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THE YELLOW HAND AT ST. FRANK'S!

HANDFORTH WARNED!

"You are the boy who thwarted me—I shall not forget!"

(An exciting incident from this week's gripping long complete story of Nelson Lee and Mystery.)

New Series No. 10.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

July 10th, 1926.



Barging at full tilt through the door, Church crashed into Handforth, just as Handy was in the midst of his juggling feat. The weighty Latin dictionary caught Handy full in the face, the chair followed it, and he sat down with a terrific crash on the floor.

THE YELLOW HAND AT ST FRANKS!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Handforth is in his element in this stunning long complete yarn of mystery and adventure at St. Frank's.

CHAPTER I.

THE LEADER OF THE TIGER PATROL.

WALTER CHURCH, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, tore into Study D like a whirlwind, his face blazing with excitement.

"I've got a chance!" he yelled triumphantly.

He could not have chosen a more inopportune moment for such a violent entry, for Edward Oswald Handforth was in the act of showing McClure exactly how to balance a Latin dictionary on the top of a cricket stump, poised on the back of a chair. And it so happened that Handforth's nose was the precise balancing point.

"Look out!" shouted McClure in alarm.

Crash—thud!

Church hadn't seen his chums at all. He simply biffed into Handforth, and the cricket stump went flying. And the Latin dictionary, not being possessed of the powers of levitation, naturally fell in a straight line—so did the chair! The book hit Handforth full in the face, and the unfortunate Edward Oswald sat down with a terrific crash on the floor.

"My only hat!" gasped Church, staring.

"You—you careless ass!" said McClure indignantly. "Handy was just showing me a juggling trick—"

"I'll show you another!" hooted Handforth, leaping to his feet. "I'll show you what Church looks like when he's upside down! In about two seconds he'll be so disfigured that you won't know him!"

Church backed away.

"Dry up, you ass," he panted. "Sorry I bashed into you, Handy. I was so excited, I didn't see you. Awfully sorry, old man."

Thus appealed to, Handforth was like butter in anybody's hands. He thawed so rapidly that he merely gave a snort, and ruefully rubbed his forehead.

"You might have brained me!" he said accusingly. "When will you chaps learn? How many more times must I tell you not to come into the study like a charging rhinoceros? Do you ever see me barging in like that?"

"Ahem! Never!" said Church solemnly. "At least—"

"And what's the excitement about, anyhow?" demanded Edward Oswald.

"I've just seen Fenton!" replied Church, with gleaming eyes.

Handforth was pleased to be sarcastic.

"Of course, that explains it," he said heavily. "I always go wild with excitement when I see Fenton. There must be something about him, you know. I just take one look, and then I'm raving."

McClure grinned dutifully, and Handforth smiled.

"No need to be funny," said Church, reddening. "Fenton had a word with me about the cricket. Said he saw me playing in the House match on Wednesday, for the Second Eleven. He was quite decent."

"And so he ought to be," said Handforth warmly. "Your cricket's improving marvellously, Churchy. Anything else?"

"Yes. He said there's just a chance—the slimmest of slim possibilities—that I might

be chosen to go up to London for the final Test match at Lord's—as a reserve, of course,” said Church breathlessly. “Even if I don't play, there'll be the honour of being chosen. Besides, I should be a First Eleven man, then!” he added.

“Congrats, old man,” said McClure heartily. “I've been pretty dud at cricket this season, but you've come on like a Trojan.”

Handforth was inclined to be indifferent.

“Blessed if I can see anything to rave about,” he said tartly. “Fenton ought to be boiled. So he's just given you a slim hope that you MIGHT be able to go to London as a reserve? My hat! A RESERVE! If that's what Fenton calls encouraging a chap, I don't!”

But Church only smiled. He was about the happiest fellow in St. Frank's. Handforth was a First Eleven man already, and had won great fame the previous week by practically saving the Schoolboy Ashes. It had been his extraordinary batting that had turned an apparently certain defeat into a glorious victory. William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth, and Fullwood, of the Remove, had shared the especial honours.

But Church, who had improved his form immensely of late, had sometimes dreamed of playing in one of these schoolboy Test matches. Never had he believed that any remote chance might crop up which would enable him to play. And now Edgar Fenton, the school captain, had dropped him a hint. It was enough! From that second, Church meant to practise like mad.

“I shall be at it first thing to-morrow,” he said joyously. “And to-morrow afternoon, too. It's Saturday, and a half-holiday——”

“Rats!” interrupted Handforth, with a start. “You can't do any practising to-morrow afternoon. There's a match on between our chaps and the East House, and they'll want the ground. East House is so weak that Hamilton's only playing minor men. And Big Side will be full, too, because the seniors are playing Helmford.”

“But we can watch,” said Church keenly. “There's all sorts of hints to be picked up——”

“What you need is a complete rest, my lad,” said Handforth firmly. “If you have too much cricket, you're liable to get stale. So you're coming with me to-morrow afternoon for the week-end.”

His chums stared.

“Coming with you?” asked Church.

“For the week-end?” said McClure.

This was the first they had heard of any such arrangement. But it was one of Handforth's little habits to make plans for Church and McClure, without consulting them on the matter. And if they didn't happen to see eye to eye with him there was generally trouble.

“Yes, for the week-end,” repeated Handforth carelessly. “We shall leave directly after lunch, and get back early on Monday morning. And if you chaps start kicking up a fuss——”

“We're not kicking up a fuss,” said Church. “At the same time, it might be rather helpful to know where we're going. You must give us time to pack our things.”

“Pack your things be blowed!” said Handforth. “We're only going as far as the Shingle Head cliffs.”

“And we're going to stay there to-morrow night and Sunday night?”

“Yes.”

“But what on earth for?” asked McClure.

“Why can't we come home to sleep? It's only a mile or two——”

“Because the Tiger Patrol is going into camp,” replied Handforth calmly. “We've got to get all our Scout outfits ready to-night, and be off directly after lunch to-morrow.”

This was news to Handforth's chums, but they weren't particularly opposed to the scheme. Even Church approved of it, for Handforth was probably right about getting stale. But they could see one or two snags.

“Have you told the other members of the Patrol?” asked McClure carelessly.

“Not yet.”

“Has Mr. Lee given us permission to go into camp on our own?” asked Church.

“Well, no, not exactly,” admitted Handforth. “But that's only a detail. I'm going to get his permission now.”

“These Housemasters get rummy ideas,” said McClure. “There's nothing wrong with the scheme, but Mr. Lee is quite liable to kybosh it. A Scout's camp is one thing, with the whole troop under canvas—but a mere patrol camp is different. I shouldn't be too sure, if I were you.”

Handforth sniffed.

“I'm going straight to Mr. Lee now,” he said. “We've got our tent and equipment, and everything. I'm going to teach my patrol a lot of useful scouting. It'll come in handy during the vac.”

He went off at once, and Church and McClure grinned. They had an idea that there would be no camp on the Shingle Head cliffs that week-end. Handforth was always an optimist until somebody came along and pointed out a few forceful facts.

Arriving at the Housemaster's study, the leader of the Tiger Patrol rapped on the door and walked in. Mr. Lee was at home, and he nodded cheerfully to the visitor.

“I'm glad you've come, Handforth,” he said. “I wanted to have a word with you about the recent examinations. I thought you would like to know that both Fullwood and yourself have secured very creditable marks.”

“Oh, that's good, sir,” said Handforth, with relief. “Then we're safe?”

Handforth and Fullwood, owing to a misunderstanding with their girl chums of the Moor View School, had done very badly in the exams., and, with the Head's permission, had sat for them again—quite privately. It was good to learn that they had been successful this time.

“Yes, my boy, I think you are safe,” smiled Mr. Lee. “I dare say Mr. Crowell, your Form-master, will give you fuller details

to-morrow. What is it you wished to see me about?"

"Well, I'm the leader of the Tiger Patrol, sir—1st St. Frank's Troop," explained Handforth. "I've decided to take my patrol into camp to-morrow, on the Shingle Head cliffs, and we're going to stay there until Monday morning."

"Indeed," said the Housemaster drily.

"Yes, sir. I thought I'd better come and tell you about it," explained Handforth. "Otherwise, you might wonder what had become of us."

Mr. Lee sat back, and stroked his chin.

"You didn't think it necessary, by any chance, to ask my permission?" he suggested gravely.

"Eh? I—I mean—— Permission, sir?" said Handforth, with a start. "But—but that's what I am asking! You just heard me, sir."

"I just heard you make a statement, young man."

"Well, it's all the same, sir," said Handforth. "So it's all serene, then? Thanks awfully, sir! I knew I could rely upon you to do the decent thing. We'll go directly after lunch to-morrow, and be back in time for lessons on Monday morning. Good-night, sir!"

"One moment, Handforth," said the Housemaster firmly. "If you were any other boy, I should put my foot down at once on this high-handed attitude. But I really don't imagine that you realise your own impudence. Who are the other boys in this patrol?"

"Church, McClure, Burton, Owen major, and Goodwin, sir," said Handforth, who was quite astonished at Mr. Lee's tone. "But I didn't mean to be impudent, sir. Dash it all, I wouldn't cheek you, sir."

"I'm sure you wouldn't, Handforth," agreed Mr. Nelson Lee. "I take it that you intend to confine your activities to scouting practice, and that you have the necessary tent and equipment for this week-end camp?"

"Oh, rather, sir."

"In that case, I will grant you the necessary permission," said the Housemaster. "But you must report to me before starting to-morrow, and I will inspect you. By the way, two of the boys you mentioned are in the West House, so you must go to Mr. Stokes about them. My sanction only extends to boys of the Ancient House. Good-night, Handforth."

"Good-night, sir!"



CHAPTER 2.

FIGURES IN THE NIGHT!

"WELL?" said Church and McClure, as Handforth entered Study D.

"It's all right—I've got permission, of course," said Handforth, frowning. "But I've forgotten something. Those asses, Owen major and Goodwin, are in the West House now. I've got to go and get old Stokes' sanction before I can give them their orders."

"And their sanction, too," grinned McClure.

"It's all very well to make these arrangements without telling anybody about them, but we're different to the other chaps," said Church. "We understand you, Handy, and we naturally fall into line. But you'll probably have some trouble with those other three Tigers. For all you know, they may have made other plans."

"Rats!" said Handforth tartly. "If they've made other plans, those other plans'll

have to be squashed.

My orders have got to be obeyed, under penalty of—of—"

"Death?" suggested McClure.

"No, you ass!" roared Handforth.

"Under penalty of being kicked out of the patrol. I'm not going to be messed about by my own giddy Scouts. Come on! Help me to rope the bounders in!"

This was easier said than done. In the first place, Tom Burton flatly

declined to go into camp at all. Not only was he playing in the morrow's House match, but he had also promised to accompany Alec Duncan, the New Zealand junior, to Caistowe in the evening. It seemed that some of Duncan's friends had taken a furnished house at the seaside, and the two juniors were to spend the week-end there. So scouting was distinctly off.

"But I've given you my orders!" snorted Handforth.

"So you have, shipmate, but they've come too late," said the cheery Bo'sun. "I've already planned a cruise, and I can't cancel my ticket. Souse me! You should have given me longer notice of sailing!"

"Scouting's more important than wasting a week-end in frivolous holiday-making," said Handforth sternly. "Where's your sense of duty?"

"Chuck it, old man!" grinned Duncan. "The Bo'sun's coming with me, and if you like to go, that's your affair!"

You will find

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

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Arguments were useless—persuasions were equally futile—and threats were worse than anything. Tom Burton was a good Scout, but he was certainly not going into camp this week-end. Handforth was disgusted.

And when he went into the West House, Owen major and Dick Goodwin not only gave him a point-blank refusal, but they repudiated the Tiger Patrol altogether. In fact, they refused to acknowledge Handforth as their patrol leader.

"Nothing doing, lad," said Goodwin firmly.

"But, you ass, I'm ordering you!" roared Handforth.

"You can order us all you like—but we don't recognise the Tiger Patrol," said Owen major. "Why, we were fed-up with your leadership last season. And we were in the Ancient House then."

"By George! So you were!"

"It's different now," said Owen major. "If we want to do any scouting, we'll get up our own patrol—and you can get some new members. Don't forget to close the door as you go out!"

"We told you what would happen," said Church, when they got back to the Ancient House. "It's your own fault for making up your mind—and trying to make up other chaps' minds. We might stand it, but they won't."

"Stand it!" yelled Handforth. "But—but this is a treat! Being in camp for the week-end is nothing but a glorious holiday!"

His chums were inclined to think otherwise. As a leader, Handforth was apt to be dictatorial. The Tiger Patrol had always been more or less a joke, and the other three members were glad to be out of it. Church and McClure were less fortunate. Unless they stuck to Handforth, and agreed with him in almost everything, their lives wouldn't be worth living.

Finally, since nobody else would join the patrol, Handforth decided that he wouldn't admit any fresh members at any price. The three of them would go alone—and all the other fellows could go to the dickens. A few humorists called it only half a patrol, but these sallies were treated with the disdain they deserved.

"I've a dashed good mind to cut lessons altogether to-morrow," said Handforth, as he and his chums undressed in their dormitory. "I'll speak to Mr. Lee about it in the morning. What's the good of messing up the day? We'll get up at five o'clock, and be in camp by six."

"And I suppose you'll wake Mr. Lee at about a quarter-past five—to ask his permission?" said Church casually. "That's a ripping idea! Housemasters are always in a sweet temper if you wake them in the grey dawn. They'll do anything for you, bar eat out of your hand."

Handforth started.

"H'm! I'd forgotten that," he admitted. "I ought to have asked Mr. Lee this evening. Anyhow, we can be up at five, and get every-

thing ready—and grab Mr. Lee as soon as he comes down. So you chaps get straight to sleep, so that you'll be fresh."

This advice was excellent, but as Handforth persisted in talking long after lights-out, it became somewhat hollow. In the end, Edward Oswald's voice lulled his chums to sleep, but he wasn't aware of this fact.

"We'll show these idiots how a patrol should be run!" he said, with a yawn. "I'll teach them to sneer at me as a leader—Hullo! Did you hear that, Mac? Sounded like rain!"

He sat up and looked anxiously at the window.

"See if it's raining, Church, you ass!" he said sharply.

But Church was in the land of dreams.

"Didn't you hear me?" demanded Handforth. "Church! Mac! By George, they're both asleep, the rotters! That's all the attention I get!" he added indignantly. "Might as well talk to a brick wall!"

He got out of bed and leaned out of the window. The sky was heavily overcast, and there were a few drops of rain falling. The July night was warm, but the wind had a chilly, rainy feel about it. So far there wasn't any moon, and over in the West the last tinge of the summer sunset could be seen.

"H'm!" muttered Handforth. "Just our luck. It'll pour to-morrow!"

He got back to bed, and the matter apparently preyed on his mind, for he awoke at intervals, listening for rain. As a rule, he dropped off into a sound sleep and snored happily until the rising-bell went.

He was awake again just after midnight, but this time there was a reason for it. A sudden squall had come along, and had caused the casement window to crash to. A flurry of rain was pattering against the panes.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Handforth in alarm.

He was very anxious that the morrow should be fine, for there wasn't much fun in camping in wet weather. He jumped out of bed again, and went to the window. The rain had already stopped—it had only been a brief squall—and the moon was peeping out from behind a black cloud.

The West Square was illuminated with the pale radiance, and Handforth was just going to secure the window, when he stared.

Rummy!

He could have sworn that he saw two figures moving in the shadows. An illusion, of course—

"Great Scott!" he breathed tensely, "There ARE two figures!"

He stood there, stiff and alert, all sleep banished.

Quite distinct in the moonlight were two creeping, silent figures—and they were apparently preparing to make an entry into the West House!

What were they after?



CHAPTER 3.

HANDFORTH'S NIGHTMARE!

HANDFORTH'S first suspicions were that a rag was in progress. Some practical jokers were on the warpath! Then, after only a moment's consideration, he dismissed this supposition.

In the first place, raggers wouldn't risk a flogging, and possible expulsion, by prowling about after midnight. Neither would they venture upon such a mission with only two in the party. A dozen, perhaps, might have been reckless enough to venture. But two—no. Besides, these figures were strangely unfamiliar. They didn't look like schoolboys, and their movements were curiously lithe.

"By George!" murmured Handforth. "Burglars, I'll bet! Huh! They can't catch me napping!"

His first consideration should have been to awaken either the head prefect of his House, or one of the under-masters, or the Housemaster himself. In fact, anybody in authority.

But Edward Oswald Handforth never thought of a brainy thing like that. He prided himself upon being an amateur detective, and his first instinct was to capture these burglars single-handed. The honour of it would be enormous. As for the odds, he never even considered them. His spirit was of the kind which wins the V.C. on the battlefield without even knowing that anything out of the usual has been accomplished.

Without troubling to dress, he rushed out into the corridor, sped downstairs, and went to Study D. Flinging open the window, he tore out of doors in his bare feet, and ran across the square. He appeared upon the scene so abruptly that the strangers were caught unawares.

"Got you, you rotters!" roared Handforth triumphantly.

The two men were apparently trying to force an entry into the West House. And as they turned, the moonlight fell upon their figures. Handforth stared in amazement. He had pictured a pair of burglars such as one reads about in sensational fiction—desperate-looking characters with chokers round their necks. Handforth's mind always flew to melodrama.

But these men were foreigners—yellowish-looking fellows, with a distinctly Chinese aspect. And then the moon went behind a cloud, and he could only see their dim outlines. One of them uttered some words which Handforth could not understand.

"Put 'em up!" he bellowed. "Hi! Help! Burglars!"

Crash! Biff! Thud!

Handforth gave battle on the spot, fighting desperately. He had no intention of letting these mysterious visitors get away. Chinamen! Why, the very thought of it was startling.

In the West House, Reggie Pitt awoke with

a start, listening. Jack Grey stirred, too, and sat up in bed.

"So you heard something too?" asked Pitt, throwing the bedclothes aside. "There was a yell of some kind, down in the Square—Listen! What's all that racket? By Jove, it must be after midnight!"

"It's a fight!" said Grey, in alarm.

They ran to the window and looked out. It was so gloomy now that they could detect nothing, although they heard some scuffles. On the other side of the Square, Dick Hamilton was looking out of one window, and William Napoleon Browne and Edgar Fenton were at two others. Handforth's yells had certainly aroused the lighter sleepers.

Browne, the lanky Fifth Form skipper, emerged from his bed-room in his dressing-gown, and found Dick Hamilton and Tommy Watson just going down the corridor. And Fenton came along at the same moment.

"I am indeed glad that we are venturing forth in force, brothers," said Browne, with his usual coolness. "I may be wrong, but there is every indication of murky events in the Square. I trust you have brought your faithful revolver, Brother Fenton?"

"Don't be an ass, Browne," said Fenton sharply. "This looks serious. I could swear it was Handforth yelling out like that."

"In that case we need fear nothing," replied Browne. "In fact, we may take it for granted that Brother Handforth has found a mare's-nest. But let us hasten to the scene of action."

They arrived in the Square at about the same time as Pitt, Grey, and a couple of West House prefects. The moon came out, and revealed a still figure on the paved path. There was something uncomfortably sinister about that crumpled, motionless form.

With a run, the fellows were upon it, and found the huddled form of Edward Oswald Handforth. He was attired in pyjamas only, and it was first thought that he was badly hurt. But almost as soon as he was touched he sat up in a dazed condition, and lashed out.

"Take that!" he muttered fiercely.

"Thank you, Brother Handforth, but this violence is entirely unnecessary," said Browne gently, as he massaged his thigh. "Your knuckles are in excellent condition—"

"What is the matter here?" came a sharp voice.

The new arrival was Mr. Beverley Stokes, of the West House. The excited crowd broke away, and the Housemaster came through. And by this time numerous other wakeful boys were at the windows.

"Handforth!" said Mr. Stokes. "What has happened?"

"Chinamen!" said Handforth hoarsely.

"Eh?"

"Two of 'em—awful-looking rotters," muttered Handforth, with a dazed expression. "I tried to hold 'em, but they were as slippery as eels. Oh, my hat! They nearly smashed me, too. They tripped me up, and my head must have hit the flagstones—"

"Come, come!" said Mr. Stokes. "You

cannot expect us to credit this extraordinary story, Handforth. Morrow, help the boy to stand—he still appears very unsteady. He'll catch his death of cold, too——"

"I tell you they're here, sir!" insisted Handforth. "If you search, you'll find them! Two horrid-looking Chinks!"

"Has anybody seen anything of these—these strangers?" asked Mr. Stokes, looking round.

"No, sir," replied Fenton. "We simply heard some yells, and we found Handforth alone. It seems pretty obvious to me, sir," he added, with a keen look. "Just a case of nightmare."

"That's what we think, too," said Dick Hamilton, nodding.

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Stokes. "Pull yourself together, Handforth. Either you walked in your sleep, or you have been suffering from hallucinations. You had better go straight back to bed. Fenton, perhaps you will see that he goes straight into his dormitory?"

"Leave it to me, sir," said Fenton.

Handforth struggled fiercely.

"Nightmare!" he gasped. "But—but I tell you they were here—two Chinamen! I saw them from my window at first, and buzzed straight down. They were trying to break into the West House, sir. And as soon as I grabbed them, they biffed me over and bolted."

"Take him indoors, Fenton," said Mr. Stokes gently.

"Don't you believe me, sir?" panted Edward Oswald.

"My dear boy, you have merely had a nightmare," said the Housemaster, in a soothing voice. "I rather fancy that you have been reading some sensational fiction, and I shall look further into this to-morrow. At the moment you must get straight back to bed."

Handforth was utterly aghast.

