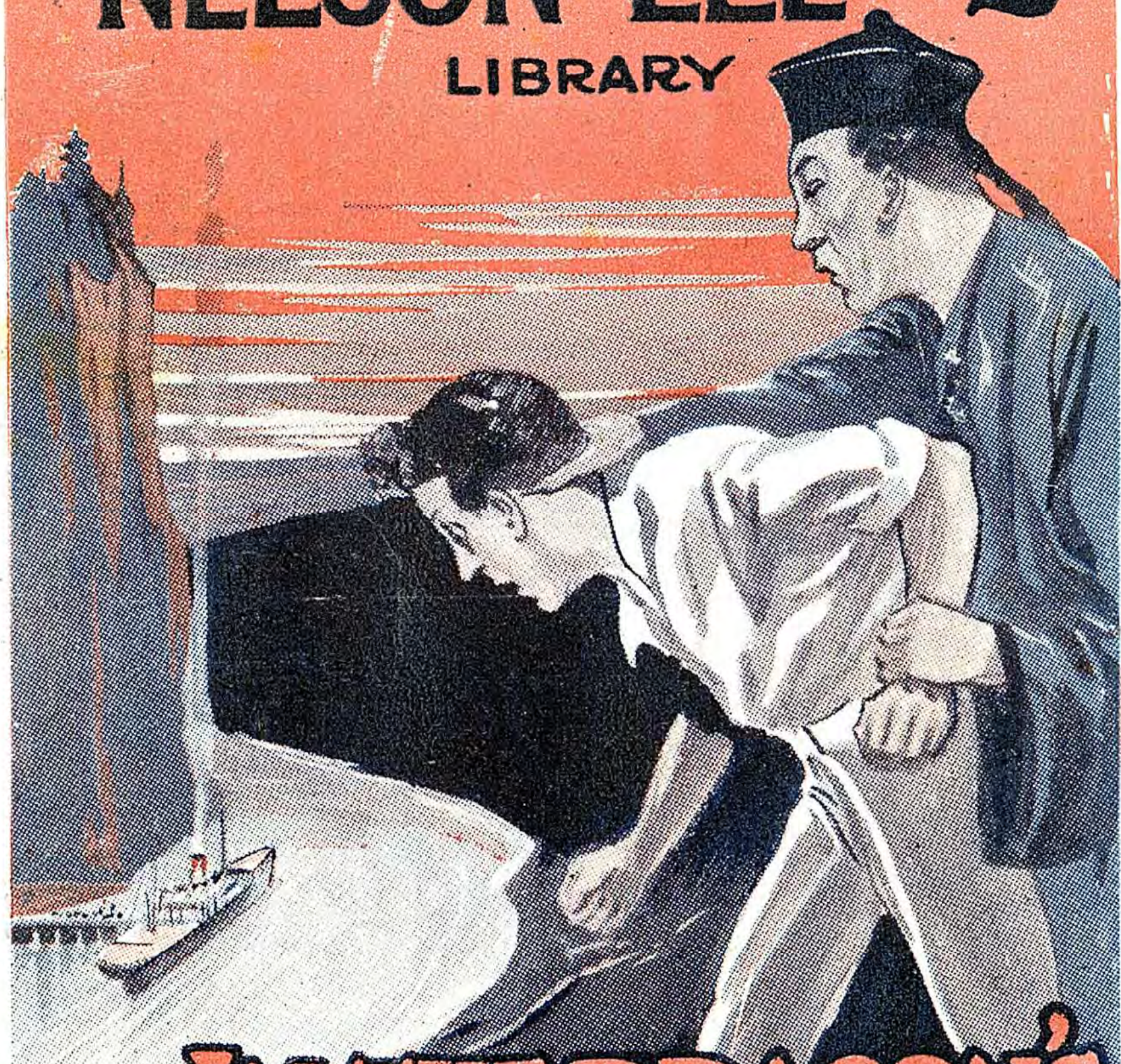


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**IN THE DRAGON'S
CLUTCH!**

**THRILLING COMPLETE STORY OF
THE BOYS OF ST FRANK'S IN CHINA!**



Umlosi sailed into the Chinamen. He swung two of the shrieking yellow men off their feet, one in either hand. He held them aloft and then flung them contemptuously amidst their fellows. From somewhere behind came Handforth's lusty bellow: "Come on, you chaps! Rescue, the Remove!" But Umlosi didn't need much rescuing!

IN THE DRAGON'S CLUTCH!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The Boys of St. Frank's are captured by Dr. Foo Chow, the mysterious Chinese millionaire! This rousing long complete yarn is full of real thrills.

CHAPTER 1.

ON THE CHINA SEAS!

LORD DORRIMORE broke open his revolver, examined the shells, and twirled the cylinder with satisfaction.

"Well, I am ready when you are," he said cheerfully.

"You can put that ordnance away, old man," remarked Nelson Lee with a smile. "We're contemplating a war-like expedition, but I hardly think it necessary to bring out the heavy artillery. If there's any fighting, we've got some good British fists."

Dorrie regretfully slipped the revolver into his hip-pocket.

"Nothin' like keepin' it handy, anyhow," he observed. "I'm a believer in fists, too; but some of these Chinks have a habit of producin' knives when they get nasty. Best to be on the safe side."

"Wise words, O my father!"

A rumble sounded at Lord Dorrimore's elbow, and he glanced round. Umlosi, the massive Kutana chieftain, was by his side. This corner of the *Wanderer's* deck was otherwise deserted, and the gloom of the semi-tropical night was heightened by the overcast sky. The luxurious steam yacht was

lying idle on the calm sea, and only a few cable-length's away gleamed the many lights of the *Dragon*.

"Hallo, old coal-box!" said Dorrie, smiling. "Are you ready, too?"

"Even as Umtagati has instructed, I am awaiting the word," replied Umlosi in his deep voice. "Wau! Methinks this will be no battle of fists. For are not these yellow dogs a cunning and tricky race?"

"Well, it's hardly fair to tar them all with the same brush, but I've no doubt that Dr. Foo Chow's crew are a specially selected brand of cut-throats," admitted his lordship genially. "But what about that little stiletto of yours? You'll have a job to hide it in your hip-pocket! Lee, old man, it's up to you to suggest somethin'."

Lord Dorrimore indicated the African chief's formidable-looking spear, which he was holding in obvious readiness for gory battle. It was an enormous weapon, and had assisted Umlosi in many a fight.

"I think Umlosi had better retain the little stiletto, as you call it," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "Even if he has no occasion to use it, there is something impressive in its very appearance."

"Thou art of strange mind, O Umtagati," said Umlosi coldly. "Think thou that I will

enter this fight and use nothing but my fists?"

"Unless it's absolutely necessary, you won't even use your fists," replied the schoolmaster-detective grimly. "So put all ideas of bloodshed out of your murderous old mind. You're never satisfied unless you strew the ground with dead and dying, you warlike ruffian! You'd better understand at once that this trip is to be a peaceful one—and there'll be no fighting unless we're attacked, and forced into it."

Umlosi sadly shook his head.

"Thou art indeed a man of wondrous peace," he rumbled discontentedly. "Have not these yellow dogs seized one of thy pupils? Are we not intent upon saving him from their unclean clutches? Then, why hesitate, O my master? Thou hast always been reluctant to bare thy blade."

Dorrie grinned.

"We don't happen to be such thirsters after blood as you are, old chap," he chuckled. "But don't look so black. I don't think there'll be much doubt regardin' the attack. They're bound to have a shot at us after we get the fireworks in full swing."

Such conversation from the members of a dinner-party, invited by the celebrated Dr. Foo Chow to a banquet on the *Dragon*, was certainly somewhat singular. It was nearly time for the start, and the Chinese millionaire was probably preparing for his guests. If he could have seen what was happening on the *Wanderer*, he might have felt a twinge of uneasiness.

For the dinner-party consisted of Lord Dorrimore, Mr. Nelson Lee, two of the yacht's officers, and a dozen men. They were not only grim, but every man was fully armed. It seemed that the party was to be of a desperate nature.

On another part of the deck, groups of St. Frank's juniors were excitedly and eagerly talking. Irene Manners and her chums of the Moor View School were there, too, with Mrs. Beverley Stokes doing her utmost to keep them calm.

Her husband was rather upset because he had been requested to stay behind—in order to keep his eye on the fellows. In ordinary life, Mr. Stokes was the Housemaster of the West House at St. Frank's. And Mr. Lee was the Housemaster of the Ancient House; but just now they were both spoiling for a fight.

For they would soon be at grips with the enemy.

At least, Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Lee would be. Mr. Stokes would have to remain behind, and he didn't like it at all.

"It's no good you fellows kicking up a dust," he growled, as he pushed his way into a group of juniors. "We're out of this particular picnic. We've got to stay here and look on. So don't try any of your tricks."

Dick Hamilton, the captain of the *Remove*, grunted.

"It's a bit thick, Barry," he protested. "Foo Chow invited us all to this dinner-party, so why can't we go? If there's going to be any scrapping, we want to take our share."

"Hear, hear!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne stoutly. "Odds battles and fights! I mean to say, it's a bit frightfully murky when we're kept out of it!"

Edward Oswald Handforth, of Study D fame, snorted.

"Kept out of it?" he repeated scornfully. "I'd like to see the chap who's going to keep me out of it! By George! I've never heard of such nerve—trying to hold us down like this!"

"Yes, it's rather trying, but we've got to stick it," said Mr. Stokes quietly. "Mr. Lee has given his orders, and all we can do is to obey. And if I'm willing to abide by the decision, it'll help a whole lot if you do a little abiding, too."

"But it's not fair, sir!" protested Doyle of the West House. "Foo Chow is a rotter, and he's got Yung Ching on that yacht of his, hidden away somewhere, so that he can take him into China and torture him. Ching is one of us, and we want to help in his rescue."

"Hear, hear!"

"Chingy's a St. Frank's chap!"

"And we want to search Foo Chow's yacht, and rescue him," said Handforth. "We're going to do it, too. It's no good trying to calm us down, Barry. We're absolutely firm!"

Mr. Beverley Stokes chuckled. Informally, he answered to the name of Barry—and preferred it. After all, why not? One could afford to be free and easy during the summer holidays. It was quite sufficient to recognise the amenities of public school life at ordinary times.

"I appreciate your feelings, Handy, old son, but there's nothing doing," he replied smoothly. "I'll grant that we've all been invited to Foo Chow's dinner-party, but circumstances alter cases. In the first place, there'll be no dinner at all."

"Great pancakes!" said Fatty Little with a start. "That's settled me, then! What's the good of going if there'll be nothing to eat? Might as well stay on the *Wanderer*, and——"

"We shouldn't take you, anyhow," interrupted Handforth coldly. "We want to find Yung Ching on the *Dragon*. We're not thinking about sinking her. If you tried to climb up her ladder, you'd make her turn turtle!"

The St. Frank's fellows were certainly upset. They could see no earthly reason why they should be debarred from the expedition. Yung Ching, of St. Frank's, had been kidnapped, and Dorrie had brought out this rescue party from England for the sole purpose of saving the cheery little Chinese.

And now that the time for action had come, they were to be left out in the cold!

Of course, Mr. Nelson Lee had an excellent reason for this.

He had already seen Dr. Foo Chow, but not one word of battle had been breathed. Indeed, the wealthy Chinaman had invited every member of Dorrie's party to a sumptuous banquet, and the hour was at hand.

Until this encounter, Nelson Lee had no definite proof that Yung Ching was actually on Dr. Foo Chow's yacht. But now he was certain. His quick eyes had detected a peculiar ring on the Chinaman's little finger, and he recognised that ring as Yung Ching's property.

"We've got to take bold action," Lee had declared. "We can't enter this fight with kid gloves on our hands, Dorrie. Official action is impossible, so the only alternative is to show Foo Chow that we are in earnest. We shan't go aboard his yacht as a party of guests—but as a search-party, ready to take Yung Ching away by force."

His lordship had fully concurred.

"It's the only way," he agreed. "These Chinese beggars are cunning, and if we lose this opportunity we might never get another. He's unsuspecting now, so we'll take him off his guard. I'm game for the scrap, so let's get on with it. An' once we've collared Yung Ching, we can keep him tight. An' Foo Chow won't dare to raise any kind of dust."

So that was the position.

Both yachts were now in the China Seas, and well clear of the trade routes. This little drama was taking place—or about to take place—on the bosom of the ocean, far from any other human presence.

Dr. Foo Chow was a millionaire, and a man of immense power in China. But he had kidnapped Yung Ching from St. Frank's in a manner that laid him open to the consequences of British criminal law. To prove his guilt was out of the question; but to rescue Yung Ching was another matter. Once the boy was safely on the *Wanderer*, neither Foo Chow nor all his myrmidons would be able to get him back.

So it was well worth a swift, bold move.

Even Nelson Lee had no definite knowledge of Dr. Foo Chow's ultimate intentions, but he had the proof that Yung Ching was being taken to China to be tortured and mutilated. It was a simple, but diabolical scheme to further Foo Chow's land-grabbing campaign in his own country.

Yung Ching's father, Yung Li Chang, was a man of even greater power than Foo Chow himself. Far in the interior he had his own armies, and was a great war lord. He controlled some of the richest lands of which China could boast.

And Dr. Foo Chow was jealous of these lands, and desired them for his own ends. His armies were no match for Yung Li Chang's, and although his own domain adjoined that of his enemy, he dared attempt

no invasion. So his plan had been to kidnap the son of his rival, and to hold him a prisoner in his own capital, the city of Yang Fu. He would then put Yung Ching to the torture, mutilating his limbs, and sending these to the unfortunate boy's father, until the latter agreed to surrender his lands.

What Dr. Foo Chow's armies could not accomplish, this campaign of cruelty might achieve. Yung Ching was the only remaining son of this powerful mandarin, and he would sacrifice almost anything for the safety of that son. The plan was simple and straightforward—once the Chinese boy was in Foo Chow's domain.

This was not the first time that Yung Ching had met with such adventures. When he had first arrived at St. Frank's he had been forcibly removed—in similar circumstances. But then it had been at the hands of a powerful Tong—a Chinese secret society—and Mr. Nelson Lee's efforts had brought the plan to nothing.

Again the famous detective was working in the boy's interest. But this time he was up against a more difficult proposition. Dr. Foo Chow was no Tong man, he was no ordinary criminal. Indeed, before long all the members of the holiday party were to recognise Dr. Foo Chow as a man of amazing mystery!



CHAPTER 2.

HANDFORTH'S BOLD MOVE.

"LISTEN!" said Irene Manners softly.

Handforth and the others in the group leaned over the rail and listened.

Across the placid water, from the direction of the *Dragon*, came the silvery strains of a waltz. The effect was peaceful and charming.

"Has he got a band on board?" asked Doris Berkeley in surprise.

"I don't suppose so," said Fullwood of the *Remove*. "It's more likely to be a powerful wireless set, and he's picking up dance music from somewhere. Even Dorrie hasn't got a radio like that!"

"Oh, why can't we accept this invitation to dinner, and then dance afterwards?" asked Mary Summers eagerly. "Wouldn't it be fun? And I'm sure we're all keen to join in the picnic!"

"I should think we are!" said Handforth indignantly.

"It's no good," remarked Mr. Nelson Lee, as he came up in the rear. "This picnic is liable to be a somewhat risky affair. Dorrie and I are responsible for your safety, and we're taking no chances. And don't harbour the delusion that there's going to be any eating or dancing on the *Dragon* to-night."

"But the invitation, Mr. Lee?" asked Irene.

"I thought you knew that Dorrie and I are intending to face this Chinaman with our cards on the table," said Nelson Lee grimly. "We're going to his yacht for the purpose of searching it. So it will be hardly possible to sit at Foo Chow's table after such a display of open tactics."

Handforth brightened up.

"I'll tell you what, sir," he suggested eagerly. "Why shouldn't we all accept the invitation, and go to this dinner, and then search for Chingy afterwards?"

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Little. "Why waste a good feed?"

"This is a sad moment," remarked Mr. Lee, shaking his head. "I am not surprised at you, Little, but I am very shocked at you, Handforth. Surely you would not consent to eat from the table of a man who has deliberately kidnapped one of your school-fellows?"

"Well, no, sir," admitted Handforth. "Perhaps——"

"Perhaps you will realise the necessity for keeping your spirits in check," interrupted Nelson Lee smoothly. "Under no circumstances can any of us accept Foo Chow's proffered hospitality. The less we have to do with him the better. And the sooner we can wrest Yung Ching from his clutches the better, too. My idea is to get this thing over swiftly and promptly. So let's have no more of this discontent."

"Oh, we're sorry, Mr. Lee," said Irene contritely.

"You're right, of course," confessed Doris. "It's Ted's fault, really; he's been egging us on. But you don't think there'll be any danger, do you?" she added concernedly.

"If there was no danger the boys would be at liberty to accompany us," replied Mr. Lee quietly. "However, do not alarm yourselves. There is very little likelihood that Foo Chow will attack us. He is no crude rascal, and there is only a remote possibility that he will show his teeth."

The "dinner-party" was already descending the ladder to the waiting boat, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie were the last to go. His lordship was leaving everything in the able hands of the detective, preferring to be just one of the crowd.

Just before going overside, Lee had a final word with Captain Burton, the bluff and able skipper of Dorrie's yacht.

"I don't anticipate any trouble, captain, but it will be as well to be on the safe side," he said. "I should like you to have another boat ready, manned with a fully-armed crew. If we require any help, I will give a signal by firing three rapid shots."

