

THE ST. FRANK'S WEEKLY!

NELSON LEE 2^D

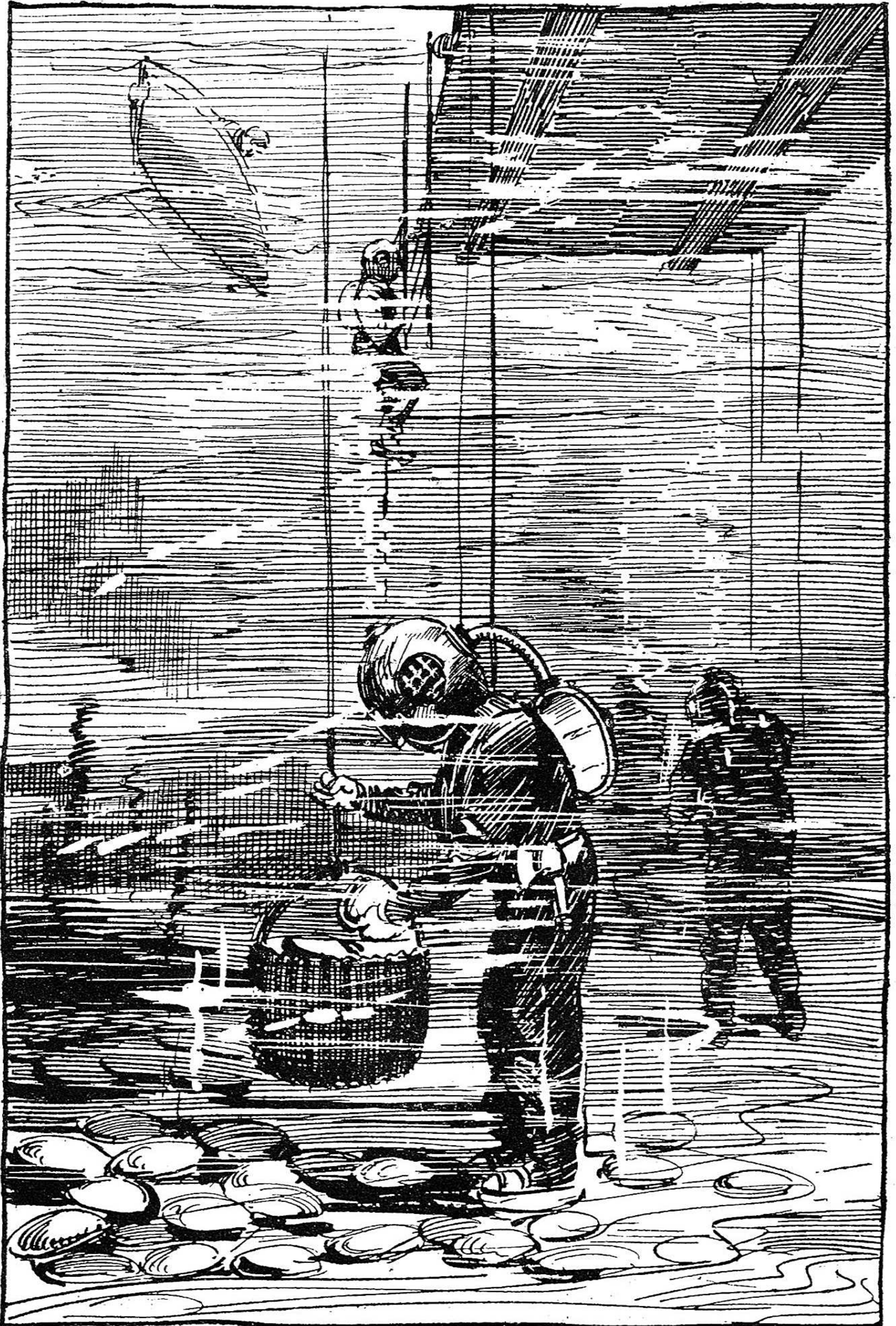
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And for a second Doris had a clear, never-to-be-forgotten glimpse of Willy Handforth clinging dazedly to the broken fragment of palm.

THE PEARL HUNTERS

Being a fine long story of the Boys of St. Frank's and their wonderful adventures on a coral island.



As far as Clive's eye could reach, in all directions, the floor of the lagoon was smothered. It was one big oyster bed.



The PEARL HUNTERS!

the Wanderer. And throughout this pen picture of life on a coral island.

A thrilling account of the adventures of Lord Dorrimore's holiday party of St. Frank's boys in their quest for pearls on a coral island in the South Seas. Some of the exciting incidents in this narrative include a fight with a shark, Willy's amazing aerial flight on the crest of a palm tree carried out to sea by the force of a tremendous hurricane, his daring rescue from a coral needle by Tessa Love, the appearance of a rival expedition on the island and their capture of Lord Dorrimore's yacht,

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

NEWCOMERS TO PARADISE ISLAND.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE, of the Fifth Form at St. Frank's, picked his way dubiously over the sharp coral ridges. He was accompanied by Stevens, his inseparable chum of Study No. 10 in the Ancient House.

"Without wishing to offend you, Brother Horace, may I remark that your schemes are sometimes considerably blistered?" he asked gently. "In the present instance, the scheme is not only blistered, but absolutely seared. My regard for coral has suffered a complete relapse."

Horace Stevens grinned.

"The coral's a bit chippy here, and I don't suppose it's doing our crepe soles much good," he observed. "But we can't worry over trifles—My hat! That was a sharp piece!"

"I venture to suggest that Mr. Gillette paid a personal visit to the nearest coral

reef before he invented his celebrated razor," said Browne. "I was lamentably weak, Brother Horace, when I consented to this moth-eaten proposition. But I am never one to grumble. Let us proceed."

The two Fifth-Formers were crossing a rather difficult stretch of coral on the southern spur of Paradise Island. They were not the only fellows to venture on this enterprise, for Handforth & Co., Nipper, and Reggie Pitt and several others were already in advance.

It was growing somewhat late in the afternoon, and the tropic sun was sinking westward. The atoll itself as wonderful as ever with its long stretches of greenland and woods, and with the palms all nodding their heads towards the crystal lagoon.

Edward Oswald Handforth frowned as he glanced round.

"Who told old Browne to come?" he demanded, gazing accusingly at Church and McClure. "We shan't get any peace now. He'll start jawing in his usual way, and——"

"You needn't worry, old man—you can easily beat him!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Handforth, with a modest shrug. "Eh? Beat him?" he added suspiciously. "Do you mean I can do more jawing?"

"My dear chap, why argue?" asked Pitt blandly.

"You fathead!" snorted Handforth. "Everybody knows that I'm one of the quietest chaps in the Fourth! I'm not boasting about it—I'm simply stating a fact. What the dickens are you grinning at, Arnold McClure?"

McClure hastily pulled his face straight.

"Was I grinning?" he asked.

"You looked like a Cheshire cat!" retorted Handforth tartly. "Any of your rot, my lad, and I'll biff you over!"

"Steady, Handy!" warned Nipper. "No biffing here. A fall on this coral might mean a serious accident, and if somebody dropped into the lagoon he'd probably be snapped up by a shark."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "There aren't any sharks. Don't we bathe in the lagoon three or four times a day?"

"Yes, but over on the north-west shore, where the water's shallow and safe," replied Nipper. "We're right against the break of the reef here, and the water's tremendously deep. I wouldn't give a cent for anybody's life once he fell in at this point."

Edward Oswald looked rather serious.

"All right—no biffing!" he promised. "I say, she's getting nearer now," he added, as he glanced out to sea. "She ought to be coming in pretty soon. We shall get a fine view from here."

The fellows had ventured on this southern spur for a particular reason. There were visitors coming to Paradise Island, and everybody had an idea that the approaching schooner would be none too friendly. Her progress was watched with more than usual interest.

In the deep water of the lagoon Lord Dorrimore's famous yacht, *Wanderer*, was lying at anchor, and she looked wonderfully neat and trim amid these tropic surroundings. Behind her, and all round, in fact, stretched the great irregular horseshoe that constituted the coral island.

Although over five miles across, the island itself was really a mere rim, for the lagoon occupied the centre of the horseshoe—with a narrow opening in the south. Here there was the inevitable break in the reef, with sufficient depth of water to allow any big ship to pass through into the safe anchorage beyond.

No matter what tropic cyclones swept down, no matter how thunderous the ocean,

the *Wanderer* was safe in the lagoon. The harbour was perfect.

Even from where the juniors were standing they could see three miles across the lagoon to their own camp—where they had built themselves a rather wonderful dwelling of bamboo and cane, with a thatch of tropical leaves. But for the moment the camp had ceased to interest them, although they had only recently finished the constructional operations.

Lord Dorrimore's holiday party had been thoroughly enjoying itself since this remote atoll of the Pacific had been reached. Paradise Island was hundreds of miles distant from all trade routes, and was not even charted. To all intents and purposes it was an unknown, undiscovered speck on the ocean.

The holiday-makers had discovered almost virgin beauty. The island was not inhabited, and never had been, except by Mr. Warner Russell and his son. This pair had spent several months on the atoll early in the year, and the present visit was an outcome.

The approaching schooner had been in sight for a full hour. She made a fascinating picture as she came on towards the island with all sails set. But the breeze was light, and her progress was slow.

Some little time earlier the boys had been watching the schooner's approach from the outer beach near their camp. Then somebody had suggested walking round the island to the south, until they were at the extreme end of the horseshoe. From this point of vantage they would be able to watch the schooner at close quarters as she swept in on the foaming breakers. It would be an interesting sight.

So quite a number of juniors had come, to say nothing of Napoleon Browne and Horace Stevens. Browne would probably have refused, only he had his camera with him, and he was anxious to take a snapshot of the schooner.

The difficulties had been greater than the boys realised.

It had been easy-going most of the way, but the island dwindled into a mere reef of coral for a difficult stretch of two or three hundred yards. This had to be crossed in order to reach the extreme end of the spur, where there was a rising hillock, with a group of three palm-trees on the summit.

Once at this spot the view was wonderful, and under foot the ground was quite solid. There was the added advantage of the shade from the three palms. The roar of the surf filled the air with a continuous thunder, and as the schooner drew nearer, the juniors became more and more interested.

CHAPTER II.

THE SAMOA DROPS HER ANCHOR.



LORD DORRIMORE lowered his telescope and nodded.

"Yes, I made out the name all right—she's the Samoa, as sure as a gun," he declared. "You were right, Mr. Russell. Your great friend, Mr. Jonathan Prescott, is about to burst upon us in all his glory."

Mr. Russell frowned, and flushed deeply. "The infernal rogue!" he said hotly. "By heaven! The thought of meeting him face to face makes me—" He broke off, breathing hard. "I beg your pardon, gentlemen," he went on quietly.

"Don't mention it, old man," grinned Dorrie. "If Prescott had treated me as he's treated you, I should now be sharpenin' up my trusty sword an' thoroughly oilin' my pet revolver. Let yourself go as much as you like—we shall enjoy it."

Nelson Lee and Captain Burton were on the bridge with the other two men, and all had been scrutinising the schooner as she sailed towards the island. By now she was approaching the break in the reef, and would soon come surging through on the powerful rollers.

"Keep where you are, Mr. Russell," said Nelson Lee warningly. "You have not shown yourself so far, and it would be a pity to do so now. You remember our little plan—"

"Yes, and a good plan, too," said the Canadian, nodding. "Maybe I'd better get below at once. But you won't keep me waiting a minute longer than is necessary, will you? I guess I'm just crazy to face that reptile of a Prescott!"

"Good!" grinned Lord Dorrimore. "That's the style, old man! Go below, an' lug out your 'horsewhip—swords an' revolvers are a bit out of your line, I fancy. You can practice on Umlosi if you like—his hide's so thunderin' tough that he'll never feel it."

It was characteristic of his lordship to prepare for any situation with banter. He was in his most jocular moods at the moments of greatest danger. Lord Dorrimore had faced death on many an occasion, and he had faced it with a smile on his face, and a joke on his lips.

There was nothing particularly alarming in the schooner's arrival, however, for the Wanderer's party was by far the more powerful. Prescott would be helpless in the presence of these adventurers who had forestalled him.

True he was bringing, according to his original arrangement, a big contingent of native labour. And he had stated that he would obtain the toughest and wildest specimens possible from various islands.

The more ignorant and savage, the better they would be for the work in hand.

"I wonder what the beggar is thinkin' at this moment?" mused Lord Dorrimore, as he lowered the telescope again. "I think he's standin' on the poop, havin' a look at us through a glass of his own. If he caught sight of Friend Russell he'd probably have two fits on the bally quarter-deck, an' expire on the spot."

"We're reserving that little surprise for him later on," smiled Nelson Lee. "It'll suit our book to interview Mr. Prescott as strangers. Russell and his son are the only two of our number he knows, and they have both been warned to keep out of the way until they are wanted."

Apparently Mr. Jonathan Prescott was having a special reception prepared for him. As Nelson Lee had stated, Clive Russell had also been advised to make himself scarce, and Clive, in fact, was now on board, in his father's cabin, where he was presently joined by Mr. Russell himself.

In the meantime, Mr. Jonathan Prescott was considerably astonished. The schooner was making straight for the break in the reef, and she was already amid the surf, rising and falling gracefully to the powerful thrust of the long Pacific rollers.

"Gosh, darn it, captain, what's this?" he exclaimed, turning to Captain Jason Hawke, the master of the Samoa. "What in blazes' name is this? Boys, by thunder! D'you see 'em? I'm darned if we haven't run into a school camp!"

"Blamed queer—that's what it is!" growled Captain Hawke, who was grasping the wheel in his own hands. "Boys on this uncharted atoll! Say, I'm sure puzzled over this, mister. But it looks good, all the same. I guess these English guys don't know a thing about them pearl oysters."

Mr. Prescott laughed contemptuously.

"English!" he snapped, glancing at the Wanderer's masthead. "You're right! They're British sure enough, an' I guess they're a bunch of dumb-bells. We don't need to worry a thing, cap."

On the reef, within a short stone's throw, the St. Frank's fellows were interestedly watching the schooner's entry, quite unaware of the uncomplimentary remarks Mr. Prescott had been making. Indeed, unconscious of those insults, they were cheerily waving their hats, with Handforth taking the lead. He would have crushed it under his heel rather than wave it, had he known Mr. Prescott's opinion of British schoolboys.

The youthful enthusiasm was not difficult to understand.

For the schooner made a delightful, unforgettable picture as she swept through the foam-laden break in the reef to the accom-

paniment of snow-white spray and hissing froth.

Sailors were hard at work, and the schooner's canvas was being lowered and trimmed. Men were at her anchor, ready to drop it when the order came. She swept majestically into the lagoon, curving round in the Wanderer's direction.

While still a quarter of a mile distant—for Dorrie's yacht was at her anchorage nearly a mile within the reef—the chains roared, and the anchor swept down to the lagoon bed. And presently the Samoa swung easily round, and her voyage was at an end.

She was a neat craft—one of the smartest sailing-ships Nelson Lee had seen. And she was finely equipped, and kept as neat and trim as a private yacht. There was something clean-looking about her, and it was difficult to associate the Samoa with any dirty trickery.

But appearances are very frequently deceptive.

CHAPTER III.

QUITE A FRIENDLY CHAT.



NELSON LEE pursed his lips tightly.

"Significant—extremely so!" he said, with a grim little note in his voice. "You see what's happening, Dorrie?"

"It's no good pretendin' that I can see all that you see, old man," replied his lordship. "My mind isn't trained in the same way. Not bein' blind, however, I've got an idea that four men are just gettin' into a motor-boat from the schooner—"

"Exactly!" interrupted Lee. "A motor-boat."

"Anythin' remarkable about that?"

"I'm afraid you're hopeless, Dorrie," smiled Nelson Lee. "Last night, Umlosi was on the outer beach with myself and some of the boys. He declared he saw something—a shape out to sea—"

"By glory, yes!" interrupted Dorrie. "He smelt fumes, too, didn't he? But you an' the boys saw nothin' an' smelt nothin'?"

"That is so."

"Umlosi's an uncanny beggar," declared Dorrie slowly. "He can see things that we can't you know—an' he's got nostrils like a bally bloodhound. Do you think he was right?"

"I hardly know what to think," said Nelson Lee. "But the fact that the Samoa carries a motor-boat is enlightening. Not every schooner is thus equipped. It almost makes me believe that our friends ventured upon a preliminary survey during the hours of darkness. If so, it's more than ever necessary for us to be cautious in our dealings with them."

They watched the schooner's motor-boat as it left the parent ship's side and came gliding across the lagoon towards the

Wanderer. Nelson Lee had thought rather deeply over that "vision" of Umlosi's. And in his own mind he was practically convinced that the African chief had made no blunder.

The motor-boat drew alongside the platform below, and Mr. Jonathan Prescott ran lightly up the ladder, accompanied by Captain Hawke. They were both considerably smartened up.

Mr. Prescott had donned a dazzling suit of white drill—cut and made with all the usual American smartness—and the skipper had followed his example. They looked a very friendly pair as they stepped on to the Wanderer's deck. Two members of the schooner's crew were left in the boat.

Lord Dorrimore and Captain Burton and Nelson Lee were at the top of the gangway, waiting.

"Well, say, this is a big surprise!" exclaimed Mr. Prescott heartily. "You don't know how pleased I am to see you folks here! Guess you're British, eh? I'd be proud to know you."

"Sure thing!" put in Captain Hawke, nodding. "My name's Hawke—master of the schooner Samoa. This gentleman is my owner—Mr. Jonathan Prescott, of San Francisco."

"You are welcome on board, gentlemen," replied Captain Burton, shaking hands warmly. "Allow me to introduce Lord Dorrimore—the owner of the Wanderer—and Mr. Nelson Lee, of London."

For a few moments there was a good deal of hand-shaking and jovial chat. Without doubt, Mr. Prescott could make himself very pleasant when he liked, and even Captain Hawke—that leathery old South Sea skipper—knew his manners.

Outwardly, the pair were just ordinary voyagers, and Mr. Prescott's bluff, hearty manner was disarming in itself. If Dorrie hadn't known the character of the man in advance, he might easily have been deceived. As it was, he was inwardly amused, and was determined to lead Prescott on, just to see what nature of yarn he would spin.

They went below, and had the saloon to themselves—although Mr. Beverley Stokes had casually strolled in.

"Gee, this is some little boat!" remarked Mr. Prescott, as he glanced admiringly round. "Just cruisin' around, I take it?" he added casually. "Doin' the South Seas, eh?"

Dorrie nodded.

"You're a wonderful guesser, Mr. Prescott," he replied drily. "That's right—we're doin' the South Seas. A summer holiday trip, you know. We've got quite a big party on board—mostly schoolboys an' schoolgirls. Incidentally, we're havin' a priceless time."

"I'll tell the world you are!" agreed Mr. Prescott. "Say, anybody could have a good time on a dandy craft of this sort. You've sure picked a gem of an island," he added. "I took a look as we came into the lagoon. It's a peach."

"One of the most enchanting places I have

ever visited," said Nelson Lee. "We couldn't resist the temptation to let the boys spend a few days here. Later on we shall probably sail for the better-known islands, where there are plenty of natives."

Mr. Prescott heaved an inward sigh of relief. Already he was convinced that these people knew nothing of the bed of shell—and guessed less. The English dumb-bells! This was easier than shelling peas!

"Yes, these isolated islands are all very well in their way, but they haven't got much of a kick," said Mr. Prescott, nodding. "You kind of get tired when there's too much scenery around. I take it that you won't be located here for very long?"

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Prescott, we've made no definite plans," smiled Lord Dorrimore. "It's a holiday trip, as I said before, an' we don't like to feel bound to a time schedule. We shall just stay here until we're ready to go."

"That's great!" said Mr. Prescott breezily.