"You ought to ring up the police, sir!" he said, looking round wildly. "I thought they were just ordinary burglars at first, but then I saw they were Chinamen! Yellow-looking chaps, with pigtails! And I believe they were wearing blue smocks, and one of them had a dagger in his teeth! I'm not quite sure about that, though, because the moon went in."

Handforth was drawing upon his imagination slightly, and it only served to utterly kill any credence that his story might otherwise have received. Had he given an account of two ordinary tramps, Mr. Stokes would probably have ordered a search. But to hear of two Chinamen—one with a knife in his teeth—was altogether too fantastic for words. Quite obviously, Handforth had been indulging in a particularly vivid nightmare. The very fact that he was in his pyjamas was eloquent proof of this.

In spite of his protestations, he was led back into the Ancient House, and escorted to bed. And the school settled down again, grinning hugely over the fiasco. Edward Oswald Handforth was the only one who

knew that those Chinamen were real flesh and blood!

"You—you idiots!" he panted, as he was forced between the sheets by Fenton and Browne. "I saw those Chinks——"

"Of course you did!" said Fenton gently. "We're not doubting you, Handforth, old man. One can see all sorts of queer things in a nightmare. Now go to sleep, and forget everything."

"I tell you——"

"Good-night!"

They went out and closed the door, and Handforth gnashed his teeth helplessly. He couldn't even appeal to Church and McClure—for these wise youths, although fully awake, were snoring loudly, and refused to "awaken" in spite of Handforth's most urgent promptings.



CHAPTER 4.

THE TIGERS AT LARGE.

"CHINAMEN!" grinned McClure scornfully.

"Probably with dragons' heads!" said Church, as he fastened his

collar. "Are you sure they didn't have claws instead of feet, Handy?"

Handforth regarded his chums with cold disdain. The morning sunlight was streaming through the dormitory window, and the rising-bell had clanged out long since. In fact, Handforth & Co. were rather late.

"You can sneer!" he said tartly. "But I know what I know! A nightmare, eh? You wait until I get on the track! I'm going to trail those Chinamen, and find out what their game was!"

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Church. "He still believes it!"

They had chipped their leader unmercifully while dressing, reckless of the possible consequences. There were some opportunities which Church and McClure simply couldn't ignore, and this was one of them. Rather to their surprise, Handforth had not attempted any fistic retaliation. He adopted a cold, disdainful attitude.

As a matter of fact, he was startled to find *himself* doubting the story. At midnight it had seemed quite rational, and he had been further convinced by the simple reality of his swift scrap. There had been no question then. He had battled with those two Orientals, and he had known well enough that they were living flesh.

But this morning he wasn't so sure!

With the summer sunshine streaming through the window, and the continual chip-pings of his chums, he half wondered if the adventure had actually happened. His reason told him that it had. But what proof was there? That was the awkward part of it.

He remembered awakening, and he remembered looking out of the window. Then he had rushed downstairs, and had found those two rummy-looking men—— But it certainly seemed a bit fantastic. After all, why on earth should a couple of Chinamen



The moonlight lit up the yellow, slant-eyed features of the two Chinamen who had been trying to get through the window. For a moment, Handy stared in blank amazement, then he went leaping at them. "Put 'em up!" he bellowed, and one of the Chinamen took the full weight of Handforth's right, squarely on his ear!

try to get into the West House? The thing was palpably ridiculous.

And nightmares have a habit of seeming extraordinarily real. Handforth wondered if he had imagined the whole thing, and had only really awakened after a mock fight with himself in the Square. Perhaps he had slipped, and that bang on the head had knocked the nightmare away.

Yet he couldn't bring himself to accept this as the true explanation. In spite of his doubts, he positively knew that the affair had happened. Still his doubts remained, and he wasn't very keen on discussing the subject.

"You wait!" he said gruffly. "You can crow now, but I'll make you sing another tune after I've conducted my investigations."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

His chums laughed heartlessly, and only just escaped from the dormitory in time. Never for an instant did they think of believing their leader. More than anybody else, they had reason to do otherwise. For Handforth was famous for his imagination, and Church and McClure were constantly suffering on account of it. Of course he had had a nightmare!

Most of the junior school was laughing over the affair when Handforth got down, and he was subjected to further unmerciful ragging throughout the morning. But after one or two juniors had received violent punches on the nose, they thought it advisable to drop the subject. Handy was becoming exasperated, and when he was in

that condition his right was liable to lash out with singular forcefulness.

He had thought better of his proposal to start the Scout camp in the early morning. And when lessons were over he received a summons to attend his Housemaster's study. He eagerly obeyed, for it afforded him an opportunity of laying his case before the famous Housemaster-detective.

"I understand, Handforth, that only three of you will go under canvas this afternoon?" asked Mr. Lee. "The arrangement was that the full patrol should encamp."

"The others won't come, sir," said Handforth indignantly. "Burton's going somewhere with Duncan, and Goodwin and Owen major aren't Tigers any more. They're independent now that they're in the West House."

"Do you propose to camp with merely Church and McClure?"

"Why, yes, sir."

"Well, I shall only grant my permission on your faithful assurance that you will confine yourselves solely to scouting routine, and that you return not later than eight o'clock on Monday morning," said the Housemaster. "There must be no evasions, Handforth. You are to go into camp as Scouts, and confine yourselves to the strict scouting procedure. Is that quite understood?"

"Why, of course, sir," said Handforth.

"That's the whole idea."

"I have your word on that?"

"Honour bright, sir."

"Very good—you may go on this little expedition," said Mr. Lee. "I don't want to appear unreasonable, Handforth, but you will understand that this is an exceptional pass. Boys do not usually go under canvas unless the whole troop participates. I would not like you to treat the Boy Scout movement with your usual levity. Since you have satisfied me on the point, I will say no more. I wish you luck with the weather, my boy. I hope you all have a happy week-end under canvas."

"Thanks awfully, sir," said Edward Oswald.

"And now, about these two mysterious Chinamen—"

"By George, I was going to speak to you about them, sir," interrupted Handforth eagerly. "I thought perhaps you'd help me to get on the track. I'm going to make some investigations, sir, and I was going to offer to let you assist me—"

"Thank you, Handforth—I am honoured," said Mr. Nelson Lee gravely. "But let me advise you to put all such nonsense out of your head."

"Nonsense, sir!"

"Mr. Stokes has told me of what happened last night, and it is fairly clear that your dream was of a particularly vivid nature," continued the Housemaster. "Mr. Stokes suggests that you have been reading detective stories of a rather lurid kind, Handforth. Have you recently been reading stories concerning Chinamen?"

Handforth flushed indignantly.

"I haven't read a word about Chinamen, sir," he denied. "Great Scott! Do you think it was a dream, too? Why, the story I'm reading now is as mild as anything! It's only about a gang of Italian secret society crooks who kidnap a chap. They torture him, and demand ten thousand pounds ransom, and then hide him away with some brigands."

"And that is what you call mild?" asked the Housemaster sternly. "Good gracious! I don't wonder that you dream of mysterious Orientals! If I catch you reading anything of that nature, young man, I'll find it necessary to institute a strict censorship. Let this be a word of warning."

"But those Chinks were really there, sir—"

"That is quite enough, Handforth," interrupted the Housemaster sternly. "I am inclined to think this week-end in camp will do you a lot of good. The fresh air will clear the phantasms out of your vivid imagination. Take my advice, and leave all such reading matter behind. Once again, Handforth, I hope you will enjoy yourself."

It was undoubtedly a hint of dismissal, and Handforth had to go. He found Church and McClure waiting for him outside—both looking very smart in their Scouts' outfits. They had taken the opportunity to change.

"All off?" asked Church. "Has Mr. Lee kyboshed it because the other fellows won't come?"

Handforth stared at him dazedly.

"He's squashed the whole thing!" he said, with intense indignation.

"Oh, well, we'd better go and change again," said McClure. "After all, I'm not particularly disappointed—"

"Change again?" said Handforth, starting. "What for?"

"Didn't you say it was squashed?"

"What was squashed?"

"Our camp."

"You hopeless ass, I was talking about these Chinamen!" snorted Handforth. "Mr. Lee's had the nerve to tell me that I was dreaming! And he's told me that I read lurid literature!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

His chums laughed with callous amusement.

"Wait until I've got my uniform on!" said Handforth darkly. "I'll make you toe the line then, my lads! The camp isn't off, and we're starting out directly after lunch! And unless I'm a Dutchman I'll find out the truth about those Chinamen, too!"

"Then you must be a Dutchman!" grinned Church. "Anyhow, you're generally talking double Dutch, so it amounts to the same thing."



CHAPTER 5.

THE INTER-HOUSE CYCLE RACE.

WHEN the Tiger patrol marched importantly across the Triangle after luncheon, trying to look like a full contingent, the whole place seemed to be littered up with bicycles. Handforth was so surprised that he swung round and blared out an order.

"Halt!" he roared. "Company, stand at ease!"

"Fathead!" said Church. "We're not cadets!"

"Eh?" said Handforth. "H'm! I suppose not. All the same, you've got to obey orders—"

"Yes, but you can't use that military tone," put in McClure. "Scouts are free and easy—that's the whole idea of the thing. So not so much of your 'Halt.' We're going to enjoy this camp, aren't we?"

"Well, never mind," growled Handforth, as he looked round. "Hi, Pitt! What's the idea of all this preparation? What are all these bikes doing?"

"Nothing, at present," said Pitt genially. "But before long they're going to be used in a race. We've been planning it for days, you know, and everybody's been talking about it—but I suppose this is the first you've heard? Good old Trackett Grim!"

Handforth frowned.

"I didn't ask for any rot!" he said severely. "Why should I bother about your silly bicycle races? Now I come to think of it, I do remember something about a contest between you chaps and Stockdale's lot. Huh! I suppose this is why Goodwin and Owen major turned down my camping idea?"

"It's one reason," nodded Pitt. "They're both in the race, and you can't expect them to go scouting at the same time. It's going to be a stiff fight, by the look of it. Those Modern House chaps are hot."

"Well, I wish you luck," said Handforth, nodding. "Can't stop now—we're off to camp. There seems to be plenty of sport to-day, one way and another. You fellows will be tearing over the countryside on your jiggers, and Goole's and Stokes' are having a cricket match. We've got something better to do."

"Going to find out about those Chinamen?" asked Pitt solemnly.

"You leave those Chinamen alone!" snorted Handforth.

"They're yours, old man," agreed Pitt. "O dreamer of dreams! Let me warn you against the evils of scoffing wonky salmon just before going to bed—"

"Come on, you chaps," said Handforth tartly. "We're Scouts, and we've got something better to do than— Well, my hat!" He broke off, and stared excitedly across the Triangle. "Got it! By George, got it!"

The others followed the direction of his gaze.

"Blessed if I can see what he's staring at," said Church, frowning.

"And those Chinks were trying to break into the West House!" said Handforth tensely. "I knew it all the time! Why, it's as clear as—as—"

"Mud?" suggested Pitt blandly.

"Look at him!" said Handforth, pointing. "Yung Ching! NOW do you understand? Yung Ching, the Chinese chap!"

"What about him?" asked Pitt. "He's in this cycle race. He looks pretty fit, as far as I can see. He's a wiry young bounder, and a bit of a dark horse. What's the excitement about?"

"Don't—don't you understand?" said Handforth breathlessly. "Those two Chinamen were breaking into the West House to kidnap Yung Ching!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody in the vicinity howled.

"Oh, Handy, you're just about the limit!" grinned Reggie. "Trust you to find some wild explanation! But I'm afraid it's a frost, old man. You'll have to try again!"

"You can cackle!" retorted Handforth. "But I saw those beggars, and I'd forgotten for the moment that Chingy was in the West House. It's as clear as daylight! They were going to kidnap him, and Chingy can thank me for being saved."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

This sounded taller than ever, and Handforth gave a final snort, and marched off with the other members of his patrol. He and his nightmare were becoming somewhat stale, and the juniors soon dismissed the subject. Doyle and Scott, however, who were Yung Ching's chums in Study R, couldn't help putting a question or two to the Chinese boy.

"Handy says that he saw two of your countrymen last night," grinned Doyle.

Yung Ching nodded.

"Allee samee, savvy," he said. "But Handy 'long."

"Of course he's wrong," said Doyle. "It was only a dream of his. He thinks they were breaking in to kidnap you, Chingy. Have you got a few enemies knocking about that you know of?"

"Me tink'ee Handy have bad dleam," said Yung Ching, with a nod. "Allee samee, Handy got heap plentee 'magination. Velly stlange fella."

"There's nobody likely to harm you?" asked Scott.

"Me gotee no enemies," replied Ching, with a bland smile. "Why baddee men come and harm poor Chinese boy? Allee sillee. Handy scattee!"

"By Jingo, so he is!" chuckled Pitt. "Scatty's just the right word. Well, what about this race? Where's the starter? And what about the handicaps? Unless we get going, we shall waste the whole giddy afternoon."

The cycle race was quite an important event in the sports carnival—which, this term, was a feature of St. Frank's. The Schoolboy Test matches were, naturally, the most interesting of all, and everybody was looking forward to the fifth and final Test at Lord's, on the following week—when the rival elevens would battle for the Schoolboy Ashes.

But this cycle race was quite a big affair, in its own way. Some of the Modern House juniors were inclined to smile when they saw that Yung Ching was included in the West House competitors. But the Chinese boy, although small, was surprisingly strong and wiry, and his powers of endurance were astonishing. He had all the vivid vitality of his race.

Of late, too, he had taken up cycling as a hobby, and had shelved his favourite sport of kite-flying. He had grown very fond of his bicycle, but had only entered for the race under the persuasions of his study chums. They had an idea that he would do well.

The course was a long one—a circular route through Bannington, via Caistowe, and then on through various villages, and across the moor to home.

Doyle was not a particularly brilliant cyclist, and he had only entered for the fun of the thing, and had no real expectation of being among the first dozen. And it was always possible to drop out if the effort became too gruelling.

Scott and Yung Ching were off almost together, and Doyle followed soon afterwards. On the other side of Bellton village the competitors were strung out at varying distances, and the pace was easy and leisurely in these early stages of the race. The villagers wondered what was the matter when the batches of cyclists came through in continuous procession.

Doyle found himself alone as he pedalled his machine along the cliff road in the neighbourhood of Shingle Head. It was only a lane, with high banks and hedges on either side. Turning a bend, Doyle came within

sight of another competitor who had apparently met with a mishap. He rode up, and then leapt from his machine.

"Trouble, Chingy?" he asked breathlessly.

"Velly bad," replied Yung Ching, glancing round. "Allee samee wire mixed in chain. Muchee entangled."

"My hat! That's pretty rough," said Doyle, as he glanced at his study-mate's bicycle. "And Scott and I were hoping that you'd spring a surprise, and win the giddy race! How did it happen?"

"No savee!" said Ching, as he wrestled with his chain.

"But you must have seen it on the road

"Bikee suddenly stop!" explained Ching. "Goe hard, and I fall off. Wire on road, pelhaps. Me picke it up. But you hully on, Doyle. No waitee. No spoilee own chance. Me come plesently."

"But, hang it, I don't like to leave you

"Me alle light," Yung Ching assured him. "Soon lide again."

Doyle went on, after glancing round and assuring himself that there were no other competitors within sight. A few were some little distance ahead, and he pedalled hard in order to make up for lost time.

It was rather a pity about Yung Ching's mishap, though. Both Scott and Doyle had secretly held the opinion that the Chinese boy's endurance would be a big factor in the race—and they even believed that he might be the winner. But that chain had looked badly entangled, and Doyle was rather dubious as to whether his strange little chum would conquer it.

However, there was no sense in worrying. He glanced back now and again, but there was no sign of the Chinese boy. So Doyle decided to go all out on the race, and with this object he put on some extra speed. He was at the top of a hill, and he coasted down it swiftly.

There had been some rain in the night, and the surface was none too good. In any case, this was only a country lane, and one had to be pretty cautious. And Doyle was rather a reckless cyclist. He fairly hummed down the hill, revelling in the speed.

And when it was almost too late, he suddenly came upon a sharp, left-hand bend. He applied his brakes, and might have got round the bend in safety, but for the fact that some brainy individual had littered the road with loose stones, leaving the traffic to drive them in.

"My hat!" gasped Doyle in alarm.

He struck those loose stones at about twenty miles an hour, and he hardly knew what happened immediately afterwards.

His machine seemed to leap from under him.

He catapulted through the air with terrific force, and landed with a squelching thud in the ditch on the far side.



CHAPTER 6.

THE MYSTERY OF YUNG CHING.

"GLUB-GLUB!" said Doyle incoherently.

He was scarcely recognisable as a human being, having just come to the surface of about three feet of thick, glutinous mud. He struggled out upon the grassy bank, and viewed the world giddily.

He knew that he was whole, and this was at least something. A muddy ditch is not a pleasant place to fall into—but it had the great advantage of being soft. If Doyle had come down on those loose stones, he would probably have maimed himself for life.

His bicycle was lying in the middle of the road, the front wheel doing its utmost to resemble a figure "8." The forks, too, were bent back drunkenly, and the handlebars were pointing to the north-east.

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Doyle unhappily.

He was rather proud of his machine, for it was a good one. At least, it had been a good one. At the present moment it was more like a mass of old iron. He forgot his muddy condition, and hauled the machine to the side of the road—so that it would not obstruct the fairway.

He realised that he was out of the race—for no self-respecting cyclist would attempt to ride a machine with a front wheel in that condition. His one desire, too, was to get home and indulge in a bath.

But he remembered Yung Ching. The Chinese boy was bound to come along in a minute or two, and Doyle decided to give him a cheer as he passed. He had caught sight of a little brook, too, and it struck him that it might be a good idea to have a dip at once.

After all, he was wearing practically no clothing—merely singlet and shorts, hardly any heavier than an ordinary bathing costume. He waited there impatiently, and at last a cyclist came coasting down.

But it wasn't Yung Ching. The newcomer was Owen major.

"Had a spill?" he shouted, quite gratuitously.

"No!" shouted Doyle. "I wanted to see what the mud was like!"

"Ass!" sang out the other junior as he rode by.

"Seen Chingy up the road?" yelled Doyle.

"No!"

"But he's at the top of that hill—with a piece of wire in his chain—"

"Not there now," came back Owen major's breathless answer. "You must have missed him."

Doyle frowned. He couldn't understand it. How on earth could Owen major have overlooked Yung Ching? There were no side turnings, and the Chinese boy's mishap had occurred where the banks and hedges were high. It was ridiculous. Owen major MUST have passed him.

Another competitor came in sight—this time Singleton.

"Hallo!" he shouted, as he swept by. "Had a smash?"

"Idiot!" roared Doyle furiously.

"No need to slang me——"

"Seen Chingy up the road?" snapped Doyle, swallowing his indignation.

"Not a sign of him," replied Singleton. "I've been chasing that ass, Owen major, for about two miles. Chingy wasn't on the road."

"Jolly queer!" muttered Doyle. "It's all rot! I left Ching on the top of that hill, and I'll swear he hasn't come by. H'm! I suppose he must have found that wire too much for him, and he's walking back. But, in that case, why didn't those other fatheads see him? They couldn't have missed him!"

It was a bit of a puzzle, but Doyle was so concerned about his own condition that he soon forgot it. He had his dip in the brook, and emerged gasping, but clean. He decided to leave his machine behind the hedge, and to come along for it later, when he was dressed more respectably—and more comfortably. At the moment his best policy would be to make a beeline for St. Frank's at a steady trot.

So he started off, and long before he had reached Bellton his thin clothing had dried on him. And by the time he got back to the school it was wet again—but now with perspiration. The July sun was hot.

But Doyle had adopted the sensible course, and there was no fear of him catching any chill. Having changed into Etons, he felt more like himself, and was inclined to feel thankful that he had come off so lightly. There wasn't a bruise on him, and the damage to his machine was the only casualty.

"Seen Yung Ching anywhere?" he asked, as he met Willy Handforth in the Triangle.

"I thought he was in the race," said Willy. "He went off with the others, anyhow——"

"No, since then," interrupted Doyle. "He had a mishap, I think, and walked back. I thought perhaps you'd seen him coming in."

"No," said Willy, shaking his head. "He hasn't come back, Doyle. I've been in the Triangle all the time, and I should have spotted him at once. He must have gone on with the others."

"I suppose he must," said Doyle, nodding.

He hung about the Triangle, and was there when the excitement began. For it was nearly time when the first arrivals were expected. Crowds gathered out in the lane,

and strung themselves out for two or three hundred yards in order to cheer the leaders on.

Reggie Pitt, of the West House, was the winner—with John Busterfield Boots a hot second. Not that Doyle was particularly interested. He was beginning to get quite worried about Yung Ching—particularly when the rank and file of the competitors pedalled wearily home. Ching wasn't among them, and nobody had seen him.

Within twenty minutes the last straggler had dribbled in, and he, too, reported that he had seen Yung Ching nowhere on the route.

"It's a rummy affair altogether," said Doyle, as he discussed matters with Scott. "What happened during those five minutes?"

"Which five minutes?" asked Larry Scott.

"Why, after I left Ching, and before

Owen major came along," said Doyle.

"It couldn't have been longer than five minutes, at the most. Ching was wrestling with some wire that had got in his chain, and I left him. The very next chap to come was Owen major, and he hadn't seen Ching at all."

"It's a bit queer, but he's bound to turn up," said Scott.

"But it's—it's so dashed mysterious," frowned Doyle. "He didn't walk his jigger back, and he didn't complete the

course. What became of him?"

Scott smiled.