"I'll have the boat ready, Mr. Lee," said Captain Burton, nodding. "If we hear three shots, we'll send you some reinforcements without a second's delay."

A minute later the boat was being pulled across the intervening water in the direction of the brilliantly lit *Dragon*. Every member

of the holiday party leaned over the rails, watching.

"Well, it's a dirty trick!" said Handforth firmly. "That's all I've got to say. It's a dirty trick, leaving us behind like this."

"But Mr. Lee explained——" began Church.

"I don't care about that!" interrupted Handforth. "It's a dirty trick leaving us behind. I'm not going to make a fuss or kick up a shindy, but I feel pretty strongly about the whole business. And I've got one thing to say—just one thing."

"That it's a dirty trick?" suggested McClure.

"One thing!" roared Handforth, glaring. "I can say it in four words! We're not going to stand it!"

"That's six words," grinned Fullwood.

"We're not going to stand it, and if you other chaps will place yourselves under my leadership I'll make a move!" went on Edward Oswald darkly. "Remember, there's no sense in talking about this. We've got to act. Dorrie and Mr. Lee and the others have gone off to find Yung Ching—you can still see the boat going across now. Isn't Yung Ching a Remove fellow? And isn't it our job to go and rescue him? I'm just asking you——"

"One moment, Brother Handforth—one moment!" interrupted William Napoleon Browne, who, of course, was included in the party. "Are we to understand that this is your idea of a four-word speech? Correct me if I am wrong, but there are indications that you are fully wound up."

Handforth started.

"Yes, I am wound up!" he agreed fiercely. "I'm wild, too. What's the matter with all you fellows? Why shouldn't we take part in this rescue? By George! They're getting another boat ready!" he added, gazing at some activity farther along the deck. "Supposing we pinch that boat and follow the others?"

"Hear, hear!" said Doyle. "Chingy's our game!"

"Rather!"

"We're with you, Handy!"

Quite a number of excited juniors were ready to support Handforth.

"Look here, you asses," growled Dick Hamilton. "Mr. Lee's given his instructions, and we've got to obey. The gov'nor knows what he's doing, so we shall only get into hot water if we start any monkey tricks."

"While agreeing with the spirit of your denunciation, Brother Hamilton, I must confess that the idea of a trip to the *Dragon* appeals to me," said Browne thoughtfully. "At the same time, I am opposed to Brother Handforth's volcanic suggestions. Let us, rather, man this boat, and hold ourselves in readiness. Let us approach the enemy, and await——"

"Not likely!" interrupted Handforth. "We

might have to wait for hours. We'll go straight across, board the yacht, and search her! That's my plan, and I call for volunteers. Hands up, everybody who's game!"

"Alas, my efforts are unavailing!" murmured Browne sadly.

Handforth obtained over a dozen volunteers at once; and by this time the second boat was lying placidly on the sea alongside, with one sailor in charge. Mr. Stewart, the chief officer, was selecting his crew. In accordance with Mr. Nelson Lee's suggestion, the boat would lie ready for action if the pre-arranged signal came.

But at the moment the boat was empty, and Handforth and his supporters had their chance.

"It's all rot!" muttered Dick Hamilton, frowning. "If these chumps butt in they may cause a lot of trouble. Handy again! Why on earth does the ass get so excited? We can't restrain him, either——"

"Let me suggest, therefore, that we should accompany this expedition," put in Browne. "At the moment it is similar to a motor-car without a brake, ready to plunge headlong to destruction. Let us be the brake, Brother Hamilton."

"Yes, it'll be better than nothing," admitted Dick. "Handforth needs somebody to hold him in check, anyhow—— Hallo! They're on the move!"

Edward Oswald and his eager helpers were piling down the ladder and tumbling into the waiting boat. The sailor's protests were ignored, and a shout from the bridge was equally futile.

Dick Hamilton and Reggie Pitt and Browne and Stevens managed to join the party, accompanied by one or two other level-headed fellows. Irene and the other girls stood at the rail, watching, having been unable to avert this unexpected rush.

"Hold on, there!" roared Mr. Stewart, hurrying up. "What in the name of mischief do you boys think you're doing? That boat's wanted——"

"Sorry!" sang out Handforth. "Can't stop!"

"I did the best I could, sir!" shouted the sailor, running up the ladder. "The young gents piled in before I could prevent them——"

"I'm not blaming you, Smith," snapped Mr. Stewart. "Hi, down there! Come back at once! Mr. Lee gave strict orders——"

"Fear not, Brother Stewart," interrupted the voice of the Fifth Form captain. "I will hold myself personally responsible for the good conduct of this expedition."

"I am surprised at you, Mr. Browne!" shouted the first officer angrily. "I thought——"

"Don't blame Browne, Mr. Stewart," shouted Dick. "It's Handforth's doing, and we've come along just to hold him in check. He thinks he's going to board the *Dragon*, but that's where he's wrong. Leave it to us."

Mr. Stewart gave it up, and watched the boat as it pulled out across the dark surface of the sea. Then, turning, he gave some fresh orders, and a third boat was hurriedly lowered from the davits.



CHAPTER 3.

DR. FOO CHOW.

EXCELLENCY, the boat containing the foreign devils approaches."

Dr. Foo Chow glanced up and nodded.

"It is well, Yen," he said softly. "Remember my orders. These people are to be treated with deference and humility. It is my object to destroy any suspicion that may be still lurking in their minds. Before they leave this yacht they must be perfectly satisfied that Yung Ching has never been on board. You, too, Wong—remember my orders."

"Excellency, we live but to obey."

Dr. Foo Chow's personal attendants silently left the apartment. They were not ordinary members of the *Dragon's* crew, but were virtually the slaves of their master. They wore ordinary European evening dress, and appeared to be refined, educated gentlemen.

Dr. Foo Chow himself was also conventionally attired—although his surroundings, in this private apartment of his, were purely Oriental. He rose from his silken lounge and glanced at his reflection in a long mirror. There was no smile on his inscrutable features as he straightened his tie.

He was a tallish, well-built man, clean-shaven, and apparently middle-aged. So thoroughly European was his appearance, that, except for colour, he might have been mistaken for an Italian, with his dark, sleek hair and his quick, active eyes.

He brushed some draperies aside and passed through a doorway. A moment later he paused in the main saloon of the yacht, and nodded with approval. The preparations for the dinner-party were elaborate.

The tables were resplendent with spotless linen and glittering silver. In every particular this banquet was to be conventional, and with no hint of the customs of China. Dr. Foo Chow knew that he was dealing with Britishers, so he was complimenting them by providing a typically British feast.

He had already had an interview with Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Nelson Lee, when they had diplomatically suggested that some members of his crew had smuggled Yung Ching on board the yacht. Dr. Foo Chow believed that he had sent them away satisfied, and the fact that they had accepted his invitation pleased him immensely, for it was his desire to remove any lingering doubt from their minds.

He did not know that Yung Ching's ring had betrayed him!

He had been wearing that ring during the interview, and Nelson Lee had recognised it. It was a quaintly engraved trinket, and one that the little Chinese boy had always worn, being, in fact, a gift from his father. Dr. Foo Chow had taken it for a very special purpose, but would never have worn it if he had guessed at the identity of those on board the *Wanderer*. He had no suspicion that the ring had been seen and recognised. But he had now taken the precaution to remove it.

Going on deck, he found Yen and Wong awaiting at the head of the accommodation ladder. There were two immaculately attired officers, too, and at least a dozen sailors—all lined up to form a kind of guard of honour.

"It is well!" murmured Dr. Foo Chow, nodding.

"There is but one boat, Excellency," said Wong, after a searching glance overside. "It contains neither boys nor girls, but men."

"Doubtless the young people are following," said Dr. Foo Chow contentedly. "The elders have come in advance, to make the necessary greetings."

But the Chinese millionaire was startled a minute or two later, when the guests came up the ladder. They hardly resembled a care-free group of visitors. Not one wore evening dress; and most of them were uniformed members of the *Wanderer's* crew—and these had not been invited. The presence of Umlosi, the huge African, was another incongruous feature.

"Gentlemen, I make you welcome," said Dr. Foo Chow suavely.

He gave no indication of his startled surprise—for his quick brain had immediately detected a warlike grimness in this party. Umlosi's spear was the only weapon which was brazenly exhibited, but Foo Chow had no difficulty in guessing that other weapons were at hand.

"We thank you, Dr. Foo Chow, for your hospitality, but we regret that we are unable to accept it," said Nelson Lee quietly. "And in order that there shall be no misapprehension, let me say at once that we have come here with a set purpose, and not to eat at your table. We desire the immediate surrender of Yung Ching, son of Yung Li Chang, Mandarin of Ngan-Chau-Fu."

Dr. Foo Chow appeared mildly surprised.

"But is this not impolite?" he asked softly. "Have I not already assured you, gentlemen, that this boy has never been on my yacht?"

"I am sorry, Dr. Foo Chow, but we have evidence that your statements are untrue," replied Nelson Lee with perfect coolness. "It is not our wish to create a scene or to precipitate any trouble; but we warn you that unless the boy is delivered at once, we are here to take him away by force."

Just for a second a glint appeared in Dr. Foo Chow's eyes—a glint which indicated

that he was fully alive to the acute nature of the position. But in a flash he was smiling again. His manner was hurt and distressed.

"Mere words cannot express my unhappiness that there should be a misunderstanding," he said regretfully. "My hopes for the evening are shattered. It is beyond all my deserts that my humble yacht should be graced by your august presence, and I fear that this unfortunate error has offended the honourable dignity of your gracious——"

"It would be better, Dr. Foo Chow, to dispense with this pretence," interrupted Mr. Lee curtly. "We do not desire your courtesy, neither do we expect it. Please understand at once that our mission is in deadly earnest. We have every ground for knowing that Yung Ching is on board this yacht, and we shall not be satisfied until he has been handed into our keeping."

"Hear, hear!" said Lord Dorrimore, nodding. "Sorry, an' all that, but business is business. In other words, Foo Chow, old man, you haven't got a leg to stand on. Let's have the boy, an' done with it."

The Chinese millionaire shrugged his shoulders with resignation.

"I have done my best, and I have failed," he said sadly. "I am grieved that you should adopt this remarkable attitude." He drew himself up with dignity. "Are you not presuming upon the rights of hospitality?" he went on, cold and politely angry. "I make you welcome, and I desire you as my guests, and you act as pirates on the high seas. I did not anticipate such behaviour from Britishers."

The detective smiled grimly.

"That sounds very nice, Dr. Foo Chow, but, happily, we know how much reliance to place upon your protestations," he said. "And it is just as well that we should have the gloves off. The boy is on this vessel, and we mean to have him."

"Your presumption is indeed amazing, sir."

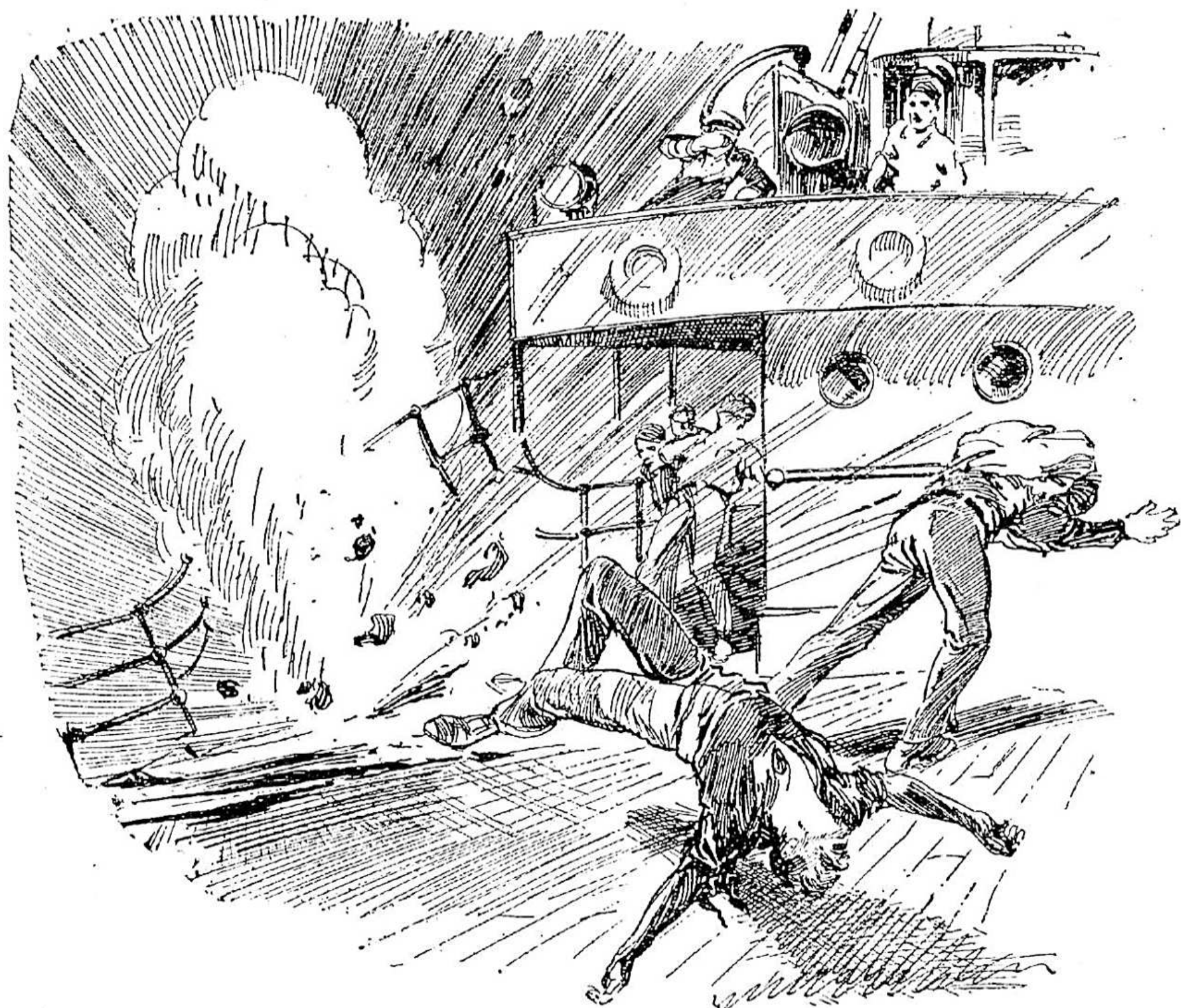
"Possibly so," agreed Nelson Lee. "We are perfectly well aware that we have no legal right to have your ship searched, and we are acting in a manner that you will probably call high-handed. But we have no intention of allowing that boy to be taken into China and tortured. Deliver him into our hands, and the matter will be ended."

"Wau!" rumbled Umlosi. "Is not this delay unfitting for warriors such as thou and I, Umtagati? Speak thou the word, and I will make light work of these yellow dogs!"

Dr. Foo Chow was much amused.

"Your black friend is pleased to be complimentary," he said mockingly. "Will you not realise that there must be some misapprehension? Am I dealing with madmen, or do you really believe that this preposterous story is true? I am Dr. Foo Chow," he added coldly. "I do not imprison boys on my yacht."

He waved his hand as though to dismiss



Crash! A shattering, ear-splitting explosion sounded as a shell from Foo Chow's yacht exploded aboard the "Wanderer." Two seamen were hurled headlong, and some of the juniors heard fragments of the shell whistle viciously past their heads.

the whole matter. But inwardly he was alarmed. There was something about these Britishers which boded ill for him. It was necessary to think very quickly. Foiled in their objective, they would undoubtedly cause him a lot of trouble. They would stir up an inquiry.

For, without question, they would be foiled. Yung Ching was no longer on board the *Dragon*. For had he not been removed a few days earlier? Had he not been dispatched by fast aeroplane to China? By this time the boy was safely within the borders of Foo Chow's domain.

These "foreign devils" could search the yacht with impunity—but what would follow afterwards? This was the problem which Dr. Foo Chow was obliged to wrestle with at short notice. None could have guessed his thoughts, for he was as suave and immobile as ever.

"We are waiting, Dr. Foo Chow," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"I crave your pardon, but I confess I am entirely bewildered," replied the Chinaman. "Under the circumstances. I will overlook

this breach of good manners, and regard it as an amusing diversion. Obviously, you are labouring under a delusion. There has never been such a boy on this yacht, and I must request you to accept my word for that fact. I am compelled to remind you that I am not accustomed to having my word doubted."

"We take it, then, that you absolutely deny all knowledge of Yung Ching?"

"I deny absolutely all knowledge," replied Dr. Foo Chow. "But I am willing to give way before this exhibition of armed force. You may search the vessel to your heart's content. You are at liberty to go where you please without molestation."

"Well, that's fair enough," admitted Dorrie uncomfortably.

"I am a man of world-wide reputation, and I suggest that you will apologise before you leave this deck," continued Dr. Foo Chow. "That I shall be ready to accept such an apology, I hardly need mention. For I am convinced that you are making a lamentable mistake."

Nelson Lee compressed his lips. He had half expected this attitude from the China-

man, but he knew that he was bluffing. The evidence of that ring was indisputable, although Lee saw no reason to gratify Foo Chow's curiosity by explaining the reason for his suspicions. Indeed, they were more than suspicions, for they amounted to positive knowledge.

"Very well, Dr. Foo Chow," he said curtly. "We will search this yacht at once—and let me warn you that we are prepared for action if you are unwise enough to precipitate any interference."

