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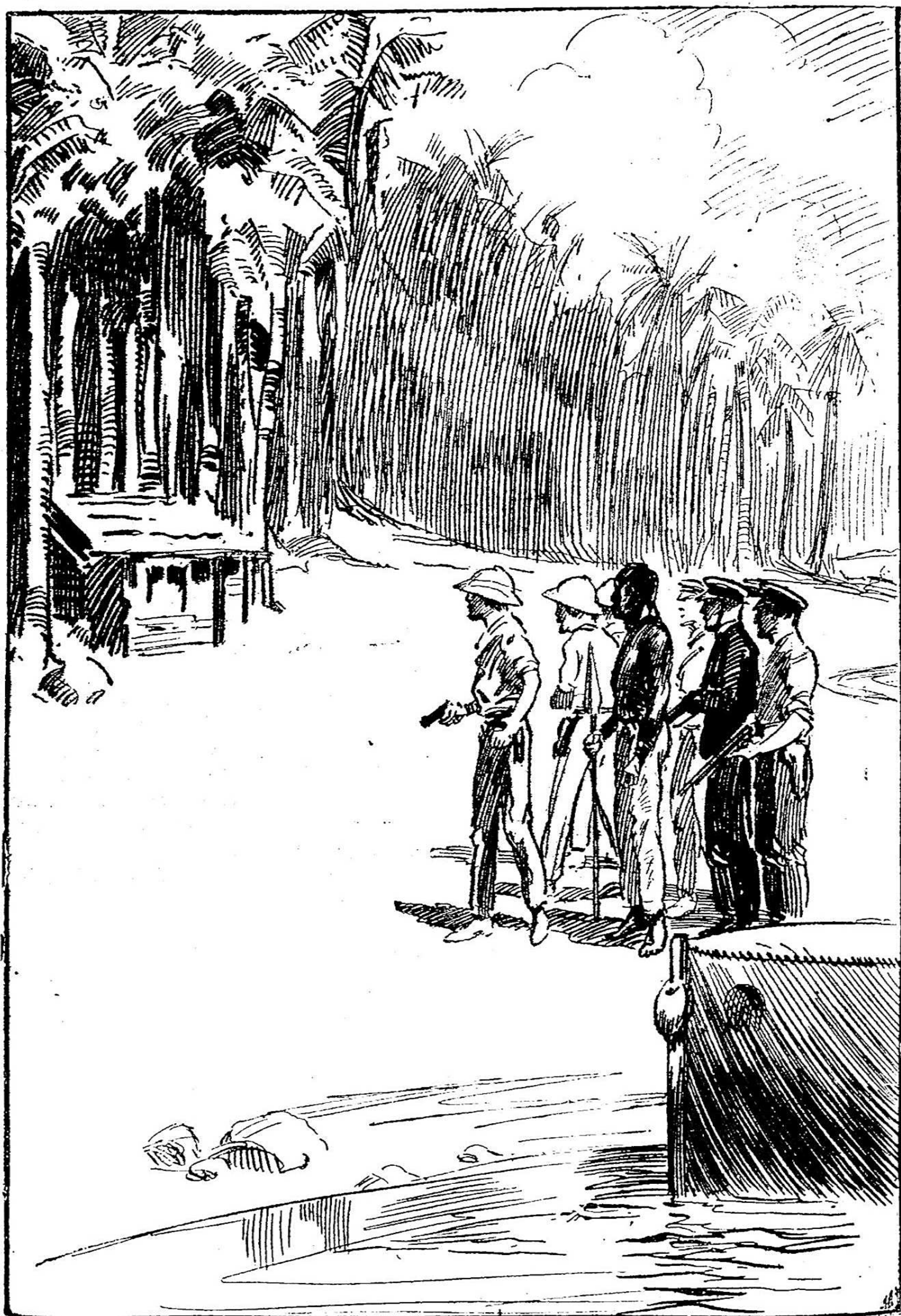
The Wanderer's Quest

An extra long story of the St. Frank's Boys and their voyage out to the South Seas with Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee.

No. 530.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

August 1, 1925.



Mr. Russell paused after he had walked a few yards up the dazzling sands. "Just the same!" he murmured dreamily. "Glory! It hardly seems that I've been away for so many months."

The WANDERER'S QUEST !



awaiting this light-hearted party of holiday-makers.

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

MID-ATLANTIC.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD, of the Fourth Form at St. Frank's, leaned elegantly against the Wanderer's rail and idly watched a game of quoits that was going on near by.

It seemed to be quite good fun, and Fullwood really wanted to join in, but he felt that if he did so his dignity would suffer. Fullwood had a very exaggerated idea of his own importance, and his dignity was dear to him.

"Only a kid's game, after all," he growled, as he turned on his elbow and glanced at John Busterfield Boots. "Supposin' we go below an' have a round or two of nap?"

"Not me!" replied Boots promptly. "You gambling rotter——"

"I'm stayin' up here!" added Bob Christine, who was also helping to hold the rail up. "I've a jolly good mind to join in that game of quoits. It may be kiddish ashore, but it's different on shipboard. Look at old Browne. He's going great guns, and Mr. Stokes has just joined him, too."

"Babies!" said Fullwood disparagingly.

At the same time, he felt envious. It was very pleasant on the yacht's deck this morning. The sun was shining, the weather was calm and perfect, and the Wanderer was skimming over the ocean with such silkiness and grace that nobody could quite realise her true speed.

It was only by looking directly overside at the flashing foam that one appreciated the yacht's pace. She was the fastest private vessel afloat, and she was in mid-

Atlantic, although only two days out from the Thames.

Lord Dorrimore's party, in fact, was well on its way, and the guests were fairly revelling in the trip. The South Sea Islands was the objective—the blue waters of the Pacific. Nobody quite believed that, with fair weather, the Wanderer would be in the Pacific within a week.

Her course was taking her towards the West Indies and the Caribbean Sea. She would pass through the Panama Canal, and then the wide Pacific would lay ahead—with Paradise Island somewhere in that vast expanse of tropic water.

The Wanderer's new engines were wonders of mechanical perfection. While thrusting the yacht onwards at an amazing turn of speed, they were noiseless and vibrationless. On deck, and in the saloon, there was not even a tremor. And the yacht sped on with scarcely any motion.

Indeed, so far, there had not been a single case of seasickness. Even the Moor View girls, who had feared all sorts of indisposition, were as robust and healthy as they had been on dry land. The sea had been calm since the commencement of the voyage, but Lord Dorrimore declared that even in rough weather, the yacht behaved magnificently.

The party was a big one. There were twenty-four St. Frank's fellows in all—including Willy & Co. of the Third, Browne and Stevens of the Fifth, and Fenton and Morrow of the Sixth. The rest were all Fourth-Formers.

Then, of course, there were Irene Manners & Co., to say nothing of Ena Handforth, Ethel Church, Agnes Christine, Violet Watson—nine girls in all. Nelson Lee was on board, and Mr. Beverley Stokes, too. Mrs. Stokes had consented to act as hostess, and she was revelling in her task.

Even Phipps, Archie Glenthorne's valet, had his place on board—being temporary saloon steward. And Tubbs, the well-known pageboy of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, was now a pageboy on the Wanderer.

Professor Sylvester Tucker, the science master, was on board—having scrambled on at the last moment, in response to an urgent telephone message. The Professor had forgotten all about the sailing day, and had been reminded when it was nearly too late. Then he had discovered that all his luggage was left behind—only to learn, later on, that he had been using the wrong state-room. His luggage had been in the next cabin all the time. But these absent-minded episodes were only to be expected from the Professor.

Last, but by no means least, Umlosi was numbered among the guests. The Kutana chief would go anywhere with his beloved "N'Kose," Lord Dorrimore. And the black

giant was longing for the tropics. He wouldn't be satisfied until the wanderer was well into the Pacific.

And with Captain Burton in command of the yacht, there was not much fear of any mistakes in navigation. Tom Burton's father was immensely proud of his post, and Dorrie had the utmost faith in him. The captain had a large private fortune of his own, and there was no necessity for him to work—but it was the breath of life to him to be in harness.

Fullwood, leaning against the rail, grunted as he caught sight of a figure coming along the deck. It was a sturdy figure, attired in flannels, and the newcomer's face was cheery and frank.

"Here's that confounded Russell chap," muttered Fullwood. "A bit thick, I call it, puttin' that cad on a level with all the rest of us. He's only a rotten pageboy, after all. An' how about his father? On the Wanderer's last voyage he was only a bally steward—an' now he's one of the guests of honour."

"No need to make a song about it," put in Bob Christine, with a slight show of spirit. "And you're wrong, too. Russell and his father are miles better than an ordinary steward and a pageboy. They only took on those jobs because they were stranded in San Francisco. I understand that old Russell once had a terrific business in Montreal."

"Anyway, he was down an' out in 'Frisco!" argued Fullwood.

This was quite enough for the cad of the Fourth. The fact that Clive Russell and his father had been down and out stamped them as beyond the pale. But as nobody else but Fullwood held this view it didn't much matter. Clive Russell and his father had been accepted by everybody else with enthusiasm.

Lord Dorrimore didn't forget that Clive had once saved his life—neither did he overlook the fact that the Wanderer was now en route for Paradise Island—a tiny, uncharted atoll in the wide Pacific, where, according to Mr. Russell, lay a fortune in pearls. But Mr. Russell, who had been victimised and swindled by a man named Jonathan Prescott, had been left penniless in San Francisco.

Without capital he was helpless—the pearl lagoon on Paradise Island was as remote from him as the stars. And so, after much persuasion, he had told his story to Lord Dorrimore—and the latter, with his usual enthusiasm, had entered into the affair with heart and soul. Reckless of all expense, he was determined to locate Paradise Island, and place a fortune into Mr. Warner Russell's hands. It was rightly his, since he had been the first to discover the pearl lagoon.

The Wanderer's quest was one which promised any amount of adventure and excitement.

CHAPTER II.

STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER.



CLIVE RUSSELL paused as he drew opposite to Fullwood, and stood looking at the quoit players. They were a merry throng, the fellows laughing and hot, and the girls looking amazingly cool and fresh in their light summer frocks. "They're getting some fun, I guess, anyway," remarked Clive, smiling.

Fullwood stared. "Speakin' to me?" he demanded curtly. "Sure, I——" Clive paused, and flushed slightly. "I was just saying that the folks seem to be enjoying themselves," he added. "Then you'd better address your remarks to somebody else," said Fullwood, turning away. "I don't want any unpleasantness, Russell, but the less you can say to me, the better. I'm rather particular about whom I mix with. That's straight, isn't it?" Clive went very red. "I'm sorry!" he said, speaking quietly with difficulty. "I thought I was speaking to a gentleman. I guess I made a mistake."

"Why, you confounded pauper!" roared Fullwood angrily, "if you talk to me like that I'll knock you down!"

This time Clive's eyes blazed.

"You'll knock me down?" he snapped, squaring up to Fullwood. "Gee! Try it, you cad! You've called me a pauper, and that's an insult——"

"And so you are a pauper!" sneered Fullwood. "You and your father are only on board this yacht by Lord Dorrimore's charity——"

Crash!

Clive's fist shot out, and Fullwood staggered back, and fell heavily on the deck. The cad of the Fourth had certainly not expected that blow. He picked himself up, quivering with rage. But before anything else could happen, Nipper and Reggie Pitt and Handforth came up—to say nothing of William Napoleon Browne and a few others.

The quoit game had been interrupted by this dramatic altercation. Everybody had been astonished to see Clive Russell act so forcefully, but most of the juniors felt sure that he had had provocation.

"Don't you think this is about enough?" asked Nipper grimly, as he stood between the pair. "Russell, I'm a bit surprised at you. It was hardly the thing to knock Fullwood down in the presence of the ladies. You might have waited——"

"The cad took me unawares!" snarled Fullwood. "But what else can you expect from a common pageboy!"

"That's enough!" rapped out Nipper. "I'd better tell you at once. Fullwood, that we're not standing any of this supercilious rot from you! Russell's one of us, and if you don't treat him decently, you'll be cut by every one of us on board."

"We'll send the rotter to Coventry!" roared Handforth angrily. "I say, let's begin now! This cad oughtn't to be on board, anyhow—the whole trip's going to be spoiled! I'm blessed if I know what Dorrie was doing when he invited him!"

"Dry up, Handy!" muttered Church. "Dorrie invited the whole Fourth, and Fullwood happened to be one of those whose parents allowed him to come. Don't make things worse."

William Napoleon Browne lounged forward. "I can safely say this is one of those occasions when my tact and discretion will smooth the troubled waters."

"Look here, Browne," began Nipper, "we don't need you——"

"That, Brother Nipper, is just where you jump the track," interrupted Browne smoothly. "I am not only needed, but I am absolutely essential. Without wishing to be set down as an eavesdropper, I may lightly mention that I overheard a few potent remarks from the lips of Brother Fullwood."

"What kind of remarks?" demanded Handforth.

"Potent, Brother Handforth—meaning, if you will consult your dictionary, powerful and influential," went on Browne calmly. "I happened to be standing on the lee side of the binnacle, watching the deck-hands perform their daily labours. There is nothing I love better than watching men at work. It makes me realise——"

"Never mind watching men at work," interrupted Nipper. "What did you hear Fullwood say?"

"Under the circumstances, we will overlook the crudity of your interruption," said Browne kindly. "Brevity, Brother Nipper, is indicated. Brevity is the watchword. Much as I hate to act as counsel for the prosecution in this affair, I must inform you that Fullwood referred to Brother Russell as a confounded pauper. Not content with that blistered insult, he informed the said Brother Russell that he and his father were on board by Lord Dorrimore's charity. And I can assure you that it afforded me a large amount of delight when Brother Russell delivered an uppercut which I can only characterise as a beauty. I regret that you should have interrupted the scrap at such an interesting moment."

Handforth gave an expressive grunt.

"There you are!" he said grimly. "What did I tell you? I knew that Fullwood had."

acted like a cad! The only thing we can do is to form a ring, and let Russell finish the job!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on, Russell, my son!" went on Handforth. "Roll up your sleeves, and give this rotter a jolly good hiding!"

"You silly fool——" began Fullwood, in alarm.

"We don't want to keep it up, do we?" asked Clive uncomfortably. "I'm sorry I acted hastily, Nipper. I guess I oughtn't to take any notice of such foolish remarks!"

"Why, you ass, you're going to smash him!" roared Handforth.

"No, he isn't!" declared Nipper. "We don't want any bad blood on board, Handy. Fullwood, you insulted Russell without any provocation, and you've got to apologise."

Fullwood started, and scowled.

"I'm hanged if I'll apologise!" he said hotly.

"Either you apologise, or every St. Frank's fellow on board will cut you dead!" went on Nipper, with a grim note in his voice. "You've got about ten seconds to decide, so you'd better buck up."

Ralph Leslie Fullwood bit his lip, and an inner fight took place. His pride rebelled against the thought of apologising in the presence of Browne and the girls. But the alternative was even worse. Fullwood considered himself to be a regular ladies' man—and he instinctively knew that if he refused to apologise, Irene & Co. would cut him as surely as the others.

"A lot of fuss over nothing!" he growled at last. "You seem to forget that Russell attacked me—— Oh, all right! Sorry I insulted you, Russell. Is that good enough?"

"Why, sure!" replied Clive heartily. "Shake, Fullwood!"

They shook hands, and Handforth turned aside with such an expression of disgust on his face that the others were compelled to laugh. The incident was over, and would soon be forgotten.

But there was something in the gleam in Fullwood's eyes that did not look healthy. Peace had been patched up, but there was little doubt that Clive Russell already had one bitter enemy.

CHAPTER III.

MYSTERIOUS HAPPENINGS IN STATE-ROOM NO. 12.



"PENNY for 'em, old man," said Church, grinning. "Eh?"

Handforth turned on his elbow, and looked at Church absently. For the last five minutes he had been leaning over the rail, staring unseeingly at the foaming sea, as it appeared to glide swiftly by.

"Penny for what?" went on Handforth.

"Your thoughts, of course," said Church. "You've been brooding ever since Fullwood went below, and Mac and I haven't been able to get a word out of you. What's on your mind?"

"Fullwood's on my mind!" retorted Edward Oswald darkly.

"There's no accounting for tastes," said McClure. "Why not think about something pleasant? Luncheon, for example. Or even Irene."

"Are you implying that luncheon is a more pleasant consideration than Irene?" asked Handforth, with a glare.

"For goodness' sake don't start another row!" pleaded McClure. "My hat! You're as touchy as the dickens! I didn't mean any reflection on Irene—or even the luncheon, if it comes to that. What's the matter with you, fathead?"

Handforth snorted.

"And it might have been a terrific fight!" he said sadly. "Just when it was beginning, too! I'm disgusted with Fullwood! Fancy apologising like that! We should have seen a glorious mill——"

"Well, I'm blessed!" grinned Church. "He's upset, if you please, because Fullwood had the decency to apologise—because there wasn't a fight!"

"And he'd have been just as upset if Fullwood hadn't apologised," put in McClure. "You know what he is, Churchy. He can't help it. Some people are born with perverse natures like that. Let's go down to the swimming-bath and have a dip!"

"Good idea!" said McClure promptly.

Handforth was not congenial company in his present mood, and his chums walked briskly away, bound for the luxuriously appointed swimming-bath. For a moment, Handforth thought about following. He was indignant because his chums had deserted him. But he only grunted.

"Rats to 'em!" he muttered. "I'm fed up!"

He walked moodily up and down the deck for a few minutes, and then suddenly remembered that he had urgent business with his minor. Willy had borrowed a fountain-pen the previous evening, and Handforth had recently discovered that it was his own. As a rule, Willy never bothered about the formality of asking before he borrowed things.

In the saloon, Handforth ran into a group of Fourth-Formers, but there was no sign of his minor.

"Where's Willy?" he demanded gruffly.

"No need to bark, old man," said Nicodemus Trotwood. "We haven't seen your minor—but if we happen to spot him, we'll give him the tip to keep out of the way. You look a bit dangerous."

"Do I?" said Handforth grimly. "Well, I am!"

He strode on, and the others chuckled. They knew well enough that Edward Oswald would turn up again within a few minutes, his temper completely restored. He was subject to these rapid changes.

Having seen no sign of Willy on deck, or in the saloon or lounge, Handforth explored the library and the gymnasium, and then turned his attention to the state-rooms. He was not fully acquainted with the geography of the yacht yet, but he knew that Willy and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon shared State-Room No. 12, on Deck D.

Handforth strode in, and gave an expressive sniff as he found the room empty. Just at the moment, he wanted that fountain-pen of his more than anything else on earth—although, after he had got it, he probably wouldn't make any use of it. It exasperated him to be kept waiting.

"Huh! Untidy little beggars!" he said witheringly.

This remark was entirely unjustified, for the state-room was looking quite neat and tidy. Handforth, however, felt that it was up to him to make some disparaging comment. It stood to reason that fags would be untidy.

All the cabins on the Wanderer were splendidly appointed. Handforth was treading upon a soft carpet, and he was looking at rich furnishings. The cabin was roomy, and it contained real beds—not mere bunks. The dressing-table, wash-hand stand and wardrobe, were all built into the walls, and of polished mahogany. The entire room was panelled, and there was plenty of daylight admitted from the ample porthole.

"Fathead!"

Handforth started as a mysterious voice came to him from apparently nowhere. It was a kind of disguised voice, not unlike a croak. But there was no doubt whatever about the word it pronounced.

Edward Oswald stared round in astonishment. As far as he could see, the state-room was absolutely empty, except for himself.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STOWAWAY.

"GET out of here!"

The voice came again, and a frown appeared upon Handforth's massive brow. It was bad enough to be called a fathead, but to

be ordered out was even worse. And the mysterious speaker took good care to remain hidden.

It seemed to Edward Oswald, however, that the voice had come from above. In fact, he had been on the point of looking under the beds, but abandoned this parti-

cular search. The voice had certainly come from above.

He looked round the cabin in astonishment. On the top of the wardrobe there were two little doors—a kind of extra cupboard, so that every inch of available space was used. One of the cupboard doors stood half-open. Handforth looked up incredulously.

"Impossible!" he muttered. "I'm blessed if I can understand——"

"Don't jaw so much!" said the voice severely.

This time Handforth's face fairly flushed with amazement. Beyond any question, the voice had come from that cupboard. But the doorway was not more than six inches high, and it seemed impossible that any human being could have squeezed himself into such a confined space.

"Oh, so that's the game!" said Handforth grimly. "You young fathead! Come out of that cupboard at once! You'll get suffocated! You can't fool me with your silly tricks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laugh was so uncanny, and so croaky, that Handforth gave a violent start. It wasn't like a human laugh at all. The affair was beginning to worry him. And his worry took the form of anger.

"If you don't come out of that cupboard within five seconds, I'll jolly well drag you out!" he roared. "You'd better not play about any longer, my lad! I might as well tell you I'm in a temper!"

He expected to see a red, confused face appear at this threat. But nothing happened, and dead silence reigned. The silence was even more worrying than the croak. Subconsciously, Handforth congratulated the unseen fag upon his powers of disguising his voice. In its way, it was a masterpiece.