But he wasn't particularly satisfied. Dorrie's statement had been non-committal, and the owner of the Samoa had not gained the information he urgently wanted. Even now he didn't know how long the Wanderer was staying. At all costs, this British yacht had to be shifted!

CHAPTER IV.

LEADING HIM ON.



THE situation was interesting.

Jonathan Prescott was now satisfied that the intruders were a harmless party of holiday tourists. They knew nothing

of the lagoon's secret, and were just staying here because the island was an interesting haven.

But Mr. Prescott realised that the longer the Wanderer stayed, the greater the risk. Lord Dorrimore looked an amiable sort of ass, but he was evidently a man who had knocked about the world a lot. He probably knew something about pearls. The fat would be in the fire if the shell was discovered, for these Britishers would undoubtedly investigate.

"We shall sure be good company," declared Mr. Prescott, seeking to gain some further information. "My skipper put in here for water—we don't carry our own plant, the same as you wealthy people. But the island is so inviting that we shall probably stay for a day or two."

"The lagoon is big enough," said Nelson Lee calmly.

"Sure it is!" agreed Mr. Prescott. "I guess you folks don't intend staying here longer than a week?"

Failing to obtain any satisfaction by indirect methods, Prescott had been forced to a blunt question. He received a blunt answer.

"A week?" said Dorrie amusedly. "Good

gad, yes! We may be here two weeks—four weeks—there's no tellin'! This island is so rippin' that we could enjoy ourselves, an' find plenty to do, if we remained in this anchorage for a year!"

Hawke and Prescott exchanged a brief startled glance.

"But—Gosh!" burst out Prescott. "You don't mean—"

He broke off, and resumed his careless air.

"I guess you can stay a year if you please—it don't concern me," he continued lightly. "Captain Hawke means to up-anchor tomorrow or the next day. Our time's more valuable than yours, it seems."

The two men were exasperated. Indeed, they were thoroughly alarmed. This British party was evidently planning to stay on the island indefinitely! And a hint of those pearls might be discovered at any hour!

"See here!" exclaimed Prescott, his alarm getting the better of his caution. "You folks had best be warned! Bein' British, you probably don't know the danger of these atolls! Why, the first storm that comes along will send this yacht aground, and you'll be marooned for the rest of your lives!"

"Indeed?" said Captain Burton coldly.

"Sure thing!" said Prescott earnestly. "Gee, you don't know the danger you're running! We're hundreds of miles off the trade routes, and once your yacht was disabled you'd never see civilisation again! You can't afford to take risks like that—with a crowd of young folks aboard!"

"Dashed interestin', but I'd like to point out, Mr. Prescott, that we're easily capable of lookin' after ourselves," said Lord Dorrimore languidly. "Let me assure you that Captain Burton sailed these seas before you were born. An' let me add that there's scarcely an island on this side of the Equator that I haven't visited at one time or another. You may take us for novices, but we're not!"

Prescott flushed and bit his lip.

"Why, say, I didn't mean—" he began.

"And about a sudden storm, Mr. Prescott," put in Captain Burton. "It will afford you some relief to know that there is no safer anchorage than this lagoon. The hardest storm that blows will not affect us. Your own schooner, therefore, is perfectly secure."

Slowly, Mr. Prescott was beginning to realise that these people weren't such duffers as he had taken them for. In any case, it was apparently impossible to fool them. He had only made himself look ridiculous by his efforts.

"Well, I guess we'll be going," he said gruffly.

"So soon?" asked Dorrie. "I thought about invitin' you to dinner this evenin'; but please yourself. Take as much water as you like, Mr. Prescott—there are plenty of streams on the island. You don't know how sorry we shall be when you sail away!"

Prescott was vaguely aware that Dorrie spoke with a trace of banter. There was more in this than met the eye, but Prescott couldn't quite understand. He decided to get back to the schooner at once, and consult in private with Captain Hawke.

These people were proving to be an unexpected stumbling-block. They had butted into the lagoon, and looked like staying indefinitely. They wouldn't be frightened away, and it was impossible to adopt any hostile tactics. It seemed that there was a deadlock.

The one ray of comfort for Mr. Prescott was the fact that the Wanderer's party were on holiday—that the yacht had dropped into the lagoon by chance. The island's secret was still secure. These people were just cruising about the Pacific, and had no knowledge of the pearls.

So far, the situation was good. Once the Wanderer departed, everything would be plain sailing. And Mr. Prescott mentally decided that it wouldn't be particularly hard to get out some plan. But it would have to be prompt. Those two hundred savages on the neighbouring atoll could not be left there for long. Swift action was essential.

"Well, gentlemen, we'll quit," said Mr. Prescott pleasantly. "I'm not the kind of fellow to butt in. I should hate to disturb you folks in any way."

Lord Dorrimore laughed.

"You're not disturbin' us in the least," he said reassuringly. "On the contrary, Mr. Prescott, your company is highly interestin', an' promises to be more so very shortly. Lee, old man, do you mind callin' our other friends from their state-room?"

This was the moment Lee had been waiting for, and he went to the door of the saloon, and gave a soft whistle. The door of a neighbouring state-room at once opened, and Mr. Russell and his son emerged.

They entered the saloon side by side, and Lord Dorrimore turned.

"Good!" he said heartily. "Mr. Prescott, allow me to introduce Mr. Warner Russell—"

He broke off, for Jonathan Prescott had staggered back with a startled cry. His face had gone almost purple, and he stared at the two Canadians as though they had risen from the dead.

CHAPTER V.

FACE TO FACE.



FROM the very first, Lord Dorrimore had believed in Warner Russell's story.

Step by step this story had proved true, and now the last link in the chain had

been forged. Jonathan Prescott's wild

alarm was evidence enough that he was guilty of everything that Mr. Russell had related.

"Gosh, darn you!" snarled Prescott, attempting to control himself. "What the heck are you doing here? There's trickery—"

"Yes, perhaps there is!" broke in Mr. Russell, with deadly calmness. "Being a past master at the art yourself, Mr. Prescott, you instantly appreciate it. You needn't shrink back—I'm not going to choke you as you deserve. My only emotion is one of contempt, as it is for all things foul."

Lee nodded approvingly. He was pleased at Mr. Russell's self-control. This was far better than a burst of unseemly violence. The contempt in the Canadian's tone was like the lash of a whip.

Clive, however, was unable to restrain himself.

"You swindling brute!" he burst out passionately. "You tricked my father in 'Frisco, and thought you could trick him all along. But we're here first, and you won't get a red cent!"

Prescott fought to regain his composure. Captain Hawke was utterly startled, but he stood there, making no comment. He realised that his employer was face to face with an uncomfortable situation. It was better for him to keep out of it.

"You're mad!" burst out Prescott at last. "This man's crazy! Who is he? I've never seen him before—"

"That attitude was profitable in 'Frisco, Mr. Prescott, but it carries no weight now," interrupted Mr. Russell quietly. "To deny that you know me is childish. You gave yourself away when I first entered."

"That's true enough," agreed Nelson Lee. "In order to save you any further embarrassment, Mr. Prescott, let me inform you that we are aware of the exact position. Lord Dorrimore has taken the place you so basely betrayed, and is financing Mr. Russell in his pearling enterprise."

"Good gosh!" broke out Captain Hawke, aghast.

"I know nothing of any pearls!" roared Prescott wildly.

"It's no good, old man—so why keep it up?" asked Dorrie soothingly. "Cool down, an' admit that you've made a mess of things. That's the general consequence when a man plays dirty. You obtained Mr. Russell's secret in San Francisco, an' then you left him in the lurch. But Mr. Russell happened to fall in with me, an' the rest you can imagine. Anyhow, we were in the lagoon first, an' the British flag is flyin' over it. You'll oblige everybody, an' simplify the whole position if you

tuck in your tail an' run away. Most curs run when they're thrashed."

Prescott went pale with fury.

"This island is as much mine as yours!" he stormed. "You've got no right here! That rag you're flying has no more authority than a piece of dirty linen——"

"By the Lord Harry!" roared Dorrie. "You can insult me as much as you like, an' I'll grin at you, but I'm listenin' to no abuse of the Union Jack!"

Crash!

He leapt forward, and delivered a terrific drive which sent Jonathan Prescott hurtling backwards. He struck the saloon table, slithered sideways, and crashed over on his back. All the men were startled, with the exception of Dorrie. His lordship grinned.

"It's all right—I'm as calm as a cucumber," he said coolly. "The thing's over, but it did me good!"

Prescott picked himself up, subdued.

"I apologise!" he muttered thickly. "I guess I was carried away; I didn't mean to insult your flag, gentlemen."

"Then we'll say no more about it," exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "Mind you, I don't accept you as a sample American. By what I can see, you an' your skipper are two of the worst advertisements for the United States that ever sailed out from the Barbary Coast. I know scores of Americans, an' I value them as the staunchest of friends. You two are nothin' but scum!"

"Say!" bellowed Hawke hotly. "You'd best quit that line o' talk——"

Dorrie turned on him.

"I'll quit nothin'!" he thundered. "You two will get off this yacht as fast as your legs will carry you. You've dirtied my decks too long as it is. Anythin' more to say?"

The leathery skipper backed away, silenced.

"Well, folks, I might as well admit I'm beaten!" said Prescott, with a sudden show of frankness. "Gosh darn it! I take off my hat you you. Beaten, by Jupiter! Beaten by Britishers! I guess my opinion of you guys has altered its shape!"

He lounged towards the door, all his former assurance reasserting itself. He was evidently bluffing the matter out. Finding himself beaten, he was accepting his defeat with a show of true American bluster.

"I was a fool to double-cross you, Russell, I know that now," he went on ruefully. "I was greedy, and I've got my reward. I'll quit, and leave the field to you. I hope those pearls will turn out good."

He suddenly laughed.

"But I guess you've got it wrong about my own plans," he continued amusedly. "Things went different to what I expected, an' I didn't drift into this lagoon for the



With a plunge, he entered the water not three feet in front of the rising shark.

pearls. I just came to look around. As a matter of fact, I haven't got a pearling crew yet."

"No?" asked Russell contemptuously.

"I'm glad now," said Prescott. "It's saved me a whole heap of trouble. I meant to gather a bunch of Kanakas for the job, but I shall be saved that expense. If you don't believe me, gents, you're welcome to come aboard my craft and see for yourselves. The Samoa has come here empty, except for her normal crew."

"I'm not in the least interested whether you've come with a normal crew, or an abnormal one," said Mr. Russell contemptuously. "There's only one course for you now, Prescott, and that is to get out."

"Sure!" agreed the other. "The fact is, I didn't believe your pearl yarn, an' came here to have a look around first. It's mighty good to know that I can get back to 'Frisco without any further delay."

He nodded to the company in general, and lounged blusteringly out of the saloon, with Captain Hawke at his heels. Their attempt at indifference, however, was rather pitiful.

A more thoroughly whipped pair of curs could hardly be imagined.

CHAPTER VI.

A CLEAR FIELD.



"GOOD riddance to bad rubbish, dad!" Clive Russell uttered the words gleefully as he leaned over the yacht's rail, and watched the Samoa's motor-boat

gliding across the lagoon to the anchored schooner. The two white figures in the stern seemed small and insignificant now. They had somehow crumpled.

"Yes, Clive, you're right," said Mr. Russell. "I felt like throttling the brute, but it wouldn't have done any good. He's beaten, and if he's got any sense he'll lift his anchor within the hour."

"He won't stay until to-morrow, will he?" asked Clive indignantly. "I think we ought to order him off. This is a British island now, and we don't want any intruders. I don't look upon those rotters as Americans, either."

"They're not Americans—they'd change their spots in two seconds if there was money in it," said Mr. Russell contemptuously.

He turned, as Nelson Lee joined them.

"Everything went off splendidly, Mr. Russell," smiled Nelson Lee. "I'd like to congratulate you on your calmness—"

"That's nothing, Mr. Lee," interrupted the Canadian gruffly.

"It was rather humorous that Dorrie should be the one to show violence," went on the schoolmaster-detective with a chuckle. "Dorrie, the languid, knocking Prescott down. I'm afraid he's an impulsive fellow."

"Jolly good luck to him!" said Clive heartily. "I'll bet old Prescott's jaw will ache for a week. It was a glorious hit, and I'm only sorry that dad didn't land it."

They watched their late visitors climb on board the schooner, and it was soon evident that the vessel was preparing for departure. Her decks became alive with men, and Captain Hawke stood on the poop, bellowing out orders.

"They're going, dad—they're quitting!" said Clive eagerly.

"So it seems," nodded Mr. Russell.

Lord Dorrimore joined them.

"Wouldn't it be as well to pay the schooner a visit?" he asked. "We might as well satisfy ourselves about those Kanakas, not that it really matters. It would make no difference if he had a hundred."

Mr. Russell shook his head.

"I wouldn't like you to soil yourselves by going on that schooner, trim as she looks," he said grimly. "There's no question that Prescott was speaking the truth. The Samoa only has her ordinary crew."

"Unless they're battened down under the hatches," said Dorrie thoughtfully. "I've known that sort of thing on more than one occasion."

"I fancy not, Dorrie," remarked Nelson Lee. "Prescott knew nothing of your presence here, and he would have no object in concealing his men. If he had really come with a crowd of pearl divers, they would be in evidence. There would have been no object in hiding them from view."

"That's true enough," agreed Mr. Russell. "For once the man was telling the truth, I guess. He just dropped in to make sure of the pearls before going to the expense of collecting his divers."

"And yet there is a strange discrepancy," said Nelson Lee slowly. "I'm convinced there are no pearling men on board the schooner, and it would be a waste of time to go on board. But why has Prescott taken so many weeks? What has occupied his time?"

"Unfavourable wind, perhaps?" suggested Mr. Russell.

"A few days ago we were attributing his non-arrival to difficulties in picking the right men," said Nelson Lee. "That would easily account for the lapse of time. But now that Prescott has appeared with no crew at all we must seek another explanation."

"You don't suspect anythin' funny, do you?" asked Dorrie, staring.

"Judging by my brief acquaintanceship with Mr. Prescott, I could suspect him of anything," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "He struck me as being a particularly determined man, a man who would fight to the bitter end before accepting defeat. It is possible that he was delayed by unfavourable winds and trading business, but I'm hardly satisfied. The absence of those pearl divers rather worries me."

"What exactly are you gettin' at?" asked Dorrie curiously.

"Well, to be frank, Prescott accepted his defeat too readily for my liking," replied Nelson Lee bluntly. "I fancied I detected a subtle change in him just before he left; there was a gleam in his eyes as though he had come to some decision. And his hasty preparations for departure strike me as being ominous."

"But, man alive, the fool wouldn't dream of startin' any funny business!" protested Dorrie. "It'll take him weeks—months, to collect the necessary men. 'An' by that time we shall be gone, an' the lagoon will be cleaned out—as empty as—"

"I'll admit all this," interrupted Lee. "On the face of it there's not the remotest possibility of danger from Prescott's quarter. But in my experience, Dorrie, I've learned to be wary of the obvious. It seems ridiculous that Prescott can be a menace, but he may attempt some desperate scheme to outwit us. It isn't likely, but we must be on our guard. That's all."

Dorrie and the others were frankly sceptical. For the life of them, they couldn't see any reason for Nelson Lee's uneasiness. They were quite ready to dismiss Mr. Prescott and all his works from their minds. As far as they were concerned, he was a back number.

Nelson Lee, however, remained unchanged. The one fact which stuck in his mind was Jonathan Prescott's tame surrender. It wasn't at all in keeping with the man's character.

Was there something behind it all?

CHAPTER VII.

JONATHAN PRESCOTT'S VOW.



THE Samoa skimmed along before a fair wind on a western course—full into the face of the setting sun. In the rear, Paradise Island was dwindling, and looked like a green jewel in the midst of the eternal blue. The reflection from the placid lagoon was mirrored in the tropic sky like a kind of mirage.

The crew talked together in twos and threes, and the poop was in charge of the

first mate. The abrupt departure from the atoll had surprised everybody.

Below, Mr. Jonathan Prescott and Captain Hawke were in the schooner's well-equipped saloon. And Prescott was pacing up and down in the confined space like a caged tiger. His expression was ominous. Captain Hawke sat still, a glass of grog in front of him.

"Russell!" muttered Prescott thickly. "Russell! Of all the men on this earth! I tell you, Hawke, it was the biggest shock of my life when he and that brat came through the doorway."

"Doggone it, I guess it was startlin'," agreed the skipper.

"And we'd been fooling ourselves that the island was in the hands of a bunch of blamed holiday-makers!" went on Prescott, glaring. "We thought they knew nothing of the pearls, and— Yet they were laughing at us all the time—laughing and waiting for the right moment!"

"I've got to hand it to that titled guy that he fixed us good and proper!" admitted Hawke. "Say, he pulled it over snappy!"

Prescott swore fiercely.

"They had Russell there all the time—ready to spring upon us!" he went on. "Think of it, Hawke! They've got that island—and they've got the pearls! I've spent weeks and months for nothing! Hundreds of dollars—thousands of dollars! Everything wasted! By Heaven! If you think I'm going to sit still and see all this, you're wrong!"

"What's the big idea?" asked the captain. "We're beat, Mr. Prescott—and you ought to know it! Gosh! You don't expect us to pull anything over on them guys? What in blazes can we do against a ship of that size? They've got us beat, mister."

"Have they!" snapped Prescott, pacing up and down with the same jerky stride. "You're wrong, Hawke—there's plenty o' fight in me yet! I'll admit things look fierce, but we've got them Kanakas."

Hawke looked up sharply.

"You don't mean—"

"I don't know what I mean," broke in Prescott. "But there's two hundred natives within easy reach, and they're ours. Russell and his new friends don't know a thing about 'em—they don't even know that there's another atoll thirty miles away. We hold the trumps, Hawke."

The skipper was on his feet.

"You mean to make a fight?" he asked tensely.

"Sure I mean to make a fight!" retorted Prescott. "Have you ever known me to give in tamely? We'll go warily—we'll allow those guys to think that everything's sweet an' pretty. They can go ahead with their pearling. All the better—less trouble for us. The longer we can delay, the more certain we shall be of success."

"I guess you're full of pep," said the captain admiringly. "But it's a tall order,

mister. I'm not altogether sure that I'll help you. You may be the owner of this ship, but I'm the master. I'm not taking any risks if there's no chance of——"

"Don't be a fool, Hawke," interrupted Prescott. "I'll make it worth your while—trust me for that. You were to get a ten per cent share of the pearls under our old arrangement. Now that things are changed, I'll make it twenty-five per cent—and another twenty-five per cent for your crew."

The skipper's eyes narrowed greedily.

"It's sure temptin'," he admitted. "But, doggone it, you don't know what you're monkeying with! It'll mean piracy—no less!"

"Piracy be hanged!" exclaimed Prescott. "These people were on the island first, and we've either got to quit, or get the upper hand. Somehow or other, we'll capture that yacht, and show them who's master!"

"If we capture the yacht, we'll have to capture the island," said Hawke slowly. "It wouldn't be the first time I've played a game of that sort—but it's risky. It's mighty risky, Mister! If we fail——"

"There's no such word as 'fail' in my dictionary, Hawke!" interrupted Prescott curtly. "I've been in business twenty-five years, and I've never failed yet. No matter what I've planned to put over, I've put it over. Sometimes it's cost me more than I've made on the deal, but no man's ever beat me. Those pearls are goin' to be mine, and those Britishers will eat out of my hand before I've finished with 'em! Gosh! I'm worked right up over this affair, and nothing's going to stop me!"

"Them Kanakas——" began the skipper.

"You've hit it!" said Prescott. "We've got two hundred of 'em—and they're going to prove the deciding factor. We picked a tough bunch, and I'm glad of it now. Those cusses are as savage as blazes, mostly—I took good care to ship only men from the inland villages. Coast natives know too much. We've got the right stuff, captain. As soon as that crowd is let loose on that British bunch there's goin' to be something doing!"

The captain looked more dubious than ever.