Dr. Foo Chow shrugged his shoulders.

"Search!" he replied contemptuously. "You are an armed force, and we on this yacht are people of peace. Make your search, and let us put an end to this unfortunate affair."



CHAPTER 4.

THE CHINAMAN ACTS.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH held up a warning hand.

"Steady — steady!" he murmured. "Ease up, there! And not a word—not a sound! Directly we reach the ladder, follow me!"

He was in the bows of the boat, and four of the juniors were rowing. The rest stared at the *Dragon*, and listened eagerly for sounds of strife. None came. The Chinese yacht was blazing with a myriad lights, and everything appeared to be in perfect order.

"Steady, I tell you!" went on Handforth, turning round. "Why the dickens don't you stop rowing when I give the order? And who's steering? Pitt, you fathead, what's the idea of veering off like this?"

"Orders!" said Reggie Pitt calmly.

"Orders?" retorted Handforth. "Whose orders?"

"Browne's."

"Lest you should be under any misapprehension, Brother Handforth, let me explain that I am nominally in charge of this nocturnal spree," said Browne smoothly. "Possibly you have regarded yourself as the leader? Alack, we all suffer by these little errors at times."

"You lanky Fifth Form idiot——"

"Chuck it, Handy," interrupted Dick Hamilton. "Browne's right. Pitt and Fullwood and a few more of us with common sense agree with him. You hotheads have got to be suppressed."

"Suppressed!" choked Handforth, in a thick voice.

"I could not have chosen a better word myself," said Browne, with approval. "You must remember that Brother Lee is anxious to conduct the affair with dignity, and we are only necessary in the event of an untoward sideslip. We are, in fact, an emergency party, standing by in readiness if the call comes."

"That's not a bad idea," admitted Doyle, nodding.

"Yes, rather," agreed some of the others.

"But aren't we going to board the yacht?" roared Handforth.

"Not unless we're wanted," said Church. "Don't be silly, Handy. These chaps are right. We don't want to butt in."

"Upon hearing the signal for help, brothers, we will dash into the fray," explained Browne. "That is, of course, if there is any fray—which I doubt. I have a mournful fear that we shall have no fistic exercise this moon."

Handforth gave one of his fiercest snorts.

"Rot!" he said indignantly. "We're going to board the *Dragon* now!"

But he was wrong. William Napoleon made it quite clear that, if Handforth insisted, he was at liberty to swim to the yacht, but he would certainly not be conveyed in the boat. The latter was idling on the smooth sea, and all the oarsmen had decided upon a general strike. Handforth argued grimly and desperately, but all negotiations were fruitless.

In the meantime, there was plenty of activity on the Chinese yacht.

Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi were searching in one direction, Nelson Lee and one of the *Wanderer's* men in another, and so on. Pairs of invaders examined every nook and cranny of the vessel. Not the slightest attempt was made to impede the progress of the searchers.

Indeed, under Dr. Foo Chow's orders, most of the *Dragon's* men remained on deck. The search-party had the lower regions almost entirely to themselves—although, of course, a full staff occupied the engine-room and stokeholds. But these surprised men offered no objection to the Britishers' activities.

"Looks pretty hopeless, old man," remarked Dorrie, as he came across Mr. Lee, far down in the bowels of the yacht. "Found anything yet?"

"Nothing."

"Not even a clue?" asked his lordship. "What's the matter? I thought you went about finding clues everywhere?"

"There's something about this affair I don't like," replied Nelson Lee, frowning. "Foo Chow's attitude is too open, Dorrie—he was too ready to allow us to make an unrestricted round of the vessel. The boy isn't here."

"Not on board at all?"

"No—they have got rid of him somehow."

"Good gad! You don't mean——"

"No, I'm not afraid of anything like that," interrupted Lee, divining Dorrie's thoughts. "They haven't killed him, old man. He's too valuable to them alive. But they've managed to spirit him away somehow—and we're merely wasting our time here."

"You don't think it's possible that we've made a ghastly blunder?" asked his lordship cheerfully. "I must say that old Chu Chin Chow seemed deucedly cut-up over the whole business. It's not possible that we've made a stumer?"

"There's not the remotest possibility of it," replied Lee, shaking his head. "Foo Chow knows exactly where the boy is."

"But our evidence isn't conclusive," objected Dorrie. "Yung Ching managed to get a letter to St. Frank's, didn't he? He explained what had happened to him, but he couldn't give any names—an' we've only assumed that old Chop Suey is the kidnapper-in-chief. I say, what a perfectly disgustin' mess if we're on the wrong boat!"

"You can put that out of your head," said the detective. "The evidence of that ring is conclusive—and there are a hundred-and-one other circumstantial bits of evidence, too. This was the only Chinese-owned vessel in England on the day that Yung Ching was kidnapped—at least, the only yacht which could possibly approximate to the boy's description. We needn't discuss the points now—you can be satisfied that Dr. Foo Chow is the culprit. But I'm afraid he's got the better of us."

Umlosi, who had heard the talk, grunted.

"There is to be no fighting, then?" he asked despondently. "I am sad, my masters. Thou hast but to speak the word, and this yellow rabble will fall like saplings before the storm. Thou shalt hear the squeals as they run from my spear."

Dorrie shook his head.

"Sorry, old ink-pot, but there's nothin' doin' in the pig-stickin' line," he replied. "You'll have to curb that bloodthirsty desire of yours. Untagati, the all-wise, has decreed that gore shall not flow."

"Wau!" rumbled Umlosi. "I am sick at heart."

They continued the search, and in the meantime Dr. Foo Chow was standing on deck, motionless, staring out across the sea towards the British millionaire's yacht. He was like a statue there, his face expressing none of his feelings. Near him, certain activities were in progress.

Foo Chow was beset with many troubled thoughts. He was no ordinary Chinaman—no placid Oriental who failed to reason as Europeans can reason. His brain was super-developed, and contained all the cunning of his own race, all the experience that travel had taught him, and an amazing fund of general knowledge. This Chinaman was a man with a master intellect.

But this problem now before him was a ticklish one.

These Britishers were searching his yacht—fruitlessly, of course, since Yung Ching had gone, and there was no trace left of his presence. But they knew that he had been on board—they had come to him with the certain knowledge that he had forcibly kidnapped Ching from St. Frank's.

How they had gained such information did not concern Dr. Foo Chow in the least. Somewhere there had been a slip—somewhere a scrap of information had been allowed to leak out. But why waste the precious seconds on thinking over this puzzle? What did it matter how these strangers had come by their information? The point was to decide upon a course of action now—and it was a point which needed instantaneous decision.

They would go away empty-handed—their search barren. But would that be the end? Dr. Foo Chow's knowledge of Britishers told him that it would not. They were persistent devils, these English! In all probability they would go to Hong Kong—Peking—to any port, in fact, which would place them in communication with the Chinese Government.

Possibly their story would be discounted—and possibly no official action would be taken. But, on the other hand, there was a chance that trouble would develop. And just at the moment Dr. Foo Chow was particularly anxious that the Government should remain dormant.

He had many ambitious plans in prospect. A war in the far interior, a war between his own legions and those of Yung Li Chang, would occasion little or no comment, no matter what massacres were wrought, no matter what tortures were indulged in—if the Government remained passive.

But Dr. Foo Chow had many enemies in Peking and in other ports. One hint that he had outraged the laws of Britain, and strong official action might be taken. His great schemes would be held up, and his dream of power shattered. At all costs he must prevent these interfering curs from taking their story further!

Until now they had obviously acted on their own initiative, without seeking any official aid. Either their mouths were to be sealed now, or never. And Dr. Foo Chow was not the kind of man to give up his ambitions lightly.

Human life meant nothing to him. His one desire, as he stood upon the deck there, was to sink the *Wanderer*, and every soul on board, and thus make himself safe. But this was a step which could not be undertaken with impunity.

But he could at least show this search-party that he was not a man to be trifled with. Since they knew the truth, it would do him no harm to admit it freely.

When Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore came on deck they found everything just the same as they had left it. Other members of the search-party were there, and still more were coming up. And the reports were all the same.

"Well, gentlemen?" asked Dr. Foo Chow smoothly. "I trust you are satisfied?"

"We are at least satisfied that the boy is not on board this vessel," replied Nelson Lee. "But we are still convinced that he was a prisoner in your hands when you left Southampton."

"Perhaps you are right, gentlemen," admitted Foo Chow candidly. "In fact, the possibility is so strong that I am reluctant to let you go. I naturally ignore your firearms, since I am convinced that you will not use them. You are great bluffers, you British."

"What are you hinting at, Dr. Foo Chow?" asked Lee sharply.

"It is not merely a hint, but a statement," replied the Chinaman. "From this moment you will regard yourselves as my prisoners."

He gave some sharp orders in Chinese, and the next second the decks became alive with running figures, and the *Wanderer's* party found itself surrounded by hordes of yellow faces.

"By the Lord Harry!" muttered Dorrie.

Mr. Nelson Lee made no comment. Without a second's hesitation, he withdrew the revolver from his pocket, and fired three rapid shots into the air.



CHAPTER 5.

THE FIGHT ON THE "DRAGON."

RACK—crack—crack!

"By George!" gasped Handforth, starting so violently that he made the boat rock. "The three shots! Oh, my hat! That's the signal!"

The other fellows looked equally as startled, and Dick Hamilton grabbed at his oar.

"The guv'nor!" he panted. "He'd never have fired unless there was real danger! Quick! Let her rip, you chaps!"

"Listen!" said Church sharply.

The boat was comparatively close to the *Dragon*, whose lights were reflected on the dark sea in long, shimmering streaks. The juniors could see nothing as they stared up at her rail, but shouts could be heard—the gruff, throaty yells of the British sailors mingled with the peculiarly shrill voices of the Chinese. A fight was already on!

"This," said William Napoleon Browne, "is where we make our celebrated dash. I must confess I did not hope for this joyous occasion, but luck is evidently with us. Brother Handforth, double your fists, and prepare for action."

The boat was soon hissing towards the Chinese yacht, and within a few seconds it bumped violently against her plates. And then, while some of the St. Frank's fellows held her in position, the others scrambled up the ladder. Handforth took care to be the first.

On deck, a fight was developing in an ugly fashion.

Dr. Foo Chow had been right when he predicted that the Britishers would not use their firearms. They had only been brought as a precaution. So long as there was no actual attempt at murder, Dorrie's men had strict orders to use nothing but their fists. But if their lives were threatened they would be justified in shooting.

Within twenty seconds Lee knew that this was no attempt at killing.

The Chinese swarmed round, and not one of them was armed with anything more formidable than his own hands. With one concerted movement, they rushed the white men, and attempted to throw them over by sheer weight and force.

Dr. Foo Chow himself stood aside, watching.

"Do not harm them!" he commanded. "Render them helpless, but nothing further. The man who exceeds my orders will die!"

He relied upon the swiftness of the attack to bring him success. There were between fifty and sixty of the Chinamen—all swarming round—pushing, kicking, shoving and shouting at the top of their voices.

They had sixteen Britishers to quell, and during those first dramatic moments it seemed as though they would be overcome. It was Foo Chow's intention to steam off at once, before any possible reinforcements could get across from the *Wanderer*.

But these white men were not so easily beaten! After the first moment of the shock they rallied, and fists thudded ominously. Lee and Dorrie were fighting with all their strength, trying to get elbow room, so that they could punch with greater effect. It was Umlosi, however, who cleared the way.

"A fight—a fight!" he thundered. "Speak, my master! Am I to kill this vermin as they deserve?"

"Nay, old friend—fight, but do not kill," panted Lee.

Umlosi gave a bellow, and sailed in. Six Chinamen gave way before him like grass before a gale. He swung two of the shrieking yellow men off their feet, and held them aloft—one in either hand. Then, with a contemptuous roar, he sent them crashing into their fellows. The confusion was chaotic.

And in the midst of it a familiar yell came down the deck.

"Harrah!" came the voice. "Come on, you chaps! Rescue, the Remove!"

"Hurrah!" came the echo.

Handforth hurled himself into the fray with wild enthusiasm. He sailed in with the gusto of sheer happiness. He always loved a real scrap.

Crash!

"Take that!" roared Edward Oswald delightedly. "Come on, you fellows! By George! This was worth waiting for!" Biff! Slam! "That's one for you, old yellow-dial! And take that as a free sample, squint-eyes!"

Handforth was like a miniature Umlosi. He didn't wait to ask any questions, or to find out how the fight was progressing. He saw a swarm of excited Chinese, and he brought his famous right into play at once.

The effect was soon apparent.

Foo Chow's men had anticipated very little resistance from this small group of white men, and they had never expected any reinforcements at all. The battling powers of Umlosi, however, combined with the forceful hitting of Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, made all the difference. When Handforth and the other St. Frank's fellows arrived, the Chinamen were wavering.

"Hurrah! Smash 'em!" shouted Dick Hamilton grimly.

"Go it, Remove!"

There wasn't a fellow who didn't join in the attack. Their help was timely, too, for the yellow men had been on the point of rallying. The fight continued now with all

the advantage on the side of the attacked. The attackers were being beaten back, their early confidence destroyed.

And to make victory quite certain, a rousing hail came from the surface of the sea, close at hand. Mr. Stewart and another batch of reinforcements were practically on hand. Indeed, within the next minute they bumped against the *Dragon's* side, and came swarming up the ladder.

Dr. Foo Chow had not changed his expression in the slightest degree. Yet he knew that he had made a grave blunder—he had attempted to keep the British party on board his yacht, and he had failed. The fight had been so quick that he had had no time to give the orders he had contemplated.

He had revealed his hand to the white men—had admitted his guilt regarding Yung Ching—and he had nothing to show for it. For it was obviously impossible to keep his enemies on board. They were of such a mettle that they scorned the attacks of the yellow men.

Swiftly, Dr. Foo Chow made up his mind. Turning to two of his officers, he spoke sharply and curtly. Orders rang out, and the fight ceased as if by magic. The men of the *Dragon* held back, skulking away along the decks, and leaving the Britishers victorious.

Nelson Lee glanced at his bruised knuckles, and then saw, in a swift survey, that all the members of his party, including the St. Frank's boys, were unharmed, save for superficial bruises. Lee looked grim. What was the meaning of this sudden change? He knew the wiles of the Chinese, and suspected much. It was not like Dr. Foo Chow to knuckle under so easily.

"Gentlemen, I apologise," came Dr. Foo Chow's voice, still smooth and silky. "I acted in a moment of rashness, but I now realise that it was a fatal mistake. Pray accept my regrets, and be sure that you are at liberty to leave my decks at the moment you please."

"You infernal humbug!" said Dorrie, in his blunt, direct way. "Are you tryin' to maintain that you still know nothin' of Yung Ching?"

Dr. Foo Chow bowed.

"I am afraid it is too late for any such disclaimers," he replied coolly. "Under the circumstances, I must admit my unredeemable guilt. However, the boy is Chinese, and therefore your efforts on his behalf are, in my opinion, an impertinence and an unjustifiable interference."

"By gad, you've got a nerve!" said his lordship contemptuously. "A millionaire—a man of world-wide repute—an' you stand there admittin' yourself to be a liar! As for that youngster, you needn't think you're goin' to keep him in your dirty clutches. We'll have him yet!"

"Opinions differ," murmured Dr. Foo Chow.

"Wrangling is quite useless, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee quietly. "The boy is not here, and we have no wish to engage in an un-

seemly quarrel with this man. Let us get back to your yacht at once."

Handforth was looking indignant.

"But we've only just started the fight, sir!" he protested. "Where have all those Chinks gone to? I was beginning to enjoy myself."

"You boys have done very well indeed, and we may safely say that you turned the tide," continued Lee approvingly. "However, Dr. Foo Chow realises the impossibility of defeating us; so we are at liberty to go. Let us be satisfied that we have won the first round in this struggle."

The Chinese millionaire smiled very slightly.

"You think so?" he said purringly. "Perhaps; but—perhaps not."



CHAPTER 6.

MR. NELSON LEE DECIDES.

MR. BEVERLEY STOKES pointed.

"They're coming!" he said with satisfaction.

"Upon my word, Joyce, can't you keep those girls quiet? We can't hear ourselves think!"

"Don't be unreasonable, Barry," protested Mrs. Stokes. "Who wouldn't be excited? I believe that something *dreadful* has happened! They've been fighting with those terrible Chinamen over there!"

The rail of the *Wanderer* was lined with eager figures. The Moor View girls were all in a flutter of tense expectancy, for they knew that a big number of St. Frank's fellows, headed by Handforth, had entered the battle.

The rest of the juniors were at the rail, too, in addition to many members of Dorrie's crew. During the last ten minutes the sounds of strife and confusion had come clearly across the intervening water. For the night was windless, sultry, and still. What had really happened?

Following the direction of Mr. Stokes' pointing finger, those near him could see the boats. There were three of them—all coming across from the other yacht. And a gentle thudding could now be heard, accompanied by the dull, swirling rush of water.

"The *Dragon's* moving off!" said Irene excitedly. "Look! She's getting up speed. Oh! Supposing they've kept some of our people on board?"

"Don't suppose anything so melodramatic, young lady!" said Mr. Stokes. "There'll be a nice pile of trouble for Mr. Foo Chow if he interferes with any British subject. By the sound of that recent fight, he's due for a good dose of hot water already."

As was only natural, rumours were flying about, and everybody was on tenterhooks until the first boat arrived. It contained the schoolboy party, for Handforth had

urged the others to row madly in order to get back first.

