girl, suddenly released, fled into the darkness on the instant. She had lost no time in taking advantage of her opportunity.

"Doggone you for a son of blazes!" snarled one of the men in a thick, drunken voice. "Say, who told you to butt in?"

"I wasn't aware that I had butted in," retorted Lord Dorrimore. "I heard something unusual, so I came along to have a look——"

He got no further, for with one accord the three men rushed at him. Their action was not so much impelled by a desire for revenge as the instinctive knowledge that here was a promising victim. Dorrie's very appearance proclaimed him to be a gentleman—and it was more than likely he carried a heavy roll of dollar bills. And men are murdered in San Francisco for the sake of a mere song.

"All right!" roared Dorrie. "If that's your game, I'm ready to oblige!"

Crash!

He landed a shattering blow upon the first face within reach. Single-handed, he would have been a match for these toughs, had they confined themselves to fist fighting. But guns and knives were more to their liking.

In spite of the gloom, Dorrie caught a flash of steel, and his eyes blazed. With a swift dart backwards he avoided the murderous thrust. But at the same time he knew that the situation was desperate. He was in evening-dress, and carried no revolver—he had only his fists to rely upon.

He was not a rash man. He did not usually enter into brawls, although he loved a scrap as much as anybody. This particular fight had sprung up unexpectedly.

And Dorrie managed to hold his own, although, in his heart, he knew perfectly well that cold steel would penetrate him within a very few seconds unless help came.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIGHT IN THE FOG.



RUSSELL, the steward, stood near the gangway, staring keenly into the gloom and listening intently. Dorrie had only just disappeared, and one or two confused sounds came to the steward's ears.

A footstep sounded behind him, and a hand touched his arm.

"Anything wrong, dad?"

Russell turned, and found himself looking at a youngster of about fifteen—a broad-shouldered, sturdy boy with fair hair, and a cheery, open countenance. He, too, was dressed in uniform.

"Yes, Clive, I guess there is," said Russell sharply. "There's a fight going on, or something, and Lord Dorrimore has just gone ashore. I think I'd better——"

"A fight?" interrupted Clive tensely. "And Lord Dorrimore's in danger? Say, dad, let's hurry! There's no telling what may happen down here at midnight. Hallo, did you hear that?"

"Yes, I did!" muttered Russell grimly. "You stay there!"

He fairly leapt across the gangway and ran into the mist, but Clive was at his heels. The father and son had both secured work on the *Wanderer*—Russell as a steward, and Clive as deck-boy. Their inclusion in the *Wanderer's* crew had come about by chance, for the ordinary British crew was practically permanent.

On this trip, however, one of the stewards had learned by cable that his mother was grievously ill, and Dorrie had sent him full speed overland and thence across the Atlantic by one of the fastest liners.

Thus, a man short, a temporary steward had been employed—and Russell, being a Canadian, and a refined, gentlemanly man, had secured the berth. Dorrie had instinctively liked him at the first interview, and had not troubled about many inquiries. Russell, however, had his son with him, and Dorrie had good-naturedly signed on Clive as a deck-boy.

The pair were grateful—far more grateful than Dorrie had suspected. Their joy at being in a British ship—and a luxurious private yacht at that—had been overwhelming. And they now had a chance to prove what they thought of their benefactor—for they regarded him as such.

Russell caught sight of the fighting figures in the gloom, and he plunged into the fray without a second's hesitation. Lord Dorrimore was in urgent need of help, too. By sheer agility, by the skilful use of his fists, he had kept up his end so far. And the three toughs were convinced, by this time, that even a Britisher in evening-dress can hit like a sledge-hammer.

Not that Dorrie had escaped unscathed. He had received a nasty slash in the forearm, and the wound was bleeding profusely.

"Good man!" panted Dorrie, as Russell entered the fray. "Take that small fellow—I can deal with these, I fancy."

But even now the fight was uneven. Russell obeyed orders, and took on the smallest of the three toughs—his intention being to knock the man out, and then turn to Dorrie's further assistance.

But the small man had ideas of his own. He was not relying upon his fists as a means of protection. As he fell back before Russell's onslaught, his foot caught against a heavy piece of timber. In a flash he swept it up from the ground and swung it round.

Crash!

Russell, unprepared for such methods, received the blow in the side, and for a moment he was nearly winded. In the meantime, the other two hooligans were taking full advantage of Dorrie's growing weakness—for loss of blood was having its due effect.

One of the pair managed to land a heavy blow, and Dorrie staggered. But there was plenty of fight in him yet. Instead of falling back, he recovered quickly and attacked with greater ferocity than ever. But at the same instant the other gangster saw an opportunity of driving his knife home. He raised it, and thrust swiftly and murderously.

And it was at this very second that Clive Russell entered the fight. Whether he saw Dorrie's terrible peril or not is doubtful, but he cared nothing. He flung himself between Lord Dorrimore and the striking tough.

Thud!

The knife went home—deeply into the unfortunate youngster's side, instead of into Dorrie's heart. Without a cry, Clive sank to the ground, and the terrible incident was over. It had happened so swiftly and unexpectedly that even Dorrie didn't know exactly what had happened.

The man who had used the knife suddenly lost his nerve and fled. The knowledge of his action had probably deprived him of courage. And the other two men, scenting that tragedy had occurred, dropped the fight.

Cursing furiously, they followed their companion into the gloom, and Lord Dorrimore and Russell found themselves standing alone, with the fog swirls wreathing about them.

"Phew! That was a bit warm while it lasted!" said Dorrie breathlessly. "Thanks, Russell! That was splendid! I shan't forget this—Why, good gad! What in the name of—"

He broke off, staring down at the still figure near him. Russell, for the first time, became aware that his son had entered the fight. He dropped on his knees, and then screamed aloud with sudden horror. His hand had encountered the abandoned knife, and his fingers were sticky.

"Heaven help me!" he moaned. "The boy's been killed!"

"Killed?" muttered Dorrie tensely. "Russell! You don't mean—"

But the steward was gently lifting the stricken boy into his arms. Lord Dorrimore, forgetting his own injury, leapt forward. This tragic occurrence had horrified him more than he could express.

"We'll take him on board!" he said huskily. "We must get a doctor—he may still live! Poor kid! He took the thrust instead of me! Russell, your son saved my life at the expense of his own."

"It can't be true—it can't!" muttered Russell distractedly. "He was alive a minute ago—as strong and healthy—Heaven preserve him, sir! I can't believe it—I can't—"

"Let's get him aboard!" interrupted Dorrie fiercely.

CHAPTER III.

TOUCH AND GO.



LORD DORRIMORE stood against the Wanderer's rail, staring unseeingly across the bay towards the ghostly lights of Oakland. Half an

hour had passed, and Dorrie was awaiting the verdict.

Russell and his son were below, and there were two doctors in attendance upon the boy. They had been rushed to the spot at express speed, and had been making their examination for the last ten minutes.

Dorrie himself had performed first aid, upon carrying the lad below. The knife wound was deep—in the left side. But there seemed just a chance that the heart had not been penetrated, for Clive was still breathing.

"Hadn't you better go below, too, Lord Dorrimore?"

Dorrie turned at the sound of the quiet voice, and found that Captain Burton had joined him. The Wanderer's skipper had turned out upon hearing of the dramatic affray. Practically the entire complement of the yacht lived on board. The Wanderer was due to sail on the morrow, in any case—bound for home.

"Go below?" repeated Lord Dorrimore. "I?"

"Yes, you!" said Captain Burton grimly, as he fingered his grizzled moustache. "What about that gash in your arm? Man alive, you'll bleed to death unless you're attended to! You've only got a handkerchief round it—"

"Good glory! Why worry about me?" interrupted Dorrie gruffly. "I've had many worse scratches than this! The boy may be dying—and he took the knife-thrust that was intended for me! If he dies, I'll—I'll — But I can't believe it, captain."

He walked off, unwilling to talk. Usually, his lordship was the cheeriest of mortals, but this affair had practically silenced him. He wanted to be alone—and he was only waiting to hear the result of the examination. His own injury never occurred to him. Yet he was feeling weak and dizzy from loss of blood.

A figure appeared under the electric light which glowed above the main stairway. Dorrie approached.

"Well?" he asked quietly.

"The boy's all right, I guess," replied the other—a clean-shaven, middle-aged man with the unmistakable professional air of a doctor. "Fortunately, the blade just missed the vital parts—"

"He'll live?" asked Dorrie sharply.

"Sure, he'll live," said the doctor, smiling. "The heart isn't touched, and even the lung isn't pierced. He's a healthy youngster, and I don't think it'll even be necessary to shift him into hospital."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Lord Dorrimore, an immense load off his mind.

"Are there likely to be any complications?"

"I don't anticipate any," replied the doctor. "It's just a simple wound, and there's only one thing that can cure him—time. The boy's got a fine constitution, and a week or two ought to see him on his feet."

"This is the best news I've heard for many a day," said Lord Dorrimore, his natural light-heartedness surging to the surface. "Splendid! By gad! I'll repay the lad somehow!"

"You're sailing for England to-morrow, I understand?"

"That was the original plan—"

"The boy will be almost himself by the time you arrive," said the doctor, nodding. "All the same, I guess I'd wait here a couple of days if I were you, just to be on the safe side. Or you can leave the youngster behind—"

"No, I shan't do that," interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "The Wanderer will remain in 'Frisco for another two or three days—until all possibility of danger has passed. I'm in no hurry—my time's my own. Oh, by the way, you might have a look at this while you're here."

He held out his injured arm, and the doctor started.

"Say, what's the idea?" he asked sharply. "Why didn't you tell me about this before? You're winged, man!"

"It's nothin' much—only a scratch."

The doctor ordered his lordship below, and in a few moments his coat was off, and the arm laid bare. The gash was deep—and nasty. It had been bleeding continuously, as Dorrie's saturated handkerchief testified. But within fifteen minutes the wound was washed and anointed and dressed.

A little later, after both the doctors had gone, Lord Dorrimore had a few words with Russell. The steward was looking rather pale, but supremely relieved.

"He'll live, sir—the doctors are positive that he'll live," he said, with a kind of triumph in his voice. "I don't know what I should have done if—if—"

"No need to talk about it," interrupted Dorrie quietly. "Look here, Russell, I like you. Liked you the first minute I saw you. Without wishin' to pry into your affairs, haven't you any home?"

"No, sir."

"Your wife—"

"She died seven years ago, sir," said Russell gravely. "Clive is all I've got. I should advise you to get to bed, sir—"

"Just a moment—just a moment," said Dorrie. "Your son saved my life, Russell, an' pretty nearly lost his own. I'd like to do somethin' for the lad—an' that means doin' somethin' for you. You're not a steward—although you do your work amazin'ly well. You're somethin' better, Russell. I'd like to help the pair of you—"

"Thank you all the same, sir," interrupted Russell quietly. "We're Canadians—we've never accepted charity from anybody—"

"Charity be hanged!" interrupted Dorrie gruffly. "Don't talk rot! That boy risked his life—"

"It was just an accident, sir—it might have happened to anybody," said Russell. "As long as Clive gets well and strong everything will be all right. I know. I can be certain that you'll take good care of him, sir."

"By Jove, yes!" said his lordship. "Your boy shall have the best of everything on the homeward trip, an' if he isn't practically recovered by the time we sight the

cliffs of Old England I'm a Dutchman! At the same time, Russell, we can't let the matter end here. Surely there's somethin' I can help you in? Set you up in a business, finance one of your pet dreams, or somethin' of that sort? Remember, I've got more money than I can do with, and it'll be no tax on me!"

For a moment a keen, intent light burned in Russell's eyes. A flush came into his face, and he turned to Lord Dorrimore with a quickening of his breath. Then, gradually, his emotion died down.

"Well?" asked Dorrie curiously.

"Nothing, sir—nothing," replied Russell, himself again. "Thank you very much for your offer, but my son's restored health is all I want. Good night, sir."

He walked away, and Dorrie looked after him and shook his head.

"Queer!" he murmured, with a frown. "Can't understand the fellow. A gentleman to his fingertips—breedin' in every line of him. Yet he's a steward on this yacht! H'm! I'll get the truth from him one day!"

THE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

AN IMPORTANT OCCASION.



ENA HANDFORTH compressed her lips firmly.

"I'll wait just one more minute, and not a second longer!" she declared.

"That's final, Willy!"

"All right, sis," grinned Handforth minor. "But you've got to remember that Ted's a bit touched—so it's up to us to make excuses for him. Let's give him two minutes——"

"No!" interrupted Ena grimly. "Only one!"

They were standing in the spacious hall of Sir Edward Handforth's London mansion, and both were in holiday attire. It was early evening, and the warm July sunshine was streaming through the windows. Outside, the weather was hot and brilliant.

"It's disgraceful!" went on Ena, consulting her wrist watch for the tenth time. "Ten past six already—and we've got to be on board the Wanderer by seven! I can tell you, Willy, I'm getting fed up!"

"I've been fed up for half an hour!" sighed Willy. "But don't worry—a taxi will get us down to the London docks in thirty-five or forty minutes, so we shan't be late."

"That's not the point!" said his sister imperiously. "We all arranged to start at six, and an arrangement is an arrangement. Ted's a nice kind of chap to keep a lady waiting!"

"A lady?" said Willy, looking round. "Where?"

"Me, of course!" retorted Ena frigidly. Willy grinned.

"Oh, you!" he said. "Cheese it, sis! You're not a lady—you're only our giddy sister! Like your nerve to call yourself a lady! I'll tell you what—I'll buzz upstairs and give old Ted a dig."

"You'll only make him later still!" said Ena impatiently. "Let's go without him. I'm going to tell everybody when we get there, particularly if we're late! He's worse than any girl—he takes hours and hours to dress."

"That's because he's going to meet Irene," grinned Willy.

As usual, Edward Oswald Handforth was bringing the frowns to his sister's brow. Somehow or other, whenever they arranged to go anywhere together, he generally caused delay. It was one of his pet habits to waste time on trivialities until it was almost time to start. Then he would suddenly remember a hundred and one things. And in attempting to crowd half-an-hour's work into ten minutes, he always caused an upheaval. It was no uncommon thing for the entire household to be set in commotion.

And on this occasion the matter was of great importance.

Nothing more nor less than an invitation to a sumptuous banquet on Lord Dorrimore's famous yacht, the Wanderer. Altogether, there would be about two dozen St. Frank's fellows in the party—to say nothing of seven or eight Moor View schoolgirls, and Mr. and Mrs. Stokes, Nelson Lee, and others.

The summer vacation was in full swing, and the recent Boy Scouts' Camp seemed remote. Actually only a few days had elapsed, but they had been exceedingly crowded.

Dorrie had announced his intention of going on a long summer cruise, and with his usual generosity, he had invited the entire Fourth Form to accompany him. His invitations had extended to the Third and the Fifth and the Sixth, and to Irene & Co. For the famous sporting peer revelled in juvenile company. And as the Wanderer could easily accommodate a host, he made no stipulations as to numbers.

But parents and guardians had had something to say.

The majority of the fellows, in fact, were required at home. So Dorrie's party was reduced to a nice, reasonable number. And this special banquet was held for a double purpose.

Firstly, the party would gather together with the object of selecting their cabins and general quarters—so that everything would be cut and dried on sailing day. And secondly the banquet would be an occasion for choosing the nature of the cruise. Lord Dorrimore had hit upon the idea of letting his guests vote. He was content to go to any part of the world they desired. And it was rather a novel scheme to leave it to the decision of the majority.

Therefore, the gathering on the Wanderer that evening promised to be a joyous, hilarious occasion. So the exasperation of Willy and Ena was fully justified. It was like Ted's cheek to keep them waiting!

"I'm not going to wait another second!" said Ena, stamping her foot. "Look here, it's a quarter past six! Come on, Willy, we'll go——"

"Just a minute!" said Willy. "I've got an idea! If Ted isn't down here within two shakes of a lamb's tail, I'll eat my straw hat!"

He bounded up the stairs before Ena could make any comment, and he made a dive for his major's bed-room. Bursting in, he paused inside the doorway, and gasped.

"My goodness!" he ejaculated. "What's happened—a cyclone?"

Edward Oswald was standing before the mirror, wrestling desperately with a necktie. The bed was strewn with shirts, the floor was littered with collars, and practically every drawer in the room was turned inside out. And the famous leader of Study D turned a red, perspiring face towards his minor.

"Clear out!" he panted. "I've had a fearful time! Somebody's been mixing up all my ties——"

"Blow your ties!" interrupted Willy. "We've been waiting for you for nearly twenty minutes! Irene's downstairs!"

Handforth started so violently that his collar came unbuttoned.

"Irene!" he gasped. "Great Scott! I—I didn't know she was coming here! I shall have to fly!"

CHAPTER II.

MORE HASTE, LESS SPEED.



"NOT much good flying!" said Willy, shaking his head. "What you've got to do is to shove that tie on, and buzz downstairs. It's bad enough to keep Ena and I waiting, but Irene——"

"Tell her I'll be there in two jiffs!" said Handforth desperately.

"No fear!" said Willy. "I'm not stirring out of this room until you come with me! In fact, I'll give you a hand. I'm full of noble qualities like that—I always like to assist people in distress. Come on, here's your jacket——"

"I can't get this rotten collar fastened!" roared Handforth. "My hat! I've torn the tie now! And I must wear this one, because Irene likes blue! Get out of the way, you young ass! Leave that jacket alone until I'm ready!"

"The best thing you can do is to finish dressing in the taxi!" said Willy briskly. "I've got a couple of pins—you can mend that tie, too. Come on—Ena won't wait any longer——"

"I can't come down like this!" hooted Handforth, as Willy made a move for the door. "Come back with that jacket, blow you!"

But Willy calmly disobeyed, and Edward Oswald became more flustered than ever. He grabbed a pillow off the bed, and hurled it at his minor. But Willy was quite accustomed to these affairs, and he dodged with such neatness that the pillow passed harmlessly over his head, and flew out of the open window.

It was going at some speed, and vanished amid the branches of a chestnut tree outside. One side of it was ripped entirely open as it caught against a jagged branch, and a perfect shower of feathers floated down towards the ground.

As it happened, Sir Edward was peacefully reclining in a hammock below, indulging in a short nap in the cool of the evening. The garden was very peaceful and enjoyable just now.

Something flicked Sir Edward's nose, and he brushed it away. Then something else touched his cheek, and he opened his eyes. For a moment he lay staring upwards in blank amazement, only half awake.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "Snow! A veritable snowstorm in July! Amazing!"

There was some excuse for Sir Edward Handforth's misapprehension. The air was literally filled with falling white feathers—and to Sir Edward's astonished gaze they resembled enormous snowflakes.

"Griggs!" roared Sir Edward, sitting up. "What's the meaning of this, Griggs?"

He gazed round at the gardener, who was trundling a wheelbarrow across the lawn. Sir Edward's tone implied that Griggs was responsible for the extraordinary behaviour of the weather.

"Anything wrong, Sir Edward?" asked Griggs, pausing.