Without doubt, Willy was the author of this joke. Handforth dismissed Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon at once—they didn't possess the ability. But he had learned by experience that nothing was impossible where his minor was concerned.

"Are you coming down, or not?" he demanded fiercely. "You young idiot, you'll kill yourself in that confined space! And what's the idea of squeezing in there anyhow? If you call this a joke, then I pity your sense of humour! I'm not going to stand here all day!"

"Yah! Go and eat coke!"

"By George!" gasped Handforth. "You—you——"

He paused, a peculiar kind of sensation stealing over him. Many hundreds of times had he been requested to go and eat coke, but never before in this particular tone. The croakiness of the voice was positively unnerving. The words, although spoken thickly, were unmistakable.

"I say, Willy!" panted Handforth. "Chuck it, you know! What's the matter



with you? Anybody might think you'd gone dotty, squeezing yourself in that cupboard and croaking at me like this!"

There was another tense, painful silence. "Are you listening?" asked Handforth desperately.

"Yah! Fry your face!" said the unknown, with supreme contempt in the voice. "Ha, ha, ha! Blow old Suncliffe and his lines!"

"What?" gasped Handforth.

"Come on, Marmy!" croaked the unknown. "Let's have tea!"

Edward Oswald turned rather pale. This was getting on his nerves—and a dreadful suspicion was creeping into his mind. Willy was undoubtedly the author of this business—for he had referred to Mr. Suncliffe, the Third Form-master, and to Marmaduke, the monkey.

"My goodness!" breathed Handforth, startled. "He's gone dotty! Something's turned his giddy brain, and he's crawled into that cupboard, and now he's rambling on like a lunatic!"

The unnatural character of Willy's voice lent colour to this awful suspicion.

"Willy, old son," said Handforth anxiously, "chuck it, you know! I'll go and fetch Dorrie—or Mr. Lee! Come out of that cupboard!"

"Talking to me?" asked Willy Handforth, strolling through the doorway.

"Eh?" ejaculated Handforth, swinging round. "Why, what— But—but— You young ass!" he gasped. "I—I thought—"

"There's no telling what you'd think, Ted," interrupted Willy calmly. "What are you going to fetch Mr. Lee for? And what's the idea of telling me to come out of that cupboard?"

Handforth stared blankly.

"But—but you're up in that cupboard!" he said hoarsely.

"Am I?" asked Willy. "Well, of course, you know best. I wouldn't dream of arguing with my elders!"

"I—I mean, I thought you were in the cupboard!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "There's something up there—something that's been croaking at me for the last five minutes!"

"Croaking?" repeated Willy thoughtfully.

"Yes—a horrible, uncanny voice!"

"Oh, that!" said Willy, as though he understood perfectly. "Sorry if you've been scared, Ted. But you shouldn't come nosing into my state-room like this."

"Scared?" repeated Handforth, recovering himself rapidly. "Who's scared, you young idiot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" croaked the mysterious voice.

"There you are—there it is again!" gasped Handforth, turning round.

"Oh, it's only Priscilla!" said Willy coolly.

"Priscilla?" breathed Handforth, with a feeling of weakness.

"My parrot," explained Willy, with a grin.

CHAPTER V.

MAINLY ABOUT PETS.



HANDFORTH'S feeling of weakness increased.

"Your parrot?" he repeated dazedly.

"Yes."

"Parrot?"

"One of those birds that talk," explained Willy. "Human beings can be parrots, too. Sometimes, Ted, I've come to the conclusion that you're one. In fact, you're acting like one now."

"You—you cheeky young sweep!" snorted Handforth, turning red. "Are you calling me a parrot?"

Willy sighed.

"Am I calling you a parrot?" he asked, appealing to the nearest bedstead. "The fact is, Ted, your brain must work in low gear. It takes you two or three minutes to grasp anything. You've been holding a conversation with Priscilla for the last five minutes, and even now you can't realise it. Hey, Prissie! Come on, old girl!"

Words failed Handforth as he gazed up at the cupboard. A perky head appeared, accompanied by two claws, which fixed themselves to the edge of the woodwork. Priscilla turned her head sideways, and gazed at Handforth with such an unwinking stare that he felt uncomfortable.

"It's all right—she's only sizing you up," said Willy comfortingly. "That's one of her little habits with strangers. If she likes you, she'll probably wink. If she doesn't like you, it's on the cards that she'll fly down and bite a chunk out of your neck!"

To Handforth's relief, Priscilla winked, and turned her head the other way, as though she were unable to trust the evidence of one eye. She wanted to make assurance doubly sure by examining Handforth with the other. The scrutiny was evidently satisfactory, for she condescended to wink again.

"Hello!" she croaked. "How goes it?"

"That's her usual greeting," explained Willy, grinning. "Whenever she sees anybody for the first time she asks that. To be polite, you've got to answer."

"Do you think I'm going to waste my time jawing to a silly parrot?" demanded Handforth, turning redder than ever. "My hat! Have I been talking to that parrot for the last five minutes? I thought it was you in that cupboard!"

"I can't help your troubles," said Willy briskly. "Anybody with a grain of sense would have known that a fellow of my size couldn't squeeze into that cupboard. But then, of course, you haven't got one."

"Haven't got what?"

"What I just said," replied Willy carelessly.

Handforth frowned as he thought for a moment.

"Do you mean to say I haven't got a grain of sense?" he demanded. "I came in this state-room, and I heard a voice——"

"Oh, dry up, idiot!" said Priscilla.

"She hates to be bored," said Willy. "She's even had the nerve to tell me to dry up now and again. I haven't had her long, and she needs a lot more training. Still, she's pretty smart on the whole."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated his major. "How is it that I haven't seen this monstrosity before? Did you have it at home before we started on this trip?"

"Of course I had it at home," said Willy. "But you don't take any interest in my pets, old man. I spent hours and hours on Priscilla—teaching her choice remarks, and making her obey me. And it's all done by kindness. Just have a look at this."

He walked nearer to the cupboard, and looked up.

"Come on, Prissie!" he said soothingly. "Shoulder!"

The parrot evidently knew what her young master meant, for she gave a long hop, fluttered down, and perched herself upon Willy's shoulder. In some extraordinary way Willy had an almost uncanny influence over dumb animals and birds. He could make them do almost anything he desired.

"Well, I give it up!" said Handforth helplessly. "It's a pity you couldn't come on this trip without leaving that beastly parrot behind! I distinctly ordered you not to bring any of your pets, didn't I?"

"You did!" agreed Willy.

"And yet you brought this parrot!" said Handforth severely.

"Shocking!" said Willy, looking horrified.

"I suppose you haven't brought any others?" went on Handforth, with sudden suspicion. "There aren't any more of your fat-headed pets knocking about?"

"Not one!"

"Well, that's good!" said Handforth, relieved. "I'm glad——"

"Not one of my fat-headed pets, anyway," amended Willy thoughtfully. "I couldn't bring any of those, because I haven't got any. But old Marmaduke is down below in one of the store-rooms——"

"Marmaduke!" said Handforth. "Your monkey?"

"Yes, I thought he'd like the trip," said Willy. "You see, he'll probably meet some of his pals out in the South Seas, and it'll be a treat for him to have a chat. And there's Septimus——"

"Septimus!" breathed Handforth. "You—you don't mean you've brought that horrible snake with you? Look here, you young ass!"



"That is . . . I mean . . . what ho!" panted Archie. "Moonlight, what? I mean to say . . . How dashed priceless, dear old girl! Bally good, and all that sort of rot!"

This yacht isn't a menagerie or a Zoo! I'll chuck them all overboard!"

Willy smiled. He knew the value of this threat—for his major was almost as kind-hearted regarding animals as he was himself. But Handforth felt that it was up to him to say something strong.

"There's no need for you to worry, Ted," observed Willy. "These pets of mine won't cause any trouble—and we might get some fun. Take my advice, and trip upstairs. Just think of Irene, walking about on deck in distress because you're not there!"

Handforth started.

"Yes, by George, I'd forgotten——" he began. "Look here, we're not talking about Irene now!" he went on hastily. "We're talking about your pets! Are you going to keep that parrot in this state-room?"

"I don't see what it's got to do with you if I do," replied Willy promptly. "You're trespassing, anyway. It's up to Chubby and Juicy to kick—and if they start any of that funny business they'll know all about it!"

"Well, I give you up!" said Handforth helplessly.

"Fine!" said Willy. "So-long, old man!"

CHAPTER VI.

PRISCILLA SUNS HERSELF.



TO Willy's relief, Handforth took the hint and departed. Edward Oswald, in fact, had a feeling that the conversation was getting beyond him. He generally had this sensation after he had conversed with Willy for a period of ten minutes.

Either he had to attack his minor, or flee. And he generally fled—for he held strong opinions on the subject of a fellow hitting somebody smaller than himself. It sometimes angered him because he was accused of bullying his minor. But it was a crime he never committed. Occasionally he would deliver an impulsive cuff, but to attack Willy in a bullying manner was quite foreign to Edward Oswald's nature.

"It's all right, Prissie, he can't help it!" said Willy, as soon as his major was gone. "When you get to know him you'll like him. He's a good chap in his own way, but he needs wangling."

"Go and eat coke!" remarked Priscilla.

"That's no way to talk to your master, my girl!" retorted Willy. "You can speak fairly well, but I've got to admit that your vocabulary is a bit limited. You're liable to repeat yourself."

"Fathead!" exclaimed the parrot.

"It's quite all right to say those remarks to others, but you mustn't say them to me!" went on Willy. "I shall have to teach you to treat your master with the correct amount of deference. How about some seed?"

Priscilla cocked her head on one side.

"What-ho!" she said approvingly.

"That's the style!" grinned Willy. "You artful beggar, you know what 'seed' means, don't you? Well, we shall have to fish your cage out, and make you secure."

Willy proceeded to produce a cage from the wardrobe. That morning there had been a heated argument between himself and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon. A most unnecessary argument, in Willy's opinion. Priscilla had merely distributed a few seeds over Chubby's white trousers, and Chubby had indignantly declared that the parrot ought to be consigned to the stokehold.

Pending a settlement, Willy had locked the parrot in the state-room—never dreaming that Handforth would barge in. He began to realise that it would be necessary to keep Priscilla in her cage. Otherwise, she might take it into her head to fly home. And Willy had little faith in Priscilla's powers as a transatlantic flier.

"Hop on to that bed rail, and wait a bit," said Willy, as he jerked the parrot off his shoulder. "How do you think I can put this cage in order with you on my giddy shoulder?"

Priscilla obediently perched herself at the foot of the bed. And Willy gave his full attention to the cage. It had suffered slightly during the early morning altercation. Quite unintentionally, Chubby Heath had put his foot through the bars, and these required straightening.

"Clumsy ass!" said Willy, frowning. "I wouldn't have minded so much, only he cackled like a hyena afterwards. Well, it'll be two days before his black eye disappears, so he won't do it again in a hurry!"

Priscilla watched with little or no interest. She was mainly concerned with seed, and wondered when Willy would keep his promise. Unfortunately, she didn't know where the seed was kept. She had made a careful investigation of the state-room earlier, but without result. As a last resort, she had entered the cupboard, but this had proved equally barren.

And now, perched upon the bed-rail, she came to the conclusion that her master was treating her very badly. Furthermore, she had just discovered that the cabin door was open, and although she wasn't sure, it seemed to her that there were fresh worlds waiting to be conquered.

"What-ho!" she observed loudly.

"All right—don't be impatient," said Willy, without turning his head.

"Blow old Sunny and his lines!" continued Priscilla conversationally. "Let's go out to the cricket!"

"You'll get no cricket here," grinned Willy, as he recognised the familiar words—used by himself many times in the study at St. Frank's. "But you'll have some seed in about two minutes, old girl."

Apparently, Priscilla had lost her interest in seed. She hopped down from the bed-rail and stood on the floor. Glancing round at Willy, she noted that he was still turning his back to her. Possibly she regarded this as an affront, for she proceeded with deliberate stride to the doorway.

Arriving there, she turned her head, and took another look at Willy. She was just about to speak, when she checked herself. It wouldn't be a wise move to make any sound now. Freedom lay before her.

One glance along the corridor was enough. She hadn't seen anything so interesting for weeks. With a series of hops and skips, she progressed along the corridor until she arrived at some stairs. These puzzled her for some moments, but, as nobody appeared, she mounted one or two.

In the meantime, Willy had completed his task.

"Now, then, old girl—in with you!" he said crisply. "I think I shall have to take you down to one of the store-rooms. . . Hallo! What the— Hey, Priscilla! Where the dickens have you got to?"

He looked round with a startled expression. The parrot was certainly not in the cabin, and Willy frowned as he observed the half-open door.



"Just like that careless fathead!" he growled, thinking of his major. "He couldn't even shut the door behind him! But I'm to blame, too, for not noticing it earlier! If that parrot's got away——"

His thoughts were too alarming for words. He knew that Priscilla couldn't fly. At the most, she could only progress in a series of hops, accompanied by a flutter of her wings. But if she happened to hop over the rail, her number would be up. Once in the sea, nothing on earth could save her.

And Willy was becoming quite attached to his latest pet. In her own way, Priscilla was even more attractive than Marmaduke. For she could at least carry on a conversation.

"My hat! She's gone!" muttered Willy, as he sped along the corridor.

Priscilla, it must be confessed, had distinctly heard her master's first call, but instead of obeying, she had continued her way upstairs with greater speed than before.

By a piece of luck, she arrived on deck without having met anybody. She looked round with wonder, and decided that the deck was quite a good place. The sun was shining, and the warmth from it was grateful. She paused for a moment to make a few investigations beneath her right wing.

Having conducted the inquiry satisfactorily, she shook herself, and glanced severely at a neighbouring coil of rope.

"Fathead!" she said scornfully.

A deck-chair was just a little beyond, and the top of it seemed to suggest a good perching place. For a recently escaped prisoner, Priscilla was not exceedingly ambitious. For the moment, the top of that deck-chair would satisfy all her requirements.

In a couple of hops she reached the perch, and then she made another discovery. Immediately beneath her was the figure of Professor Sylvester Tucker, deep in the pages of an astronomical volume.

CHAPTER VII.

AN AMAZING IMPROVEMENT.



"GO and eat coke!" said Priscilla loudly.

She had waited for two solid minutes for something to happen, but in all that time Professor Tucker had merely turned over a page. Priscilla felt that it was up to her to start something more lively.

"Eh?" said Professor Tucker. "I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Fathead!" said Priscilla.

"Really, I don't quite understand—— But perhaps you were not addressing me?"

said the professor. "No, no, of course not! How absurd!"

He went on with his book, dimly supposing that one of the youthful guests had been talking to another youthful guest in his own peculiar way. And Priscilla, considering the whole business unsatisfactory, gave several pecks at the top of the deck-chair.

It was very pleasant here, in the shade. There were some more chairs near by, and in two of them Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were smoking and chatting. A little further along, Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley were leaning against the rail, talking about silk jumpers. In the other direction, Archie Glenthorne was lounging with Reggie Pitt and Nipper and William Napoleon Browne.

And everybody became aware of the parrot's presence at just about the same moment. Perhaps it was her croaking voice which attracted the general attention.

"Good gad!" said Archie. "I mean to say, what's this? A parrot, dash it! A bally green, blue and red parrot! I must observe, laddies, that the colour scheme is somewhat poisonous!"

"The poor thing can't help its colouring," chuckled Nipper. "Personally, I rather like it. I wonder how on earth it got up here——"

"By George! Willy's parrot!" ejaculated Handforth, coming along at that moment. "I told him he'd have trouble with that blessed bird! In two minutes it'll take an inch out of the professor's ear!"

"In that case, Brother Handforth, I beseech you to remain silent," said Browne gently. "Although not cruelly inclined, I must admit that it would give me quite a kick to observe such an interesting event. Silence, brothers, for the entertainment!"

Browne had no real fear that Professor Tucker was in peril. But, knowing the professor's absent-minded nature, he thought it quite probable that some interesting development might occur. It did.

"What-ho!" said Priscilla, becoming impatient.

"Ah, you're still there?" said the science master. "Splendid! Now, here you will observe a diagram of the stars which form the constellation group known familiarly as Orion. Here you see Betelgeux, and here Rigel——"

"Who cares about the stars?" asked Priscilla scornfully.

She seemed distinctly bored by the conversation, and everybody else on deck smiled with appreciation. Even Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and the girls stopped their conversation in order to listen.

"But, my dear sir, the stars are all important," declared Professor Tucker, quite unconscious of the fact that he was talking to a parrot. "Here you will observe the Great Bear, with the Pointers——"

"Rats to the Great Bear!" said Priscilla.

in her croaking voice. "I'm a lot more interested in nuts and apples and bird seed!"

"Good gad!" gasped Archie Glenthorne.

"Did you hear that, old man?" asked Dorrie, startled. "By the Lord Harry! I've never known a parrot to talk like that! I say, this is absolutely staggering!"

"It is certainly remarkable," agreed Nelson Lee.

The girls were equally surprised.

"Oh, but it's impossible!" said Irene. "No parrot could talk about the Great Bear like that!"

"But it did talk about the Great Bear," insisted Dorrie. "I've never heard anything so rummy——"

"Hush!" put in Irene.

The professor turned a page, and was talking again.

"When we come to comets, we touch upon a most interesting topic," he said enthusiastically. "Now, I have a theory of my own concerning comets. You will no doubt be interested to learn——"

"I'm not interested at all," croaked the parrot. "Here comes that young master of mine, and I'll bet he'll collar me! Just my luck! Can't have five minutes on deck without being pinched."

"Good glory!" breathed Lord Dorrimore.

And all the others on deck were equally amazed. There was something truly startling in Priscilla's flow of language. Willy's mastery over his pets was well known, but it was incredible that he could have taught his parrot to carry on an intelligent conversation. Even the cleverest parrots are only capable of uttering and repeating phrases which they have heard again and again.

Priscilla's powers were extraordinary.

"What about the sun?" she croaked. "What's the idea of sitting here in the shade? The sun's shining, and——"

"My dear sir, you appear to overlook the fact that the month is July," interrupted the professor impatiently turning his head. "The sun develops a most uncomfortable intensity—— Bless my soul!" he gasped. "What—what—— This is simply amazing! I—I thought——"

"You thought I was one of the chaps, eh?" asked Priscilla, cocking her head on one side as Professor Tucker looked at her. "That was just your little mistake. I'll bet I've upset some of your pet theories!"

"This—this is uncanny!" breathed Professor Tucker hoarsely.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BEWITCHED BIRD.



WILLY HANDFORTH stood stock still. As a general rule, he was the most difficult junior to startle under the sun. He took everything coolly and

calmly and as a matter of course. But for once he was nearly dumb with amazement.

He knew Priscilla's capabilities, and he knew her limitations. In fact, her limitations had frequently worried him. And here she was, talking in a way that no other parrot had talked in the whole world's history.

"Great stars!" panted Willy. "She's—she's talking like a human being!"

He had been creeping up in the rear, with the fell intention of grasping Priscilla unawares. But his surprise caused him to pause, and he did not fail to observe the expressions of astonishment on all the other faces, too.

"Dear me!" panted Professor Tucker, removing his spectacles. "A parrot! This is most singular! I was distinctly under the impression that I was conversing with one of the boys!"

"That's just your little mistake," said Priscilla. "I'm one of the girls."

"Upon my word, Lee, this is too much!" said Lord Dorrimore. "I don't believe it—I simply don't believe it! I've seen parrots in all parts of the world, an' I've never heard one——"

"Hi, come here!" gasped Willy suddenly. Priscilla had suddenly left the top of the chair—taking a dislike to the professor's continued stare—and was now perched on the edge of a small deck-house. From here she edged her way along, and sat at the corner.

"Sorry, sir!" said Willy hastily. "She scooted out of the door before I could catch her! I'm afraid she'll fly overboard——"

"There's not much fear of that, Willy," said Nelson Lee rising. "The bird will have enough sense to know that such a course would mean death. We'll catch her if we go about it gently."

"But I don't know what's come over her!" went on Willy, looking worried. "I've never heard her speak like that before! Hi, Priscilla, come down here, and I'll give you some seed!"

"What-ho!" said Priscilla, more croakily than ever.

"Dash it all, I can understand the bally bird saying 'what-ho,' but when it comes to carrying on a dashed conversation, I'm dashed if I believe the dashed thing!" said Archie Glenthorne flatly. "I mean——"

"It's jolly rummy, anyhow," said Reggie Pitt. "Willy must have taught that parrot to say those things—— Oh, but it's out of the question," he added, frowning. "I can't understand——"

"If you want to catch me, come up here!" sang out Priscilla. "Yah! I can beat the lot of you!"

"Come on, Prissie!" pleaded Willy. "Good girl—good girl!"

"That's it—talk to me as if I were a baby!" exclaimed the parrot scornfully. "I'm free now, and I'm jolly well going to

stay free! But I shan't jump overboard, my lad!"

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Willy faintly. He stared up in stupefied amazement. This conversational ability was growing more and more unaccountable. Priscilla was talking with greater fluency than ever. More fellows and girls had come up, and were looking on and listening with a kind of awe.