And Handforth was first up the ladder, too. He looked flushed, hot, and somewhat battered; but he was happy.

"Thought you'd turn up safe and sound, Ted," exclaimed Willy, as he greeted him. "What's happened? Just my luck to be out of the scrap!"

"Scrap!" repeated Handforth, glaring at his minor. "It was a swindle! The giddy thing was over when we arrived. At least, we only managed to get a few biffs in, and then old Foo Chow called his men off."

"Anybody hurt?" asked Irene quickly.

"Plenty of 'em—all Chinese!" replied Edward Oswald. "You ought to have seen Umlosi throwing those Chinks about like ninepins! They were fairly surrounded, you know—swarms and swarms of the beggars. If we chaps hadn't gone to the rescue, it might have been serious."

"Then nobody's hurt?" asked Mary Summers with relief. "Not Mr. Lee, or Lord Dorrie, or anybody?"

"We're all as safe as houses," said Dick Hamilton. "Surely you didn't expect those yellow beggars to get the best of us? It was only a scrap. No knives or revolvers, or anything. It seems that Foo Chow wanted to keep our party on board for something, and he ordered his men to hold them."

"But they wouldn't be held," grinned Handforth. "Not likely! There must have been about three thousand Chinamen crowding round——"

"Three thousand!" echoed Irene in surprise.

"Well, thirty, anyhow," chuckled Reggie Pitt. "It's only a matter of two noughts, and——"

"Thirty be blowed!" interrupted Handforth. "There were crowds and crowds of the rotters. Just as if Foo Chow could hold Mr. Lee and Dorrie and the others! Anyhow, he's proved himself to be a crook now, and we shall know what to do."

"Well, what shall we do?" asked Buster Boots.

"If it was left to me, I'd capture that beastly yacht, and everybody on board her," retorted Handforth promptly. "I'd take her into Hong Kong, or somewhere, and have the whole crowd arrested. But what's the use? Nobody takes any notice of my advice," he added bitterly. "I might as well save my breath."

"A very sensible remark, Handforth," said Mr. Nelson Lee as he came aboard. "The best thing we can all do is to tidy ourselves up and prepare for dinner. Let us forget this little adventure as quickly as possible."

"But what about Yung Ching, sir?" asked half a dozen voices.

"He is not on board the *Dragon*, and it is difficult to say exactly what has been done with him," replied Nelson Lee. "But you

can rely upon me to do everything possible in the unfortunate boy's cause. For the moment we had better resume our normal routine; both Lord Dorrimore and I are anxious that you should all enjoy this trip to the full."

"Absolutely," agreed Dorrie, nodding. "So don't get any rummy ideas into your heads. I'm takin' you to Hong Kong, an' there'll be plenty of chances to have a good look at China. As for Yung Ching, leave him to Mr. Lee."

So, within half an hour, the *Wanderer* was herself again, and the recent adventure with Foo Chow's men was a memory. The St. Frank's fellows were disappointed with regard to Yung Ching, but there was a general feeling that Mr. Lee would soon get something moving.

After dinner Dorrie discussed matters with Mr. Lee and Mr. Stokes in a quiet corner of the smoking-room, while the *Wanderer* plunged steadily onwards towards the coast of China.

"Well, it's been a queer business altogether," said his lordship. "Of course, Foo Chow is a wrong 'un, an' I suppose he's got his own reasons for stickin' to that Chinese kid. But I can't quite get the hang of him. A millionaire—a man with the highest reputation in London—an' yet he tinkers with kidnappin' an' this sort of monkey business."

"Yung Ching's letter was quite conclusive, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee quietly. "He is the only son of a powerful war lord, and Foo Chow means to use the boy as a method of forcing his rival's hand. Torture will be resorted to as a mere matter of course. The Chinese regard torture as a legitimate practice."

"They are a peculiar lot," remarked Mr. Stokes thoughtfully. "One would have thought that Foo Chow would be above that sort of thing. He's highly civilised, and he seems to have the culture of a British aristocrat."

"Veneer, Barry; just surface polish," said Nelson Lee. "At heart, Foo Chow is a true celestial. And he is ready to adopt the most fiendish methods in order to gain his own ends. We're up against a very determined man, remember. I was rather surprised at his recent action, for I never imagined that he would declare open warfare as he did. It is really all to the good, for now he has clearly admitted his guilt."

"But what about Yung Ching?" inquired Barry. "That's the worrying point. After all, we set out on this chase to take the boy off the *Dragon*, and you say he's not there."

"It's my belief they've thrown him overboard," said Dorrie.

"My dear old man, that's absurd!" laughed the detective. "Foo Chow would rather lose half his crew than lose the life of Yung Ching. No, I have come to the conclusion that he was removed by aeroplane."



When he came aboard the "Wanderer," Foo Chow was backed by an escort of Chinese soldiery—powerful men in uniforms rich with colour. Foo Chow faced Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore. "From this moment, understand that this vessel is entirely under my command," the Chinaman said grimly.

"Aeroplane!" echoed the others.

"Surely that is not very startling?" asked Lee. "Nowadays it is a very simple matter for a small aeroplane to be launched from a ship's deck—especially one of these very high-powered racing 'planes."

"But what makes you think this?" asked his lordship.

"Well, I came across a large number of empty petrol tins in one of the *Dragon's* store-rooms," replied Nelson Lee shrewdly. "Also, I saw some apparatus which is not the usual equipment of a steam yacht. Only one or two traces of it—not the complete apparatus, mark you—but I believe an aeroplane was catapulted from the *Dragon's* deck. Taking that as an established fact, we need no longer conjecture as to Yung Ching's whereabouts."

"You mean—he's already in China?" asked Mr. Stokes dubiously.

"Of course—in Yang Fu, the capital city of Foo Chow's domain," replied Lee. "In the far interior these Chinese potentates are

kings unto themselves. Even to-day, when China is supposed to be a republic, the interior is more or less ruled by despotic war lords. And Foo Chow is apparently one of the most ambitious of them all. In fact, that is where we have the advantage."

"How?" asked Barry Stokes curiously.

"Our yellow friend has shown his hand in a very marked fashion," replied the schoolmaster-detective contentedly. "Why did he make that foolish attempt to keep us on board his yacht? Because he is afraid of what we might do. He is in mortal dread of the Chinese Government being stirred into activity. He doesn't want his plans to be wrecked by any kind of official interference."

"You think we shall be able to make them move?" asked Mr. Stokes.

"We shall have a very good try," replied Lee grimly. "First of all we shall consult the British authorities in Hong Kong, and, if necessary, we shall urge the Chinese Government to take strong action. You

must remember that Yung Ching is virtually under British protection, being a pupil of St. Frank's. So the Government may decide to act at once, and effect his rescue. Dr. Foo Chow must not imagine that he has beaten us. I will warrant that he has many enemies, particularly in official circles. It will be a big blow to his ambitions if there is any Governmental interference at this period. The chances are that he will surrender the boy at once—in order to avoid further confusion of his schemes.

That Nelson Lee's conclusions were sound was proved by the fact that Dr. Foo Chow himself was arriving at precisely the same point in his own thoughts at that very minute.

The wily Chinaman was ready for further action, too.



CHAPTER 7.

THE MESSAGE FROM THE ETHER.

DR. FOO CHOW was alone. He sat in his private room on board the *Dragon*—that secret apartment which was shut off from every other part of the vessel. The Chinese millionaire's thoughts were busy.

He was convinced that the *Wanderer* would sail direct for Hong Kong, and there stir up a host of inquiries, and cause official intervention. Under any ordinary circumstances Dr. Foo Chow would have laughed at the idea, for he knew from experience how cumbersome were the wheels of Government, and how unlikely it was that any definite activity would result.

But this case was different.

There were plenty of influential officials who would be only too ready to precipitate a move towards Foo Chow's lands in the far interior. And his one earnest desire at the moment was to "let sleeping dogs lie." He did not wish one word of his ambitious plans to leak out.

The fact that these Britishers knew of his secret designs had come upon him as an overwhelming surprise. They had failed in their attempt to rescue Yung Ching, but it was a moral certainty that they would pursue their set course with even greater determination.

The only possible means of safety, therefore, was to prevent the *Wanderer* from reaching any port. Dr. Foo Chow had no fear that his enemies would use the wireless at this early stage. They were so near the Chinese coast that they would wait. It would not suit their plans to make the story public. So if the British yacht could be dealt with now—

But in what way?

Dr. Foo Chow toyed with the thought of sinking the *Wanderer* that very night, destroying her, with every soul on board. That would certainly solve the problem in the

most satisfactory manner possible. As for the sacrifice of innocent lives, the Chinaman never gave this aspect of the matter a thought. For years he had ruled his lands with the will of a despot, and the lives of others meant nothing to him. What did it matter how many souls were trampled underfoot in his bid for power?

But these lives now under consideration were British. And that made a difference. The risk was too great. Even if the *Wanderer* was sunk swiftly and dramatically, there was still a chance that one or two souls might survive. Then, indeed, the result would be swift and calamitous. For the British Government itself would take a hand, and Foo Chow would be hounded until he was made to answer for the crime. For all his power, for all his despotism, Dr. Foo Chow had a wholesome respect for the supremacy of the British authorities.

No, the *Wanderer* could not be sunk. He did not dare to take such a fatal chance. But there was another way. If none of these British lives were taken, there could be no question of punishment. And later, when his plans had materialised, his strength would be so great that he could easily defy any inquiry on the part of his native enemies.

Dr. Foo Chow made up his mind quickly. He went on deck and sought out his captain. For five minutes he talked quietly and earnestly. And while doing so his gaze was fixed across the dark sea, to a point where a blur of radiance stood out like a soft yellow beacon in the night. It was the *Wanderer*, steaming sedately towards Hong Kong.

On Dorrie's yacht it was just about bedtime for the guests. Most of the St. Frank's fellows were feeling rather depressed—a reaction after the recent excitement.

After all their efforts, poor old Chingy, hadn't been rescued!

"The whole thing's a frost," Handforth was saying as he leaned over the rail. "What the dickens was the good of coming? What's the good of going to Hong Kong? We'll never find Chingy now."

"Well, let's go to bed," said Dick Hamilton practically. "All the girls have gone below long ago, and a sleep'll do us good. We can trust Mr. Lee to make the right move."

Handforth seemed dubious.

"Can we?" he said gruffly.

"Yes, we can," retorted Dick.

"Well, I'm not so sure," went on Handforth. "Mr. Lee's a marvellous chap when it comes to detective work, and anything of that sort. But he's opposed to direct action. What we ought to do is to—"

"Go to bed!" said Church, yawning.

"We ought to follow the *Dragon*, and stick to her like glue," continued Handforth tensely. "Chingy is either on board, or Foo Chow's going to the place where he's a prisoner. So if we follow the *Dragon* we shall be on the right track."

"You hopeless ass!" said Dick, exasperated. "It's a ten to one chance that Foo Chow is making straight for Shanghai. What's the good of following his yacht? Chingy himself said that he was being taken to Yang Fu, and he's probably there by this time."

"By George, yes!" said Handforth with a start. "Why, then, it's simple. We've only got to get to Yang Fu, and we shall find him in no time. Let's ask Mr. Lee to change our course, and take the *Wanderer* straight to Yang Fu!"

"Nothing easier," grinned McClure. "We've only got to put wheels on the yacht and take her across country. Yang Fu is inland, Handy."

"I'd forgotten that," growled Handforth, scratching his head. "Still, that's nothing. We can make for the nearest port, and then get there by train, or hire a fleet of motor-cars."

Dick Hamilton sighed.

"You seem to have got the idea that China is like England," he said patiently. "My dear ass, you don't understand there aren't any railways?"

"No railways in China?"

"There are plenty of railways in some parts of China, but not round Yang Fu," replied Dick. "It's in the interior, where European civilisation has hardly penetrated. In those far-off places, China is practically the same now as it was two thousand years ago. They've made no progress at all—because they're so jolly conservative that they think their ways are the best. They despise railways, and I don't suppose they've got any wheeled traffic at all."

Handforth was incredulous.

"No carts or carriages or anything?" he asked.

"In that part of China they don't use wheels," said Dick cheerily. "Take my advice, old son, and read up the subject. Your ignorance is colossal! People go about in sedan chairs, and goods are carried about on poles. Wheels wouldn't be any good, anyhow, because they haven't got any proper roads. In the winter-time they're just canals of mud, and in the summer-time they're choking with dust. Nothing short of a land tractor would be able to make any progress. China's not an ordinary country."

"The lecturer will pause for a breath," grinned Church.

"Oh, dry up!" growled Dick Hamilton. "I'm only giving Handy a few tips. He seems to think that we can get to Yang Fu as easily as we can bike from St. Frank's to Caistowe! But China's the rummiest country in the world—in the far interior, where they haven't adopted any European methods."

Handforth was obstinate.

"Well, we can get to Chingy somehow," he declared. "Think of the chap, languishing in some beastly dungeon, chained up,

and having his fingers cut off! And we can't do anything!"

He suddenly started, and his eyes gleamed.

"I say, what about an aeroplane?" he went on tensely. "If there aren't any roads or railways, there must be plenty of air!"

"I shouldn't be surprised if there's some air," admitted Dick Hamilton.

"That's all an aeroplane wants, then," said Handforth triumphantly. "We'll get an aeroplane, fly to Yang Fu, and there you are!"

"Exactly!" said Reggie Pitt. "There you are! And, as far as I can see, there you'll stay! Yang Fu is Dr. Foo Chow's stronghold, and by all I've heard the natives are pretty antagonistic towards white people. As soon as your aeroplane landed it would be seized, and you'd be clapped into jail. No, Handy, we'd better leave this problem to Mr. Lee. He knows a bit more about the country than we do. Anyhow, I'm going to bed."

"Same here," agreed Dick. "Coming, Tommy?"

They drifted off, and Handforth was left alone with Church and McClure. They didn't argue with him, but simply took his arms and led him below to their cabin. Handforth was thinking deeply, and when he was in this condition his chums could lead him where they pleased.

He was thinking after they had undressed and were in bed.

"We ought to be in Hong Kong within a day or two," said Edward Oswald at last. "Hong Kong's a civilised place, anyhow. It's bound to be—it's British. I suggest that we get up a big expedition, and—Are you listening to me, Church? Are you awake, Mac?"

His chums were wide awake, but their snores sounded conclusive.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth tartly. "Just when I've got a ripping idea, the fatheads go to sleep—"

He paused and listened. A sudden burst of excited talk had sounded from the deck—just outside the window of the state-room. A covered deck ran alongside these cabins, and Handforth recognised the voice of young "Sparks," and that of Mr. Stewart, the first officer.

"You must be dreaming, Sparks," Mr. Stewart was saying.

"I'm not, sir—it's just come through," insisted "Sparks"—to be accurate, Ellis, the wireless operator. "Must be some joke, I suppose. Have a look yourself, sir. I was just going to take it to old Dorrie!"

"Like your nerve to refer to his lordship in that way!" growled the first officer. "Not so much of your cheek, young 'un! Let's have a look at that message."

Handforth pushed his head through the curtains, and looked out.

"Anything up?" he asked eagerly.

"Aren't you asleep yet?" demanded Mr. Stewart. "Practically everybody else has

been in bed for an hour past. No, there's nothing the matter——"

"Well, I'm not so sure of it, sir," interrupted Ellis. "I've left Mr. Lee in the wireless room, and he told me to fetch Lord Dorrimore—so it must be serious."

Mr. Stewart changed his tone.

"Mr. Lee sent you?" he asked sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Jove, then it looks important," muttered the first officer. "You'd better get straight back to your job, Sparks—I'll find his lordship and bring him along."

He glanced at a slip of paper which the wireless operator had given him, and hurried off. Sparks hesitated, and Handforth grasped him by the shoulder before he could go.

"What's the excitement?" asked Edward Oswald curiously.

"Why, we've just had a message from the *Dragon*," replied Ellis. "We've been told to heave-to, and take orders. In fact, we've got to surrender to Foo Chow, and regard ourselves as his prisoners!"

Handforth grinned.

"Chuck it!" he said. "I want to know——"

"My dear kid, it's true!" insisted Sparks. "But I can't stop."

He hurried off, and Handforth was left there, staring.

"Ordered to surrender!" he muttered dazedly. "Why, he's mad! He's absolutely——"

He broke off, gasping. A sudden pencil of light had shot out from the darkness of the sea. It wavered about for a moment or two, sweeping the surface; then it settled itself fully on the *Wanderer*, showing up every rail and bolt and line with dazzling brilliance.



CHAPTER 8.

THE CHALLENGE.

GAZING across the water, Handy stared with all his eyes.

"Great Scott!" he panted.

There hadn't been a light showing a second earlier. That beam had come from the sheer darkness, proving that the vessel on which the searchlight was being operated was steaming without lights. The *Dragon*!

If there was any corroboration needed for Ellis' story, here it was! Foo Chow had ordered the British yacht to heave-to and surrender, and now Foo Chow was steaming up out of the night, and was playing a powerful searchlight upon the vessel he was intent upon capturing.

For a moment or two Handforth couldn't think clearly. It was too preposterous—too utterly fantastic.

The *Dragon* wasn't a warship—she was merely a private yacht. How on earth could Foo Chow expect Dorrie to obey his outrageous demands? But yet that searchlight

looked sinister! The fact that the *Dragon* had stolen up in the darkness was even more significant.

"My only topper!" breathed Handforth.