"Haven't you got better sense than to leave me sleeping in the middle of a snowstorm?" thundered Sir Edward. "Why on earth didn't you wake me up, you dunder-head?"

"Snow!" gasped Griggs, dropping the barrow with a thud. "Ye must be dreaming, sir! There's no snow——"

He broke off abruptly as he caught sight of the gently falling white cloud, and his eyes nearly started out of his head. From the bed-room window above, Willy Handforth was grinning with keen appreciation.

"You've smothered the pater in feathers, and he thinks it's a snowstorm!" he chuckled. "That's what comes of your giddy pillow-throwing, my lad! I think we'll quietly vanish before the storm breaks!"

He withdrew his head abruptly, for a sudden roar from below announced the fact that Sir Edward had discovered the truth. Willy had an idea that investigations of a painful nature would be instituted forthwith.

"Did you hear that?" he asked tensely. "In about two ticks the pater will be in full cry! We've just got time to dash down

and clear out before he gets into the hall! Speed's the watchword!"

Fortunately, Handforth was now ready, and he was looking resplendent in a flannel suit and a silk shirt. He hadn't taken any notice of the uproar from outside, and didn't know what Willy had been talking about. There was only one thought in his mind, and that was enough. Irene was waiting downstairs!

He hurried out of the bed-room, Willy at his heels. And as they sped downstairs they were just in time to meet Ena, who was coming up to investigate personally.

"Never!" she exclaimed faintly. "You don't mean to say you're ready, Ted?"

"Rats! I was telling the truth!" said Willy. "I didn't mention any particular Irene, did I? If you go and jump to conclusions, that's your affair! I happen to know that the parlourmaid's second name is Irene. We call her Ellen, but that's only a detail. I told you that Irene was downstairs, and if that wasn't true—Cave!" he added breathlessly. "I can hear the pater coming in the back door! If we don't bunk now he'll keep us for half an hour!"

Handforth grabbed Ena by one arm, and Willy by the other. They fairly swept through the lobby, and just escaped in the nick of time. By the time Sir Edward Hand-



"What's the trouble here?" asked Dorrie calmly. The men turned upon him, surprised at the interruption.

"Where's Irene?" demanded Handforth breathlessly.

"How should I know where she is—on her way to the yacht, I expect," said Ena. "Don't ask silly questions. We're late already—"

"Willy told me that Irene was downstairs—"

"My dear ass, just a little scheme to make you buck up," said Willy blandly. "We've got to do something to make you shift. Thank goodness we're ready to start now!"

Handforth looked blank.

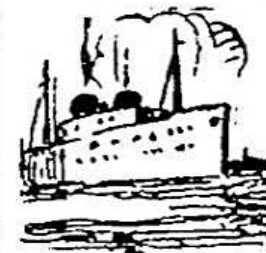
"And isn't Irene here?" he asked fiercely.

"Why, you young fibber, I never knew you could tell such awful whoppers—"

forth reached the front door he was exasperated to see his three hopeful children dashing into a taxicab.

CHAPTER III.

WELCOMING THE GUESTS.



MR. BEVERLEY STOKES paused for a moment, his eyes sparkling with admiration. The House-master of the Ancient House at St. Frank's was looking more than usually cheerful and healthy.

"By Jove, Joyce, doesn't she look wonderful?" ejaculated Mr. Stokes.

"I'd no idea she was such a beautiful yacht," said Mrs. Stokes breathlessly. "Oh, Barry, we're going to have a glorious trip! I think Lord Dorrimore is just a brick!"

They were both on the dock, having arrived a few moments earlier by taxicab. And before them, at her berth, lay the steam-yacht *Wanderer*—Lord Dorrimore's famous vessel.

She had recently come out of dry dock, and she was resplendent from stem to stern. Repainted and reconditioned, the *Wanderer* looked brand new. Her brasswork glittered brilliantly, her graceful hull was cream-coloured, and her two funnels had a squat, rakish appearance which gave her the suggestion of a destroyer.

As a matter of fact, Lord Dorrimore had recently spent a small fortune on the *Wanderer*. New engines had been installed, and many alterations performed. The yacht was now the fastest vessel of her kind afloat. Dorrie was proud of the fact that she had a cruising speed almost comparable to that of a destroyer. She was capable of crossing the Atlantic in under four days.

And this evening the vessel was in gala array.

Although daylight still lingered, the *Wanderer* was dressed with thousands of tiny electric lights—every colour of the rainbow. They hung in festoons from the masthead, they twinkled along the bridge, and round the rails. And all the portholes and cabin windows were ablaze.

The Housemaster and his wife were among the guests. Mrs. Stokes, indeed, had consented to act as hostess, and it would be her special care to chaperone the Moor View girls.

"Come along—let's get on board!" said Mr. Stokes briskly.

They approached the gangway, and found Lord Dorrimore waiting on deck to receive them. His lordship was in evening-dress, and he shook hands warmly with the new arrivals.

"Not many more to come now," he said cheerfully. "Make yourselves at home—go where you please, and meet the others. You there, Russell? Good! Conduct Mr. and Mrs. Stokes to their cabin."

The steward saluted, and escorted Mr. and Mrs. Stokes below. Russell was looking healthier and stronger now. And his son was also on duty, having practically recovered from that knife-thrust which had been inflicted in San Francisco, several weeks earlier.

Once or twice, Lord Dorrimore had attempted to draw Russell's story from him, but he had not been successful. But Dorrie hadn't given up hope. He was just waiting.

"About time old Lee turned up," murmured Dorrie, as he lit a fresh cigarette. "Hallo, here come some of the others! A pretty lively crowd, too, by the look of it! Oh, well, the livelier the better!"

A number of juniors had appeared on the dock—most of them in flannels. Dorrie could see Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West, Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, and Fatty Little. And further beyond, William Napoleon Browne and Horace Stevens, of the Fifth, were coming into view.

"They're all rollin' up now," said Lord Dorrimore. "An' don't I see some of the girls?"

Captain Burton, hale, bluff, and hearty, came down from the bridge with his son. There were one or two other juniors, too—Boots and Christine and Archie Glenthorne. Tom Burton had been showing them round.

"They're comin' thick an' fast now, boys," said Dorrie genially. "Better make yourselves look smart—I can spot several of the young ladies."

Within a few minutes the guests were coming on board in a kind of procession. Irene Manners and her girl chums arrived in a group. They had arranged to meet at a given spot, and had come by themselves. Ena Handforth was the only one who was absent.

There were eight of them—Irene Manners, Doris Berkeley, Marjorie Temple, Violet Watson, Tessa Love, Winnie Pitt, Ethel Church, and Agnes Christine. And all the young ladies were looking dainty and fresh in their evening-frocks.

Lord Dorrimore was kept busy as he welcomed everybody.

"Ah, sir, this is a great occasion!" observed Browne, as he gravely shook hands. "I perceive that the populace have arrived in large quantities. 'Tis well. Allow me to relieve you of your duties, and do the honours in your stead."

"Thanks all the same," grinned Dorrie. "But I'm in no need of relief."

"We are all liable to err," said Browne benevolently. "In my opinion, Brother Dorrie—You have no objection, I take it, to being addressed as Brother Dorrie? It is a habit of mine to be quite impartial in the distribution of my favours."

"You can call me what you like, young 'un," chuckled his lordship.

"Splendid!" said Browne. "However, you must permit me to remark that 'young 'un' scarcely fits my own personage. But we will let that pass. After all, quibbles are but empty utterances, and fit only for the mouths of the ignorant."

"Dry up, old man!" grinned Stevens.

"I regret, Brother Horace, that you should urge me thus," said Browne sadly. "I am about to take on Brother Dorrie's duties, and act as host. Who better? Imagine the delight of all when they observe my manly figure at the top of the gangway."

The captain of the Fifth was as talkative as usual, and he seemed slightly disappointed when Dorrie made it quite clear that he was in no need of assistance. Browne, however, consoled himself by strolling about the yacht as though he owned it, beaming with a kindly eye upon all and sundry.

"By no means a bad vessel, Brother Horace," he observed condescendingly. "Having made my inspection, I have finally decided to honour the Wanderer by my presence during the forthcoming trip."

"You ought to think yourself jolly lucky that you're invited, old man," said Stevens, with enthusiasm. "She's the finest boat I've ever stepped on! Why, we're the most fortunate chaps in existence, to be the guests of a millionaire, on a yacht of this kind!"

William Napoleon Browne knew it, and he needed no reminding of the fact; but it pleased him to act as though he were bestowing a favour to be on the ship at all. Not that Browne meant anything by it. It was just his little way. He was one of the best chaps imaginable.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee and Nipper had turned up, to say nothing of Professor Sylvester Tucker and his nephew, Timothy. The Handforth trio had also arrived, and the Wanderer was filled with a gay, merry throng.

CHAPTER IV.

LOOKING FOR UMLOSI!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH looked round with entire approval.

"By George, the old tub's changed a bit—but she's better!" he declared. "I hear she's got new engines——"

"Rather!" interrupted Church. "They're some new invention—something that no other ship has got! The Wanderer can shoot through the water nearly as fast as a destroyer—and she can cross the Atlantic in three days and a bit!"

Handforth nodded.

"That's the idea," he said. "Progress! I always believe in going forward! Old Dorrie's shown his common sense by improving the Wanderer—— Hallo, what the—— Well, I'm jiggered! Look who's coming up the gangway!"

Handforth, having renewed acquaintance with everyone on board, had joined his own chums—Church and McClure—on the promenade deck. They were leaning against the rail, watching the various activities.

Church and McClure turned and looked at the gangway in response to Handforth's invitation. There was a note of astonishment and indignation in his voice which rather puzzled them. But a moment later they understood.

There was another new arrival—and the latecomer was no less than Ralph Leslie Fullwood, the celebrated cad of Study A at St. Frank's.

Fullwood was looking his very best. Always dandified, he was positively dazzling on this occasion. He swept on board like the honoured guest at a banquet. And to Hand-

forth's horror, Lord Dorrimore greeted him as cheerily and as warmly as he had greeted Edward Oswald himself.

"Rummy!" said Church, frowning. "I didn't know the rotter was invited!"

"He wasn't invited—he's just pushing his way in, and old Dorrie doesn't know it!" said Handforth fiercely. "I'm going to knock him backwards down that giddy gangway! Fancy coming here! Nerve!"

He strode along the deck with a purposeful air, and there was no telling what he might have done had not Nipper intervened. Nipper was strolling along the deck, accompanied by Irene Manners.

"What's wrong, Handy?" asked Nipper, as he noticed the angry flush on Handforth's face. "You'll have to go easy for this evening, you know——"

"I'm going to——" Handforth paused as he caught sight of Irene looking at him rather strangely. "The fact is—— I mean—— Look here," he burst out, "what's that cad doing on board? Fullwood, by George! Who invited him?"

"There's no need to be so angry, Ted," said Irene. "After all, it isn't nice to criticise Lord Dorrimore's judgment——"

"But this rotter is invited!" protested Handforth hotly.

Nipper grinned.

"Calm down, old chap—let it simmer!" he chuckled. "As a matter of fact, Fullwood has a perfect right to be here. Where's your memory? You know as well as I do that the entire Fourth Form was invited."

Handforth started.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "So it was!"

"But it was only natural that lots of fellows couldn't accept," went on Nipper. "And so, out of the entire Fourth—Ancient and Modern sections—only seventeen of us will be able to go on the trip. Of course, there'll be nine of the girls and Mr. and Mrs. Stokes, and the guv'nor, and seven fellows out of the Sixth, Fifth, and Third. Altogether we shall be a jolly party."

"But Fullwood——" began Handforth.

"He happens to be one of the fellows whose parents consented to the trip," said Nipper. "Dorrie couldn't make any exceptions, and he wouldn't if he could."

Nipper was quite right. All told, there would be exactly two dozen St. Frank's fellows on board—for in addition to the seventeen Fourth-Formers, Fenton and Morrow of the Sixth, and Browne and Stevens of the Fifth were invited—to say nothing of Willy Handforth, Chubby Heath, and Juicy Lemon of the Third. Nipper was delighted with the formation of the party, for it was representative of the entire school. And the Moor View girls, naturally, were a very welcome addition.

"Oh, well, I suppose I shall have to let the cad stay on board!" said Handforth gruffly.

"Yes, I think it'll be as well, Ted," said Irene, with perfect gravity. "I am quite pleased to see him here."

"Pleased?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Yes, he may learn better manners in such good company," replied Irene. "I've no reason to like him, but I am sure he must have some good in him."

"If he starts any of his tricks I'll jolly soon shove him in his place!" said Handforth darkly. "By the way, Nipper, I thought we were going to see old Umlosi? Somebody was saying that he'd arrived from Africa, and was on board. Spoof, I suppose?"

"No, by jingo!" said Nipper. "He's on board somewhere—Dorrie told me so ten minutes ago. Supposing we go and rout him out?"

"Good idea!" said Handforth & Co. in one voice.

Irene was carried off at this moment by Browne and Stevens, much to Handforth's displeasure. But he consoled himself by the thought of seeing Umlosi again. And from Lord Dorrimore, the juniors learned that the King of Kutaland was below in his cabin, dressing for the banquet.

"Let's go and rout him out," said Nipper promptly.

"That's the idea!" agreed Dorrie. "It's high time the old rascal put in an appearance—he's been dressing for the last two hours. As a matter of fact, I believe he's afraid to show himself."

Tregellis-West and Watson joined the others, and they all hurried below. They were keen upon seeing Umlosi again. A great chief in his own country, Umlosi always felt like a fish out of water when he entered civilisation. He was a warrior first and last, and any kind of convention worried him. He was positively dreading the banquet, and had almost begged Dorrie to let him off. But his lordship had been adamant.

The juniors arrived in Umlosi's state-room, hammered upon the door, and then burst in like a flood.

room was so comical that they found it impossible to restrain themselves.

The fellows crowded in, grinning loudly. Umlosi was there. There was no doubt whatever that Umlosi was there. He was so very obviously there that the juniors crowded round him in an appreciative throng.

Something had apparently gone wrong with the works, as Handforth remarked. For Umlosi presented a wondrous spectacle. He was a huge man, coal-black, and with a dignity all his own. But in the present circumstances any kind of dignity was out of the question.

To be exact, Umlosi was in evening-dress. But the evening-dress was about six sizes too small for him. The trousers scarcely reached his ankles, and in spite of their ample width they fitted Umlosi round the thighs like tights. The waistcoat was buttoned up, but it was like a belt, and the buttons were threatening to burst off at any second. His shirt-front bulged out with a balloon effect. And the swallow-tail coat, splitting ominously at the seams, utterly failed to stretch across those enormous shoulders. The sleeves ended about half-way down Umlosi's forearms. The complete effect was wonderful.

"Wau! Ye have come to mock me!" said the Kutana chief, in his rumbling voice. "But I blamest ye not for laughing, young masters. For am I not an object of disdain, of ridicule, of hapless scorn?"

"Cheer up, Umlosi!" grinned Nipper, grabbing his hand. "Excuse us for laughing, but we simply couldn't help it. What's happened? Where on earth did you dig up that marvellous suit?"

"Surely thou art mocking me still, O Manzie!" replied Umlosi. "For is not the suit deplorable in its meagre proportions? Four hours have I laboured, inserting myself into these wondrous vestments of the white races. And, lo, I am naught but an object of ridicule for all my pains!"

"But the suit's too small for you, old man," grinned Handforth.

"Even as thou sayest, O thou of the Big Voice!" replied Umlosi, nodding.

"Well, I like that!" snorted Handforth. "Who's got a big voice?"

"Dry up, old man!" chuckled Church. "You can't fool Umlosi. He calls a spade a spade!"

Handforth stared.

"Ass!" he snapped. "Umlosi didn't even mention a spade."

"My dear ass, that's only an expression—"

"Can't you chaps keep from arguing for a bit?" asked Nipper. "Look here, Umlosi, there must be something wrong about this suit. It looks like one of Lord Dorrimore's to me—"

CHAPTER V.

THE WOES OF A KING.



"GREAT Scott!" gasped Nipper blankly.

"My only hat!"

"What—what is it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After the first chorus of startled exclamations the juniors fairly yelled with laughter. For the sight they beheld within the state-

"Nay, O thou of the Bright Eye, thou art mistaken!" said Umlosi. "These hideous garments were given to me by N'Kose himself. 'Twas my father who instructed me to wear this accursed attire. And am I not his slave? Am I not here to obey his orders?"

"I shall have to make some inquiries," said Nipper briskly. "I'll bet Dorrie's given you the wrong suit. Just like him to make a bloomer. He's nearly as careless as Handy!"

"But enough of such trivial matters," said Umlosi, waving a huge hand, and splitting a seam at the same second. "Let me gaze upon ye, young white masters. 'Tis many moons since we were last in company. And N'Kose informs me that we are soon to travel across the great waters, to places where the sun shines with warmth, and where no chill winds blow. Wau! 'Twill be a glad day when we leave this cold climate behind."

"It all depends what you call cold," chuckled Tommy Watson. "I've been complaining about the heat all day, and it's as close as the dickens this evening. No accounting for tastes, of course."

In the meantime Nipper had slipped off, and he sought out Dorrie.

"Oh, there you are, young 'un!" said his lordship, when Nipper located him on the brilliant staircase. "Nearly time for the feed, you know. The guests are already rollin' in to the baronial banquetting chamber—in other words, the saloon."

"Just a minute, Dorrie," said Nipper. "Umlosi's in an awful mess."

"Again?" asked Lord Dorrimore mildly. "I'm not at all surprised. The old ruffian is generally tumblin' out of one heap of trouble into another, especially when he is away from his own climate. What's wrong now?"

"His suit—it's miles too small for him."

"Too small?" repeated Dorrie. "Good gad! When I looked at it I thought it would fit an elephant!"

"He says you gave it to him," went on Nipper. "And you're wrong, Dorrie—it's no bigger than one of your own suits. I suppose you didn't make a mistake—"

"By the Lord Harry!" exclaimed his lordship, with a start. "Now you come to mention it, young man, I was in a deuce of a hurry when I took that suit to Umlosi. I was in my state-room, and there were two dress-suits there—one of mine, and this one for Umlosi. It isn't possible—"

He broke off, dashed down the staircase, and rushed to his state-room. Nipper followed closely behind. Ten seconds later Dorrie uttered a roar, and turned his rear towards Nipper.

"Kick me, my son—and kick hard!" he said grimly.

"Just as you like!" said Nipper obligingly. "How's that?"

"Gad! I didn't mean it literally, you young fathead!" roared Dorrie, as Nipper delivered a mighty kick. "'Pon my soul! I shan't be able to sit down for a week!"

"Well, you asked for it," grinned Nipper.

"Look here!" said his lordship, pointing to the wardrobe. "There it is—hanging up, just as my valet left it! The infernal dolt ought to have known it wasn't one of mine!"

The suit was an enormous one, and Nipper appreciated how the mistake had taken place. Both suits had been folded, and Dorrie had carelessly taken the wrong one to Umlosi, and the black chieftain, obedient in all things where Dorrie was concerned, had faithfully struggled into the wrong garments.