"There's no need to look so worried, old man," he said. "Why make a mystery out of such a trifle? A thousand things might have happened to him—all of them quite simple. If we wait here he's bound to come in before long. Don't get the wind up."

Doyle glared.

"Do you take me for an ass?" he asked warmly.

"Yes!"

"Look here——"

He paused, and grunted. Larry Scott had a singular habit of telling the exact truth, and this was sometimes very awkward. In fact, Scott couldn't do anything but state the bald and absolute truth on any subject. It was a peculiarity of his. He had got into trouble with the Moor View girls on many an occasion—without the slightest intention of doing so. If one of them happened to ask how he liked her frock, she naturally expected him to go into raptures. But if Scott didn't like a thing, he promptly SAID he didn't like it. He just couldn't help himself. He had more than once got into severe hot water with Mr. Crowell for the very same cause.

"Yes, you're an ass," he repeated genially.

FREE GIFTS !.....

Going on holidays? You are?
Good, you'll be going to the sea-
side, eh? Then look out for the
"Nelson Lee" man—if he sees you
carrying your copy of the Old
Paper, he'll stop you and make
you a present! He is visiting
all the seaside towns this summer
—carry your copy where he can
see it.

.....FREE GIFTS!

"Why make something out of nothing? And what about your jigger? Supposing we go along and rescue it? It'll give us something to do before tea."

"Let's wait a bit longer for Chingy," growled Doyle. "That bike of mine is a wreck. It'll cost quids to have it repaired. Just my luck when I'm nearly broke!"

"You were always a reckless beggar on hills," said Scott.

"How was I to know those rotten stones were there?"

"That's why you're reckless," said Larry. "Before taking a bend at high speed, you ought to know what's beyond. But if you're short of cash, I'll lend you some. Take your machine to the repair shop, and I'll foot the bill. You can pay me later."

"Thanks awfully," said Doyle gratefully. "Upon the whole, Larry, I think you're right. I am an ass. The next hill I go down I'll be jolly careful. I might have broken my neck if I hadn't fallen into that ditch."

They waited a little longer, and made further inquiries. But Yung Ching did not return, and the time dragged on. Doyle continued to be worried, but Larry Scott was only amused. He hadn't been on the spot at the time, and he couldn't appreciate the peculiarity of the position as Doyle could. Besides, he had not been Yung Ching's study-mate for nothing.

"There's no telling with these Chinese chaps," he said. "Ching's all right in most respects, but he does queer things occasionally—things that we can't understand, and never will understand. I suppose all Orientals are the same. They're a rummy lot."

"That's true enough," admitted Doyle, as he looked down the lane.

"And Ching is so deep, too," went on Scott. "Sometimes he goes out, and comes back after an hour or two, and the young beggar won't say where he's been. What does he answer when we ask him?"

"No savee!" growled Doyle.

"Exactly," grinned Larry Scott. "The young boulder savvies all the time, but he doesn't choose to say. That's one of his Chinese peculiarities. Most of these Chinks are the same—they're so deep that you can't get to the bottom of 'em. Let's have some tea."

Doyle was feeling better.

"Good idea!" he agreed. "Lead me to it!"



CHAPTER 7. TIGERS IN CAMP!

WATER!" said Handforth, looking round. "Where's the water?"

"In the river, I expect," snapped Church.

"Where do you expect to find it? There's plenty in the sea, if you're particularly keen. But I don't believe it'll taste nice with the

tea. There's no accounting for some chaps, though."

Church was feeling rather peevish. The depleted Tiger Patrol had made their camp on the downs just overlooking Shingle Head. The sloping cliffs were near by, with the gleaming waters of the Channel in full sight. It was quite an ideal camping ground. There were some dense trees away to the left, where a thick spinney half-concealed a kind of gully. There wasn't a house for a mile, and the privacy was supreme.

But Handforth, as usual, had acted the autocrat. As leader of the Tiger Patrol, he had an idea that Church and McClure were slaves, and that he was their lord and master. This sort of thing was all right as a joke, but too much of it was inclined to grow monotonous. There had been squabbles while the tent was being pitched.

"I don't want any of your piffle," said Handforth coldly. "How do you expect me to make a decent cup of tea without any fresh water?"

"Goodness knows," said Church. "If it comes to that, you can't make a decent cup of tea at all! Mac's the chap to make the tea—"

"I've told Mac to light the fire," retorted Handforth. "He's gone off to collect some sticks. What's the good of scouting unless we have a camp-fire?"

"And what's the good of a spirit-stove if we don't use it?" asked Church tartly. "You silly ass, if we wait for a camp-fire we shan't get any tea until midnight! I've never known such an obstinate beggar!"

"My hat!" gasped Handforth. "Mutiny!"

"Not far off it!" retorted Church. "Mac's just about fed-up, too—and for two pins we'll both go back to St. Frank's, and leave you here on your own. What do you say, Mac?"

McClure had just come up, with about five little twigs in his hand.

"I say the same!" he agreed heartily. "Camping's all very well, but we've got to have harmony. And we've got to have tea, too. There's a good spirit-stove, and plenty of spirit—so let's do the thing sensibly."

Handforth was looking at the twigs suspiciously.

"Is that all you could find?" he demanded.

"Well, I might have found a few more if I'd looked more closely," replied McClure evasively. "But why bother? We can have a proper camp-fire to-night. I'll make the tea while Church cuts the bread-and-butter. Have we come here to enjoy ourselves, or suffer misery?"

Handforth became suddenly cold.

"Have your own way!" he said bitterly. "It's always the same! I do the best I can for you chaps, and all you do is to return good for evil!"

"Hear, hear!" said Church, grinning.

"Eh?" ejaculated Handforth, with a start. "You cackling asses! I mean, all you do is to defy me. I try to make good Scouts of you, and you're nothing but a couple of fat-heads. Where's the water?"

"There's a brook in that little spinney,"



Handforth saw that Yung Ching was bound and heavily gagged, and the Chinamen who held him were rushing him towards the boat. Handy didn't hesitate, he simply sailed into them, lashing out with all his strength.

said McClure, with a jerk of his head. "You buzz off, Churchy, and fill the pannikin. We'll soon have some tea on the go. And after that a dip, eh? The sea's looking lovely!"

Handforth brightened up.

"Yes, by George, I can just do with a bathe!" he agreed genially. "Buzz off and get the water, Church, and we'll hustle with the other things. Where's the spirit-stove? There's nothing to beat a spirit-stove when you're camping. Where's the idiot who suggested a camp-fire? What rot! I gave you credit for more sense, Mac!"

"Well, my hat!" said McClure blankly.

Church went off grinning, and made his way into the dense spinney which McClure had indicated. Church was swallowed up at once, and he soon located the stream. It was quite a pretty little spot—a hidden glade in the wood. The ground sloped steeply, and the stream came trickling musically over a miniature waterfall. There were tangled masses of bramble, and Church found it rather difficult to obtain his water. But he filled the pannikin at last, and turned. Then he paused. He had caught a glint of something in a particularly large bramble-clump close at hand.

His curiosity was only idle at first. He wondered what the glint could be caused by—he paused, and looked more closely. The sunlight was percolating through the overhead foliage at this point, and the rays were catching something which the brambles contained.

"I suppose I'm an ass for wasting time," murmured Church.

All the same, he set the pannikin down, and gingerly parted the outermost brambles. It seemed to him that they had been recently disturbed. He peered through closely, and then gasped.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed.

His discovery was indeed a surprising one, and it took him unawares. The bramble clump contained about the last thing he would have expected to see—a bicycle, in perfect condition!

Even during that first glance Church could see that there wasn't a speck of rust upon it. It had a kind of racing look about it, the rims of the wheels being of wood, and the tyres exceedingly slim.

"But—but who the dickens could have shoved this jigger in here?" asked Church, appealing to the air. "And why? There's no road for miles— Yes, there is, though," he added, as a thought struck him. "There's that lane from Bellton— By jingo, it must run fairly close to this spinney, too. But why ruin a good machine by leaving it to the mercy of the weather in the middle of a wood?"

He forgot all about the water, and hurried back to camp. The spirit-stove was going fine when he arrived, and Handforth and McClure were busy. Handforth glanced round approvingly.

"Good man!" he said. "Fill the kettle, and— Hallo! Where's the water?"

"Oh, sorry!" said Church. "I forgot it."

"You forgot it!" gasped Handforth. "You go to the brook to fetch some water, and you forget it! Of all the blithering idiots——"

"Shut up!" snapped Church. "There's something rummy there——"

"Something rummy?"

"A bicycle!"

"There's nothing rummy about a bicycle, you ass!"

"But this one's pushed into a bramble-clump," explained Church. "I happened to see it by accident, and I thought I'd better come along and tell you chaps. It seems so jolly queer, you know. There's something mysterious about it. No sane chap would hide a machine up like that. It's a new machine, too—and couldn't have been there long."

Handforth suddenly became eager.

"A new machine hidden in a spinney!" he said, with a start. "By George! That smacks of something I once read in a book. A chap was murdered, and his bike was pushed into a pond."

"We'd better go and look for the body!" said McClure sarcastically. "You didn't happen to see any clothes knocking about, Church? Or a stray leg or two?"

"It's all very well to be funny, but I've heard of mysterious happenings in spinneys," said Handforth darkly. "Where's that bike, Church? You leave this to me! It won't take me long to form a theory!"

His chums believed him. Handforth generally formed a theory in about twenty seconds—before he could possibly obtain any grounds for his deductions. Unfortunately, ninety-nine per cent of his theories fell to the ground upon close examination.

But Church was certainly interested this time. He couldn't think of any adequate reason for that bicycle being hidden in the brambles. If there was nothing sinister behind it, it seemed a perfectly senseless thing. No rational cyclist would leave his machine in a place of that sort.

Within five minutes Handforth & Co. had reached the spot, and the mysterious jigger was pulled out. And Church's statement was proved to be correct. The machine had been thrust deeply into the very heart of the clump, and it was in perfect condition, excepting for one peculiar feature. The chain was entangled with a coil of thin, springy wire. It was so enmeshed that the chain-wheel was locked. Otherwise, the machine was as new. The wire hadn't done any harm, either, for, once it was disentangled, the chain would work as sweetly as ever.

"There's something funny about this," said Handforth, with gleaming eyes. "Look at the plating! Not a spot of rust on it—and the frame's dusty, too. It couldn't have been here for more than an hour or two!"

"How do you know that?" asked Church.

"Because of that dust."

"That's no proof——"

"A fat lot you know about detective investigation!" sneered Handforth. "There was some rain last night, and the roads were damp until midday. If this bike had been

here overnight, it would be spotted with rust, and showing other signs of rain. But it's dry and dusty—and there wasn't any dust on the roads until an hour or two ago."

"By jingo, that's true enough," said Church, with a start.

"Elementary!" said Handforth carelessly. "A mere trifle. These sort of deductions are child's-play to an expert like me. We know for a fact that the bike was shoved in here this afternoon. But who did it? And why?"

"Good old Handy!" said McClure, nodding. "Go ahead!"

"Eh?"

"We're waiting to hear the rest," explained McClure. "It ought to be easy for you to tell us who the bike belongs to, and what he had for breakfast! It might be interesting to know who his father is, too, and how many moles he's got on his right arm. Buck up!"

Handforth glared.

"I'm surprised at you!" he said sourly. "There's a mystery here, and, instead of treating it with respect, you try to be funny! We've got to search this spinney until we find another clue."

"But what about tea?" asked Church.

"Never mind about tea!" roared Handforth. "We've hit upon a startling case, and we mustn't have any rest until we've elucidated the mystery. There's probably a victim," he added darkly. "We've got to find the victim and the murderer."

"Oh, my hat!" growled McClure. "Finding a bike isn't enough for him—he's got to invent a victim and a murderer! We shan't get any tea until to-morrow at this rate! It's a pity you couldn't choose a better time to find bicycles in bramble-clumps, Church, you ass!"

Church nodded dolefully.

"If I'd thought of it, I'd have waited until after tea," he replied, with feeling.



CHAPTER 8.

ON THE TRACK.

WELL, it beats me!" said Doyle gruffly.

He and Scott had finished tea, and had made further inquiries about Yung Ching. But the Chinese junior had not returned, and nobody could give his study mates any information. Ching was still absent.

"I tell you there's something mysterious about it," went on Doyle. "I can't help feeling it, Larry, old man. I'm not suggesting that Chingy has met with any accident, but I'd like to go back to that place where I saw him, and have a look round. I'm sort of uncomfortable."

"Well, let's go, then," said Scott. "We've got to fetch your machine, anyhow, and we shall go right past the spot where you left Ching. We might see something of those Tigers, too."

"Tigers?" said Doyle, staring.

"Handforth & Co., camping."

"My hat! I thought you meant real tigers!" said Doyle, grinning. "I was wondering what menagerie they'd escaped from. If it comes to that, a lot of those Ancient House chaps often wonder about Handy."

They started off briskly, and made further inquiries about Yung Ching in the village. But he hadn't been seen, and even Doyle was beginning to feel amused. Of course, he was obviously making a mountain out of a molehill. The chances were that Ching had dropped out of the race, and had decided to cut across the downs to Caistowe, or something like that, and was probably having a good time on the beach.

The pair reached the spot after a goodish walk, and Doyle looked round closely.

"Nothing here, of course," he remarked. "But this is the place, though. I remember that elm-tree, there. Ching was just about here, trying to get that chunk of wire out of his chain. There's a spinney just behind, and——"

"Listen!" said Scott, holding up his finger.

Voices came to them, and they both grinned. It would be more correct to say that one voice came to them, and they had no difficulty in recognising the tones of Edward Oswald Handforth. He was apparently laying down the law to the other Scouts of the Tiger patrol.

"Let's go and have a look at 'em," suggested Doyle. "Their camp's just here, isn't it? I say!" he added, with a chuckle. "What a lark! I'll bet Ching's here all the time!"

"It's the most likely explanation," agreed Scott.

Doyle grinned widely.

"And I've been worrying over nothing!" he said. "Of course Ching's here! That accounts for him not following me along the road, and for the other fellows seeing nothing of him. Those Ancient House chaps must have got him in their camp. We'll rag him for this, blow him!"

They walked a little further along, and broke through the hedge. And within a minute or two they located the Tiger patrol. The three Scouts were standing in a group among the trees, and Handforth was holding a bicycle, which the West House fellows instantly recognised as Yung Ching's.

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

The Scouts looked round at the sound of voices.

"Of course, we couldn't expect to be undisturbed!" said Handforth gruffly. "You chaps can clear off!" he added. "We're busy on an investigation, and can't be interrupted. We're Scouts——"

"Never mind about that," said Doyle. "Where is he?"

"Where's whom?"

"Yung Ching."

"How the dickens should I know?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Doyle. "You've got his bike in your hands, and you don't

know where Chingy is! Come off it, Handy!"

"Yung Ching's bike!" repeated Handforth, staring. "How do you know it's Chingy's bike?"

"I helped him to choose it," said Doyle promptly. "But what's the mystery about? Isn't he really here?"

Handforth was rather upset, because he had just been explaining to Church and McClure, with much detail, that the owner of the machine was obviously a short, stout man. He had arrived at this conclusion because the saddle was low, and the tyres were very highly inflated. The pressure was to withstand the weight of a heavy man. He was also red-haired, for a couple of hairs had been found on the lamp-bracket—although Church insisted they were scraps of vegetable fibre from the bramble-clump. And suddenly to learn that the machine belonged to Yung Ching was a bit of a shock. At the same time, it was certainly a piece of useful information.

"This makes it all the more mysterious," said Handforth eagerly. "My first theory was wrong, but every detective is liable to make a mistake."

"Theory?" said Doyle. "Detective?"

"I'm investigating the case," explained Handforth.

"What case?"

"This mystery of the hidden bicycle."

"You hopeless chump!" growled Doyle. "Ching took part in the cycle race, and the last I saw of him was on the road, just near here. That was this afternoon. Scott and I wondered what had happened to the young ass, so we came along to have a look round. What do you mean—the mystery of the hidden bicycle?"

"You saw Yung Ching on the road here?" repeated Handforth. "Doyle, there's something fishy about this! We found this machine shoved hard into a mass of brambles—concealed there. But we didn't know it was Ching's bike until you told us. We haven't seen him, and there's no sign of him. What do you make of it?"

"Blessed if I know," said Doyle, scratching his head. "Ching is a decent little chap, but he does funny things at times. But I'm hanged if I can understand why he should deliberately shove his new bike into a bramble-clump, and then disappear. Look there, Larry! That piece of wire is still entangled in the chain!"

"What do you know about the wire?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"For goodness' sake, come to earth, Handy, and drop this rot!" retorted Doyle. "Haven't I told you that Ching was in the race? I passed him on the road, and he was trying to get that wire out of his chain-wheel. After that I lost him, but there's no mystery about it now. He must have got fed-up with that wire, and then he chucked his bike into the brambles in disgust. That's about the truth of it."

"Sounds reasonable enough," nodded Church.

But Handforth was thoroughly unconvinced.

"If he was disgusted with the bike, why didn't he just push it through the hedge?" he asked. "Why the necessity of coming right into this spinney, and burying his jigger in the thickest bunch of brambles he could find? Can't you see that the machine was deliberately hidden away? Can't you see— Why, great Scott! Those Chinks!" he roared.

"Eh?"

"Those two Chinamen I scrapped with last night!" gasped Handforth, with sudden wild excitement. "Can't you see? Didn't I tell you that they were after Yung Ching? They failed last night, but they got him this afternoon! The poor kid's been kidnapped!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's been kidnapped!" insisted Handforth tensely. "You think that he put that bike in the brambles himself, eh? Well, he didn't! He was pounced upon, and carried away. And the kidnappers concealed his machine in the bramble-bush so that there wouldn't be any evidence. It was the only way to get rid of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They daren't take it anywhere in broad daylight, so they hid it in the spinney," continued Edward Oswald, ignoring the yells of laughter. "The whole thing's becoming clear now—I can see it all! The rotters knew that Ching was in that race, and they waited for him—and chucked that wire into the chain-wheel as he passed. Then they jumped on him."

"In that case, why didn't I see 'em?" grinned Doyle.

"Eh?" Handforth paused, but he wasn't to be done by a trifle like that. "Because they spotted you coming, and waited," he said triumphantly. "They couldn't kidnap him with you there as a witness, so they waited. As soon as you'd gone, they grabbed him, and pulled him into the spinney. Then they concealed his machine, and carried him off. That was before we got here, of course," he added, turning to Church and McClure. "By George! We're in the thick of a mystery!"



CHAPTER 9.

HANDFORTH THE SLEUTH.

HANDFORTH'S explanation seemed truly melodramatic; it was just the kind of fantastic theory that he could be relied upon to produce. To the other juniors it seemed highly amusing.

"Rats!" said Doyle practically. "What a chap you are for adding two and two together, Handy, and making about four hundred! It's all rot to talk about kidnappers and villains. Ching put that bike in the brambles himself, and by this time he's probably back at St. Frank's."

"And what about those Chinamen I fought with?" demanded Handforth.

"You only dreamed about them, you ass!"

"I didn't dream!" bellowed Handforth. "Everybody thinks I had a nightmare—but it was absolutely real. This clinches the whole thing beyond dispute. I didn't dream anything—I really saw those Chinks, and had a scrap with 'em! And now they've got hold of Ching, and they've spirited him away!"

"Oh, Handy!" sobbed Church derisively. "You're getting worse and worse! We could stand your theories before we knew whom the bike belonged to, but Doyle's cleared it all up. There's no mystery left."

Handforth set his lips, and said nothing. He was thinking deeply, and he decided to ignore these sallies. After all, his was by far the superior position. It wasn't a case of suspicion, or of theorising. He *knew*! He absolutely knew!

The fellows could chip him all they liked, but those two Orientals had been real, and there could be no reasonable doubt that the very same men had attacked Yung Ching in the lane. And now they had got him into their clutches, and were carrying him off somewhere. And that was the point to be settled. Who were these men, and where had they taken their victim to?

"We've got a starting-point now, anyhow," said Handforth tensely. "If we go out into the lane we shall probably pick up some clues."

"Rather!" said Doyle. "They're littered about everywhere! I saw at least a dozen as we came along!"

Handforth ignored him. He was inwardly surging with excitement. In nine cases out of ten he was hopelessly wrong in his assumptions, and his "investigations" generally turned out to be fiascos.

But there is an exception to every rule!

And for once Edward Oswald Handforth was on the right track. He had been right at first, and he was right now. And something in his bones told him that he was right. Often enough in the past he had fooled himself, and had only carried on in order to justify his activities. But now he felt that by carrying on he would achieve something really important.

"Come on!" he said crisply.

The other juniors decided to humour him. This was decidedly amusing, and Church and McClure had even forgotten about their tea. In the lane, Handforth issued a stern warning against spoiling any possible footprints, and the others dutifully hopped on the grass, and made exaggerated pretences of searching round for clues.

"Here we are!" said Handforth, within a minute. "Look at this! This is where they came through the hedge!"

"Marvellous!" grinned Doyle.

He and the others looked. There were certainly some traces. Now that they knew what to look for, they could see that the hedge had been forced at this point. There were several broken twigs, and a number of leaves had been torn away. But Doyle and the others came to the conclusion that Yung Ching was alone responsible.

"Careful, now!" said Handforth, as he pushed through the hedge. "We might be able to find some evidence— By George! Footprints! Here's a piece of luck, if you like!"

He was on the other side of the hedge now, and he was eagerly examining some blurred marks in the sandy soil just below the bank. One was clearly a footprint—and the size of it indicated that Yung Ching himself had made it. Near by were some other marks, and Handforth, who knew that there had been others in addition to Yung Ching, recognised a second footprint—much bigger. But he pointed it out in vain. The juniors scoffed.