Then he turned, and grabbed hold of Church and McClure, who by this time were really asleep. He awoke them with a couple of lusty shakes.

"Quick!" he gasped. "Get up, you asses!"

"What the dickens——"

"Foo Chow has followed us, and he's sent a wireless message that we've got to surrender!" said Handforth tensely. "There's something fishy about the whole business, and we'd better go on deck, and——"

"You've been dreaming!" snapped Church irritably. "Why don't you go to bed like a decent human being, instead of——"

He paused, and glanced at the curtains. The beam of the searchlight had again flashed along the *Wanderer's* side, and at the same moment Handforth switched off the cabin lights.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed. "I tell you there's some excitement!"

"My goodness!" said McClure blankly.

In less than ten seconds they were scurrying into their clothes, and Handforth was going to the other cabins, and rousing the rest of the fellows. Many of them were dressing already, having seen the mysterious searchlight themselves.

And while the excitement was growing, Nelson Lee and Barry Stokes and Lord Dorrimore and Captain Burton were in the wireless room, grave and amazed, although there was no hint of any alarm.

"The message is perfectly clear," Nelson Lee was saying. "And it has obviously been sent out from the *Dragon's* wireless apparatus. Foo Chow must be insane."

"Of all the infernal cheek!" snorted his lordship. "Calmly orderin' us to consider ourselves his prisoners! Hang it all, I enjoy a joke as much as anybody, but this is a bit too steep!"

Dorrie had already instructed Ellis to send a reply—to the curt effect that Foo Chow could hang himself. The two yachts were so close that a minimum amount of power was required to send out the necessary radiations. Indeed, that from the *Dragon* was so weak that the *Wanderer's* apparatus only faintly picked it up, in spite of her close proximity.

"This is being done deliberately," Lee had declared. "Foo Chow intends this message for us, and us alone. It is so weak that no other ship or wireless station will be able to pick it up."

They were all angry—in addition to being mildly astonished. Was it possible that Dr. Foo Chow really meant this, or was he trying to be humorous? Somehow, Nelson Lee had an uneasy feeling that the Chinaman was in earnest.

"She's not more than a mile away," said Mr. Stokes, as he stood at the open door. "Not a light showing except that beam—and it's holding us all the while now. Unless I knew to the contrary, I should imagine we

were being escorted by a destroyer. But the *Dragon* is only a private yacht, without any means of—"

"Hallo!" said Dorrie. "Somethin' else comin'!"

Sparks was writing, his head encased in an ear-phone apparatus. There was an expression of excitement on his face as he plied his pencil. He turned, and held out the sheet.

"Stop and surrender, or you will be fired upon—Foo Chow!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "That's the latest, sir!"

Nelson Lee glanced at the others.

"But this is utterly ridiculous!" he snapped. "Fired upon! The *Dragon* carries no gun whatever—unless, perhaps, an insignificant little quick-firer—" He paused, and looked thoughtful. "And yet I noticed one or two peculiarities when we searched her," he went on. "Those deck-houses for'ard, and—"

"Man alive, she's as harmless as a barge!" interrupted Dorrie. "Besides, what about speed? Does this fool of a Chinaman think that we're calmly goin' to obey his preposterous orders? He doesn't know that we've got as much speed as a destroyer!"

"No, that'll be a surprise for him," said Captain Burton.

"Skipper, do me a favour, and order full speed ahead," went on Dorrie, grinning. "By the Lord Harry, we'll show this Chink what we think of his impudence! We'll show him what real speed is!"

"We'll ignore the threat?" asked the captain.

"The threat to fire?" said Dorrie. "Ignore it! Good gad, we're not afraid of Foo Chow's pop-guns! It's only bluff, captain—nothing else! The best thing we can do is to ignore the whole nonsensical business by showin' the idiot a clean pair of heels. We'll leave him standin'!"

The captain hurried off, and Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, Dorrie, I think that's the best course we can pursue," he agreed. "There is no necessity to send any reply. Our very action will tell Foo Chow what we think of his orders."

"Let's go outside, and watch him drop astern," grinned his lordship.

They went out on deck, and found the place swarming. All the St. Frank's fellows were there, and even some of the girls. They had dressed fully, unable to sleep in the midst of this excitement. Dawn was already appearing over the sea, and the blackness was merging into a sombre grey. The *Dragon's* searchlight was still fixed steadily upon the *Wanderer*.

"What's it all about, sir?" shouted a dozen voices, as Lee appeared.

"You ought to be in bed, the whole lot of you," said the schoolmaster-detective. "There's no need to be excited, you fellows. Foo Chow has ordered us to stop, but we're going to steam ahead at full speed."

"He doesn't know what kind of engines we've got," chuckled Dorrie.

But, although they tried to calm the boys and girls, it was useless. There was an element of adventure in the air, and everybody was eager to see what would happen. From first to last, the whole thing was startling. By what possible chance could Dr. Foo Chow imagine that his grotesque orders would be obeyed?

The whole affair was madness itself.

The decks began to vibrate, and the whole vessel throbbed with a life which she had hitherto lacked. The rail, as the juniors leaned over it, quivered and shook. The *Wanderer's* powerful engines were using their utmost energy, and the difference in the speed was startling. She surged through the calm sea at an amazing rate, sending the foam hissing in her wake, white and creamy. Two enormous waves were cut by her sharp bows.

"By George! This is the stuff!" grinned Handforth delightedly. "Why couldn't we go at this speed all the time?"

"It's gorgeous!" said Winnie Pitt, her hair waving in the wind.

"Doesn't it make you feel fine," asked Church breathlessly. "Fancy old Foo Chow thinking he could put the wind up us!"

The *Wanderer* was going at such a speed now that the sea appeared to be rushing past. It was like being on an express train, and there was a sense of exhilaration in the very air.

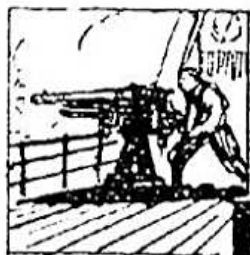
"Of course, we couldn't do this speed all the time, Handy," said Dick Hamilton. "It's too much of a strain on the engines. They can only be used at this pressure in an emergency. We'll soon leave the *Dragon* miles behind."

The grey light was already changing, and the new day was with them. The *Dragon's* searchlight was losing its value, and after another few minutes it was switched off. The Chinese yacht herself could now be seen—a grey little object in the distance.

"We're leaving her well behind already," said Fullwood, with satisfaction.

"In ten minutes she'll be a giddy speck!" declared Handforth.

But, somehow, this prophecy failed to come true. The minutes passed, and the *Dragon* appeared to remain at the same approximate distance. Dick Hamilton was looking with rather startled eyes now. Perhaps he was mistaken, but it seemed to him that the *Dragon* was not merely keeping her place, but was actually drawing closer!



CHAPTER 9.

A STAGGERING SURPRISE.

ORD DORRIMORE tossed his cigarette away, and frowned.

"This is deucedly queer," he muttered.

"We've been goin' full speed ahead for twenty minutes, but I'm hanged if I can see much difference."

"The *Dragon* is closer, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"Closer!"

"Perceptibly closer."

"But, hang it!" ejaculated his lordship. "You don't mean——"

"It's a rather nasty shock, but we can't discredit the evidence of our own eyes," continued Lee. "She's closer, and that means only one thing. Her engines are more powerful than ours. A bit of a staggerer, Dorrie."

The sporting peer looked blank.

"But these engines of mine are about the fastest things that burn oil!" he exclaimed, in amazement. "I had them specially installed——"

"My dear man, it's no good talking like that," interrupted the detective. "We're travelling with the speed of a destroyer already, and yet the *Dragon* is creeping closer to us with every minute that passes. If we're doing forty knots, she's probably doing forty-five."

"Good glory!" said Dorrie, staring.

He looked across the sea towards the Chinese yacht. The light was stronger now, and the *Dragon* could be seen with greater distinctness. Her bows were almost smothered in the gigantic wave which her speed was creating, and there was a long white line in her wake.

"But what does this mean, Mr. Lee?" asked Barry Stokes soberly.

"Surely you can guess?" returned Nelson Lee. "Foo Chow's threats were not so idle as we first imagined. I don't want to alarm anybody, but there can be little doubt now that Foo Chow will fire, too, unless we obey his orders."

Dorrie flushed deeply.

"Let him fire!" he snapped. "Great Scott! Does the yellow rascal think that I'm afraid of him? This is my yacht, and I'm not going to take orders from anybody, let alone a confounded Chink! But you must be wrong, Lee! Foo Chow wouldn't be crazy enough to fire on us!"

"We shall see," replied the detective anxiously. "I don't think he'll fire on us, but he will probably fire over us. And, if that happens, we must remember all the young lives we have on board. It's an uncomfortable thought, Dorrie, but it would be better to surrender than to risk any of these lives."

His lordship was too startled to make any reply. The whole affair seemed incongruous—it seemed unreal. This was warfare! A peaceful British pleasure yacht was being menaced by a Chinese pirate! That was what it amounted to, in blunt terms. For, if Foo Chow actually meant his threat, he was a pirate of the high seas!

On another part of the deck excitement was brewing.

"She's getting closer," said Reggie Pitt, in an amazed voice. "Look, you chaps! Instead of showing her a clean pair of heels, we're not making any headway at all! She's gaining on us!"

"I've already noticed it," said Dick Hamilton, nodding. "Don't get excited, you chaps, but remember you belong to the St. Frank's Remove. This business is more serious than we first thought. Foo Chow is in earnest."

"But—but what can he do?" asked Tommy Watson, aghast. "You don't mean to say that he'll capture the *Wanderer*?"

Handforth laughed scornfully.

"You hopeless idiot!" he said, with more than his usual bluntness. "Capture the *Wanderer*? I'd like to see him have a shot at it! My hat! Do you think old Dorrie would take any orders from a yellow-faced monkey like Foo Chow?"

"That's not the question," said Church, looking scared. "Supposing he threatens to sink us, or something like that? We shall have to give in then! It's no good winking at facts, Handy. We thought the *Dragon* would be left miles behind, and yet she's overhauling us! Foo Chow's a pirate!"

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "A pirate, eh? I hadn't thought of that! I'll bet that's how he's made his millions! The *Dragon* is his pirate ship, and he's probably been looting and sinking every other ship he comes across!"

"A plausible suggestion, Brother Handforth, but somewhat imaginative," said William Napoleon Browne gently. "Allow me to compliment you upon your rapid powers of inventive genius. One word is sufficient to set your brain revolving like the armature of a dynamo. If one gazes closely, one can even see the sparks emanating from that massive cranium of yours."

"This is no time for rotting!" said Handforth coldly.

"I agree with you," said Browne. "But it is necessary to curb your imagination at times, brother. You may be quite sure that Brother Chow would not take this present step unless he was hard driven. I venture to suggest that he is no ordinary pirate. A man of surprises, certainly, and one whom we have sadly under-rated in every respect. If I may venture to assume the cloak of a prophet, I suggest that we shall presently be in Brother Chow's captivity."

"You howling ass!" roared Handforth. "We'd never surrender!"

"Alas, we are not all composed of that rugged, dogged, granite-like substance which comprises your own being," continued Browne. "I have noticed this granite effect particularly with regard to the superstructure arising from your shoulders, Brother Handforth. But let us not labour these painful points. We must remember that Brothers Dorrie and Lee have our safety in their keeping. And they will even pander to this cheery Chinaman's whim rather than see us sent to the bottom of the ocean. A fad, no doubt, but we must make allowances. We cannot all possess your own perish-rather-than-surrender attitude."

The lanky Fifth Former spoke with his usual lightness, but there was a great deal of serious thought behind his airy words. The

other fellows were not making many comments. Truth to tell, they were far too startled. The singular speed of the *Dragon*, and her grim closing-in, hinted at further mischief to come.

Browne was quite right regarding Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee. If matters actually came to a crisis, they would obey the Chinaman's orders, much as it would gall them to do so. For there were between thirty and forty young lives aboard, in addition to the officers and crew. And the parents of these youngsters had been assured that they would be protected against any danger.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Lee was filled with grave anxiety.

Ho and Dorrie were on the bridge now, watching the movements of the Chinese yacht with close attention. The daylight was strengthening with every minute, and the *Dragon's* lines could now be distinctly seen.

"If I had dreamed of this, Dorrie, I would never have precipitated Foo Chow's present designs," Nelson Lee was saying. "I believed him to be a dangerous man, and I was prepared to act with the necessary caution. But how could one, in one's right senses, foretell such a staggering event as this?"

"Old man, it's got me standin' still," admitted Dorrie.

"Just as this yacht is a faster boat than she appears to be, the *Dragon* is nothing but a ship of war," continued Lee, the concern apparent in his voice. "Look at her, man! She's no pleasure yacht now! This Chinese fiend is a far more clever man than I imagined, and his methods are equally amazing. We do not even know the extent of his resources, although he is now giving us a sinister hint."

Lord Dorrimore levelled his binoculars.

"Yes, by glory, she's no pleasure yacht!" he agreed. "Man alive, she's totally different! Her trimmin's have vanished."

"We don't even need the glasses to note her changed appearance," said Captain Burton, as he stared out across the water. "Look at her bows—they are low and protected now. She's got guns showing fore and aft—naval guns, too! This looks an ugly business altogether, gentlemen."

"I'm afraid you're right, captain," muttered Lee. "If we could only show her a clean pair of heels it wouldn't matter. But she's got us—without question, she's about to hold us at her mercy."

"But it's rank piracy!" said Dorrie, aghast.

"Aren't these Chinese pirates by nature?" asked Captain Burton grimly. "Up till now I've only come across a few of the primitive sorts—just ordinary thieving Chinks of the junk tribe. But that's no reason why a highly educated Chinaman, with endless resources, shouldn't adopt the same tactics. It's in the blood, sir! And this Foo Chow seems pretty anxious to hold us. It's my opinion, we know too much about that boy for his liking."

"You've hit it, skipper," agreed Nelson Lee. "That's the very point. Foo Chow

fears that we shall stir up trouble for him, and he is determined to prevent that at all costs. That's the meaning of this remarkable business."

"Then why doesn't he sink us, an' have done with it?" asked Dorrie bluntly.

"He's afraid of doing anything like that, although I've no doubt that he would send us all to the bottom without a qualm if he felt he could do so in safety," said the detective. "And look here, Dorrie, there's no sense in being pigheaded if the affair gets too hot. None of us anticipated this extraordinary turn of events. And in face of a really serious threat we can only bow to Foo Chow's command."

"That's not like you, old man," said Dorrie, staring.

"No," agreed Lee quietly. "But I'm thinking of—others."

"Oh!" said his lordship.

He noted that Nelson Lee was looking down at the crowd of boys and girls who were at the rails. And Dorrie understood. The very fact that Foo Chow was holding his fire proved that he had no intention of actual murder. During the last half-hour he could have blown the *Wanderer* to atoms had he chosen.

The chase was continuing relentlessly. By now the converted *Dragon* was steaming level with the British yacht, although a considerable distance away. And she was making no attempt to forge ahead. She accommodated her pace to that of the *Wanderer*. As far as the eye could reach, in all directions, the sea was otherwise devoid of a sail.

"She's a pirate, all right," said Handforth tensely. "Look at those guns. But I'm hanged if I can understand what it all means. Why does Foo Chow want to stop us?"

"He's probably afraid that we shall ruin his plans," said Reggie Pitt. "But I don't see what he can do. This is only bluff—"

"Look!" shouted Dorrie, grasping his arm.

A white puff of smoke had appeared from the aft gun on the *Dragon*, and at the same moment a dull boom sounded. While the juniors were staring with startled eyes, a whining, droning sound reached their ears, growing louder until there was a scream of something overhead.

"Great Scott!" gasped Dick Hamilton. "A shell!"



CHAPTER 10.

THE SURRENDER.