"It'll be murder!" he said grimly. "Gee! Once those niggers get fairly going, they'll wipe out the lot—boys, girls, and the whole crew. You'd better think twice, Mister. One sight of blood, and those dog-gone Solomon Islanders will make a massacre of it. Half our men are from the Solomons—hard-working blacks when kept in check, but devils when they're let loose. Why, blame me, they're head-hunters and cannibals!"

"All the better!" said Prescott harshly. "But you're all wrong, Hawke. Cannibalism and head-hunting died out in the last century. These natives are rough customers, but——"

"Say, who knows best?" interrupted Hawke grimly. "Haven't I sailed these seas all my darned life? Those islanders are capable of reverting back to their savagery if they're given half a chance. Mebbe it was their grandfathers who last went off head-huntin'—but it's in their blood. They'll go back at the first chance, I tell you. Once loose, and there's no tellin' what might happen."

"You can leave it to me," said Prescott, sitting down. "I'll be careful before I decide on any definite step. There'll be no murders, Hawke. We can arrange it better than that. To let the islanders loose altogether would be a mistake—we should never get them under control again. No, we'll think this out carefully, and take our time. And when those Britishers least expect it, we'll strike!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PEARL HUNTERS.



PARADISE ISLAND basked in the clear morning sunshine, and the coconut groves swayed and bent in the wind which was blowing up strongly from the north-east.

The lagoon, with its glorious shades of blue, was ruffled by the gusts, and over on the wooded parts of the island everything was moving. The whole picture was enchanting. Breadfruit trees, artu, and chap-parel all swayed and rocked in the driving wind.

And on the outer beach the surf was dashing with much greater vigour than hitherto, sending the spray and foam cascading. The air was cooler, too, and the inhabitants of the atoll were more than pleased at the slight change in the weather. The sky was still blue and glorious, and there was no sign of rain—but this coolness was refreshing.

Four days had elapsed.

The schooner had almost been forgotten. She had sailed away into the infinite of the Pacific, carrying a defeated man. And there was little or no risk of him returning. Indeed, there was nothing to return for. He could never hope to drive his enemy from their stronghold.

The St. Frank's fellows had thought no more of Jonathan Prescott. On the evening of his departure there had been a good deal of talk, but on the following day the juniors had their own concerns to attract them.

Crusoe Camp—as they had termed their island home—had been greatly improved of late. The Fourth-Formers had built a splendid house of cane and bamboo and

creeper, and they were thoroughly enjoying the life of the island.

Irene & Co. were equally keen. The girls had their own camp—although they always went aboard the *Wanderer* at night. But there was endless interest during the day—endless adventure on the island and in the lagoon. The St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls spent a third of their time bathing in the warm, crystal waters. And not merely bathing—but watching the continuous panorama of life on the lagoon bed. It was a source of fascination that never palled.

This morning half the juniors were bathing, and had been in and out of the water since breakfast-time. The others were exploring the coconut groves and other stretches of woodland. There was always something to do.

Fatty Little, of course, had all his work cut out to superintend the food department. It had been agreed that he should always have six assistants an hour before each meal, and the fellows took it in turns to perform this duty. So there was no grumbling or jealousy.

Clive Russell had had his bathe, and was preparing to leave. The pearling was in full swing on the north-east shore of the lagoon, and the juniors had more than once visited the scene. But to them the diving operations did not seem very attractive.

Clive was going over this morning to see how matters were progressing—for he naturally took a great interest in his father's fortunes. Lord Dorrimore had insisted that the pearls were Mr. Russell's, and whatever their value, it would be his. But Mr. Russell was determined to give a big share to the *Wanderer's* crew.

"Anything you fellows want from the *Wanderer*?" asked Clive, as he prepared to push out one of the small boats. "I'm just going to row across, and I can bring a few things back—books, or clothes."

"I thought you were going to the fishery?" asked Handforth, as he lolled back in the shallow water.

"So I am—but I can't go like this!" replied Clive, indicating his careless attire. "I've got to put on a clean white suit, and look a bit decent."

"Good!" said Fullwood, strolling up. "If you're goin' to the yacht, I'll come with you. There's one or two things I want."

Clive looked at him curiously.

"All right—jump in," he said. "We'll be off."

They were soon out upon the lagoon, rowing across to the *Wanderer*—quite a fairish distance. The two juniors said little, and Clive did the rowing. Fullwood lounged back, trailing a hand in the water.

From the very first, there had been a kind of tension between these two. At the commencement of the voyage, Fullwood had sneered at Clive Russell in no uncertain manner. He had reminded the other fellows

that Clive and his father had first served on the *Wanderer* as steward and cabin-boy. But they had accepted these positions after being stranded by Jonathan Prescott's villainy. Fullwood was not the kind of fellow to forget the menial position Clive had once held. He had always been a snob, and his weeks of association with decent fellows had changed him little.

"The wind's blowing up pretty hard this morning," remarked Clive, presently.

"A good thing, too," said Fullwood. "The heat's been ghastly for the last few days. I wouldn't care if a storm came along—it might clear the air."

"It might clear something else, too!" laughed Clive. "These tropical storms are fearful things. Lord Dorrimore was saying that it looked a bit uncertain, but I don't know why. I've never seen the sky clearer."

"What do you know about tropical storms, anyhow?" asked Fullwood.

"I've heard—"

"You hear all sorts of yarns," interrupted Ralph Leslie. "Take my advice, an' talk about what you know."

Clive flushed slightly.

"No need to be personal, I guess!" he retorted. "If we only talked about our personal experiences, we shouldn't say much. You're a queer chap, Fullwood—I can't quite understand you."

"That doesn't worry me in the least," said Fullwood sarcastically. "You'd better attend to your rowin', an' jaw less. We shan't get to the yacht at all at this rate. Put some energy into it."

Clive was about to make a hot remark, when he checked himself. After all, he had consented to take Fullwood, and Fullwood had accepted the invitation literally. It was just like the cad of Study A to loll back in comfort while somebody else did the work.

CHAPTER IX.

A SCRAP AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.



WHEN they reached the *Wanderer*, Clive was perspiring freely, and

Fullwood was comfortably cool. It rather amused Fullwood to see his companion's

condition. It suited his mean nature to let the other fellow expend all the energy.

They walked up the ladder, and found the deck deserted. The yacht, indeed, might have been abandoned altogether, to judge by her appearance. The reason was simple enough.

The St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls were at their respective camps, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Mr. Russell were over at the shallow end of the lagoon, intent upon the pearling operations. With them were a number of the crew—engineers, and so forth.

There were only a few left on the Wanderer, and these were below somewhere, attending to their various jobs, or taking things easy. The entire decks were empty.

"You'd better go below an' clean yourself up a bit," remarked Fullwood, giving Clive a look over. "Gad, you're streamin'! What the deuce have you been doin' to get in that state?" he added humorously.

Clive glared.

"If you think it was easy work, pulling you for nearly two miles over the lagoon, you'd better think again!" he retorted. "And while I'm at it, I might as well tell you my opinion. If you'd had any decency, you would have taken an oar!"

"You confounded Canadian rotter!" said Fullwood, scowling. "You keep your insults to yourself! Go below an' get washed! I've generally noticed that common people perspire more than gentlemen!"

Clive's eyes gleamed.

"Look here, are you asking for trouble?" he demanded grimly.

"Yes—if you can give it to me!" sneered Fullwood.

"I'll give you more than you bargain for if you try that tone any more!" said the Canadian boy angrily. "From the very first you've tried to pick quarrels with me, and I've ignored you. Look here, Fullwood, what's the matter with you? What have I done to you that you should pick on me?"

"Nothin'," replied Fullwood calmly. "As far as I can see, you're a perfectly harmless chap. But I'm a bit particular about the people I mix with—that's all."

He turned with a laugh, and walked off. But Clive leapt after him, and dragged him round. Perhaps it was the absence of any other eyes which caused the Canadian boy to accept this opportunity. For week's he had felt a keen desire to have a straight talk with Ralph Leslie.

"Just a minute!" he snapped.

"Let go of my arm, confound you!" shouted Fullwood. "Do you hear? You common——"

"That remark of yours just now needs explaining," interrupted Clive fiercely. "You said you were particular about the people you mix with. Are you telling me I am beneath your position in life?"

Fullwood looked him up and down with obvious contempt.

"By gad!" he said slowly. "Have you got the utter nerve to pretend you're not? The insolence of you menials is gettin' beyond all bounds nowadays."

"Menials?" repeated Clive thickly.

"That's the word I said—an' cabin-boys have always been menials to me," said Fullwood, thoroughly enjoying the other's discomfort. "An' your father, too. A bally steward! You ought to be jolly thankful that we speak to you at all! You can't expect too much!"

Clive breathed hard.

"You mean, contemptible cad!" he said passionately. "You know as well as I do

that my father and I accepted those positions because we were down and out—because Prescott had swindled my dad out of everything!"

"That's what your dad said, anyhow!" sneered Fullwood meaningly.

"You rotter!" shouted Clive. "Are you trying to suggest that my father didn't tell the truth? At one time he was one of the richest merchants in Montreal——"

"I've heard all that!" interrupted Fullwood impatiently. "You an' your people don't interest me in the slightest. A merchant in Montreal, eh? What was he—a street-hawker?"

He laughed heartily at his own humour, and Clive turned a shade paler under his perspiring skin. Fullwood was not only unpleasant, but deliberately insulting. His words were offensive in the extreme.

"You'll take that back!" he said, in a low voice. "My family is one of the best in Canada—one of the cleanest on record! Three of my uncles were in the war! Two were killed, and one got the V.C.——"

"This is frightfully interestin'," interrupted Fullwood. "I suppose your wonderful pater was a bally conscientious objector? You haven't mentioned him yet. A shirker, what?"

"You miserable cad!" roared Clive, his patience exhausted.

Crash!

He swept his right fist round, and caught Fullwood on the chest with such force that the cad of the Fourth reeled back, and tumbled headlong to the deck. He was more surprised than hurt, and he was up again in a moment. He had enjoyed taunting the Canadian boy, but to be knocked down by him was a totally different matter.

"By gad!" he said chokingly. "You bally pauper!"

He hurled himself at Clive like a whirlwind, convinced that he would be able to eat this miserable Canadian up at one mouthful. For Fullwood was an excellent boxer, and he had plenty of courage, too. It was on his credit side that he was game in a fight.

A moment later the pair were locked together, hammering, tearing, and fighting with absolute abandon.

CHAPTER X.

IN DEADLY PERIL.



IT was one of those desperate "mills" such as schoolboys will indulge in when they are genuinely infuriated. Nine schoolboy fights out of ten are mild affairs, undertaken in the presence of a crowd of partisans, and with a referee and a time-keeper.

But now and again two fellows will fling themselves at one another and fight wildly

—until one or the other is drastically knocked out. This was one of those occasions.

Fullwood was exceedingly sorry for himself within two minutes.

Contrary to his belief, Clive could fight amazingly well. He had an excellent knowledge of boxing, and his guard was uncomfortably perfect. Try as he would, Fullwood couldn't smash through it. On the other hand, Clive got in punch after punch—and Fullwood was already marked.

"I'm going to make you apologise to me!" panted Clive, as he fought. "At least, you'll apologise for my dad! You miserable—"

Biff! Crash!

Conversation was interrupted for a moment by a sudden interchange of blows. This time Clive was caught unawares. Fullwood's bare knuckles landed on his jaw just as he was in the middle of a word, and his teeth snapped together with such force that the agony was tremendous. Everything went blurry in Clive's eyes, and he broke away.

But he had delivered a blow on Fullwood's nose at the same time which hurt that member considerably. Fullwood choked in a great breath, and literally leapt at his enemy like a tiger.

His gaze blurred, Clive side-stepped as he sought for a moment's respite. The next instant the scrap was over. Fullwood was unprepared for the swift movement, and he was unable to pull himself up.

He was exactly opposite the gangway, and although he clutched desperately, his speed was too great. His hand just gripped the woodwork, and failed to hold. He went hurtling down.

Splash!

Clive felt his heart leap as he heard the sound. He had feared that Fullwood would dash himself upon the moored boat, which was close against the Wanderer's side. But Fullwood's great speed had sent him outwards in a kind of arc, and he was fairly in the lagoon.

"That'll cool him, anyhow!" muttered Clive, with a deep breath.

His relief was great, and now that the fight was over, he experienced a momentary sensation of shame. After all, it had been a rather disgraceful business, this cat and dog fight on the deck.

And it had ended in a fitting manner. When Fullwood came on board again he would probably be in a chastened mood. A ducking of this sort was exactly what he had required.

Clive leaned over, and watched.

Fullwood was a good swimmer, and he rose out of the transparent depths, and made for the ladder. Apparently, he wasn't chastened, after all. For he stopped swimming, and glared up at Clive.

"You wait!" he shouted fiercely. "I'll smash you for this!"

Clive laughed. He could afford to do so

now. It suddenly occurred to him that the whole thing was ridiculous. All his temper was gone, and he could appreciate the fight at its true worth. He had been an idiot, in the first place, to take any notice of Fullwood's nonsense. Many of the fellows had warned him that Ralph Leslie's tongue was forked.

Grinning, he continued to watch, interested in the water. It seemed more transparent than ever, now that Fullwood was down there, a definite object in the blue. The lagoon was deep here—twenty-five or thirty fathoms, at least—and the coral floor was shrouded in bluish gloom. But for a depth of eight or nine fathoms the water was almost crystal. Fish of all kinds could be seen flitting hither and thither.

And then Clive suddenly felt his heart miss a beat. At least, it seemed to. Coming from the direction of the yacht's stern, and making straight for Ralph Leslie Fullwood, was a long, sleek object. It reminded Clive of a torpedo. A huge thing, ten or twelve feet long. It was deep in the water, but rising as it approached.

And Clive gasped with horror as the truth flashed into his mind.

A shark!

He had seen them before—hovering near the yacht. The lagoon was practically free of the monsters, but a stray one would occasionally glide round. This fellow was comparatively small—but a horrible, deadly menace, nevertheless.

Attracted towards the Wanderer in the hope of snatching some morsel of waste food, probably, it had caught sight of Fullwood in the water. And it was losing no time in attacking its prey.

Just for one second Clive felt appallingly helpless. The shark would get to Fullwood long before the latter could pull himself into safety. And Fullwood knew nothing of his peril—which made the thing infinitely worse.

Clive tried to shout, but his vocal chords had failed owing to the tension of his excitement. Near him, on the deck, lay a golf club—for Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Stokes frequently indulged in a game of clock golf on deck.

Almost without knowing it, Clive gripped the club, and his next movement was automatic. One second of hesitation, and Fullwood would be mauled to death before his eyes! A thought too ghastly for words. There wasn't a split moment to be wasted.

Clive flashed down into the blue in a perfect dive. He didn't seem to realise that he was risking his life for the sake of Fullwood—that it was any odds against him escaping the fate that Fullwood was menaced with.

He merely knew that a human life was in terrible peril, and that it was possible for him to save it. So he dived—judging his direction perfectly.

With a plunge, he entered the water not

three feet in front of the rising shark. For one second they were together—Clive and the shark. They even touched. And then the shark shot away at a tangent, diving deeply. Exactly as Clive had hoped, his sudden plunge had scared the monster away. But his peril was by no means over.

CHAPTER XI.

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH.



FULLWOOD was rather confused.

He had had no knowledge of the shark, and didn't even know that Clive was diving, until he actually struck the water.

But Ralph Leslie had reached the ladder, and he pulled himself clear, and stood up, dripping and running with water. He was breathing hard.

"Bally fool!" he muttered contemptuously.

He thought that Clive had dived in for the purpose of continuing the scrap. Then he stared. Clive had come to the surface, and was making for the ladder with frantic strokes—hampered by a golf-club. But his face was ghastly. It was pale, drawn, and horror-stricken.

"By gad!" gasped Fullwood, jumping.

Behind Clive something had just cut the surface of the water with the edge of a fan. It was a fin—and, indistinctly, Fullwood could see a shape. He could see something whitish—and a gaping black hole in front, with cruel, fearful teeth.

"A shark!" panted Fullwood madly.

His blood seemed to turn to water. He knew that he could do nothing—he was helpless. And something told him that here was an explanation of Clive's dive. The Canadian boy deliberately flung himself into the water to protect him—Fullwood—from this tropic monster!

It was a thought that made Fullwood wince—a thought that penetrated his mean soul.

Clive was scared out of his wits—and didn't mind admitting it. He had a horrible feeling that one of his legs would be snapped off at one bite of those cruel jaws. He acted by instinct, and dived. Something told him that he could never pull himself out of the water in time, although Fullwood was leaning over, ready to grasp his hand.

The shark swept over the spot which Clive had just vacated, and the snap of his jaws was audible—it made Fullwood go sick and faint. He stared down into the water, clutching at the ladder for support. And,

curiously enough, nobody else knew what was happening! No shout came from the deck, and no alarm had been raised. Clive and Fullwood were the only two who knew of this battle of life and death.

The Canadian boy saw the shark sweep over him, and he acted without a second's hesitation. To swing the golf-stick was impossible—he could get no force upon it under water. Furthermore, he was gripping it by the base. There was only one possibility—to use it as a kind of lance.

He plunged with all his strength, and the end of the stick rammed hard against the shark's stomach as it swept overhead. The effect was startling.

The shark sped away with the pace of a streak. It simply vanished, surprised and annoyed at that thrust. Contrary to general belief, sharks won't attack human beings unless provoked, or hungry. There is, of course, an exception to this rule, as there is to every rule. And Clive's shark had only made the attack because the prey had seemed easy.

At the first show of resistance, the shark fled—although it would doubtless return to the attack within a second or two.

There was just time to get into safety.

"Grab hold!" yelled Fullwood desperately.

He grasped Clive's hand, and a moment later the Canadian boy was safe on the ladder. But for that golf-stick he would have undoubtedly perished. He clung there, breathing hard.

"My goodness!" he muttered. "That was pretty near, wasn't it? Thanks, Fullwood!"

"By gad!" said Fullwood blankly.

He couldn't think of anything else to say. To receive thanks from Clive was the very last thing he had expected. They mounted the ladder, and reached the deck again. Neither of them wanted to look overside, to see what had happened to the shark.

"That was a close call!" said Clive, recovering himself. "It's the first time I've met a shark at such close quarters, and once is enough for me! Did you see the way he sheered off when I hit him with that club? I never thought for a moment that it would scare him!"

Fullwood was looking at him queerly.

"I say, Russell, did you dive in on purpose to save me?" he asked. "I mean, did you see the shark comin' for me?"

"Yes," said Clive uncomfortably.

"An' you dived in—" Fullwood paused, and stared. "But why didn't you shout?" he asked.

"It wouldn't have been any good—the brute was almost on you," replied Clive. "Even as it was, I practically landed on top of the beast. I was scared stiff."

"Rot!" growled Fullwood. "A chap who'll risk his life like that wouldn't be scared stiff. I'm beginning to believe what you said about your V.C. uncle. It must run in the blood!"

Clive flushed.

"My uncle admitted he was frightened out

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of his life while he was winning that V.C.," he replied drily. "But let's go below and get changed. I say, we'll keep this mum, shall we? There's no need for anybody else to hear about it."

"Keep it mum?" repeated Fullwood. "Aren't you going to tell everybody that you risked your life to save mine?"

"Oh, don't make a song about it!" said Clive awkwardly. "It's over now—done with. If my pater gets to know, he'll ask Dorrie or Mr. Lee to forbid us bathing in the lagoon. They wouldn't admit that the other shore is shallow and safe. It'll be far better to keep quiet. I don't think anybody saw us."

Fullwood had the decency to feel rather ashamed of himself.

"Gad!" he muttered disgustedly. "What a bally cad you are!"