"It's another of Chingy's footprints, you hopeless duffer!" said Scott. "It's blurred, anyhow, so you can't be sure. Do be sensible, Handforth! If Ching was forced away by some kidnappers, where did they take him to?"

"In broad daylight?" asked Doyle, grinning.

"That's what we've got to find out," replied Handforth. "You can leave this case in my hands. Don't tell Mr. Lee, or anybody else."

"You can trust us not to!" said Doyle drily.

"And don't go to the police, either," said Handforth. "I don't want the police messing about and ruining everything!"

The others howled, but Handforth continued, musingly:

"The two men must have crouched behind this hedge. They saw Ching coming, and chucked the wire out."

"Must have a good aim," said Church solemnly.

"It didn't matter much about aim," replied Handforth, with shrewd reasoning. "The wire was enough in itself—whether it caught in the chain-wheel or not. It was bound to tangle up something, and Chingy was bound to jump off. That was their chance—but Doyle came along and delayed them."

"Very thoughtless of him!" said McClure indignantly.

"Yes, I was a bit careless," said Doyle. "I ought to have given them a chance to conclude the dirty work before I came along. The trouble is, there aren't any cross-roads just here."

"Cross-roads?" repeated Handforth.

Doyle nodded.

"Cross-roads are absolutely essential when a couple of miscreants come along to do the dirty work," he replied firmly. "You can't expect them to change their system—"

"You—you funny ass!" growled Handforth. "Here am I trying to solve this riddle, and all you chaps can do is to chip me! But I'll have the laugh on you in the end! He who laughs last laughs at the finish!"

"Never!" said Scott, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, we're laughing now—while the

laughing's good!" grinned Church. "Handy, old son, why the dickens don't you come down to earth, and let these chaps go? I'm dying for a cup of tea, and I'll bet you've left that spirit-stove burning all this time. I wish I hadn't found the silly bike!"

"It's the best thing you ever did!" retorted Handforth. "Look here, all of you," he went on earnestly, "joking aside, you know. Honestly, this affair is serious. Ching's been kidnapped, and we've got to find him. He couldn't have been taken along the road, because it was full of bikes."

"Perhaps they put Ching into a bramble-bush, too?" suggested Doyle.

"I'm keeping my temper, but in about two minutes I shall lose it!" said Handforth thickly. "I'm trying to make you chaps understand that this is no time for rotting. Those kidnappers must have taken Ching across the downs—and that means to the beach. Why to the beach?"

"To paddle!" suggested Doyle.

"You—you—you exasperating lunatic!" thundered Handforth. "Ching was taken to the beach so that he could be taken on board a ship. There's no deduction in that—it's obvious! And why on a ship? To go to China, probably. There's some grim business here, and it's our duty to make a thorough, complete investigation."

Doyle dropped his banter, and became serious.

"Sorry, Handy," he said. "I won't fool any more. But, honestly, you're a bit too speedy for me. Scott and I are Yung Ching's chums. At least, we know him better than most of the older fellows. And we don't believe a word of this wild yarn of yours."

"But can't you see—"

"My dear old chap, your imagination's too vivid," said Doyle gently. "I'm not quite so excitable. I can see quite clearly that Ching chucked up the race, and put that bicycle into the brambles. Then he went off somewhere on his own. Goodness knows why—but he does things like that. There's never any telling with these Oriental beggars. They do queer things, and don't explain—but you can take my word for it that there's no mystery."

"Hear, hear!" said the others.

But, of course, they were all at a disadvantage.

Never for a moment did they believe in Handforth's story of two mysterious Chinamen at midnight. And, discrediting that, it was only natural that they should regard the whole of Handforth's theory with amusement.

Handforth, on the other hand, knew that he had had no nightmare. And, as he was convinced that a pair of mysterious Orientals had attempted to break into the West House the previous night, it stood to reason that there was some connection between that incident and the Chinese boy's disappearance. Handforth was proving, in fact, that when he had the opportunity he could perform some really sound reasoning.

But he had always been a fellow of surprises.



CHAPTER 10.

FURTHER PROOF.

HAROLD DOYLE laughed. "Well, let's be going," he said, with a wink to Larry Scott. "We'll leave Handforth to his pet hobby—investigating a mystery that doesn't exist. I wouldn't mind betting my best Sunday bags that Ching's in Study R when we get back.

Handforth shook his head.

"He won't be there," he declared. "And if you'll take my advice you'll stay here, and help us to— No, blow you!" he added gruffly. "I've had enough of your rot! I'll carry on the case alone!"

"Good man!" grinned Doyle. "We wish you luck!"

He and Scott went off, laughing amusedly at the whole affair. But they didn't feel quite so amused when they arrived at St. Frank's and found that Yung Ching was still absent. They made all sorts of inquiries, but nobody had seen him.

"Confound the young ass!" said Doyle, frowning. "I'm not uneasy, of course, but he should have turned up before this. I expect he went to Caistowe, or somewhere, and means to get his bicycle on the way back."

"That's about it," agreed Scott. "Let's do our prep."

They did their prep., but they were rather absent-minded—expecting Ching to come in every moment. But Ching didn't come in, and when it was nearly bed-time they began to feel the first pangs of doubt. They went out into the Triangle, and stood there watching the gates, which had been locked for some time.

"Hang it, I wonder if there's anything in what Handforth said?" muttered Doyle. "It's well after locking-up, and Ching isn't back, and he hasn't 'phoned, or anything. Unusual for him, too. I can never remember him being late before."

Scott was looking dubious, too.

"But that yarn of Handforth's is too thick," he protested. "If he really did see those Chinamen last night—"

"He didn't," interrupted Doyle. "I spoke to Mr. Stokes about it, and he said it was all rot. Handforth just had a nightmare. It's just one of those simple things that turn out to be nothing—only it's a bit rummy at the time. Why on earth doesn't Ching come back?"

"Do you think we'd better see Stokes?"

"No fear," said Doyle. "We should only get Ching into trouble. The chances are he'll nip in without any of the beaks knowing anything about it. And by going to Stokes we should only land him in hot water. Besides, it sounds so jolly silly. We'd far better keep quiet."

This was an unwise decision, but the two juniors were in a quandary. They were worried about the Chinese boy, but not in any acute sense. At least, they wouldn't admit it. Yet they each felt an uneasy pang deep down somewhere. Ching had vanished during the early afternoon, and the peculiar discovery of his bicycle was significant in itself. But to accept Handforth's supposition as fact was simply asking for ridicule.

Indeed, it was the fear of ridicule which held Doyle and Scott back. They would look hopeless asses if they told everybody else of this story, and then Yung Ching turned up smiling immediately afterwards. So the pair kept quiet; and expected Ching to arrive at any moment.

In the meantime, Handforth was feeling depressed.

It was getting dark now, and it was time for the camp to be snuggled down for the night. The idea was to go to sleep an hour before darkness, and to get up soon after dawn. This would mean at about 4 a.m. Handforth's programme would be to include an orgy of scouting practice. But that programme had now gone by the board. There was something of far greater importance to be dealt with.

Church and McClure had callously deserted him. Nature would not be denied, and as the evening had drawn on, their hunger had become ravenous. So they prepared a huge meal over the spirit-stove, and carried on as though Handforth didn't exist. Their leader prowled about, making his investigations. He went through the spinney two or three times, and found nothing. He paid a visit to the beach, and was equally unsuccessful.

When he came up the cliffs again an odour assailed him which temporarily shattered his determination. It was the mingled odour of hot coffee and fried bacon. He paused, sniffing the air, and then made a bee-line for camp. A camp-fire was crackling merrily, and there were steaming dishes and vessels.

"By George!" he said, with satisfaction. "I'm starving!"

"Any luck, old man?" asked Church.

"Not a trace of anything," said Handforth, shaking his head. "Who cooked these eggs and bacon? My hat! There's enough for six here!"

"That's my idea," said McClure. "We've all got double hungers, so I cooked enough for the whole patrol!"

"Now and again," said Handforth, "you show a gleam of intelligence!"

He squatted down, and the Tiger patrol spent a glorious half-hour in luxurious feeding. By the time the meal was over Church and McClure were feeling sleepy. They wouldn't admit that they had eaten too much, but they were certainly heavy. And their thoughts turned towards bed.

"We'll turn in, eh?" suggested Church, yawning.

"Might as well," said Handforth, nodding. "I thought about doing a bit more prowling about, though. I tell you, I'm uneasy. I've got a feeling that Yung Ching isn't far off."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned McClure.

"They couldn't have taken him away in broad daylight," argued Handforth. "At least, they wouldn't risk it, in case somebody spotted them. Chingy wouldn't be so noticeable, but if he was a prisoner in the hands of two rotten Chinamen, the thing would be talked about all over the whole district. That's why I'm jolly certain he's still somewhere nearby."

"But those two Chinamen are only myths, and— Oh, well, don't let's argue," said Church hastily. "After all this time, Handy, I should have thought you were fed-up with the thing. My dear chap, don't you realise that Ching's at St. Frank's, in bed? He must have been home for hours!"

"I've a good mind to go and see!" said Handforth grimly.

"Then you're not certain about your theory, after all?"

"Yes, I am!" snorted Handforth. "He's not at St. Frank's—and I'm not going to waste time in going there. But this suspense is rotten. If I could only get hold of some evidence— Well, never mind. Let's go to bed."

He said this with such an air of carelessness that his chums exchanged significant glances. They knew, from past experience, what that careless air meant.

Handforth had something on—something he wished to keep from them. But they always knew! They were aware of Edward Oswald's every move.

"The ass means to get up after we've gone to sleep!" muttered Church, as he snuggled down into his blankets. "I think we ought to keep our weather-eye open, you know. He'll only get himself into a mess if he goes mooching along these cliffs in the dark."

"We'll follow him if he sneaks out," breathed McClure.

But it wasn't quite so easy as it sounded. After that heavy supper, Church and McClure were asleep within five minutes, and Edward Oswald Handforth found himself repeatedly dozing off. His chums were quite right. He had made up his mind to steal out as soon as complete darkness had fallen. And then he was going to watch.

He didn't know exactly what he was going to watch for, but it would be better than giving up the case as a failure. Handforth never admitted defeat. And the loss of sleep was a light matter compared to the rest. Whatever happened, he simply had to keep awake.

After dozing twice he came to the conclusion that it was altogether too risky to remain between the blankets. So he noiselessly slipped out and left the tent. He bumped into Church, and he nearly trod on McClure. But they slept blissfully on.

Outside, the night was starry, and the moon hadn't yet appeared. It was a mild, serene summer's night, with the sea looking placid down at the bottom of the cliffs.

Out in the Channel, the winking lights of passing shipping could be seen. But the downs were black and deserted.

Handforth wandered about near the cliff-edge; very soon he was reluctantly coming to the conclusion that his efforts were useless. After all, what could he do? He had no definite facts to go upon, and—

He suddenly became tense, and stared downwards.

At the same moment his scouting instinct warned him to drop. He was standing at the cliff-top, probably outlined against the sky. And the next moment he was lying flat on his face, peering down towards the beach.

Was it fancy, or had he really seen something moving down there?

"Just my imagination," he grunted, after a vain minute had passed. "Yet I could have sworn I was— By George! I was right, though!"

He fairly quivered.

His eyes were thoroughly accustomed to the gloom, and he was not mistaken now. Something was moving down there on the white beach. A figure— No, two figures! Handforth shook with excitement. Those two Chinamen!

He jumped to the conclusion automatically. Without any shadow of doubt, those two Chinamen! It didn't occur to him that the figures might belong to a pair of fishermen or coastguards. It didn't occur to him that such things as lobster-pots exist, or that shrimps have to be netted.

He was sure that his whole theory was correct.

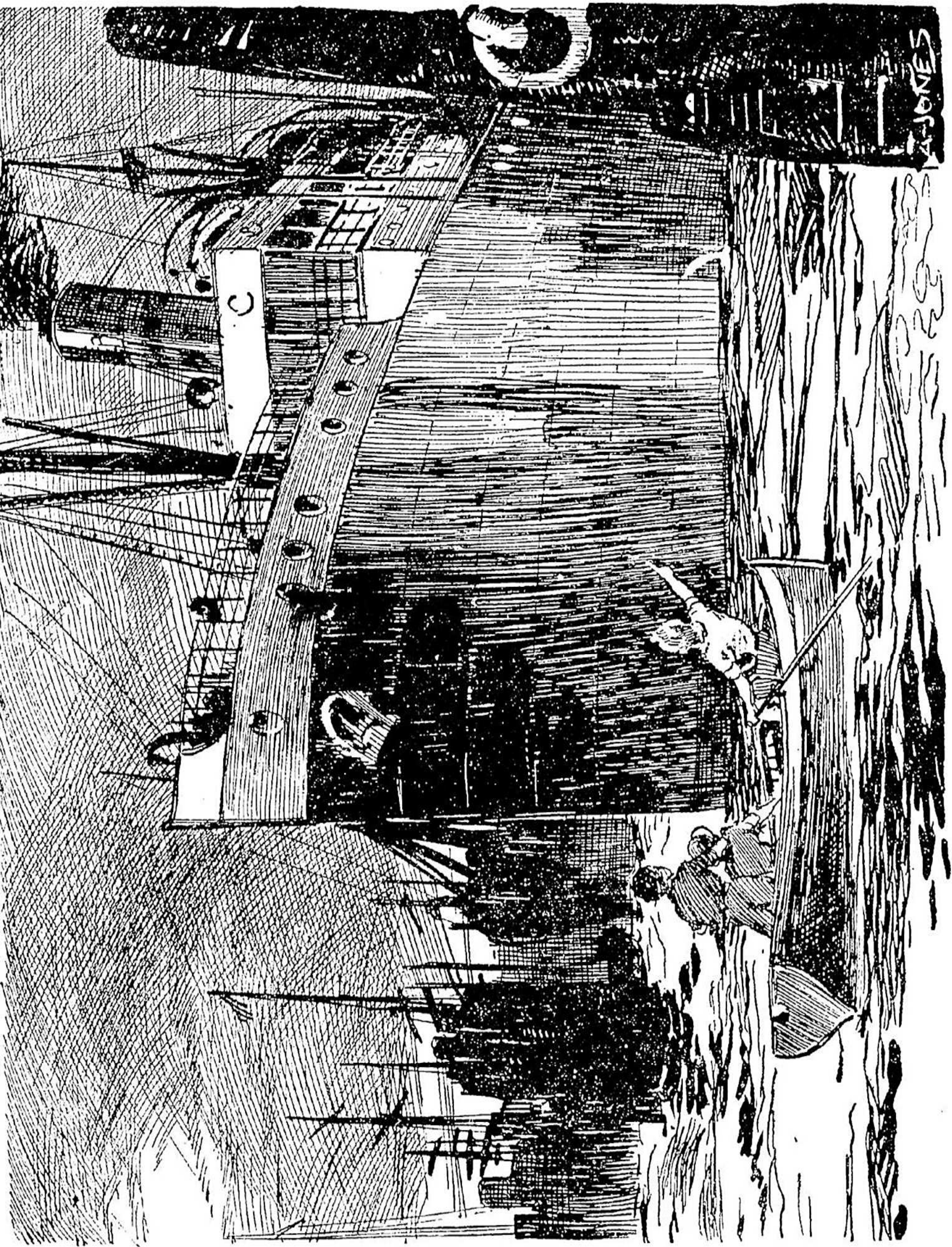
If Church and McClure had been with him they would have held him back, laughing uproariously at his melodramatic suppositions. Handforth was famous for his highly imaginative mind, and nobody ever took the slightest notice of his high-sounding talk.

He was even a bit sceptical himself, although he wouldn't admit it. Many a time, when hot-foot on a wild-goose chase, he had instinctively known that he was making an ass of himself. Yet he had gone on, blundering headlong into the mire.

At the present moment these instincts did not function.

For once he was wholly convinced that he was on the track of a real drama. He had seen those Chinamen at St. Frank's, and had fought with them. They weren't figments of his imagination, as the other fellows believed. Yung Ching had been kidnapped just near that spinney, and as it had been impossible to take him far in broad daylight, he was obviously held a prisoner in the vicinity. His captors had waited for darkness to fall.

And these figures on the beach were no fishermen—they were no coastguards—they were the mysterious Orientals who had attacked the "Chinese boy! And Edward Oswald Handforth took the shortest cut down to the beach, determined to face them. A moment's consideration would have made him pause, but the uneven odds never occurred to him.



"That's the one!" Handy exclaimed. "Yung Ching's aboard that boat!" Church and McClure followed the direction of his pointing finger, staring up at the huge bulk of the mighty steamer. If the Chinese junior was indeed aboard the vessel, it was going to be a tough job to rescue him.

He knew that Yung Ching was in danger, and he dashed to the rescue.



CHAPTER 11.

THE PLIGHT OF YUNG CHING.

THERE was still a faint trace of the sunset in the western sky, but it was only visible from the cliff-tops. The beach was black, and the only relief down there was a faint phosphorescence as the waves broke in a mass of foam and hissed over the shingle.

Handforth arrived on the beach, his whole body quivering with excitement. He knew exactly where those figures had been, and guessed that a boat was there, too. Earlier, there hadn't been a trace of a boat, but Handforth had been theorising again. There were some caves near here—only shallow ones, it is true, but they were sufficient to afford cover for any unlawful persons who desired a temporary haven. On the other hand, the boat might have come in from the sea, and perhaps Yung Ching had been alone in one of those caves ever since the afternoon. Handforth felt that he ought to have explored them earlier.

He progressed without any thought of caution, running hard over the shingle towards the spot where he had seen the figures. In any case, precautions were difficult, for it was impossible to walk without disturbing the noisy, loose stones.

A mass of rock projecting from the beach, however, served him well. He swung round this suddenly, and found himself within a yard or two of the mysterious strangers. And they knew nothing of his presence until he was actually upon them. Their own movements in the shingle had effectually drowned the sounds of the approaching junior.

"By George!" roared Handforth triumphantly.

He had an electric torch ready, and he flashed it on. And he saw precisely what he had expected to see—two, roughly dressed Orientals carrying the helpless figure of Yung Ching, the Chinese boy. Handforth wasn't in the least surprised, but he was gloating with victory.

If these men had turned out to be mere shrimpers, he would have been aghast. He had known what to expect, and he was ready for battle. He stood there, the light from his torch playing upon the startled features of the strangers. Perhaps they weren't Chinamen, after all, but half-castes. They were certainly yellowish and villainous. Sort of lascars, Handforth decided. And their clothing indicated that they were members of a ship's crew.

Yung Ching was not only helpless, but in addition to his bonds of rope, he was heavily gagged by means of a thick scarf. One man held his feet, and the other his shoulders. And they were carrying him down to a boat, which was half in and half out of the water.



"That's the one!" Handy exclaimed. "Yung Ching's aboard pointing finger, staring up at the huge bulk of the mighty steamer going to be a ton."

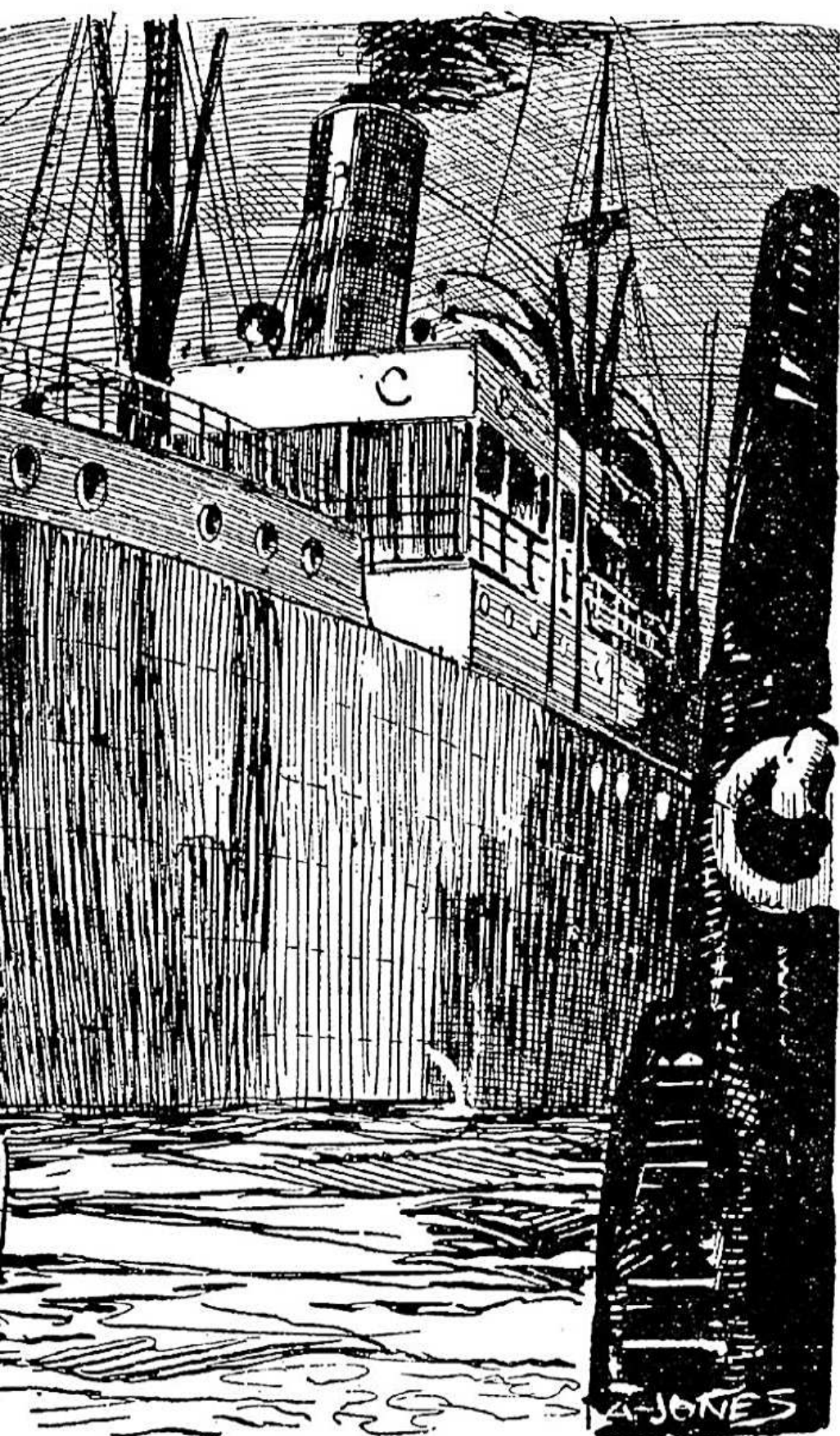
It was real melodrama now!