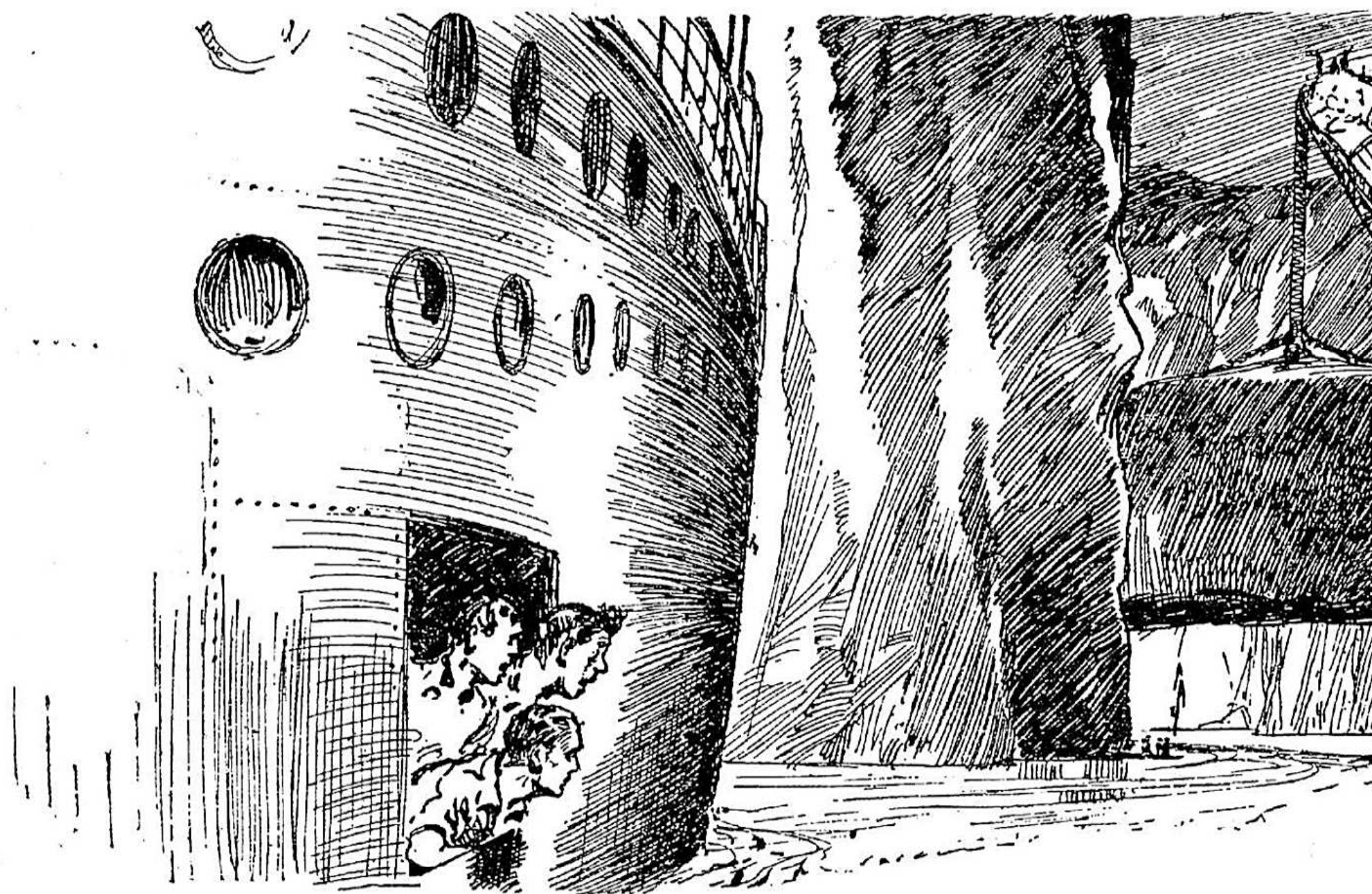
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OOM!

Away in the distance came a second explosion as the shell struck the water. For a tense moment everybody on Dorrie's yacht was dumb. Dr. Foo Chow meant business in deadly earnest!



Handforth and his chums
of rock being slowly rain-
coolies straining on the m
of St. Frank's were to be
barrier—into the heart of
domain



"The rotter!" shouted a dozen juniors. "He's trying to sink us!"

"Steady, boys!" said Mr. Stokes. "It was only a warning. Foo Chow wouldn't dare to fire a direct shot."

"But we're not going to surrender, sir, are we?" asked Handforth hotly.

"We shall leave that to Lord Dorrimore," replied the young Housemaster.

On the bridge, Dorrie was white with rage. It took a great deal to make the genial peer lose his temper; but when he did lose it, his fury took a violent form.

"The infernal scum!" he roared. "The dirty pirate! A shot across our bows, Lee! That means we've got to heave-to, or he'll try to sink us. Captain, order the engine-room to put on more speed!"

"But Dorrie, old man——" began Lee.

"I'm not going to knuckle under to this filthy buccaneer!" thundered Lord Dorrimore. "Mr. Stewart! We've got a gun for'ard. Nip down and get ready for action! Two can play at this game——"

"Calm yourself, Dorrie!" broke in Nelson Lee sternly. "This won't do! We can't engage in a running fight with this Chinaman. His guns are twenty times more powerful than the one you've got. We shouldn't stand an earthly chance if it came to a real fight."

"Well, I'm not going to take orders from that skunk!" panted his lordship.

"I can appreciate your feelings, but you must think of these guests of yours." in-

sisted Lee. "Remember their parents, remember the pledges I gave that they should not be wittingly taken into danger. Let us cease this madness, and hear what Foo Chow has to say. It's not a bit of good fighting when the odds are all against us."

Lord Dorrimore nearly choked.

"But, hang it, it goes against the grain!" he muttered thickly. "I've never surrendered to anybody—— But those boys and girls—— Yes, old man, I suppose it's our duty to think of them first."

He stood there, his fists clenched, his eyes blazing. In the meantime, Nelson Lee hurried down the bridge ladder and quietly gave orders to the St. Frank's fellows to get below. Mrs. Stokes had already escorted the girls down into the saloon.

"But we want to stay on deck, sir!" protested a dozen juniors.

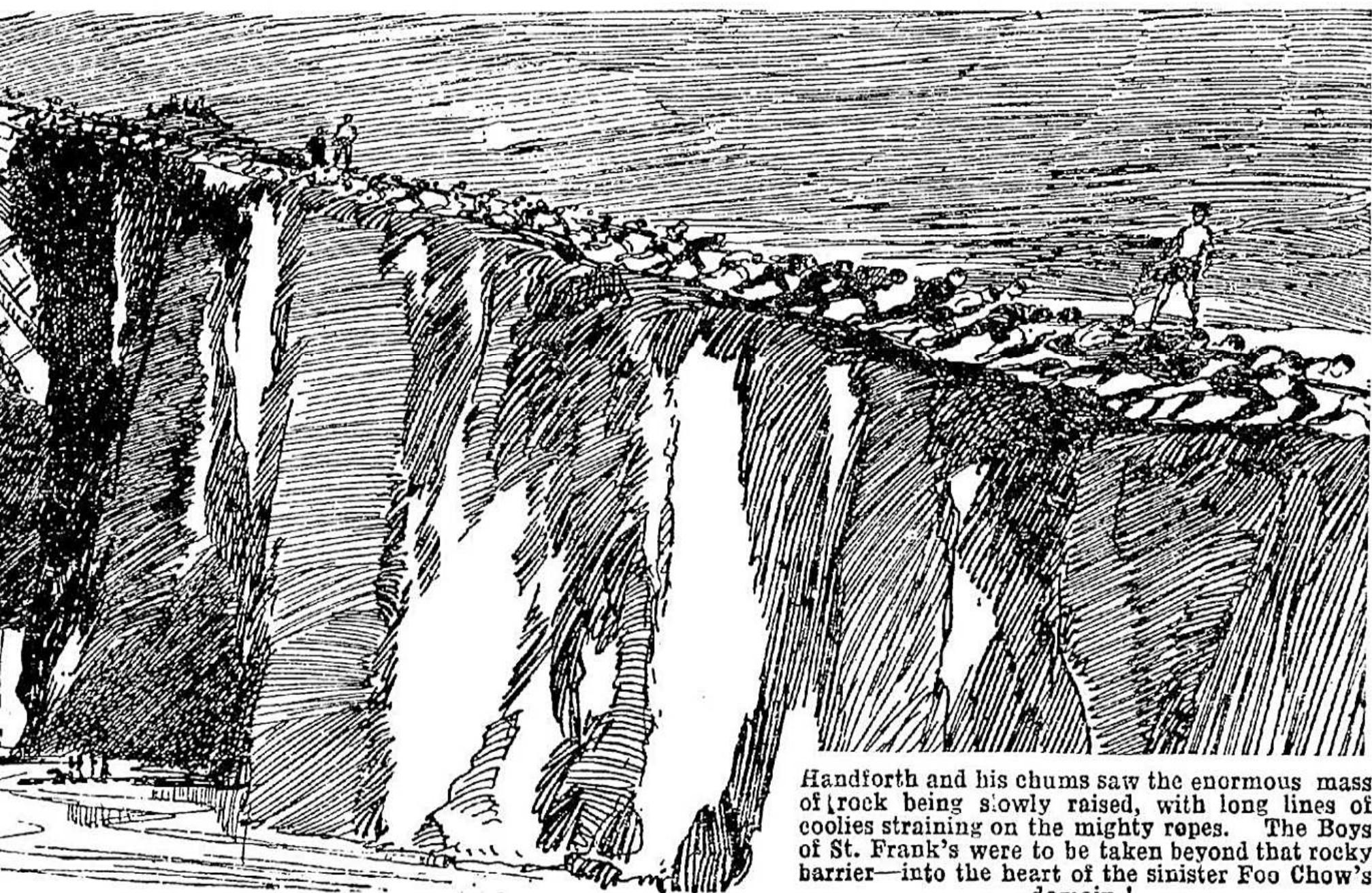
"You'll come on deck the moment the danger has passed," replied the Housemaster. "There is every possibility that——"

Boom!

Again came that ominous sound, and all eyes were turned towards the *Dragon*. The droning of the shell could already be heard, and it changed into a scream of velocity within the space of a split second. It was nearer this time, and those on the *Wanderer* held their breath——

Crash!

It came with stunning unexpectedness. A shattering, ear-splitting explosion aft. The *Wanderer* seemed to shake and quiver, but



Handforth and his chums saw the enormous mass of rock being slowly raised, with long lines of coolies straining on the mighty ropes. The Boys of St. Frank's were to be taken beyond that rocky barrier—into the heart of the sinister Foo Chow's domain!

her speed was not diminished. Nelson Lee, with his face bloodless, ran down the deck.

Two men were picking themselves up, one dazed, and the other bleeding. The shell had exploded against the superstructure at the very stern of the yacht. Very little damage was done, and the two men were not badly hurt.

But Foo Chow had left no doubt that he was in earnest!

Lord Dorrimore, on the bridge, turned to the captain.

"Signal the engine-room to reverse engines," he said quietly.

"It's the only thing we can do," muttered Captain Burton, nodding.

Lee sternly stopped all protests from the boys as he ordered them below. His heart nearly stopped as he thought of what massacre would have been created if the shell had struck amidships.

"It's all right, old man—we're stoppin'," said Dorrie, as Lee ran up the bridge ladder.

"After what's just happened, we should be crazy to continue this one-sided fight," said the detective with relief. "Don't be upset, Dorrie. There are times when it's courageous to give in. Thank Heaven none of those boys were hurt just now!"

"The yellow scum!" said Lord Dorrimore harshly. "Firin' at us deliberately! By glory, Lee, I'll have this man punished for this—"

"I rather think that shot was a stray one," interrupted Lee. "It was probably meant to

go overhead, but those blundering Chinese gunners pitched the shell too low. All the same, it shows that we can't take any risks. The next shot may hit us on the water-line, and if that happened we might be on our way to the bottom in no time."

Dorrie made no comment. He knew that it was useless to resist any longer; although, if he had had only himself to think of, he would have carried on the fight to the bitter end.

The *Wanderer* was now gliding through the water with her engines stilled. The Chinese yacht was drawing closer, and the sun was peeping up over the edge of the sea. Full daylight had come.

Below, Mr. and Mrs. Stokes were doing their utmost to keep the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls calm. It was a difficult task, for they all wanted to be on deck. Indeed, their excitement was so intense that Mr. Stokes sent an urgent message to Nelson Lee. And as a result the guests were allowed to swarm up into the open again.

"There's no danger now, anyhow," said Lee quietly. "They won't fire on us after we have stopped, and the young people might as well be on deck. I think you'd better leave Foo Chow to me, Dorrie."

"I'd like to wring his neck!" said Lord Dorrimore fiercely.

"That's why I suggest that you should leave him to me," said the detective. "I'm afraid you'll be too hotheaded."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," growled his lordship. "But how do you know he's comin'?"

"Under the circumstances, I think we can take it for granted that Dr. Foo Chow will formally come aboard to accept our surrender," replied Lee. "No, don't go off the deep end again, old man. It can't be helped, and it might be all to the good if we pretend to be cowed."

The two yachts were soon at close quarters, and quite stationary on the smooth surface of the sea. A launch was already putting off from the *Dragon*, and the watchers could see the gleam of steel glinting in the sunlight, and the shimmering of bright colours.

"It—it seems so unreal," murmured Mary Summers as she watched. "There's such an air of mystery about it all. I didn't think these sort of things could happen nowadays, Dick."

Dick Hamilton shook his head.

"Neither did I," he replied. "But Foo Chow isn't an ordinary man—he's more daring than any of us gave him credit for being. I'm wondering what his next move will be."

"I say," exclaimed Handforth, with a start. "Couldn't we send out some urgent wireless messages? Couldn't we give the S.O.S. signal, and get help? We're not going to give in tamely!"

But Nelson Lee, of course, had thought of this very obvious expedient already. Fate, however, had stepped in.

Until Dr. Foo Chow's intentions were definitely established, Lee and Dorrie had been reluctant to send out any appeals for assistance. And now that they urgently desired to send these appeals, they were unable to do so. For that exploding shell had wrecked the aerial. The *Wanderer's* wireless equipment was hopelessly disabled.

"It's no good, sir, we're silenced," said young Ellis, when Mr. Stokes hurried to him in the wireless-room. "Aerial's done in, and it's worse than that, too. All the electrical stuff is put out of tune. It'll take twelve hours to make an effective repair."

"By Jove, that's bad!" said Mr. Stokes seriously.

"It's rotten, sir!" agreed "Sparks."

"Didn't you send out any messages at all?"

"Didn't get any orders, sir," replied the wireless operator. "Besides, how were we to anticipate a show like this? Anybody might think we were in the middle of another war. Sorry, sir, but we're properly dished. We can't get help from anywhere."

Nelson Lee nodded when he heard the news.

"I feared as much," he said quietly. "Well, it doesn't make a lot of difference. No matter what ship picked up a message, it couldn't help us. Both these yachts are racers, and we can be quite sure that Foo Chow will give all shipping a wide berth."

Five minutes later Dr. Foo Chow himself came aboard.

There was something impressive in the whole performance, and the Chinaman's arrival was watched by scores of curious eyes. He came up the ladder, calm and collected, attired in white from head to foot—a cool, gentlemanly figure.

His escort was astonishing. They numbered fifty strong, and were not merely sailors, but soldiers in full uniform. Huge, powerful men, clothed in a manner that reminded the surprised Britishers of some episode from the "Arabian Nights." The uniforms were rich with colour, and there was sufficient gold lace on these fifty men to supply a regiment of British generals. They were armed to the teeth, and their discipline was perfect.

Dr. Foo Chow found a group of grim-faced men awaiting him, and he bowed with all his former urbanity and grace.

"Gentlemen, allow me to express my keenest regret that this step should have been necessary," he said silkily. "I crave your pardon for this act of war, but I had no alternative. From this moment I desire you to understand that this vessel is entirely under my command."



CHAPTER 11.

UNDER FOO CHOW'S ORDERS.

BOWING again, Foo Chow smiled a little.

"Be hanged to you!" stormed Lord Dorrimore.

"Under your command, eh? By the Lord Harry, I'll never agree to that!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Dorrie!"

"No surrender, sir!"

The St. Frank's juniors, who were crowding as near as possible, shouted excitedly. But Dr. Foo Chow's soldiers were spreading out, as though by prearranged orders, and posting themselves in every section of the decks.

"I regret that you should adopt this defiant tone," said Foo Chow smoothly. "It pains me deeply, since my task will be the harder. Defiant or not, however, I would remind you that I hold the trump card. This yacht is mine, and it will save much trouble if the formal surrender is agreed upon at once."

"You infernal pirate!" retorted Dorrie hotly.

"You slight me undeservedly," replied Dr. Foo Chow. "I trust my ideals are higher than those of a pirate. This quarrel was not of my making. Let me remind you, gentlemen, that the first unfriendly act came from your side. You searched my own vessel by force, and acted with high-handed arrogance. Is it very surprising that I should return the compliment?"

"What are your terms, Dr. Foo Chow?" asked Nelson Lee curtly. "We do not deny that we have no alternative but to obey your orders. But we should like to know the exact object of this piratical act."

The Chinaman smiled inscrutably.

"When one is the victor, one does not give explanations," he replied evenly. "As I have already said, this vessel is now under my command, and I desire to take formal charge at once. Within a very few minutes a competent crew of my own men will come aboard. My one desire is that you should fully appreciate the position. I am complete master, and it will be an everlasting pity if there is the slightest attempt at resistance. You will have noticed that my soldiers are here in force. They have orders to shoot to kill if there is any attempt to attack them."

"I am the captain of this ship, and I resign my command to no man!" broke in Captain Burton angrily. "Unless I receive definite orders from Lord Dorrimore I shall defy your outrageous—"

"One moment, please," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Dorrie—Captain Burton! You know I am not the kind of man to suggest an act of weakness; but when you remember our passengers you will realise that we are in no position to remain stubborn. Dr. Foo Chow has the whip hand, and we can only submit to this outrage."

"Thank you," said Dr. Foo Chow, bowing. "I am glad, at least, that one gentleman has the courage to confess the truth. Let me assure you that I desire no bloodshed. Indeed, my keenest wish is that you should regard yourselves as my guests."

"Your guests!" shouted Dorrie. "Why, you scoundrel, I've a good mind to order full steam ahead, and risk everything. I'm not afraid of your gunners. If they do hit, it'll only be by accident!"

"At this moment both the *Dragon's* guns are trained on the water-line at this vessel's stern," said Dr. Foo Chow quietly. "My officers have their orders. At the first indication of resistance on your part, one of my men here will fire a smoke signal. And in the next second your rudder and propeller will be blown away, and you will be left in a sinking condition. I mention this as a mere precaution, and for your own safety entirely. This yacht is a good one, and it would pain me to destroy it unnecessarily."

Nelson Lee glanced at the others. And they all knew that Dr. Foo Chow's words were genuine. It would be madness itself to precipitate the *Dragon's* gun-fire. The *Wanderer* would not be sunk swiftly, and these armed Chinamen would shoot down every soul within sight at the first moment of resistance. It was insanity to assume that Foo Chow's commands could be ignored.