And to cap everything, Umlosi appeared along the deck, and paused to take in the scene. The enormous Kutana Chieftain nearly reached to the roof of the deck-house, and his shoulder was invitingly close to Priscilla. And Priscilla, be it known, had a particular liking for shoulders.

Umlosi was dressed all in white—an imposing figure, with his huge, broad chest, and his powerful shoulders. He couldn't quite understand the rigid attitudes of the others.

"Good old Umlosi!" said Willy quickly. "You've just come in time. Reach up, and grab that giddy parrot!"

"It shall be even as thou sayest, young master," rumbled Umlosi, as he glanced at the highly-coloured Priscilla. "Perchance the bird has escaped from its cage——"

"Perchance it has!" agreed Priscilla. "And perchance it won't go back again, either! Wise words, O Umlosi!"

Umlosi started as though he had been shot.

"Wau! 'Tis possessed of the powers of a witch!" he exclaimed, his eyes rolling. "N'Kose—N'Kose! Come, my father, and slay this bird, for it is surely tagati!"

"I didn't ask you to slay it—I asked you to capture it!" panted Willy. "She even knows your name, Umlosi! And she's never seen you before! She must have heard me speak to you——"

"Of course I did!" said Priscilla. "I'm clever, I am!"

The parrot, having scrutinised Umlosi's shoulder for some moments, decided that it was satisfactory. She hopped down, and the next moment Umlosi uttered such a terrific yell that everybody jumped. The black warrior staggered backwards, causing Priscilla to flutter down, and then he fled along the deck as though a thousand demons were after him.

"Got you!" gasped Willy, pouncing on Priscilla like a cat on a mouse.

"Fathead!" said Priscilla, with disgust.

Umlosi's flight and the parrot's capture brought the tension to an end. Everybody started speaking at once. The black giant's terror had caused as much surprise as Priscilla herself. Umlosi was ready enough to face a hundred valiant warriors—and to even fight them single handed—but anything in the nature of witchcraft induced sheer terror within his breast. He was more afraid of that parrot than of a whole army corps.

"I may possibly be wrong, Brother Stevens," murmured William Napoleon

Browne, "but it has occurred to my massive intellect that we have been listening to a certain amount of hokey-pokey business. In other words, there has been dirty work."

"Dirty work?" asked Stevens, of the Fifth.

"Not to say foul doings!" said Browne solemnly. "Although we are far removed from the first of April, I am convinced that some tricky gentleman of the younger strata has deliberately fooled us. At least, he has fooled you," added Browne gently. "To fool me is an impossibility."

"You're mad!" said Stevens frankly.

In the meantime, Willy was holding tightly to Priscilla—who, for some reason, had completely lost her vocabulary. All she could do was to call Willy a fathead, and give an excellent imitation of Marmaduke's chatter. Her powers of speech had gone.

CHAPTER IX.

MOONLIGHT, AND ALL THAT SORT OF THING.



LORD DORRIMORE scratched his head and frowned.

"Well, I'm hanged if I can understand it!" he said frankly. "Of course, no parrot on earth could talk like that. Can't you offer any explanation, Lee? What's the meaning of it?"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"Trotwood major, come here!" he said, with mock severity. "You needn't think I didn't notice you behind those deck chairs! What do you mean by playing such a trick upon Professor Tucker?"

Nicodemus Trotwood grinned, and turned red.

"Sorry, sir," he murmured. "I—I— Well, sir, I couldn't resist it, you know. The professor was asking for it, the way he started speaking to the parrot. I thought it was rather rich."

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Dorrie. "So you——"

"Yes, sir," said Nicodemus meekly.

"Observe, Brother Stevens, the author of the dirty work!" remarked Browne calmly. "Have you ever known me to be at fault? In all our fifty years of friendship, have you ever known your Napoleon to make a bloomer? If I were crude, I should say I told you so!"

"But even now I don't understand!" frowned Stevens.

"No?" said Browne benevolently. "Alas, Brother Horace, I'm afraid the contents of your cerebellum are becoming moss-grown. Brother Nicodemus, let me tell you, has the power of throwing his voice."

"He's a ventriloquist, eh?" breathed Stevens.

"Exactly," replied Browne. "I refrained from using the word, as I thought you would not know the meaning. I am



pleased to observe your intelligence is increasing by leaps and bounds. Before long you will even know your A.B.C. It is an encouraging sign, Brother Horace."

"You—you spoofing bounder!" said Willy indignantly, as he glared at Nicodemus Trotwood. "I never thought of you and your silly ventriloquism! I thought Priscilla had gone off her rocker!"

Nicodemus grinned.

"It was only a joke, you know," he said cheerfully.

"An' a bally good joke, too!" said Lord Dorrimore heartily. "Good gad! I've never heard anythin' so life-like before! My boy, you're wastin' your talents! When you leave school you can earn a hundred pounds a week!"

Nicodemus blushed modestly, and protested that he had done nothing to make a song about. Willy Handforth soon lost his indignant expression, and he was grinning.

"It was a nerve, but it was jolly clever!" he admitted. "Trotty, my son, you're a marvel! Even I couldn't tell any difference between Priscilla's own croak and yours! And the way you threw it was uncanny!"

"I couldn't resist the temptation," chuckled Nick. "It was just one of those opportunities that couldn't be missed. Priscilla kept putting in a word or two of her own, and I had to dodge 'em."

While Willy took the parrot below, and consigned her to her cage, Nick Trotwood was surrounded by the others—particularly Irene & Co. They insisted upon him giving further samples of his ventriloquial powers. Most of the girls were learning of Nick's gift for the first time.

But in the middle of the demonstration, the gong sounded for luncheon, and it was postponed for a more fitting occasion.

During luncheon, there was a good deal of laughter at the recollection of Priscilla and Umlosi's fight. Even now, the black chief refused to be convinced. Dorrie was quite convinced that Umlosi would regard the bird with awe for all time.

"And don't tell Umlosi about your gift, my lad!" said Nipper to Nicodemus. "If you do, he'll think you're bewitched, too. He's a rummy chap in some ways, full of superstitions, so you'd better be careful."

"My hat, yes!" said Trotwood major. "If he mistakes me for a white witch doctor he might pitch me overboard! Or he might grab Corny by mistake, and do the same to him!"

Both the Trotwood twins were on board—Cornelius, the simple, being so unobtrusive that he was hardly ever noticed. Corny was also exceedingly deaf, and the difference between the two twin brothers was astonishing. In face and form they were identical—but in character, they were as the poles apart.

During the afternoon the weather turned showery, and deck games were abandoned. In any case, all the adult travellers in the party indulged in a siesta. The St. Frank's

fellows amused themselves in the swimming bath, and in the gymnasium.

But the evening compensated for the afternoon, for after dinner the weather was glorious. With the last tinge of sunset in the west, the sea was smooth and sparkling, with a full moon rising in the clear sky. The air was mild and exceedingly pleasant. It was impossible to remain below.

"What-ho! Moonlight, and all that sort of stuff!" observed Archie Glenthorne, as he leaned over the rail. "It makes a chappie romantic and what not. It's hard to believe, Handy, old chestnut, that we shall be among the South Sea Islands in a few dashed days."

"Anything's possible on a yacht like this," said Handforth enthusiastically. "Why, she's as good as an airship—she can cover the distance at a tremendous speed. I'll bet we're doing practically fifty miles an hour now!"

Handforth's statement was true enough—notwithstanding its remarkable nature. The Wanderer was skimming through the water so easily and so effortlessly that there was no indication of hurry. She seemed to be merely lazing along, until one looked directly overside at the speeding foam.

Willy Handforth, strolling along the port side, considered that something ought to be done on such a night as this. It was a shame to let it go for nothing. As it happened, Marjorie Temple was the one who put a scheme into his head.

She was leaning against the rail with Violet Watson and Tessa Love. All three girls were examining the moon—for it was so clear and bright that the craters could almost be seen with the naked eye.

"Oh, I say, Willy," said Marjorie sweetly. Willy sighed.

"All right—what is it?" he asked resignedly. "I know that one! You want me to fetch something, I suppose?"

CHAPTER X.

ARCHIE RISES TO THE OCCASION.



MARJORIE TEMPLE frowned.

"You needn't go unless you like!" she said loftily. "I'm sure I don't want you to do me a favour if—"

"Cheese it!" interrupted Willy, grinning. "I was only kidding you, Marjorie. Anything I can do will be an honour. I've never seen you looking so jolly pretty as you look to-night."

"That's very sweet of you, Willy," said Marjorie, flushing.

"It's the moonlight, I suppose—I can't see you so plainly!" remarked Willy thoughtfully.

"You little wretch!" said Marjorie, as her companions chuckled. "I thought something was the matter—trying to pay me compliments like that! Look here, do you mind finding Archie for me?"

"Archie?" repeated Willy, putting his head on one side. "Oh, Marjorie! If you're going to flirt——"

"Don't be ridiculous!" interrupted the girl severely. "He's got a wonderful telescope, and we want to look at the moon. Be a sport, and find Archie at once."

"Right you are," said Willy briskly. "Anything for you, old girl!"

He walked off, with his hands in his pockets. But he hadn't proceeded ten yards before an idea occurred to him. His eyes took on a keener sparkle, and the corners of his mouth twitched.

"She didn't say anything about asking Archie to bring the telescope, did she?" he murmured. "And she didn't tell me to mention it to Archie. Of course, that's what she meant—but I'm not to be blamed if Archie gets hold of the message wrong—these girls ought to be more explicit!"

Willy grinned as his simple scheme unfolded itself in his mind. It was so easy that it seemed too good to be true. He promised himself that there would be some good fun before long.

Finding Archie was a comparatively simple matter, for that elegant youth was lying full length in the lounge, near one of the open windows. Except for Cornelius Trotwood and Timothy Tucker, the lounge was otherwise empty.

"I say, Archie," said Willy softly, as he dropped on the lounge.

"Eh? What-ho!" murmured Archie, opening his eyes. "Dash it all, have a heart, laddie! I was just indulging in forty of the best——"

"This is no time for sleeping, you awful slacker!" said Willy tartly. "I'm surprised at you, Archie!"

"Oddslife!"

"I'm shocked at you!" went on Willy.

"I mean, dash it——"

"Lazing down here, while the ladies are on deck!" said Willy. "Do you know that I've come here with a message from Marjorie? Do you realise that she's asked me to come down and find you?"

Archie turned a beautiful pink, and gulped.

"No! Not—not really?" he breathed. "Marjorie, what? I mean, I never thought—— The fact is, I saw her go up with——"

"Never mind about that!" interrupted Willy, his voice becoming softer and gentler. "She asked me to tell you that she's waiting on the portside, against the rails."

"Good gad!" gurgled Archie.

"The fact is, she wants to look at the moon with you," whispered Willy. "Honest Injun, Archie—that's just what she said! You don't need any more, do you?" he added, with a nudge. "When a chap looks at the

moon with a girl—— Well, that's enough, isn't it?"

"I—I mean—— That is——"

"And she's asked you to come!" went on Willy breathlessly. "That's the glorious thing about it, Archie! If I were you I'd dash out on deck like the dickens, and seize your chance!"

"Absolutely!" panted Archie, fumbling with his tie.

Willy left him in a dazed condition. Marjorie was Archie's particular favourite—and for her to ask him to come on deck so that they could look at the moon together was too glorious for words.

Archie didn't quite remember how he got on deck. He went along the port rail, literally trembling. He was so agitated that he didn't notice Willy Handforth some distance in front. He didn't observe Willy approach three daintily attired figures, and carry two of them away. All Archie knew was that Marjorie Temple was waiting against the rail in solitude. What was more to the point, she was gazing dreamily at the moon. If Archie needed any verification of Willy's message, here it was!

The softness of the night, the brilliance of the moon, all combined to make Archie romantic. As for Marjorie, he had never seen her looking so priceless before. She was like some dashed fairy standing there! He approached with his heart beating a fierce tattoo against his aristocratic ribs.

Everything was favourable for the purpose in hand.

Marjorie was standing quite alone, and as far as Archie could see, there was nobody else in the immediate vicinity. This portion of the deck was beautifully deserted. Happy voices and merry laughter floated from the starboard side, but Archie scarcely heard them.

He had often longed to steal five minutes with Marjorie alone—just to pay her some extra choice compliments he had thought out. Unhappily, he had never been able to voice them so far—it was so bally difficult to get the dear old girl alone!

But here was his chance—waiting for him!

CHAPTER XI.

A LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDING.



"WHAT-HO!" breathed Archie, as he stole nearer. "How frightfully rummy, and all that! I mean, the good old leg department! A trifle unsteady at the knees, as it were!"

He was startled to find that his footsteps were flagging. Now that he was getting quite near his heart nearly failed him. And there was Marjorie, looking perfectly wonderful, bathed in the soft moonlight.

Archie paused, horrified.

In some extraordinary way, he had forgotten every one of those compliments! It was uncanny. Time and again he had turned them over in his mind, and dreamily pictured himself whispering them into Marjorie's ear. And now that the supreme moment had arrived, he couldn't remember a dashed thing!

"I mean, this is simply poisonous!" groaned Archie. "The old plates of memory have let the young master down somewhat shabbily. Not a bally word, as it were!"

He stood there, not daring to go forward, and too frightened to turn back. And Willy Handforth, watching from a convenient point of vantage, gave Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon a warning hiss.

"Keep back, fatheads!" he whispered tensely.

"Is she in his arms yet?" grinned Juicy.

"If Archie takes her in his arms, I'll faint on the spot!" retorted Willy. "I'm not expecting anything like that, you chump! But the developments ought to be interesting, all the same. The trouble is, the old idiot is standing there like a giddy dummy!"

"Go and give him a prod!" suggested Chubby.

"No fear! That would give the game away—Hallo! He's making a move at last!" murmured Willy gleefully. "Look out!"

Archie had braced himself up, and he took another step forward. At last he had thought of something rather fruity. Once the good old conversation was started, everything would go smoothly.

Marjorie was not usually a girl to go off into a deep reverie. She was lively and merry, and as fond of a joke as anybody. But the brilliance of the moonlight, and the soothing hiss of the sea, had temporarily sent her off into a kind of day-dream. She found herself standing against the rail, thinking of what might happen in the future. She tried to picture the South Sea Islands, and the tropical waters of the Pacific.

And then she heard a faint sound near by, and she started.

"Why, Archie!" she exclaimed, as she saw the swell of the Fourth within a yard of her. "I didn't hear you come up! And where's the tele—"

"I—I—I—" gurgled Archie helplessly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"That is—I mean—what-ho!" panted Archie, in desperation. "Moonlight, what! I mean to say—How dashed

priceless, dear old girl! Bally good, and all that sort of rot!"

He paused with a kind of gulp—acutely conscious of the fact that something had gone wrong with the works. The words he wanted to utter hadn't come at all. Instead of gracefully murmuring a flow of beautiful compliments, he had produced a series of gurgles and disjointed nonsense.

"Yes, the moonlight is quite nice," said Marjorie, looking at her companion rather curiously. "I say, Archie," she added, peering at him, "is something the matter?"

"The—the matter?" asked Archie faintly.

"You don't look quite yourself," said the girl. "I thought, perhaps— And yet there's hardly any motion on the boat," she added thoughtfully. "Besides, you're a good sailor."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie, clutching at a straw. "A life on the ocean wave, what? Odds sharks and jellyfish! Absolutely! As a matter of absolute fact, I could sail anywhere—with you!" he blurted out.

"With me?" smiled Marjorie, failing to catch the purport.

"I—I mean— Good gad! That is—"

Archie paused again, Marjorie's failure to respond having flung him into fresh confusion. He clung to the rail limply, and had an awful feeling that if he released his grip he would collapse.

"The moon, you know!" he went on, pulling himself together. "You wanted to have a gaze at the good old lunar sphere, what? The fact is, Marjorie, I thought it would be rather priceless if we both gazed together, what?"

"Why, yes," agreed Marjorie. "Of course!"

"Good!" said Archie, growing slightly bolder.

"I asked Willy to go and fetch you," went on the girl. "We can have a glorious look at the moon from here, Archie. But didn't Willy tell you to bring—"

"I say, that was dashed ripping of you," breathed Archie softly. "I mean, asking me to come up, and all that sort of thing. The fact is, Marjorie, old darling—I—I mean— That is—"

"All right, Archie," chuckled Marjorie. "Go on!"

"What-ho!" murmured Archie happily. "Go on, what? Absolutely! For weeks I've waited for this dashed moment! For months I've longed— But that's not right, dash it!" he added earnestly. "I mean to say, one can hardly call it a dashed moment, if you grasp the old trend. More like a glorious moment, what?"

Marjorie looked at him squarely.

"There's something the matter with you, Archie!" she said, in a firm voice. "Even in the moonlight I can see that you're red in the face, and you don't look yourself, either. You've got a strained, haggard look."

ANSWERS

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"Good gad!" panted Archie. "I've heard that chappies get that kind of look at such times as this! Marjorie, old dear, it was ripping of you to want me here. You're looking absolutely top-hole in that get-up. I mean to say, muslin, and silk, and all that sort of thing! Shimmering moonlight on the good old golden locks! Why, dash it, a fairy isn't in it with you! I've always thought you were frightfully pretty——"

"Archie!" interrupted Marjorie sternly. She was blushing, but she spoke in a grim voice. This sort of thing had to be stopped. Archie was rambling on, and gathering speed at every moment.

"Eh?" he gasped. "You see——"
"I see that you're not well!" interrupted Marjorie severely. "It's awfully nice of you to say these things, Archie, but it isn't safe! Somebody might come along at any minute!"

Archie gazed at her happily.
"Then—then you don't mind, what?" he breathed. "I mean to say, if it wasn't for any interruptions——"

"But I do mind," interrupted Marjorie, nearly bursting with inward laughter. "You shouldn't say such silly things to me—although I'll admit they were rather topping. But there's a misunderstanding."

"Absolutely not!" declared Archie. "Willy told me——"

"Willy!" interrupted Marjorie, with a sudden thought. "The young scamp! I believe he's played a trick on you, Archie!"

CHAPTER XII.

RESTORATIVES REQUIRED.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE started.
"A trick?" he repeated huskily.
"Oh, absolutely not! I mean, Willy is a frightfully decent chappie——"

"What did he tell you?" demanded Marjorie.

"He told me that you were waiting up here for me," replied Archie, his voice softening. "What-ho! You told him that we could look at the moon together. I mean—— Well, there you are! When a chappie looks at the moon with a dashed pretty girl—— That is to say——"

"Didn't Willy ask you to bring the telescope?" interrupted Marjorie sternly.

"The—the telescope?"
"That big one of yours."

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie. "Willy didn't say anything about——"

"I knew it!" said the girl triumphantly. "Just wait until I get my hands on him! Now I can understand why he took Violet and Tessa away! He did it so that I should be left here alone."

"But, dash it all——"



The most surprising fact was the low-lying nature of the island. It seemed to be flat on the sea—only visible at close quarters. One or two palms raised their heads above the water, as though their very roots were under the sea.

"The mischievous young monkey!" went on Marjorie, her colour increasing. "We all wanted that telescope of yours, Archie, so that we could get a good view of the moon. Willy gave you the message wrong—although I'll warrant he told the strict truth. It's what he left out that made all the difference! He didn't say a word about the telescope!"

"Oh, I say!" breathed Archie helplessly. "Then—then you didn't want me to come up here so that we could—— I mean—— How frightfully embarrassing!" he added, with a gulp. "Dash it all, I—I——"

He went cold all over, and then he went hot as he remembered the things he had attempted to say. And Marjorie had only expected him to bring his telescope on deck! For one tense moment Archie seriously thought of jumping overboard.

But, upon the whole, he decided that his own state-room would be a more comfortable refuge. He caught his breath in, turned on his heel, and fled. Marjorie looked after him, laughing softly.

"Poor old Archie!" she murmured. "It was too bad of Willy to deliver my

message all wrong! I'll make him pay for it sooner or later!"

Archie, fleeing, ran full-tilt into three figures which suddenly strolled out from behind a deck-house.

"Hold on!" gasped Willy Handforth. "Look where you're going, old son! What's the matter, Archie?"

"Gadzooks!" panted Archie. "You frightful young vagabond! You absolute rascal! You dashed spoofer! Good gad! I've a dashed good mind to spank you, dash it!"

He strode on with dignity, feeling somewhat better. In his own opinion, he had ticked off Willy in no uncertain terms, and felt convinced that Willy was now metaphorically squashed to pulp. As a matter of fact, Willy was executing a neat waltz, with Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon as accompanists.

Archie reeled into his state-room and sagged into the lounge with a hollow groan. He sat there, gazing glassily before him. In a flood, he realised the farcical nature of the whole situation. He had been paying Marjorie all sorts of compliments, and she had only expected him to bring a telescope!

"Are you feeling unwell, sir?"

Archie started, and for the first time became aware that Phipps was in the cabin. The valet was gliding about getting everything ready for the night.

"Oh, really, Phipps!" bleated Archie. "I mean to say, this phantom business. You absolutely float about like a dashed ghost! I didn't know you were in the bally room until you spoke."