"You—you rotters!" bellowed Handforth.

He threw his torch down, and simply sailed in. Crash! One of the half-castes took the blow on the point of his chin before he could drop his burden. The other man uttered some peculiar words and attacked. A single glance had assured him that Handforth was alone.

The fight was dramatic, and almost as swift as that scrap in the West Square the previous night. Naturally, the unfortunate Handforth had no chance. In spite of his valiant efforts, in spite of his lusty endurance, he was very quickly settled. These half-castes were not only wiry, but they seemed impervious to heavy blows.

And when they fought they fought strangely, not exchanging blow for blow as Handforth would have desired. One of them flung himself at Handforth's feet and grasped them in a vice-like clutch. The next second Handforth was pitched over backwards upon the shingle, and his enemies were upon him,



at!" Church and McClure followed the direction of his finger. If the Chinese junior was indeed aboard the vessel, it was their duty to rescue him.

beating him fiercely with their fists and kicking with vicious force.

One of these kicks caught the unfortunate junior on the head, and although he wasn't "out," he became limp, and everything seemed to go blurry. He faintly heard the mutterings of his assailants, but he had lost all further interest in the fight.

He wasn't aware of it, but during those tense moments he came within an inch of his life. For one of the men pulled out a villainous-looking knife, and stood there, ready to bring it into deadly use. But his companion checked the thrust, and spoke rapidly.

Apparently he was arguing—advising the other not to use the blade. They wanted no bloodshed, and the subsequent hue and cry. The mere story of a schoolboy would not be credited. It was better to leave him on the beach and allow him to crawl away after he had recovered.

So Handforth's life was spared, although only by the merest fraction of chance.

There was another chance happening, too. Up in camp Church and McClure had slept peacefully after Handforth's departure. The leader of Study D, however, with his usual carelessness, had neglected to close the tent flap, and the summer breeze caused the canvas to sway idly to and fro. An extra powerful little gust swept the canvas inwards, and the loose end of it caught against the spirit stove. The kettle clattered off with quite a din.

Church woke up with a start, and blinked into the darkness.

"Who's that?" he mumbled irritably.

He could see the canvas flapping about, with the stars gleaming beyond. And Church was alert in a moment. The tent had been secured when he had gone to sleep.

"Handy!" he called sharply, sitting up.

There was no reply, and Church felt for a box of matches that he had placed under his pillow. He struck one, and in the flare of light he saw McClure peacefully sleeping—and Handforth's empty blankets.

"Oh, the hopeless fathead!" muttered Church in alarm.

He realised at once that Handforth had gone off on his night prow, and he felt angry with himself for having slept so soundly. But perhaps it wasn't too late even now. He slipped from between his blankets, and shook McClure. The latter was just stirring.

"Oh, chuck it, you ass," he said, with a yawn. "Let's get to sleep again. If Handy's ass enough to go mooching about in the middle of the night, let him get on with it. We needn't be mugs, need we?"

"That's not the point," retorted Church. "You know what these cliffs are like here."

"They're safe."

"Yes, just at this point," admitted Church. "But further along they become steeper, and there's no telling with Handy. We'd better go out and have a look round. Shove your things on, and look sharp about it!"

"All right, you needn't try to imitate Handy," grumbled McClure, as he got out. "Not so much of that ordering about, you ass!"

They emerged from the tent a few minutes later, and found the night quiet and peaceful. Pausing, they felt rather helpless. How could they commence their operations? In which direction should they search? They had no clue as to their leader's movements.

And then came a sound—an unmistakable sound.

Handforth's voice, raised in triumphant accents. It floated up mysteriously, as though from a great distance—almost unreal and ghostly. Church and McClure only knew that it came from the beach, curiously distinguishable above the continuous hiss and murmur of the breaking waves.

"My only hat!" said Church breathlessly.

He rushed across the downs and paused at the cliff edge. There was no danger here, for the cliff sloped steeply, but not sheerly. Anybody tumbling over would be unable to save himself, but would come to no particular

harm. The path wound down in a round-about way.

The beach was in full sight, with the jutting sections of rock showing black against the foam and the shingle. Dimly some figures were in sight.

"Look!" breathed McClure, as he came up. "There's a boat down there!"

"Yes, by Jove, and it's just pushing out, too!" muttered Church. "I—I say, do you think it's possible that there was anything in Handy's theory after all?"

"Blessed if I know!" said McClure. "But we'll soon know if we hurry down to the beach. Come on! No good standing here and doing nothing. I hope the chump is all right."

They scrambled down the cliff path at a reckless speed, and more than once they nearly lost their grip and went headlong to the bottom. But at last, with almost all the breath knocked out of them, they reached the shingle.

By this time the boat was well away—just a mere speck on the water—and pulling off in the direction of the headland, beyond which lay Caistowe Bay and the snug little harbour.

"Where is he?" muttered Church, looking round. "He must have gone off in that boat—"

"What's that over there?" panted McClure, pointing.

There was something on the shingle—something which moved slightly as they looked. They rushed up and found Handforth vainly attempting to struggle up. He was dazed and dizzy, and hardly seemed to recognise his own chums.



CHAPTER 12.

THE CHASE.

HANDY!" shouted Church, dropping to his knees.

"What's happened, old man?" gasped McClure.

"We heard your yell, and came down. It's no good," he added. "He can't understand us. The poor chap's had a fearful scrap by the look of it. What had we better do?"

"Drag him into the water," said Church grimly. "It's no good taking half measures at a time like this. In with him!"

Their treatment was certainly drastic. Grabbing their leader's limp hands, they rushed him down the beach to the water's edge, and the very first wave came splashing over his head and shoulders in a cascade. The effect was almost instantaneous. Handforth sat up with a wild gurgle.

"You—you rotters!" he gasped. "You'd try to drown me, would you? By George! I've got you now!"

He leapt to his feet, swayed dizzily for a moment, and then launched himself at the amazed Church with tremendous violence. Church received a blow in the chest which sent him staggering backwards into the next

wave, and he sat down with a splash and was lost in the foam.

"Hold on!" yelled McClure in alarm. "Chuck it, Handy!"

"I'll show you something!" bellowed Handforth. "You dirty Chinks! I've got the upper hand now!"

"I'm Mac, you dummy!" hooted McClure.

"Eh? What the——" Handforth paused, and held himself back. "Mac?" he repeated dazedly. "I—I thought you were those rotten Chinks! What's happened? I—I don't seem to remember——"

"Another of your nightmares, I suppose," said McClure fiercely. "Look what you've done to old Churchy! He's nearly drowned!"

Church was just hauling himself out of the surf.

"Ooooh!" he groaned, holding his chest. "That biff of yours felt like a steam-hammer! This is all the thanks we get for coming down to lend a hand. We were just reviving you, you silly ass!"

"Reviving me?" repeated Handforth, staring. "But—but I don't understand how—— Wait a minute, though!" he added, as his brain cleared. "Those Chinese rotters—awful-looking half-castes—I went for 'em, and—and—I suppose they must have knocked me out!" he added angrily.

"Two of 'em!" went on Edward Oswald, looking round wildly. "Two frightful-looking fellows with yellow faces. They had Yung Ching with 'em—just as I expected!"

"Oh, cheese it——"

"And Yung Ching was bound and gagged, too," said Handforth grimly. "They were going to put him into a boat, but I rushed up—— My only hat! They must have carried him off, after all! Did you chaps see a boat?"

"Yes, it was just going off towards the headland——"

"I knew it!" shouted Handforth, his excitement at fever pitch. "Quick! Where's a boat? We've got to follow! They've got Yung Ching in their clutches, and there's no telling what they mean to do with him. I tell you I saw him—tied up with ropes and gagged!"

"Look here, Handy, we know there's been a bit of a dust-up, because we found you knocked out," said Church quietly. "And we saw that boat making out to sea, too. But there's no need to let your imagination run away with your wits! It's all rot to talk about Chingy being bound and gagged——"

Handforth grasped Church by the shoulder, and his intense excitement had left him. In a moment he was calm and tense. It was one of Handforth's characteristics to change in this abrupt fashion.

"Hold on, Church, old man," he said. "I'm not imagining things. I haven't had a nightmare. And I don't blame you for being a bit unbelieving. But Yung Ching is in a tight corner—honest Injun! He's in the hands of those enemies of his, and he's

bound and gagged. That's the plain truth—and we've got to help him."

Church and McClure could not fail to be impressed.

"Is—is this absolutely straight, old man?" asked Church huskily.

"It's absolutely straight."

"You—you mean——" began McClure.

"I mean that every word I've just said is true," interrupted Handforth. "It's serious—and I was a blithering idiot to attack those Chinks single-handed. But we don't want to waste time in going over what's happened. Let's go after that boat."

Church and McClure were convinced at last. It wasn't often they saw their leader in this quiet mood. There was something about him which thrilled them. He wasn't fooling himself now!

"But—but we can't swim after it!" gasped Church. "Besides, it's gone——"

"There's a boat in the next little cove," put in McClure excitedly. "Don't you remember? It's not much of a thing—a fisherman's boat, pulled up the beach beyond high-water mark. I'm not sure about oars——"

"Let's go and see," said Handforth quickly.

He didn't tell his chums that his head was throbbing so painfully that he was still dizzy. There was a lump just behind his left ear—an ugly bruise, where one of those men had kicked him. He was aching in other parts of his body, too, but he never gave a thought to these trivial hurts.

Yung Ching was in danger, and Handforth and his chums were the only people who could possibly help. It was their plain duty to do everything within their power. Church and McClure were thrilled to the core by the prospects of the chase. Their last lingering doubt had vanished. Edward Oswald had struck upon a real drama at last!

The boat proved to be a clumsy, tarry old relic of enormous weight, and there were two pairs of oars lying in the bottom of it. This was all that Handforth wanted to know.

"Good!" he said. "Shove her down!"

But this wasn't so easy as it seemed. Their combined strength was only just sufficient to haul the small but heavy craft into the sea. Almost exhausted, they managed it, and finally got her afloat. Handforth took one pair of oars, and his chums divided the other two.

"You just row!" said Handforth. "I'll look after the direction. And pull as hard as you can, my lads—no shirking! You're sure the boat went towards the headland?"

"Yes, she seemed to be going round into the bay," panted Church. "I can't see that we can do much good, though. They've probably taken Chingy ashore again by now—into one of those water-front places near Caistowe——"

"More likely to have taken him on board a ship," interrupted Handforth shrewdly. "Otherwise, why use a boat at all? They could have carried him by land. I'll bet ten to one they've got him on a ship."

"Then we're dished," growled McClure. "There must be a dozen ships in the har-

bour. Caistowe may be a seaside resort, but it's a port, too, and plenty of tramp steamers put in——"

"Then we'll go to every blessed ship until we've found the right one," interrupted Handforth.

There was no arguing with this decision, so Church and McClure kept all their breath for their work—and it was strenuous work, too. The boat dragged heavily, and in anything of a sea would have been difficult to manage. But to-night the water was perfectly calm.

The juniors were thoroughly familiar with the coast, and Handforth took care to give the jutting rocks a wide berth. On a wild winter's day, this headland was a seething mass of gigantic waves—a menace to all shipping. But now, on a calm summer's night, it seemed impossible that such a peaceful spot could be really dangerous.

There were many ships riding at anchor in Caistowe Harbour and at the entrance of the bay. The majority were small fishing craft, and Handforth hardly gave them a glance.

"It's hopeless, old man," said Church. "There must be three or four dozen ships here. The rowing-boat's vanished, and there's nothing to show us which ship she went to——"

"Don't be in such a hurry," interrupted Handforth, frowning. "What we've got to do is to adopt a process of elimination. It's a jolly good thing we're Scouts—and that we were in camp this week-end. Otherwise, there would have been nobody to help Yung Ching out of this hole."

"Yes, but what's that you said about elimination?" asked McClure. "I seem to have read that somewhere in one of your detective stories——"

"All detectives arrive at their conclusions by a process of elimination," said Handforth curtly. "There are dozens of ships here—but we needn't worry about a detail like that. All those smaller ships can be dismissed at once—and that brings the field down to these bigger ones at anchor in the bay."

"By Jove, there's something in that," admitted Church in surprise.

"There's everything in it," declared Handforth. "Let's row a bit farther, and then take a good look at 'em. This is where we need brains, my lads. And we've got brains, too."

For another five minutes they rowed in silence, and then Handforth quietly shipped his oars. On one side lay the twinkling lights of Caistowe—only a few now, since the hour was late. And there were the fishing craft at anchor, too—and the steamers riding in the deeper water at the entrance of the bay. The three juniors had grown fully accustomed to the dim starlight by now, and could see the outline of the ships distinctly.

"It's like a Chinese puzzle!" muttered Church at length.

"Wait a minute," said Handforth eagerly. "Look here, it stands to reason that Chingy has been taken to a ship which is going out of the country—to some foreign port."

"Why does it stand to reason?" asked McClure.

"Because they'd never go to that elaborate trouble if they merely wanted to shift him from one part of England to another," replied the sleuth of the Remove. "They'd have shoved him into a motor-car and taken him by road. No, he'd be on one of these bigger ships."

"But which one?"

"That one!" replied Handforth, pointing.

His chums stared at a squat, ugly-looking tramp steamer close by—a bigger ship than the others, and by no means pleasant in appearance. She was evidently fully loaded, for she was deep in the water.

"How do you know it's that one?" asked Church dubiously.

"The thing's obvious," retorted Handforth, with a triumphant note. "Nearly all these other ships are just coastal steamers—ones that go up and down the Channel, and round from Bristol to London. You can always tell a coastal steamer by the very look of her. But this ugly brute is in a different class altogether. She's an ocean-going tramp."

Church and McClure looked at the ship more closely.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Church. "I'm blessed if he isn't right, Mac! And she seems to be the only big tramp of that type, too. But even now we don't know anything for certain——"

"But we shall know soon!" interrupted

Handforth, picking up his oars again. "We're going to board that tramp, and search her from stem to stern!"



CHAPTER 13.

THE SHIP FOR HONG KONG.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH'S deductions were certainly convincing.

For once, Church and McClure felt thrilled. As a rule, their leader's excursions into the field of detection amused them enormously, for in nine cases out of ten he followed his "trail" by a process of pure assumption, without having any definite line to go upon. Consequently, his detective work was something of a farce.

But this time Handforth was surprising the natives.

The latter—his chums—were at a certain disadvantage, for they had seen nothing of the two mysterious yellow men, and they had to take Handforth's word that these individuals really existed. Edward Oswald, on the other hand, knew perfectly well that he was on a red-hot trail. His choice of the tramp steamer as a possible goal was indeed a brainy one.

The clumsy little boat bumped alongside the iron plates of the ship, and at these close quarters she looked less prepossessing than

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ever. Her blackened sides were streaked with rust, and there were litters of untidy ropes hanging over her rail. There wasn't a sound of life, and there was no answer in response to Handforth's cautious hail.

A clumsy rope ladder was hanging overside, and there were one or two boats tethered near the bottom of it. Handforth secured his own craft to a ring, and grasped the rope ladder—the rungs of which were of wood.

"Come on—you'd better support me!" he muttered. "And be ready for a fight. We shall probably be in the thick of it in two ticks!"

Church and McClure obediently followed, although they weren't quite so certain of a fight as their leader. Handforth always looked upon the most melodramatic side.

Once on deck they found themselves alone. There was a smell of tar and oil and stale cooking hovering in the atmosphere, and from one of the ventilators came a faint sound of hammering. Obviously the engineers were making some repairs far below.

A footstep sounded, and a man suddenly appeared from beyond the chart-room. He was a burly customer, with a pipe between his teeth and a peaked cap slung rakishly at an angle.

"What the—Hullo! Where on earth did you youngsters spring from?" he demanded, walking up and eyeing Handforth & Co. with frank astonishment. "Boy Scouts, eh? Well, we do see life!"

"Where's Ching?" demanded Handforth fiercely.

"Ching?"

"Yes. Yung Ching!"

"Frightfully sorry, old chap, but I'm afraid I can't oblige you," said the other genially. "But I'm a good-natured fellow, and if you'll just explain the details, I'm at your service. My name's Rogers—third officer of this smelly old tub."

Mr. Rogers was a younger man than the juniors had first imagined, and he was grinning broadly.

"I suppose you came aboard for the fun of the thing, eh?" he went on. "Sorry I can't take you to the skipper—he's engaged with guests at the moment. And it's the first time I knew that Boy Scouts indulged in this sort of pastime. And you're not even Sea Scouts!"

"We're the Tiger Patrol—First St. Frank's Troop," said Handforth briskly. "One of our chaps has been kidnapped, and I've got every reason to believe that he was brought to this ship."

"Look here, young man—"

"He's a Chinese chap named Yung Ching," went on Handforth. "And the rotters who carried him off were two half-castes or lascars. They kidnapped him this afternoon, held him prisoner until after dark, and then brought him out by boat. And I'm pretty sure he's on this ship."

Mr. Rogers removed his pipe and grinned.

"By golly, that's not a bad yarn!" he

chuckled. "I suppose I've got to join in the spirit of the thing, and pretend to believe it?"

"But it's true!" said Handforth gruffly. "There's no spoof about it. Yung Ching's on this ship, and I demand a search—"

"Hold on!" interrupted the officer, his manner changing. "Are you trying to tell me that you're serious?"

"Of course we're serious!"

"Then you're a set of young idiots!" said Mr. Rogers. "I thought it was just some of your scouting practice. It's no good coming aboard this ship with such wild yarns. This is a respectable merchantman, I'd have you know, and we don't go in for such luxuries as kidnapping as a sideline. If the skipper heard you talking like that, he'd find a use for the toe of his boot! Take my advice and get back to your little cots!"

Handforth flushed with indignation.

"It's all very well for you to scoff!" he snorted. "Yung Ching was brought to one of these ships out here, and I'll bet yours —"

"Chuck it!" interrupted Mr. Rogers gruffly. "I tell you the whole thing's ridiculous. Practically the whole of our crew is ashore on leave. We don't sail for another twenty-four hours."

"What port are you sailing for?" asked Handforth quickly. "Where's your destination?"

The officer started.

"H'm!" he muttered. "That's curious!"

"What's curious?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, we're bound for Hong Kong," said Mr. Rogers slowly.

"Hong Kong!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "I KNEW it!"

"Don't go off the deep end—it's only a coincidence," said Mr. Rogers, with a frown. "I'll admit we're bound for a Chinese port, and we've also got some half-castes among the crew. They're a lazy, shirking, good-for-nothing lot altogether, if it comes to that. Our owners are too grabbing and grasping to ship an all-British crew."

"And—and you've got Chinese for'ard?" asked Church, open-eyed.

"Well, not exactly Chinks, but the same breed," confessed Mr. Rogers. "Still, there's no certainty that this yarn of yours is anything but a fairy tale. Most ships of this type carry lascars and—"

"Look here, have any of your men gone ashore to-night?" interrupted Handforth grimly. "Have they had shore leave?"

"Hang it, you'll almost make me believe in this high-sounding yarn of yours soon!" growled the third officer, scratching his head. "A couple of men went ashore two or three hours ago, and came back a few minutes before you arrived. But it's only a chance occurrence."

"It's not!" interrupted Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "Now then, you chaps, what did I tell you? I knew this was the ship all the time! Hong Kong! Why, it's as clear as daylight! Ching has been kidnapped, and they

mean to stow him away and take him back to China!"

"But—but why?" asked Church blankly. Handforth glared.

"What's the good of standing there looking like a gargoyle and asking why?" he snapped. "It doesn't matter to us why, does it? We know he's on board this dirty old mass of scrap-iron, and we've got to rescue him. We can ask questions afterwards!"

"You're right about the scrap-iron," agreed Mr. Rogers. "It's a wonder to me she holds together. But I'm not going to believe that a Chinese schoolboy has been kidnapped——"

"Anything wrong there, Mr. Rogers?" interrupted another voice. "What's this—visitors? Boy Scouts, eh?"

"The skipper," said Mr. Rogers briefly.

The captain of the tramp-steamer was an elderly man, thin and wiry, with a grizzled beard. He was accompanied by two others—apparently the guests whom Mr. Rogers had referred to. Handforth gave these latter two one keen look, and then his eyes sparkled.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "Captain Boom and Mr. Jiggs! I say, cap'n, tell this officer chap that we're genuine, will you? We've been trying to get something done for nearly an hour!"

"Five minutes, you mean!" said Church.

"What is it, Mr. Rogers?" asked the captain bluntly. "What do these boys want at this time of night?"