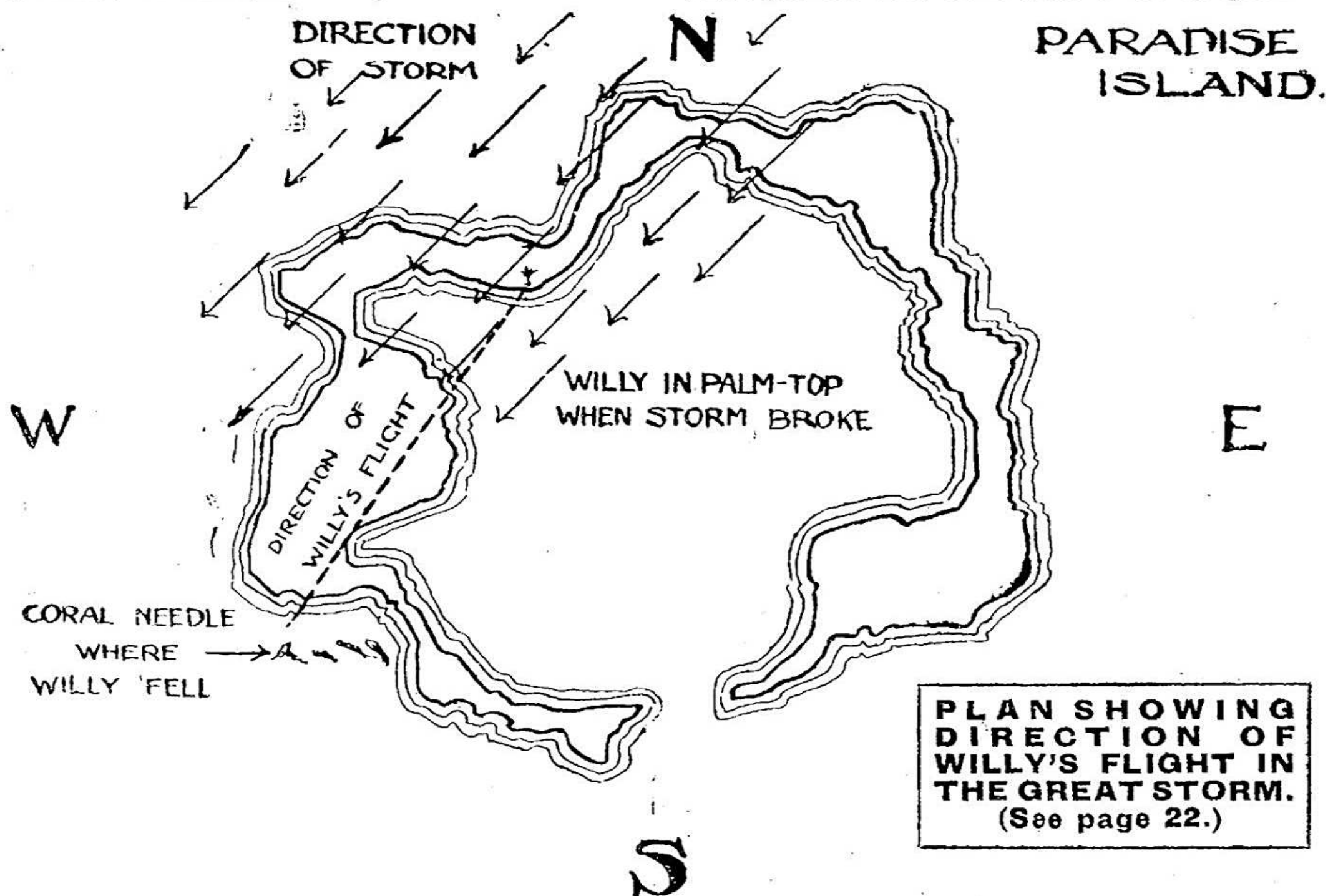
And for Ralph Leslie Fullwood to address himself in such terms was indeed an indication that he wasn't completely bad.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DIVERS.



CLIVE RUSSELL saw no more of Fullwood when he came on deck twenty minutes later. He was changed now—arrayed in spotless white. And he was feeling unusually good-tempered. The recent scrap and its consequences had done him a lot of good.



"That's bally good of you, Russell!" he muttered. "I say, I'm sorry I goaded you like that. I was a bit of a beast, I suppose. I didn't mean what I said about your pater—I must have been dotty!"

"That's all right," said Clive frankly. "Let's forget it."

"Thanks awfully!"

For a moment Fullwood met Clive's eye, and then he extended his hand. They shook with a certain amount of embarrassment, and went below. Clive was pleased. Fullwood wasn't such a rotter, after all.

As for Ralph Leslie, he experienced a revulsion of feeling. His contempt for Clive vanished. The fellow had saved his life, and he was obviously several kinds of a brick. And Fullwood stood gazing at his reflection in his cabin.

The wind was still blowing hard, and the lagoon was ruffled. He went down the ladder, got into the boat, and pushed off. And he was soon rowing across to the north-east beach, where the pearling operations were in progress.

The lagoon was very uneven.

Within a mile of the break in the reef the depth was great, but then it shoaled fairly rapidly, and the entire northern half of the great stretch of water was shallow.

And to the north-west the lagoon floor was literally one vast bed of oysters—enormous oysters that lay clustered in myriads. Their value was a mystery. It was impossible to know whether they contained a vast fortune, or whether they were only valuable for their own worth. For the shells alone represented a small fortune.

Quite a camp had been established on the pearl beach.

Lord Dorrimore had brought every kind of modern apparatus. A great raft had been constructed, and this was moored out over the oyster bed. On the shore were tents, with supplies of every kind. A motor-launch was hovering near, and on the raft were several air-pumps.

Three divers were at work—not pearl divers of the primitive type, however. Prescott had planned to obtain the pearls by native labour—naked divers, who continuously went down, and groped for oysters while they held their breath.

Dorrie's methods were different.

Divers wearing the latest suits were on the job. As the water was shallow, they were capable of working for long periods without exhaustion. And instead of gathering the shells one by one, they collected them by the basket, these being hauled up continuously.

Clive approached in his boat, and paused in his rowing when he drew near to the big raft. The water was so clear that it was possible for him to follow the movements of one of the divers who was almost beneath him. The figure, in its squat helmet, looked grotesque from immediately overhead.

As far as Clive's eye could reach, in all directions, the floor of the lagoon was smothered. It was one big oyster-bed. And it was ugly. In other spots, the lagoon was a paradise of beauty. Here it was precisely the opposite.

Mr. Russell had estimated that the northern section of the lagoon contained millions of oysters—representing countless tons of shell. But shell was one thing, and pearls were another. It was impossible to estimate what pearls there were, for there is nothing more uncertain in this world than pearl-fishing.

But this lagoon had already given forth many wonderful stones.

The old-fashioned method was to expose the raised shells to the sun—allowing them to gape open until the oysters rotted. It was then possible to wash them, and search for pearls. The stench involved in this process was remarkable.

And it was rather a slow business, too.

Lord Dorrimore was using different tactics at present. The oysters were being examined while fresh, although this meant forcing them open. But the Wanderer had come provided with one of the latest methods. Dorrie had invested an enormous amount of capital in the enterprise. He would, of course, consent to Mr. Russell repaying him this money—although he required no profit.

"Any luck, dad?" asked Clive, when he met his father.

"Sure!" replied Mr. Russell briskly. "We've made one or two finds already. The whole thing's a gamble, of course, but I think we're on the winning side. Sometimes we'll open oysters for two or three hours on end, and find nothing—and then we'll

come upon two or three prizes in succession."

"Are they good pearls, dad?"

"There's nothing more uncertain than the size of pearls," replied Mr. Russell. "We've got a wonderful black pearl here—although the black ones aren't the most valuable. Our best pearls are half a dozen white ones—all perfectly round, and of enormous size. They're worth thousands."

"My hat!" said Clive. "And you've hardly started getting the shell up yet!"

"We might work for weeks, and take up nothing but shell," replied Mr. Russell. "But I'm not excited about it. Lord Dorrimore has promised to take the shell away with him—there's plenty of cargo space on the Wanderer. And the shell is worth big money. Whatever happens, Clive, we're made."

"I say, that's ripping!" said Clive happily.

"Oh, and there's another thing," went on his father. "It has been decided that the Wanderer shall leave in about a week. You and all the other guests are to continue your holiday cruise. You'll have a look round the Tongas and the Gilberts, and most of the other islands—"

"But what about the pearls, dad?"

"Oh, I shall remain here with one of the Wanderer's officers and a few men!" replied Mr. Russell. "We can get on with the work while you have your pleasure. The yacht's going to call for us on the way home, and possibly another ship will come out here—a schooner of some sort. I can't expect Lord Dorrimore to spend all his time over my affairs."

Clive looked thoughtful.

"Well, as long as we call back on the way home I suppose it'll be all right," he said. "I've a good mind to stay with you, dad—I'm not keen on going away and leaving you here—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted his father. "You might just as well have a good time with all the others. In any case, nothing's settled yet, so we needn't discuss the matter."

Soon afterwards Clive was lost in interest as he watched the diving operations and all the other details in connection with pearling. He came to the conclusion, like all the rest, that the other part of the island was vastly more interesting.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMING OF THE STORM.



ARCHIE GLEN THORNE yawned lazily.

"What about it, laddies?" he murmured. "I mean to say, all this dashed racket, and so forth. It's frightfully annoying when a chappie is

attempting to obtain his good old forty after the day's weary labour."

Handforth stared.

"You've done a fat lot of weary labour!" he said tartly. "You've been slacking about ever since this morning."

"My dear old horse——"

"You were asleep all the afternoon, under one of the palms," continued Handforth severely. "And now it's bedtime you wonder what's the matter. Dry up, and let somebody else get to sleep!"

"If it's all the same to you, Handy, you're the one to dry up," said Reggie Pitt. "I was just dozing off, and I didn't even hear Archie. But as soon as you started speaking I thought somebody had pushed a hole in the reef."

A number of chuckles came from the darkness.

"I suppose you call that funny?" demanded Handforth sarcastically. "I'm getting fed up with all this noise. You can sleep by yourselves—I'm going out!"

Many sighs of relief went up audibly. But there were two other sighs of resignation. Church and McClure prepared to accompany their leader. If Handforth was going out, they must go with him. It wasn't sheer affection that actuated them, but Handforth was such a reckless beggar that he couldn't be trusted alone.

Crusoe Camp was supposed to be quiet for the night. The camp fire on the beach was out, and everything was shipshape. Within their big dwelling of cane and bamboo the juniors were cool and comfortable. Of course, an insect or two would create a disturbance now and again, but such matters were treated lightly.

Strangely enough the fellows enjoyed this primitive life far better than the orderly perfection of the Wanderer. Sheets, spring mattresses and such-like luxuries were scorned in favour of simple hammocks.

The bamboo house was very big, with open windows, and the hammocks were slung round, side by side. At the moment, practically all the fellows were trying to get to sleep. Archie's lament was by no means unjustified, for the racket he referred to was certainly annoying.

It came from outside, from far across the lagoon.

For some reason the seagulls were making a big uproar.

Occasionally they could be heard screaming as they wheeled over the thundering reef. But to-night their commotion was unusual. They were making a continuous clamour. And it was all the more noticeable because they had never previously been heard after nightfall.

"Archie's right about those giddy gulls," said Handforth, as he prepared to leave his hammock. "Something must have

happened, you know. They may have spotted another ship coming along."

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" said Church. "The gulls wouldn't take any notice of that. I've heard that the glass is falling, and it's quite possible that a storm's coming along. Old Dorrie was looking a bit queer this evening when I spoke to him."

"A storm?" repeated Handforth scornfully. "What rot! Why, the sky's as clear as crystal, and even the wind is dying down. We've had it pretty strong all day and all yesterday, but the weather's lovely."

He swarmed out of his hammock, and immediately bumped into the fellow next to him, incidentally pushing one of his hands forcibly into the unfortunate sleeper's face.

"Gug-gug—— What the——"

Buster Boots sat up, confused.

"Was that your face?" asked Handforth. "Sorry! It was your own fault, though; you shouldn't push it in my way."

"You clumsy fathead!" roared Boots.

"I was fast asleep!"

"All right—go to sleep again!"

And thus lightly dismissing the subject, Handforth put on his shoes, and stalked out. Most of the juniors dropped into their hammocks attired in their shorts and shirts, and they were thus ready to venture out whenever they cared to, without the formality of dressing. In any case, they half lived in the lagoon during the daytime.

Handforth walked out of the shade of the veranda and strode down the beach. Church and McClure accompanied him, and they stood looking across the great stretch of placid water towards the gleaming lights of the Wanderer. Behind them, and on both sides, lay the dark, mysterious depths of the tropic isle. To-night the lagoon was disturbed by strange, silent undulations. They were almost imperceptible until one looked closely.

"Hallo! Those gulls have stopped their din," remarked Church.

"I suppose they were scared over something," said Handforth. "Nothing to be worried about, anyhow. Who was that saying something about a storm? Rubbish! The sky's clear and the wind's nearly gone. The weather's going to be fine yet for days."

"Well, I wouldn't be so sure," said McClure, glancing round. "The stars don't look as clear as usual, and there's something rummy about the moon. Listen to the surf, too. It doesn't usually make all that noise. There's a kind of feeling in the air that something's going to happen."

"That's what I thought, too," agreed Church.

But Handforth dismissed the idea scornfully.

"You shouldn't let your imagination get the better of you, my sons," he said in a fatherly way. "You can take my word for it that there's nothing wrong. Let's get back to bed, and have no more of this nonsense. It was like your rot to drag me out for nothing."

"Eh?" ejaculated Church. "Why, you ass, it was you who dragged us out! Didn't you get out of your hammock—"

"There's no need to argue!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "We don't want to have a scrap on the beach, I suppose? Let's get back."

So they returned without further argument and were soon asleep. But even Handforth had to admit to himself, before dropping off, that there certainly was an uneasy sort of feeling in the very air.

CHAPTER XIV.

OMINOUS SIGNS.



NEXT morning the schoolboy camp was astir early.

Fatty Little was the first one out, and he gave his six assistants no rest until they joined him. Breakfast had to be prepared, and Fatty had no intention of doing all the work himself.

Soon after dawn the entire camp was active. Some of the fellows had noticed that the seagulls had set up their clamouring noise again shortly before dawn. Their screaming cries had contained a significant note of alarm. But now that daylight had come, all was silent. And the juniors were surprised to find that the gulls had vanished.

"That's a bit funny, isn't it?" said Reggie Pitt thoughtfully. "Where the dickens have those birds gone to? And why did they kick up that din during the night? Hallo! The sky isn't so clear as usual!" he added.

With two or three of the others he had walked out from beneath the shelter of the palms, and they stood looking towards the east. Although the sky was clear generally, the sunrise itself was clouded. And the recent high wind had dropped. A great calm had settled over the island.

"A storm, eh?" sniffed Handforth, as he looked round. "What rot!"

"There's no need to display your ignorance, old man," said Nipper gently. "These signs are too obvious to ignore. A calm like this, following a high wind, means something. And don't forget those gulls. Even if we don't get the storm,

there's one about somewhere—and a big one, too. Just listen to the surf!"

"Suppose we go across and look at the reef?" suggested Pitt.

Quite a number of fellows approved of the idea, and they were soon off across the narrow belt of the island—at this point it was no more than a quarter of a mile from inner beach to outer beach. The juniors proceeded at their usual brisk pace, but soon slackened down.

"By jingo!" ejaculated Pitt. "It doesn't feel particularly warm this morning, but I'm all weak. I wonder what it is? I've got a feeling that the air's all charged with a sort of high tension current."

Pitt had put it into the right words. The others had felt the same thing. Electricity seemed to be in the very air, although there was no visible sign of anything different. By the time the juniors reached the outer beach they were positively limp.

"By George!" said Handforth, staring.

Without question, there was something wrong with the sea. It was amazingly calm—absolutely flat. And yet, with this calmness, there was a powerful underswell which stirred the very depths of the ocean. Unknown forces were at work, and although the Pacific was calm on the surface, appearances were deceptive.

After a while the juniors noticed that the flatness was more or less deceptive. The sea was one long series of enormous undulations. And the rollers were breaking upon the reef with a steady, even persistency. Each roller broke with sullen, concentrated fury.

"There's been a fearful uproar somewhere," said Nipper grimly. "If we do get the storm it'll be a real beauty. These rollers mean something—they never come in like this unless there's a tremendous disturbance somewhere. Look at them—each breaker is just as powerful as the last. They're not coming in series, as they usually do."

The sun was already up, but the sea didn't sparkle in the usual way. The surface was dazzling where the sunlight fell, but otherwise the whole vast expanse of water was black and ominous, and the long undulations gave one the impression that the once-blue sea had turned to treacle.

If the boys were impressed by these ominous signs, those on board the *Wanderer* were no less disturbed. Both Nelson Lee and Dorrie were out early, and they found Captain Burton shaking his shaggy old head in a solemn manner.

"Looks a bit threatenin', eh?" suggested Dorrie.

"Threatening isn't the word," replied the skipper grimly. "There's one of the biggest of all storms coming. We may not

get it for hours yet, but it'll be a miracle if we escape it altogether. I'm thinking of those boys on the island," he added, glancing across the lagoon.

"Won't they be safe?" asked Nelson Lee.

"They'll be safe enough if they keep to their shelters; but there's no telling what the young rascals will get up to," replied Captain Burton. "I wish you'd get across, Mr. Lee, and give them a word of warning."

"I'll bring them all back with me," said Nelson Lee promptly.

"I don't think it'll be necessary to do that," replied the captain. "As long as they refrain from any of their usual tricks they'll be safe. But there must be no expeditions on to the coral, no rowing about in the lagoon. When the storm breaks it'll come with a rush."

And so, before breakfast, Nelson Lee visited Crusoe Camp, and earnestly warned the boys against venturing out upon the coral, or going far from their shelters. They all promised to remain in or near the camp.

After breakfast there were a few other changes—although they were more obvious to the experienced eye than any other. The calmness was oppressive, but there seemed to be no actual danger. And Irene & Co. were highly indignant when it was suggested that they should remain on board the *Wanderer*.

"If the boys can be in camp, why can't we?" demanded Doris warmly. And the other girls echoed her protest—with the result that the girls went ashore as usual. But when they had a look at the sea from the outer beach, they began to appreciate the menace.

The sun was shining, but it had none of its usual brilliance. And the horizon, instead of being clear cut, was hazy and indistinct. The entire surface of the sea was oily and smooth, and the rollers were breaking on the reef with a dull thunder which was a threat in itself.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DREADFUL HUSH.



EVEN Handforth felt uneasy. He had scoffed the previous night, but he scoffed no longer. The air was charged with a vague threat, and it was impossible to

ignore it.

The whole of Paradise Island was wrapped in a complete silence. Not a single tree whispered—not a palm frond moved. The stillness was uncanny—and was trebly intensified by the continuous roar of the surf from every side of the atoll.

But as the morning slowly passed, the sense of dread became less. Hour after hour the conditions remained unaltered, and the juniors grew accustomed to them. They were becoming convinced that the storm had missed the island, and that there was nothing to worry about.

"What did I tell you?" said Handforth, with a sniff. "It only shows what the imagination can do. It was a bit threatening this morning, but this calm will soon—"

He broke off, staring. He and a few of the others were on the beach where the water of the lagoon was lapping gently upon the white coral sands. Handforth was staring at the palms along the rim of the lagoon.

Without the slightest warning, the tops of several palms had rocked to and fro, tossing about as though pulled by wires. There wasn't a breath of wind where the boys were standing.

The palms became restful again, and the surface of the lagoon was whipped into froth in several places. Then a whirl of hot wind struck Handforth in the face, and passed.

"My hat!" he ejaculated. "What was that?"

"Simply another sign that we're not out of the wood," replied Nipper grimly. "There's a wind coming—and it'll be like something solid when it arrives. These isolated gusts are just forerunners."

"Do you think it'll be a cyclone?" asked Church eagerly.

"I hope not!" retorted Nipper.