But the matter was soon rectified.

Nipper carried off the big suit, and he and Tommy Watson acted as Umlosi's valets. They were fast workers, and in less than ten minutes Umlosi emerged, resplendent and dignified in dress clothes which fitted him to perfection.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BANQUET.



FATTY LITTLE regarded the festive board with a sad, sad eye.

"By pancakes!" he groaned. "All that stuff left! And I'm full up. I couldn't eat another giddy mouthful!"

"It's a wonder to me you're still alive," said William Napoleon Browne severely. "Seldom have I witnessed such an exhibition of sheer gluttony! It has not only pained me, Brother Little, but it has had the effect of utterly destroying my own appetite."

"Rats!" said Fatty. "It's the feed that's spoiled your appetite, you ass! Why, you've eaten nearly as much as me!" Browne shook his head sadly.

"I grieve for your sense of proportion, Brother Little," he said. "Had I demolished one-fifth of the rations which have disappeared into your darkest regions I should now be prone upon the floor, a corpse. Indeed, it passes my comprehension that you are still with us. You have not, by any chance, a sack, or a gladstone bag hidden beneath the table?"

Fatty Little grunted, and refused to reply. He had certainly eaten well, and Browne, for once, had scarcely exaggerated. It amazed him that Fatty Little could still live. There was a rather shiny look about Fatty's features—a bloated puffiness

which told its own story. Fatty was not a glutton of the disgusting type as a rule; but this banquet had been of such royal character that he had been tempted and had fallen.

The dinner was practically over, and everybody was smiling and merry. The Wanderer's saloon presented a brilliant picture—the great table, with its snowy linen, its glittering silver, and its bowls of luxurious flowers. The diners, all in evening-dress, the subdued glow of electric lights, and all round, the stately, impressive furnishings. It was a scene to be remembered.

"Well, of course, you know why we're all here?" Dorrie was saying, from the head of the table. "Although we don't sail for four days, it's better that we should have everything shipshape in advance. You all know your state-rooms, an' when you come on board on Friday you'll be feelin' at home. There'll be no muddle an' no confusion. Everythin', in fact, will go as sweet as marriage bells."

"It was a jolly good idea to have this muster, sir," said Fenton, the captain of St. Frank's.

"But there's somethin' else, old man," went on Dorrie. "Ladies an' gentlemen, kindly be good enough to cease the general chatter an' listen to me for a few minutes. I know it'll be an ordeal, but you surely didn't expect to get away from this dinner without payin' for it?"

The company laughed, and gave Dorrie full attention.

"The fact is, we've got to decide where we're goin'," continued his lordship. "I'm disownin' all responsibility this trip. The cruise has got to be decided by vote—an' the 'Ayes' will win the day. In other words, we're goin' by the decision of the majority. Then there can't be any grumblin' later on."

"You mean to be on the safe side, evidently," smiled Nelson Lee.

"Absolutely!" agreed Dorrie. "It doesn't matter a toss to me where we go—India, China, Peru, Africa, Australia—any old place. An' now that I've started the ball rollin', you can carry on for yourselves."

"I vote for China!" said Handforth promptly.

"Rats!" said half a dozen others. "Blow China!"

"Why China, Ted?" asked Doris Berkeley, leaning across the table. "I thought you preferred a trip up the Amazon, or a visit to Borneo, or something like that?"

"China's the place!" declared Handforth. "I wrote a serial story about China once, and all the fellows told me that everything was wrong. I'm jolly well going to prove that my local colour was right!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Without wishing to be severe, surely

this is one of the most unadulterated pieces of nerve on record?" said Browne mildly. "We are here urged to visit China in order that Brother Handforth shall substantiate the details of his frightful serial. I have painful memories of that blistered effusion, having once glanced at some back numbers of the school magazine in a moment of weakness."

"Who told you to start, gasbag?" demanded Handforth, glaring. "Then it's settled? We're going to China? Good! I shouldn't be surprised if we're chased by a giddy junk, and taken prisoners by pirates——"

"Steady on, old son!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "We haven't taken any votes yet. Personally, I plump for the South Sea Islands."

"What-ho!" agreed Archie Glenthorne approvingly. "I mean to say, the jolly old palms, what? Silvery sands and balmy airs and all that sort of stuff! Absolutely!"

"Yes, rather!" said Irene, her eyes sparkling. "I'd love to go to the South Sea Islands! It's a trip I've always longed for——"

"China's a rotten place, anyhow!" said Handforth carelessly. "I vote we go to the South Sea Islands! I meant to say that at first——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everyone laughed heartily. Handforth's sudden right-about-face, after Irene's vote in favour of the South Sea Islands, was extremely comical. And Edward Oswald sat there, red and confused.

"I think we ought to go to Africa," said Morrow of the Sixth. "Umlosi could take us to his own country, and we could have all sorts of sport."

"Wau! Wise words, young master," rumbled Umlosi. "Thou hast spoken well. But of what avail are our small voices?"

"Not so small, either," grinned Fullwood easily. "Sorry, Umlosi, old man. But I'd much prefer to take a trip to India. That's the place!"

"Hear, hear!" said Jack Grey.

"India!" went on Fullwood. "The land of mystery an' fakirs an' workers of magic. We could have tiger hunts an' go into the jungle an' look over the old temples."

"Too jolly hot!" declared John Busterfield Boots firmly. "I don't believe in all these tropical places. What's wrong with going to the South Pole? Snow and ice! And if it comes to that, why shouldn't we be the first discoverers of the South Pole itself?"

But Buster Boots was apparently in a minority of one, for none of the guests seemed to care for a cold cruise. But at the moment everything was undecided. Everybody was talking, and the four corners of the earth were being discussed.

CHAPTER VII.

A MOMENTOUS DISCUSSION.



THE saloon hummed with animated conversation. Most of the fellows had pet ideas of their own, and they were all urging the delights of the particular spots of their choice.

It was just the same with Irene and the other girls. Whilst Irene was keen on the South Sea Islands, Marjorie Temple thought that Australia would be the best cruise of all. Winnie Pitt was fascinated by India, and Tessa Love was just dying to go to Brazil.

Lord Dorrimore, listening to the hum of conversation, was mildly amused. He was in the fortunate position of not caring where he went. He had visited practically every spot on earth, and for this cruise he wanted his guests to choose their own route. It didn't matter a toss to him whether they went north, south, east, or west. He was prepared to take the Wanderer to any sea that was navigable.

"What do you say, professor?" he asked, turning to Professor Tucker, who sat near him. "Where would you like to go this trip?"

"Mars!" said Professor Tucker dreamily.

"Mars?" gasped Dorrie.

"Let me tell you, sir, that Mars is the most wonderful planet in the whole solar system," declared the professor enthusiastically. "I am convinced that Mars is divided by enormous canals—vast stretches of water hundreds of miles in extent—linked up in the most amazing system—"

"But, my dear professor, though I'm admittin' that the Wanderer might possibly cruise in these canals, I don't quite see how we can get her up there," said Dorrie politely. "Of course, you may have some scheme."

"Then there is Venus," went on the professor. "Venus is a planet which remains mysterious in some respects, although it is my personal opinion that Venus is absolutely smothered with rank vegetation, with utterly impassable waterways, weed-grown rivers, and vast seas which teem with stupendous monsters—"

"I'm afraid we can't go to Venus, then," said his lordship regretfully. "I'm half-afraid that the moon is a bit too difficult—"

"Good gracious me!" ejaculated the professor. "I beg your pardon, sir! Pray accept a thousand apologies! I had no intention of discussing astronomy, but my mind was somewhat obsessed."

"Then you don't want us to go to Mars?" chuckled Dorrie.

"Good heavens, no!" said Professor Tucker. "Surely it is not possible to journey there? No, no, of course not—how

absurd! You were, I think, discussing this cruise? By all means let it be the Southern Pacific. For there the stars gleam with a brilliance that is positively unknown in these latitudes. And there we have the Southern Cross, and I am told that on clear nights—"

Professor Tucker went off into a long, dreamy eulogy of the constellations seen from the southern hemisphere. But as Lord Dorrimore was already in conversation with Nelson Lee, his remarks were addressed to the empty air.

At the end of the table a heated discussion was in progress. Willy Handforth and his fellow-fags were at the height of an argument. Like everybody else, they had their own ideas.

"I'm of the same opinion as Irene," Willy was saying. "Give me the giddy South Sea Islands! Cannibals and head-hunters, you know! What's the good of going for a holiday, unless we have some excitement?"

"There's tons of excitement in India!" said Chubby Heath.

"Nothing but jungles!" sniffed Willy.

"Well, that ought to suit you," retorted Chubby. "Just think of the snakes you can find! And you might be able to collar a tiger, and make a pet of it!" he added sarcastically.

"Or an elephant!" grinned Juicy Lemon. "I say, it would be rather rich if you had a pet elephant at St. Frank's next term, old man! Imagine it barging into the classroom when you gave a whistle!"

"Are you trying to be funny?" asked Willy grimly.

"India's no good, anyhow," went on Juicy with haste. "To my mind, there's nothing to compare with Peru."

"Fathead!" snorted Willy. "What do you want to go to Peru for?"

"That's the place where they've got buried cities," said Lemon. "I was reading a book once, all about the Incas. A party of chaps went out, and found an Inca city, and they had all sorts of ripping adventures—"

"You chump, that was only an adventure story," interrupted Willy. "You don't find things like that in real life!"

"Yes, you do!" retorted Chubby Heath. "What about that city in the middle of the Sahara, with the Ancient Romans?"

"Oh, well, Peru's no good, anyhow!" said Willy. "We've got to give our votes for the South Sea Islands. Think of the coral, and adventures with head-hunters! Understand, my sons—the South Sea Islands! If you vote for anything else, I'll jolly well smash you to pulp!"

"But look here—"

"I don't want to look there—my mind's made up!" said Willy. "You've got to promise me that you'll vote for the South Sea Islands. Is it a go?"



"Wait a minute——"

"I'm not waiting ten seconds—is it a go?" persisted Willy.

"Oh, all right!" growled his chums. "I suppose we shall have to agree."

"I'm glad you realise it," said Willy contentedly. "Honest Injun, of course?"

"Honest Injun!" said the other fags.

"Then it's as good as settled," declared Handforth minor. "My major's keen on the South Seas now—because Irene's mentioned it. And I know Ena is safe. On the whole, we ought to be safe for a majority."

He leaned across the table.

"How about you, Fatty?" he asked eagerly.

"Eh?" said Fatty Little. "No thanks—no more!"

"Who's asking you to have any more, you porpoise?" said Willy indignantly. "My hat! I'm blessed if you ain't still thinking of grub! Where do you want to go, you fat ass?"

"I want to go to sleep!" replied Fatty Little thickly.

Willy looked at him with disdain.

"Gaze upon it!" he said tartly. "There you see an example of the complete glutton! He's so jolly overfed that he doesn't care where he goes, and for the first time in his whole giddy life he's got the house full boards outside the front entrance! I say, Browne!"

William Napoleon Browne looked across the table.

"You desire speech with me, little man?" he asked benevolently.

"Yes, big boy!" retorted Willy. "What about your vote?"

"I have already decided that the Wanderer shall travel to the South Sea Islands," replied Browne calmly. "There are certain indications that we will have a struggle, but I shall prevail. I would remind you that my name is Napoleon. I would further remind you that my other name is William. And was not William the celebrated Conqueror?"

CHAPTER VIII.

PUTTING IT TO THE VOTE.



WILLY leaned further across the table.

"What do you mean — indications that we shall have a struggle?" he asked. "I'm for the South Sea Islands, too—and so are these chaps, and so is my major, and Irene, and——"

"An important group, I will admit," said Browne. "But, at the same time, we shall need to swell our numbers before success is assured. If you will close one portion of your face, and open up two others, you will doubtless catch the trend of opinion round the table. Much as it grieves me, I fear that India is the star attraction."

"India?" said Willy. "What rot!"

"I agree with you, Brother Willy, but it is the majority that prevails," replied Browne. "Personally, I regard India as a particularly pestilential spot. Possibly it is a delightful country in many respects, and there is no question that it is also a wonderful land. But for me it holds nothing but misery. We must set ourselves to work and kill this blight. India, Brother Willy, is no place for us."

Browne was quite right. All round the table the fellows were talking about India, and several of the girls were equally animated. Lord Dorrimore, asked to relate some of his Indian experiences, genially obliged. And the word-pictures he painted were so vivid that the entire company was entranced. Dorrie told of the jungles, the thousand and one romantic sidelights of India. And Willy Handforth fumed as he listened.

"Dorrie's a good sort, but he's too fond of gassing!" he confided to Chubby Heath. "In two minutes he'll have me voting for India! And we've already made up our minds to go to the South Sea Islands!"

He caught Browne's eye.

"Have no fear, Brother Willy," said the Fifth Form skipper. "Trust to me entirely, and all will be well. This eagerness for India is distressing, but a few choice words will soon scotch the whole idea."

Lord Dorrimore finished his discourse, and smiled.

"Of course, I've only given you one side of the picture," he added. "I could name all sorts of things about India which wouldn't sound so attractive. At the same time——"

"India for us, sir!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's have the voting now," suggested Jack Grey. "I'm for India, for one. It'll be a glorious trip."

"Rather!" agreed Bob Christine.

And many others voiced the same opinion. If the voting had started at that moment there could have been only one result. But William Napoleon Browne gracefully stood up in his seat and coughed.

"What's this—another speech?" asked Fenton. "Have we got to listen to Browne?"

"Let's shout him down!" suggested Fullwood.

"My dear ass, we can't shout him down until he's started," said Lord Dorrimore mildly. "Besides, he's got a perfect right to speak if he wants to. Come along, Browne. Proceed with the speech."

ANSWERS

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Browne bowed gracefully, and the guests smiled in anticipation.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is not my intention to bore you with a long discourse," said Browne gently. "I am a man of a few words—"

"Oh!"

"The trouble is, you use 'em over and over again, old man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A few words!" repeated Browne sternly. "I regret that there should be these disturbing interruptions. Pray remember, brothers—to say nothing of sisters—that we are not at a political meeting. We have just heard a wonderful description of India from our cheerful host. And, if I read the signs aright, a considerable proportion of misguided fellows are keen upon going to India."

"Cut it short, old son!"

"But India, although attractive in many ways, is scarcely the ideal spot for spending the summer holidays," continued Browne. "Let me point out that there are more snakes in India than any other country in the world. Imagine the horror of the entire world if the news was flashed from continent to continent that Handforth had been bitten by a snake! Imagine the absolute consternation of mankind if the fact was revealed that William Napoleon Browne had been devoured by a tiger. I will not mention my own feelings in such an event—although I can assure you that being eaten by a tiger is not my idea of fame. I would prefer my name to go down in history in a less tragic manner. India, ladies and gentlemen, is the home of chutney. Surely you will not be content to spend week after week, gazing upon fakirs, eating chutney, and dodging snakes? A more blistered existence fails the imagination. And let me assure you that the heat in India is absolutely appalling—"

"How do you know?" demanded Jack Grey. "You've never been there!"

"A fact, as I must admit," said Browne, "but these are enlightened days, Brother Grey. We know for an absolute fact that a cable lies at the bottom of the Atlantic. But have we ever been there to see it? No, Brother Grey—we take these things for granted. I have an uncle who spent no less than twenty years in India. I will not pain you by a description of this unfortunate relative—but will merely assure you that he provides no less than three doctors with a steady income. No, ladies and gentlemen, India may be a great country, but as the scene of a summer holiday, it is decidedly and distinctly off the map. On the other hand, the South Sea Islands—"

"Hear, hear!" roared Willy enthusiastically.

"Yes, the South Sea Islands!" exclaimed Irene, nodding.

"The South Sea Islands!" declared Edward Oswald Handforth firmly. "Listen to me, everybody, and I will tell you why we ought to chuck up India and go the South Seas!"



To be exact, Umlosi was in evening dress. But the evening dress was about six sizes too small for him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RESULT OF THE VOTE.



BROWNE looked round rather reproachfully.

"Without wishing to distress you, Brother Handforth, may I voice a little reminder that I am already on my hind legs?" he said smoothly. "After I have finished you may speak to your heart's content; but for the moment I am the cynosure of all eyes and ears."

"All right—I'll give you one minute!" said Handforth generously.

"Let us dwell upon the South Sea Islands," proceeded Browne, beaming up and down the table. "There we have a scene to conjure with, ladies and gentlemen! The South Sea Islands! On the one hand we have India, with its jungles and fever-infested swamps, its snakes and its tigers—and on the other hand we have the serene peace and tranquillity of a tiny speck in the Southern Pacific. An island, set in the blue of the ocean, and overlooked by the glorious azure of the sky. I am no hand at describing scenery, but I can assure you that there's no place on earth to compare with the South Sea Islands."

"Hear, hear!" said Willy, clapping his hands.



"Imagine the glorious lagoon, the waving palms, and the silvery white sands," proceeded Browne, warming to his work. "Could there be a more alluring picture? The surf of the Pacific breaking over the reef—the thousand-and-one variegated colours of the coral—the luscious tropical fruits, and the homely but wholesome coconut. And, ladies and gentlemen—no tigers, no snakes, no wild animals of any kind."

"Only a few cannibals!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

"I will grant that cannibals may be a possible contingency; but surely that is an added attraction?" asked Browne. "I propose that our host will now discourse upon the South Sea Islands——"

"There's no need to bother Dorrie!" interrupted Handforth. "Lots of us have been to the South Seas, and we know what it's like. And we couldn't go to a better place for the summer holidays."

And, forthwith, a discussion started. It went up and down the table in a kind of wave. India was brought up again, but Browne's brief picture of the South Seas had wrought the change. There was not so much enthusiasm for India as there had been.

And when, finally, the votes were taken, the result was eminently satisfactory. Two-thirds of the Fourth were solid for the South Sea Islands. Willy & Co., and Browne and Stevens, were equally enthusiastic, and every one of the girls voted in the same way.

There was an overwhelming majority.

"Good!" said Lord Dorrimore, at length. "Nothing pleases me better. I made up my mind to let you have your own way, but I'll admit I'm pleased. There's nothin' to compare with this proposed trip. We'll start in four days' time, an' go by way of the Panama Canal. With the Wanderer's new engines, we ought to be in the region of the Low Archipelago—that's a considerable distance south of the Equator—in fifteen or sixteen days from the time we start."

"Surely that's impossible?" asked Nelson Lee doubtfully.

"Just you wait, old man," smiled Dorrie. "You haven't seen the Wanderer since the old engines were taken out. She is a marvel! She can cut through the roughest sea with scarcely a knot's reduction of speed. Roughly, the distance is about nine thousand miles, via the Panama. It's three thousand to New York, and the Wanderer can do it in under four days. Reckon it out for yourself, old man."

"We ought to be there in under twelve days, sir!" put in Bob Christine.