"Avast, there!" said Captain Boom, pushing forward. "Sink me for a slab-sided hooker! If it ain't three of them young sparks from the big school! Lively lubbers, Cap'n Walker, mark my words! Lively lubbers, ain't they, Jiggs?"

"No good sayin' they ain't," agreed Mr. Jiggs, nodding.

Captain Boom was an old merchant skipper—a man who had supreme contempt for "steam." He was short, stocky and broad-shouldered, and in spite of his sixty years he had an abundance of red, curly hair. He was weather-beaten and ruddy, and wore an aggressive tuft of red beard at the end of his chin. Mr. Jiggs, his mate, was a wizened little man, all sinew and bone. For over twenty-five years he had been associated with Captain Boom, and they were both the personal servants of a certain Commander Rudd, an ex-Naval officer who lived just beyond Caistowe.

In retirement Captain Boom was a butler, and Mr. Jiggs a valet, but they still dearly loved the salt of the sea. They had just been paying a call on an old friend, and their presence was opportune.

"You know these boys, Phineas?" asked Captain Walker.

"May I look like a barnacle!" retorted Captain Boom. "Do we know 'em, Jiggs? Wasn't we at their school for a few days? And won't we remember them few days for the rest of our lives?"

"We shall!" agreed Mr. Jiggs feelingly. "A pack of young monkeys, if you ask me.

They gave us a rough passage, an' it's no good sayin' they didn't."

Captain Boom and his mate had once descended upon St. Frank's to quell a barring-out, but had fled in despair from the Remove. Privately they had a wholesome respect for these juniors.

"Look here, Captain Boom," said Handforth, "do you remember a little Chinese at St. Frank's? He's in our Form—the Remove. Yung Ching, you know."

"Ay, I remember him," said the old salt. "A lively young spark!"

"He's been kidnapped," said Handforth. "He's been carried off by a couple of half-castes, or lascars, and brought on board this ship. They mean to take him to China. But Mr. Rogers doesn't believe it."

"Of course I don't!" said the third officer. "That yarn's too wild."



CHAPTER 14.

THE DISCOVERY.

CAPTAIN BOOM stroked his tuft of beard.

"Too wild, eh?" he repeated. "I ain't so sure about that."

"Surely you don't believe in this fantastic story?" asked Captain Walker, in surprise. "The boys have evidently allowed their imaginations to run riot. This is a respectable ship, and kidnapping doesn't happen in these days, anyhow."

"A ship, do ye call it?" said Captain Boom, with contempt. "Sink me for a shark! It's more like a rusty tin-can! I'm ashamed of ye, Jim, for bein' master of such a leaky tub! But that ain't neither here nor there. These boys are probably right."

"Like as not!" agreed Mr. Jiggs, nodding.

"When I ask ye to talk, ye wizened lump o' tarpaulin, ye can talk!" snapped Captain Boom. "But until then ye'll stand at attention, an' keep silent."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Mr. Jiggs humbly.

"I've sailed the China seas, an' I know China like a book, too," proceeded the stocky old skipper. "An' you can take my word for it that them Chinks are capable of anything. Roarin' gales! The best thing you can do, Jim, is to have your fo'c'sle searched straight away."

"Good idea!" said Handforth enthusiastically.

"Hang it, I'm inclined to agree, sir," said Mr. Rogers. "As it happens, two of our men went ashore in a boat a bit earlier, and they haven't been back long. Both lascars, too."

"Then ye can bet your sea-boots that the boys are right," said Captain Boom grimly. "We know what them Chinks are, don't we, Jiggs?"

"We do, cap'n," agreed Mr. Jiggs.

"Tricky scum, ain't they?"

"They are, cap'n," said Mr. Jiggs. "No good sayin' they ain't!"



The yellow rays of the lantern revealed a figure huddled behind the barrels. Ropes swathed his feet and arms, and he lay there strangely inert and still. "Chingy!" gasped Handforth.

"Shall we go and have a look, sir?" asked the officer.

"Might as well, I suppose," said Captain Walker, smiling. "But you can't convince me there's anything in this wild story."

"You allus was an obstinate old octopus, Jim," said Captain Boom gruffly.

There was a general move forward, and within a minute or two the party had penetrated into the smelly gloom of the fore-castle. A single storm-lantern was burning, and the place reeked of smoke and the thousand-and-one odours characteristic of such a place. Most of the bunks were empty, but there were three or four sleeping men. Many of the crew had gone ashore for the night, as the ship was sailing for the Far East on the morrow.

"Rouse up!" said Mr. Rogers, going round and stirring up the bunks. "Lively, now! Let's have a look at you. Think you can recognise the fellows you are talking about, young 'un?"

Handforth was quivering with excitement.

"I didn't see them properly," he said, "but I can tell— Yes, by George! That's one of them!" he added, with a roar. "And there's the other! They're the rotters! I'd know 'em anywhere!"

Two sleepy-eyed half-castes were among those who had been aroused. They were nondescript-looking rascals with grimy, yellowish features, and their knowledge of English was limited. They were both looking bewildered, as though aroused from a deep sleep,

"These men haven't been up to any mischief," muttered Captain Walker. "They haven't got enough sense to perform their own duties, let alone indulge in kidnapping! The boy's wrong!"

"They're the two, I tell you!" insisted Handforth. "Didn't I have a scrap with them? Didn't I fight with 'em twice? It was dark, I know, but you can't spoof me—"

"Not so fast!" interrupted the captain. "See here, you two, you went ashore this evening, didn't you? Where did you go to?"

"All same went ashore," muttered one of them.

"What did you do there?"

"Plenty drink—plenty fight—then we turned out and come back all same ship," explained the fellow blandly. "Plenty sleep."

"You didn't see anything of a Chinese boy?"

"No savvy Chinese boy."

They both shook their heads with innocent astonishment.

"It's no good—you'll get nothing out of them," said Mr. Rogers. "I've had this sort of thing before. They're the biggest liars under the sun. See here, you two! You've been asleep for hours, eh?"

"Plenty sleep for hours," agreed the pair, in one voice.

"You see?" growled the third officer. "That's a barefaced lie right off, because they only came back half an hour ago."

"Did you see them?" asked the captain.

"I heard the boat come up, and I took

a look overside—but I didn't watch them particularly," replied Mr. Rogers. "I knew who they were, and after they'd come to me and reported, I never thought anything more about it. But it's quite likely they brought that boy aboard with 'em."

"Sink my anchor!" growled Captain Boom. "Take my advice, Jim, and search these bunks. An' if there ain't any sign of the young 'un, you'd best search the whole ship."

Mr. Rogers received a nod from his captain, and he ordered the two half-castes to stand back. And as he approached their bunks, Captain Walker watched them closely. They showed no signs of agitation, and merely appeared to be mildly bewildered at the whole proceeding.

"Nothing here," said Mr. Rogers, after a minute. "What about the other bunks, sir?"

"Yes, let's look in them!" said Handforth eagerly.

"Might as well make a job of it while you're at it, Mr. Rogers," nodded the captain. "Search the whole place."

"Can we help, sir?" asked Edward Oswald.

Without waiting for permission, they joined in the search, and suddenly both the half-castes commenced jabbering. With gleaming eyes they ran up, and talked fluently in their own lingo.

"That's enough of that!" roared the skipper. "Stand back, there! By thunder! I'm beginning to think— Silence, you dogs!"

The men cowered back, now thoroughly alarmed. The change had come about when Handforth & Co. went to a far corner of the fo'c'sle and commenced looking behind a littered mass of ropes and tarpaulins and barrels.

"I'd better come over there!" said Mr. Rogers grimly.

He pushed the juniors aside, and took down the storm-lantern. Climbing over the litter, he held the light so that its rays penetrated behind the pile. Then he drew his breath in sharply.

"By ginger!" he muttered.

"Anything there?" asked Handforth tensely.

He climbed up and peered over. For a moment nothing was said. Handforth found himself looking down into a kind of dark corner, and the lantern rays revealed the bound and gagged figure of Yung Ching, the Chinese boy.

He was lying quite still, and on his side—so that the searchers could not be certain whether he was unconscious or not. Mr. Rogers was looking very angry. Not only was Handforth's story fully justified, but the officer was furious with himself for having discredited it.

"Well?" came an inquiry from Captain Walker.

"The boy's here, sir," snapped Mr. Rogers. "You'd better keep a hold on those two, sir! And watch out for their knives—they'll probably be desperate. Here, lend a hand with this litter!"

"Chingy!" muttered Handforth. "We've got him! By George, and he might have been carted off to China to-morrow!"

They hastily pulled the lumber away, and Yung Ching was lifted and carried out into the open. His eyes were wide, and it was quite evident that he was very conscious. In the meantime, Captain Boom and Mr. Jiggs had acted with commendable promptitude—and both the half-castes were held from the rear, and in such a way that they could not use their arms.

"Well, this beats me!" said Captain Walker, with a deep breath. "A stowaway aboard my ship! And these schoolboys had to come and tell us about it! Mr. Rogers, this'll need a lot of explaining! You were on watch, and I hold you responsible."

"That's not fair, sir!" shouted Handforth. "How was Mr. Rogers to know anything about it until we told him? But never mind that! Let's carry Chingy out on deck, and give him some water."



CHAPTER 15.

"NO SAVVY!"

FIVE minutes later Yung Ching was in the skipper's own cabin, resting on one of the lounges. He was looking dishevelled and haggard. His only attire consisted of singlet and shorts—the clothing he had worn for the cycle race. There were bruises on him, too, and the ropes had left ugly marks on his wrists.

Acting upon Captain Walker's orders, Mr. Rogers had clapped both the half-castes in irons, and they were now locked up. They had steadfastly refused to give any explanation of their conduct—and after Yung Ching had been found, they had become perfectly calm and immobile.

"The beggars won't say anything, of course," growled Mr. Rogers, as he came in and reported. "These chaps never will—they're always as mum as oysters. But there's something pretty deep at the bottom of it, I'll warrant. I'll bet they were paid for this job by somebody higher—somebody we shall never know anything about."

"They won't say anything?" asked the captain.

"Not a word, sir."

"Well, I'll hand 'em over to the police in the morning," declared the skipper. "There's plenty of evidence to charge them with kidnapping, and they'll probably get a year in gaol. How's the boy?"

"He'll be better soon, sir," said Handforth cheerfully. "We'll take him ashore in our

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own boat, if you don't mind, and get him back to St. Frank's. They're probably anxious by this time, too. More water, Chingy?"

"Plentee water," said Yung Ching. "No wantee more."

"Have a drop of brandy, kid?" asked Mr. Rogers.

"No likee blandy."

"But it'll do you good."

"Me allee light," said Yung Ching, nodding.

"Chuck it!" growled Handforth. "You can speak better than that, if you like! I've heard you use perfect English in the Form-room. What happened to you this afternoon?"

"No savvy!"

"Look here, you needn't trot out that rot—"

"No savvy!"

"I'll punch your head if you start those games!" roared Handforth. "Come on, my lad! Out with that yarn of yours!"

"Well, I must say you're an original kind

of rescuer!" smiled Captain Walker. "You find your kidnapped friend, and then threaten to punch his head! You'd better treat him gently——"

"But he always spoofs like this, sir," interrupted Handforth. "Come on, Chingy, we've rescued you, and it's your turn to do a bit of talking."

"Me plentee glateful," said Yung Ching warmly. "Me unworthy of such honourable attention. But me thankee you muchee."

"But I don't want you to thankee me muchee, blow you!" retorted Handforth. "We want to know how you were pinched. And talk proper English—not that pidgin lingo!"

"Men cally me off from load," explained Ching.

"From which?"

"From the road, you ass," said Church. "They carried you off from the road, eh, Chingy? How did they do it?"

"They thlow wire in my bike, and then glab me flom behind," said the Chinese boy.

"Plentee surprise. Takee me to cave, and

me stopee there until night. Mo muchee puzzled. No savvy why. Allee same mystely."

"But can't you explain it at all?"

"Plentee queer."

"But don't you know why they collared you?"

"No savvy," said Yung Ching.

"Do you mean that you can't suggest any explanation?" asked Church. "What about your father? He's in China, isn't he?"

"My honouable father big mandalin in Ngan-Chau-Fu. Him plentee busy. No time to come to this countly."

"Ngan-Chau-Fu," repeated Captain Boom, who had been listening intently. "Sink me for a landlubber! There's a pile of trouble in that part of China just now. It's in the province of Hu-kiang. There's a kind of war there—all to itself."

Yung Ching nodded.

"My honouable father heap war lord," he replied, smiling. "Plentee stlong. Enemies no good. My honouable father safe with plentee soldiers. Big tlouble, but, allee samee, my honouable father smile and watch. Enemies can do him no harm."

"H'm!" said Mr. Rogers. "I wouldn't be so sure of that, young 'un. It seems to me that your father's enemies have been trying to strike at him through you. These dogs wouldn't kidnap you just for the fun of the thing—and it's quite obvious they were going to carry you off to China, and deliver you into the hands of somebody who's been specially tipped."

"That's about the size of it," agreed Handforth. "My hat! What a plot! I suspected something of this kind all along—only those chumps at St. Frank's wouldn't listen to me. They even yelled with laughter when I told 'em about my scrap with those half-castes—said I'd been having a nightmare!"

"Well, it did sound a bit thick, Handy," remarked Church.

"I've been proved right now, anyhow," retorted Handforth. "By George, I'm going to have my laugh over those other chaps when we get back to school! Like their giddy nerve to ridicule me! I don't want to boast, but if I hadn't stuck to this trail from the very beginning, Chingy would have been carried off for good."

A little crowing on Handforth's part was excusable. For about the first time on record his deductions had turned out to be justified, and he had brought the "case" to a triumphant conclusion. He was rather dazed about it himself, or he might have crowed with even greater strength.

"Well, what are you boys going to do?" asked Captain Walker, at length. "Perhaps you'd better stay aboard for the night, and go back to-morrow. You've had some hard going, and you need a rest—"

"Thanks all the same, but we'd rather get back to the school at once," interrupted Handforth. "We've got to take Chingy, too. Wouldn't you rather go straight back to St. Frank's, Chingy?"

"Velly fine," replied Yung Ching. "But me cause muchee tlouble—"

"Never mind about the tlouble—I mean trouble," said Handforth. "We've got to deliver you safe and sound at St. Frank's, and I shan't be satisfied until you're there. As for those rotten half-castes, they're in irons, and we needn't bother about 'em any more."

"The boy's got the right kind of grit," declared Captain Boom approvingly. "Sink my anchor, but I'm durned if we don't form an escort. What do you say, Jiggs?"

"Ay, ay, sir," agreed Mr. Jiggs. "We allus said these young 'uns was reg'lar clippers. They've got a fine turn o' speed, an' it's no good sayin' they ain't!"

"Thanks!" said Handforth coldly. "But, if it's all the same to you, we don't want an escort. We'd rather row our old wash-tub back, and deliver Chingy without any help. We started out on this job alone, and we want to finish it alone."

Captain Boom slapped his thigh.

"Swab me for a half-baked son of a beach-comber!" he roared delightedly. "Did ye hear that, Jiggs? No escort, if ye please! These young sparks ain't afraid o' nothin'. Avast, there! Make way for your betters, Jiggs! May I be mistook for a derelict if these kids ain't grit right through!"

"We allus said they was a handful, cap'n," said Mr. Jiggs.

"Well, there's no danger now," smiled Mr. Rogers. "Both those men are under lock and key, so the boys might as well get off. Are you sure you feel well enough to make the trip, young 'un?" he added, turning to Yung Ching.

"Me plentee good," smiled Ching. "Feel heap fine."

And so, five minutes later, Handforth & Co. and their little Oriental companion set off in the clumsy fisherman's boat, having bid a warm good-night to Captain Phineas Boom and the others.

"By jingo, won't the chaps sing small, Handy?" grinned Church, as they pulled at the oars. "They simply went into hysterics when you talked about kidnapping and Chinamen! They'll have to eat out of your giddy hand!"

Edward Oswald nodded coldly.

"It might be a good idea for you and Mac to make a start!" he retorted. "I seem to remember you asses grinning like a couple of Cheshire cats, too. I've a good mind to slaughter the pair of you for your nerve!"



CHAPTER 16.

THE YELLOW FACE.

"LOOK!" said McClure, pointing.

They had just rounded the headland, and were within sight of the strip of beach at the foot of the sloping cliffs, with the downs rolling beyond. Their

camp was just up there, and it should have been in a state of desolation. But many lights were gleaming.

Other lights were half-way down the cliff-path, and the general effect was rather eerie. Handforth turned in his seat, resting on his oars.

"A search-party!" he grinned. "Good! This means that we shan't have to go to St. Frank's, after all! We can hand Chingy over to the search-party, and then turn in."

"You think that those lights are lanterns?" asked Church eagerly. "Some of the masters and prefects from St. Frank's?"

"Of course," said Handforth. "Didn't I tell you there'd be search-parties out?"

"Did you?"

"Of course I did, you chump!"

"All right—I dare say you're right, but I don't seem to remember it," replied Church. "Let's put some speed on, and get ashore as quickly as we can. They're evidently in a stew, or they wouldn't organise a search-party in the middle of the night like this."

Handforth's surmise was correct. The search-party consisted of Mr. Nelson Lee, Mr. Beverley Stokes, Fenton, Morrow, Browne, and a number of other seniors. They had been hunting for well over an hour.

Long after lights out, Doyle and Scott had become thoroughly alarmed, and had gone to their Housemaster, and had reported Yung Ching's mysterious disappearance. Mr. Stokes had been very sceptical at first, but had made inquiries throughout the school.

Then, finding that the Chinese boy was indeed missing, Mr. Stokes had consulted with Mr. Nelson Lee, and this search-party was the result. So far nothing significant had been discovered, excepting the strange absence from camp of Handforth & Co.

By the time the Tiger Patrol nosed their clumsy craft into the shingle, the search-party had reached the beach, and nothing could have suited Handforth better. He was fairly glowing with victory.

"Come on—we'll take it all calmly," he chuckled. "Leave all the talking to me, and let me go in advance. Come up when I give a hail."

He went off, and came upon the two Housemasters holding a discussion with the other members of the search-party. They were just wondering where to continue their activities, for they were at a loose end.

"Hallo, sir!" said Handforth, as he loomed up out of the night.

"Oh, so here you are, Handforth!" said Mr. Lee, turning. "We were wondering what had become of you and your patrol. I suppose you know that Yung Ching is missing, and that there are several indications of foul play?"

"That's stale, sir," replied Handforth carelessly. "My hat! Wasn't I the first chap to warn everybody that Chingy was in danger? What about that scrap I had last night with those two Chinamen?"

"That was only a nightmare, Handforth,"

put in Fenton. "There's no need to bring your dreams into this business. Ching must have met with an accident of some kind, and he's probably lying in one of these spinneys, or on the downs, with a sprained ankle or a broken leg. That's our theory——"

"Well, you can preserve it in spirit, and bottle it up!" interrupted Handforth tartly. "MY theory was that Yung Ching had been kidnapped by enemies——"

"Really, Handforth, we can't waste time——"

"Just a minute, Mr. Lee!" interrupted Handforth. "I'd like to tell you that my theory was the correct one. And if you want any proof, I've got Yung Ching here!"

"Here?" echoed Mr. Stokes. "Where?"

"We've just rescued him," explained Handforth carelessly. "Hi, Mac! Bring him along! These fatheads won't believe—I—I mean Mr. Stokes won't believe that we've got Chingy!"

His chums came up with Yung Ching between them.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated both the Housemasters.

"Me allee light!" beamed Yung Ching. "No hurt. Plentee safe."

"But you weren't really kidnapped, were you?" demanded Fenton, staring.

"Men come and cally me off," explained the Chinese boy. "Plentee bad men. Handforth fine fella. Muchee glit and blain."

"Glit and blain!" repeated Handforth.

"He says you've got plenty of grit and brain!" grinned Church.

"Oh, rot! I mean—— Well, of course——"

"Handforth, is this extraordinary story true?" asked Mr. Nelson Lee sharply.

Handforth proceeded to explain in detail, with the greatest enjoyment in the world. It afforded him keen pleasure to go over every phase of the adventure, and to produce positive proof that his "fantastic" theory had been right from the very first.

"In these circumstances, Handforth, I can only compliment you for your remarkable astuteness," said Mr. Lee, at length. "You have not only done splendidly, but Yung Ching is under a great obligation to you. He might easily have been carried off in that tramp steamer."

"Well, there's never any telling with Handforth," said Fenton. "He's the most surprising young beggar under the sun."

"A wise and truthful remark, Brother Fenton," agreed Browne. "Next to Brother Willy, I can safely assert that Brother Handforth is the supreme surprise-package of St. Frank's. If you gaze closely you will observe the halo which now surrounds him."

Both Mr. Lee and Mr. Stokes questioned Yung Ching carefully, but could gain no satisfactory explanation. He only knew that his father was a powerful mandarin—a wealthy potentate in one of the little-known provinces of Inner China. He believed that there was a petty war in progress, but he had supreme confidence in his father's great powers. And

he could only vaguely guess that his father's enemies had made this attempt to carry him off to China.

"It seems that we shall never get to the actual truth," said Mr. Stokes, at last, as he consulted privately with Mr. Lee. "I don't like it at all—I am the boy's Housemaster, and I am very uneasy. What guarantee have we that this sort of thing won't happen again?"

"None, I am afraid," replied Mr. Nelson Lee. "At the same time, another attempt is hardly likely. It is always difficult to get to the bottom of these Oriental affairs. The minds of these Eastern people work differently to our minds, Mr. Stokes. Perhaps we shall be able to get some further facts from Ching to-morrow. For the time being I am relieved that he is safe, and we cannot do better than get back to the school at once. I think the Headmaster is very anxious."