"I saw a cyclone in a picture once," said Handforth thoughtfully. "It was a ripping picture, too. It was called 'The Cyclone of Doom,' and there was a terrific wind in it. Everything was blown to the dickens, and sheets of water flooded down—"

"Yes, I know all about those cyclones!" growled Nipper. "All made in Hollywood—with aeroplane propellers and hose pipes! But a real cyclone is a different proposition, old man—and for our own sakes I hope we don't get one to-day."

"It would be rather exciting," said Tommy Watson.

"My dear chap, if a cyclone struck this island direct—if it passed right over us—there'd be precious little island left afterwards," said Nipper grimly. "It's the terror of the Pacific, and I'm not exactly bubbling with eagerness to breathe my last."

It wasn't until the mid-day meal was over that the coming storm definitely showed itself. Nipper and Nelson Lee and Dorrie and practically all the sailors had known what to expect, and were prepared. They had all read the signs accurately. To many of the others, the storm was a novelty.

It appeared over the north-east. The haze in that direction was heavier than elsewhere, and the horizon became inky, and remained so. After about an hour, this

intense blackness became something solid—it looked like an enormous cliff rising out of the sea, in the far distance. It was too massive to be a mere cloudbank. But as it rose higher, and spread itself over the entire sky, the St. Frank's fellows felt their uneasiness growing. They were aware of their own insignificance in the face of this terrifying exhibition of nature's forces.

The bank of dense clouds was changing to a dull bronze hue, and it filled the sky along the northern horizon. And there was now a remarkable change. For hours the storm had gathered slowly and imperceptibly. But now it gathered at tremendous speed.

The development was so swift that the boys found themselves looking at the sky in amazement and awe. The sun was practically gone. A dimness settled over the island—a kind of half-light which was ominous in itself. The surf was still roaring, and the breakers were gathering in force.

And then, at length, the wind came in earnest. It swept down upon the atoll with a fierce, devastating rush. The palms bent nearly double, and the other trees in the groves groaned and shrieked under the sudden onslaught. The air thickened, and the darkness increased.

On the beach, a number of the juniors were nearly bowled over by the sudden rush.

"Now we've got it!" gasped Watson. "By jingo, what a wind!"

"This is nothing!" shouted Nipper. "Come on, you chaps, let's get in the grove—there'll be shelter there. The storm hasn't started yet—this is just a preliminary taste."

"A taste!" roared Handforth. "Do you call this gale a taste? Why, the storm can't be worse than this when it's at the full! Hi, Willy! What are you doing with that monkey? Leave the young beggar alone!"

Handforth minor was near by with Marmaduke in his arms. The pet monkey was shivering in every limb with fear, and he was clinging to his young master with a desperate kind of terror.

"All right, Marmy—keep your pecker up, old man," said Willy soothingly. "There's nothing to be frightened about."

But perhaps Marmaduke knew more than Willy did—his animal instinct was unerring. The leader of the Third was perfectly cool about the coming storm—it didn't worry him in the least. But Marmaduke knew better! His pitiful terror was not without cause.

"There you are!" said Willy suddenly. "It's blowing over!"

He was astonished—as, indeed, were most of the other fellows. As suddenly as it had come, the wind was dying down, and then it dropped altogether. The resulting stillness was uncanny.

The hush was so absolute that it could be felt. Not a leaf moved, and even the roar of the surf had quietened down to a ghost of its former thunder. There was something positively dreadful in this weird silence.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INFERNO.



WILLY HANDFORTH looked at Marmaduke anxiously. The monkey was showing greater signs of terror than ever—although there was nothing to be

scared about, as far as Willy could see.

Some of the other fellows had hurried across the island to the outer beach. They wanted to see what was coming—for even the most sceptical was now convinced that nature was gathering her elements together for a devastating onslaught.

"Cheer up!" said Willy soothingly. "There you are, have a walk round," he added, putting Marmaduke on the sands. "There's nothing to be frightened about, you young ass! Hi! What the— Come back, blow you!"

But Marmaduke had no sooner found himself free from Willy's grasp than he made a bee-line for the nearest palm. He streaked up it like a flash of lightning—chattering shrilly with terror. His fright was more than Willy could understand.

The monkey had chosen an isolated palm—one that stood on the rim of the lagoon, some yards distant from any of its companions. Willy ran up, and could see Marmaduke crouching among the foliage.

"Come down, you silly young idiot!" he shouted anxiously.

But Marmaduke took no notice. Willy looked round, and then started. Somehow, the air seemed to be vibrating. The stillness was just as ominous as ever, but now there was an added throb in the very atmosphere. Handforth minor didn't even attempt to elucidate the mystery—but he instinctively felt that Marmaduke's position was unsafe.

"All right—we'll see who's master!" he said grimly.

With an agility scarcely less than Marmaduke's, the fag leapt at the palm, and swarmed up. If Marmaduke wouldn't come to him, he would go to Marmaduke! He regretted releasing the monkey now, but he would soon re-capture him.

He climbed higher and higher, and at last, perspiring so freely that he streamed, he reached the palm-top. All his skin seemed to be tightened, in spite of the perspiration, and his hair felt crackly. Undoubtedly, the air was heavily charged with electricity in some form or another.

"Now then!" growled Willy. "Got you, my lad!"

But he spoke too soon. Marmaduke was so terrified that his eyes were rolling, and his teeth chattered. He took no notice of Willy, but slithered back out of reach, and the next second he was racing to the ground at such a speed that he appeared to be falling.

Buster Boots and Bob Christine and Nicodemus Trotwood were hurrying along the sands near by, and Willy let out a yell.

"Hi! Collar him!" he shouted, exasperated.

The three juniors looked round, and were just in time to see Marmaduke streak across the sands. More by luck than anything else, Buster Boots grabbed him, and held him tightly.

"Good!" roared Willy. "Hang on to him, Buster!"

But at this moment the whole world turned into an inferno, and the events of the next minutes were confused and blurred.

In order to understand exactly what happened, we'll go with the other juniors to the outer shore—where they were enabled to get a full look at the Pacific towards the north east—that is, in the direction from which the storm was blowing up.

Nipper and Handforth and a good many others were included in the party, and they halted just before emerging from the belt of woodland. They had been brought to a standstill by a sign from Nipper.

"Listen!" he said tensely.

Even Handforth remained silent. For there was something in the air that startled him. It was that strange vibration which Willy was listening to at the same moment—before climbing the palm.

But it was a sound as well as a vibration—a deep, low, throbbing hum, coming on the air from a great distance, apparently. It increased with every second, until the ears of the listeners were singing painfully with the intensity of it.

"What is it?" whispered Church huskily.

"It's the storm," replied Nipper. "We'd better not go out on the reef—the awful thing might burst any second—"

"By gad, look!" gasped Fullwood.

He was a little in advance of the others, and he could see out across the sands to the open sea. They all pressed forward, and stared. At that moment a rush of hot air came surging inland from the reef. It hit the boys like a blow.

But they didn't take any notice—they were looking at the sea.

Close to the island it was very much the same as usual, except for the thick, treacherous appearance. But far beyond—two or three miles out—the appearance was staggering.

The ocean was absolutely flat, and had the appearance of frosted glass. It was beaten to this uniform flatness by the devastating force of the wind which was sweeping towards the atoll. The power of that wind



Willy's figure could be clearly seen on the coral needle—clinging desperately, and waving his hand.

can be judged by the effect it had upon the sea.

"Run!" yelled Nipper. "It's death to stay here, exposed like this!"

They didn't stop to ask any questions—but fled inland as fast as their legs could carry them. It needed no second warning from Nipper to assure them that their peril was great. Incidentally, Nelson Lee was bitterly regretting his decision to let the boys and girls remain on the island—but it was too late to fetch them on board the Wanderer now. Even Nelson Lee had never dreamed that the storm would develop with this appalling violence.

Stumbling, gasping, the juniors found themselves in the heart of the small grove which separated the outer shore from the lagoon. That vibration had now swelled into a drumming roar which filled their ears and dulled their senses. They were almost upon the lagoon—and thus protected by the entire grove from the full force of the coming storm.

And then the wind hit Paradise Island.

It was like a shattering blow—like an earthquake. Dully, the juniors heard the coconuts thudding down from the palm-trees. They saw the palms bending and swaying. But that was only a momentary vision.

For the next second, the atoll appeared

to be shattered into a thousand fragments as the explosion of the first thunderclap shook the universe. The blaze of dazzling lightning was simultaneous with the accompanying thunder.

The juniors were flung down on every side, and it seemed that the end of the world had come.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT HAPPENED TO WILLY.



THE storm simply howled with one Satanic yell.

It was like nothing on earth. Not merely a shriek of wind and a roar of tortured foliage—but a continuous shout of horror. To the stunned and dazed St. Frank's fellows, the storm was terrifying in the extreme. Not one of them ever believed that they would come out alive.

And the first crash of thunder was followed in rapid succession by a prolonged series. It was like the continuous firing of a thousand six-inch guns, one on top of the other. Every living soul on the island was deafened by the ghastly commotion. There was hardly an ear that wasn't bleeding from the effects.

It seemed impossible, indeed, that any storm could be so violent. This was surely the end of all things! But in reality—as Lord Dorrimore well knew—such outbursts are common enough in the Pacific. And they are far less dangerous than they appear to be.

It wasn't even a cyclone—but the tail end of a fearful storm that had probably travelled thousands of miles. Curiously enough, such storms lose none of their power as they exhaust themselves. They finally peter out, but almost to the last they maintain their shattering ferocity. They diminish in size, but not in power.

In nine cases out of ten, these storms sweep over the Pacific, missing islands and trade routes, and doing no damage. But afterwards the ocean for thousands of miles feels the effect—the restlessness of the sea extending in all directions.

Paradise Island, a gem of the Pacific, was not exempt from the perils that beset the tropics. It was as though Nature felt impelled to exercise a compensating law. A paradise most of the time, the lonely atoll had to pay the price for its beauty by these occasional visitations.

At first there was no rain, but when it did come it was rain in earnest! It drove inland from the north-east, and across the lagoon, like a solid sheet. It fell en masse, smothering everything in its first onslaught. Happily, it was brief, settling down into an ordinary torrential downpour immediately afterwards.

But what else had been happening during these fateful moments?

For the first blow of the storm was the worst—and it was within the space of a few sensational minutes that most of the damage happened. Trees were being uprooted, leaves were being stripped by the million—and the Wanderer, at her anchorage, was sent heeling over as though by a giant hand.

And what of Willy in the palm-top?

His position was probably the most exposed of any on the island—although he hadn't even thought of this when he raced up the palm to fetch Marmaduke down. And the storm hit the island in its first devastating blow before the fag could even attempt to descend to the ground.

This particular palm-tree was well down the beach, and quite to itself. The effect was startling. The rush of wind, beating everything flat as it swept across the narrow section of the island, took Willy's palm-tree fairly in its stride.

In the rear, the other palms were bending down like whips, for they are capable of withstanding these storms as a rule. But for once there was a casualty.

The wind, rushing with the velocity of immeasurable speed, flattened the other palms, but caught the top of Willy's like the edge of a knife. Handforth minor knew scarcely anything about it. He only had sufficient sense left to grab—and to grab hard.

An appalling thing happened.

The entire palm-top was whipped off from the stem as a daisy-head may be decapitated by a cane. And the next second, caught irresistibly in the rush, the palm-top was hurtling over the western section of the island, three or four hundred feet in the air.

And Willy Handforth was clinging to it with the desperation of the doomed. If he had any capacity left for thinking at all—which is doubtful—he must have realised that there was not one chance in a thousand. But the luckless fag was stunned by the rush of the wind, and the explosive crashes of the thunder. His fingers gripped mechanically.

The palm-top was whirled along like a feather—shooting over the western rim of the island, towards the deadly reef. And the direction was exactly over the encampment of Irene & Co.*

The girls were just as startled as the St. Frank's fellows—and probably more so. By the purest chance, Doris Berkeley caught a fleeting glimpse of the palm-top as it hurtled far overhead. She and the others were flat on the sands, praying for deliverance.

It wasn't completely dark—and the rain

* A glance at the map of Paradise Island on page 15 will make this clear.

hadn't yet commenced to fall. Between two of the lightning flashes, the thing happened. Doris saw the palm-top against the leaden sky, and for a fraction of a second she had a clear, never-to-be-forgotten glimpse of Willy Handforth clinging dazedly to the broken fragment.

As though held by unseen wires, Willy's extraordinary conveyance—a kind of magic carpet—swept right over the edge of the island, and carried the junior out beyond the reef. In cold fact, he was being driven out over the open sea, where all hope would be gone.

But the palm-top had hardly crossed the foaming coral reef when it encountered a kind of air-pocket—a wind eddy of some kind which the storm had manufactured by its wizardry.

Willy and the palm-top dropped sheer for twenty feet. They fluttered like a leaf on the breeze, dropped again, and hesitated. Then, as though deposited there by a magic hand, the palm-top fluttered on to the sea. And Willy Handforth awoke to the full realisation of his position as he felt the cooling water about him.

And if his position had been perilous before, it was now trebly so. For he was in the wide ocean, with the barrier reef in front of him—and a mighty roller came along and lifted him on its crest, ready to send him crashing upon the razor-like edges of the reef.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MIRACLE OF THE STORM.



DORIS BERKELEY was startled and horrified by what she had seen.

At first she couldn't appreciate the full significance of the happening, for her mind was stunned by the crashing of the elements. The fury of the heavens had concentrated to batter human thought into dull indifference.

Then came the rain.

First of all, the swamping, drenching cloudburst, and then the seething down-pour, torrential and fierce. With it the wind was robbed of much of its appalling strength. And the whole of Paradise Island was in the agony of a fierce, tropical electric storm.

But the end of the world hadn't come, after all. The people on the Wanderer—the boys in their camp—the girls in theirs—all began to recover their scattered senses. From first to last, that devastating battery of the elements had only lasted a few tense minutes.

But it was not to be imagined the affair was over.

Even now, the thunderstorm was twenty times more violent than any summer tempest the boys could remember in England. The wind roared, the trees screamed and whistled, and the lagoon whipped itself into a fury which none would have believed possible. And the rain hissed down in one long, continuous cascade.

One of the first to recover was Doris Berkeley. She was actuated by the fleeting vision she had glimpsed of Willy Handforth, sweeping across the island to what seemed certain death.

"Renie—Renie!" she shouted feverishly. "Marjorie—Vi! Quick! We've got to do something! He may be in the surf!"

"It's all right, Doris—it'll soon be over!" panted Irene Manners, her fair hair streaming all over her rain-swept forehead. "Don't get excited—we're all safe!"

"But Willy—Willy!" cried Doris wildly. "Didn't you see?"

"Oh, Doris, please!"

"Didn't you see him in that torn palm-tree top?" shouted Doris, shaking Irene fiercely. "The tree must have been uprooted, and Willy was in it! The wind was sweeping him over us—towards the reef! He's dead by this time, I expect—but we ought to go and see!"

The other girls, gradually recovering from the first shock, almost forgot the storm as they listened to Doris' seemingly wild words.

"Don't you believe me?" she went on, as she sensed her companions' incredulity. "It's true—it's true! Oh, what's the use? Why don't you believe me? We can't waste a second!"

Her quick brain had told her that if any aid was to be sent to Willy Handforth, it must come from the girls. The boys' camp was too far off—and the Wanderer was just as impossible. But the girls' camp was on the edge of the woods, just where the island narrowed down to a mere ridge. And Willy had been carried in that direction.

Doris could see that the others were suspecting her sanity, and she waited no longer. She ran swiftly towards the outer shore, caring nothing for the storm. Beneath the trees it was gloomy, and the noise was thunderous—even without the crashing of the elements from the sky.

After a moment of hesitation, the other girls followed—dreading that Doris would do herself harm in her obvious madness. But Doris was not only fully sane, but acutely alive to the situation. She was acting with amazing presence of mind, under the circumstances.

Once out from the trees, she paused, staring down the coral strand at the reef. It was lighter now—the dense masses of

lowering clouds were scurrying overhead, and tearing themselves asunder. The black pall which had fallen at the commencement of the storm was beginning to lift.

"Oh!" panted Doris frantically.

She was both aghast and relieved. Willy was within sight—out there beyond the foaming surf, clinging desperately to a pinnacle of exposed coral—a sharp needle which rose up acutely out of the sea. Although his position was apparently hopeless, it was an immense relief for Doris to see him alive.

And she was amazed, too. Contrary to her expectations, the surf was not excessively fierce. It appeared to be beaten down, and held in check. Willy Handforth owed his life to this fact.

And the reason was obvious. The storm, tearing down from the north-east, had converted that shore of the island to a raging vortex of gigantic breakers and foam—a whirlpool in which no human life could live for a second.

But on the opposite beach—the southwestern shore—the effect was exactly the opposite. The wind, rushing off the land, was beating the sea back, instead of hurtling it forward. And the natural force of the rollers was nullified by the fury of the hurricane. The sea was only moderately rough, and the surf was creamy and sluggish.

But at any moment the wind might check—and during that check the rollers would come surging back with redoubled vigour—to sweep Willy off his perch with one stupendous yell of triumph. If anything was to be done, it had to be put into operation instantly.

Willy's escape was one of those miracles which occur in every storm. There is never a tornado in the great central plain of the United States without a number of people living through what had appeared to be certain death.

Once in the sea, Willy had clung to his decapitated palm-top as desperately as ever, and he had been swept on to the coral, mercifully protected from the treacherous rock by the palm. But then he had been washed free of it, and by wonderful presence of mind he had clung to the rock, climbing higher and higher, out of reach of the beating surf.

But he had little hope.

For the moment he was safe, but between him and the sands lay a stretch of razor-edged coral. It was impassable in the calmest weather, and a death-trap during a storm. One slip, and the victim would be swept over, and literally torn to shreds by the cruel edges. The foam was sweeping over it with great force. If the wind dropped and the waves were allowed to have their way, the reef would be a whirlpool of death.

CHAPTER XIX.

IRENE & CO. TO THE RESCUE.



IRENE MANNERS proved her presence of mind, too.

Seeing Doris rush off, apparently demented, Irene had followed, but not before running to the outer wall of the primitive house and tearing down a long coil of rope. Irene never knew why she did this, but perhaps she imagined that Doris would run out into the surf and need help.

At all events, her action was providential. She and Marjorie Temple and Violet Watson and the others came upon Doris as the latter was staring out across the coral strand. They were immensely relieved to find her still safe.

"Doris!" panted Irene. "Oh, Doris, why—"

"Look!" interrupted Doris tensely.

She pointed, and there were shouts and little screams of amazement and consternation. Willy's figure could be clearly seen on the coral needle, clinging there desperately, and waving his hand. For Willy himself was well aware of the girls' presence, and he waved his hand to reassure them.

"Then—then it was true?" gasped Marjorie. "But—but we can't do anything! We can never rescue him from that dreadful place. I don't understand. How did he get there? How—"

"I tell you he was blown clean over on a broken palm-tree!" interrupted Doris fiercely. "He must have fallen into the surf. Thank heaven he's still safe! What can we do? What can—I know!" she added excitedly. "A rope! Somebody dash back for a rope—"

"I've brought one!" gasped Irene.

"You've brought one?" repeated Doris breathlessly. "Oh, Renie, you're simply a marvel! Quick! If we can throw it to him—"

"But we daren't pull him across that coral!" broke in Violet. "It's as sharp as needles, and he'll be torn to bits!"

"Let's get the rope across first," said Doris practically.

Some of the girls were dressed in their simple white drill camping frocks, now sadly dishevelled and stained, while others were in their bathing costumes, having been actually in the lagoon ten minutes before the storm broke. Ena Handforth and Tessa Love were among these latter.

Ena was desperate with anxiety. At first she hadn't believed a word of what Doris had said, but now she had the evidence of her own eyes. Three of the girls had to force her back, or she would have rushed down on those fatal coral knives.