"Captain Burton, it will be advisable to take this matter with a good grace," said

Lee tensely. "On Lord Dorrimore's behalf, I suggest that you should relinquish your command."

"By thunder, sir!" choked the skipper. "Is that your desire?"

Lord Dorrimore shrugged.

"Yes, captain; we're helpless," he admitted. "So we've got to knuckle under."

"I thank you, gentlemen, for this sensible decision," purred Dr. Foo Chow. "And let me repeat my former request that you should regard yourselves as my guests. You may think that I am mocking you. I assure you I am not. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than your acceptance of my hospitality."

"Wouldn't it be better to dispense with this hypocrisy?" snapped Dorrie.

"I am grieved that you should so misunderstand me," said the Chinaman, pained. "I have no quarrel with the British. I have always respected and honoured your nationality. This quarrel of ours was forced upon me, and I am taking this present step under the greatest possible stress. Can you doubt my sincerity? If I had any desire to harm you I should have blown your ship to fragments an hour ago."

His listeners were silent.

"The facts are simple," proceeded Dr. Foo Chow. "Without boring you with any of my motives, it becomes necessary for me to keep you under my control until it will be expedient for me to release you. I trust this period will not be unduly prolonged. But while it lasts I earnestly hope that you will regard me as a lavish host—one whom you can call upon to supply any and every whim. Until the moment for your release comes, you will receive nothing but courtesy and comfort at my hands. That is, of course, if you so desire it. My own wishes are clear. I trust you will conform to them."

"Are you seriously suggesting that we should actually be your guests?" said Dorrie in blank amazement. "After what has happened, do you think—"

"That which has happened was forced upon me," interrupted the Chinaman smoothly. "It was not my desire that this unfortunate contretemps should occur. But since it has occurred, and since it is unavoidable, will it not be better for all concerned if we remain on terms of amicability? While you do not show a hostile spirit, so will I do my utmost to entertain you as an exemplary host. I will repeat, gentlemen, that I am pained beyond measure that there should be any suggestion of force, but can we not forget that fact?"

There was something rather incongruous in the attitude of the Chinese millionaire, something which stamped him as a man of extraordinary character. He not only held the trump card, but he was in a position to treat his prisoners in any way he pleased.

And yet he persisted in this desire that

all should regard themselves as his guests. And having taken up this attitude, he did not depart from it.

More men from the *Dragon* were now coming on board—sailors, this time, who quietly and systematically set about their work. There was something uncannily efficient in these Chinese slaves of Dr. Foo Chow.

Without discussing the matter further with Lord Dorrimore, Foo Chow proceeded to give his orders. And it was soon apparent that Lord Dorrimore and his entire party were to be transferred to the *Dragon*. Any thought of refusing the instructions was futile.

Only the *Wanderer's* captain, officers and crew were to remain on board. And these, it was soon clear, would be helpless. The engine-room staff would remain on duty, but now they would take orders from the Chinese substitutes. The fifty soldiers would remain on board, acting as constant guards. Their weapons were supplemented by the arrival of a dozen machine-guns, these being placed at various advantageous points.

In short, the *Wanderer* had been seized, and there was no sense in thinking that there was any possibility of turning the tables. The Chinaman's precautions were so elaborate that his mastery was supreme.

The St. Frank's fellows were burning with indignation, and they submitted to being transferred to the *Dragon* with stubborn

anger—and only after Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore had urged them to remain calm. The majority were so startled that they were in a kind of dream as they found themselves being carried off to the enemy yacht. And the girls, with Mrs. Stokes in charge of them, remained calm with difficulty. They shrunk with horror at the thought of going on board that Chinese vessel, with the fear of unknown terrors ahead. For the whole party was at Foo Chow's mercy, and none knew what to expect.

"His guests, eh?" said Reggie Pitt, as he and a number of others were being conveyed across the intervening water. "I expect we shall be imprisoned, or something—flung down into the holds, and kept there like cattle."

"Can't—can't we do something?" whispered Doyle, thoroughly scared. "We thought we were going to rescue Chingy, but we've landed ourselves in this awful mess! I believe that fiend's going to murder us all!"

"The whole thing's wrong!" said Handforth fiercely. "I'm ashamed of Mr. Lee and Dorrie for knuckling under! Why couldn't we have fought it out? Wouldn't it have been better to scrap in an honest way, and go under fighting? This—this tame business makes my blood boil!"

William Napoleon Browne was looking thoughtful.

"It is possible that I am in error, but something seems to tell me that our cheery host

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is in earnest," he exclaimed. "He indeed desires us to be his honoured guests, and will treat us as such. A strange paradox, since we are his prisoners—but these Chinese have astonishing ways."

"Guests!" snorted Handforth. "Don't you believe it! He's going to torture us as soon as we get on board the *Dragon*! Oh, my goodness! What a hopeless crash! The *Wanderer's* in the hands of these yellow brutes, and we're all being taken to the torture!"



CHAPTER 12.

THE PERFECT HOST.

LORD DORRIMORE scratched his head.

"Well, it beats me!" he said frankly. "I've had a few surprises in my time, but this licks everything!"

Four hours had passed, and the *Dragon* was steaming smoothly and gracefully through the heat of the day. Some distance astern, the *Wanderer* was following, a picture in the brilliant sunlight.

Dorrie and Nelson Lee and Barry Stokes were lounging under an awning, and cooling drinks were at their elbows. Obsequious Chinese stewards were hovering about, ready to obey their lightest whims.

Further along the deck, a group of St. Frank's juniors were partaking of ice creams and iced drinks of all descriptions, fresh from the perfectly equipped soda fountain with which this surprising yacht was provided. The Moor View girls were chatting together animatedly. No longer were there any strained, anxious expressions. But everybody was looking flushed with astonishment.

"Yes, it's a licker!" said Dorrie. "I'm hanged if Foo Chow didn't mean every word he said. He's treatin' us like kings! What do you make of it, Lee?"

"Well, it's pretty obvious that Foo Chow is quite anxious to keep the peace," replied Nelson Lee. "So long as we are meek and submissive, he will give us every consideration. I believe him when he declares that he wishes us no harm. All he requires is our silence. And by keeping us under his eye like this he is assured of it."

"But what on earth is he going to do with us?" asked Mr. Stokes blankly.

"That remains to be seen," replied Lee. "But I don't think he'll throw us into a characteristically filthy Chinese prison. There's something distinctive about this Chinaman, Barry. There's nothing crude about him. It pleases his vanity to treat us like this—and, in addition, it will be a sort of a guarantee that we shan't thirst for vengeance after we get our release."

"If we ever do get it," growled Dorrie.

"I think we shall get it, but it's a problem to guess when," said the detective thoughtfully. "Foo Chow has got some ambitious schemes up his sleeve—gigantic enterprises

in connection with Yung Li Chang's properties. Our intervention—and particularly our activities in Hong Kong—might have upset these schemes. So Foo Chow is keeping us where we can't do him any harm. That's about the long and the short of it."

"Well, hang it, as long as he treats us like this, we can't say much," replied Dorrie, whose temper had completely subsided. "Confound the man, but we've got to admit he's actin' like a sportsman."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"That's the embarrassing part of it," he said. "We can't very well glower at him every time he comes near us, and treat him with cold disdain. In spite of his relentless strength, there's a certain charm about the fellow."

There were others who were saying the same thing.

"It's all like a dream!" declared Irene Manners, as she stood talking with the other girls. "Instead of being submitted to all sorts of dignities, we're just as well off as we were on the *Wanderer*."

"It's too lovely for words," said Doris, nodding. "Our state rooms are simply glorious, and we're allowed to keep our own stewardesses just the same as ever!"

"I don't believe Foo Chow is such a terrible man as Ted and the other boys have been saying," declared Irene. "Why, ever since we've been on board he's gone out of his way to be nice to us."

"But that doesn't alter the fact that we're all his prisoners," said Ena Handforth bluntly. "And at any moment he may change completely. You can never tell with a Chinaman, you know—they've got such different ways. Let's hope that Dr. Foo Chow will remain on his best behaviour."

Everybody had a good word to say. Although the situation was grave, and although the *Wanderer* had been captured by an act of sheer piracy, the conditions on the Chinese yacht were perfect.

Dr. Foo Chow was as good as his word, and he was still maintaining his attitude as host. His guests were provided with every comfort. The state rooms were excellent—even more lavish than those on Dorrie's yacht. There were Chinese stewards everywhere, all deferential and attentive.

One might have supposed that there was no such thing as danger. It seemed incredible that this remarkable host had it in his power to hurl his enforced guests into one of the holds, if he so desired.

The Chinese millionaire maintained his air of honoured host, and at intervals he would send his attendants round, or go himself, inquiring if everything was satisfactory.

"Pray let me know if there is any comfort lacking," he said suavely. "You have but to inform me of your desires, and I will do my utmost to fulfil them. I want you to know that my efforts to please you are sincere."

Thus he went about, smiling and genial.

"Well, he's a rummy sort of gaoler, I must say," remarked Reggie Pitt, with a puzzled

frown. "He's pinched our yacht, he's got us all prisoners, and yet he honours us as though we were lords and ladies."

"Yes, but what about grub?" asked Fatty Little anxiously. "We didn't have any breakfast, you know, what with the excitement, and I'm practically a shadow. It's nearly lunch-time now, and——"

"Goodness knows what we shall have for lunch!" interrupted Handforth. "Chop suey, or some other Chinese horror, I suppose."

Boom—boom—boom!

It was the sound of a deep gong, and Fatty Little gave a start.

"That means lunch!" he said enthusiastically. "By pancakes! This Foo Chow chap isn't half so bad!"

A steward was passing, and Handforth pulled him up.

"What does that gong mean?" he asked.

"Him one piece lunch," explained the steward, grinning. "Excellency make velly good lunch."

And when the guests made their way to the luxurious saloon, they found an abundance of evidence that Dr. Foo Chow had trained his chefs in a European school. If they were experts in Chinese cookery, they were also exemplary in their preparation of Western dishes.

The luncheon, in fact, was a huge success.

"I always like to suit any menus to the nationality of my guests," explained Dr. Foo Chow, who presided with charming courtesy. "I have done my simple best to prepare this meal in a manner that will gratify you all, but I fear that it is but a poor beginning. Doubtless, as the days pass, these little defects will be remedied. I trust you will forgive the crudities of this initial effort."

"Really, Dr. Foo Chow, I think we can congratulate your chefs upon their excellent adroitness," smiled Nelson Lee.

The day passed peacefully, and by the time evening arrived the holiday party was feeling quite at ease. There was such an atmosphere of freedom here—such a feeling of security—that most of the younger members were almost forgetting the exact nature of their position.

They were allowed to go anywhere they pleased on the yacht—to play deck games, and to carry on exactly as they had done aboard the *Wanderer*. It was Dr. Foo Chow's wish that no change should make itself apparent.

Dinner was an even greater success than luncheon, and when bed-time came Dr. Foo Chow had thoroughly satisfied his guests that his efforts for their comfort were sincere. And Nelson Lee thought that he could divine the Chinaman's object. Although Foo Chow had no intention of releasing his prisoners, he nevertheless had every desire to please them.

In this way, perhaps, they would overlook the manner in which they had become his guests, and would be willing, later, to let bygones be bygones. He was only afraid of

them if they gained their liberty—and if he ill-treated them in captivity they would demand reprisals.

The night passed peacefully, and throughout the next day the yacht continued to steam onwards, with Dorrie's captive craft in close attendance. There was only one change on this second day, and then not until dusk had fallen. All members of the party discovered that the decks were forbidden. Every door was guarded, and every stairway was protected by sentries. It was even impossible to gain a glimpse into the dusk, for coverings had been placed over every window and porthole.

"What's the idea?" asked Fullwood curiously.

"Goodness knows!" said Winnie Pitt, who was with him. "Perhaps there's something special going on," she added, looking eager. "I say, whatever does it mean? Are we going to hold up another ship, or something? Isn't it queer that we shouldn't be allowed to see out anywhere?"

"We're still steaming at the same rate, too," said Fullwood.

He looked at one of the guards. This man had plainly indicated, by barring the way, that the guests were to remain within.

"What does this mean?" asked Fullwood.

"No go out," replied the sentry stolidly.

"Yes, but why can't we go out?"

"Excellency give orders," replied the man.

"What's going to happen, then?"

"No go out," said the sentry, with the same stolid air.

"It's no good, Fully—you'll get nothing out of him," said Church, coming up with McClure. "We've just been having a shot at one of the other beggars, and we can't get a word out of him. I shouldn't be surprised if something big is in the wind. This tranquility is too good to last long!"

"Let's go and tell Handy," suggested McClure.

They went off, and found other members of the party equally mystified regarding this unexpected "bottling up" business. What earthly reason could Dr. Foo Chow have for blinding every doorway, window, and porthole? What was there that must be enshrouded from the eyes of these prisoners?



CHAPTER 13.

HANDY'S LATEST.

CHURCH and McClure paused in the doorway of their state room and stared. Edward Oswald Handforth had just been dressing for dinner—for all the personal belongings of the holiday party had been transferred from the *Wanderer*—and now he was deliberately eating an orange.

There was nothing startling in this fact. But Handforth was, frankly, making the most disgusting sounds as he champed his teeth



Coolies from every side swum down on the drifting boat. Handy, Church and McClure lashed out in a desperate effort to beat them off, while Yung Ching fought like a little yellow madman. Handy & Co. had found the Chinese junior—but could they get him away?

upon the fruit. He smacked his lips, gasped, and generally behaved like a particularly ill-bred hog.

"I say, Handy, chuck it!" said Church, frowning.

"What's the idea of making all that ghastly noise?" demanded McClure. "Can't you eat an orange more decently, like a human being?"

Handforth gave his lips a final smack of sheer gluttony.

"There's nothing like a bit of practice," he said calmly. "As a matter of fact, I've been having a word with Mr. Stokes this afternoon, and he gave me a few tips about the Chinese. We've been doing everything wrong, my lads. The correct way to please a Chinaman at a banquet is to smack your lips in appreciation, and make every disgusting noise you can think of."

"You—you hopeless chump——"

"So, in future, we've got to make an alteration," went on Edward Oswald. "In order to please our host, we must adopt Chinese customs. Don't forget this little tip at dinner-time. Follow my example, and you'll be all right."

His chums stared in horror.

"Are you going to make that horrible noise at dinner-time?" asked Church, aghast.

"Just to please our host? Are you particularly keen on pleasing Dr. Foo Chow?"

Handforth frowned.

"Foo Chow is a crook," he said darkly. "One of these days I'm going to unmask him, too, and make him give us our liberty."

But that's not the point. It's the principle of the thing that matters. Whether Foo Chow's a rotter or not, he's our host. And it's our duty to conform to Chinese customs."

"By making noises at meals like a set of well-satisfied gourmands?" asked Church.

"No, I apologise to the gourmands," he added sarcastically. "There's no self-respecting gourmand in the world who makes sounds like you were making just now, Handy. You're dotty!"

"I tell you that the Chinese are insulted unless you snack your lips and make those sounds at a meal," declared Handforth firmly. "They think you're not enjoying the grub they've given you."

His chums were thoroughly exasperated.

"I've heard something of the sort," said McClure tartly. "But that only applies among the real natives, where European habits haven't penetrated. Dr. Foo Chow is like one of us in most things. He'd be horribly offended if you acted like a pig at the dinner-table!"

"Well, we won't discuss the matter," put in Church hurriedly. "We came down to tell you, Handy, that all the exits to the deck are barred, and nobody is allowed outside. We can't even see through a porthole. In my opinion, it means something fishy."

"You must be dreaming," said Handforth, with a sniff.

He went to the porthole, and looked out. The electric light in the cabin was switched on, for it was now nearly dark. For a moment Handforth stood there, thinking that the night

had completely shut down. Then he saw that a thick cover had been placed over the outside of the porthole.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he ejaculated.

"They're all like that," said Church. "We can go about as we like in the saloon and the lounges, and all that, but we can't go on deck. We're properly bottled-up to-night for some reason."

Handforth looked excited.

"There's something on!" he said tensely.

"I knew it! Didn't I tell you chaps, five minutes ago, that Foo Chow was planning something awful for to-night?"

"I don't remember it," said his chums, in unison.

"You should listen, then!" retorted Handforth tartly. "I've suspected this all day. Why are we being hemmed in and prevented from seeing? I'll tell you! Because Foo Chow means to do something that we mustn't see!"

"Marvellous!" said McClure approvingly.

"Good old Trackett Grim!" grinned Church. "Tell us something we don't know!"

Handforth started.

"Anyhow, Foo Chow needn't think that he's going to keep me bottled-up!" he said contemptuously. "I'm going straight out, and I'm going to walk on deck. Anybody who tries to stop me will feel the weight of my fist."

"I tell you all the doors are guarded," insisted Church.

"Then I'll get a drill, and bore a whacking great hole in the side of this cabin," said Handforth, who was never at a loss. "That'll be the best way, in fact. Then we shall be able to see what's going on without Foo Chow's men knowing anything about it."

"My hat! What a chap you are for unique ideas!" said Church, exasperated. "Where do you think you're going to get a drill? And how do you suppose you can bore through steel plates? And what about the thickness between the cabin wall and the outer shell? Why, even if you did bore a hole you wouldn't be able to see more than an inch of the sea at once. For goodness' sake, chuck up these fantastic ideas and—"

"There goes the gong for dinner," interrupted McClure.