So they went off immediately, leaving Handforth & Co to get between their blankets again, in camp. The Tiger Patrol was feeling thoroughly pleased with itself, and Handforth was already making plans as to his triumph on the morrow. He'd show the school!

"By the way, Handforth," said Mr. Lee, just before he left, "and you, too, Church and McClure. We here are the only ones who know the real facts about Yung Ching, and it is inadvisable for this remarkable story to go further. So you will oblige me by saying nothing whatever about it. Just a little secret between ourselves, you see."

Handforth looked blank.

"But—but I'm going to make all the chaps sing small, sir!" he protested.

"I shall have to ask you to forego that little pleasure," said the Housemaster-detective gravely. "I realise it will be an effort, Handforth, but to a scout—and a patrol-leader at that—it should not be so very arduous. Surely you can forget this dramatic affair?"

"All right, sir," he said gruffly. "I'll say nothing more about it. I hope I'm a good scout, sir!"

"There's no question of it, Handforth," replied Mr. Lee, nodding. "To-night you have proved your worth in a very definite manner."

Edward Oswald was very subdued when he tucked himself into his blankets, and he received no condolence from Church and McClure, for they dropped off to sleep in about twenty seconds. Handforth slept, too, until he was awakened by the light from an electric torch blazing into his eyes. He sat up, blinking, and gave a gasp. Just beyond that glare of light he could see an indistinct yellow face—the face of a true Chinaman!

"It is well!" said a soft voice. "You are the boy who foiled me—and I shall remember you!"

The light snapped out, and Handforth gave a wild yell.

"Quick!" he roared. "Church! McClure! We're trapped!"

Church and McClure, violently aroused from their sleep, found Handforth striking matches. They listened dazedly as he told them of what he had seen and heard. But the tent was empty, and outside everything was quiet.

"You—you dotty ass!" growled Church, at last. "It was a nightmare——"

"Everything I see is a nightmare!" snorted Handforth indignantly. "I tell you that face was within a yard of me, and——"

"Rats!" mumbled his chums. "Get to sleep!"

And when Handforth tucked himself into his blankets again he wondered. After all, it did seem a bit strange. And he couldn't be quite certain about that yellow face. Had he dreamed of it, or had he actually seen it?

This was a question which time would answer in due course!

THE END.

.....NEXT WEDNESDAY!.....

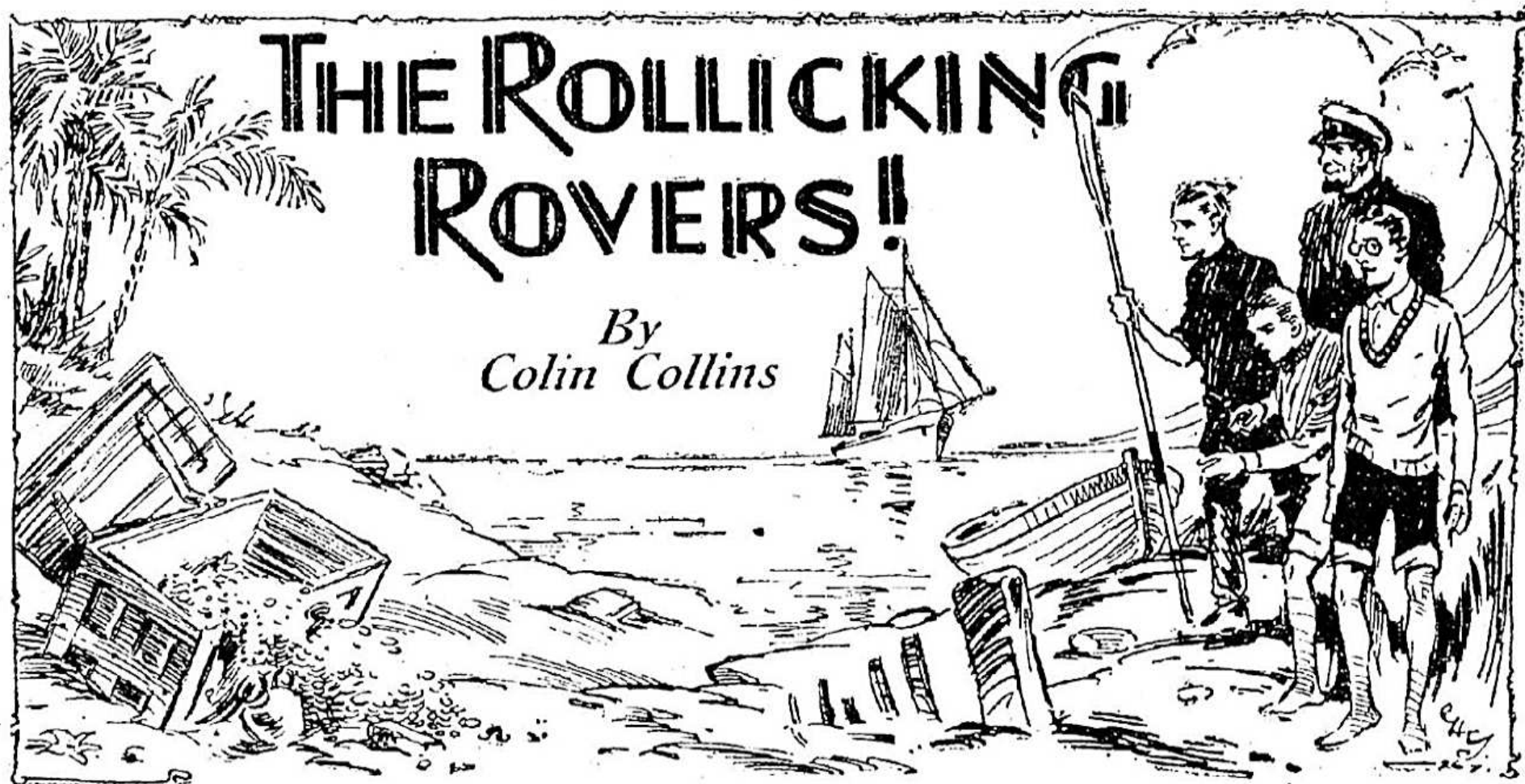
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BOB DIGBY, HAROLD DWYER and FATTY VOSS are left a large fortune, to be divided equally between them. The fortune is left them by their uncle, Silas Digby, and the wealth is hidden in a chest which he has buried somewhere during his travels round the world. They have no clue to the whereabouts of this fortune, but enlist the aid of BEN TOPPET, the

skipper of the Saucy Ann. Skipper Ben tells them of a chest which may be concealed beneath a tree in their uncle's garden. They dig for it, but are shadowed by a crafty seaman known as FOXEY. They get the chest up, and open it, to find that it contains documents, and a mummified head and hands!

(Now read on.)

Inside the Box.

THERE was only the light of the torch, the stars overhead, the stillness of the night around, and the nearby swish of the waves in the harbour below. The excavators held their breath and peered into the iron box unearthed from the foot of the tree.

Gruesome as were the contents of the chest, they conveyed less horror when it was realised that the mummified head and hands were those of some traitor of three hundred years ago.

The rest of the contents were parchment deeds and paper charts and drawings, and some columns of figures on leaves torn from an ancient account book.

Ben Toppit was the first to speak.

"I've seen that box afore," he cried. "By gum, yes, but not what was inside of it. I've seen several others like it; and I know where this one came from."

Harold, peering through his spectacles, bent low to get a look at the parchments and read a few words aloud.

"The writing is in Spanish, and I can see some drawings," he announced. "This isn't uncle's treasure, but it may contain a clue."

"I know where the old man got this!" cried Ben. "It all comes back to me. I remember his getting it from a wreck off the coast of South America. Wonderful stories

they told about that wreck, and your uncle worked it out that, on the day of the lowest tide of the year, he might be able to get a squint at it; and we hung about for weeks outside the reef."

"Did he find anything else besides this?" asked Bob.

"No, not then. No, I'm certain he didn't. It was after that he took to porin' over certain musty old papers—these papers, or I'm a Dutchman!—and saying to me, 'Ben, I'm getting nearer to it,' he says, 'nearer to understanding.'"

"Understanding what?" asked Harold.

"The lingo, I took him to mean. It was foreign, and it beat him. He was no scholar, and he was always writin' words out on bits o' paper—little bits of Spanish lingo—and asking Spanish sailors what the words meant. He never showed 'em any of these papers, only bits copied in his own hand-writin'; but I've seen some of these papers in his cabin o' nights; and that old deed box under his bunk."

"Obviously these papers once contained the secret of the treasure—he afterwards went in search of—and found," said Harold.

"I believe you, my boy," said Ben. "No wonder he anchored on to this box as second only to the real thing. He brought it here, and hid it agin' the time when he should be free to go treasure hunting again. Oh, he was allus cunning, was that uncle of yours."

"We'll have these papers translated," said Fatty.

"What for?" demanded Ben. "They won't tell yer what he did with the treasure when he found it. When he retired from trading he got very mysterious in his ways, and went hunting in queer, outlandish places, any sort of island in uncharted water drew him off his course, and he generally had a packet of papers in his pocket, and he always went ashore alone, like a sick dog 'unting for a bit o' grass to tickle his gullet with."

"Let's take this box indoors and examine it carefully," said Bob, who so far had said nothing, and regarded the find as a great disappointment.

"Better not. There's Martha," whispered Ben warningly.

"Let's take the chest indoors and hide it. Martha won't know. We can fill in the hole."

That was agreed. While Ben went round to the kitchen to make sure that Martha's attention was absorbed in the business of preparing the young gentlemen's evening meal, the boys carried the chest indoors and hid it in the hall, covered by an overcoat. Afterwards they returned to the garden and put back the soil; and they made all flat and neat as possible in the uncertain light of the torch.

The Opal Ring.

MARTHA was busy laying the table in the dining-room, bustling to and fro, when she caught sight of an overcoat down in a corner.

"Drat those boys!" she cried. "Whenever will they learn tidy ways?"

Martha whipped up the overcoat, and espied the dirty, metal-bound and mildewed box.

"More wireless!" she cried in despair. "And full o' dirty rubbish, and acid and accumulators, I'll be bound."

She lifted the lid, and, for a moment, failed to understand what was inside, the hall being too dark. Turning on the light overhead, she bent down again. Then she screamed and fled out to the kitchen, threatening a faint.

"That's Martha!" cried Ben, throwing down the shovel with which he had been smoothing down the last bit of soil. "She's screaming!"

"She's seen a mouse, that's all," said Fatty calmly.

"It must be worse 'an that—a rat, at least."

"Take it away! Take it away! I won't have it in the house; nor you neither, if you bring such things in!" Martha protested, when Ben explained. "Don't tell me it's three hundred years old. What's that got to do with it? Take it away!"

"There's papers in the box we must examine."

"Take it away, I say. It's dreadful, such things in a decent house."

"I'll see the young gents about it," sighed Ben. "We'd better bury the box again. Don't you worry no more about it."

Ben came to the boys and proposed a better plan.

"We'd better take this chest to the harbour right away, my lads," he whispered mysteriously. "Only us'll know where it is—but not a word to Martha that we've got it aboard the Saucy Ann, or she'd never come the trip with us. Wrap it up in an oil-skin so as it looks like a bundle of clothes; and there's a place below deck where it'll lie snug and out o' sight."

"We can examine it on the ship," cried Bob; and the others agreed.

They carried the box out of the house, Martha peeping in horror from behind a door.

"We're going to bury it decent, Martha," cried Ben loudly, and winked at the boys.

In a few minutes they were at the quay side and took the deed box aboard. They found the ship all dark below, and no one there.

"Dang his eyes, where's that slimy toad of a ferret-faced son of a sea cook Foxey?" roared the giant Ben, stamping about till the deck boards boomed with his tread. "I told that miserable bit o' scum he was to float here till he was relieved."

"Never mind, Ben," cried Bob. "Get us a light, and we'll go into the saloon and see what's in the box besides the head and hands."

"Find ye a light!" laughed Ben. "This ship ain't a place o' lamps and candles now—there's 'lectric light!"

The saloon, or main cabin, of the old ship—now refitted for pleasure and blessed with many comforts—was soon lighted and the curtains drawn, and the box placed on the centre table.

The lid was again opened and all peered inside, as if half expecting the head and hands to come to life, and jump out at them. Cautiously they drew some papers from under.

But, as all the writing was in Spanish, they were no wiser. The names of a few islands on one map were familiar to Ben. He could remember the old master calling at some; beyond that he could recollect little.

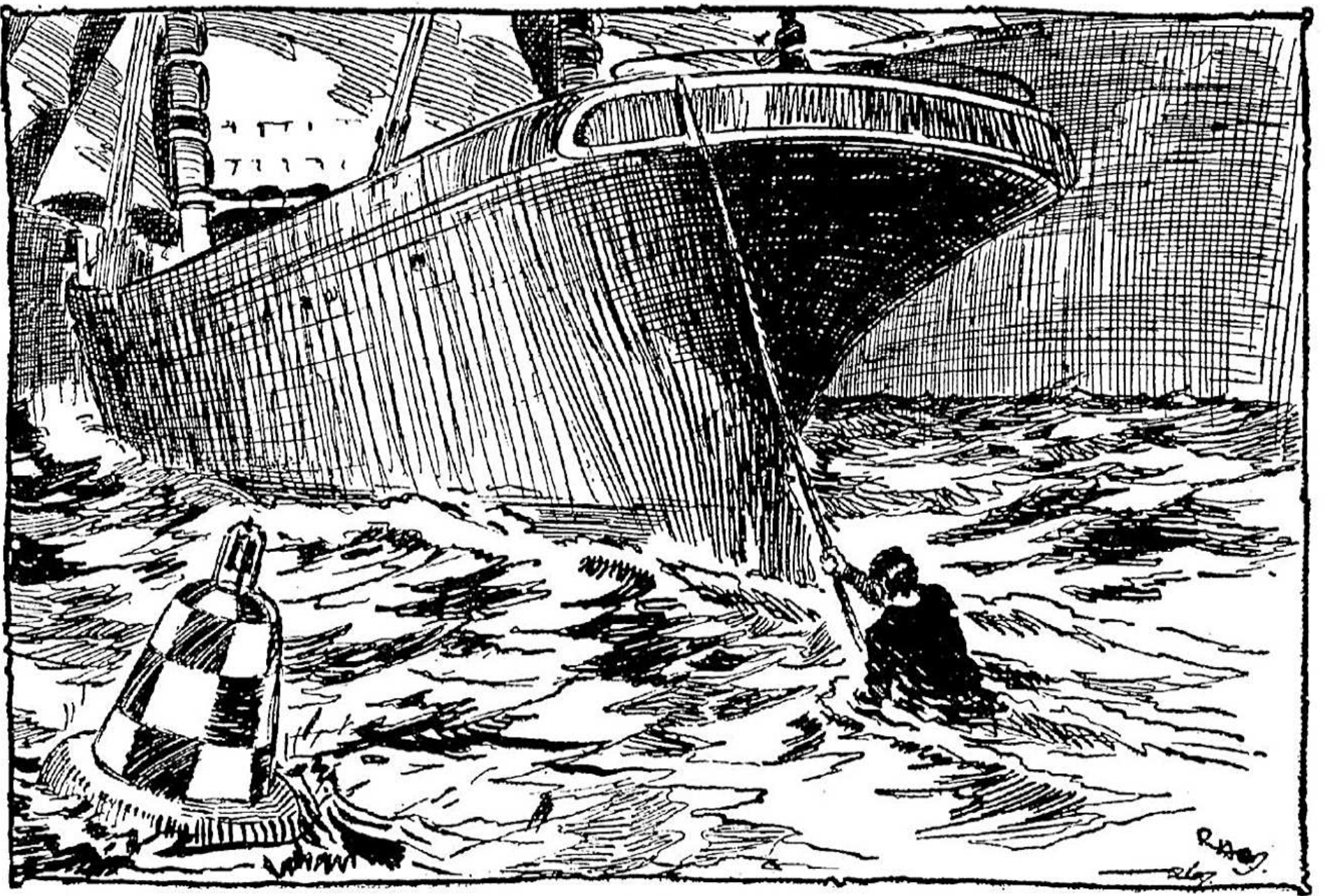
"It's no good worrying over these," Bob declared at last. "They're all old, and would only tell us where uncle found his treasure, not where he hid it. But we'll keep the box on board and take it with us. Ben can find a hiding-place for it until we decide what's to be done with these mummified remains."

"There's a ring on one of the fingers; it's almost falling off," whispered Fatty, pointing at the withered, claw-like hand.

"And a jewel in the ring," Harold observed, thrusting his goggles close.

"A jewel—yes, an opal!" cried Fatty, gingerly removing the thin circle of tarnished gold. "I'm going to have that."

"An opal, Mr. Joseph—unlucky!" cried Ben. "Look what luck it brought him,"



A dark figure lifted out of the sea, grasped the rope trailing from the stern of the vessel, and climbed it hand over hand. None saw him come aboard. The treasure-seekers were taking with them a mysterious, cunning enemy!

he added, pointing to the shrivelled head with the long, black hair.

"I don't care," replied Fatty, slipping the ring on his finger.

"Fatty is cracked on rings," jeered Harold. "Let him have it, to keep company with his rolled-gold signet."

"This one is gold, anyway," cried Fatty, admiring the effect on his chubby finger.

Ben carried the box away and hid it; and they settled down round the centre table for a further conference. There was something practical and definite to do—the examination of Silas Digby's papers, ship's logs and diaries. And this was a long business.

Round the World!

PAGE after page was read, until they came to the very last one in the diary written at the final post of call on the last journey home, a lodging in Boulogne. Ben remembered the place, a humble fisherman's cottage just off the harbour, where Captain Digby always stayed when in that port.

"But why did he stay in a fisherman's cottage—he wasn't poor? Why didn't he go to some hotel?" asked Bob.

"Your uncle never liked hotels; he wasn't particular fond o' people," Ben explained; "and after he found his treasure he got sort of suspicious of everybody."

"Listen!" cried Bob, who was reading out the entries. "This is what he wrote:

"Under a tree is best. No one ever digs under a tree. . . . Very secluded and comfortable. . . . Food always good. No passers-by. . . . Easy to reach. . . . Will bring the boys some day. The woman is away with her man in his boat all day, no disturbance. . . . Soles for dinner . . . very good. Sea water always in the cellars, yet never damp!"

"Another thing is very plain," said Harold shrewdly. "The idea of 'under a tree' was always in his mind as the most likely place to be undisturbed; remember, he chose 'under a tree' for this deed box at home!"

"That's so," sighed Ben. "And I call to mind that he often stood under big trees in lonely places and pondered like, and then he'd sometimes turn to me, if I was there, and say: 'This has stood 'ere a good hundred years, Ben, and it'll stand for a hundred more. The one thing that nobody never disturbs is an old tree. Young 'uns is cut down, but the old 'uns stays on.'"

"From time immemorial," said Goggles, looking like a wise owl, "men have hidden treasures at the foot of trees. Was there a tree in that garden, Ben?"

"There was, just outside the window. It was a quiet spot, close to the harbour's edge, in a sort of creek or dock. One wall was built on the harbour wall, a little garden as big as this room, and the cellars below the house were useless, because of the water always in 'em."

"That sounds interesting. A water-tight sea chest might lie unnoticed and untouched in water there as safely as if buried under soil, as safely as if it lay under the sea waiting for uncle to find it."

"That's so," Ben agreed. "But, in that house, you never see no cellars. Bein' useless, they was boarded over, and never talked about. The guv'nor couldn't abide damp houses, and he talked about this one as bein' so dry as to be remarkable."

"Observe," said Goggles, "that he talks in his diary of taking us there some day. Why—unless it was to fetch the treasure away when we were old enough to be trusted?"

Ben woke up with a cry of excitement.

"The Saucy Ann used to berth in the harbour, right up agin' the sea wall, close to the very windows of that house. He could have shoved that heavy chest into the house single-handed from the yacht, without a soul aboard knowing."

"And it was the last place he stopped at!" cried Harold. "Poor old uncle; you know what a man he was for not making up his mind until the last minute. Why shouldn't he have put off hiding the box until the very last?"

"That sounds reasonable. He was always growling about the taxes of this country," said Ben.

"The chest is hidden in that house, in the cellars," cried Fatty with conviction. "I vote we go to the last place he stopped at. And if it isn't there, to the place before that. And if that's no go, to the one before that, and so on backwards, until we succeed."

"It's the only thing we can do. It's what we must do," Bob declared. "Even if it takes us all round the world, we've got to do it."

"Hooray! Round the world for a fortune!" cried Fatty joyously.

"What do you say, Ben?" asked Harold.

"I was with him, and I can lead yer," said Ben. "And it's best to begin at the beginning—which is the end, as you might say—and work backwards."

"Are we all agreed?" asked Bob, closing the diary with a bang.

"Yes," the others assented, and they looked to Ben, who nodded and grunted his "Ay, hay!"

There was nothing to do now but go home and to bed. It was a relief to have settled something. They could not start at once, because there was Mr. Endersleigh, the lawyer, to see; there was Ben to get married to Martha; the Saucy Ann to be provisioned; arrangements to be made for money to be forwarded from England; clothes to be bought; and all the hundred and one little things needed for a voyage, and a possible long absence from home.

They returned and informed Martha that they "had come home from the mummy's funeral," and the box was "safely buried."

The Sinister Stowaway.

BEN was first up in the morning, astir long before the others, doing odd jobs for Martha, who instructed him as if he were a little boy knowing nothing. Ben grinned all over his face as he accepted her corrections and advice, solacing himself with the thought that, when he got her aboard, "he'd larn her," to quote his own phrase.