"No, sir," replied Phipps.

"Kindly prepare the old cot!" went on Archie feebly. "The young master would retire forthwith, Phipps. The fact is, I'm feeling slightly wonky in the knee-joints, and the old tissues are deflated."

"A mere passing indisposition, sir," assured Phipps. "At sea one is always subject to these little trials. The slight motion, no doubt——"

"How absolutely ridic.!" interrupted Archie warmly. "Phipps, you're a dashed ass! I don't like saying so—I don't like speaking in these bold, blunt terms—but you're absolutely a dashed ass!"

"Yes, sir," said Phipps humbly.

"And not only a dashed ass, but a bally fathead!" went on Archie strongly. "There's nothing wrong with me at all! Seasickness, what? Good gad! Of all the poisonous ideas. Kindly allow me to remark, Phipps, that you are distinctly off the rails!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Phipps. "A slight misunderstanding——"

Archie yelped.

"Don't use that frightful word!" he gasped. "No more misunderstandings, Phipps. I mean to say, Marjorie waiting up there. How was I to know she expected me to bring a telescope? And there was I,

dash it, warbling all sorts of sweet nothings. As for Willy——"

"You have had a slight shock, sir?" asked Phipps gently.

"Sometimes, Phipps, I regard you as a second father," said Archie firmly. "But just at the moment the young master is displeased with you. All you can do is to stand there and jibber at me. That's what you're doing, Phipps—positively jibbering. As for explaining what took place, I'm dashed if I will! That, dash you, remains a locked secret in the old bosom department!"

And Archie set his jaw and prepared for bed.

Unfortunately, he had already said quite enough to tell Phipps exactly what had occurred. And the valet, appreciating the situation in all its details, softly and gently put his young master to bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHECK AT PANAMA.



THE next day or two passed happily.

The weather continued fine, and grew warmer practically every hour. For by now the *Wanderer* was in the region of the West Indies, and heading for the Caribbean Sea. She had come so far southward that the weather was becoming tropical.

The holiday party had now settled down, and every member of it was enjoying the trip to the full.

The changing conditions were startlingly abrupt.

This was due to the extraordinary speed of the *Wanderer*. At night everybody would go to bed, and in the morning the sea would be bluer, the sun hotter, and the sky more azure in its tint.

The *Wanderer* was in the West Indies almost before the holiday party realised it. She passed near the Leeward Islands, but made no stop, her first port of call being Colon, in Panama, where the entrance to the canal was situated.

Lord Dorrimore had consulted with Nelson Lee and Mr. Russell, and all had concluded that every minute was of value. The party could wander leisurely among the West Indian Islands on the homeward trip. It was vitally urgent that the *Wanderer* should get to that little coral atoll in the Pacific in the shortest possible space of time.

So the yacht steamed into the Caribbean on the last lap of the first part of her journey. Once through the Panama Canal, and she would be able to continue unchecked until she reached the latitude and longitude of Paradise Island.

That was the programme.

"The Caribbean!" remarked Nipper, as he stood leaning over the rail with a number of other fellows one morning. "This is where the pirates of old used to do all their dirty work."

"Rather!" agreed Reggie Pitt. "The good old Spanish Main!"

"The what?" asked Handforth tartly.

"The Spanish Main."

"There's no need for you to air your giddy ignorance like that!" exclaimed Handforth, nudging Reggie, and whispering in a loud undertone. "Don't let the girls hear you, my son."

"Ignorance?" repeated Reggie.

"Yes. Didn't you just say that we're in the Spanish Main?"

"Of course I did."

"Then you're dotty!" retorted Handforth. "How the dickens can this be the Spanish Main when we're thousands of miles from Spain?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The group of juniors laughed, and a few of the girls laughed, too, for Handforth's voice was audible all along the deck. Edward Oswald looked round and turned rather red.

"What's the joke?" he demanded gruffly. "You know as well as I do that we're in the Gulf of Mexico——"

"We're not—we're in the Caribbean," said Church.

"What's the difference?" roared Handforth. "Just look at the map, and you'll find they're practically one and the same."

"It's a good job old Crowell isn't here," grinned McClure. "I'm afraid your geography's a bit rusty, old man. It creaks horribly. And your history's not much better. Don't you know that the Spanish Main is the Caribbean Sea?"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth blankly. "Of course, I knew it all the time!" he went on hastily. "You chaps can't take a joke. I can spoof the lot of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Brothers, allow me!" said William Napoleon Browne, lounging forward. "Much as I dislike butting in upon a private conversation, I feel that it is incumbent upon me to do so. It is a matter of great regret that these expressions of ignorance should find such free play."

"Ignorance?" grinned Nipper. "What do you mean?"

"Did I not hear Brother McClure describe the Caribbean Sea as the Spanish Main?" asked Browne gently. "And did I not hear Brother Pitt make a somewhat similar assertion?"

"You did," said Brother Pitt.

"Then it pains me to correct you in this matter," went on Browne. "When the term 'Spanish Main' is applied to the Caribbean Sea, it is merely a loose expres-

sion. In actual fact, brothers, the Spanish Main was formerly used to describe those possessions of Spain on the coast of the American mainland from the Orinoco to Yucatan."

"Rats!" grinned Church. "The Spanish Main was a sea."

"Alas and alack," sighed Browne sadly. "Free, gratis, and for nothing, I come forward and distribute knowledge. And as a reward, I have the word 'Rats' hurled at me with no little vehemence. But, pray, seek Brother Lee, and ask for corroborative evidence. I fear not."

Browne strolled away, and Nipper chuckled.

"As a matter of fact, I believe the old ass is right," he said. "The very term itself—Spanish Main—implies land. A mainland—see? But the most popular use of the term is in connection with the Caribbean Sea. Look at it!" he added, waving his hand and indicating the vista of intense blue. "This is where the old pirates used to roam."

There was something impressive in the thought, and it was particularly interesting to the juniors—most of whom had read many a rollicking pirate story.

Late on the following afternoon Colon was reached, and everybody was eagerly looking forward to the interesting trip through the canal. This would naturally be a somewhat slow business.

"You needn't expect to see anythin' particularly gorgeous in this part of the world, young 'uns," said Lord Dorrimore, as he encountered a group of fellows on deck. "Passin' through the Panama Canal is a bally tedious affair, an' most of the scenery isn't worth a dump."

"Still, it'll be a novelty, sir," said Reggie Pitt.

And most of the others felt the same way about it. And then came some rather disquieting news. The Panama Canal was temporarily closed!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CRASH IN THE DARK.



THE first news came by wireless, and as it was decidedly indefinite, Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee decided to go ashore and find out the exact state of affairs.

"If it's really true that the canal is closed, it will mean an appalling delay," said Mr. Russell anxiously. "We shall have to encircle the entire South American continent and go down by Cape Horn. It's—it's unthinkable! Heaven knows there's been enough delay already——"

"Don't worry, Mr. Russell," interrupted Dorrie. "You know what these rumours are. I expect it's frightfully exaggerated. A little bigger landslide than usual, I suppose. Anyhow, we'll soon see."

Mr. Russell elected to go ashore with Lee and Dorrie, for he was very concerned. A long delay here would make all the difference in the world. It was essential to reach Paradise Island at the earliest possible moment.

The juniors wanted to go ashore, too, but this was forbidden. It was late, and darkness would descend within an hour, and they were told they would have to wait until the following morning.

The motor-launch was lowered, and very soon afterwards Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Mr. Russell set foot ashore. They lost no time in going straight to the port authorities, and what they learned was fairly cheering.

"It's not so bad," declared Dorrie. "Just as I suspected, there's been a big landslide, an' all shippin' is held up. The dredges are workin' overtime, an' they reckon to have the channel free within a couple of days."

"That's splendid!" said Mr. Russell with relief.

"Don't cheer too soon," went on his lordship gruffly. "There's such a congestion of shippin' that our turn won't come for a week. It simply means that we've got to stick here twiddlin' our thumbs—an' slowly roast in this bally heat!"

"But Prescott may be at the island——" began Mr. Russell.

"If he is, it won't take us long to pitch him off," said Dorrie lightly. "We're well equipped for any sort of trouble, an' we're not standin' any nonsense from an infernal swindler of Prescott's type."

Mr. Russell felt relieved. It did him good to realise that his benefactor believed every word of his story. And this trip to Paradise Island—to search for the pearls that were on the bed of the lagoon—was one of Mr. Russell's dreams that were coming true.

But he knew that Jonathan Prescott had sailed many weeks earlier from 'Frisco in his own schooner—to find the island for himself, and to grab its valuable prize. Any kind of delay was exasperating. And here, at Colon, a delay was particularly trying. The heat was oppressive, and at the time of the Wanderer's visit there was a great deal of humidity. The harbour, indeed, was growing quite thick and misty in the evening gloom.

"Well, I'm not goin' to stay here for a week, coolin' my heels in this bally place," declared Lord Dorrimore, as he glanced at the uninspiring surroundings. "What's the matter with takin' a trip up the coast? Might as well see somethin' of Central America——"

"That's not a bad idea," agreed Nelson Lee, smiling. "We might put in at the

port of Santa Monica, at Costa Bella. It's a tiny republic, but none the less interesting on that account. The president, I understand, has recently adopted a large number of ultra-modern innovations in his little territory."

"Good enough!" said Dorrie promptly. "Santa Monica reminds me of a bally Californian beach town, but I suppose there's more than one city of that name. We'll go along an' sample it."

Before returning to the Wanderer, Nelson Lee suggested a visit to one of the hotels. It was possible they might pick up some more information about the canal stoppage. As it happened, they heard something of quite a different nature.

There was a good deal of talk about the republic of Costa Bella. It was gala week in Santa Monica, and one of the special events of the following day was a motor race on the fine new speedway which the president had had built. This speedway, according to the gossip, was as good as many famous tracks in the United States.

"But here's the point," said Dorrie, as he was discussing the news. "There's a British competitor in this race, and he's had an accident, or something. An' the car's all right. Ye gods! That settles it! A motor race an' a British car with no driver! If we don't get to Santa Monica in time for that race, I'll never smile again!"

"You needn't worry," chuckled Lee. "Even if we don't sail before dawn we shall get to Santa Monica in decent time—it's only a few hours' run."

"All the same, the sooner we're there, the better," declared his lordship. "I wouldn't miss an opportunity of this sort for a fortune! Let's hurry!"

They left the hotel, Nelson Lee and Mr. Russell rather amused at Dorrie's enthusiasm. It was pitchy dark now, and the air was misty and humid. Long before they reached the quayside they were hot and clammy.

"I'll be thankful to get out of this beastly place!" growled Dorrie.

They found the launch waiting where they had left it, in charge of one of the engineers. And they were presently gliding across the oily water towards the Wanderer—which, however, was quite invisible in the murk.

"Confound this mist!" said Dorrie grumblingly. "It'll probably delay our departure. Why the thunder can't they treat visitors with more respect? This is a nice kind of mixture to serve up——"

"What was that?" interrupted Lee sharply.

He had fancied that a sudden hail had come out of the gloom. At the same second, the man at the helm caused the launch to lurch giddily sideways. There was another shout from near by, a moment of confusion, and——

Crash!

With a splintering, shivering concussion, the bows of the launch cut deeply into the side of a small dinghy which had abruptly loomed up out of the mist. The accident was as sudden as it was unexpected. There was a grinding of smashed timber and a great splashing intermingled with lusty curses.

"By the Lord Harry!" roared Dorrie. "Come on, you fellows! It's up to us to do a bit of rescue work!"

Without hesitating a second he dived clean overboard, and Nelson Lee and Mr. Russell followed.

CHAPTER XV.

AS THOUGH FROM THE DEAD.



AS Mr. Russell came to the surface, his hand encountered a human arm. He grabbed and held on. The owner of the arm was gasping and growling and making a big commotion in the water.

"Steady!" panted Mr. Russell. "I've got you all right—"

"Get to blazes!" gurgled the rescued one, in an accent which smacked of Scotch. "I'll hae ye know I'm in no need of help. Hoots, d'ye think I canna' swim, ye clumsy dunder-head?"

In the meantime, Nelson Lee and Dorrie were swimming round for other survivors, but only found one boy. The dinghy, it appeared, had been rowing to one of the other ships in the harbour with only these two occupants. The smashed craft had gone to the bottom like a stone.

Mr. Russell retained his grip on the Scotchman's arm—not because he feared the man would drown, but because he was utterly startled. That voice! It brought back memories in a flood.

"It's impossible!" he gasped, as he strove to pierce the murk. "Who are you? What's your name?"

"It's nae time to bother aboot introductions!" growled the other fiercely. "I'm thinkin' there'll be a big bill to pay, ma friend! Yon dinghy was practically new, and you came sweeping along in your infernal launch—"

"By all the stars!" burst out Mr. Russell, as he trod water. "It's McAndrew! Say I'm right, you old beggar! You're McAndrew, aren't you?"

"Ay, McAndrew's ma name—"

"And the Clyde?" shouted Mr. Russell excitedly.

"She's lyin' yonder— Hoots!" Captain McAndrew broke off with a kind of gurgle.

"Ye're no' Mr. Russell, are ye? I'm thinkin' your voice seems—"

"McAndrew!" exclaimed Mr. Russell. "I thought you were dead—I'd given you up as lost—"

"It's nae fault of yours I'm not drowned this meenit!" interrupted the Scotchman. "But I'll forgive ye, Mr. Russell. It's a queer kind o' meetin'-place after all these months, I'm thinkin', but it's grand to see ye again. Ay, mon, it's real glad I am!"

By this time they were near the stationary launch, and they scrambled on board. Captain McAndrew was relieved when he found the boy safe. And Nelson Lee and Dorrie sensed at once that there was more in this than met the eye. Warner Russell's excitement was very obvious.

"Don't you understand, Lord Dorrimore?" asked the Canadian tensely. "It's the most extraordinary chance that could have happened. This is Captain McAndrew, and the Clyde's lying in this very harbour. She's our schooner, you know—Mac and I have got half-shares in her."

"But I thought the Clyde was posted as missing?" asked Lee.

"So she was," went on Mr. Russell breathlessly. "I thought she was a total loss—I guessed that Mac was dead. And the fates decide that we shall literally run into him in this humid mist!"

"Ay, an' ye smashed my dinghy!" said the Scotsman drily. "Weel, she'll match the Clyde the noo. Ay, Mr. Russell, it's a poor wee shippie she is now, I'm tellin' ye! Such a bonnie craft she was, too!"

"Not wrecked?"

"Nae so bad as that," said Captain McAndrew. "But she's sair crippled."

Later on, when they got aboard, they learned how the Clyde had met storm after storm, weathering them all. After weeks and months of hardship, the old Scotch skipper had managed to bring his vessel into port. She was now lying at Colon, waiting for repairs.

It was a fine relief for Mr. Russell to know that Captain McAndrew was alive, and the Clyde afloat. It put new heart into him. And when the old Scot learned about the Wanderer's quest, he was full of enthusiasm.

Before anybody went to bed that night it was arranged that Captain McAndrew should follow on to Paradise Island as soon as the Clyde was ready for sea again. The schooner might come in very useful there. Dorrie handsomely advanced a big sum of money so that the refitting could be done at full speed.

And so, the next day, when the Wanderer set off for Santa Monica, two men were very much happier. Captain McAndrew set about the task of having his ship repaired with a hearty good will. He had the latitude and longitude of Paradise Island, and his one thought for the future was to get to sea again, and sail for the South Seas.

Clive Russell and his father were overjoyed at the unexpected turn of events and they were thankful for that chance accident in Colon Harbour. Ultimately, it was to mean a very, very great deal!

As for what happened at Santa Monica, the story cannot be told here. The Wan-

derer spent ten exciting days there—for she happened to arrive in the capital of Costa Bella on the very day that a revolution broke out! But she ultimately escaped, and the passage through the Panama Canal was made without any further incident.*

After that, every day took the yacht further out into the Pacific—nearer and nearer to her goal. She was making excellent speed, and her direction was mainly towards the Low Archipelago—in the region of which far-flung group of Pacific islands, Mr. Russell's coral atoll was situated.

The weather continued calm and glorious. Scarcely any rough sea was encountered, and storms were conspicuous by their absence. The Pacific was intensely blue, and seemed never ending.

Within a very few days the Wanderer was well off the trade routes, and was plunging deeper and deeper into the unknown seas where Paradise Island lay. The guests were becoming bronzed, and none of them felt the heat now as they had felt it at first.

It was blazingly hot at midday, but the nights were generally cool. And they were nights of wonder, for there was always some fresh marvel to see in the tropic sky. One who has only been accustomed to behold the stars in a temperate zone can have no idea of the dazzling glory of the heavens in Southern latitudes.

Only a comparative few enthusiasts, however, led by Professor Tucker, found delight in the stars. Most of the others were becoming impatient, although the Wanderer was making such fine speed. It was less than a month since the yacht had left the Thames Estuary, but everybody felt that the voyage was unending.

The very knowledge that they had a definite objective in view made the adventure all the more interesting. It was already whispered that this was no mere cruise among the islands. There was a possibility of trouble. And so a kind of tension was in the air when the latitude of that coral atoll was approached.

Would the next few hours prove the existence of that wonder-lagoon of pearl-oysters, or would they expose Mr. Warner Russell's remarkable story as a mere invention?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ISLAND.



“**L**AND-HO!”

The cry came from aloft quite clearly on the morning air, and Willy Handforth looked up sharply. He could easily see the figure of the look-out, perched high on the mast.

“Hear that?” he asked briskly, turning to Chubby Heath. “Land!”

Chubby Heath dashed to the rail, and stared across the sparkling sea. As far as the eye could see there was nothing but the unbroken horizon.

“Rats!” said Chubby gruffly. “He’s fooling us! There’s no land in sight—not even a smudge! I told you it was no good turning out as early as this,” he added, yawning. “Two hours before breakfast—”

“Always thinking of your giddy tummy!” interrupted Willy severely. “Didn’t you hear that call from the look-out just now? Land-ho! Wasn’t it worth while getting up to hear that?”

Chubby Heath sniffed.

“The call was all right,” he retorted; “but where’s the giddy land?”

“There’s no need to display your ignorance,” said Willy. “What did you expect to see—a mountain, or something, a couple of yards off the starboard bow? When a look-out spots land, he’s using a telescope, and he’s a lot higher than we are, too.”

They were about to go forward, so that they could get a better view of the vista ahead. But there was a rush on the stairway, and a number of other juniors appeared. Handforth was the first out, and he looked round excitedly.

“Where is it?” he demanded.

“Eh?” said Willy. “Where’s what?”

“The land! Church came dashing in our state-room a minute ago, and said that land had been sighted,” said Handforth breathlessly. “If he was spoofing me—”

He broke off, and looked from side to side, frowning.

“You rotter!” he went on, glaring at Church. “It was just one of your tricks to make me dash out quick—”

“It wasn’t!” protested Church. “I distinctly heard the look-out shout ‘Land-ho!’ If you want to glare at somebody, go and glare at him! I can’t help it if there’s no land in sight!”

Napoleon Browne, who had also turned out, lounged up, and held up a deprecating hand.

“Peace, brothers!” he said softly. “Why this unseemly wrangling? Pray remember that the bulk of the customers are still sleeping. Would you bring on nightmares by this disturbance? Allow me to make a few choice remarks concerning land—”

“You can go and eat coke, Browne!” interrupted Handforth grimly. “What do you know about land? It’s a pity you giddy Fifth-Formers can’t stay in bed! Who told you to turn out at this hour?”

Handforth & Co. marched for’ard, leaving Browne shaking his head.

“A sad, sad state of affairs; but it must be acknowledged that these high-spirited youths are lacking in respect,” murmured Browne. “Something must be done to curb this modern tendency. However, the matter can wait. At the moment, land appears to be the most important point upon the agenda.”

* For a full account of the holiday party’s amazing adventures in the Republic of Costa Bella, see “The Schoolboy Republic,” which begins in next week’s “Boys’ Realm.” Don’t miss your copy on any account!—EDITOR.

He followed the others towards the bows. Reggie Pitt and Nipper and Fatty Little had appeared on deck by this time, in addition to several other Fourth-Formers. Everybody seemed imbued with the same early rising spirit.