"Unfortunately, young 'un, we can't go at full speed all the way," smiled Dorrie. "It's a tedious business, getting through the Panama Canal—an' we shall have to make one or two stops for fuel, to say nothin' of other delays. Still, takin' everythin' into consideration, we ought to be in the South Seas three weeks from to-day."

It was almost too much to believe; but the fellows knew Lord Dorrimore of old. It was more than likely they would be among the South Sea Islands a day or two under the stipulated time. And a cruise through Polynesia was indeed an inviting prospect.

"Good for you, Browne, old son!" said Willy heartily.

They were on deck now, and William Napoleon Browne turned as the fag clapped him on the shoulder.

"Did I not assure you, Brother Willy, that all would be well?" he asked. "Remember, in all your little troubles, in your little trials, turn to me. I have never been known to fail. Were I an American citizen, I should undoubtedly be known as Mr. Fixit. For I pride myself that I can fix anything that is fixable. India, Brother Willy, is relegated to the limbo of forgotten things. And the South Seas loom ahead—inviting us. Brother Stevens, let us wander for'ard, and meditate upon the wonders of the Tropics."

Soon afterwards the guests departed.

In groups, and in twos and threes, they bade their host good-night, and went their way. Everything was settled. The cruise was fixed, and there were four clear days before sailing time—four days in which to make final purchases, and pay flying visits.

"I'll tell you what," said Willy to Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, as he prepared for departure. "We've got nothing to do until Friday, so there's no reason why we shouldn't have another go at Wembley. Might as well fix it up now, my lads. How about to-morrow?"

"Suit me!" said Chubby Heath promptly.

"Me, too!" agreed Juicy. "Where shall we meet?"

"Outside the India Pavilion," replied Willy. "All right—it's a go! Be there at ten o'clock sharp. We'll have a giddy whirl to-morrow."

And, thus briefly, the matter was decided. But even Willy Handforth didn't anticipate the exciting events that were booked for the morrow.

Lord Dorrimore was still on deck when the last of the guests were ready to depart. They were Nelson Lee and Nipper, and Dorrie hesitated.

"Look here, you two," he said gruffly. "I don't believe in this rushin' off. We haven't had a chance of pow-wowin' all the evenin'. It's late now, I'll admit, but you're not in any particular hurry, are you?"

"Well, no——" began Nelson Lee.

"That's good enough for me," interrupted Dorrie, grabbing Lee and Nipper by the arms. "Come on—let's go below. We'll have a quiet little chat over old times, an' map out the course of this South Sea Island cruise."

But, as events turned out, the cruise was to be mapped out in a totally unexpected fashion.



CHAPTER X.

A TOUCH OF THE DRAMATIC.



TWO minutes later the trio were lounging comfortably in Lord Dorrimore's private state-room—an apartment which was peculiarly characteristic of the Wanderer's owner.

While most of the other state-rooms were luxurious and orderly, Dorrie's own cabin was hopelessly untidy. There were several enormous easy-chairs, and a soft carpet. But every corner of the state-room was littered up with oddments and papers. Cigarette-ash lay on the carpet, and the whole apartment had an appearance of comfort. It breathed of Dorrie's personality.

"That's the style!" said his lordship cheerfully. "Make yourselves at home! What about a drink, Lee? Whisky and soda? Good! Nipper, just jab that bell, there's a good 'un!"

Nipper obliged, and a moment later the door opened, and Russell appeared.

"Good man!" said Dorrie. "Bring in two whisky-and-sodas, and an iced limejuice—Hullo, anythin' wrong, Russell?" he added curiously. "Man alive, what's come over you?"

The steward started slightly.

"Nothing, sir—nothing at all," he said. "I'm quite all right, sir."

But Dorrie was looking at him in astonishment. Certainly there was a great change in Russell. His usual calm demeanour had gone, and he was unnaturally flushed. There was also a bright, excited look in his eyes. One might have thought that he had just come direct from a heated quarrel.

"You're not yourself, Russell," said Lord Dorrimore keenly. "Have you been havin' a row with somebody?"

"No, sir. Well, not exactly——"

"Not exactly, eh?"

"Just a little argument with Clive, sir," said Russell uncomfortably. "It's nothing at all—please don't disturb yourself, sir. Maybe I am a little excited over the prospect of the forthcoming trip. You see, sir, I know the South Sea Islands well."

"I suspected it," said Lord Dorrimore, nodding. "You know somethin' else, too, or I'm a Dutchman! All right, Russell—you can fetch those drinks. But don't come in until I ring."

"Very good, sir."

Russell departed, and Dorrie glanced at Nelson Lee.

"Notice anythin' queer about that fellow?" he asked.

"Hardly queer," replied Lee. "He certainly seems much more refined and gentlemanly than the average steward."

"That's where you've hit it," agreed Dorrie. "The man's got a story—an' if you're interested, I'll tell you."

And Nelson Lee and Nipper heard all about that affair in 'Frisco. Lord Dorrimore

made it quite clear that Clive Russell had saved his life at the extreme risk of his own.

"I can tell you, I'm thunderin' pleased the boy's well again," continued his lordship. "It would have been an awful thing if he had pegged out. I'm convinced that Russell is a gentleman. They're both Canadians, you know—an' they're refined. The boy's had a college education, an' Russell himself shows breedin' in every inch of him. They're both like square pegs in round holes."

"Won't Russell give you any account of his past life?" asked Lee.

"Not a word."

"Looks a bit fishy, doesn't it?" asked Nipper.

"It may look so, but I'll warrant it isn't," replied Lord Dorrimore. "If ever I set eyes on an honest man, Russell's one. It's my belief he's had a frightfully hard knock—swindled by some of those sharks on the 'other side, probably. I'd like you to see the boy, Lee."

He rang the bell, and when Russell appeared with the drinks, Dorrie requested him to bring Clive in at once. The steward looked a little startled, but he made no comment. And three minutes later Clive Russell entered the state-room. If anything, he was even more flushed and excited than his father.

"This is the youngster," said Dorrie. "All right, Clive—don't get flustered. I've told Mr. Lee how you saved my life——"

"I'd almost forgotten it, sir," said Clive uncomfortably. "I guess you won't go telling everybody, will you? And is it true that we're going to the South Sea Islands?" he added, in a sudden burst of uncontrollable excitement. "Is it really true, sir?"

"Yes, said Dorrie curiously.

"Dad!" exclaimed Clive, turning to his father, "why don't you tell Lord Dorrimore now? I've asked you twenty times, and you won't budge! Say, you ought to tell him—you ought to, dad!"

Russell flushed deeply.

"Don't take any notice of the boy, sir, please!" he urged. "He's nearly off his head about this trip——"

"And I've good reason to be off my head, sir!" interrupted Clive, turning eagerly to Dorrie. "The Southern Pacific is the one part of the world where dad wants to go to! Let's go to the island, sir—let's give that scoundrel Prescott all he deserves."

"That's enough, Clive—that's enough!" said Russell sharply.

The boy remained silent, breathing hard.

"There's nothing else you require, sir?" asked Russell quietly.

Lord Dorrimore shook his head.

"It won't do, Russell—not on your life!" he said, rising to his feet. "Clive has said quite enough to commit you to the whole story. You can't let it rest where it stands.

Of course, if it's somethin' purely personal, that's another matter——"

"It isn't, sir!" interrupted Clive eagerly. "Ever since we left 'Frisco, I've been asking dad to tell you the story, and he won't. He's afraid you'll disbelieve the story—the same as others have disbelieved it. It's about pearls, sir."

"Pearls, eh?" said Dorrie. "Russell, old man, you don't know how interested I am in pearls! Not financially—I'm a millionaire—but in every other way. Come along—let's have the yarn!"

CHAPTER XI.

RUSSELL DECIDES TO TELL HIS STORY.

 NIPPER was aware that a sudden tension had made itself felt in the state-room. The very looks of Russell and his son were enough to account for this. But there was something else.

Clive's mention of "that scoundrel, Prescott" was significant, and it tended to substantiate Lord Dorrimore's suggestion that Russell had been victimised. But it went further. According to Clive, the mysterious Prescott was on one of the islands. And the mention of pearls was even more significant than everything else.

"Oh, dad, why don't you tell Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Lee?" asked Clive breathlessly. "I know they'll believe you—they can't do anything else! And as we're going to the South Sea Islands, we might just as well go to the one island that matters."

Russell looked rather helpless.

"I am sorry, sir," he said, looking at Dorrie. "I didn't want Clive to force my hand like this."

"Clive's got some sense," said Dorrie grimly. "He probably knows what an obstinate mule you are! If there's anythin' I can do to help you, Russell, just say the word. I have already told you that I want the opportunity to repay that debt. It's up to you to spin the yarn."

"It's a long story, sir——" began Russell dubiously.

"That's all right—these gentleman don't mind if they stay here all night," interrupted Dorrie. "An' now that we're on this thing, we'll go through with it. You needn't fear that I shall discredit you."

"That's just what I do fear, sir," replied Russell frankly. "I guess I've had cause to feel uncertain. I'll admit there's a story, sir—but it's such an extraordinary one that I'd made up my mind to keep it to myself. In these prosaic surroundings, and without a single atom of evidence to substantiate it, the yarn will naturally have a false ring about it. I don't want you to think I'm just an adventurer."

Lord Dorrimore smiled.

"By the Lord Harry!" he ejaculated.

"An' you've held back all these weeks because of that? Upon my soul, Russell, I'm not such a bad judge of character as all that! An adventurer? You? Man alive, I am content to accept you at face value."

"Thank you, sir."

"I must say that I agree with Lord Dorrimore," said Nelson Lee. "And you will be well advised, Russell, to accept his lordship's advice and help. If a wrong has been done you, and you are anxious to obtain justice, Lord Dorrimore is the one man to turn to. We are already committed to this South Sea Island trip, and it is merely a pleasure cruise."

"That's just what I said, sir," put in Clive eagerly. "It doesn't matter where The Wanderer goes, does it, sir?" he added, turning to Dorrie. "I mean, the Pacific is an awful big place, and as long as the party visits some of the islands, everybody will be satisfied?"

"Exactly," said Dorrie.

"There you are, dad!" said Clive. "So there's no reason why we shouldn't go to our own island. I expect we shall get there after Prescott has begun his operations. We shall find the place swarming with Kanakas, and there might be some fighting——"

"Fightin'?" interrupted Lord Dorrimore, with a start. "Good gad, Russell! Do you mean to say you were going to leave me out of this? I didn't think you were so infernally cold-hearted! Why, an adventure is the very thing we want to give this cruise a bit of spice!"

The steward smiled slightly.

"I guess there'll be plenty of adventure if we go to this island," he said with a slightly grim note in his voice. "But I was thinking of the young gentlemen and the young ladies. The Wanderer's going on a pleasure cruise, and it wouldn't be the thing to involve the party in a fight—particularly as it is my own private fight——"

"It doesn't matter whose fight it is, if we're on your side, we're all in it together," interrupted Dorrie. "As for the boys and girls, there's nothin' to fear. They'll be safe on The Wanderer, an' we can attend to the scrappin' ourselves. Come along, Russell—sit down, an' let's have that yarn. It's sheer cruelty to animals to keep us waitin'!"

"If you insist, sir——"

"I insist so much that you'll either tell that story, or you won't leave this cabin alive!" said his lordship sternly. "You can't let the matter rest where it stands, Russell. Your son saved my life, an' I'm anxious to do somethin' to repay the debt. If there's any opportunity here, I'll grab it with both hands."

Russell stood there, silent for a moment. The flushed, excited look had left his face, and he was now calm and tense. Obviously, he had made up his mind. His eyes were gleaming with a sudden fire—as though his

very thoughts caused his blood to boil. Without question, Russell had much to tell.

Clive's eyes were gleaming, too—but in a different way. Ever since that San Francisco affair he had been urging his father to confide in their employer. But the fear of being discredited had always caused Russell to hold back.

"You mustn't blame me, gentlemen, if this yarn sounds tall," exclaimed Russell, as he accepted Dorrie's invitation, and sat down. "Sometimes I can hardly believe that all the events happened. But I can assure you that I'll tell nothing but the truth, without any exaggeration. I'll leave you to judge for yourselves."

"That's the idea," agreed Lord Dorri-more. "Go ahead, old man! Let's have everythin'—right from the very start."

Russell settled himself in his chair, and began.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORY OF PARADISE ISLAND.

(Related by Warner Russell)

I.



JUST over seven years ago, I was a prosperous business man in Montreal. I owned and controlled an extensive agricultural implement-factory, with two downtown stores.

At that time, I was living happily with my wife and Clive—who was just about eight. Everything was going splendidly for me, and I had prospects of becoming one of Montreal's most successful men.

Then came the crash.

Details, after all, are unnecessary. Possibly, the collapse was largely my own fault. I was younger then, and I was in too much of a hurry to turn big money into bigger. I attempted to run before I could walk, and there's no more fatal mistake. Briefly, I opened up two new stores, involving myself in enormous expense. I also took my manager into partnership.

As a manager, he had been all that could be desired—as a partner, he was as crooked as a corkscrew. I am not excusing myself—I should have kept my eyes open. But I trusted this man, and paid the penalty.

After working hard ever since my marriage, without any holiday, I left the business in charge of my partner, and took my wife and child West on a trip. We went to Vancouver, and then down through California, and back. That homecoming was tragic in many ways.

My partner had decamped with every penny he could realise, and the business was in an unsound condition. A minor slump had occurred, and this, combined with the added expense of the two new stores, and the lack of funds, brought about a crisis.

In a nutshell, my entire business collapsed.

Within the space of a few months, I became a bankrupt, I was left without a penny from the wreckage, and the shock of it all killed my poor wife. That holiday trip had been fatal in more ways than one—for my wife had contracted lung trouble in California—the last place on earth where one would anticipate such a thing—and she had returned much weakened. The hardships entailed in the crash proved too much for her.

With only Clive left, and with my credit ruined, I found that Montreal was no place for me to live in. We managed to get to Vancouver. I had liked the town during my vacation trip, and it was sufficiently remote from Montreal to suit me. In Vancouver I was unknown. In a small way, I made a fresh start, and within the course of a few years I had established a modest hardware business. I was able to send Clive to college, and I was putting a little money by in the bank, month by month.

The old days at Montreal were forgotten, and I found myself fairly content with my new sphere of life.

Being on the coast, I naturally came into contact with many sea-faring men—indeed, I did quite a good business at the docks. And occasionally I had a longing to travel. A widower, with no home ties, and with my son at college, there was only my small business to keep me ashore.

Well, one day this year I met Captain McAndrew, the skipper and half-owner of one of the trimmest schooners I ever set eyes on. And McAndrew was a bluff, honest Scotsman of the right sort. I had made no mistake with him, and I liked him immensely.

It seemed that he was having trouble with the man who owned the other half of his schooner. Mentioning one day that I should like to do a little travelling, he suggested that I should sell my business and invest my money in his schooner. He felt that he and I would be ideal partners.

I didn't forget my former experience of taking a partner, but this was different. Old McAndrew was true-blue to the backbone. I finally succumbed to his suggestions, and sold out.

From that moment I was half-owner of the schooner, Clyde. She was due to sail for the Hawaiian Islands within two or three weeks on a trading cruise, and would then continue south through the Marshalls and Carolines to New Guinea and Australia.

The prospect of this cruise delighted me, although Clive was in no way pleased, for I had decided that he should remain at college until I returned. Now I recall all these events, I am coming to the conclusion that I was born under an unlucky star.

For another disaster occurred to me.

Clive and I had been on board the Clyde one evening, taking dinner with Captain

McAndrew. And Clive, I remember, had been urging me to let him come on the trip. I was more than half inclined to yield to his pleadings.

It was late when we went ashore and the night was inky black. I remember two or three forms springing out from behind a lumber pile; I struggled for a moment or two, and then received a crashing blow on the head which knocked me senseless.

As a matter of fact, Clive and I were attacked unawares, and we really stood no chance. Clive was knocked out at the same instant as myself.

When I came to my senses I knew that I was aboard ship. I was in a bunk—a foul-smelling fo'c'sle, where little or no light penetrated. The creaking of timbers and the unmistakable motion told me that the ship was under way.

Of course, Clive and I had been shanghaied.

Knocked unconscious during that encounter, we had been bundled aboard this sailing ship, and she had gone out with the early morning tide. I soon discovered that she was an ancient barque, her timbers rotten, and her captain rottener.

He was one of the most villainous men I ever came across—an American skipper of the worst type. The barque was ill-found, the food was little better than poison, and she was short-handed. Clive and I will never forget that trip, particularly in the light of what happened afterwards. We were compelled to work like slaves under the orders of a bullying mate and the drunken skipper.

The barque was a slow old tub, and I was convinced that any kind of hurricane would cause her to founder. I was struck by one significant fact. A longboat was kept constantly ready—new, in perfect condition, and with a supply of food and water in the lockers. I became convinced that the rascally skipper had been paid to lose his ship. No doubt she was heavily insured, and the captain was thoughtful for his own safety, although he didn't care a snap what happened to the crew.

For the first week Clive and I suffered tortures.

But after that we became more resigned. I won't go into details here. I had more than one fight with the mate, and Clive, too, had his own troubles. But by the end of a fortnight we were fairly broken. We found that kicking was more than useless.

Fortunately we had fair weather, and when we crossed the Line the heat was suffocating. Even with a fair wind the barque could make only two or three knots, and we dragged along, day after day, crawling southward towards the islands.

Even now I don't know if the skipper had any definite objective in mind. As

far as I could understand, he was rigidly keeping out of the recognised ocean routes, and was well off the track of all shipping.

Then, one day, the storm came—a fearful, devastating, tropical hurricane.

II.



UNTIL then I had never been in the midst of a cyclone. It was one of the most fearful experiences imaginable.

The captain apparently knew that his barque could never withstand the fury of it, for he and the mate and one or two of their picked conspirators, took to the longboat before the storm had fairly developed.

The rest of the crew consisted of one or two Kanakas, a Chinaman, a Swede, two Germans, and Clive and myself.

There was another boat—a leaky old whaleboat. I shan't try to describe the ghastly fight which took place after the captain had left. That motley crowd of ruffians—they were all scum—fought like maniacs to get the whaleboat launched. In the end they only succeeded in capsizing their craft, a cable's-length from the barque, and going to the bottom, or else to the sharks.

The situation was then critical. Clive and I were left utterly alone on that rotten hulk, with no other boat on board. Most of the crew were drowned, and the captain and his men had long since disappeared in the smother. I've got an idea they went to the bottom, too—a well-deserved retribution.

As the storm increased Clive and I gave up hope. We did think of making a raft, but soon dismissed the idea. Even if we succeeded in launching such a crazy device we could never have survived. For the sea was absolutely mountainous. I have never before witnessed such a scene of utter wildness.

So we could only stay on board and wait for the end. At any moment we expected the barque to take her last plunge. To remain on deck was impossible, for the gale was shrieking down like something solid, tearing the rigging to shreds, and setting spars adrift every moment. As a matter of fact, Clive and I got below just before the mainmast snapped like a carrot and went overside. All this time the barque was plunging ominously. We could do nothing but await the end. To walk about was impossible; we just clung to the furniture in the dingy saloon and listened to the crashing of wreckage and the uproar of the hurricane.