Breakfast over, the boys called to Ben and took him to the hole under the tree, which they had so carefully filled in.

"Look, look, Ben!"

The earth was all in a heap. The hole they had so carefully covered was exposed to view.

"Who's done this?" cried Ben in astonishment, going on his knees and examining the burrow; for that was what it looked like, a narrow hole made by hands, or paws, the soil being torn up and flung backwards until the cavity was exposed and at the mercy of the marauders of the night.

"Look—in the soft soil—marks of claws, or fingers!" cried Goggles.

They all looked.

"Someone came here after we left."

That was obvious. But who?

"Foxey!" cried Ben, or, rather, he roared out the name as he beat the air with his clenched fists. "It's that parchment-faced, wrinkled old son of a coconut that we found here starting to dig!"

"I allus said as that bit o' scum knew something, and there was some reason why the guv'nor was so careful to keep 'im in view! Foxey knew there was something hid under the tree. Perhaps he knows where something else is hid!"

"That's not likely," said Bob. "If he did, he'd have been off after it when uncle himself forgot!"

"I've half a mind to lay a rope end about him, and make him talk!" cried Ben.

As they stood there discussing the culprit, Foxey himself came slouching up the drive.

"Just come round to see if there's any odd job the young gents or Martha is wanting done this morning," said Foxey.

"Come here!" roared Ben, pointing to the ground at his feet, and looking daggers at the slimy rascal. "What ha' you been diggin' there for?"

"Me—diggin'!" cried Foxey. "You stopped my gardening and sent me to the ship."

"And you did 'as you was bid?" cried Ben.

"Of course I did, Ben."

"Liar!" shouted Ben. "You skunk! What did you make that hole for?"

"Me make a hole! I never made no hole. What are you blaming me for? Looks like as a dog's been at work there."

"Yes, a two-legged one!" snarled Ben, seizing him by the neck and spinning him round.

In his giant grip Foxey was as a little

boy. He was almost lifted from his feet; and as he roared and ran round and round, Ben administered—or tried to administer—a kick for each word that he spoke, but missing each time, the slippery one wriggling so expertly.

"You—blamed—old—four-legged—crawling—burrowing—old ferret! Keep still, I can't kick you if you don't—and if I can't let off steam a bit that way, I'll rope you; I'll tie a noose round your neck, I will——"

"Steady, Ben," cried Bob, barging with his shoulder and separating the two. "Let him go, he found nothing."

Foxy scuttled round to the back of the house, Ben nearly falling over in his endeavour to administer a parting kick.

"There's a very simple way of dealing with that slimy toad," said Ben. "When the Saucy Ann sails, Foxy will be left behind; he won't come nosing after us any more. He knows about that box we've got aboard. There may be more treasure left in that wreck from which your uncle got that there chest. Maybe Foxy helped salve it. And maybe Foxy thinks that if he had the chart from the iron box he could get back there. Or he might put some skipper on the track, for Foxy ain't no navigator, and about the worst sailor as ever signed on. We'll run that ship ourselves, and I'll larn you all how to do it. We're goin' along, and Martha and me is goin' to get married to-morrow—so we can start at once, and Foxy can stay and look after the house."

This was agreed.

"We'll want an extra hand," said Ben, "and I know as good a man as ever handled a rope, though he can't hear, and he can't speak—bein' deaf and dumb!"

"A deaf mute?" cried Bob.

"Yes, a man as can't talk and can't hear is the man we want for the job. He can take the wheel and leave me free to look after other things. Dumb Dummy he's allus known as, and Dummy's the name he signs under."

"But he can see—he has eyes, I suppose?" said Goggles.

"Ay, he has, and he don't need no 'Arold Lloyds neither. He's a man what can see in the dark, like a cat—a man as can see ghostises, too!"

"Lots of use that'll be," chuckled Fatty.

"I dunno so much," replied superstitious Ben, with a wag of his great head. "I allus likes to know what's around out there in the water, whether it's sea serpents or ghostises, or whales, or sharks. We'll take Dummy as look-out man. Him and me has a language of our own."

So it was settled that way; and each got ready for an early start, all desperately busy for a couple of days.

Ben was presently married to Martha. The getting of Martha on board, with her luggage and cooking pots and polishing things, and

a wringer for washing the young gentlemen's linen, and irons for their collars, trouser presses, boot brushes, umbrellas and walking sticks and what-nots, was the biggest business of all.

Ben only laughed and let her take what she fancied.

At last they were ready to sail, with no wind, but a favourable tide, and at night a big moon coming and going behind rolling clouds. Foxy was left in charge of the house. They could see him standing on the front door step, outlined against the light beyond. He stood and watched till they were far out.

The going-off was a great thrill for the three young men. To them it was their first emancipation from the days of school, their first voyage on the sea of life.

The yacht sails flapped idly at first, then swelled, and the ship began to steal down the harbour, carrying her burden of living and dead.

The boys all went forward, feeling like Columbus on the look-out. Ben took the wheel, and Martha was below examining the ship's kitchen, finding no place for all her cleaning kit, and complaining loudly.

Scarcely a wave rippled, and progress was so silent and stealthy that only the slow-moving cliffs revealed the ship's motion. They could still distinguish the figure of Foxy up at the house, clear-cut in the doorway. But long before Foxy faded from sight, before they were out of the harbour, in fact, something happened, something rather uncanny—although they were entirely unconscious of it—something that the new man, Dummy, at the wheel, could not hear, and failed to see.

With a splash like a rat dropping into water someone slipped into the sea at the mouth of the harbour, and begun to swim out to the Saucy Ann. In the dark none saw, and none heard. Hand over hand the dark mass moved outward; and soon a trailing rope, cunningly placed astern, was grasped.

Still hand over hand, on the rope. Higher and higher the wet form climbed—slipped on deck—and vanished below.

There was more than one hiding-place on the Saucy Ann where a man or a box could be hidden. The human rat went head-first down under a loose deck plank—replaced the timber—shot a prepared bolt underneath, and gave no further sign.

The trackers were being tracked. Themselves so secretive and cunning, there was one more cunning than they; more greedy, more reckless, more venturesome. In his belt a knife. In his heart murder—treachery—desperation.

The invisible man!

Yes, that was what he intended to be. If any chanced upon him unawares they would not live to tell the tale.

Mystery!

THE enthusiasm of the lads began to die down about midnight. Ben, the skipper, had left the wheel to the new man, Dumb Dummy, and announced that he was going to turn in for a short spell.

The sails strained with little puffs of wind, and the rigging creaked; but beyond that there was hardly any sound. The dark shadow of the man at the wheel occasionally moved, and the three youths seated for'ard looked back at him wistfully. They would have liked to go and chat; but there was no talking to the man at the wheel on this ship.

Dummy was a sandy-haired man of about forty, with a round, red face, short-cropped hair, and big, pale blue eyes that always seemed to be staring hard. He was ready enough with a smile, and at times a grunt; but a more watchful person never walked; and those eyes of his were on you all the time if you were near.

As if conscious that a deaf and dumb man must be more on his guard than one with all his senses, Dummy behaved rather like the keepers of wild animals, who never turn their backs on dangerous beasts. If anyone walked round Dummy his eyes swivelled and followed, always full of intelligence and alertness; but never a word could he utter, and he scarcely made a sign, unless signed to—he only watched.

A glance from Ben was enough; Dummy always understood what he wanted. The boys had not yet learned how to deal with him.

"I wish he could talk and tell us things," said Fatty, when Ben had retired. "Ben seems to think that because we've been out sailing before with uncle, we know all about ships and the sailing of them."

"We shall learn by degrees," said Bob, squaring his broad shoulders. "I don't care how soon I begin."

"I bought a book on navigation," said Harold, "and I think I shall go to my bunk and begin to swot it right now. Ready for bed, Fatty? Why, I do believe Fatty's asleep."

It was almost true. Fatty began to yawn noisily, and he declared there was no sense in sitting up and staring at the moon.

Suddenly, from Ben's cabin, came a roar of rage. In a few moments Ben himself was rolling out of the doorway.

"Ere, you!" he shouted. "I saw yer! None of them there larks aboard this ship, my lads, while you're here with me. I won't have any of your senseless tomfoolery!"

"Tomfoolery! What tomfoolery?" the boys asked.

"Draggin' the blanket off me bed," cried Ben. "I saw yer."

"Saw us!" cried Bob, advancing down the deck slowly, and with all the dignity of injured innocence. "We haven't moved from here. No one has touched your blanket."

"Then it was Mr. Fatty," growled Ben. "S'elp me, if you was a sailor, my lad, I'd be latherin' you—"

"It wasn't me. I haven't stirred," cried Fatty.

"Nor me," added Harold sharply. "We wouldn't think of entering your cabin."

"All pitchin' the same yarn, eh? But I weren't asleep, and I felt a hand clawin' at the blankets."

"Nonsense!" cried Bob.

"They're all on the floor," cried Ben, leading the way back.

It took some time to convince him that no one had been to his cabin and he must have been dreaming. He went back shaking his head, suspicious and worried.

The lads, after laughing at Ben's extraordinary delusion, turned in to their cabins; and the ship was left to Dummy.

Each boy had a bunk allotted to him, Ben and Harold, as the elders, being given one cabin between them, with a bunk on each side of it, and a door in the middle. Fatty was stowed away in a smaller place next door, which was hardly a cabin, but a sort of cupboard with a bunk in it.

The sounds of the ship continued rather monotonously; and soon Bob was asleep; and Goggles, finding no electric light for the study of his navigation book, dozed, too. Fatty was snoring faintly when there was another disturbance.

This time, Ben, half dressed, leapt out of his cabin and found an empty deck. He ran to Dummy and made grunts and signs. Dummy only shook his head.

"What—nobody went near my door?" roared Ben, regardless of the fact that Dummy could not hear a word.

Dummy shook his head with great finality, as though he had heard every word.

A yell now came from Fatty's cabin, and it's occupant, in a suit of pyjamas, leapt out into the light of the moon.

"Who was it? Who did it?" Fatty shouted out, leaping about. "He bit me!"

"Bit you?" cried Ben, looming over him.

"Was it a rat?"

"A hand!" gasped Fatty. "It clawed me! It dragged off the bedclothes—and—it bit me!"

"Hands don't bite," cried Ben, going to the door of cabin No. 2 and banging to bring out Bob and Goggles.

When the startled sleepers stumbled on deck, Ben addressed them fiercely.

"Now then, which of you two was it?"

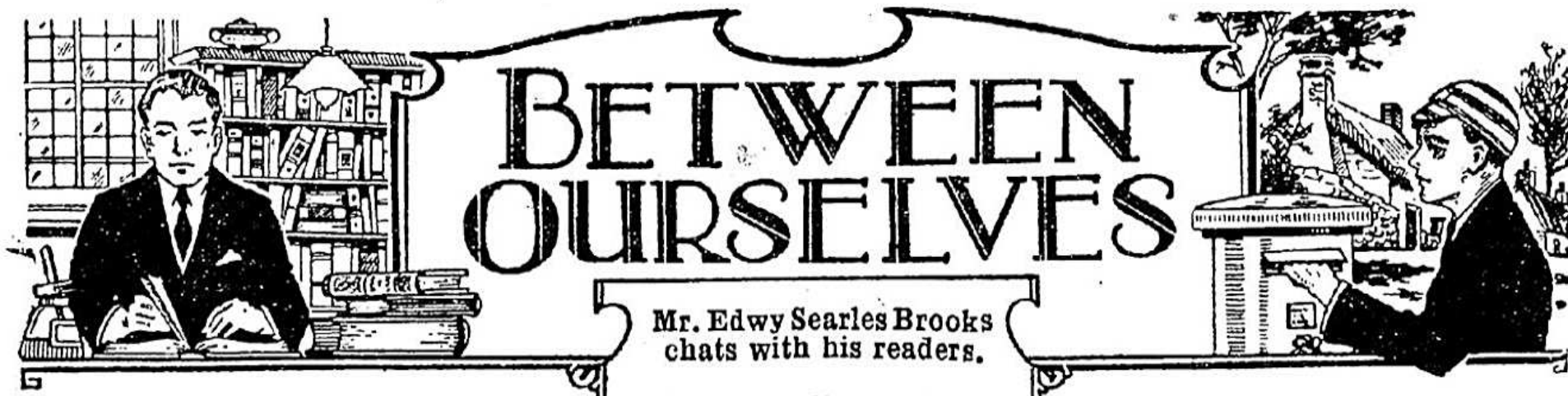
"Was what?" they queried, only half awake.

"Larkin!" retorted Ben. "You ain't at school now, I'd have you know. I'm skipper this trip, and I won't have no sky-larkin!"

"We were asleep," the suspected two replied.

From somewhere in the black shadows at the stern of the ship, behind Dummy, who stood unmoved and staring ahead as he hung

(Continued on page 44.)



NOTE.—If any reader writes to me I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter will be acknowledged in these columns, and if of very special merit will be starred.

E. S. B.

It's a jolly good thing that I don't actually *live* at the Fleetway House, as I've got an idea that a few thousand of you will be swarming round there after my blood. In that last chat of mine, a week or two ago, I believe I gave a sort of vague impression that "Between Ourselves" was to be a regular weekly feature from that issue onwards. But, after all, what about the strike? It's lucky for me that I've just thought of that strike, because it's given me a ripping excuse. Anyhow, I'll try to keep this feature up regularly from now onwards. In fact, I don't very well see how I can get out of it, for there's not likely to be another strike to provide me with such a good loophole of escape.

* * *

Besides, there's quite another strike to think of, so I'm hoping that you'll all forgive me, and write to me just the same as though I hadn't been in the least bit lazy. As a matter of fact, I haven't been lazy. What on earth makes you get that idea? This other kind of strike isn't a general affair like the one we can still remember—but quite a private little strike of my own. My brain-box. Now and again, without any warning, and without even giving me the correct notice, it goes on strike. Just when I want to do a tremendous lot of work, the old gear wheels get rusty, or something, and refuse to function. I'm not hinting that I have to be oiled before I can go on again. I want it to be distinctly understood that I never need oiling. And you'll see that I have only referred to my brain-box—not what it contains. I'm just as much in the dark as you are regarding that point, because I've never seen inside it. And I can assure you that my curiosity is quite nil.

* * *

And now, having filled up quite a few lines with absolutely nothing, I think it might be a good idea to acknowledge a few of those whiskery letters. Those ones I mentioned in my last chat—the poor, flattened creatures who have been waiting in a forlorn pile in my drawer to be acknowledged. Perhaps some of you will forget that you ever wrote

to me, but this is very doubtful. Judging from your references to far-back numbers, you seem to have memories like— Well, anyhow, you've got long memories. I wasted about five minutes trying to think of a proper simile, but I've had to give it up. And I mean to acknowledge all those letters, so as to be on the safe side.

* * *

A Staunch Supporter (Blackshaw Head, Yorks), O.O.F.M.631 (London, E.1), L. Franklin (Upper Holloway), G. Foy (Liverpool), James A. Innes* (Port Elizabeth, S.A.), S. E. Bate (Warrington), Charles Gregson (Derby), Dudley Lister (Gateshead), Richard Ferrell (Gateshead), A Lancashire Lad (Nelson), F. M. Ambler (Dulwich), Frank Lescun (Melbourne), P. Benjamin (South Yarra, Vic.), R. A. C. (Tottenham), G. Burgess (Selsey), A. H. Yeo (Wallasey), J. S. Dale (Middlesbrough), No. 1,536 (Shrewsbury), Clive Riddell (Middleton-St. George, Co. Durham), Duncan McDonald (Glasgow), S. J. Ward (Bluntisham, Hunts.), Frank Williams (Nottingham), E. L. F. (Liverpool).

* * *

Thanks very much, Wilfred Hartley, for that sketch of yours, depicting Irene under the mistletoe. And, thanks to you, John Brittan, too, for that brilliant drawing of yours, depicting Ezra Quirke. I am treasuring it, and I hope one day it will appear in print.

Well, if I write any more, it will probably be lopped off, as I am just about at the end of my space. So the safest course will be for me to dry up at once. But I'm pretty certain to be at it again next week.

Edwy Searles Brooks

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION

FORM No. 40.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

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 that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE 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 the Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

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 makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

INSTRUCTIONS.

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. 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, bearing the same number, are needed. 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 that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for $\frac{1}{2}$ d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

All **LETTERS** in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4. Any enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

DEAR LEAGUEITES,—There are several important matters I want to deal with this week. As you all know, one part of the League's activities concerns correspondence. I want to make it easy for members of the S.F.L. to get in touch with each other. So I am inviting any member who wishes to exchange notes on hobbies, sports, or other subjects with a fellow-member overseas, or in any part of the British Isles, to send in his requirements. Put the notice you send me in this form: League member No. wishes to correspond with a reader in South Rhodesia. Address It is simple enough. I am confident that this opportunity for mutual work and exchange of ideas will be of real value to all members of the League.

Stamp-collectors are legion, and they, more than anyone, desire friends overseas. Then it broadens the outlook to get chummy letters from fellows in Australia or the other Dominions of the British Empire. What's more, it brings opportunities.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED!

A triumphant letter reaches me from a loyal supporter at Waterloo, Liverpool. He has brought in seventeen new readers in the last week! Talk about the victory of Waterloo—here we have it! My hard-working chum is Gerard Mercer, O.O. 466. Address: 1, Sweden Grove, Waterloo, Liverpool. He will be glad to hear from fellow-members—especially, too, from those who are in his district, and who wish to join.

I can tell Charles Hammond, 208, Alexandra Parade, Clifton Hill, Victoria, Australia, that Jerry Dodd, the Australian member of the St. Frank's Remove, was the only representative of St. Frank's selected to play with the Australian Team against the old school. A signal honour, and Dodd was worth it. Jerry will be much heard of, naturally. He has not dropped out, as my Victorian pal thinks. Far from it! Sorry; but I have not space to put in a complete list of the characters. See the yarns!

R. W. Mersereau, Moreland House, Craig Street, St. Heliers, Jersey, League No. 658, wishes to hear from a New Zealand reader. He wants to exchange stamps.

John Walsh, 37, Wickham Street, Limerick, Ireland, is interested in bookkeeping, and wishes to correspond with some member who is interested in the same subject.

H. Hillgrove, 7, Dean Street, South Shore, Blackpool, No. 2571, wishes to correspond with readers in Bombay and in South America.

THAT BADGE!

A great number of letters have reached me from readers who are anxious about "that badge." I can bunch the replies in one go. The badge question is being seriously gone into this week. What I have to find out is whether it will be feasible to get a number of badges manufactured at a price

which is thoroughly reasonable. I believe it will be possible to surmount the various difficulties which have arisen since this subject first came up for discussion. The badge would be welcomed, I know perfectly well. In a week or two I shall be in a position to give you the result of the deliberations, and I much hope to tell you that the badge will then be an accomplished fact.

NOTEBOOKS.

There has been talk of a St. Frank's Notebook. This is useful, but I am not going to suggest the issue of an official book. What I do advise is that all members should start a notebook and jot down League doings, the names of their correspondents, and any useful data.

CLUB TICKETS.

Gerard Mercer, whose work has already been mentioned, has started the neatest club ticket for members of his club. This is a red-coloured card-board, folded in two, and bears the name of the member, with particulars of the club.

AN ARGUMENT.

They have had a fierce argument at the St. Frank's League Club in a Northern town about popular characters. One speaker said he regarded Robinson Crusoe as a hairy bore, and was shouted down. Rudyard Kipling got a lot of the honours, and so he should. G. A. Henty was voted a bit dry, but "Midshipman Easy" was awarded a prize, and one member said he liked Jules Verne's yarns of the scientific type. But Verne only imagined flying machines. I am glad to note that Mr. Searles Brooks got away with a first-class tribute as an adventure and humorous writer.



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JUNO

THE ROLICKING ROVERS!

(Continued from page 40.)

on the wheel, came a wild shriek of laughter, scarcely human, more like the shriek of some bird or animal in pain.

"What's that?" gasped Ben, shaking. "There's ghosts on board this ship," he declared in a low voice. "Turn on all the lights, every light in the ship, and start the dynamo again!"

"Don't be foolish, Ben," cried Martha, who had by now appeared on the deck. "It was the wind or some sea-bird."

"The wind don't walk through walls and into cabins, and drag bed-clothes along the deck in this or any other ship," cried Ben. "The door was shut—it shuts of its own accord."

"Oh, don't, Ben, don't!" cried Martha, shivering with terror.

"It's that there box we've got aboard," said Ben. "It was a dead hand that came a clawin' at the bed-clothes. That box goes

into the sea and down to the bottom this very night. Bring me a lantern."

"No, no!" protested Goggles. "The box is ours; we won't have it sent overboard."

"Well, at any rate, save the papers," pleaded Bob in distress.

Ben lighted a lantern and took them down a trap to a dark place where the sea chest lay, just as they had hidden it; and he passed it up the ladder to the hands above.

Bob set it on the deck and opened the lid. Martha fled to her unlighted cabin, protesting in horror at their perfidy in deceiving her and bringing the horrid thing on board.

"Bring a light," said Bob scornfully, rather amazed at Ben's timidity. "I want to take out the papers; the rest can go, if you insist, but it is very stupid."

"Ay, I should think I do insist," growled Ben, thrusting the lantern forward.

They all bent over and peered in except Ben, who held the lantern at arm's length.

"Why—the head isn't here! The hands aren't here!" cried Bob. "They're gone!"

(More exciting chapters from this great yarn next Wednesday. Don't miss them!)



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