In the meantime Doris acted.

Swinging the rope loose, she hurried down as far as she dared. Her heart nearly failed her. Willy was far out, a clear hundred feet distant, an insignificant small space, apparently, but certain death between. Doris feared that she would never be able to throw the rope across.

She summoned all her strength and swung the rope round, and then she hurled it. Unaided, her effort would have been useless. But the wind caught the rope, lifted it high, and carried it. The end fell well past the pinnacle, but to the side. A groan went up from the girls. It instantly changed to an exciting shout, however, as the rope was caught in the foam and carried sideways.

The next moment Willy had it, for he had been ready, and he was full of admiration for the girls, whom he had never suspected of such presence of mind.

He was already beginning to get an inkling of Doris Berkeley's plan.

"Tie it!" she shouted, above the scream of the storm. "Tie it as high as you can, and we'll tie ours! Then swing across!"

Only a few of her words reached Willy above the roar of the surf. But he understood.

"All right!" he yelled. "I've got you!"

It was a simple plan, a brain-wave. The beach shelved steeply from the palms on this outer shore, and if Willy could only tie his end of the rope secure the girls could then make their own end fast high in one of the trees. In this way the line would be stretched tautly across the treacherous coral. And Willy would be able to swing hand over hand to safety.

It was indeed a brilliant idea.

The coral pinnacle was high, and in spite of the buffeting wind and blinding spray, Willy tied the end secure. He waved his hand to signify that all was well, and the watching girls acted at once. They were all tensely excited, for they knew how great the peril was.

"He's done it!" shouted Doris breathlessly. "Hurrah! Quick! I'll dash up this tree with the rope. Signal to Willy as soon as I call."

"Go ahead!" panted Irene.

Doris was in bathing dress, too, and in spite of grazes and scratches she swarmed up the tree with all the agility granted by her fine physical condition. It was a stout palm, and was protected from the wind by the island behind. The girls, in fact, were standing in a kind of safety zone, with the storm tearing and shouting overhead.

Doris was now praying that the storm would continue, for any abatement would mean the rising of the sea over the reef.

She clearly understood that Willy's safety depended upon the force of the wind.

"All right!" she called down. "It's tied!"

"Hurrah!"

Shouting and waving, the girls signalled to Willy. The rope was now stretched across like a tight-rope, at least Tessa Love thought so. Her own knowledge of tight-ropes, and her skill as a circus performer naturally led her mind into such a channel.

Willy, scarcely believing that safety was within sight, grasped the rope and swung outwards. The girls' splendid efforts were about to prove successful. Everything would depend upon the next few minutes. But the storm was diminishing rapidly; the rain was ceasing, and the wind was losing its steady power.

It was still stupendous, but hesitated now and again. And the rollers, in consequence, were gathering force. They were no longer being beaten back. But there was still a chance.

Willy had only just swung outwards when there came a crashing of foam, a thunder of water, and he was beaten back. He struck the coral rock heavily, and lost his grip. Half stunned, his left arm numbed with pain, he just managed to save himself from plunging down.

And he was helpless. Battered and dazed, he little cared what happened. The fight was too much. With the way to safety in front of him he could not take advantage of it.

The storm had won the battle.

CHAPTER XX.

TESSA'S DESPERATE VENTURE.



"WHY doesn't he come — why doesn't he come?"

Willy's sister was nearly distracted. She wasn't an emotional girl as a rule; she was famed, indeed, for her cool, calculating matter-of-factness. But in this desperate trial she threw all reserve to the winds.

She and Tessa were side by side, just in front of the others, graceful figures in their bathing costumes, with their hair waving in the wind. The surf was roaring and hissing at their feet, and Willy, out beyond the treacherous strand, had ceased to respond to the signals.

"Didn't you see?" asked Tessa tensely. "He was caught by that last wave—it

nearly carried him completely away. The next one will. He's stunned, or something—perhaps he's wedged there!"

All the girls were frantic.

"What can we do?" breathed Ena, her face haggard with anxiety. "Oh, Tessa, what can we do? Why don't you tell me? Where's Ted? Ted ought to be here—"

"The boys don't know anything about it," interrupted Doris. "Just as we were on the point of success, too. The wind's dropping, and the storm's going over. In no time those rollers will be coming in with awful force, and poor Willy will be swept off, and—and—"

It was cruel that the plan should have miscarried when it was nearly on the point of success. But for that one wave Willy would have been across by now and safe. To stand there and see another huge roller dash him to death was impossible. Something had to be done, no matter how drastic.

"Yes," said Tessa, "I've thought of something!"

It was the tone of her voice rather than her words that caused Doris to grasp her companion. But Tessa pulled herself away, ran forward, and leapt at the rope. It was high above, and none of the other girls

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She caught her breath in, horrified at the prospect.

"Oh!" breathed Tessa, looking out with a keen sparkle in her eyes. "I wonder. Yes, I believe it's possible! Anyhow, it's the only chance. I've got to do it!"

"Do what?" asked Doris sharply.

"Have you thought of something, Tess?" The other girl nodded, and she compressed her lips. She had been on the point of telling the others of her intention, but refrained. Instinctively, she knew they would drag her back, and prevent her from her purpose.

Willy's life was in the balance, and this was a time for desperate means.

could have reached it. But Tessa was like india-rubber—she soared up, gripped the rope, and held. Before going to the Moor View School she had been one of the star performers in a circus, and she had never forgotten, and had never allowed herself to get out of training.

"Oh, Tessa!" shouted Irene, alarmed. "What are you doing?"

"Quick—stop her!" cried Doris.

But Tessa was already out of reach. Swinging hand over hand, with infinite grace and lightness, she went out across the death-trap. The other girls were silenced, utterly dumb with the tense

apprehension of the situation. They had never dreamed of this.

One slip and the girl would perish, one faulty strand in the rope, and it would part. But such thoughts had never entered Tessa's head. The rope was there, taut and inviting, and she had been unable to resist the temptation. There was one solution to this problem and one only. And Tessa was the only human being on Paradise Island who could now go to Willy Handforth's aid.

Gasps of joy went up when the girl reached her objective. She was on the coral needle; she was pulling at Willy. Doris wanted to shout with excitement but she was unable to utter a sound.

Willy, nearly losing his grip, stunned and battered by the waves until he was almost senseless, was dimly aware that somebody was near him. He had been losing grip, and was indifferent. But now he made a huge effort, and attempted to pull himself together.

"Tessa!" he muttered, recognising her.

"It's all right, Willy—there's still a chance!" she said breathlessly. "Can you help yourself at all? I'm going to take you across the rope. Try and grip—"

She broke off, and clutched madly at the coral. With a surging, devastating roar, one of the breakers came plunging in. Every moment the sea was getting rougher. Tessa and Willy were smothered, nearly torn from their grip, and the surf retreated disappointed.

On the shore the watchers had experienced a terrible moment. The suspense of this affair was becoming almost unbearable.

"Quick, Willy—now's our chance!" breathed Tessa, as the foam receded. "You've got to—"

Again she paused—this time because she noted that Willy was indifferent. The wave had battered him against the coral so violently that consciousness had nearly fled. He was still capable of looking at her, and gripping slightly, but it was touch and go.

Tessa set her teeth and determined to make one grim effort. She had never bargained for this when setting out on her mission, but there was only one possibility left. She had hoped for Willy to grasp her round the shoulders, thus lightening her own task.

But that was now impossible.

Climbing higher up the pinnacle, she dragged Willy inch by inch—until they were both at the very summit, clinging to the rugged rock. How Tessa got Willy into her arms she never knew—but she managed it somehow. And then, gripping him, she placed her feet upon the rope, and started off on the most terrible tight-rope walk of her life!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ROPE OF LIFE.



REGINALD PITT took a deep breath.

"Phew, that was pretty stiff while it lasted!" he ejaculated. "The rain's holding up a bit now, and the wind isn't so bad.

Wonder if the storm will get worse again?"

"I don't think so," replied Nipper, as he sat up. "I'm pretty certain we only got the tail-end of this storm—otherwise it wouldn't be sheering off so quickly."

"My hat! We've had quite enough!" said Handforth huskily.

"More than enough!" grinned Nipper. "It was the first onslaught that was the worst—the first three or four minutes. Imagine it! That terrific blast is still roaring across the Pacific at the same velocity! It makes a chap think. I wonder how many ships were in its path?"

"I say, what about the girls?" asked Tommy Watson anxiously.

"The girls?"

"Yes—they're in their camp, you know," replied Tommy. "The silly cuckoos! Mrs. Stokes ought to have made them go on board! I'm worrying about Vi," he added, with concern.

"You needn't fret yourself, old son," said Nipper. "The girls' camp was better protected than ours—but, all the same, we'll run round and see how they fared. It'll be something to do, too."

Practically all the juniors were eager. They were more or less jumpy and excited, and they were all truly anxious about Irene & Co. The fury of the storm had startled them. And even now it was tremendous. The groves were lashing and bending under the fury of the wind, and the rain was coming down in a steady down-pour.

"I say, seen Willy anywhere?" asked Chubby Heath, running up.

"Isn't he with you fags?" demanded Handforth abruptly.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Buster Boots, aghast. "I remember now! Willy was up in that palm-tree a minute before the storm broke."

"Palm-tree?" repeated Handforth sharply.

"Which palm-tree?"

"Why, that one standing——" Buster broke off and gasped. "Great Scott," he yelled, "it's gone!"

"Gone!"

"Look!" roared Buster. "The top's clean off it! And Willy was up there! He'd gone up after Marmaduke!"

"Great pip!" panted Handforth. "My minor! Just like that young fathead, to get himself into trouble! But where is he? What's happened to the palm-tree? I say, this looks pretty awful!"

"Perhaps he fell in the lagoon!" suggested somebody.

"It'll be a good thing if he did," said Handforth anxiously. "He wouldn't have come to any harm then, but we'd better search round—"

He broke off and ran up and down. There were thousands of torn leaves and minor branches everywhere, but no sign of a huge palm-top. And as Willy wasn't in evidence, injured or otherwise, a certain amount of the anxiety began to die down.

"Oh, he must have got down all right," said Chubby Heath. "He's probably among the trees somewhere. If he'd been hurt we should find him somewhere near by. Let's go and see how the girls got on."

Not one of the juniors dreamed that the top of the palm-tree had been torn off and carried into the air like a feather. Such an incredible thing never occurred to them. And it was assumed that Willy was knocking about somewhere, safe and sound.

Hurrying along the coral beach, the crowd of fellows went round the bathing cove, and then continued past the woodland stretch until they arrived at the girls' camp. It was a long run, and they reached their destination breathless. To their surprise, the place was deserted.

"There's nobody here!" said Nipper. "That's queer! I was sure the girls were—Hullo, look at that, by Jove!"

He pointed past the picturesque dwelling which the girls had made their headquarters—the primitive house that Clive Russell and his father had built during their original sojourn on the island. Deep in the rain-soaked coral sand were numbers of footprints, all leading towards the outer beach. The deduction was obvious.

"The reckless bounders!" said Tommy Watson indignantly. "They've gone to the reef, to have a look at the storm, I expect! I'll tick 'em off for this!"

They hurried on, and soon burst through the trees upon the strand. At this point the reef was narrow, and only a small belt of trees had to be passed through. Handforth and Nipper, who were two of the first to emerge, suddenly checked themselves, and stared.

"Good heavens!" said Nipper huskily.

There was every reason for his amazement. Just to the right, all the girls were standing—fixed and rigid, staring at another figure in mid-air—and only a bare foot or so above the deadly surf, which was now racing over the treacherous coral like a whirlpool.

Tessa Love was just half-way across, and she carried Willy Handforth in her arms. The rope was swaying in the wind, and all the watching girls were ready to scream. It seemed impossible that Tessa could ever get across in safety. The sagging rope was literally a slack-wire, and the driving rain and the buffeting wind made the girl's task perilous in the extreme. One slip, and both she and Willy would plunge into the boiling surf.

So far the girl had conquered. Her skill, never forgotten, coupled with her natural bravery, stood her in good stead. The St. Frank's fellows crowded up, watching with thumping hearts.

The girl formed a graceful picture in her neat bathing-dress, and she made light of her load—for Willy, after all, was no mean weight. Step by step she progressed.

"My goodness!" breathed Handforth. "Come on—quick! We can go down a few feet—and that may make all the difference."

Handforth's suggestion was instantly carried out. The leader of Study D was pale with anxiety—his affection for his minor was much greater than he generally admitted. Furthermore, he was deeply concerned on Tessa's behalf—and filled with wild admiration for her sterling courage.

Quickly, a number of the juniors plunged down the coral strand until they were immediately under the swaying rope. It was impossible to go far, for the surf was deadly. And there, tense and anxious, they waited.

Tessa came on at the same speed—unhurried and deliberate. And then, at last, she was within reach of the waiting boys. The rope, sagging under her weight still, was low.

"All right—you can fall now!" said Nipper tensely. "Drop him, Tessa—and let yourself go! We'll catch you!"

The girl gave a sobbing cry, and Willy tumbled out of her strained, aching arms. The next moment she fell, too, and was caught by willing hands. She had won! In spite of every effort of the elements, Willy Handforth was saved!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RETURN TO NORMAL.



"HURRAH!"

"Oh, well done!" "Odds gales and blizzards!" said Archie Glenthorne. "Absolutely! I mean to say, how frightfully stunning, by gad!"

The boys and girls crowded round excitedly—the girls almost hysterical with relief. Tessa was pulled up the beach, and now that the whole thing was over she felt faint and ill. But she managed to smile.

"It's all right," she exclaimed. "Please don't make a fuss, you fellows! There was nothing in it—I'm used to tight-rope walking—"

"Tessa, you're worth your giddy weight in gold!" said Handforth fervently. "You saved old Willy's life! I'm going to have a talk with him presently, and ask what the dickens he means by getting himself out there in the surf! Just like the silly young ass!"

But it wasn't long before everybody knew the full facts—and then, indeed, they were staggered. Naturally, the story was told on

the Wanderer, too—and Tessa Love was the heroine of the hour.

"But I'm blessed if I can believe it, you know!" said Handforth that night, as the wind still raged over the island. "It seems impossible! You must have been carried over a mile by that wind, Willy!"

"Pretty nearly two miles," said Willy calmly.

They were in their bamboo house, and the hammocks were slung for the night. All the boys had decided to remain on the island—they didn't believe in taking refuge on the yacht. Willy was basking in a considerable amount of notoriety. A fellow who had sailed a couple of miles through the air in the top of a palm-tree was celebrated!

The leader of the Third was practically recovered by now. He was bruised and battered after his buffeting on the coral pinnacle—but he made light of his hurts and scorned the suggestion that he should remain on the yacht until he was well. In his opinion, he was well already.

"Yes, practically two miles," he went on. "I'm jiggered if I shall ever be able to thank Tessa for what she did. I always knew she was a bit of a wonder on the tight-rope, but she fairly took the biscuit this time. Don't forget Doris, either—it was her idea to sling the rope over."

"Rather!" said Reggie Pitt enthusiastically. "I reckon Doris took charge of the situation pretty marvellously."

A number of chuckles sounded, and Reggie flushed.

"Oh, don't be silly!" he growled. "I'll admit I like Doris the best of the bunch; but I'm not exaggerating. Didn't she show splendid presence of mind, considering the difficulties?"

"She was a brick!" agreed Nipper heartily. "And so were all the other girls. They covered themselves with glory to-day."

"Well, thank goodness Marmaduke's all right!" observed Willy. "The young fat-head was scared stiff, but he's gradually recovering now. When I climbed that palm-tree I hadn't the faintest notion what I was in for."

"What was it like when the top snapped off?" asked Chubby Heath.

"No good asking me," replied Willy frankly. "The storm hit me so abruptly that I hardly knew it. I've got a kind of hazy recollection of shooting through space like a giddy comet, and it seemed that I was in the sea the next second."

"Whole houses—wooden houses, of course—have been lifted up before now and carried a couple of miles," said Nipper. "There's no knowing the force of these tropical storms. There was nothing unusual about that palm-top being ripped off and carried away—the miracle of the thing is that Willy is still with us to tell the tale!"

Ultimately, the juniors got to sleep, and they slumbered off to the accompaniment of the rushing wind, and the dull, booming



Tessa Love was just half way across, and she carried Willy Handforth in her arms.

thunder of the reef. And in the morning there was a change.

The wind had died to a stiff breeze, but the sea was imposing and grand in its might. Nipper was one of the first to awaken, and he was immediately struck with the crashing of the waves. The whole air was filled by the sound.

A number of fellows went across to the outer beach and had a look. The waves were coming in with mountainous force, and the coral strand was a vast mass of hissing, foaming spume.

"This is the only evidence we need about that storm," said Nipper grimly. "It must have been an extra big one, and this sea probably disturbs the Pacific from the American coast to Australia. Its made one huge track right across."

"Well, its over now, anyhow," said Reggie Pitt. "Thank goodness, these storms don't come too often—they're a bit too violent for my delicate taste."

The sun was shining, and the sky was deep, deep, glorious blue. The storm had cleared the air wonderfully, and the atmosphere was cooled until it was fresh and almost invigorating. The languor of the tropics was not so apparent now.

And within two or three days Paradise Island was itself again, all traces of the commotion having vanished, except for a broken tree here and there in the groves,

and floating branches in the lagoon. Conditions had returned to 'normal, and once again the sea purred musically on the reef, and the lagoon was placid.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.



"A FIVER for 'em, old man," said Lord Dorrimore genially. "I'd offer the proverbial penny, but I'm afraid you wouldn't accept."

Nelson Lee smiled. He had been standing against the rail on the Wanderers promenade deck, and Dorrie had come up in the gleam of the electric lights. It was rather late, and the yacht was asleep, except for the man on watch. Out beyond, the lagoon and the island lay enshrouded in inky darkness, and the night was unusually still.

"As a matter of fact, I was thinking about our immediate plans, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "We shall sail on Friday, leaving Mr. Russell and a number of the men for the pearling operations. He's rather chafing at this delay—he doesn't like keeping us here. Russell is a sensitive man."

"He's a good fellow," declared Lord Dorrimore, nodding. "Personally, I'm infernally disappointed, Lee. As for Umlosi, he's sick with disgust, an' will hardly show himself. We thought there was goin' to be a decent scrap on this island, but it's fizzled out."

"I'm not so warlike as you are, Dorrie, and I am quite pleased," said Nelson Lee drily. "Nevertheless, Umlosi still talks about his red mists, and swears that some fighting is not far distant. And Umlosi is uncannily near the mark more often than not. I'm wondering whether we're doing right in going."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked his lordship.

"It is just possible that Prescott is still hanging about," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "He may be awaiting his opportunity. What if the Wanderer sails, leaving Russell and a handful of men on the island? Prescott could come with his schooner, and win hands down."

Dorrie laughed sceptically.

"But the Samoa sailed for 'Frisco," he replied. "She is well on her way by now. Where could she hang about, Lee? This is the only island for hundreds of miles, an' we know that Prescott had no men with him—except the ordinary crew of the schooner. He's in no position to make battle."

"I'll admit that there's nothing to fear on the face of things," acknowledged Nelson Lee. "But, as I've told you before, Dorrie,

we can't always go by appearances. For example, how do we know that this is the only island for hundreds of miles?"

"But good gad! Man alive——"

"These seas are uncharted—and we mustn't take anything for granted," went on Lee. "That skipper of Prescott's—the leathery Mr. Hawke—is a man who knows the South Seas backwards. It's quite likely there's another atoll near by—although I don't believe it for a moment. Still, I can't help remembering that incident last week—when Umlosi swore he saw something out beyond the reef—and when he detected oil fumes. The Samoa's motorboat might have been making a secret survey."

"And what of it?" asked Dorrie. "The Samoa herself came in the next day, didn't she? It's quite possible Prescott came along in the motor-boat, but he soon discovered that trickery was useless. What can his handful do against us?"