It seemed to go on for ever. And although the old tub tossed and heaved, she didn't founder. She was leaking; she was listing heavily to starboard, and down by the bows, but she kept afloat. It was one of those unexpected contingencies which the skipper hadn't bargained for.

I won't go into a long account of that smother. Clive became exhausted after the first four or five hours and fell asleep, and I've got to admit that I slept, too. I had given up all hope of ever seeing the blue sky again. I had been expecting

helplessly, now high, now low, and the scene on her deck was beyond my meagre powers of description.

I can only say that everything was a tangle of wreckage and destruction. Not a mast was left, not a spar, not a shred of sailcloth. The gallery had been swept completely away, in addition to everything movable. But the fact which struck me more than anything else was that the barque kept afloat.

Hope began to revive within my breast. If the old hulk had come through the



The situation was then critical. Clive and I were left utterly alone on that rotten hulk, with no other boat on board.

the barque to take her final plunge at any moment.

But when I awoke many hours later, I was instantly aware that a great change had taken place. The saloon was at an acute angle, but the howl and shriek of the gale had ceased. Leaving Clive asleep, I got up the companion and found myself on deck.

It was morning—clear, brilliant, and flooded with dazzling sunlight. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, or a breath of wind, but the sea was big. Enormous, smooth-topped rollers told of the force of the recent storm. The ship was wallowing

worst part of the storm there was every chance that she would now keep afloat. She was a derelict—with her bows under water, and her stern sticking out, leaving her rudder well above the surface. She was just drifting with the sea.

And an hour's inspection satisfied me that she was getting no lower in the water. Fortunately, the ship's store-room was intact, and there was enough food and water on board to last the pair of us six months.

It struck me as being rather ironical that while the captain and crew had probably gone to their deaths, Clive and I were

still alive. The skipper had never believed that the vessel could remain afloat, and even now I can't understand why she survived. But the sea is full of those mysteries.

When Clive awoke he was overjoyed to find that we were comparatively safe, although, drifting like a piece of flotsam in the Southern Pacific, far out of the track of all shipping, there was precious little chance of our being sighted by any other vessel.

That morning we had our first decent meal since leaving Vancouver. The fo'c'sle hands had been fed on stuff that was unfit for pigs, while the after-guard had enjoyed the very best of food. There was plenty of this latter, so Clive and I fared royally.

And after that we could do nothing, except make ourselves as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. The sea subsided during the day, and by the next morning there was only a gentle swell.

Days of brilliant weather followed, with the barque drifting imperceptibly. We kept a constant lookout, in case we sighted any other ship. But as the days dragged on it seemed unlikely that we should ever do so. And by now the vessel had proved that she was in no danger of sinking.

However, it was impossible for Clive and I to live day after day without doing anything, so we occupied our time by constructing an elaborate raft—a big affair, with a small shelter in the centre, so that we could take plenty of stores and water with us.

How wise we were was proved just over a week later.

For another tropical storm came along, and lashed the sea into fury. Only in the nick of time did we get the raft launched. And before the storm had fairly developed we saw the barque tilt up suddenly and take her final plunge. All this sounds like a purely imaginative yarn, but it isn't. I could go into a thousand and one details, but there's no need of them here.

Anyhow, the storm passed, and left Clive and I afloat on the raft, still alive, and still with food and water. And on the morning of the second day after this new storm had subsided, we caught sight of a faint smudge on the horizon.

And as we drifted nearer we knew that we were within sight of land.

III.



AT first we were very excited; but it wasn't long before we found that the "land" was merely an isolated coral atoll—a lagoon island of the type which is dotted over the Southern Pacific by the score.

But this island was obviously right off the track, and one, I believe, that had never been even placed on a chart. Indeed, I know that this latter is a fact. Our island is unknown.

As I had at first suspected, it proved to be a ring of coral, enclosing a fairly big lagoon. But the height of the land in one or two spots led me to believe that they were mountain-tops—that is to say, the summits of a submarine ridge. In that latitude the Pacific is of an extraordinary depth, but in certain spots there are many islands. Now, these islands are quite frequently the mere tops of under-water mountains. The sea, on all sides, goes down to an immense depth—almost sheer.

More by luck than anything else, we managed to get the raft through a break in the reef, for the circle of land was, in reality, a coral reef for the most part. The surf was considerable, on account of the recent storm, but within the lagoon the water was as clear as crystal.

We drifted leisurely across it, the lagoon itself being between three and four miles from one shore to the other. Whilst I was inwardly dejected, Clive was fairly glowing with excitement and delight.

"Let's call it Paradise Island, dad!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "Did you ever see anything so glorious?"

I told him that it was a kind of dream-island, and encouraged his high spirits. But at the same time, I realised that there was an excellent chance of our remaining on this atoll for the rest of our lives.

Not only was it uncharted, but it was many hundreds of miles out of the track of all shipping—and even those Pacific islands in the track of shipping are sometimes left for years without a visit. So what chance was there here? And there was the further possibility that we should be faced by hostile natives.

I allowed Clive to enjoy himself to the full as we drifted over the lagoon. He was overwhelmed by the amazing colours of the coral, of the fishes, and even I was entranced by the wonders of that lagoon. Until one sees these things with one's own eyes, it is impossible to realise their magnificence.

At last we ran ashore on the white sands on the further side of the lagoon. My very first task was to search for water, for we had precious little left on the raft—and I was not unaware of the fact that many of these coral atolls are devoid of all fresh water—except for the rain.

However, the problem was soon solved, for we found a delightfully fresh spring—a sparkling, rippling brook which came down through one of the groves, where palms and bread-fruit grew in profusion—together with many other trees. And the hibiscus flowers were scattered in myriads.

Clive had been quite right in describing the island as a paradise. It certainly was—or

would have been if any mode of communication with the outside world had existed. It was the knowledge that we were cut off—marooned—that spoiled the effect.

A very brief survey of the island assured us that we were the only living things upon it. And, as far as I could judge, no human beings had ever lived there—it was in its primeval state.

As it happened, we needn't have worried about the water, for on the following day the skies clouded over, and rain descended for two solid days—as only tropical rain can descend. And by the time it was over, and the skies cleared again, the island was smothered with fresh water pools, containing thousands of gallons. If necessary, we could have fashioned a miniature lake, with a big water supply.

Clive, of course, was as high-spirited as ever, and was confident that a ship would show up in a very short time, and that we should be rescued. He didn't seem to realise that by all the laws of chance we should be lonely castaways for years on end.

In order to keep my spirits up, I worked. With Clive's help, I set about making a house. We used most of the raft for this purpose, assisted by many of the timbers from the island itself. At the end of a week we had erected quite a respectable little dwelling. During this time the weather had remained perfect, and our lives were tranquil.

One day Clive went off before breakfast for a bathe. At first we had been rather uncertain about entering the lagoon, but we had soon found that sharks were absent from this ideal lake. Moreover, sharks are like everything else—they generally avoid human beings. Most of the shark stories one hears are more or less fictitious.

We had reserved a number of timbers, and had manufactured a smaller raft—just something on which we could negotiate the lagoon if necessary. Clive took this out, and dived from it. And in the meantime I prepared breakfast. As he didn't turn up at the right time, I went down to the beach to look for him.

Rather to my surprise, I saw the raft far out on the lagoon, well over a mile distant. It was drifting, having evidently broken away from its usual mooring-rope. For a moment I was rather scared, thinking that Clive had met with some disaster.

Then I saw him climb on the raft, and wave to me. He shouted, and in that crystal air his voice carried over the water with extraordinary clarity. He assured me that he would wait until the raft drifted ashore, and then return to camp by the reef.

So I could do nothing but wait.

It struck me that Clive was an extraordinary time. Watching him, I saw him dive repeatedly—particularly when he got nearer to the other shore. But at last the tiny raft drifted on to the white sands, and Clive made it secure. Then he came running along the sands.

It was a long journey for him—some miles. The island was not an island in the ordinary, accepted sense of the word. The land formed an almost complete circle—something like a broken hoop. On the outer edge of this hoop the surf of the Pacific pounded, and the interior of the hoop was filled by the lagoon. The broken section, of course, signifies the opening in the reef.

I have used a hoop as a simile, but I am afraid it is a rather inadequate one. The reef was by no means circular, but distinctly uneven, broadening out in places, and narrowing in others, with several minor hills here and there. At least, I think I have made myself clear.

Clive, therefore, having drifted ashore on the lagoon sands some miles away, had to return to the camp by the beach—or, in other words, along the inner side of the hoop.

When he arrived—minus all clothing, of course, except for a pair of shorts—I saw that he was carrying something in his hands. It proved to be an enormous oyster.

"The whole bed of the lagoon is smothered with them on the other side, dad!" declared Clive excitedly. "I've never seen so many in all my life! We shall be able to have oysters every day!"

I looked at the great shellfish, and my heart started thumping. Clive was thinking of many possible feasts, but my own thoughts turned in quite a different direction.

Shell! Until this moment I had never dreamed that Paradise Island was a treasure of oyster-shell. For shell of this description has a high commercial value. And one thought led to another, and I stood there, turning the oyster over and over, genuinely excited.

"Pearls!" I murmured musingly. "By Jove, I wonder!"

IV.



THE thing seemed too big to be true—too stupendous!

I was well aware that most of the pearl fisheries exist in the Southern Pacific, but I had always coupled Australia with the thought of pearls. Here, on this isolated atoll, it seemed that the thing was impossible. Yet, upon due consideration, I saw no earthly reason why pearls shouldn't exist there. The atoll was uncharted, and probably unknown to any living beings except Clive and myself.

Naturally, I decided upon an immediate investigation. After a hurried breakfast, I went with Clive to the spot where the raft was lying on the beach. We embarked upon it, and it was just capable of sustaining our weight. Then, paddling out over the crystal water, we moored the raft several hundred yards from the beach—where the bed of the lagoon lay about three fathoms below us.



It was a fascinating sight.

The water of a tropical lagoon is so amazingly crystal that one scarcely believes it at first—like the Irishman at the Zoo, who, seeing a giraffe for the first time, declares that there's no such animal. One can hardly credit that one is actually floating upon water.

As Clive and I leaned over the raft, we could see the shadow of it on the lagoon bed. And we were gazing upon an absolute paradise of colour. Everything was gorgeous. The shells, the fish, the coral. All combined, the picture was entrancing and intoxicating.

But I must confess I was too excited to pay much heed to the charm of my surroundings. The thought of pearls had sent my heart thumping, and I had to fight with myself. I felt that I was acting like a fool to even think of such preposterous possibilities.

At first I thought Clive had exaggerated, for I only saw comparatively few oyster-shells on the sea bed—lying there, gaping open in the most grotesque fashion. But Clive assured me that we were a little out of our location. The majority of the oysters were further to the south, where the whole bottom of the lagoon was alive with shell.

But this sample was enough for me. I spent two or three hours diving, and bringing oysters to the surface. I couldn't possibly wait until the oysters had rotted, in the usual way. Having obtained a good supply, Clive and I got the raft back to the beach, and then we made an examination.

With my jack-knife I forced the shells open, and eagerly examined them. Clive, of course, expected to find a pearl in each shell—but I knew something of the pearl industry, and realised that only one in a hundred may contain anything of value, or even one in a thousand.

But the shell itself is of considerable worth, and this alone interested me. But after we had opened two-thirds of our "take," we struck lucky. Out of that shell I fished one of the most amazing pearls I have ever set eyes upon—a great, round, lustrous object of pure white. It was almost as large as a marble. It was incredible. And my excitement was so great that I felt sick and giddy with it.

The thing was true!

By the remotest chance on record, Clive and I had stumbled upon a bed of pearl oysters. My first impulse was to work like mad, day and night, in bringing the shells to the surface. But then a reaction set in, and I realised what a useless proceeding this would be.

I had the knowledge—and that was sufficient. The pearls were there, and perfectly safe. But what value were they to me? Although I didn't tell Clive so, I had an idea that we should never be taken off that atoll. All the gold from the vaults of the Bank of

England wouldn't have been of any use to us. And pearls were equally useless.

The days passed, and I regarded the whole situation with a level head. Now and again, Clive and I would do some diving, and bring up some more pearls. And I secured six fine specimens—the prize from some hundreds of shells.

The first one was the king of the lot. The other five, although good pearls, were little more than half the size. I was completely satisfied. If this oyster-fishery could produce half a dozen pearls as the result of my scrappy labours, what could it produce when the work was done properly, with a score of expert divers on the job?

Naturally, I surveyed the lagoon in a very thorough manner. And I discovered that the oyster-bed extended for a full two miles towards the south. I told Clive, without exaggeration, that the lagoon contained a vast fortune. Lying here, unsuspected, for any number of years, these pearl oysters were just waiting to be seized and converted into cash.

I found myself dreaming—picturing the day when we should be rescued from the atoll. I made wonderful plans for the future—dizzy, glorious plans. I pictured myself as a man of wealth again, with even greater position than I had enjoyed in Montreal, at the height of my business success.

I had almost forgotten old Captain McAndrew, and my half-share in the schooner Clyde. What was that now, anyway? The half-share in a small trading ship! It was an insignificant trifle compared with the riches which lay at my very feet.

After the first week or two Clive became impatient. The novelty of the island wore off, and the loneliness of our existence tended to have a bad effect upon us. We fed well, for the island was abundantly covered with fruits, and there was fish for the mere taking.

But, with the passing of the days, we became more and more convinced that our fate was sealed—and that we should never see civilisation again. Indeed, we resigned ourselves to the inevitable, and gave up our last hope.

And then, of course, the whaler arrived. Just when we had made up our minds that rescue was impossible, rescue came.

V.



IT was Clive who caught sight of the whaler first. He had gone across the reef while I was preparing breakfast, in order to have a bathe in the surf. And he suddenly came running to me, his face flushed, his eyes glittering with excitement.

"Dad!" he gasped. "There's a ship!"



"A ship!" I repeated, with an incredulous stare. "Nonsense!"

I simply couldn't believe it. It seemed too good to be true—too wildly impossible. But when I hurried across the reef with Clive, I was not left long in doubt.

Far out, and almost hull down, I could see the canvas of a sailing-ship, gleaming in the sunlight. I can't describe my feelings at that welcome sight. I had never expected to see a ship again.

And for hours Clive and I experienced torture.

It was almost a calm, and we couldn't tell whether the ship was approaching the island or not—she seemed to remain in exactly the same position. But at last, towards noon, the wind freshened slightly, and we were left in no further fear as to her course. She was making straight for the island.

Then, my anxiety being over, I thought of other things. A whaler! And probably a villainous skipper and a cut-throat crew. One word to them about the lagoon's secret, and there would be frightful trouble.

Fortunately, the oyster-bed lay at the extremity of the lagoon, where the water shoaled away to the shallows. If the whaler entered the lagoon, she would undoubtedly drop her anchor in the deep water, where there was no sign of a single oyster. And it was quite on the cards that nobody would think of exploring, especially if we mentioned nothing.

I certainly had no idea of sharing my discovery with the captain of a whaler—although, to tell the truth, I was grateful enough for the arrival of a ship. In any case, it would be far better to judge what kind of a man he was before making a final decision.

We lit a huge fire, and the great column of smoke acted as a signal. I instructed Clive to breathe no word about the pearls, and to leave everything to me. I also told him that there was a distinct possibility of our remaining on the whaler for a year or two. I know what kind of ships they are.

She came right in, and dropped her hook into the lagoon with a clatter. And a boat soon put off, and I found myself face to face with the skipper and two or three members of the crew. As I had half-anticipated, they were a tough lot.

The captain was a German, and it would be quite impossible to enumerate the nationalities of his crew. The ship was one of the dirtiest I had ever set eyes on, and she was as slow as a tub.

It appeared that she had merely come to the atoll for water. Having been blown off her course by one of the Pacific storms, she had sighted the island by chance, and her skipper had thought it possible that he would find a spring.

He was extremely astonished to find two

white people there, and he was greatly interested in our story, for he could understand and speak English fairly well. I told him exactly what had happened, for there was no earthly reason to conceal the fact that Clive and I had been shanghaied.

To my great relief, the skipper showed no desire to explore the lagoon—the thought of any possible pearl oysters never occurred to him. No doubt he had been disappointed too many times. For one may cruise among the Pacific atolls for years without striking a real find. The luck of Clive and I had been phenomenal. It was just one of those strokes of chance which come to a man now and again.

I discovered that the whaler was intent upon making for Sydney, and she reckoned to be in harbour in less than three months. This was an excellent piece of news. Clive and I offered to work our passage, and the offer was accepted.

We worked, too—we worked harder than we had worked on the other ship. That German skipper was a tartar! After the first three or four days I was delighted at having kept my secret secure. The whaler contained no gear for the purpose of pearl fishing, and her crew was hopeless. Nothing but trouble would have resulted if I had revealed the secret of the lagoon. Indeed, I am convinced that mutiny would have broken out, with the possible murder of many men. They were not the type to learn such news without losing their heads.

As it happened, we were soon caught in a terrific hurricane, and for two solid days we fought it, being swept hundreds of miles out of our course. Furthermore, the whaler was crippled, and when the storm died down, the captain came to a fresh decision. As we had favourable winds, we set our bows towards San Francisco. A great deal of the whaler's canvas had gone, and we were in a pretty bad plight altogether. The distance to 'Frisco was much shorter, too.

Clive and I, of course, were overjoyed at the change, for 'Frisco was the one port we desired to enter. It would be a trivial matter to get to Vancouver once we had landed.

Everything comes to an end at last, but that voyage seemed eternal. However, we entered the Golden Gate after weeks of toil and weeks of bad food. Never in my life have I been so glad to see land. Once ashore, Clive and I felt that we had just come out of prison.

We were able to breathe again. I hugged my precious pearls, and had no fears for the immediate future. For those six pearls meant comparative affluence—at least, so I supposed.

But within twenty-four hours of landing in 'Frisco, I came precious near to finding myself in gaol.

VI.



WE had landed practically penniless, but I hadn't cared a snap, for my waistcoat-pocket contained a miniature fortune. Both Clive and I were perfect scarecrows, and although we hadn't thought of our appearance on board the whaler, it made all the difference now that we were back in civilisation.

My first thoughts, therefore, were connected with the pearls. It was up to me to sell one of them, in order to get some

they were obtained—otherwise he will not look at them. And any disreputable buyer will pay next to nothing.

I went to a big jewel merchant, but was cautious enough to produce only two of my smaller pearls. Even this nearly proved fatal. He was suspicious at once, and not only refused to have anything to do with me, but came precious near to informing the police. Heaven knows what he would have done if I had shown him the biggest pearl of all!

It was a shock to me, and I began to realise that I should have to adopt different tactics. So I left Clive in Golden Gate

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ready cash. Until I had money, we dared not present ourselves at a decent hotel, and it was impossible to obtain decent clothing without the necessary dollars.