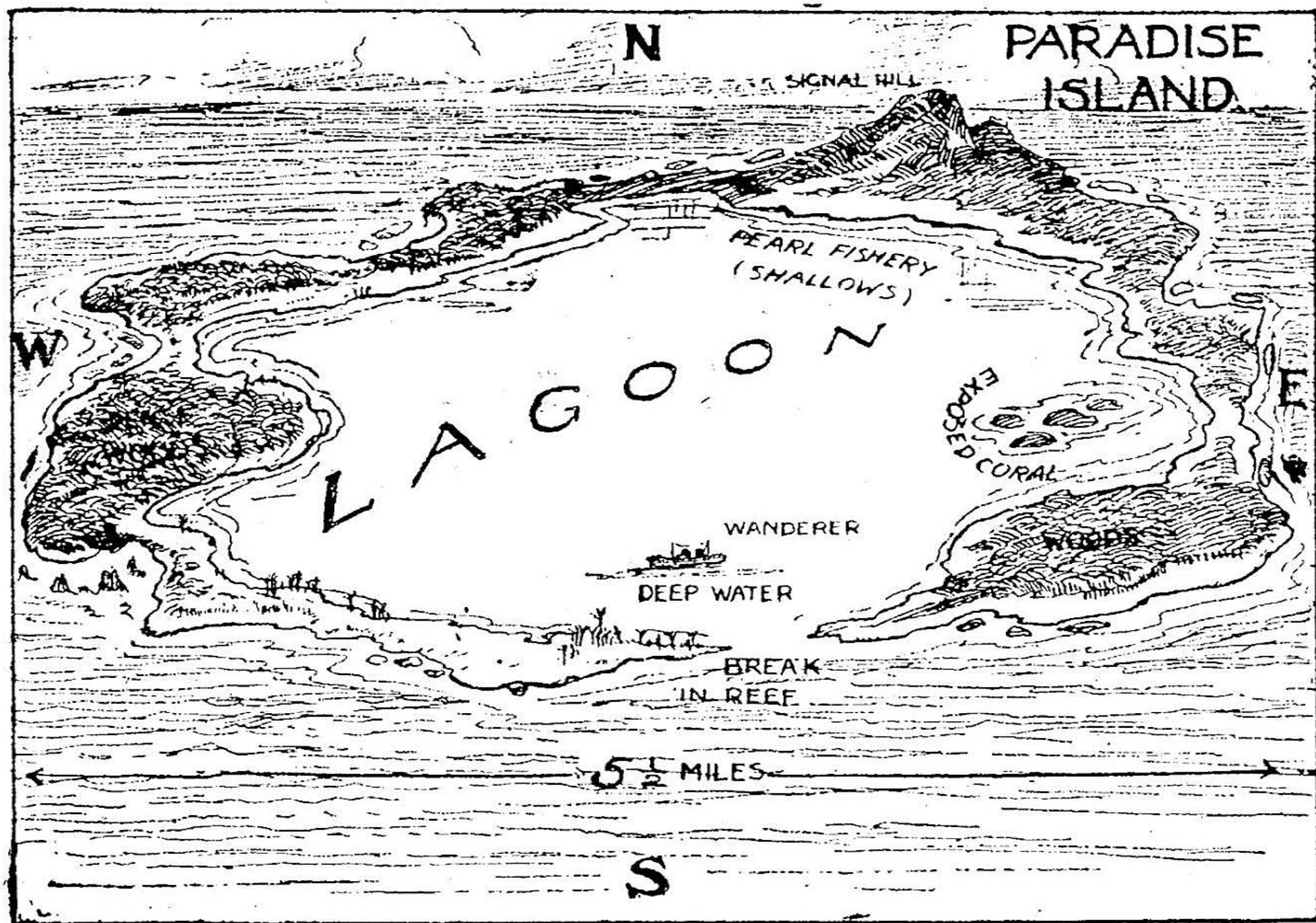
Umlosi, in fact, had been one of the very first on deck, but he was up on the bridge, side by side with Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee. All were searching the distant horizon through binoculars and telescopes. Obviously, this talk of land was not a false alarm.

"What did I tell you?" said Handforth triumphantly. "There's no land at all—

caused by the reflection cast up into the sky by a big lagoon."

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth, startled. "A lagoon? Then—then— You mean the lagoon is so smooth that it sends up a reflection—" He paused, breathless. "I knew it all the time!" he went on, excitedly. "Didn't I say from the very first that land was in sight?"

"We won't argue, old man," said Willy kindly. "There's no accounting for lunatics—they get all sorts of funny ideas. And there's no time to bother with you, anyhow—the island's practically in sight, and before we know what's happening we shall be in the giddy lagoon!"



A BIRD'S-EYE MAP OF THE ATOLL AS DESCRIBED ON PAGE 22.

simply nothing! That fellow on the look-out is a duffer. If I was Dorrie, I'd sack him!"

"Hold on, old man!" said Nipper keenly. "Don't you notice something different straight ahead? There's a kind of break in the sea-line, and the sky's curiously pale over that particular spot. It looks quite distinctive from all the rest of the sky-line."

"That's nothing," said Handforth. "You're not going to tell me that a pale spot in the sky means land?"

"It might not mean land—but it probably means water!" replied Nipper keenly. "I've never seen the phenomenon before, but I've read that a pale spot like this is

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BREAK IN THE REEF.



THIRTY minutes brought about an astonishing change.

Not only had the entire holiday party come on deck, including all the young ladies, but the island had risen clear above the horizon, and was now within full sight. The air was so crystal clear that small details could be made out at a big distance.

The most surprising fact to the juniors was the low-lying nature of the island. It seemed to be flat on the sea—only visible

when at close quarters. One or two palms raised their heads above the water—as though their very roots were under the sea.

But this effect changed as the yacht drew nearer.

Nipper could now understand why the *Wanderer* had slowed down to less than half speed during the night. Captain Burton had known that he was in the exact latitude of the island, and it had been necessary to proceed with caution. For more than one gallant ship has piled herself upon the reef of an uncharted atoll during the hours of darkness.

These coral formations are generally so low that a ship can be upon them before she has time to change her course. But disasters of this sort generally occur in rough weather, when visibility is bad.

"It's your island, old man. I suppose?" inquired Lord Dorrimore, as he stood behind Mr. Russell on the bridge. "We haven't struck another bally atoll by mistake?"

Mr. Russell shook his head.

"No, this is the one," he replied, his voice a trifle unsteady with subdued excitement. "I would know the formation of those palms among a thousand other clumps. I guess this is Paradise Island all right."

"Well, it's just as well to know," nodded his lordship. "I understand that these seas are fairly littered up with chunks of coral. H'm! I must say the island looks invitin'."

For'ard, the juniors were talking in a similar strain.

"It's dad's island!" Clive Russell kept repeating. "Everything's just the same—nothing's altered! By Jove! It makes me feel good to see it again like this! And we thought we should never come back to these waters."

Handforth grunted.

"I don't want to say anything unpleasant, but if you call that giddy place a paradise, I'm sorry for you!" he said bluntly. "Why, it's hardly an island at all! It doesn't rise more than a few feet above the giddy sea! It's like a water lily floating on a pond!"

Nipper grinned.

"Give it a chance, old man," he chuckled. "We're still a mile or two away, you know, and we can't see much yet. Russell has told us that the island is a glorious place—and I believe him."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Reggie Pitt.

"But why the dickens are we going so slow?" asked Buster Boots. "We're almost on top of the island, and we're crawling along at about three knots an hour!"

"They're mad on the bridge!" commented Jack Grey.

This impatience was only to be expected. But Captain Burton was a cautious man.

Far from being mad, he was exceedingly sane. He knew well enough that an unsuspected reef might extend for out from the island, and he wasn't particularly anxious to pile up the *Wanderer* on one of these death-traps of the Pacific.

There was no hurry, and it was far better to take the yacht forward at a mere crawl. And so the island came into view very slowly. It was half an hour before the adventurers could gain a good view.

The island was a singular one—at least, most of the fellows regarded it as such. But it was commonplace enough for these waters.

In actual fact, it was a huge ring of coral—or a better simile, perhaps, would be to describe it as a horse-shoe. On practically all sides, the ring was complete. But in one place there existed a wide opening—which admitted into the great lagoon.

The watchers were intensely interested.

Some islands are rocky and prominent, with a reef extending all the way round. But Paradise Island was quite different. The reef itself was the island, the central lagoon being a great sheet of crystal water, four or five miles from inner shore to inner shore.

The Pacific rollers pounded on the outer edge of this reef, and the surf could be seen, sparkling and scintillating in the sunlight. But on the inner side, the water was placid and calm.

The formation of the horse-shoe was irregular and uneven, with jutting out portions here and there. And in other places it dwindled until it was a mere barrier of coral.

There appeared to be one or two minor hills, and a few valleys, and the wide sections of the island were heavily wooded. As the watchers stood on the *Wanderer's* deck, the waft of countless perfumes came to their nostrils. The island was sending forth a wonderful assortment of tropical scents.

Roughly, the atoll was something like the sketch on page 21.

And one fact impressed Mr. Russell and his son particularly.

"We're here first!" declared Mr. Russell tensely. "Do you see, Lord Dorrimore? The island is deserted! The lagoon is as empty as it was the first moment I saw it. Prescott and his precious schooner have failed to arrive!"

"Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"Yes, I noticed that," he agreed. "Good old *Wanderer*! She's done the trick after all—in spite of that delay at Panama, too! Well, we're first on the scene, and that's everythin'."

"It's a great advantage, at all events," said Mr. Russell. "But if Prescott comes along and finds us here, I'm afraid there'll be trouble."

"Splendid!" said Dorrie calmly. "Nothin' I'd like better!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE LAGOON.



CLIVE RUSSELL was agog with excitement.

"We're first—we're first!" he said breathlessly. "I was sure that Prescott's schooner would be

here, and the gang of Kanakas working on the oyster beds. But we're on the scene before him!"

"There's something rummy about it," remarked Nipper thoughtfully. "Prescott had two or three months' start, and yet there's no sign of him. I suppose there's no chance that he has lifted the oyster-shell and bunked?"

Clive started for a moment, but then shook his head.

"Why, no," he replied slowly. "It would take a good many weeks to get all that shell aboard a schooner—especially with native labour. It couldn't have been done in the time. I guess we're first all right."

"Then the schooner must have got caught in a storm and gone to the bottom!" declared Handforth. "That's the only explanation. She's sunk! Of all the rotten frosts! And I was expecting a fight!"

"No, there's not one chance in a thousand that the schooner has gone to the bottom," declared Clive. "And I don't think my father is particularly surprised that we're here first. Time is of small account in the Pacific—especially on a sailing ship."

"But this rotter wanted to grab these pearls," said Bob Christine.

"Before grabbing 'em, he had to get labour to do the grabbing," explained Clive. "And that's not an easy matter. Prescott knew that dad and I were stranded in Frisco, and the possibility of us setting out for the island on our own account never occurred to him. I guess he's been cruising among the islands, picking up Kanakas here and there—natives who don't know a thing about pearling. They're the only kind he wants."

"That's about it," agreed Nipper. "He's been taking his time, confident in his own security. And the schooner may have encountered a few storms, and it may have been driven out of its course. On the other hand, it may have been becalmed for a week or two. It's no good making conjectures. We're first on the scene, and that's the main thing."

Conversation flagged after this, for the Wanderer was heading for the break in the reef, seeking an anchorage in the lagoon.

Everybody watched with intense interest.

The island was now close at hand, and there was much to be seen. The atoll, indeed, was full of tropical beauty. Where the island spread out into a respectable size, there were big spaces covered with trees and bush. The palms were predominant.

But Nipper recognised many hotoo and artu trees, and the dazzling foliage of bread-fruit and other tropical growths were apparent. There were mammee apple bushes and cane, and many of the open spaces were brilliant with the flower of the hibiscus, which grew in profusion in the groves.

The whole scene was enchanting.

The lagoon itself lay like an immense azure lake—so blue that it was almost incredible. The inner shore was delightfully provided with long beaches of sand—salt-white coral sand which dazzled the eye. The green of the foliage, and the various hues of the tropical flowers, formed a vivid contrast. And the soft trade wind, blowing across the island, carried the perfumes to the Wanderer.

"It's— it's simply gorgeous!" said Irene Manners breathlessly.

"Better than that!" declared Doris. "It's the most wonderful place I've ever seen! I wouldn't have believed it unless I'd seen it! No wonder Mr. Russell called it Paradise Island!"

"It's not so bad," admitted Handforth grudgingly. "But what about that schooner? Scenery's all very well, but I'd rather have a look at those rotters who swindled Mr. Russell, and left him in the lurch."

"I'm surprised at you, Ted!" said Irene. "A glorious place like this, and all you can think about is fighting! Isn't the lagoon simply wonderful? And look at all those lovely flowers!"

"Yes, rather!" said Handforth promptly. "But, of course, flowers appeal to girls most. They'll probably be a nuisance when we get ashore. By George! Won't it be ripping? I'm longing for a run on those sands!"

The others were equally eager.

The Wanderer was a splendid yacht, and she was as comfortable as any modern hotel. But the prospect of setting foot on dry land, and having a good run, was an alluring one.

The Wanderer entered the break in the reef, and glided sedately through into the lagoon. And then, at last, her anchors came down, and her voyage was at an end.

CHAPTER XIX.

ASHORE.



DISAPPOINTMENT awaited the juniors. Nobody was allowed ashore yet—

although they had been hoping to land almost at once. They were so impatient that Handforth even suggested swimming for it.

"It's not a bad idea, old man, but you seem to have forgotten the sharks," said Pitt drily. "You'll generally find that these tropical beauty spots are full of snags. I

dare say those flowery glades are smothered with scorpions, and other poisonous insects. You can't have everything."

"Sharks?" repeated Handforth. "Rats! Russell was telling us that he bathed in this giddy lagoon when he was here before."

"That's right," agreed Clive, smiling. "But not in this part of it, old man. The water's deep here, and sharks are almost certain to be floating around. I used to bathe in the shallow part of the lagoon—over there."

He pointed across to the far shore, where the white strip of coral sand looked like a dazzling ribbon in the sunlight. It was over three miles away, but in this clear atmosphere, the visibility was startling.

"I don't see that it makes much difference," said Handforth gruffly. "Anyhow, it's a bit thick that we should be kept on board. I'm surprised at Dorrie! Look at him—preparing to leave in the launch! Sheer selfishness I call it!"

"Don't be an ass, Handy," said Church. "Dorrie's going with Mr. Lee and Mr. Russell. I expect they intend to make a circuit of the island, and make sure that everything is O.K."

This, in fact, was the scheme.

Although there was no sign of life on the island, the wooded groves were fairly dense—and could have concealed hordes of men, if necessary. Nelson Lee had no intention of exposing any of the girls or boys to danger.

"We can't do better than go ashore by ourselves to begin with," declared Lee. "We'll take rifles, and we'll have a few of the men with us."

"That's the ticket!" agreed Lord Dorri-more. "An' Umlosi, too. I dare say the old scout is anxious to stretch his legs."

"Wau! True words, my master!" exclaimed Umlosi, his eyes gleaming with eagerness. "Thou wilt sadden my heart if I am left behind, for I long to set my feet upon the earth once more. Thy floating palace is indeed wondrous, but methinks a man is apt to grow tired. But I am sad, N'Kose, that there are no warriors in this land."

"That's a defect that might be remedied in the very near future, old man," said Dorrie comfortingly.

"Tis well!" rumbled Umlosi. "Mayhap the enemy will come down upon us and give us battle. For the present we must consume our impatience, and be prepared for what might befall. Perchance a number of dogs will be skulking amid the wooded slopes."

"There's nothin' like livin' in hopes," said Dorrie drily. "You bloodthirsty old rascal! Didn't you have enough fightin' in Santa Monica? There's no pleasin' some people!"

The launch was soon ready. An accommodation-ladder had been slung over the Wanderer's side, and the yacht's powerful motor-launch was lying placidly in the

lagoon, her engine already purring. Two of the sailors were in charge of her.

And when Nelson Lee and the others went down the ladder, they were accompanied by four members of the crew, armed with rifles and revolvers. They were taking no chances on this preliminary tour.

So far, Mr. Russell's story had proved correct in every detail. The island was in the approximate position he had given—just a point or two further southward, but no doubt a slight mistake of calculation had been made by the shipmaster who had rescued Mr. Russell and Clive from the atoll.

The chances were that all the rest of Mr. Russell's story was equally true. Lee and Dorrie believed him implicitly. It was quite consistent with the facts to find the island deserted. There were many reasons to account for Jonathan Prescott's non-appearance.

At the same time, Lee didn't lose sight of the fact that the rascal may have brought his schooner here, and landed a horde of pearl-divers, in charge of a white foreman. And the schooner may have gone off for further supplies.

And the horde on the island, witnessing the approach of the Wanderer, had possibly guessed that trouble was brewing. It would have been an easy matter for everybody to hide amid the trees. And although the island looked deserted and peaceful, it was quite on the cards that a deadly ambush had been prepared.

Nelson Lee meant to examine the entire island before allowing any of the younger members ashore—and his decision was a wise one.

Not that there was much fear of an ambush. The chances were that the island was really deserted, as it appeared to be. But it was always better to be on the safe side.

The launch was soon off, and the juniors and others crowding the rail gave a cheer.

"Don't be long, gov'nor!" shouted Nipper. "Our turn next!"

"Can't we come ashore now, sir?" roared Handforth. "There's another launch on the other side of the yacht!"

"Don't be silly!" said Fatty Little indignantly. "What's the idea of going ashore now? It'll be lunch-time in under an hour! I think there must be something in this air, you know—my appetite's getting better every day!"

"You—you glutton!" snorted Handforth. "This island is more important than grub! I'm dying to go ashore——"

"And Fatty's dying because he's got to wait an hour for lunch!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Poor old chap! We shall have to find him a decent grave under one of those coconut trees. He'll like to be buried near some food!"



The juniors chafed somewhat at the delay, but Nipper did his best to appease them. In the meantime, the launch was speeding across the amazingly clear water of the lagoon.

She ran her nose into the white sand just at the point where a grove came near to the water. It was a kind of inlet, picturesque in the extreme, and like an earthly paradise. There was a small wooden dwelling, creeper-covered and quaint, nestling beneath a clump of great palms.

They approached the wooden dwelling—which proved to be a fairly ramshackle place upon close inspection. But the creepers concealed its crudities, and lent it a charm all its own.

Inside, the weeds and creepers had grown in further profusion. One glance inside the door was sufficient to convince the explorers that no human foot had penetrated here for a great many weeks.

"This is quite a good sign, old man," said Dorrie. "If those beggars had got here first in their bally schooner they wouldn't

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CHAPTER XX.

THE ISLAND OF WONDER.



M R. RUSSELL paused after he had walked a few yards up the dazzling sands.

"Just the same!" he murmured dreamily. "Glory!

It hardly seems that I've been away for so many months! Nothing's touched—the house is just the same as Clive and I left it. Considerably more creeper, but that's only to be expected. I don't fancy there are any intruders ashore."

"It doesn't look like it, but we must be certain," replied Nelson Lee.

have left this place untouched. Either Prescott or some of his cuttlefish would have made a camp out of it. We can take it for granted that we've got the island to ourselves."

"I agree," said Nelson Lee, nodding.

"Wau! Now is my heart saddened!" grumbled Umlosi disgustedly. "For the slim chance of battle has already faded. I am grieved, N'Kose, that warriors such as thou and I should come to this place of peace. Perchance there will be wild animals?" he asked, with hope. "Mayhap there will be some beast of the woods against whom I can pit my strength?"

"Afraid not, old man," said Dorrie gloomily. "No lions — no tigers — no elephants — nothing! An insect or two,

perhaps, and possibly a monkey—but nothin' worthy of your spear. Cheer up!" he added, grinning. "There's always the future to look forward to, Umlosi!"

Umlosi grunted.

"Thou art pleased to mock me, my father!" he rumbled. "I would I were back among mine own forests and jungles—where a man can be a man! But it is thy will to journey hither, and that is enough!"

Umlosi was further disgusted when two or three excursions were made into the groves. There was not the slightest indication of human life. Highly coloured birds were disturbed, and now and again a small animal would dart away—but that was all.

The explorers even penetrated the ridge, and came out upon the reef side of the island, where the surf thundered, and the Pacific rollers came charging everlastingly in.

Returning to the launch, they progressed up the lagoon, and tried at various other spots. In every case it was the same. The groves were deserted, save for wild things. The fear that Prescott had landed a horde of savages was proved to be without foundation.

Finally, the launch proceeded to the shallow end of the lagoon—where, according to Mr. Russell, the pearl oysters were lying in masses. Mr. Russell himself was slightly flushed with inward excitement. To be back here was the ambition he had always dreamed of. And this time the circumstances were very different! He had powerful friends, and they were the masters of the situation.

"A little further out!" he said, as the launch skimmed towards the shore. "Slowly now—slowly. I guess we're practically over the shell here."

Nelson Lee and Dorrie were leaning over-side, watching the lagoon bed. The sight was an amazing one. No amount of description can reveal a picture of this extraordinary spectacle. The water of the lagoon was as clear as crystal—almost as transparent as the atmosphere itself.

And the sea bed appeared to be immediately underneath—although, in reality, it was fully three fathoms below. Everything was gorgeous. A blaze of colour met the eye—the coral—the tiny schools of darting fish—the hundred-and-one trifles that are to be seen in tropical waters.

But it must be confessed that Nelson Lee and Dorrie were more interested in the great oysters—which lay in profusion below. There was something impressive in their appearance.

Oysters are peculiar creatures—one of the lowest possible forms of life. Contrary to the usual impression, they do not lie flat on the sea bed, but lean upwards, with their mouths gaping open at an angle of about twenty-five degrees. Gazing down, and seeing thousands of these mouths, was a queer sight.

There were clams, too—giant clams of incredible size. Such monstrous shellfish are only to be found in these tropical waters.