Then again Prescott was coming in with a big crowd of natives—the most savage fellows he could pick up from the various islands," went on Lee thoughtfully. "He's arrived with none—and that's queer. On the top of everything Umlosi insists that battle's in the air. Honestly, Dorrie, I'm not any too comfortable about leaving Russell alone."

Lord Dorrimore laughed.

"Go to bed an' sleep on it, old man," he advised. "Prescott is a thousand miles away by this time—a beaten man. It's high time we turned in. Everybody else is asleep, an' our cots are callin' to us."

Nelson Lee smiled, and accompanied Dorrie below. Acting upon his advice, however, Captain Burton had placed two men on the watch, day and night. Although there wasn't one chance in a hundred of Prescott returning, the Wanderer was never left without a man on duty.

Ashore, Crusoe Camp was quiet, too—although one or two figures were moving. As a matter of fact, Reggie Pitt was unable to sleep. The night was sultry, and he wasn't feeling particularly well. He decided to go on the beach for a half-hour—and Jack Grey awoke while he was getting out of his hammock.

"If you insist upon coming, all right," whispered Pitt. "But I didn't want to disturb you, old son. It's nothing much—tummy trouble, you know. I think Fatty must have given us something rich for supper. What with these taro roots, and fried bananas and other things, he's feeding us too well for a climate like this."

"You'll be all right by the morning," laughed Jack.

They went out without disturbing the others, and decided to cross over to the reef side of the island, where the wind was blowing in with zephyr-like gentleness. It was so faint that the air seemed dead on the shore of the lagoon. But the outer beach was a little more refreshing.

And it was alive with the hundred and one things that happen on the coral during the night—mysterious, unseen movements—strange events that no man can properly explain.

The two juniors stood looking out across the sea, silenced by the very wonder of the coral strand. And then, suddenly, Reggie Pitt clutched rather fiercely at his companion's bare arm.

"What's that out there?" he asked tensely.

"Eh?" ejaculated Grey. "What—"

"There!" insisted Pitt, pointing. "Can't you see?"

Jack Grey followed the direction, but his gaze met nothing but the shadowy white of the surf, and the gloom of the open sea beyond. Far off, the dividing line between sea and sky was hidden in a slight mist. The night was heavy and sultry, but with no sign of breaking weather.

"No, I can't see anything," said Jack at length. "You must be imagining things, old man—"

"I'm not!" declared Pitt tensely. "Look again, Jack—not there, but further to the right! Just a little— Yes, you've got it now! Can't you see anything moving?"

"By jingo!" breathed Jack, with a quick intake.

Sure enough, there was something there—a blacker spot against the black. Almost invisible at first, but obvious now that he had picked it up. A large object was moving slowly towards the island.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ALARM.



"IT'S a ship of some kind!" breathed Grey.

"I can see the masts now and the sails!

But it's so black to-night that she's practically invisible. My hat! You've got eyes like a cat, Reggie!"

"Never mind my eyes—we've got to think!" exclaimed Reggie, his words snapping out crisply. "There's something fishy about this, Jack—something pretty ugly. It's nothing less than providential that I had a tummy ache! Otherwise we shouldn't have been here at all!"

"But—but you don't think—"

Jack paused, staring.

"The Samoa?" whispered Pitt. "Yes! That's what I think! If she were any other ship she would be carrying her usual lights, and we should have heard the sounds of her long ago. She's the Samoa, I tell you—creeping up to make a surprise attack. And everybody on board has been ordered to keep a dead silence."

"Oh, I say!" protested Jack. "That's a bit thick, isn't it? Old Prescott chucked up the sponge, and went off—"

"He appeared to—but Mr. Lee has been uncomfortable for days," interrupted Reggie Pitt. "He reckoned that Old Man Prescott knuckled under too easily. That sort of thing generally means trickery of some kind. And here's the schooner back again—creeping up like a ghost!"

"But they can't do anything against the Wanderer!"

"Not in a fair fight," agreed Reggie grimly. "But all sorts of things are possible when you make a surprise attack. What's going to happen to us if the schooner creeps into the lagoon, and jumps on the yacht unawares? We've got to give the alarm!"

"But how?" demanded Jack. "It takes half an hour to get across the lagoon, and the Samoa's right near the break in the reef now! Look! She's veering round for it as we're looking at her!"

"There's more ways of killing a cat than shooting it!" retorted Reggie swiftly. "Come on—the first thing is to get back to our own camp. It's the time for general wakefulness. We've only got to show Prescott that we're all on the alert, and he'll get cold feet, and sheer off."

"By jingo, that's true enough!" breathed Jack.

They took a last look, and then raced back across the narrow belt of the island, and sped into their camp. The next moment the St. Frank's fellows were startled. Two black forms were dashing about among the hammocks, shouting and causing a general commotion.

"What the dickens is the matter?" demanded Handforth, sitting up.

"Souise me!" gasped Tom Burton. "What's this—another storm?"

"Odds noises and uproars!" ejaculated Archie Glenthorne plaintively. "I mean to say, when a chappie is absolutely dreaming about good old England and home and beauty, and all that sort of stuff!"

"Up with you—everybody!" shouted Pitt. "The Samoa's come back—and she's creeping into the lagoon to make an attack!"

"What!"

It was a general shout, and the last vestige of sleep was driven from the juniors' brains. They were out of their hammocks in five seconds.

"An attack?" roared Handforth. "By George! We'll rush out and—"

"We'll do nothing of the sort!" interrupted Pitt. "We can't do anything at this distance—and there's no time. The only thing to do is to light a huge fire on the beach, and attract the Wanderer's look-out. We'll all shout together, too—and kick up a fearful din."

"Fine!" declared Nipper enthusiastically. "That'll wake everybody up on the Wanderer, and they'll spot the danger at once. All we need to do is to rouse the Wanderer."

"Hear, hear!"

And the juniors streamed out of their bamboo house, and rushed down the lagoon beach. Then, while several of them got a fire going, the others used their lungs with gusto.

The fire was soon blazing, and it made a lurid picture against the background of palms and wooded groves. How were the juniors to realise that their well-meant efforts were to create a complete misunderstanding? They had done their best, and deserved all praise.

One of the officers on the *Wanderer* was lounging on the bridge—nodding, if the truth must be told, for the night was heavy. He dimly became aware of a sound of shouting and commotion, and decided that the noise was coming from the direction of the north-west beach—where the *Fourth-Formers'* camp was situated.

The other man on watch joined the officer, and they stared out across the lagoon. The fire was now burning, and through his binoculars the officer could see the dancing figures—waving and gesticulating.

"Something queer about this!" said the officer, frowning. "They seem to have all gone mad. They're dancing like a lot of dervishes! What on earth has possessed the kids!"

"Hadn't I better go and report to the skipper, sir?" asked the man.

"No—these boys are full of tricks," growled the officer. "Tell Mr. Lee, if you like, but don't disturb the Old Man. He's got a touch of liver, and he might be peevish. Perhaps you'd better awaken his lordship, too."

The man went off, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie were soon on deck. They gazed out across the lagoon, and the commotion was still going on—the fire on the beach now blazing up powerfully.

The faint wind was blowing across the lagoon in the other direction, and it tended to deaden the sounds of the juniors. At this distance it was impossible to gather what was happening. But that an alarm had been caused was obvious.

"One of the boys bitten, perhaps—or met with an accident," suggested Dorrie. "Anyhow, they're frantically callin' for help. We'd better take one of the launches, an' investigate."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, we must go at once," he replied. "It looks serious."

They lost no time in going down the ladder to one of the waiting launches. And as they glided away across the lagoon, the officer and the other man on watch leaned over the rail, interested in the proceedings. Nobody else on the *Wanderer* had been disturbed by those far-off sounds.

And nobody knew that the black shape of the Samoa was even then stealing into the lagoon through the break in the reef!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ATTACK.



MR. JONATHAN PRESCOTT paced the poop of the Samoa with short, nervous strides. Captain Hawke was at the wheel, and near by Paradise Island loomed like a black mass out of the sea. The perfume from it filled the air with a soothing, tropical fragrance.

"Everything's quiet," growled Prescott, as he paused and stared over the reef. "Shall we do it, Hawke? Shall we make it?"

"Sure we will," replied the skipper. "An' not so loud, Mister—sounds travel mighty freely on a night like this. Once we're in the lagoon—it won't matter—we shall have those guys by surprise."

It was a time of tension for Jonathan Prescott.

Uncannily enough, Nelson Lee had guessed—vaguely, it is true—that Prescott was not a beaten man. And here was the Samoa, creeping up like some thief in the night.

And Nelson Lee's assumption that another island might be in the vicinity was a further indication of the schoolmaster-detective's intuition. For, without any foundation for his impression, it was true.

Barely thirty miles away, a tiny atoll rose just above the sea-surface—a mere patch of sand, with a few palms upon it. And here the Samoa had remained during the last few days—fleeing into the Pacific for a time to weather out the recent storm. And now that all was quiet again, the schooner was bent upon mischief.

And this time she came well equipped!

In addition to her usual crew, she carried two hundred natives—Solomon Islanders for the most part—savage, fierce fellows whose grandfathers and great-grandfathers had revealed much prowess in head-hunting, and who had practised cannibalism at every opportunity. The same blood was in these interior natives. Most of them were from the less civilised islands. Prescott had taken care to engage no coast natives. His one object was to avoid men who had the slightest knowledge of pearling.

The two hundred blacks had been recruited as labourers—divers who could make short work of the oyster bed. It was not Prescott's intention to use them for war-like purposes, but he would not hesitate to do so if any hitch occurred in his plans.

And the schooner crept nearer.

"There's something happening on the island," declared Mr. Prescott, as the schooner lifted her bows to the Pacific rollers near the break in the reef. "Can't quite make it out—but it looks bad. Gosh darn it! I believe we've been spotted!"

"Can't help it now," growled the captain. "We're nearly in the lagoon, an' there's no

backing out. Don't worry, Mr. Prescott. If they're all awake and on the alert, we'll bid 'em good-night, and get out again. They won't fight unless we do. We're safe either way."

This was true enough—and one of the main reasons why Prescott had started out on the venture. If they failed to affect their surprise, it wouldn't really matter. The Wanderer would never commence any hostilities unless provoked.

And there was always the chance of getting at grips before the Britishers were ready. It was this chance that Prescott relied upon. With the Wanderer in his own hands, he would be master of the situation. And once he was top-dog, he would wield his power with iron force.

Neither Prescott nor Hawke could quite understand what was happening. They were in the lagoon now, and the Wanderer was gleaming and twinkling some distance ahead—her lights reflected in long ribbons across the still water. But she was quiet. No further lights appeared, and there was no indication of life.

On the other hand, a big fire was blazing far across the lagoon, and a dim commotion came on the air. Mr. Prescott vaguely began to realise that it had nothing to do with the schooner.

"By thunder, I don't believe they know we're here!" he muttered tensely. "We've just happened to strike in at the right minute. Luck's with us, Hawke—dead with us!"

"Best not to crow too soon," growled Hawke briefly.

Soon afterwards Prescott's carefully thought out plans were put into execution. The anchor was not dropped—for the noise of it would sound like thunder in that still air. But while the schooner still had way upon her, three boats were lowered.

They contained Prescott, Hawke and practically all the schooner's normal officers and crew. The blacks were locked under the hatches, and two men were left on guard.

The situation was gripping.

Reggie Pitt and the other fellows had done their utmost to warn the Wanderer of her peril—and their fine effort had had the opposite effect! It was extraordinarily unlucky. The two watchers on the yacht were still leaning over the rail, gazing into the direction of the departed launch, and wondering what the boys could be making such a fuss about. They knew nothing of the grim activities on the other side of the lagoon—beyond the Wanderer.

In fact, the result of the Fourth Formers' action was to distract the attention of the watch! If there had been no alarm from the camp, the Samoa's approach would have been seen and the yacht would have sprang into life. As it was, the schoolboys' action assisted Prescott's plan in the most definite manner.

The schooner's boats crept up, they bumped against the yacht's side, and then the trouble began. Too late, the men on watch realised that something unusual was happening. They found strange men swarming up ropes, and piling up the ladder.

Instead of being warned, the Wanderer was taken absolutely by surprise!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CAPTURE.



"GOOD heavens!" ejaculated the officer on watch.

Turning at an unusual sound, he was just in time to see a half-naked form climbing over the rail on the opposite side of the deck. The fellow was a Kanaka—one of the Samoa's crew. He was carrying a huge, wicked-looking knife.

The officer strode across the deck, his heart thumping.

"What's this?" he asked sharply. "Where did you spring from?"

The newcomer paused, irresolute. Prescott had given strict orders that no weapons were to be used except in self-defence. Prescott was a rascal, but bloodshed was not in his line.

"Do you hear me?" went on the officer roughly. "What—" He broke off as a shout came from his recent companion. The sailor was running up, his face flushed with tense excitement.

"It's that feller who was aboard last week, sir!" he gasped. "That man, Prescott! He's coming up—"

"What on earth are you talking about?" demanded the officer. "There's something infernally queer here—"

"Awfully sorry to disturb you, but I shall be obliged if you'll surrender!" said Jonathan Prescott, appearing along the deck. "This yacht is mine, and any resistance will be fatal. I guess that's clear, isn't it? If you don't get me—"

"You're mad!" shouted the officer. "How did you get on board? Simmons, rush below, and arouse the watch—"

"Simmons, stay just where you are!" rapped out Prescott harshly. "I'm not aboard this yacht to speak pretty. You heard what I said—well, heed! This gun might go off!"

The officer was aghast. Prescott carried two revolvers, and every other man who had swarmed on board was heavily armed. There was no question that these invaders were in deadly earnest. And so far the yacht was still asleep, and nobody below knew of the dramatic turn of events.

For a moment there was a tense silence. The officer and the other man were unable to know what to do. A situation of this

sort was new to them. It seemed unreal and fantastic. For a dozen men to creep on board and capture the yacht was opposed to all reason. It was absurd—it was impossible!

"What's this—a joke?" demanded the officer furiously. "I don't admire your humour, Mr. Prescott! When the skipper comes on deck he'll have something to say—"

"I'll tell the world he will," agreed Mr. Prescott. "And see here! There's no joke about this—no, sir! Every man on this ship has got to surrender quietly, or he'll taste lead! Get me? I'm not not here for my health—neither are my crew! You'll get for'ard, and stay there!"

"You infernal fool!" shouted the other. "If you think—"

He broke off, and leapt forward, his anger getting the better of him. He was the responsible man on watch, and it alarmed him enormously to realise that there might be some real peril in the situation.

Crack!

Prescott's revolver blazed, and the officer fell to the deck with a flesh wound in his thigh.

"You blamed fool!" snarled Prescott. "What did I tell you? I mean business! Get that—and get it good! Hawke! You'd best look alive—there'll be swarms of 'em up in a minute! If they try any funny business—shoot!"

"You bet I will!" declared Hawke hoarsely.

To tell the truth, he and all the other invaders were quivering with excitement. They knew that the whole thing was touch and go. But they were all armed—and they had reason to believe that these Britons wouldn't use firearms. It would be an easy conquest if everything went right.

"Help!" yelled the injured officer. "Help!"

"Blame you for a dog!" snarled Prescott.

He leapt forward, and delivered a kick on the unfortunate man's head that silenced him. And then the excitement really began. The officer's shout had raised the alarm at last. Men came up on deck, wondering what was happening. Captain Burton himself turned out—engineers, stokers, and numerous others. Even Mr. Stokes wanted to know what was happening.

The yacht's men knew the truth in a flash. One or two scraps, and the situation became crystal clear. Several defenders showed fight—and they were all treated the same. Shot after shot rang out, and although most of them were harmless, a few caused nasty wounds.

And the effect was startling.

Prescott gained the complete mastery. Within ten minutes he was in command of the Wanderer—and officers and crew were hustled for'ard, and held there by armed guards. Other invaders went through the

ship, searching for people who might be hiding.

Mercifully, Mrs. Stokes and the girls were left alone—after being told to keep strictly to their own quarters. But Mr. Stokes was included among the prisoners, and so was Mr. Russell. The latter was alarmed and furious beyond words. He instantly knew what had happened.

And the surrender of the yacht was to be expected.

The officers and men had shown no cowardice in giving in. They had had no other course. Taken by surprise, half-asleep, and unarmed, it would have been the height of folly to resist. One or two had shown fight—with disastrous consequences. These invaders pulled trigger at the slightest provocation, and if the Wanderer's crew had firmly resisted, over half of them would have been shot down in cold blood.

Jonathan Prescott's surprise attack had succeeded, and the Wanderer was in the enemy's hands.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DESPERATE SITUATION.



NELSON LEE was filled with doubts and perplexities as he sat in the launch. It was speeding across the lagoon to Crusoe Island, and the commotion was still going on as fiercely as ever. Indeed, it seemed to Lee that the boys were even more frantic.

"They're mad—clean loony!" declared Lord Dorrimore, as the boat drew nearer. "By the Lord Harry! What do you make of it, Lee? Look at 'em! I'm hanged if a dozen of 'em aren't swimmin' out to meet us!"

This was true enough.

The boys' camp as nearly two miles from the Wanderer, and the launch had naturally taken some little time to get there. Neither Lee nor Dorrie dreamed of looking back. The possibility that the yacht might be menaced hadn't occurred to them. There was no reason why it should.

If they were puzzled, the boys were frantic.

They could see the schooner in the lagoon, and the Wanderer was still quiet and calm. Both Nipper and Pitt realised that their plan had gone wrong—that there was a misunderstanding. Instead of having the effect they desired, the commotion they caused was simply drawing attention away from the enemy. It was exasperating to a point of frenzy.

And so when the launch approached the beach a number of juniors were swimming

in the water. They shouted as they swam. "Go back—go back!" yelled Nipper. "The schooner's here—Prescott means to make a surprise attack!"

He clutched at the side of the launch and hung there. Pitt and Handforth and two of the others did the same. And Nelson Lee and Dorrie looked at the boys in amazement. Their excitement was alarming.

"Don't you understand, sir?" gasped Pitt. "We lit this fire and yelled out so that you could be warned!"

"Warned!" repeated Lee sharply.

"The schooner, sir!" roared Handforth. "She's in the lagoon; she's—"

"Good glory!" ejaculated Dorrie, staring round. "The boy's right, Lee; that infernal schooner is— Look at that! Lights on the yacht! We've come away just when we were most needed!"

For a moment there was a hush, and Lee and Dorrie and the boys stared across the lagoon, fascinated. Two cracks, faint but unmistakable, came to their ears. The sounds were grimly ominous.

"By gad!" breathed Dorrie. "Shootin'!" Nelson Lee clenched his teeth.

"Round with the launch!" he roared. "Stand away, boys—get ashore, and wait. We're going back!"

"We tried to warn you, sir!" panted Nipper. "Oh, why the dickens didn't you stay there and be ready? We could see the schooner—"

"Never mind, Nipper, you did your best," interrupted Lee. "Thanks for your alertness, boys, all of you. But there's not a second to be lost now!"

The launch swung round, and the boys got back to the beach and watched. They were tremendously excited.

Lee and Dorrie scarcely exchanged a word as they sped back. But they watched the

Wanderer closely. And they became more and more convinced that affairs were in a desperate case.

Their arrival might just turn the tide.

"Got your gun, old man?" asked Dorrie, at length.

"Yes," muttered Lee.

"Then don't hesitate to use it," said his lordship. "If these brutes get control it'll be appallin'! Don't forget the boys an' girls!"

"I'm thinking of the boys and girls," replied Lee quietly. "I shan't hesitate to shoot, Dorrie—this affair is dreadful. We were mad to leave the yacht."

As they approached they were relieved to see that everything was apparently quiet. No further sounds of shooting came, and figures were moving about on deck. Two of them waved, and Lee and Dorrie felt their hearts beating more rapidly.