Our joy at being in 'Frisco was so great that we overlooked any possible risk. Clive was bubbling over with excitement. We could sell our pearls, fit out a ship, and return to Paradise Island—as we had christened it. It all seemed so simple.

But when it came to realising on my pearls, I began to appreciate the difficulties. Pearls, like all precious stones, are extremely hard to dispose of. Any reputable buyer must know where they come from, and how

Park, and penetrated Chinatown—I went into one of the worst quarters of the city. My disreputable appearance rendered me quite safe.

Briefly, I disposed of two pearls. It was a Chinaman who bought them from me, and he gave me one hundred dollars—although they were worth a thousand and over. But it was ready money I wanted, and this was the only way of obtaining it.

With the hundred dollars, Clive and I bought modest outfits—just enough to make ourselves decent. Then we took a room at a small hotel, and felt that we were clean again. After months on that infernal

whaler, the luxury of that modest hotel was too glorious for words.

The next day, after a good rest, I felt encouraged. I went to two or three big dealers, but they all regarded me with suspicion. I managed to sell one more pearl—obtaining five hundred dollars this time—but it was a risky position.

With that cash, Clive and I lost no time in boarding the train and setting off north for Vancouver. Here another shock awaited me. The Clyde had sailed a week or two after Clive and I had been shanghaied, and she hadn't been heard of since. She was written down as a total loss, having evidently foundered in one of the big storms that had been particularly prevalent that season.

So my scheme for taking McAndrew into my confidence had gone by the board. It was no longer possible to fit the Clyde out as a pearling schooner and set off for the island. My sole capital had vanished, too. The insurance company would pay nothing—until more definite information regarding the Clyde's loss came to hand. And I knew it would be a question of endless waiting.

And I was impatient—I wanted to get something done. I had a horror of somebody else discovering that pearl lagoon. Vancouver proved to be a hopeless place for my purpose. 'Frisco was much more promising, so Clive and I returned.

And at last I fell in with a big dealer in pearls and other precious stones—a man named Jonathan Prescott. He was a ship-owner into the bargain, owning and controlling a considerable fleet of ships. Most of these were schooners and other trading vessels of the type which are to be found in Pacific waters. And I felt myself to be on solid ground at last.

Prescott was a bluff, hearty man with a manner which inspired confidence. He was enthusiastic about my story. And when I showed him the pearls his rapture was unbounded.

I went into full details, and I could see that he was completely convinced. He agreed to send out a schooner without any delay, and arranged to go on the trip personally. Being practically a millionaire, he could afford to leave his head office whenever he chose.

Everything, of course, was arranged from a legal standpoint. An agreement was drawn out in the presence of a lawyer and signed. We were to share fifty-fifty all through, and it was an arrangement which I readily agreed to. I had certainly discovered the lagoon, but I could do nothing without capital. Prescott supplied that capital, and was entitled to half-shares.

Prescott bought my remaining pearls, agreeing to pay me an excellent price. He supplied me with ready cash, and placed ten thousand dollars to my credit in one of the banks. This ten thousand was pay-

ment for the big white pearl, and I considered it a wonderfully fair price.

Well, an expedition was fitted out without delay—a sound schooner being pressed into service. Everything was in training for the trip. It was arranged that we should go considerably out of our course to start with, picking our way among the islands, selecting Kanakas for the diving work. We wanted men who had no knowledge of the value of pearls, and it would need careful and cautious selecting. Only by choosing such men should we be secure.

Prescott was not worried about time. It was one chance in a million, he declared, that anybody else would discover the lagoon. And it would be far better for us to go leisurely and pick our labour in twos and threes from different islands than to rush into the thing with a hastily gathered crowd.

It would probably be three months before the schooner finally reached Paradise Island. But that wouldn't matter a toss. We should be able to do our work speedily and effectively once we arrived.

At last the sailing day drew near.

Clive was coming with us, of course, and he was bubbling over with anticipation. Everything was now going smoothly. My troubles were over. And then came the bombshell—three days before sailing time.

I went to Prescott's office in response to a telephone invitation—needing, in fact, some ready cash. Prescott had always supplied me with what I required, and I saw no reason to suspect trouble now.

But trouble came—the most stupendous, staggering trouble of all. And it came with the unexpectedness of a thunderbolt. I walked into Jonathan Prescott's office, and he disclaimed all knowledge of me! He treated me as a perfect stranger, and said he had never seen me before in all his life!

VII.



TO say that I was bowled over is to put it inadequately. I was literally stunned by this right-about-face on Prescott's part. I faced him, bewildered and aghast.

He asked me who I was, why I had come, and informed me that as his time was valuable he could not waste any. I stammered out something concerning the telephone conversation, and he told me that he had never used the telephone in connection with me, and did not know that I was staying in the city.

After the first few minutes a revulsion of feeling seized me.

Previously, I had liked Jonathan Prescott. Now, with a flood of light, I could see that

he was a trickster. His geniality was a pose. He was a crook to the finger-tips.

Perhaps I'm not much of a judge of character—that experience indicated so, at all events, I guess! Before leaving his office I began to get a glimmering of his purpose.

The infernal rogue had got hold of my secret—he had taken my specimen pearls. He was the only man I had consulted regarding Paradise Island—with the single exception of his lawyer.

Remembering our fifty-fifty agreement, I taxed him with it, and suddenly felt my confidence returning. I hadn't been fool enough to go into this thing blindly—I had it all in black and white! When I told him about the agreement, he laughed, and said that I was mad.

Indeed, in the end, he called several of his office staff, and had me forcibly ejected from the building. At the time I didn't realise the humiliation of the affair—I was too stunned and furious.

Prescott had double-crossed me! Without any question whatever, that was his game. Having drained me dry of all information, he was intent upon leaving me in the lurch. The absolute filthiness of the thing made me boil. I rushed to my hotel, told Clive, and the boy's shock was even greater than my own. It meant a ghastly disappointment for him.

My next move was to take the agreement out of a bureau—where I kept it locked away in a sealed envelope. And when I looked at it I realised to the full how I had been duped and swindled. Never in my life before had I been so badly stung.

The agreement was just blank paper!

It was unbelievable, for I had placed it in the envelope, and had sealed it with my own hands. Of course, it didn't take me long to guess the truth. Some diabolical kind of ink had been used for the agreement—some devil's liquid, which remained black for a few days, and then became invisible. I had read of such tricks, but never dreamed that I should be caught by one myself. From the very first I had trusted Prescott implicitly.

This new discovery brought a fresh suspicion into my mind. What about the lawyer? I had never had a great opinion of American lawyers, but this man had seemed an average sort of fellow, no worse than scores of others of his type. I rushed round to see him, and it's hardly necessary to add that his office was closed and empty. That office, as I now know, had been especially rented and prepared for the purpose of throwing dust in my eyes. I was a stranger in 'Frisco, and had never had any cause to suspect either Prescott or the lawyer.

But now I knew the truth.

Still, I had the ten thousand dollars in the bank—the purchase price of the great

white pearl. I went to the bank, and I wasn't altogether surprised when I learned that the money had been withdrawn. According to the terms of our partnership, Prescott had had the right to put his finger into my business. I was a fool to trust him so much, but I was so intoxicated by the sudden success of my enterprise that I had lost caution.

By heavens! I had been taught a lesson now! And it was easy to understand why Jonathan Prescott had agreed to pay me ten thousand dollars for the single pearl! The money had never been out of his keeping at all!

The net result of all this was that I was stranded again—and in a ten times worse position than before. For not only was I down to my last five-dollar bill, but I now had no pearls to fall back upon. Mercifully, our hotel bill had been paid in advance, otherwise Clive and I might have been in more serious trouble still.

I hadn't worried about cash, knowing, as I thought, that I could obtain as much as I wanted from Prescott. I went to his office again, with the intention of demanding an explanation of that fake agreement. He wasn't there. I went half over the city in search of him.

I remembered the schooner in harbour, and it struck me that Prescott might have paid a visit to her. I might have known that the schooner would never be there. She had gone—sailed the previous day. As a matter of fact, as I afterwards learned, she had gone south to San Pedro, the port of Los Angeles. And Prescott, travelling by train, joined the schooner at San Pedro and she set sail for my Paradise Island.

Well, there I was in 'Frisco, broke to the wide and broken in spirit. After all my trouble—after all my hopes and expectations—I found myself left like a stranded fish on the beach.

It took me two whole days to get over the effects of that shock. All this time Clive was fuming and fretting—urging me to do something—but I knew perfectly well that nothing could be done. To inform the police was out of the question. I hadn't a shred of evidence, and even if I had Prescott wasn't on the spot. I quickly realised the futility of taking any action. The fewer people who knew about that pearl lagoon, the better.

I did go to one or two big business men—sound, established bankers and so on. But I was only laughed at for my pains. I was looked upon as either a rogue or a madman. I had no proofs of my story—not even a pearl to show in evidence of good faith.

And how could I blame these business men for doubting me? Any crook could have walked into their offices and told them a similar story. Was it likely they'd part with money, or agree to fit out an

expedition on my bare word alone? I guess not.

I was obliged to sell my watch and chain in order to obtain money for food. And in the end Clive and I had to seek work. It wasn't even possible to get up to Vancouver—into honest British territory. I had friends there—not that I would appeal to them for any help. But I should have felt more at home on the soil of my own land.

The next best thing was to get work on a British ship. More and more the fact had forced itself on me that I had better keep quiet about the lagoon and the pearls. I should only be laughed at—scorned and distrusted. Everything had gone dead against me. Prescott had gone, and even Captain McAndrew and the Clyde were listed as missing.

After several days of fruitless search, I came upon the Wanderer, in 'Frisco docks. I never hoped that Clive and I would strike lucky, but we did. I was overjoyed when I obtained a position as steward—and thankful to Heaven when Clive was enabled to come with me. By that time I had learned to be thankful for small mercies.

That, gentlemen, is my story—told briefly, I will admit, but I think I have left nothing out. I don't expect you to believe it, but I have at least stuck to the truth from first to last.

CHAPTER XIII.

JUST LIKE OLD DORRIE.



MR. WARNER RUSSELL was rather hoarse as he spoke the last words of his remarkable narrative. Throughout that strange story of adventure and discovery and villainy, his listeners had remained intently attentive.

And now a brief silence fell.

Clive Russell was standing beside his father, his face flushed, his eyes gleaming with excitement and hope. Lord Dorrimore was reclining back in his chair, smoking dreamily. Nelson Lee and Nipper were affected in different ways. Lee revealed no sign of emotion, but Nipper was almost as flushed as Clive.

Lord Dorrimore was the first to speak, and his words were characteristic.

"Hard luck, old man," he said simply, extending his hand to Russell.

"You believe what I told you, sir?" asked the steward huskily.

"Every word of it," replied his lordship, tossing his cigar end into an ashtray. "Man alive! I've knocked about the world enough to know a true yarn when I hear it. Russell, you've had the most deuced luck I've ever heard of. But why in the name of all that's amazin' didn't you tell me this before?" he added indignantly.



We lit a huge fire, and the great column of smoke acted as a signal.

"You confounded idiot, why didn't you tell me this in 'Frisco?"

Clive leaned forward.

"That's what I said, sir!" he burst out. "I asked dad to tell you a dozen times—but he wouldn't—he was afraid you'd be like all the others, and call him a liar!"

"It's a bally shame!" growled Dorrie. "How long had that schooner sailed, Russell, when you first came on the Wanderer?"

"Just over a week, sir."

"By the Lord Harry! We could have grabbed her before she left San Pedro!" snorted his lordship. "The Wanderer can simply fly—as you know. But it's not a bit of good cryin' over spilt milk—we've got to do the best we can under the circumstances."

Dorrie looked round.

"Well, you old oyster, haven't you got anythin' to say?" he demanded, giving Nelson Lee a slap on the knee. "What's the idea of sittin' there mum? Out with your opinion, man!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"There is only one opinion possible," he said quietly. "Of course, Mr. Russell, I accept your story in all its details. From the first word to the last it had the ring of true sincerity. You have met with misfortune after misfortune, and I can only

express my keen sympathy. You are not the first man who has been dealt with so atrociously."

Russell's eyes gleamed with a new kind of light.

"I guess you're real good to me, gentlemen," he said, with a little huskiness in his voice. "I had sworn that I wouldn't tell that yarn again, but I'm glad I did tell it now. If you have finished with me, sir—" he went on, turning to Dorrie.

"Finished with you, be hanged!" interrupted his lordship gruffly. "An' look here, Russell—enough of that 'sir' business. When you an' your son came on board at 'Frisco you signed as steward an' page. At that time I guessed you were fellows of breedin', but you wouldn't open your mouth. Now that I know the truth, everythin's changed."

"I don't quite understand, sir," said Russell.

"Good gad, what did I tell you about callin' me 'sir'?" growled Dorrie. "From this minute, Russell, you an' your son are members of my party. Understand? An' it isn't usual for a guest to use 'sir' when he's addressin' his host."

Russell rose to his feet, red and confused. "But—but I—I—" He paused, at a loss for words.

"Well, choke it up, old man," grinned Dorrie.

"I can't take advantage of your generosity like that!" burst out Russell. "I'm only your steward, sir—"

"What's that?" roared Dorrie, leaping up.

"But, really—" Again Russell felt his words failing him. "I can't accept this, Lord Dorrimore," he went on, forcing himself to be calm. "From the first moment I knew you to be a clean white man, but to accept my story like this without proof, and to invite me on this trip as a guest—well, say, it's hit me sort of sudden."

"You'll soon get over it," smiled Dorrie. "Understand, you two, from this moment you're my guests—an' we'll get a new steward an' a new page to-morrow. I'll see that one of the best state-rooms is placed at your disposal, an' you'll use it from this hour."

"Oh, dad!" panted Clive breathlessly. "It—it sounds too good to be true! It was worth going through everything for the joy of this minute! You're a brick, sir—"

"I'm a brick what?" demanded Dorrie, glaring. "Oh, all right—I suppose it's a sign of respect for a youngster like you to call me 'sir'—although it isn't at all necessary. A tribute to age, what?"

"It's too glorious!" breathed Clive. "And are we really going out to the South Sea Islands? Are we really going to that lagoon again?"

"We are!" replied Lord Dorrimore grimly. "An', what's more, we'll put a spoke in Prescott's wheel, or my name isn't Dorrie!"

CHAPTER XIV.

PLANS AND PREPARATIONS.



NELSON LEE was entirely satisfied with the way things were going. Lord Dorrimore's happy attitude delighted him. The sporting peer was treating Mr. Russell in just the same way as Nelson Lee would treat him. And from now onwards the former steward and page-boy would be guests. It was only fitting to their station in life.

"I'm afraid it won't be so easy as you seem to imagine," remarked Lee. "Prescott has obtained a long start, and—"

"That doesn't worry me," interrupted Dorrie. "He's usin' a sailin' ship, an' he's potterin' about the islands before goin' on to that lagoon. We shall go there direct, an' it wouldn't surprise me in the least if we got on the scene first."

"Is—is that possible, sir?" asked Clive, amazed.

"Reckon out the figures for yourself, young 'un," replied Dorrie. "It's only about a month since we were in 'Frisco, an' it won't take us much more than a fortnight to get well into the Pacific. When I want the Wanderer to go—she can go—an' show a clean pair of heels to anythin' else that floats! Why, hang it, she's nearly as fast as an aeroplane, an' we've got all the advantage of tonnage an' cargo space. We can carry out as many people as we like, an' as much equipment as we shall need."

"It's—it's wonderfully good of you," broke in Russell, swallowing something. "I never dreamed of anything like this—I never hoped for a moment that you would take this course."

Russell was so visibly affected that Dorrie felt rather uncomfortable. The unfortunate Canadian had met with so many rebuffs that he could hardly realise that his luck had turned at last and that he was dealing with one of the squarest men on earth. Dorrie was white clean through.

"I wish you wouldn't keep harpin' on it," growled his lordship. "The thing's settled, so why make a fuss? By the way, Russell, you'll do me the favour of acceptin' five hundred pounds as a loan—you can pay me back after you've got those pearls—"

"But, really—"

"If you start any more of your funny business I'll lose my temper!" roared Dorrie. "Man alive, don't you need money for your outfits? You can't let Clive come on this trip without flannels and blazers an' goodness knows what else! An' you'll need a heap of things yourself. I'm not sure that five hundred will be enough—I'd better make it a thousand."

"But I've got no security to offer you," protested Russell.

"Your word's good enough for me," retorted Dorrie. "An' understand—another

word in that strain, an' I'll never forgive you. Have you overlooked the fact that your son saved my life? Isn't it my privilege to do somethin' in return?"

"That's not right, sir—I didn't save your life at all!" broke in Clive. "It was all a mix-up in that fight——"

"Ye gods and little fishes! Are you goin' to start now?" demanded his lordship blankly. "Lee, old man, give me a whisky and soda, for goodness' sake! These fellows make me dizzy!"

Lee smilingly poured out whiskies and sodas all round—although, of course, neither Nipper nor Clive participated. They drank to the success of the voyage in ginger ale.

"There's one little thing you haven't mentioned, Russell," said Nelson Lee. "This island of yours is just an insignificant atoll in the Pacific—far away from all trade routes. It'll be like searching for a needle in a haystack if we just go out on chance. I take it for granted that you have the latitude and longitude?"

"Why, sure," replied Russell, smiling. "I wouldn't have told you gentlemen a word if I couldn't supply an essential fact of that kind. I took good care to get the exact latitude and longitude from the skipper of that whaler—and it's been a fixture in my mind ever since. I did it diplomatically, too—the old ruffian never dreamed that I had a set purpose. He thought I wanted the information out of sheer curiosity."

"But you are sure he gave you the right figures?" asked Lee.

"Yes, I verified them a day or two later," replied Russell, nodding. "They were taking a sight, and working out their position by dead reckoning. And it was only a few points different from the figures the skipper had given me on the island. Those few points, of course, represented the distance we had travelled in the meantime."

This seemed conclusive enough, and was quite satisfactory to both Lee and Dorrie.

"We've only got three days," said his lordship thoughtfully. "It doesn't leave us much time, but we shall have to get a hustle on. The sooner we can be off, the better. With luck, we ought to get to that island before the schooner—an' that'll give us an opportunity of consolidatin' our position. Besides, we shall claim the island as ours, if only on the ground of bein' first on the field."

"Prescott may cause trouble," said Russell dubiously. "He's not the kind of man to take a disappointment of that sort lying down."

"Trouble?" said Dorrie. "I thrive on it!"

"I'm thinking of the boys and girls——"

"Then the less you think the better," interrupted Dorrie. "They'll be as safe as houses on this yacht. If there's any fightin' to be done, there'll be plenty of us without draggin' the boys an' girls in."

"You won't need to drag us," grinned Nipper. "We'll be in it anyhow."

"Oh, will you?" retorted his lordship. "We'll see all about that, young 'un! But what's the good of talkin' about fightin' while we're still nine or ten thousand miles away from the battlefield?"

"At least, we shall be able to make some preparations," said Nelson Lee. "There's a great deal to be done, Dorrie. You know something about pearl fishing, don't you?"