"Well, Mr. Russell, what about it?" asked Dorrie. "I told you from the first that I believed your yarn—and now the proof is right underneath us. I've seen pearl oysters more than once in my life, an' if there isn't a fortune in this bed—well, you can call me a Chinaman!"

Mr. Russell's eyes gleamed.

"A fortune—yes!" he agreed. "I knew it the first moment I set eyes on the lagoon floor. Prescott knows it, too, and that's why he's making for this island. Don't forget I took him some samples."

Nelson Lee looked thoughtful.

"And we mustn't forget that Prescott is bound to arrive sooner or later," he exclaimed. "Personally, I don't anticipate much trouble. When he finds you here, Mr. Russell, he'll be dumbfounded."

"He will, for sure!" agreed Mr. Russell grimly.

"And a quiet little conversation with Dorrie and myself will undoubtedly convince him that retreat will be his only course," continued Lee. "No matter how many Kanakas he brings, the odds are overwhelmingly in our favour. Prescott wouldn't dare to precipitate a fight."

"That's good news for Umlosi," remarked Dorrie drily. "Can't you see how pleased he looks? In about two minutes he'll be sobbin' like a child!"

Umlosi grunted, and turned away. Nelson Lee's words had, indeed, made him heavy-hearted.

"I'm sorry for Umlosi, but a pitched battle for possession of this island would not be a particularly pleasant enterprise," went on Nelson Lee. "We've got to remember the youngsters—particularly the girls. But there's nothing to fear. When Prescott finds out that our position is absolutely secure, he'll swallow his chagrin and sail away."

"I'm not so sure!" said Mr. Russell slowly. "I happen to know Prescott, Mr. Lee—and you don't. He's a hard, grimly determined man. And he's obstinate—infernally obstinate. It'll be like swallowing poison for him to admit himself beaten. No matter how heavy the odds, I fancy he'll put up a fight."

"Then it'll be the worse for him if he does," retorted Lee. "A fight for supremacy here can only have one ending. But if Mr. Prescott is bloodthirsty enough to start any trouble, I suppose we shall have to oblige him."

"Cheering words, my father!" said Umlosi, turning and taking a deep breath. "Thou art a man of peace, and I am a man of war—"

"More like an ironclad, to my mind," interrupted Dorrie, with a chuckle. "You've



got three-inch armour platin' all over you, Umlosi. I don't believe anybody could kill you with a bally naval gun!"

CHAPTER XXI.

FREEDOM AT LAST.



"HURRAH!"

The crowd of juniors gathered on the Wanderer's deck had just learned that they were now free to go ashore. Luncheon was over, and the heat of the tropic day was getting more powerful. Not that the fellows cared a jot for this. One and all, they were eager to get ashore.

They wanted to explore—to examine every inch of this wonderful island.

Fenton and Morrow of the Sixth, and Browne and Stevens of the Fifth, were almost as excited as the Fourth-Formers. And the girls, needless to say, were fairly bubbling over with excited anticipation.

There were three shore parties in all.

The juniors went off by themselves, and the seniors joined Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Russell—who were making a second trip. Mr. and Mrs. Beverley Stokes took charge of Irene & Co.

"I tell you what," declared Handforth, just before they descended the ladder. "I'm going to fetch my bathing-suit! Mr. Lee's given us permission to bathe in the shallow part of the lagoon!"

"Good idea! We'll fetch our costumes, too!"

"Rather!"

A good many of the fellows were keen upon the suggestion, and when the Fourth-Formers landed on the white sands on a distant part of the lagoon beach, there were a good many bathing-costumes with them. It was tacitly understood that the juniors should be undisturbed for at least an hour in this remote haven—so that they could bathe in comfort.

There was no fear of danger from sharks.

Even in the deep part of the lagoon the chances were slight. But here, where the water shoaled until it was quite shallow, there was not one chance in a thousand of a shark coming near.

The beach shelved down gradually, and a more ideal bathing spot could not have been discovered. Even to non-swimmers, it was perfectly safe, but there wasn't a fellow in the party who couldn't swim.

"Come on—I'll race you in!" said Handforth cheerfully.

"Good!" grinned Church and McClure.

There were plenty of trees and bushes behind which they could get off their clothes. There was a soft breeze, and the movement of the foliage attracted the attention of more than one junior. The bread-

fruit leaves were particularly noticeable—like enormous green hands, clapping one another as the wind took them. And the palm fronds rustled soothingly.

"What-ho!" said Archie Glenthorne, as he proceeded to disrobe. "I mean to say, a somewhat fruity place, and all that!"

"Fruity?" repeated Fatty Little, pricking up his ears. "I've been looking for fruit, but I haven't found any yet. Let's try and get some of these coconuts——"

"Blow the coconuts!" interrupted Reggie Pitt. "Bathing is the order of the hour. We can get some coconuts afterwards. Besides, we only finished lunch an hour ago."

Fatty Little stared.

"You speak of an hour as if it were a minute," he said indignantly. "An hour in this atmosphere is enough to make me famished again. You chaps can bathe if you like, but I'm going to search for fruit."

"Better be careful, Fatty," warned Nipper. "You mustn't eat everything that looks inviting. The loveliest wild fruits of all are sometimes the deadliest."

"The deadliest?" repeated Fatty, with a slight gulp.

"My dear chap, one bite and you'll drop dead!" said Nipper impressively. "You've no idea. Some of these glorious berries and things are no better than arsenic."

"Arsenic?" repeated Fatty hoarsely. "But—but——"

"Take my tip, and be careful."

"Jumping pancakes!" gasped Fatty. "I—I found some berries as soon as we came ashore, and ate 'em! They were a bit sour, and drew my mouth up——"

"They drew your mouth up?" shouted Nipper tragically. "Poor old Fatty! There's just a chance that you'll be saved, but—— You'd better lay down in the shade and take things quietly. Don't touch a thing! Complete quietness and rest is the only cure."

"Great bloaters!" moaned Fatty, holding his ample middle.

Nipper went off with a grave face, but he chuckled as soon as he rounded the bushes. Tregellis-West and Watson were waiting for him.

"Those berries were wholesome enough, or I shouldn't have let Fatty eat 'em!" grinned Nipper. "But he's quite capable of chewing up bella-donna. He'd make a meal off any kind of poisonous berries if they looked enticing. After this he may be a bit careful."

"Let's hope so, anyway," said Watson. "Come on—they're all in! Doesn't the water look stunning?"

Half the fellows were splashing about in the water luxuriously. It was delightfully cool and refreshing, and Nipper & Co. shared the joy of the others as soon as they plunged in.

After the long voyage on the *Wanderer*, it was too glorious for words to be ashore—to be free to race about as they pleased, and to indulge in a bathe on a perfect beach in the clearest water they'd ever seen.

But even this earthly paradise had its deadliness.

CHAPTER XXII. BEAUTY UNTOLD.



"IT'S simply marvellous!" said Reggie Pitt in wonder.

He and Jack Grey and Tom Burton were in the boat, some little distance from the shore. They had finished their bathe, and had gone out to have a look at the lagoon bed from the surface. Umlosi was with them. Indeed, without the aid of the black giant, they wouldn't have been able to launch the heavy boat.

"It's beyond me," declared Grey frankly. "I can't understand it. It doesn't look like water at all—it's practically as clear as the atmosphere itself."

The boat was quite still, and the juniors were leaning overside. The vision beneath them was like some fairy conglomeration of colour. They had often pictured such marvels, but had never before seen them from close quarters.

In the first place, it was difficult to realise that this lagoon was a mere inlet of water in the vast Pacific, with nothing but a reef of coral to protect it from the powerful rollers. The difference between the outer beach and the inner beach was startling.

On the outer beach, one stood watching the pounding surf, with the sea thundering all along the reef like a continuous discharge of subdued artillery. Then it was only necessary to cross to the inner beach, and one faced a calm, placid lake, coloured so fantastically that the eye was dazzled. But the most entrancing sight of all was on the bed of the lagoon itself.

This floor was varying in depth. Where the boat was floating it was comparatively shallow, and the coral floor seemed to rise up towards the juniors who were leaning over the boat's side.

So clear was the water that the boat's shadow was like a black patch on the sand and coral below. And there were myriads of remarkable things to see. Colour in every variety lurked in these tropic waters.

There were shells, there were fish, and the coral itself was exquisite in its rich, variegated colours.

"I always thought that coral was a kind of pink stuff," said Jack Grey. "But this is too marvellous for words! I never

dreamed of anything like it. And it's all alive, too!"

"Exactly," agreed Pitt. "That's the rummy thing about coral. This whole reef is alive on the surface, with the dead coral below. But we don't want to go into any lecture just now."

All the same, the coral presented a spectacle which caused the juniors to think. There seemed to be no limit to its colour and form. There were the most intricate, dazzling formations all along the bed of the lagoon.

And the fishes, too.

These were miracles in themselves. As the juniors looked down through the crystal depths they occasionally saw flights of fish pass—like painted wonders. It was possible to follow their shadows on the floor beneath. And the colours were one continuously changing panorama.

On the sand patches crawled great crabs, sometimes scurrying about at high speed. And now and then gigantic jellyfish would float past the boat, so clear and transparent that they were hard to detect unless one was closely watching.

Some of the tiny fish were no bigger than insects—whole flights of them, shooting under the boat like a swarm of golden points.

"It's too much to grasp all at once," declared Jack Grey at length. "I could stay here for hours watching this. Clive Russell told us that the lagoon was ripping, but I never——"

"Old Handy's coming this way," interrupted Pitt with a chuckle.

Edward Oswald, having spotted the stationary boat, decided to swim out to it, just to show the others what he could do. He came along powerfully, but the confusion he made was tremendous. Handforth was a strong swimmer, but he always made a lot of noise about it.

"Good!" he panted, as he grabbed upwards and reached Reggie Pitt's outstretched hand. "I offered to race some of those fatheads to the boat, but they haven't come. Too jolly lazy!"

"Want to be hauled up?" asked Pitt. "Come and have a rest, old man, and look at this wonderful sight. You've never seen anything like it. The beach is nothing compared to this."

"All right," said Handforth.

He was hauled up, and he dropped into the boat like a freshly landed fish. But after a few minutes he was astonishingly quiet. Even Edward Oswald's volcanic energies were stilled by what he saw. It was nearly five minutes before he shifted his position and looked up.

"By George!" he ejaculated.

"You can hardly believe it, can you?" asked Reggie.

"It's—it's startling!" replied Handforth. "Lots of the other chaps don't know any—"

thing about this. You can't see it until the boat stops, and all the ripples die down. What do you think of it, Umlosi?"

"'Tis wondrous, indeed, young white master," replied Umlosi, shaking his head. "In my own country of Kutaland there are scenes of exquisite beauty, but none so fine as this. It grieves me to admit this, but who am I to deny the truth? Perchance, however, all is not as one would think. Danger may lurk amid these marvels."

"Don't you believe it, old son," said Handforth. "The only danger could be from sharks, and there aren't any sharks here. I say, I wonder what it would be like to dive?"

as Church and McClure were only too well aware.

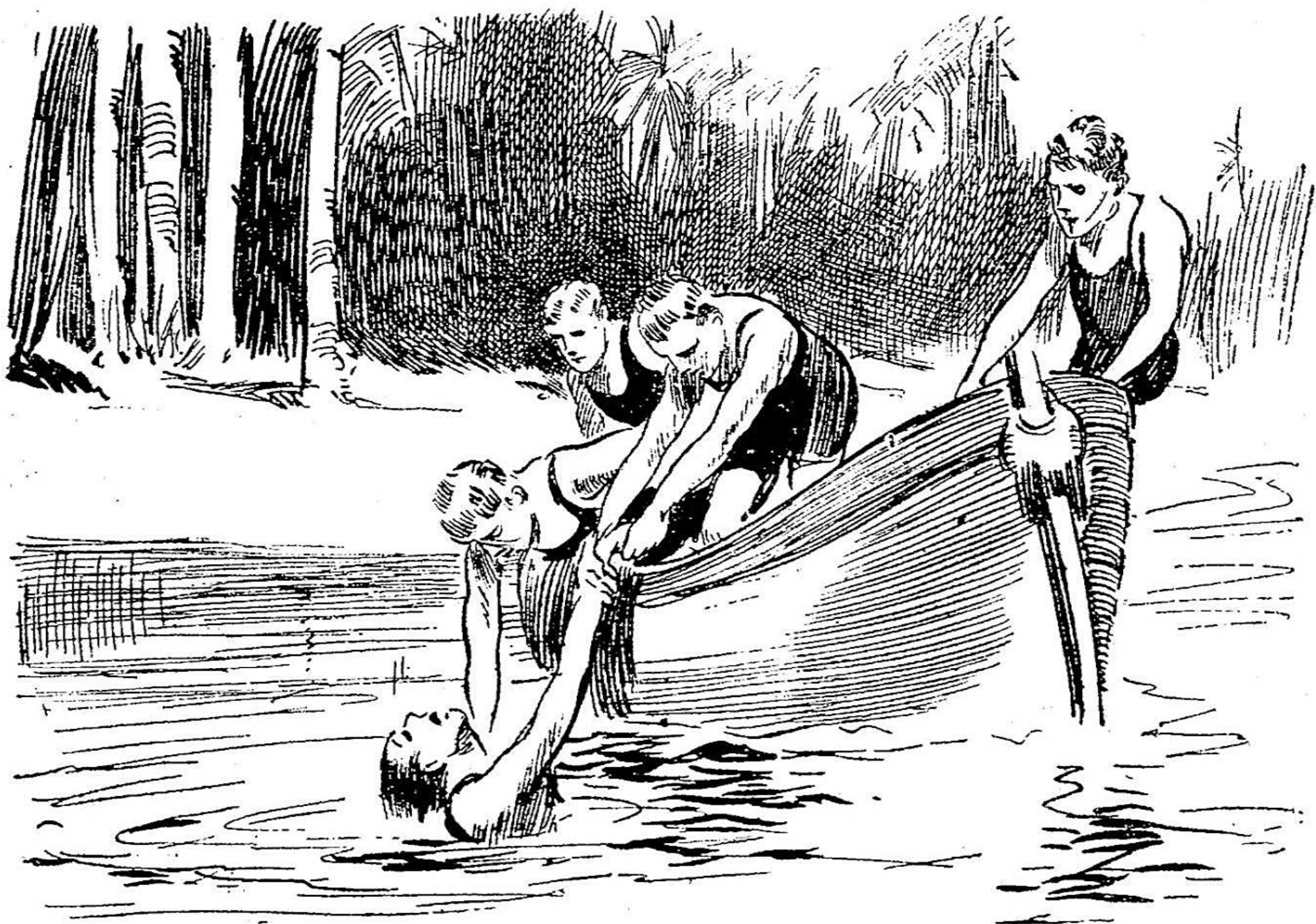
"Rot!" he said promptly. "I'm going down!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

HANDFORTH'S TERRIBLE PERIL.



IT was useless to argue. Handforth had made up his mind, and he was half-over the side of the boat already. Besides, Pitt and Grey had no real fear that the leader of Study D would come to any harm. He was a clumsy



"Quick—in with him!" panted Pitt desperately. "First aid—artificial respiration! The poor chap's nearly done!"

"Better try it and see," grinned Grey.

"Take my advice, messmate, and don't!" put in Tom Burton. "These waters are deceptive; you might head against some of that coral, and it's as sharp as a lot of razors. I wouldn't dive if I were you."

This, of course, was quite sufficient for Handforth. If all the juniors had pressed him to dive to the lagoon bed, he would have scorned to do so. But when somebody urged him as Tom Burton urged. Handforth's mind was made up. He had a peculiarly perverse streak in his character,

ass, but, somehow, he always scraped through without trouble.

"All right, shipmate, if you must go, you must," said the bo'sun. "But don't say I didn't warn you. Go easy, that's all. Take one or two short dives first, just to test the depth."

"I should have done that in any case, you chump!"

Handforth rose up, and then took a clean dive over the edge. For him it was an unusually good dive, and he went straight

down towards the lagoon floor. The experience was startling.

Ten feet down the light was almost as brilliant as it had been on the surface. Every movement of Handforth's limbs seemed to produce further rays, as though the water held the light in pockets.

Handforth's eyes were opened, and he could see as clearly as though he were in the open atmosphere. He glanced up and started. The boat was like some miniature airship floating overhead.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Handforth, forgetting himself.

He swallowed about a pint of water, and rose to the surface, gasping. He had been so surprised that he had almost forgotten he was under water. From above, those in the boat had watched him shoot down, and had been fascinated by the myriads of diamond bubbles which accompanied him.

"Had enough, old man?" asked Pitt.

"I—I swallowed a drop or two!" spluttered Handforth. "I say, it's marvellous! I'm going down again—deeper this time. I'm going to take a walk on the bottom."

"You'll cut your feet to ribbons on that coral," warned Burton.

"Rats! I'm wearing bathing-shoes," retorted Handforth.

He dived again, and this time he went much deeper—until, indeed, he touched a sandy patch on the bed. He knew that he would only be able to stop down for a second or two, and he already felt his natural buoyancy dragging him upwards. And then, at that moment, the terrible thing happened.

It took Handforth absolutely by surprise.

Subconsciously, he had noted a huge thing gaping comparatively near by—and he had mistaken it for a rock. Without realising it, he stepped upon this rock, and the next instant it had closed on him like a vice.

The agony was intense, and Handforth twisted round madly.

His foot was held tightly!

Even now he didn't know what had happened—he had never dreamed that there could be any possible danger on this innocent-looking ocean-bed. And the pain in his foot was so intense that all connected thought was impossible.

"Great Scott," thought Handforth, "I—I can't get away!"

His lungs were already tightening, and he held his breath with difficulty, but the very instinct of self-preservation led him to pull at his right foot with all his strength. But his efforts were useless—he couldn't get away.

He was held—gripped to the lagoon floor by this unknown menace!

As a matter of fact, it was a giant clam which had captured the unfortunate Edward Oswald. A mere shellfish! Unsuspectingly, he had placed his foot into the half-open

shell, and the clam had closed upon it like a trap.

By the graces of good fortune, the clam had only succeeded in gripping the extremity of his foot—and this sideways. Thus, the sole and toecap of his shoe protected his toes—although jamming them tight. But for this, his bones would have been cracked like rotten sticks, and his foot reduced to pulp.

But it made little difference, for he was helplessly trapped. After the first few moments his struggles became frantic. But this monster shellfish—a thing of no brain and no reasoning power—had closed its shell upon the intruder who had dared to venture near.

It was an appalling situation!

Accidents of this kind have happened to the pearl fisher on more than one occasion—the most terrible peril of all. The giant clam grows to a tremendous size, and in many cases the sand gathers round him and half-conceals him from the unwary diver. Constant vigilance is necessary to avoid these terrible man-traps.

And Handforth, all innocently, had fallen a victim!

He couldn't shout—he daren't even open his mouth. His lungs were bursting, and he already felt that the end was near. And yet his bulging eyes looked up for the boat, apparently so close to him. Help was there, but no help came.

As a matter of fact, those in the boat knew nothing at first.

"The fathead seems to be stopping down there for something," said Pitt, after he had watched Handforth reach the bottom. "He's tugging at something, too. I can't quite make out—"

"I hope he's all right!" interrupted Grey anxiously.

"Souise my scuppers!" gasped the Bo'sun, suddenly startled. "Look! He—he seems to be fairly anchored! He's caught his foot in something!"

"He's caught!" shouted Grey. "Can't you see? He's struggling! He's trapped by something, and can't get free! We'd better dive down and help him—the poor chap'll drown—"

"Wait!" panted Reggie Pitt. "It's one of those clams!"

"Clams?" repeated Jack, staring.

"You know—a kind of giant oyster!" said Pitt. "It's closed on him, and caught his foot. Quick! In with you—"

"Nay, 'tis I who will dive!" interrupted Umlosi gruffly. "Am I not expert in this art? Have I not dived this many a thousand time? 'Tis for me to descend to the depths!"

And before the others could interfere, Umlosi dived overboard, and swept swiftly downwards. They remained in the boat, knowing full well that if Umlosi failed, their efforts would be worse than useless.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MAN VERSUS SHELLFISH!



EVEN Umlosi didn't know the nature of the task he essayed. To force open that clam-shell with the bare hands was more than any ordinary man could hope to do. Indeed, even a crowbar might not have forced the monster to give up its prey—for it is the most difficult thing in the world to wield a crowbar with any force under water. A man has no purchasing power, for he is lighter than the element in which he swims.

Umlosi, however, was not troubled by a knowledge of what he had to face. He only knew that Handforth's foot was caught, and he had to release it. Nothing else mattered.

Nelson Lee, or Lord Dorrimore, in a similar position, would have been aghast at the prospect—knowing, as they did, what the situation exactly was. But Umlosi suffered no such handicap.

And his enormous strength was already famous. This giant chieftain from Central Africa possessed the power of four or five normal white men. He was a giant in more senses than one.

His first dive took him straight down to Handforth's side. Edward Oswald was still conscious, and even now he had managed to hold his breath. But a second or two longer and his lungs would be filled with water.

Umlosi saw the position in a flash.