It seemed that the attack had been warded off. The launch touched the ladder, and the pair sprang out. They ran up and reached the deck, both holding their revolvers ready.

"Thanks all the same, Mr. Lee, but we don't want any unpleasantness!" rapped out Mr. Prescott, leaping from the shadows. "Hands up, both of you! Hands up, or by heekey I plug you!"

The situation was worse than Lee and Dorrie had supposed. Every member of the yacht's crew was a prisoner, and they had come too late. To resist would have been suicide. An exchange of shots could only have had one result. They were made prisoners.

And so while the St. Frank's fellows remained on the island—in sole possession—the Wanderer was in the hands of the enemy. The events of the immediate future promised to be exciting indeed.

THE END.

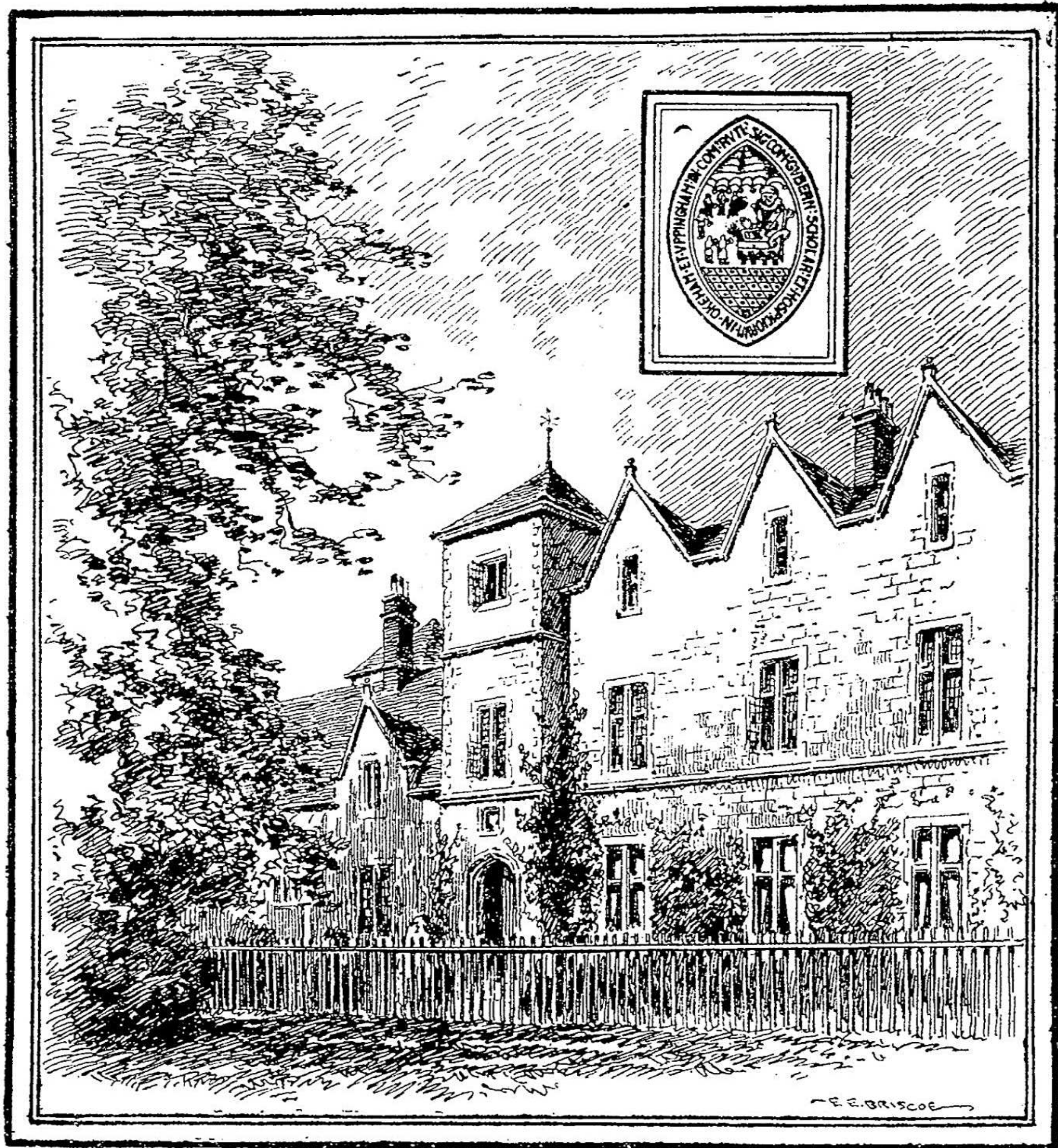
Next Week's Thrilling Account of the Battle Between the Rival Expeditions is described in

"The Secret of the Lagoon!"

THE CHIEF OFFICER OF THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE MAKES A SPECIAL APPEAL ON PAGE 40 FOR ALL READERS TO ENROL THIS WEEK WITHOUT FAIL.

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Special Sketch by Mr. Briscoe, for "The Nelson Lee Library," of
OAKHAM SCHOOL



Oakham School was founded in 1584 by Archdeacon Johnson. The old building, now used as the drawing-school, was for 300 years the only school-room. Since 1880, new modern buildings have been added, including science laboratories, a gymnasium and workshop, etc. The playing-fields cover 14 acres, and there is also a swimming-bath. Rugby football is played. The number of boys at the school is about 200.

IN THE DAYS OF THE ARMADA

By W. MURRAY GRAYDON

(Concluding instalment.)

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN WHICH THE CURTAIN FALLS.

TRENT responded to the signal with a yell, and at once he and his companions hurled themselves at the door, battered it down with a crash, and poured into the cellar, which was lighted by a lantern swung from the roof. At the same instant Jocelyn and his party entered from the opposite side.

No words can picture the rage and consternation of the conspirators when they found themselves thus unexpectedly surrounded and trapped. With hoarse cries they sprung up from the rude table at which they had been sitting, and fell back in a panic toward the chests that lined one of the side walls of the cellar, Don Gonzales foremost, leading the way.

The invaders joined forces, and it was all that the leaders could do to prevent them from rushing to the attack. The men were eager to cut and shoot, and the sight of the slain Queen's officers roused them to fury.

"Surrender!" cried Captain Jocelyn, stepping towards the conspirators. "Surrender, in the Queen's name!"

"Ay, lay down your arms, you knaves!" thundered Trent.

The only reply was a snarl from the Don and a chorus of oaths from the others.

"At them, my good fellows!" the Don cried, in Spanish, to his companions. "We have been betrayed, and it only remains for us to die like soldiers. Give and take no quarter."

"And kill De Rica, the spy!" howled another. "Yonder he stands in the background. Cut his evil heart out!"

With this the desperate little band of Spaniards drew their swords, and with hoarse cries they came most ferociously at the Queen's men. The latter, though they struck out with pikes and blades, were actually forced back a few feet by the determined onset.

But they instantly rallied, and, seeing that it must be a case of no quarter on either side, they let drive at the foe with might and main. Then ensued a hand-to-hand struggle of such ferocity and blood-thirstiness as hath rarely been equalled. The roof of the cellar fairly shook with screams and curses, yells of rage and

agony, ring of steel and clatter and crash of pikes.

A Spaniard was the first to go down, his head split by Trent's sword. Then a knave spitted one of the town guard like a lark, and an instant later a pikeman threw up his arms and fell, gashed in the throat by Don Gonzales' sword. Next Sydney was disabled, going to the rear with a broken arm, and when the bailiff was killed by a thrust between the ribs things began to look serious. A couple of Spaniards were down, but the rest continued to fight like fiends.

However, Trent and Jocelyn now ordered the men to use their pistols, and as soon as the bullets began to fly it was evident that the struggle was near its end. Giles shot a Spaniard through the head, and saw him fall. Another, who was slashing at the lad with a sword, went down before Trent's fire.

The powder smoke was now curling up thickly, and after a few more shots there was a sudden hush, broken only by groans of agony. It was believed that the fight was over, but a thrilling incident was yet to come.

Taking advantage of the fact that the men were off their guard, an elderly Spaniard sprang out of the smoke, cursing and screaming with rage. Swinging his sword round in a half-circle, he cleared a way for himself, and dashed ferociously toward De Rica, who was standing against the opposite wall.

A blow from a pike broke the ruffian's left arm, but he never faltered. Two bullets entered his body, but he merely staggered and reeled as he pushed on. One more step would have brought him in reach of De Rica, but before he could take it a pistol-ball, fired by Jocelyn, struck him behind the ear. He fell dead without a cry.

A solitary Spaniard now crept forward, begging for quarter as he gave up his sword. His life was spared, and irons were clapped on his wrists.

It was truly a sad scene that was revealed when the mist of smoke had lifted, and was curling out of the cellar into the adjoining passages. Out of the six conspirators, one was a prisoner, and all the rest lay slain save Don Gonzales. He was still breathing and conscious as he lay on his back with a bullet through his right lung. He glared ferociously at his enemies, but he could not be induced to speak.

The Queen's men were little better off. Four were stone dead, and others were wounded more or less severely. Trent had a gash across his cheek and one over his shoulder, and the back of Captain Jocelyn's head was laid open.

Sydney's arm was broken, while Giles, who had supposed until the end of the fight that he was uninjured, was now sur-

prised to find that a sword tip had pierced his right thigh to the depth of several inches. It had already begun to pain him, but he cared little for that. What did trouble him, however, was the realisation that he was unfitted for further service against the Armada.

At Jocelyn's suggestion the whole party now left the cellar, and ascended to the hall of the big mansion overhead, taking the Don with them. He was now unconscious, and stretched out upon a couch.

With De Rica for a guide, Trent and several others hurried off to another quarter of the house, and they presently returned with the servants, half a dozen in number. They had been roughly treated, and looked scared and dazed. It was a wonder that Simon Baillie had consented to spare their lives.

The butler alone was in a condition to make himself useful. He seemed to know just what was wanted, and as speedily as possible he brought warm water, bandages, and several bottles of strong cordials. By the light of three or four lamps the wounded men were relieved by their comrades, and the great hall was transformed into a hospital.

Sydney's arm was mended and put in a sling, and Giles reluctantly consented to lie down on a settee. Don Gonzales was dosed with the strong cordial, but it had little or no effect; his wound was clearly mortal.

In the midst of these stirring scenes—it was now close to the break of day—there came of a sudden a loud and furious rapping on the front door of the house. None dared go to open it at first, and it occurred to some that a force from the Spanish galleon had arrived.

But finally, when hoarse cries for admittance were joined to the pounding, Captain Jocelyn unbarred and opened the door. In rushed Master Van Hartsen, followed by a couple of rough-looking boatmen.

The burgomaster was strangely flushed and excited, and he stared in a fever of impatience around the hall. Then he caught sight of Giles, and in an instant he was kneeling beside the lad, and embracing him with trembling arms.

"Thank God for His mercy!" he cried. "I have found you at last. I am your grandfather, Giles—nay, I mean Cecil, for that is your true name. But you are hurt," he added, in a tone of keen alarm.

"It is naught but a slight cut," muttered Giles, sitting up in astonishment. "But what mean you by such strange speech?"

"I mean that you are my lost grandson," repeated the burgomaster, in a voice that shook with emotion. "I have a letter here—no, I left it at Templeton. However, I see there is proof to be had without it.

"Master Jocelyn," he added, turning to the captain, "your messenger was delayed,

and it was midnight when he brought me the letter. My impatience was so great that I came at once to Plymouth, hoping to obtain a passage up the Channel to Lord Howard's fleet. I found Captain Barwood, and Master Garwood, the contractor, preparing to start thither in a fishing-smack. When they learned what I desired, they told me of the strange events that had happened, and that I would find Stephen Trent and the lads at Mount Edgumbe. They advised me to wait until the morning, but I came across at once, as you see. And now will you have the kindness to repeat the confession that was written in your letter. Such mercy as is possible shall be shown you."

"Ay, I will repeat it," replied Captain Jocelyn, his face turning very pale, "but not in the presence of so many. Shall we go into yonder dining-room?"

The burgomaster agreed to this, and he and Jocelyn carried Giles and the settee into the apartment, Sydney and Trent following by request. A lighted lamp was brought, and the doors were closed.

"It is a shameful tale that I am going to relate," Captain Jocelyn began, "and with your leave I shall make it short. It is seemly for me to say first that years ago Simon Baillie, Ralph Montford, and myself were boon companions. We were wild lads, I confess, and in one of our scrapes Ralph Montford got a hold upon Simon Baillie and myself that he afterwards made use of.

"You all remember when Francis Montford died, leaving the care of his son to Ralph, who had just returned from abroad. Ralph had been living in Holland, where he had married the daughter of Master Van Hartsen under the assumed name of Sheriton. He had a son by her, who was just the age of Francis' boy.

"It was this fact which suggested to Ralph Montford the vile plot by which he hoped to make his own son the heir of Templeton and of the fortune of the old Spaniard's daughter. By threats, and by the offer of a large sum of money, he induced Simon Baillie and myself to help him. I stole away his son from Sluys, while the son of Francis Montford was given in charge of Baillie, and by him placed with Thomas Rookwood. A certain amount of money was paid to Rookwood, but I do not think he ever knew who the lad was. There he stands now—the real son of Francis Montford."

Jocelyn stopped, and pointed to Sydney. Giles had already divined the truth, and for a moment the cousins were overcome with emotion. They sat side by side on the settee, and the burgomaster's eyes were dim as he looked down at them.

"There is little more to tell," resumed Captain Jocelyn. "For years past I have borne this guilty secret, and when Don Gonzales in some manner learned the truth, I joined him and Baillie in a plan to extort

money from the burgomaster — whose presence and purpose in London we knew.

"That is how I came to be at the Nag and Pillion Inn that night, and you know why the plot failed. I have suspected since then that the Don and Baillie were concerned in some treachery to the Government, though I was never sure of it until now. On account of this suspicion, and for another reason as well, I sent a full confession to the burgomaster last night. I was on the point of leaving England when I met Stephen Trent yonder in Plymouth, and what he told me changed my plans.

"But I have forgotten one thing,"

Jocelyn added, as he glanced at Sydney. "Simon Baillie, the Don, and myself waylaid that brave lad on the moor a few nights ago. We told him the truth, and offered to prove it on condition that he gave us a quarter of his fortune. But he refused to treat with us, and declared that he would never take his rightful place and name from his cousin, to whom he owed his life. He even implored us to keep the secret."

"You did this?" Giles cried, turning to Sydney. "Was it not enough that I had robbed you for years? Oh, it is a bitter shame! How can I ever make atonement?"

"There is none to be made," Sydney answered softly. "It was no fault of yours. I wish this thing had never been known. I owe you so much that I should have been content to remain Sydney Rookwood always, and to keep the secret of my identity. All that I have is yours."

"He will happily not want for a fortune, my dear lad," exclaimed the burgomaster. "I am a wealthy man, and it will all belong to my grandson."

"It is better than riches to have found a grandfather and a cousin," said Giles, as he clasped the hands of Sydney and the burgomaster. "But I feel as though I were dreaming. I can scarcely believe that my Uncle Ralph was my real father, and that the man I thought to be my father was the father of Sydney."

"Yet it is even so," said the burgomaster. "We will forget the past, my lads. At last my long search is ended. If Walter Sheriton



Then ensued a hand-to-hand struggle of such ferocity and bloodthirstiness as hath rarely been equalled.

were here to-night I think I could forgive him."

"He has gone to his account," said Trent, in a solemn tone. "Ah, and Simon Baillie will speedily follow."

"And I am left with a blackened soul," muttered Humphrey Jocelyn. "My crime weighs heavily upon me."

He walked from the room with bowed head.

Little more remains to be told. Two of Captain Jocelyn's men were left at Edgcumbe Hall to help the servants put the house in order. The bodies of the Queen's officers and of those who had fallen in the fight were taken to Plymouth for burial. On the way across the Sound Don Gonzales breathed his last without returning to consciousness, and it was the best thing that could have happened to him. The prisoner and De Rica were committed to gaol.

That evening found Giles, Sydney, Trent, and the burgomaster back at Templeton, where the injured lads received careful nursing during the next few days. They were well on the way to complete recovery when the news arrived of the defeat and departure of the Armada.

Meanwhile, a search for the Spanish galleon La Rosa had proved vain. It must have taken the alarm in time and slipped out of the Sound; doubtless, it made its way safely back to Spain.

After delivering the prisoners to the keeper of the Plymouth gaol, Captain Humphrey Jocelyn disappeared from England, no

doubt fearing that he would be punished for his crime. A year later rumour reported that he was fighting gallantly in Holland against the Spaniards, but whether this was true, or what became of him afterwards, was never known.

The captured Spaniard and Simon Baillie were duly tried and convicted, the latter of treason, and the former of aiding and abetting Spain on the soil of England. No mercy was shown them, and they both perished by the axe. De Rica was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, and died before his time was up.

Although Sydney's real name was Giles Montford, and Giles' name was Cecil Montford, we will call them to the end by the names under which they have been known to the reader. Of course, Sydney was now the master of Templeton and its revenues, but he accepted his rightful place with great reluctance, and only on the condition that

Giles and the burgomaster should continue to reside there.

This they did for many years, and then Master Van Hartsen purchased a larger estate a little nearer Plymouth for himself and Giles. Stephen Trent and Bereward Tomewell were the faithful retainers of the house, as of old, and Sydney spent most of his time there.

The good burgomaster died about 1600, and a cold carried off the tutor shortly afterwards. Twenty years later the faithful Trent passed to his final rest.

In the course of time Giles and Sydney married and had children, and to the end of their lives they were constant and devoted companions. They lived near neighbours, and did their duty as brave and loyal Englishmen, and as old age crept upon them they found more and more solace in talking of their youthful adventures in the days when the great Armada was preparing to invade England.

THE END.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

(All communications for the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon St., London, E.C.4.)

My dear Leagueites and Others,—

The Others, or readers who have not yet qualified as Members of the League, have

directly he reads these lines. That is all you have to do—the rest is as simple as shelling peas. You simply hand another copy of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY to a likely new reader, get him to fill in Application Form at C, while you fill in Application Form at A in your own copy. You then post both forms to me without a letter and in an unsealed envelope for a halfpenny. The total cost is 2½d., and in return you receive a beautifully designed Members' Certificate in red and blue on which is a number, the number of your membership.

SOME ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE

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|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (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. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (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. |
|---|--|

within their grasp the golden key with which to open the magic gate that will confer untold happiness upon the many enthusiasts who are waiting to pass through. But the key refuses to turn until a force equal to 10,000 members is exerted. The mystic word is not "sesame," but "all together."

Let every reader who has not qualified for membership make up his mind to do so

And if you will join the League "all together" this week, the many advantages outlined above will begin to operate as soon as ever I can make the results known—about a month hence.

As regards those whom I can now call Leagueites, their enthusiasm is unbounded and I can assure them that their efforts to make the League a success are already bearing fruit. The record so far, I think, is

held by a Kensal Rise reader, who up-to-date has to his credit 25 introductions to new readers! This energetic Leagueite will be entitled to a League Gold Medal as soon as the membership reaches the prescribed 10,000. In the meantime, a record is being kept of the number of introductions each Member makes, and this is registered against his name.

Quite a few Members have qualified for their Bronze Medals, and these will be distributed in due course. A slight delay has been caused by the incorrect spelling of the Latin Motto on the first consignment of Bronze Medals delivered.

Your sincere friend,
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 $\frac{1}{2}$ 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. 8. Aug. 15, 1925.

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

SECTION

A

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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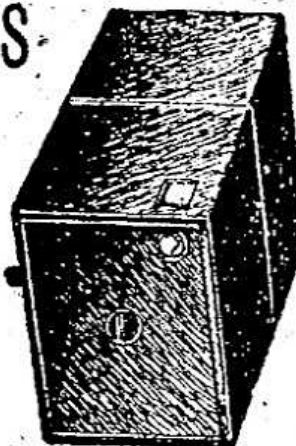


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