Dorrie laughed.

"I've spent three months on a pearlin' schooner," he replied.

"I don't think it's possible to name anything that you haven't tried, Dorrie," grinned Nipper. "The list must be nearly exhausted."

His lordship sighed.

"You've hit it!" he said, with feeling. "I've knocked about in every corner of the world, an' seen everythin' there is to be seen. Strictly speakin', it's about time my useless existence came to an end. But there's a prospect of a new thrill here, an' I'm grabbin' it with both hands."

CHAPTER XV.

READY FOR THE FRAY.



IF Lord Dorrimore considered his existence was a useless one, there were four other people in the state-room who held very different opinions. Warner Russell and his son had every reason to know that Dorrie was the kind of man who did infinite good in the world.

And Nelson Lee and Nipper knew it even more. Lord Dorrimore was a member of the aristocracy—the type of man who is generally sneered at by the ignorant, and characterised as a useless member of society.

The plain truth, however, was that Dorrie was one of Nature's tonics. Everywhere he went he spread happiness and good. From one end of the world to the other there were men who had reason to be grateful to this genial, kindly peer. There were men who had gained fresh starts in life—men who had been rescued from the bad, and who had become fine citizens.

All his life, Dorrie had pottered about from one part of the globe to another—wasting his existence, in the eyes of the uninitiated. But a few more Dorrie's would have made the world a better and a happier place. He was a clean Englishman of the finest type—and he was as fearless as he was generous—which means to say that he knew no fear at all.

"How do you propose to set about this pearling job?" asked Lee, after a brief pause. "Do you think it will be better to hire some natives—some Kanakas—as Prescott is doing?"

"It'll take too long," replied Dorrie promptly. "We'll set about the business

In a more up-to-date fashion. Every member of my crew is an old pal—a man who can be trusted to the bitter end. An' they're ready to do any work I like to mention. We'll equip ourselves with half-a-dozen complete divin' suits of the latest type—with all the necessary apparatus."

"Diving suits, sir," asked Clive breathlessly.

"Exactly," replied Dorrie. "Those Kanakas are too lazy for my likin'. They work hard enough, I'll admit, but they play at it most of the time. They can't help it—they're only like a lot of children. That is to say, when they're pearlin'. When it comes to a fight, they're devils!"

"But even then it depends upon the type of native," said Nelson Lee.

"Anyway, we can very well do without 'em," declared Dorrie. "With two or three men in divin' suits we can get up as many pearls in a day as a score of Kanakas would get up in a month. I say, Lee, you'll come along with me to-morrow, won't you? We shall have a whole pile of work to do."

"I'll come with pleasure," replied Lee. "In fact, we'd better spend another hour or two to-night, making a long list of everything we shall require. There may be some delay in getting the goods, and delay would be fatal. We're sailing on Friday, remember."

"That's just it," agreed Dorrie. "We shall want guns, shan't we? Always best to be prepared, you know! I suggest we take one or two machine-guns, an' a score of rifles. It's no good tryin' to get them out there when it's too late. If we don't use 'em, all the better. But we might as well have 'em with us."

"Yes, there's nothing like being prepared," agreed Nelson Lee. "I must admit the prospect of this adventure appeals to me enormously. It is much better to go out with a definite object. The original cruise was excellent, but this gives the whole thing a kind of spice."

"Exactly," said Dorrie. "Russell, old man, you don't know how grateful I am to you for puttin' this adventure in our way. I only hope that Old Man Prescott kicks up a rumpus. It sounds a bit bloodthirsty, but I can't help my nature, can I? As for old Umlosi, if he doesn't get a scrap, he'll probably chuck himself overboard to the sharks in sheer disgust."

"I'm afraid there's bound to be a lot of trouble," said Russell.

"Afraid?"

"Well, I mean, we can't very well avoid it," replied the Canadian. "Prescott, you remember, will bring along a shipload of blacks—and it's quite likely that they'll number a hundred. His idea was to recruit as much labour as possible in order to get the lagoon cleared in the shortest space of time. Most of these blacks will be Solomon Islanders, or men of that type—cannibals and savages."

"Good!" said Dorrie, rubbing his hands gleefully. "I thought cannibals were a thing of the past. We live an' learn! Let's hope Prescott brings two hundred instead of one hundred! The more the merrier! We'll deal with 'em, an' get up those pearls into the bargain!"

"There's just one thing I'd like to say," put in Russell quietly. "You are financing this enterprise, Lord Dorrimore. You are providing the ship and the equipment. Without you I should have been utterly helpless. I guess you ought to take two-thirds of the proceeds——"

"Two-thirds?" ejaculated Dorrie, staring. "You mean if we get all those pearls an' sell 'em for a hundred thousand, I'm to take over sixty-six thousand?"

"Yes, but I fancy the pearls will be worth more than that," replied Russell. "You don't realise what a tremendous prize it is——"

"I realise that you're talkin' rubbish," growled Dorrie. "Two-thirds be hanged!"

"Then we'll say fifty-fifty——"

"You can say what you like, but I don't take a cent!" retorted his lordship. "The adventure is all I want. This is your island, an' they're your oysters. If we can grab a few pebbles out of 'em, they're yours. So don't talk any more rot! Good gad! Don't you realise that I'm a millionaire, an' that I've got more money than I can do with. Anythin' that I can do will just be repayment of the debt I owe you."

Russell didn't like it at all, but he had to be content. Dorrie wouldn't hear of taking any share of the pearls at all—even though the enterprise was highly successful. And Nelson Lee, of course, was a mere guest on the yacht and considered himself outside the affair.

The little party didn't break up until long after midnight—Russell and his son to go to their new state-room, instead of their usual quarters forward. And there wasn't a single member of the crew who felt envious.

All along, they had realised that Mr. Russell was out of place in the garb of a steward. The crew liked him much better as a guest. As for Clive, he didn't sleep for hours.

On the morrow, he would be on a level footing with all the other young people on the trip. He would join the St. Frank's fellows, and he looked forward to the new life with sheer happiness.

CHAPTER XVI.

GOOD NEWS FOR ARCHIE



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE stood at the window, gazing glassily into nothingness. The morning was fine, and the vista from that window was not particularly inspiring. Indeed, Archie had frequently described it as being poisonous.

But this morning he didn't seem to notice the confined backyards, the dingy walls, and the array of chimney pots against the skyline. He stared out unseeingly.

"I mean to say, absolutely!" he murmured, with a sigh. "It's a dashed fine idea, and all that sort of thing, to dodge hither and thither among the good old South Sea Islands, but these things have their drawbacks."

Archie turned from the window, sighed, and dropped listlessly into an easy chair. As a matter of fact, he was occupying his eldest brother's flat, in Jermyn Street—as usual. It was becoming one of Archie's habits to commandeer this flat during the holidays—always providing, of course, that Captain Bertram Glenthorne was away from home.

A faint sound caused Archie to turn round.

"Good gad, Phipps, you gave the young master a frightful start!" he protested. "Kindly realise that I'm in the throes of mental anguish, laddie! Don't tell me that some of the dear chappies have whizzed round?"

"Breakfast is served, sir," said Phipps unemotionally.

"Oh, breakfast, what?" said Archie, with some slight show of interest. "The good old morning nosebag, as it were. Kindly strap it on, Phipps, and we will proceed to chew the good old cud!"

Archie followed Phipps into the next room, sat down to his breakfast, and toyed with the food. His appetite was usually excellent, but this morning he seemed in rather a bad way.

"I trust nothing is wrong, sir?" ventured Phipps politely.

"Wrong?" repeated Archie. "Oh, rather not! That is, of course, absolutely! Wrong? Oddslife and odddeath! I should think there is something wrong, Phipps! The young master is positively crumpling up under the strain."

"The sea voyage, no doubt, will put you right, sir."

"That's just it, Phipps—I'm frightfully worried about this bally sea voyage," confided Archie, as he stirred his coffee. "The more I think of it, the more I wilt."

"But you are usually such a good sailor, sir," said Phipps, allowing himself to lift a surprised eyebrow. "It is not like you to worry over any possible seasickness—"

"Gadzooks!" interrupted Archie stiffly. "Laddie, you're absolutely casting aspersions upon my qualifications as a sailor. I am worrying about the voyage, not because I fear seasickness, but because I shall be alone."

"Alone, sir?"

"Absolutely alone," said Archie sadly. "Forlorn, deserted, and all that sort of rot. You follow me, Phipps?"

"I must confess no, sir."

"Good gad!" said Archie startled. "But

I thought your brain worked at a most frightful speed, Phipps? Perhaps it's still somewhat clogged after the usual nightly nap. Let me repeat, Phipps, that I shall be alone on this voyage. In other words, you won't be with me."

A faint smile crossed the valet's features.

"I see, sir—so that's it," he said softly. "I shouldn't let that concern you much, Master Archie. I take it as a great compliment that you should worry, but I can assure you, you will soon—"

"Nothing of the sort, Phipps—absolutely nothing of the good old sort!" interrupted Archie stiffly. "Dash it all, I ought to know best! Without you, laddie, I shall fade away to one of those bally shadows, and finally perish in abject misery. That, Phipps, would be the result of your frightful desertion."

"Desertion, sir?" asked Phipps, grieved. "It has never been suggested that I should figure in the party, and it is hardly possible for me to thrust myself forward. It is scarcely like you, Master Archie, to—"

"Sorrow, laddie—sorrow in chunks!" interrupted Archie. "I mean to say, you wouldn't desert the young master deliberately, would you? And you wouldn't deprive him from having one of those hot rolls on the sideboard, what? Kindly yank them over, Phipps. The old appetite is beginning to stir."

Phipps passed the rolls over, and at that moment the bell rang.

"Trickle forth and learn the bad news, Phipps, old lad," said Archie. "I have a sort of gnawing horror that Handy has arrived. And, dash it, the tissues are too depleted to stand much of that bright lad! However, we must be resolute in these trials."

And while Phipps answered the door, Archie fortified himself with hot rolls and marmalade. He needn't have worried, for the visitor proved to be Nipper. And Archie beamed.

"Good-morning, and all that sort of thing!" he said cheerily. "Just in time for the foodstuffs. Phipps, dash about, and get another cup, and so forth—"

"Thanks all the same, Archie, but I've had my breakfast—hours ago," grinned Nipper. "You lazy slacker, it's half-past ten. I expected to find you getting ready for luncheon."

"I passed a somewhat frightful night," confessed Archie. "Instead of my usual forty of the best, I only managed to get about thirty-six. It's a fearful posish. I'm four bally winks short!"

"It's a terrible tragedy, but perhaps you'll outlive it," chuckled Nipper. "But I didn't come here to talk about your sleep, Archie. A wonderful development took place last night, after all the guests had left the Wanderer."

And Nipper gave Archie a brief account of Mr. Russell's story. He went into no details, but he hinted that there was now a definite object in going to the South Sea Islands, and that there would probably be some excitement.

"But that's not all," went on Nipper. "As Russell has become a guest, old Dorrie is short of a saloon steward. He wants a man who can be absolutely relied upon, and although he knows where to get one, I suggested Phipps. I thought it would please you, too."

Archie rose to his feet, and his eyes gleamed. He groped for his monocle, and jammed it into place.

"Phipps!" he exclaimed. "You—you mean Phipps is to come with us? Good gad! As steward? Laddie, you've come in time to restore me to perfect health. The scheme is not only sound, but absolutely bristling with brilliance!"

CHAPTER XVII.

SAILING DAY.



PHIPPS was busying himself with the coffee-pot, and had apparently heard nothing. Being perfectly trained, he never revealed any emotion.

"It'll be a lot better if we have old Phipps with us," went on Nipper. "It'll seem more like old times, and he's a handy chap to have about the place. I don't suppose you'll mind him being a steward, Archie. He'll only have light duties, and you can claim a good deal of his time. There are plenty of other stewards on board, and——"

"Absolutely!" interrupted Archie. "The very fact that he is with us with be suffish. Phipps, old chestnut, what about it? I mean, how does the scheme strike you?"

"I am quite delighted, sir," said Phipps.

"It won't upset any of your plans?" asked Nipper.

"Not at all, sir," replied Phipps. "In any case, I am always ready to serve Master Archie. Quite apart from that, it will be an honour to go on this voyage in the employ of Lord Dorrimore."

"Well spoken, laddie—dashed well spoken!" approved Archie. "So that's that, what? I must admit that the morning is about two hundred and fifty-three times as bright as it was. The good old sun has recovered his full power, and everything is all serene."

Archie's delight was unbounded. His one worry had gone. Phipps was coming on the voyage, so nothing else mattered. Nipper had anticipated such an effect, and he went away well pleased.

The next two or three days were filled with bustle for all concerned.

Archie spent hours loitering in outfitter's establishments, selecting garb that would be suitable for the tropics. It was fortunate that he had Phipps with him, otherwise he would have purchased enough stuff to go round the entire Fourth.

Handforth & Co., Pitt, Christine, and all the other fellows were engaged in similar pursuits. Last minute purchases were made by the hundred. In all parts of London the Wanderer's company made preparations.

Cameras were brought out and examined, supplies of films were purchased. New cameras were obtained. Practically everybody had something special to buy, and those brief days passed speedily.

And while the guests were intent upon their rather frivolous pursuits, Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were engaged in a more grim enterprise. With Mr. Russell, they went round buying diving apparatus, guns, ammunition, and many other things which were kept secret.

And on the Thursday evening big consignments of stuff arrived at the docks. The Wanderer's hatches were opened, and case after case was lowered into her hold. Everything had been accomplished with speed and dispatch, and even Nelson Lee was satisfied that nothing had been overlooked.

And then came sailing day.

The guests arrived in twos and threes, Handforth being one of the first to turn up. The Wanderer was due to slip down the Thames shortly after noon, and the morning was packed with incident. Not only the guests arrived, but parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles—all on the spot to bid the party bon voyage.

As luck would have it, the summer's day was perfect—hot, brilliant, and cloudless. The Wanderer was gay with bunting, and large crowds gathered to see the yacht leave her berth. Such a bustle was seldom witnessed in the somewhat drab surroundings of the London docks.

Press photographers were there by the dozen, for this pleasure cruise to the South Seas had aroused a good bit of newspaper interest. Lord Dorrimore and the St. Frank's fellows were well in the limelight. Groups were posed, and Handforth took good care to have a special photograph of himself taken. His one regret was that he wouldn't be able to see the snapshot in print. Had he only known it, this was just as well, perhaps. Newspaper photographs are not always flattering.

The last guests arrived, and the last visitors had taken their leave. And with the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls lining the rails, waving handkerchiefs, the Wanderer warped out of dock.

A few tears were shed among the young ladies, but this was only natural. Handforth was somewhat disgusted when he saw his own resolute sister wiping the moisture from her eyes.

"What's the idea of blubbering?" he growled, giving Ena a nudge which nearly knocked her over.

"I'm not blubbering!" protested Ena coldly.

"Yes you are—you kid!" said Edward Oswald with scorn. "Just because we're leaving the mater and pater for a few weeks. There they are, look! My only hat! I'm blowed if the mater isn't blubbering, too!"

He waved his hand, and suddenly found himself looking at the dock through a kind of mist. Among all the other figures he could see Sir Edward and Lady Handforth. It came to Edward Oswald that his parents weren't such bad sorts, after all. And it was rather a dirty trick, buzzing off like this into the tropics, and leaving them to spend the summer all alone.

Handforth gave a gulp or two and cuffed Willy severely—his only reason for this action being that Willy had glanced at him. Handforth might not have been so deeply affected had he known the trend of Sir Edward's conversation.

"It's all right, my dear!" growled Sir Edward. "I can understand you crying a bit; but don't worry. The children are safe enough with Lord Dorrimore, and I'm heartily thankful we've got rid of them!"

"Oh, Edward!" protested Lady Handforth.

"I mean it!" said Sir Edward firmly. "They're nothing but a nuisance during the holidays—upsetting the whole house, driving us both to the verge of nervous prostration. It's a good thing they're safely away and in good hands. And they won't be back until school starts again, thank Heaven!"

So it seemed that Handforth's emotion was somewhat wasted. His father, at all events, was one of the most relieved men in London, and who could blame him? Life at Sir Edward's home was more or less of a nightmare when all the younger Handforths were home for the holidays.

The Wanderer grew further and further from the dock, and at last she entered the river, and her voyage had fairly started.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ADVENTURE BOUND.



HANDFORTH heaved a sigh of relief. The quayside was now out of sight, and the last hand-waving had been abandoned.

"Thank goodness!" said Edward Oswald.

"It's all very well standing on the giddy dock, but it makes a chap's arm ache to keep waving. Willy, my lad, you're as hard-hearted as stone. I don't believe you even shed a tear!"

"I left that to you!" replied Willy blandly.

"You young ass! Are you telling me that I blubbed?"

"Well, you didn't exactly blub, but your eyes were pretty moist," said Willy. "Not that I blame you, old son. These partings are always more or less affecting. But I don't see any reason why Ena should have turned the taps on full. She must have soaked about four handkerchiefs!"

"You wretch!" protested Ena. "You're as heartless as Ted!"

She moved away, and Handforth sniffed.

"That's the worst of girls," he said disparagingly. "Always blubbing! No really nice girl would cry——"

He paused abruptly, having just caught sight of Irene Manners, who was still weeping into her handkerchief. Handforth changed his opinion, and thought it wiser to change the subject at the same time.

He walked down the deck, and came face to face with a sturdy, handsome junior in white flannels. For a moment Edward Oswald looked at him in surprise.

"Hallo!" he said. "I seem to have seen you before, but I'm blessed if I know who you are!"

"I'm Clive!" replied the other, smiling.

"Clive?"

"Clive Russell."

"Oh!" said Handforth, examining Clive from head to foot. "So you're the chap everybody has been talking about? Your pater used to be a steward, and you were a giddy page? Good! Put it there, old son!"

He shook hands heartily, and Clive felt relieved.

"You're one of us now, eh?" went on Handforth briskly. "On the same footing as all the rest of us? And so you ought to be. Anybody can tell that you and your pater are made of the right stuff. Canadians, eh? Better still! One Canadian chap on board makes things a lot better. By the way, who's taking your old place? I've heard that Phipps has stepped into your pater's shoes; but what about a page?"

"I think they've got somebody," replied Clive. "A young fellow named Tubbs, I guess."

"Tubbs!" roared Handforth. "Do you mean to say old Tubbs is on board? He's our old House-page from St. Frank's. Good old Tubby! By George! We shall be a regular family party!"

The other fellows were equally pleased to find that Tubbs was on board. He was

as cheerful and grinning as ever. Tubbs gave everything a touch of homeliness. He was far better than any ordinary pageboy.

Mr. Russell was just getting accustomed to his new mode of life. After having been pursued by bad luck for such a long time he could hardly realise that his fortunes had now turned. And Clive still had a slightly uncomfortable feeling that he was masquerading among the guests.