Bending down, and fighting to keep himself at the sea-bottom, he inserted one of his own feet into the great shell, and grasped the upper lid with his bare hands. Then he exerted his great strength, believing that the clam would succumb at once.

But the clam didn't.

It gripped with all the force of a steel vice, and Umlosi received his first shock. But his position was favourable. His feet and hands in their present holds, he was not bothered by his buoyancy—for he was automatically held to the lagoon floor. And again he exerted his strength.

But this time he put forth every ounce that was within him, for at last he appreciated the appalling power of this monster shellfish. He could feel the clam resisting—doing its utmost to beat him.

His muscles stood out, and for a dread moment he feared that he would fail again.

And then, to his joy, Handforth's foot came free, and the Fourth-Former shot upwards to the surface. At the same instant Umlosi whipped his foot and his hands away. By a hair's breadth he escaped being clutched in that vice.

Snap!

The clam's shells closed together with a vicious clap, but the creature was too late. Umlosi was already sweeping upwards to the surface. It was one of those rare occasions when he was staggered by surprise.

In the meantime, Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey and the Bo'sun had pulled the exhausted Handforth out of the water. They had seen him rise to the surface, and at first they had feared the worst.

He popped up like a cork, but was inanimate. His face was nearly purple, his eyes closed, and his chest was heaving convulsively. An awful gurgling sound came from his sagging mouth.

Truth to tell, the unfortunate junior had gulped down a large amount of water even as he had been rising. And the others thought that the release had come too late.

"Quick—in with him!" panted Pitt desperately. "First aid—artificial respiration! The poor chap's nearly done!"

"Oh, my goodness!" muttered Grey, turning suddenly pale.

In the boat, Handforth was rolled over, and first aid was instantly applied. To the extreme joy of the others, he soon responded. Within five minutes the purple aspect had left his face, and he was becoming normal.

"All right—cheese it!" he gurgled at length. "I'm better now!"

"You were nearly drowned, old man!" said Grey breathlessly.

"Rats! I only drank about half a pint!" retorted Handforth, sitting up. "Thanks awfully, all the same. Where's Umlosi? He dragged me free. Good old chap! I thought it was—Ow!" he added, with a sudden gasp of pain. "Look out, Pitt—mind my foot!"

"I was just going to take your shoe off," said Reggie. "I knew you'd been caught by that foot, and I wanted to see—"

"Methinks thou art hurt, young master," said Umlosi, who was in the boat again. "Wau! Many foul beasts have I battled with—many have I conquered; but this creature of the ocean is the most terrible of all! Mayhap the vile thing is bewitched!"

"It was only a clam, Umlosi," said Pitt. "But even a clam can be an awful danger—a menace to human life."

Handforth's shoe was gently removed, and the other juniors were startled. His foot was turning black almost up to the instep. Umlosi examined it with tender care. It was a painful operation, but Handforth sat back, and said nothing. His recent narrow escape had rather unnerved him, and this pain was a trifle.

"Thou art in luck, O Thou of the Big Voice," declared Umlosi at last. "There are no bones broken, but methinks thou wilt have difficulty in walking for several days. Thy foot is bruised severely, and will doubtless swell to uncouth proportions."

"Thanks, old son!" said Handforth. "I'll have some liniment shoved on it when I get on board, and I shall be all right to-morrow."

He was as optimistic as ever, but the others said nothing. They had an idea that nearly a week would elapse before Hand-

forth would be able to walk again without limping.

The boat was pulled slowly to the shore, where the other fellows had finished their bathing. In fact, they were dressed again, and were waiting for the boat, so that they could visit another part of the island. They crowded round as it grounded on the white sands.

"What's the idea staying out there all that time?" demanded Church. "And what were you diving for, Handy?"

"Don't make a fuss—Handy's hurt," said Reggie Pitt crisply. "He got caught by a clam, and was nearly done in."

"By a clam?" grinned Church. "Tell me another!"

"Any more jokes?" chuckled McClure.

But Nipper, at least, believed the story, and he was full of concern. Pitt and Grey lost no time in explaining what had happened, and at the end of two minutes there were no more grins.

As Handforth was being helped ashore one or two of the fellows found themselves looking out across the lagoon. It was a place of wonder and delight; but danger lurked there, hand-in-hand with beauty.

CHAPTER XXV.

MANY SYMPATHISERS.



WILLY HANDFORTH shook his head sagely.

"Just like you, Ted!" he said. "You can't have a bathe without getting yourself into some kind of mess! Why, if I'd known about this before, I should have turned absolutely grey!"

"A fat lot you care about me!" sniffed Handforth. "Do you think I deliberately stepped into that rotten clam? How was I to know it would grab me? And why am I arguing with you? Go away!"

"That's what I get for being sympathetic!" said Willy sadly. "I came here specially to sympathise—"

"I don't want it!" interrupted Edward Oswald gruffly.

Church and McClure were tenderly assisting him to dress—and even this operation irritated him. He was a fellow who loved to be absolutely independent, and to be waited upon hand and foot like this embarrassed him.

Yet such help was essential.

He found, to his dismay, that he couldn't even set his right foot to the ground. The pain had extended from his toes to the ankle itself, and it was sheer agony to move. So he had to allow his chums to even dress him! And for Willy to stand there, looking on, was simply adding insult to injury.

All the juniors were gathered round, in fact, for Handforth's mishap had aroused general concern and consternation.

"We shall have to be careful in future," said Nipper. "In fact, we'd better not do any diving at all—we'll confine ourselves to just bathing off the beach here. In any case, Dorrie and the guv'nor will prohibit all diving, so we might as well fix it up ourselves in advance."

"What about making a litter?" suggested Willy thoughtfully.

"A litter?" repeated his major.

"One of those stretcher things," explained Willy. "You don't even know the simplest words, Ted," he added regretfully. "I'm surprised at you not knowing what a litter is!"

Handforth glared.

"I'll show you what it is, if I have any more of your nerve!" he snorted. "You'll be one, my lad! I'll jolly well litter you all over the ground!"

Willy laughed sarcastically.

"Now then, you chaps—do a bit of grinning!" he said, looking round. "That was supposed to be a joke. You don't know how I'm enjoying this," he added reflectively. "I can talk to Ted peacefully and calmly, and I haven't even got to dodge!"

"You—you—"

"I wouldn't dream of taking a mean advantage of you, old son," went on Willy. "I'm only thinking of your good. We'll make a litter and carry you to the boat, and then we'll put you to bed. We shall have to keep you in your cabin for a week at least."

"A week!" gasped Handforth. "You young fathead—"

"It's all right—I'll let you have Marmaduke and Priscilla for company," said Willy generously. "They'll keep you amused. And you musn't move about too soon, you know—your foot's going to swell up to an awful size by to-night. You can't go about stepping into clams without paying for it!"

"I'm afraid he's right, Handy," said Nipper. "You'll be a cripple for a week, at least. All ready now? Good! Let's get to the boat, and we'll take Handy aboard. After that we'll explore a bit more of the island."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth miserably.

He reluctantly allowed himself to be helped down the beach.

"Blow!" he added suddenly. "I'm not going to be left out of this! Shove me in the boat, and we'll carry on as though nothing had happened. Do you think I'm going to weakly give in like this! Not likely!"

But the others insisted. In their opinion, it was highly necessary that Handforth's foot should receive prompt attention. Umlosi had declared that no bones were broken, but he wasn't skilled in surgery, and perhaps he was wrong. It was for Nelson Lee to make an examination.

"I say, I've got an idea," exclaimed

Willy, as they approached the yacht. "We shall be here for weeks, shan't we?"

"I don't know about weeks," replied Nipper. "We may stay for a fortnight, but not much longer. Dorrie has brought all sorts of modern contrivances for getting up those shells in record time. But why?"

"Well, I was thinking," replied Willy. "There's no reason for us to stick on board all the time. Why not camp ashore? Give me the simple life every time! There's a house built over there already, and we only need a few other things and we shall be absolutely O.K."

"It's a good idea," declared Nipper. "We'll ask the gov'nor, and see what he says. We shall get a lot more fun on the island."

"Rather!" agreed Buster Boots. "Do you remember how some of you chaps went on Surf Island, near Caistowe, before the holidays? You fancied yourselves as Crusoes—but that affair was nothing compared to this. This'll be a real camp, and no mistake!"

All the other fellows were equally enthusiastic. The idea of camping on the island attracted them. It would be a lot better than remaining on board the yacht. They would have quite enough of the Wanderer while cruising.

"Dorrie and Mr. Russell and the others will be busy at the oyster beds, and there's nothing interesting in that," said Reggie Pitt. "We can be on another part of the island, and have a regular spree. We'll go hunting, and fishing, and be like a second Swiss family Robinson. The thought of being on board is ridiculous when we've got the island."

"Hear, hear!"

And so, even before the fellows were on board, they had decided upon the immediate future.

Handforth was not lacking in sympathisers when the news got round. Nelson Lee made a thorough examination, and found that Umlosi's diagnosis was right. No bones were broken, but the tissues were badly bruised.

"Cheer up, young 'un!" smiled Nelson Lee, as he placed Handforth in a deck-chair. "It's not so bad as you've been told. You'll be hobbling about by to-morrow, I daresay—and within a week you'll know nothing about it. But no more diving!" he added warningly.

Handforth's eyes brightened.

"Hobbling about to-morrow, eh, sir?" he repeated. "By George, that's good hearing! and can we use that house that Mr. Russell built? Can we all camp ashore?"

"There's certainly no reason why not," replied Nelson Lee. "As a matter of fact, it'll be a first-class method of amusing you youngsters while the rest of us are otherwise engaged."

"But what about us?" asked Irene in dismay. "We've got to be left on board, with

nothing to do! That's the worst of being a girl! We've simply got to look on!"

Doris drew her aside.

"Look on?" she said, her eyes sparkling. "Don't you believe it, Renie, old girl! If these chaps are allowed to have a camp, why shouldn't we have one? What's more, we'll have that house, too!"

The other girls looked on breathlessly.

"Oh, but Doris!" protested Violet Watson. "We can't do that! The boys are going to take their camping things ashore in the morning—"

"Exactly—but we're going first, before anybody's up!" replied Doris calmly. "We'll steal a march on 'em! When they come to that house, we shall be in full possession, and all trespassers will be prosecuted!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RIVAL CAMPS.



EARLY on the following morning, Nipper stepped briskly out of his state-room, accompanied by Tregellis-West and Watson. They had risen long before the usual

time—in accordance with an overnight arrangement.

The morning was glorious—the sea calm, and the lagoon as placid as a pond. The sun was shining with great power, and a soft breeze was rustling the foliage of the island. It seemed an absolute shame to remain on board. The palms were nodding, and calling the juniors to come.

The chums of Study C entered Handforth's state-room, and found Church and McClure just finishing their toilet. Handforth was struggling into his clothes—for he insisted upon getting up, too.

"Hallo! Nearly ready?" asked Nipper crisply.

"Shan't be a minute," said Handforth.

"How's the foot?"

"Blow the foot!" growled Handy. "It's a bit sore, but I'm not going to be left behind because of a giddy bruise! I can hobble about all right. It's likely I'm going to let you chaps have all the fun!"

He proceeded to walk up and down the state-room, as proof of his fitness. But he hobbled badly, and he couldn't help screwing up his face with pain. It was characteristic of him to make light of a severe hurt.

"I admire your courage, old man, but I don't admire your wisdom," said Nipper. "If you'll take my advice, you'll stay in bed. This is only a preliminary trip ashore, after all. We're not really going into camp until after breakfast. Why not wait until then?"

"Not likely," said Handforth. "Where you chaps go, I go!"

"It's no good—we've tried everything," said Church resignedly. "First of all we

urged him not to come, and he got wild. then we pressed him to jump out of bed, and get dressed. So he told us to go and eat coke, and said he wouldn't get up for anything. But he didn't mean it, the bouncer—there's no stopping him, once he's made up his mind."

"It's my determination!" said Handforth grimly. "When I make up my mind to a thing, I'm not going to be shifted. Aren't you chaps ready yet? I've been waiting for you for ages!"

They passed out, Handforth doing his best to walk unconcernedly, as though his foot didn't hurt him at all. They collected other juniors from various state-rooms, and eventually went on deck.

"Anybody about yet?" asked Nipper, as he encountered one of the engineers.

The man started to say something, and then grinned.

"Anybody about?" he repeated. "Why, yes—you're about."

He walked off, and Nipper frowned.

"What was that grin for?" he asked. "It seems to me as if there's something on, you chaps. That fellow was going to say something, and then he changed his mind."

"We can't help his troubles," said John Busterfield Boots. "Let's go down to the boat, and push off."

The scheme was a simple one. It had been arranged that the shore camp should come into force during the morning—well after breakfast. The sailors would convey boatloads of stuff—tents, cooking utensils, stoves, and everything necessary for a complete camp. Fatty Little had already been appointed chief cook, for the juniors had scorned the offer of one of the Wanderer's chefs. The camp was to be purely select.

This early morning visit was just to have a look round. The fellows needed some outlet for their energies, and here was one. It was impossible for them to sleep until the ordinary breakfast-time. Paradise Island was so entrancing that the juniors were unable to rest.

And a preliminary scouting trip could do no harm. They would be able to choose the sites for the tents, and perhaps fix up a few contrivances for the house—which would be the headquarters of the camp.

This primitive dwelling, erected by Clive Russell and his father months earlier, would prove extremely useful as a store-room, and meals could be taken there, too. The site had the further advantage of being quite near to a natural spring.

The fellows were in the highest spirits as they rowed the boat towards the coral sands. The island was looking even better than ever in the early morning sunlight. The air was fresh, and life was well worth living.

"It's fine to be out first!" remarked Tommy Watson, as he allowed one hand to drag in the cool water. "This'll give us a ripping appetite for breakfast. And we

shall be able to work all day at the camp—"

"By the way, where's Fatty?" asked Reggie Pitt. "Talking of breakfast reminded me of him. I thought he was coming?"

"So he was, but the fat bouncer buzzed off to drag the Chief Steward out of bed!" grinned Fullwood. "Said he was so hungry that he couldn't do a thing until he demolished a couple of eggs and some ham sandwiches, an' a few trifles of that sort. Disgustin', I call it."

"For once, Fully, I agree with you," said Nipper. "But Fatty is unalterable, so why discuss him? And why do you assume that he routed out the Chief Steward for grub? He might have gone to prepare our own stores for the camp."

"The sun might drop into this lagoon, but I don't think it will," retorted Fullwood. "One's just about as likely as the other!"

As the boat neared the beach, Nipper regarded Fullwood rather closely. The leader of Study A was looking different these days. He was bronzed, healthy, and that perpetual sneer of his was not quite so obvious. Constant association with a crowd of healthy fellows had brought about a subtle change. In decent company, Fullwood was behaving himself quite well.

"Here we are!" sang out Handforth, as the boat grounded on the beach. "Come on, you chaps— Hi! What the— Great pip!"

He had forgotten all about his foot, and had leapt out of the boat with all his usual energy. Instinctively, he knew that it would be perilous to drop on that bad foot, and he swung round. Very beautifully, he sat down in the shallow water, splashing everybody liberally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's not the way to jump out, old man," said Church. "You'll have to be careful, you know—"

"Oh, rats!" growled Handforth. "I forgot all about the beastly thing! You other fellows needn't wait for me—I can crawl along alone—at least, with Church and McClure."

His chums, in any case, would not have thought of deserting him. The rest pushed up the beach, and advanced towards the primitive dwelling—which was looking very picturesque and charming amid the creepers. The shade from the palm trees afforded a delightful measure of coolness.

But as the crowd approached, the door opened, and Doris Berkley appeared.

She was looking very business-like with her sleeves rolled up, and with a frying-pan in her hand.

"Bring out all those other things, you girls," she sang out cheerily. "We might as well clean the whole place while we're at it. Help! I'm blessed if these boys haven't come ashore now."

She regarded the juniors severely, making a very pretty picture as the breeze blew her hair about. And the juniors watched, dumbfounded, as the other girls came trooping out with all sorts of oddments.

"Well I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Reggie Pitt.

"And why?" asked Doris. "Why are you jiggered?"

"I thought all you girls were in bed!" said Reggie. "What do you mean by getting up at this unearthly hour?"

"Leave 'em alone!" put in Nipper. "Can't you see they've come here to do us a good turn? They're cleaning the house out for us!"

"By jingo, so they are!"

"I say, that's sporting!"

The juniors pressed round, very delighted.

"Sorry to disappoint you, old chaps, but you seem to have got off at the wrong station," remarked Doris calmly. "We're not cleaning this house out for you—and if it comes to that, it isn't your camp at all."

"Not our camp?" repeated Nipper.

"Then whose is it?"

"Ours!" chorused the girls.

"Yours!" yelled the Fourth Formers.

"Why, of course," smiled Irene. "First come, first served! If you fellows want to camp on the island, you'll have to go somewhere else. We don't see why you chaps should have all the fun—so we came along and collared this house for ourselves!"

Nipper grinned with sudden appreciation.

"Jolly good!" he chuckled. "You deserve it for your nerve! And why shouldn't you camp? Come on, you chaps—we shall have to go along the shore, and find another spot. These girls have dished us!"

"So-long!" said Doris sweetly.

The juniors were somewhat startled at this unexpected development, but they soon got over it. In fact, they decided to build a house of their own—and to do it properly. As for the girls having a camp, there was something rather jolly in the idea.

At all events, everybody was convinced that Paradise Island would provide them with plenty of interest and adventure. As yet, nobody knew that Mr. Jonathan Prescott and his horde of blacks were steadily approaching this lonely atoll of the Pacific.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!

A full account of the Holiday Party's adventures on this enchanting Coral Island, and how Jonathan Prescott appears on the scene with a rival expedition is described in:—

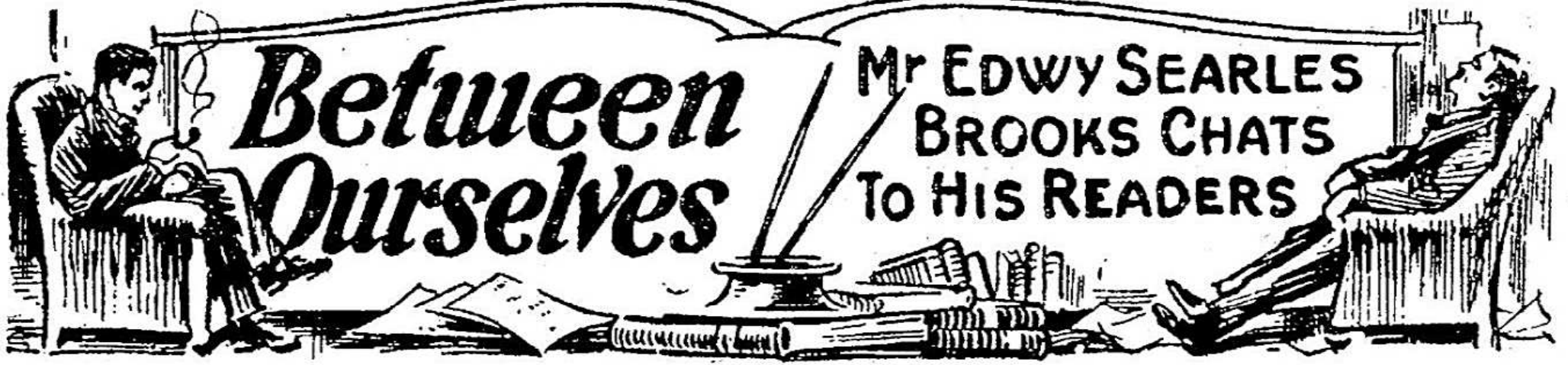
"THE ISLE OF CORAL!"

JOIN THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE!

THE CLUB OF CLUBS

FOR READERS OF THIS PAPER.

See particulars on the last page.



(NOTE.—If any readers write to me I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. If you have any suggestions, send them along. If you have any grumbles, make them to me. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY—THE ST. FRANK'S WEEKLY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter acknowledged below has been personally read by me, and I thank each writer most heartily. But although ALL letters afford me an equal amount of pleasure, I am reluctantly compelled to confine my individual replies to those of general interest.—E.S.B.)

Just at the moment there is no other subject comparable to the St. Frank's League for general interest. So I'm going to ask those whose letters I am acknowledging below to wait patiently for an individual reply. You won't all get one, of course. But in spite of this postponement, you stand just as good a chance as ever if the subject you have dealt with merits special attention. Individual replies MUST depend upon the universal appeal of the point raised. All other letters are equally welcome. But, apart altogether from their contents failing to interest a majority, want of space prevents me giving them more than a bare acknowledgment.

I want to slip in a little paragraph here which I hope will meet the eyes of eleven enthusiasts who made early application to me to become Organising Officers for the St. Frank's League. For one reason or another, or for no reason at all, you eleven, alone among several hundreds, omitted to provide me with sufficient details for you to be communicated with by post. Consequently, you have been given your numbers as foundation members of the League (62, 79, 89, 95, 98, 110, 115, 149, 177, 178, and 196), and eleven letters are waiting ready to be dispatched to you as soon as you send in your correct names and postal addresses. So if you haven't already sent these in, please do so immediately you spot this. The letters waiting to go off

are accompanied by your membership certificates (numbered as above), and other papers which will have great interest for you as holders of the post for which you have volunteered.

Well, here are the eleven of you the Chief Officer wants to hear from, corresponding in order to figures above. WILLIAM PARKER (Birmingham), J. T. (Queen's Road, Sheffield), A. ANDERSON (Bellingham, S.E.), W. SAYER (Canterbury, Kent), J. H. WALFORD (Penge, S.E.20), CHARLES ALEXANDER RICHARDSON (Liverpool).—Name and address wanted from you of the resident in Capetown, South Africa, who, you told me, in your letter of March 17th, would be pleased to act for us there. (You mustn't expect us to guess the name and address of this old schoolfellow of yours, you know), "THE HOODED UNKNOWN" (Luimneach, Ireland), "INQUISITIVE ONE" (c/o Marine Garage, Worthing, Sussex), CISSIE DOUST (Birmingham), EVA DOUST (Birmingham), and L. MOOR (Bradford).

Now for those acknowledgments, though I'm afraid I shall now have to leave the bulk of them over for attention next week. What with the extra long holiday stories, and the space which has to be collared for the League, my "Between Ourselves" looks like getting crowded out altogether, doesn't it? I wonder if many of you would mind very much if it was? Well, there's just about enough room left to acknowledge eleven letters, leaving me ninety in hand to receive attention next week, in conjunction with any which arrive in the meantime.

Muriel Hawkes (Merrylands, Sydney, N.S.W.), C. A. Baker (Sydney, N.S.W.), Winston Wood (Lee, S.E.12), Donald E. Mackenzie (Durban, Natal, S.A.), Ronald Appleby (Llswerry, Newport, Mon.), Michael O. Beirne (Dublin), Ardnjnxz (Wolverhampton), Charles Carter (Longton), Gladys Irene (New Malden), Cissie Doust (Birmingham), Eva Doust (Birmingham).

E.S.B.

IN THE DAYS OF THE ARMADA

By W. MURRAY GRAYDON

(Continued from Last Week.)

"AND I know the coast from Kingswear almost to the Lizard," admitted Sydney.

"I cannot say as much as that," declared Giles; "but I have sailed a boat in and out of Plymouth Sound a score of times."

"I find I have made a wise choice," said Drake. "Lord Howard orders me to send this fishing-smack to Plymouth, and to give it a crew from the Avenger, since its own crew know little of the coast this side of Dover. So I will put the Redwing in your charge, and your orders are to crowd all sail to Plymouth, take on board what ammunition and stores you can get, and return to the fleet as soon as possible."

"I do not think you run any chance of missing an opportunity of distinguishing yourselves further in action," he added. "There will likely be no fighting for a day or two, and with moderate wind and weather you ought to rejoin the fleet by to-morrow afternoon or evening."

"If I understand rightly, Sir Francis, myself and these lads are to do the piloting and ordering," said Trent. "How about a crew?"

"You will keep the present crew of the Redwing, of course," was Drake's reply. "They are lusty old salts, and will come handy in case a need of fighting should arise. See to it that they are well armed before you start—ay, and yourselves as well. At least one, if not more, of the Spanish galleons are known to be somewhere down the Channel behind us. They are probably on the watch to pick up powder and supplies, but by night you won't have much trouble to keep out of danger."

"Ay, ay, sir," exclaimed Trent, "we'll sheer off at the first sight of a suspicious craft."

"I'll warrant you make a safe passage going and coming," said Drake. "I have had my eyes on you of late, and I know none better fitted for this duty. So lose no time in starting, for the fleet is sorely in need of munitions and food. Plenty may arrive within an hour or two, but Lord Howard will take no chances."

Trent and the lads saluted, and hurried from the cabin to the deck. They lowered themselves to the fishing-smack, and a number of pistols, arquebuses, and swords were handed down to them; also a scanty supply of powder and ball.

Then the Redwing sheered off from the

Avenger, and took Lord Howard's messenger across to the Ark-Raleigh, after which the saucy little smack hoisted more canvas and glided swiftly down the Channel.

Giles and his companions could not shake off a feeling of sadness as they saw the English fleet fast vanishing behind them in the evening mist. In spite of what Drake had said, they feared they might miss another set-to with the Armada. Little did they think what strange events and adventures the near future held in store for them.

As our heroes are destined to take no further part in the deeds of Lord Howard's fleet, a brief digression may be made to show what ultimately became of the great and inevitable Armada. It was on Thursday evening that the Redwing started for Plymouth, and on the following morning Lord Howard concluded to make sure of supplies by going after them to Dover. This he did, and on Friday night he joined the rest of the fleet as it was moving slowly up the Channel in the rear of the Armada.

Saturday was rainy, with a hard wind from the west, and the Armada took shelter off Calais. The Spanish admiral looked for aid from the Duke of Parma, but the latter could not embark his soldiers at Dunkirk in the face of Lord Seymour's warships.

Sunday was a day of peace, and that evening a council of war was held in the cabin of the Ark-Raleigh. As a result of this, a number of fire-ships were sent drifting into the Armada at an early hour of the morning, and it was forced to put out into the Channel.

This was what Lord Howard had aimed to accomplish, for the position of the enemy in Calais Harbour had been unfavourable for attack, owing to the nearness of shallow water. So the English fleet, now augmented by Lord Seymour's squadron, at once bore down on the Armada, and the battle raged all of Monday.

Stormy weather added to the misery and helplessness of the Spanish ships, which laboured heavily amid the waves, and were crowded together in such a huddled way as to afford the best possible opportunity to the English gunners. They made what resistance they could, and none hauled down their colours, though the tremendous fire carried away their masts by the board, splintered their timbers, and caused great loss of life.

Three large galleons went to the bottom of the Channel, one was grounded on Calais sands, and three more drifted into the hands of the English garrison at Ostend.

It was sunset before Lord Howard's fleet drew off, and then only because the ammunition was spent and the crews were exhausted. The Spaniards made sail for the north as best they could, having lost four thousand men killed or drowned, while a far greater number were wounded.

The English did not realise the extent of

their victory, and at once began to prepare for a renewal of fighting on the morrow. But the Spaniards wanted no more to do with such terrible foes, and in full flight they sailed away to the north, not daring to return as they had come.

They eluded the pursuing English ships, but during the next few weeks they suffered so severely from storms, shipwrecks, and other disasters that only fifty-three vessels and about nine thousand men returned to Spain. And this was the end of the "invincible" Armada.

And where, in the meantime, were Giles and his companions? How had they fared on their mission, and what had happened to prevent them from rejoining the English fleet? We shall speedily see.

Wind and weather favoured the Redwing that Thursday night, and the sharp-cut little smack danced rapidly down the heaving Channel toward her destination. The crew were typical coast fishermen—bluff, stalwart, weather-beaten fellows, thoroughly inured to all sorts of hardship and perils.

Needless to say that they were skilled navigators as well. The smack was thoroughly under their control, and they were quick to obey orders. From fore and aft Trent and the two lads kept a sharp and constant watch, but hour after hour slipped by without a sign of the dreaded Spanish galleons, or of any craft whatsoever.

About midnight, as nearly as could be judged, a heavy mist settled down on the Channel. This gave rise to some apprehension on Giles' part, but Trent and Sydney were confident that they could pull through all right. Whether it was done by accident or skill matters not, but it is certain that an hour later the Redwing sailed right into the broad mouth of Plymouth Sound. There was no mistake about it, for by this time a breeze had partially scattered the mist, and the towering headland on either hand could be faintly seen against the sky.

"Safe at last!" exclaimed Giles, as the smack went bounding over the choppy waves along the left shore. "A while ago I was afraid we might land at the Lizard. It's not a pleasant thing to be out in the Channel in a fog."

"I was a bit uneasy myself," admitted Sydney. "This is an ugly coast along here, and I was afraid of running on the rocks. We have been truly fortunate, and half an hour ought to see us inside Plymouth Harbour, provided the wind don't—"

The lad stopped abruptly, the sentence frozen on his lips by a low, sharp cry of alarm from Trent.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN WHICH A STRANGE HAUL IS MADE IN THE SOUND.

A VESSEL sailing up Plymouth Sound, and hugging fairly close to the Cornwall side, will pass a number of bays or estuaries that slip inland between high cliffs and afford a good shelter for purposes of safety or hiding.

The Redwing was skimming along in this very neighbourhood at the time that Giles and Sydney were discussing their escape from the perils of the fog. But the lads were not looking anywhere in particular, and the crew happened just then to be passing round a pannikin of grog and water, which refreshment their labours had richly earned.

Trent alone was on the alert, watching right and left and ahead. But his vigilance was more from force of habit than anything else, and, therefore, when he did actually make a startling discovery he was so far thrown off his guard as to let slip the cry of alarm which cut short Sydney's sentence.

All glanced instinctively to the left, and what they saw made a chilly feeling run down their spines. The Redwing had just luffed round a high promontory, and was now sheering across the mouth of one of the aforementioned bays. And several hundred yards back in this bay, lying quietly at anchor between the cliffs, was a great Spanish galleon.

There was no mistaking the cut and height of the vessel; even the flag could be seen drooping from the masthead. But so far as light and sound were concerned it might have been taken for a ghostly craft. Not a glimmer was visible, and not a voice was heard.

"They surely must see us," said Giles, in a sharp whisper. "At this close range they could blow us clean out of the water."

"Hist, not a sound, comrades!" muttered Trent. "Keep your places—don't attempt to lie down. The smack is running a good course, and in a moment or two we shall be hidden by yonder cliff."

This command was strictly followed, and the Redwing went dancing on. Every eye watched the receding hulk of the galleon, and every heart was throbbing with suspense. But the minutes slipped by, and still there was no sign of life or light; no anchor was lifted, and no guns thundered from the deck.

Now the jutting headland was close by, and a little later the Redwing was beyond the enemy's vision and was running swiftly up the coast.

"Zounds, that was a narrow escape!" exclaimed Giles.

"I thought the galleon would surely open fire on us," added Sydney. "I wonder if the Spaniards saw us?"

"Ay, of course they did," replied Trent, "and I'll warrant they're more concerned to know if we saw them!"

"It was a daring thing for them to come thus far up the Sound," said Giles; "and yet I suppose they knew that every ship from this part of the coast was up Channel with Lord Howard's fleet. What can the galleon be doing here?"

"They be most loikely a-watchin' for powder-boats cooming down the Sound, maister," spoke up one of the fishermen.

"Ay, that must be it!" said Sydney. "They let us slip by them because they suspected that we were going up to Plymouth after munitions and stores."

"Nay, lads; the galleon hath surely a deeper purpose," declared Trent. "If it wished to intercept outward-bound boats it would be lying by Ram Head, which is the proper course to sea with the wind from this quarter. I doubt not that some knavery is brewing, though what it may be is too tough a nut for my head to crack. So soon as we reach Plymouth——"

Trent paused suddenly and shaded his eyes with his hand.

"What is that yonder?" he asked.

He pointed to a dark object that lay about two hundred yards off the bow of the smack, toward the Cornish coast.

"It looks to be a skiff," said Giles.

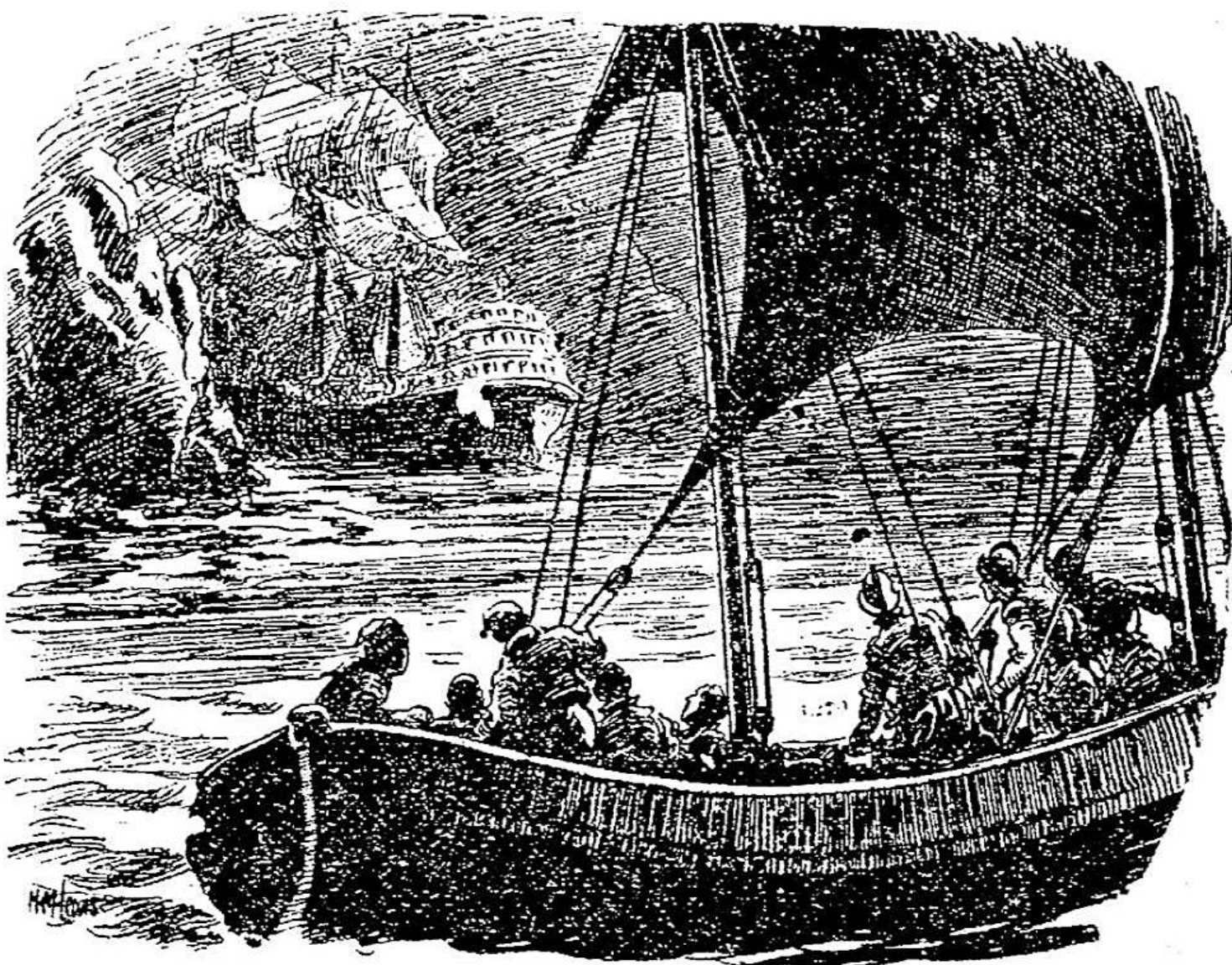
"Then it is an empty one," declared Sydney, "for no one is rowing. It is lying still on the water."

"I'll wager it is bound for the galleon," said Trent, "since its bow points in that direction. Whoever may be in it is lying low in hopes that we shan't discover the craft. There is knavery here, lads. Run the smack fairly alongside yonder boat," he added, turning to the crew. "Can you do it, my good fellows?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" was the hearty reply.

A moment later the Redwing had tacked and was running under partly lowered canvas toward the mysterious object, the identity of which was not yet positively assured.

But all doubt vanished when two dark figures rose into view and two pairs of oars began to drive the skiff toward the mouth of the Sound. The fugitives were evidently



"They surely must see us," said Giles in a sharp whisper. "At this close range they could blow us clean out of the water."

bewildered by the pursuit, else they would have steered straight inshore and taken their chances with the surf and rocks.

Never had the hardy crew of the Redwing shown their abilities to greater advantage than now. By skilful twists of tiller and sails they soon brought the smack fairly alongside the fleeing skiff, and with so gentle a bump that no harm was done to either craft.

Two men were in the boat, and the instant the grind came they leaped to their feet. By this time one of the fishermen had leaned over and caught hold of the craft's mooring-line. The foremost of the strangers made a rush toward him with a draw-knife, but Trent quickly caught the fellow by the collar and dragged him bodily on board the smack, where he was disarmed and bound by several of the crew.

The other man attempted to unsheath a sword, but when he found himself staring into the barrel of Sydney's pistol he threw up his hands and cried for quarter. After transferring a sword and dagger to his captors he was pulled on board.

The whole affair was over in a brief time. The skiff was cast adrift, and as soon as the Redwing was fairly started once more for Plymouth, Trent and the lads took a look at their prisoners. Imagine their amazement to find that one was Simon Baillie, while his companion was none other than Francisco de Rica!

"No water-haul about this," muttered

Trent. "I'll warrant the knaves were bound for the galleon with a message of some sort. Ay, and it may be in writing! We'll soon see."

He hurriedly searched Baillie, but found nothing. Then he turned to De Rica, and was instantly rewarded by the discovery of a folded sheet of parchment.

"Read it, lad," he said, handing it to Giles. "Here, this will help you."

He drew out his tinder-box and ignited a bit of greasy tow.

"The letter is addressed to Senor Captain Blanco, on board the galleon La Rosa," said Giles, as he held the parchment close to the light. "It is written in Spanish, and this is what it says:

"I have carried out the instructions of the duke's envoy, and the house is entirely in my possession. The treasure is packed, and awaits your coming. Send at least four boats, and six men to each. See that they are well armed, for there may be need to fight. At present all is well. I send this by De Rica and the Englishman. They will guide the party to the landing-place, and

thence to the secret entrance within the grounds.

"DON GONZALES."

Giles folded the letter and stared in amazement at his companions.

"What does it mean?" he gasped. "Some villainy is going on at Mount Edgcumbe."

"Ay, that's it!" cried Trent. "From the looks of the thing, Sir Richard Edgcumbe's valuables are to be put aboard this Spanish galleon. But the secret entrance within the grounds. I know of none such."

"Speak, you traitor!" he added, turning fiercely to Baillie. "What do you know of these deeds? Naught can save you from punishment, so make a clean breast of it."

Baillie shook his head and snarled like some wild beast.

"Ye may kill me," he muttered, "but no word will you get from me. I'm no blabber, an' I'll stay mum in spite of you!"

There was a brief interval of silence, and then it was broken by De Rica.

"Senors," he exclaimed, "if you will pledge that my life shall be spared I will tell you all that you wish to know."

(To be continued next week.)

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

(All communications to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o, The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.)

My dear Leagueites,

As it is essential that our membership should reach at least 10,000 before we can begin organising local clubs, the League Magazine, and many of the other attractive schemes I have already brought to your notice, I will ask you this week to make a big, concerted campaign for new members. The result of the first two weeks' influx of members is encouraging, but not nearly large enough in proportion to the number of readers. At the present rate of enrolment we shall be many weeks before we can attain the desired 10,000.

When you come to think of it, why should there be any delay in joining up? The conditions are absurdly simple, and are designed for the express purpose of making the League more widely known to non-readers. If every reader who reads these lines decides to qualify this week, we should be able to start work on the clubs and other schemes almost immediately, for we should have a membership many times over the limit required. So, you see, it rests entirely with you, dear Leagueites and readers. The League is being run for your benefit, and is virtually organised by your own representatives—the Organising

Officers. If you want to see the League a going concern this day week or fortnight, get those application forms filled in by yourself and your friend to whom you have introduced Our Paper, and send them along to me at once. Please do not leave the work of getting new members to the other fellow. If everyone did that we should never make any headway.

For the benefit of new readers, I publish below a summary of some of the advantages of joining the League:

- (1) Getting to know your fellow-readers from near at home to the most distant outposts of the Empire.
- (2) Joining local sports and social clubs affiliated to the League.
- (3) Entering for competitions run for the benefit of members.
- (4) Qualifying for various awards by promoting the growth of the League.
- (5) Opportunities for contributing short articles, stories, and sketches to the League Magazine.
- (6) Space for short notices and free adverts. for members in the above Magazine.
- (7) Advice on choosing a trade or calling in life, on emigration to the colonies, dependencies, or abroad.
- (8) An employment bureau for members of the League.
- (9) Tours to interesting places in England and on the Continent, camping-out holidays, and sea-trips, specially arranged for members of the League.

I shall be pleased to add any further suggestions that would be practicable

from members who can think of other ways of helping to make the League a means of contributing to the happiness and welfare of its members.

If, after reading the above, there are any other readers who are not yet members and who have some reason why they do not join, will they kindly drop me a postcard and let me know their objections to becoming members of an institution which

aims at helping to bring a little more brightness, interest, and sociability into the lives of themselves and their fellow-readers, and so carrying on the great traditions of the wonderful stories of the boys of St. Frank's from the realm of fiction to that of real life.

Your old pal,

THE CHIEF OFFICER.

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 £d., 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. 6. Aug. 1, 1925.

SECTION A	READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP. Being a regular reader of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" since(give date), I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League, I hereby declare myself to be a staunch supporter of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and that I have introduced Our Paper to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with Membership Number assigned to me.
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.
(FULL NAME)..... (ADDRESS).....	

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