This feeling was intensified, perhaps, by the caddish behaviour of Ralph Leslie Fullwood. This young gentleman had deliberately "cut" Clive from the first moment of their coming on board. While all the other St. Frank's fellows had shaken hands with Clive, Fullwood had ignored him.

"Common Canadian rotter!" said Fullwood disparagingly, as he watched William

Napoleon Browne and Stevens in conversation with Clive. "It's like his nerve to shove himself forward! He's only a pageboy. An' his pater's only a steward!"

Nipper, who was passing, heard this remark.

For a moment he hesitated, his blood boiling. Then he walked on, deciding that he would say nothing for the present. But he made up his mind that if Fullwood maintained his caddish behaviour, the Fourth would take the matter in hand—just as though they were at St. Frank's.

The Wanderer gathered speed after she had passed Greenwich, and she continued down the Thames, adventure bound. The great voyage to the South Seas had started at last, and according to all the indications, this trip would be one of the most exciting the St. Frank's fellows had ever undertaken.

THE END.

The voyage out to the South Seas on board the Wanderer, with its merry party of adventurers, provides, next week, another extra long narrative of absorbing interest, entitled :—

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Full particulars on page iii of cover.

IN THE DAYS OF THE ARMADA

By W. MURRAY GRAYDON

(Continued from Last Week.)

"I PRAY you forgive me, Sydney, old fellow," he said, holding out his hand. "We owe one another too much to quarrel. I will forget the matter, and will ask no more questions."

Sydney eagerly clasped the proffered hand, and wrung it in silence. The bond of friendship between the two lads seemed to suddenly grow stronger, and in after time Giles never forgot that moment of reconciliation. There came a day when he knew what Sydney's appeal meant.

"You have done well, lads," was Trent's comment. "I dare say Master Rookwood has reasons for silence which we should approve if we knew them. But I am very glad that he hath divulged the names of these ruffians, and I hope the information I intend to give in Plymouth will lead to their capture. Ay, but I can scarce credit that Humphrey Jocelyn is mixed up with ruffians of such ilk—for I'll wager my head that Simon Baillie and the Don are working for the Spanish cause."

"It may be," replied Sydney, "but this matter hath naught to do with the affairs of the Crown. Moreover, I can truly pledge you that Captain Jocelyn is as loyal as ever, and hath no hand in any traitorous doings."

"You speak in riddles, Master Rookwood," growled Trent. "However, I am right glad to believe what you say, and lest I should weave a net around innocent as well as guilty, I will take no steps in the matter at present."

"Nay, I believe that Simon Baillie should be apprehended," replied Sydney, "and Don Ferdinand as well, if Giles does not object."

"Not I," Giles cried. "I own no kinship to such a knave. I would gladly see him brought to the Tower block."

"And that fate both the Don and Simon Baillie are like to meet," declared Trent. "So soon as Plymouth be reached I will lodge information of their whereabouts with the commander of the garrison. And now let us spur on, my lads. It hath been an adventurous night, and we are doubtless on the eve of a day that will live for ever in history."

Trent and the lads pricked up their horses and rode at a furious gallop over the moor. The thrilling anticipation of what was to come soon drove the perplexities of the past from their minds, and Sydney was the most eager of the three.

Mile after mile fell behind, and as they drew near to Plymouth, where the beacon-

fire was still blazing on the hill-top, they began to pass groups of muster men hurrying in from the scattered farms of Dartmoor and from the hamlets along the coast. They spurred on more rapidly, and soon galloped into the town, and the greatest excitement prevailed.

As yet the Armada had not entered the Channel, but it was likely to arrive by day-break. It had been first sighted off Land's End early in the evening, and a line of beacon-fires stretching across Cornwall had brought the news to Plymouth.

After making information concerning Simon Baillie and Don Ferdinand to the proper persons—though it was unlikely that any steps would be taken in the matter during the excitement—Trent and the lads went aboard Drake's flagship, Avenger, which was a much larger and stronger vessel than the Hercules.

Shortly after midnight forty ships of the fleet, including the Avenger, went out to moorings behind Ram Head, so as to be ready for action in the morning.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH THE GREAT FIGHT BEGINS.

THE morning of July 20th, which was Saturday, dawned clear and warm. After their rough riding of the night before, Giles and his companions slept for several hours, but they were on deck very early, and were disappointed to find that the Armada had not yet been sighted.

"It takes a long time for such a vast number of vessels to come this far up the Channel in any sort of order," declared Trent. "I don't look for them much before noon to-day."

This seemed to be the general opinion, and it was verified about the middle of the morning, when word came from Plymouth that the Armada had been seen off the Lizard at daybreak. A fishing-boat brought the news to the town. It had been seen and pursued by the enemy, but had managed to slip away.

The time passed rather monotonously on board the little squadron of the English fleet, which still lay at its moorings off Ram Head. But about three o'clock in the afternoon a great shout arose, and spread from ship to ship. Men and officers pressed forward, and climbed to all available points among the spars and rigging.

At last the great Armada was in sight! Against the western horizon a line of white sails was visible, and these slowly mounted higher and higher, until the entire fleet could be seen. It was advancing in the shape of a crescent, before a gentle wind. A hundred and fifty ships were counted, large and small, so it was evident that reinforcements had been picked up on the way.

The enemy came steadily on up the Channel, and passed the mouth of the Sound about dusk. A little later the English squadron lifted anchor, and sailed out of the Sound, one by one. During the night they took up their position behind the Armada, the location of which could be clearly seen by the moonlight.

Giles and Sydney shared the general feeling of confidence and anticipation that prevailed. The English sailors and commanders did not dream of defeat. Many of them had fought and conquered the Spaniards in the Indies, and they hoped to vanquish as easily this formidable fleet.

The following day was Sunday, and the morning broke with scarcely a breath of wind. But between eight and nine o'clock a stiff breeze sprang up from the west, and the Armada, which had been lying still all night, at once attempted to close with the English fleet.

It was a bad move on the part of the enemy, and they were destined to have their arrogance and conceit taken down a peg or two. Lord Howard's orders were quickly conveyed throughout the fleet, which began to slip away from the approaching foe as though in full flight.

From the poop-deck of the Avenger Trent and the lads were watching the situation eagerly and anxiously. They could not help but be impressed by the sight of the vast horde of warships and galleys as they came on under full sail, bristling with guns and gay with the fluttering flags of Spain.

"It looks as though we were running away," said Sydney, "and the Spaniards evidently think so."

"They will have something else to think about ere long, else I am much mistaken," replied Trent. "Sir Francis Drake knows what he is about. Look at him standing yonder. He hath a rare gift of coolness under trying circumstances, and that is the secret of his past victories."

"I expected that the fleet would be ordered boldly to attack," said Giles, "as was done in the harbour of Cadiz."

"Nay, but this is very different," explained Trent. "At Cadiz there was naught of any account to oppose us, while here there is such a body of armed ships as was never seen before. To defeat the Armada will require craft and cunning no less than valour, and I'll warrant both Drake and Lord Howard are of that mind."

"Yes, it would be madness for our little squadron to come to close quarters now," admitted Sydney. "If the other ships were here there might be some chance."

"I doubt if the rest of the fleet can beat their way out of the Sound against this wind," said Trent. "Until such time as they can we will avoid close quarters. Then it is likely the plan of our commanders will be to follow the Armada up the Channel, gathering in what reinforcements we can and watching for a favourable chance to give battle."

"Then the fate of England will not be decided in a day?" said Giles.

"Nay, nor in several days," replied Trent. "In craft and fighting a week is likely to pass ere the victory be certainly known. That the Armada will be defeated and driven back to Spain I have little doubt."

"Nor I," added Sydney, "though I confess I was of a mind with Giles, in that I expected to see a great battle at once. But I am ready to do my part when it comes."

"I am sorry for poor Master Van Hartsen," said Giles. "It is impossible that he can fight with a sprained wrist. I wish that we could get some word to him. He ought to know that we are safe on board the fleet."

"From the way he was slumbering and snoring when last I clapped eyes on him he will scarce awake till the fighting be over," cried Trent, with a hearty laugh. "However, I dare say we shall find an opportunity to send him some message."

"Look sharp now, lads," he added. "If I mistake not, this sudden bustle means that something is going to happen. Yonder comes the Ark-Raleigh and two more of our ships."

The Ark-Raleigh was Lord Howard's flagship, and the lads had scarcely turned to look at it when Drake's lusty voice rang over the deck of the Avenger, ordering every man to his post. Trent jumped down and ran forward, followed by Giles and Sydney.

All was bustle and excitement, and order after order was given and obeyed. The bombardiers stood to their guns, and the ship-boys ran to and fro with loads of powder and ball. The officers and gentlemen volunteers put on their steel head-pieces and corselets of light armour.

The Avenger quickly joined the Ark-Raleigh and the other two vessels, and a few minutes later the engagement—for such it promised to be, in spite of Trent's prediction—opened with a roar that must have been heard far inland.

Now it was seen how cleverly Drake and his fellow-officers had taken advantage of the enemy. The Avenger, with four other English warships, separated from the rest of the fleet, and sailed around the Armada. Then they ran along the rear lines of the enemy, firing heavy broadsides into each galley as they passed.

As soon as they reached one end they would turn back again and repeat the performance. The big Spanish vessels, which resembled floating castles, were well-nigh helpless, and had the wind against them. The English ships, on the other hand, could move twice as rapidly, and were able to sail close to the wind.

As the Avenger went to and fro amid the puffing smoke, the excitement and delight of her officers and crew rose to fever pitch. They cheered hoarsely and incessantly, though their voices could scarcely be heard for the roar of the guns and the flapping and creaking of the sails.

Trent and the lads aided the gunners as much as possible, pausing now and then to look over the bulwarks and watch the devastating effects of the rain of iron missiles. Sir Francis Drake's bronzed cheeks were flushed to a rosy colour. He was in his natural element, and he seemed to be everywhere at once as he hurried from one part of the deck to another, conferring with his officers, directing the sailing-master, or shouting hoarse commands to the bombardiers.

But it was not all triumph and delight. Occasionally a shot from the Armada sped true, and cries of agony rang above the din.

All through the morning this spirited engagement continued, and its repeated successes made Trent and the boys wild with joy, as also their brave comrades.

For hour after hour the four English vessels ran to and fro along the rear of the Armada, their guns thundering without cessation and the heavy shot doing no end of damage to life and timbers.

The Spanish ships frequently attempted to close, but the effort was vain. Nor could they deliver a return fire with any degree of success, for, being to leeward, they heeled over directly they tried to come against the wind to use their guns. So, while they were suffering severely, most of their fire passed beyond the English vessels.

About noon the rest of Lord Howard's fleet was seen coming out from behind the headland, and the Spanish admiral signalled to his ships to start up the Channel. The order was quickly obeyed, and off went the Armada, its rear guarded by the squadron in command of Vice-Admiral Ricaldo.

The combined ships of the English followed, and Drake sent a letter by a fast boat to Lord Henry Seymour, telling him what was the situation, and bidding him to be on the look-out for the Armada.

During the afternoon, and while a heavy sea was rolling in from the west, the two fleets laboured heavily up the Channel. The English still hung on the enemy's rear, but as powder was scarce they fired but seldom.

Towards evening the Spanish vessels became crowded together, and a flagship of one of the squadrons, called the Capitana, was disabled by a collision. It dropped out of place, and in the darkness it was not observed by Lord Howard as he and his fleet went by.

Some time before this Drake and his portion of the fleet had turned back to pursue what they took to be a separated squadron of the Armada, but which turned out to be a convoy of merchant vessels. As they were returning they ran across and captured the Capitana. It was taken into Torbay, and the commander and officers were transferred to the Avenger. Then Drake and his fleet set sail again, and speedily overhauled Lord Howard. So ended the first day of the struggle.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN WHICH THE FISHING-SMACK REDWING MAKES A PERILOUS CRUISE BY NIGHT.

THE next day was Monday, and it was now evident to both Spaniards and English, from the events of the preceding day, that the struggle was certain to be prolonged indefinitely. The morning proved to be calm, and what slight breeze there was blew from the east, thus giving the foe the advantage. However, from sunrise to sunset the two fleets lay idly on the water at a distance of three or four miles from each other.

But on Tuesday morning, the wind being the same, the Spaniards bore down upon the English, who, having a lack of powder, retreated to the open sea and gave their enemies the slip until sundown. The only incident of that day was the contest with the Spanish ship San Marco, which fell behind the fleet, and was attacked by a number of English vessels. The action lasted several hours, and ended in the repulse of the English—a fact which greatly cheered the Spaniards.

By this time, however, Drake's fleet had been joined by a number of vessels of all sizes from various ports along the Channel, which were crowded with brave noblemen and gentlemen. So the aggregate of ships under the command of the English admiral amounted to one hundred.

Nothing happened on Wednesday except a few skirmishes, for Howard was almost out of powder. But that evening a couple of sloops arrived containing sufficient ammunition for another day's fighting, and the spirits of the disheartened Englishmen went up high. Giles took advantage of the return of the sloops to dispatch letters to Master van Hartsen and Hereward Tomewell.

At daybreak on Thursday the English fleet was thrown into great excitement by the rumour that Lord Howard had ordered a general attack to be made upon the Armada. This proved to be true, and preparations were hastily made. Shortly after sunrise the English fleet set sail and bore down upon the enemy, who were now lying some miles up the Channel, beyond Portland.

To the delight of Giles and his companions, the Avenger was one of half a dozen big ships that led the attack. The Ark-Raleigh was another, and this little squadron pushed fearlessly into the midst of the huge Spanish galleons, opening a terrific fire right and left. The rest of the fleet followed, and then ensued a most desperate and deadly fight at close quarters.

Again the English had the advantage, and their heavy iron missiles tore and splintered the massive timbers of the Spanish ships as though they were so much paper. Hundreds were killed and wounded, as much by flying pieces of wood as by the cannonballs. The fire of the Spaniards was slow

and poorly delivered, and did but little damage.

The Ark-Raleigh was very nearly lost with all on board, for during the action her rudder became unshipped, and as soon as it was seen that she was disabled a number of the enemy's ships closed around her. By the timely aid of the Avenger she managed to get head to the wind and sheer away from her foes. But she was saved only by the utmost gallantry of the men and officers of the two vessels, and during the struggle Giles and Sydney risked their lives more than once. They, as well as Trent, were personally thanked by Sir Francis Drake and Lord Howard.

The battle lasted for some hours, and then the English fleet withdrew, since their powder was again running short. The supplies were also nearly exhausted, and it was evident that something would have to be done. At a late hour of the afternoon no ammunition or stores had arrived, though a rumour to the contrary was spread throughout the fleet.

The rumour was caused by a fast-sailing fishing-smack, called the Redwing, and

manued by a crew of half a dozen coast fishermen, which was seen to run alongside the Ark-Raleigh. But it had come down the Channel from the Strait of Dover, and carried nothing save a message from Lord Henry Seymour to the effect that he was still watching the Duke of Parma's army from off Dunkirk.

The Redwing sailed over to the Avenger, and one of Lord Howard's officers came on board with a letter. He had a brief interview with Drake, and then the latter summoned Trent and the two lads to the cabin, greatly to their surprise.

"I have a commission for you, my trusty volunteers," was the vice-admiral's greeting. "Your gallant work and conduct in the past have led me to depend upon you whenever an emergency arises, and there is one at present. I take it that you are pretty well acquainted with this part of the Channel, and especially with the approaches to Plymouth Sound. Am I right?"

"Ay, sir, so far as I am concerned," replied Trent.

(To be continued next week.)

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

(All communications to the League should be addressed to Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.)

June 30th, 1925.

My dear Leagueites,

As I write, the first few hundreds of applications for membership have arrived, and, considering that each of these applicants has had to procure one regular new reader and has had to expend three halfpence on postage, the result is in every way encouraging. With the conditions made much easier, and the fact that we now know the application forms can be sent for a halfpenny (provided they are not accompanied by a letter and the envelope is not sealed), applications next week and after should be pouring into the office in thousands instead of hundreds.

There is also, I fear, another reason why we were not virtually swamped this first week, and I have had a few complaints to bear me out. Readers wanting extra copies have found to their dismay, in some instances, that THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY has been sold out, and they have been unable to get any more copies. Needless to say, I am looking into this, and after this week, I hope, there will be no occasion for such complaints. At the same time, to avoid disappointment of this kind recurring, you are advised to place an order for your copies with your newsagent a week or so in

advance. Should, after this, any readers experience difficulty in getting THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, I shall be glad to hear from them.

I have much pleasure in publishing below a few more lines by Mr. Brooks about the League.

Your sincere friend,
THE CHIEF OFFICER (S.F.L.)

Girls, lend me your eyes! Apart from the Organising Officers, the more of you there are on the ordinary Membership roll, also the better. The St. Frank's League can never reach true greatness without your whole-hearted support. So, hesitate no longer, all you delightful descendants of Eve who have hitherto held aloof!

Last, but not least, there are the grown-ups. We want you to come forward in your thousands to swell our Membership. Adults of both sexes are equally eligible. The more the merrier!

Twenty-five thousand strong, we can commence to forge ahead with the objects and benefits for which the League has been formed. Meanwhile, without any thought of failure, earnest preparations are going forward in every direction. I believe our Chief Officer—in other words, your old friend, the Editor—has told you how to qualify for Silver and Gold Medals—after you have obtained your Bronze Medals.

But it's not the intrinsic value of these Medals which will chiefly count. Their main worth to the holders will lie in the added

benefits which will follow their possession, until you have qualified for the utmost honour which The St. Frank's League will be able to confer.

It's a foregone conclusion that The St. Frank's League is going right ahead, and that it will eventually become a real power in the land. Overseas, also, it will become

known and respected. Ever expanding, in all countries, its units will have common interests which will bind them together in spheres of worth-while endeavour which will help to brighten the lives of all. The compact and powerful whole will form an organisation to which every Member will be proud to belong.

E.S.B.

AS SIMPLE AS A B C.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership: Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from TWO copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C by running the pen diagonally across both Sections. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

Member Applying for Bronze Medal: It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms are needed, and these must be taken from copies of the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the

time when the forms are sent in. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided the forms are taken from the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in.

These Application Forms can be posted for ½d., provided the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

IMPORTANT.—Complete and post off this form before the next issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is on sale. It then becomes out of date and useless.

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 5. July 25, 1925.

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SECTION B	MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR BRONZE MEDAL. I, Member No.....(give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This leaves me (state number, or, if none, signify with a dash) introductions to make to entitle me to a Bronze Medal.
SECTION C	NEW READER'S DECLARATION. I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" (No....., dated'.....), which I will read with a view to becoming a regular reader of this paper.
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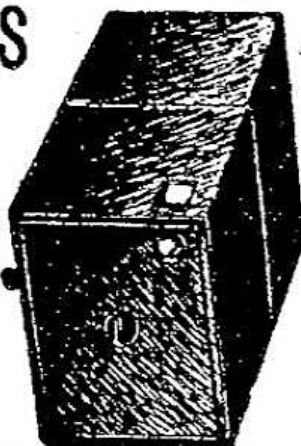
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