The argument was closed, and Handforth came to the conclusion that it would be better to leave all adventures until the meal was over. Just at the moment he was keen upon trying his latest concession to Chinese custom. Even if the other fellows were ignorant, there was no reason why he should be!

Dr. Foo Chow was as polite and urbane as ever as his guests seated themselves at the snowy white tables.

"I crave your indulgence, ladies and gentlemen, for this brief spell of confinement," he said, with regret. "Let me impress upon you that there is nothing whatever to fear. I deplore my inability to explain, but I need hardly mention that the precaution distresses me greatly. On the morrow you will have the freedom of the yacht as usual."

Nobody thought of questioning him. In spite of Foo Chow's genial manner, there was something about him which plainly indicated that questions would be useless. And they preferred to appear indifferent, too, no matter what their actual feelings were.

"Heavens!" murmured Irene presently. "Listen to Ted!"

"Is he ill?" asked Reggie Pitt wonderingly.

They were not the only ones who gazed curiously at Edward Oswald Handforth. The soup had been reached, and Handforth was doing full justice to it. Judging by the sounds he made, the soup was particularly tasty. He not only made terrible noises as he partook of it, but he smacked his lips with the most exaggerated appreciation.

"Sounds just like a river going through a sluice!" said Stevens, of the Fifth. "What on earth's the matter with the young beggar? The disgusting sweep!"

"I deplore this gratuitous insult to the sweeping fraternity, Brother Horace," said Browne, frowning. "I imagine that Brother Handforth is suffering from one of his customary delusions."

"It's a rag!" said Fullwood angrily. "Handy's doing it just to insult the host! Dash it, I gave him credit for better manners!"

Comments were flowing freely up and down the table. For Handforth was becoming more and more violent in his facial exercises.

"Odds slurs and libels!" murmured Archie Glenthorne, in keen agony. "This sort of thing is absolutely too frightfully frightful for words! I mean to say, it's a reflection on the good old Remove! This foul chappie is absolutely giving us a bad name!"

"Chuck it, Handy!" muttered Church fiercely.

Handforth finished his soup, smacked his lips again, and pushed his plate away.

"Jolly fine, you chaps!" he commented loudly.

"I am complimented by this attempt to conform to Chinese customs," said Dr. Foo Chow amiably. "It gives me keen pleasure to know that at least one of my guests is doing his best to act according to the best Chinese traditions."

"There you are!" said Handforth triumphantly.

"At the same time," purred the host, "it will be better, I think, if our young friend reverts to the more refined and graceful habits of Europe. We, of China, are but poor heathens in many respects, and I have never regretted my conversion to British deportment. I am Chinese, but I pride myself that my education is thoroughly cosmopolitan."

ANSWERS
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NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"HANDFORTH TAKES A CHANCE!"

Handy is fed up!

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Over the drawbridge—and a sheer drop of hundreds of feet to the torrent below! Handy is taking a real chance this time! Look out for this cover next Wednesday.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

Handforth looked rather crestfallen, and for the remainder of the meal he toned down his manifestations. And later on he was chipped unmercifully by the Removites and Irene & Co. In the end he had to flee to his cabin to escape the laughter.

"That's all you get for being polite," he said bitterly, as Church and McClure followed him. "Even old Foo Chow didn't seem to appreciate it. Blow his rotten Chinese customs! I'm fed-up!"

"Take my advice, Handy, and leave China alone," suggested McClure, grinning. "People who have lived in China all their lives can't get used to the native ways, so it's no good us trying to have a shot. China is a land of rummy contradictions——"

"I don't want a lecture from you!" interrupted Handforth tartly. "We're going to have a look outside now, to see what's going on. Follow me, and we'll soon slip past these guards."

But it was easier said than done. Every doorway they approached was bolted and

barred, in addition to being protected by Foo Chow's uniformed soldiers. The Chinese millionaire seemed to have an endless supply of men at his disposal. Nelson Lee even suspected that the majority of these had been taken on board quite recently from another vessel that had come out to meet the *Dragon*. They had certainly not been in evidence when Dorrie's search-party had attempted to find Yung Ching.

Handforth's determination was wasted. In two instances he entered into a violent scrap with the sentries, but he was always frustrated. The Chinamen forced him back firmly, but made no attempt to harm him. In the finish he was hot and flustered, and amazed.

"These giddy beggars of Foo Chow's are one too many for me," he confessed blankly. "By George, I'm beginning to have a bit more respect for old Chow! When he gives an order, he means it!"

"It's a pity you didn't realise that at first," said Church. "It's bed-time now,

and the best thing you can do is to get to sleep. Perhaps there'll be something fresh in the wind to-morrow."

McClure was looking thoughtful.

"There's something going on now," he remarked. "Haven't you felt how we've slowed down? We're only creeping forward, and I fancy I've heard lots of voices outside. It's my opinion we're near land."

Handforth scoffed.

"Rats!" he said firmly. "Foo Chow wouldn't dare to take us anywhere near land—we should escape too quickly. No; it's my opinion——"

But Church and McClure were not interested in Handforth's weird opinions. They got into bed, and went to sleep, leaving their leader airing his views to his heart's content.



CHAPTER 14.

WHAT THE MORNING REVEALED.

GLENTHORNE stood at the porthole of his cabin and stared blankly out upon the morning. Phipps, his faithful valet—whose services Archie was allowed to retain—was dutifully standing by with the early cup of tea.

"I mean to say, what about it, Phipps?" asked Archie, turning in amazement, and screwing his monocle into his eye. "All this—this mass of land, as it were. The jolly old stuff appears to be surrounding us in vast quantities."

"Yes, sir," agreed Phipps. "There have evidently been some changes since last evening."

"Changes!" echoed Archie. "Odds transformations and mirages! Absolutely, laddie! I mean to say, when we were deprived of the good old view yesterday, we saw nothing but considerable vistas of the rolling ocean. And now—zing!—the rolling ocean has positively gone, and we find ourselves in the midst of greenery, and all that sort of stuff!"

"It is a remarkable change, sir," agreed Phipps. "The reason for our strange imprisonment is now obvious."

"What-ho!" said Archie. "I mean, eh? Well, of course, opinions differ, old tea-carrier! By the way, what about the price-less brew? Dash it, there's no need to hold it out of arm's length of the gasping young master!" He took the tea, and sipped it contentedly. "But what's this about imprisonment, and poisonous kindred subjects?"

"It becomes quite apparent, sir, why we were deprived from appreciating the general view."

"Absolutely not," said Archie firmly. "To a chappie like you, with brains billowing about in masses, these things are as clear as anything. But I'm dashed if I can follow, Phipps. I mean, why shouldn't we see the

jolly old landscape? I mean, if not last night, why now?"

"As far as I can judge, sir, I imagine that Dr. Foo Chow was reluctant to let us glimpse the actual point of entry."

"Point of entry?" said Archie. "I mean——"

"When dusk fell yesterday," proceeded Phipps, "there could be little doubt that we were approaching the coast. Dr. Foo Chow's methods of secrecy lead me to believe that this river is provided with a hidden channel."

"Good gad!"

"If it were merely an ordinary river mouth, known to Europeans in general, there would have been no object in screening it from our view," continued Phipps shrewdly. "Our host therefore entered the river mouth during the night, and nullified every possibility of our seeing the spot. We thus find ourselves steaming up this unknown river, probably many miles from the coast."

"But, dash it, why aren't we still all corked up?"

"Because it doesn't matter now, sir," said Phipps patiently. "It was the entrance that Foo Chow desired to conceal from us. This river is merely typical of many other rivers in China, so there is really no reason why we should remain below decks. That, at least, is how I read the position. It is quite possible that I may be wrong, sir, but I fancy not."

"Well, under the circumstances, old article, we'll do a little whizzing about in the bath-room, and then proceed to leap into our white flannels," said Archie briskly. "It seems to be clearly indicated that the young master is required on deck, to mingle with the other lads and lassies."

"Most of the young ladies and gentlemen are already up, sir," said Phipps.

Archie lost no time in getting dressed and hurrying up on deck. Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were standing near the rail, watching the scenery. They were as surprised as the younger members of the party. For none had expected this strange transformation.

The previous day they had been on the high seas; now the *Dragon* was proceeding up this wide river under her own steam, with the *Wanderer* close in her wake. The sea had vanished, and the two yachts were penetrating farther and farther inland.

Nelson Lee was of very much the same opinion as Phipps. It seemed only too palpable that this river was unknown to foreign navigators, and Dr. Foo Chow had taken measures to guard the secret of its mouth.

With almost illimitable resources at his disposal in the way of labour, this extraordinary Chinaman had probably made a deep channel in this wide river—a river which was possibly reported as unnavigable for anything except the clumsy native junks and other boats, with their flat bottoms.

Steamers never attempted a passage, since the river was charted as shallow.

But with a specially constructed secret channel, Dr. Foo Chow was able to bring his yacht straight out into the open sea from his own domains without approaching any of the coastal points where foreigners were to be found.

"Almost anything can happen in China, Dorrie," explained Lee. "Plenty of Europeans believe that they know everything that China can tell; but they are wrong. It is an amazing country, populated by an amazing race. We Europeans know only the China of the coast—and that imperfectly."

"They're a rummy crowd," agreed Dorrie, nodding. "Look at the life here, too. Why, the population is simply swarming! 'An' everythin' is goin' on just the same as it did thousands of years ago. Queer thing how these Chinese detest any hint of progress. The clock might have gone back a score of centuries."

He was watching the panorama with keen interest. Farther along the rail the St. Frank's boys and the Moor View girls were enthralled, too. Nobody seemed to remember that they were all prisoners in Dr. Foo Chow's grip. They could not help feeling that they were still the same merry holiday party, here for a glimpse of an unsuspected Eastern world.

"Why, it's simply wonderful!" exclaimed Mary Summers breathlessly.

"Look at the rice-fields!" said Dick Hamilton, pointing. "Look at those bamboo woods over there, too. In some ways these landscapes are a bit like old England."

"My hat, it's good to see land again, anyhow," remarked Reggie Pitt.

The river was broad and smooth, although the current was running fairly swiftly. All along the banks were the junks and sampans, teeming with life. These people who lived on the river were almost like a race apart, dwelling entirely on their overcrowded craft. Some were sailing, others were anchored, and some were being laboriously poled along against the current.

As far as the eye could see, in every direction, the countryside was populated. There were no vast tracts of country, but villages and houses were to be seen everywhere. The population of China is enormous, and in spite of the great republic's size, there are very few barren sections, particularly in the south.

The fields looked ridiculously tiny, but there was a general air of industry everywhere. The Chinese swarmed in extraordinary numbers, many of them carrying heavy baskets, swung from either end of a long pole. There appeared to be no wheeled vehicles of any kind. Occasionally one could get a glimpse of a sedan chair being carried by coolies. Some rich merchant, possibly, travelling from one riverside town to another.

"These fields look like allotments," re-

marked Handforth wonderingly. "And what's growing in them, anyhow?"

"Those things with the dark leaves are taro plants," smiled Nelson Lee, who was close at hand. "Farther away you can see, on the dry ground, pineapples and sugar-canes. There are plenty of sweet potatoes, too. And the rice-fields are quite distinctive."

These latter were mostly separated with pathways, and along these hurried all manner of people. The fields themselves were fresh and green, and rather deceptive. For, actually, they were slimy with wet, deep mud.

"But—but it's all so primitive!" exclaimed Irene in surprise. "Look at those two men with the bucket over there. Isn't that some old-fashioned method of pouring water into the dykes?"

"Chinese irrigation!" grinned Dorrie. "These people wouldn't give you a brass farthing for modern methods, even if you offered them. Those two chaps are quite content to carry on like that. They just let the bucket down into the water, pull it up with the rope, and then empty it into the mud channel. It's slow, but it's certainly sure!"

"But wouldn't they rather have modern machinery, sir?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"Not they!" said Dorrie. "Before long you'll find out that these Chinese are hide-bound in their conservatism. What was good enough for their ancestors is good enough for them!"

"I don't suppose there are any wild animals here," said Handforth, with disappointment. "I always thought China was a wild sort of place, not populated like this. I thought they all smoked opium, too——"

"A good proportion do smoke opium, but not in the open, during their daily round of work," chuckled Nelson Lee. "And there's quite a chance that you might meet a tiger, young 'un, if you took a walk through some of the distant rice-fields or bamboo-woods during the dusk."

The yacht continued to plug steadily onwards, past open stretches of country, villages, and riverside towns. And everywhere the coolies were in great evidence—working on the land, and in other directions. Curiously enough, the natives did not appear to take much interest in the passing yachts—marvels of modern shipbuilding craft amid these primitive surroundings. They were evidently accustomed to the *Dragon*.

But where was this journey actually leading?



CHAPTER 15.

ANOTHER SURPRISE.

T

HE heat was almost unbearable towards midday, for the sun was practically overhead. Fortunately there were awnings to protect the guests from the fiercely burning rays.

The natives ashore were amply protected by their big, quaint, bamboo hats—curiously reminiscent of the figures on a willow-pattern plate. Everybody appeared to be dressed in cotton material, the prevailing tint being blue. And poverty appeared to be the keynote everywhere. These teeming thousands were all working hard, but there was not much sign of prosperity. A valley stretched away into the distance, where a little tributary wound its course between the hills. Great stretches of young rice could be seen, patch upon patch of vivid green in long chains, sometimes going up the hillsides in steps. For the Chinese believe in utilising every available inch of ground for cultivation.

The villages were scattered in countless profusion. They could be seen nestling between the dark banyan trees, with their brown-tiled roofs gleaming dully in the sunshine. And here were orange groves, fields of sugar-cane, and the inevitable rice-fields once more. Among the pine-trees on the hill-tops could be seen an occasional temple, with its curiously tip-tilted roof. Indeed, most of the buildings appeared to have the roof corners tilted upwards.

"I wonder why all the houses are built like that?" asked Irene.

"To scare the evil spirits away," grinned Fullwood. "I've read all about it, you know. The Chinese are terribly superstitious, and they seem to think that a straight roof would encourage the demons. So they're all curly, as a measure of protection."

"How extraordinary!" said Winnie Pitt.

"You'll notice other rummy things, too," said Fullwood. "Most of the houses look picturesque, but I'll bet they're not very comfortable. Look at those houses over there—showy and ornamental, but so badly built that no English architect would own to them!"

Fullwood was quite right in this remark. Most of the houses were straggling, one-storied buildings. And there were no windows facing the outer view. All the windows were built so that they looked out upon the inner courtyard. And in every case the eaves were curled up. In the towns and villages—where the population was generally packed like sardines—row upon row of these mean houses were of the same uniform height. If any reckless Chinese dared to build a house higher than the average he would immediately invite the wrath of the evil spirits!

This pandering to superstition was evident on all sides. Most of the court-yard houses had grotesque, hideously-carved monsters at the entrance. Great gargoyles, frightful in every way to European eyes—but entirely ordinary to the Chinese. For they were placed there with the set purpose of terrifying the evil spirits and protecting the homes.

Towards mid-afternoon the *Dragon* swept round a bend of the river, and passed through another thickly populated city.

From the deck the streets could be seen—dark and narrow, almost like tunnels; for the streets were overhung with awnings of mats, stretched along bamboos from roof to roof. And everywhere there was an indefinable air of squalid poverty. To the St. Frank's party, the scenes were interesting, but they could not help feeling a little depressed. There was so much of an unpleasant nature. Beggars, indescribably filthy; refuse heaps in the streets, giving forth noxious odours; and a hundred and one evidences of the most primitive form of life. Not one indication was seen of modern civilisation as we know it in Great Britain.

"It seems almost impossible!" said Dick Hamilton soberly. "If they liked, the Chinese could be as progressive as any other nation; but they prefer this antediluvian life. There's no real sanitation—no drainage system—nothing! They just carry on now as they always did. Why, China was like this when England was filled with roaming beasts, before we had any civilisation at all. And the Chinese keep to exactly the same methods century after century!"

"Yes, it is strange, is it not?" said a soft voice.

Dick turned, and Dr. Foo Chow was there.

"Only a few of us move with the times," he went on. "In some ways it is well. I am a progressive Chinaman, and I prefer modern life in accordance with European custom. Perhaps I am unpopular for that reason. My people fear me. They consider that I am outraging the habits of my country. But I prefer them to remain primitive. They are easier to deal with."

Dick and the other juniors said nothing. They could easily guess why Dr. Foo Chow preferred his people to be as they were. He was able to treat them as serfs and slaves, and grind them down in every possible way. Enlightenment of the people would have been bad for this cultured war lord, for they would have arisen and overthrown him. While they remained primitive they were as pawns in his cunning hands. And their millions gave him his power. On every hand there were countless thousands of these lives at Foo Chow's service.

Handforth & Co., leaning over the rail farther along the deck, were engaged in one of their little arguments. Handforth was evolving a brilliant method of escape, and Church and McClure were doing their utmost to scotch it.

"I tell you it's feasible!" insisted Edward Oswald. "At a given signal we'll all leap over the rail and swim ashore."

"Just the three of us?" asked Church, glaring.

"No, you ass—everybody!" said Handforth eagerly. "We'll pass the word round, and we'll all be ready at a certain fixed minute. One leap, and we're over, and after a short swim we're ashore. How's that?"

"Marvellous!" said McClure. "As a first-class scheme for jumping out of the frying-

pan into the fire it's the finest thing I've ever heard."

"Eh?" said Handforth with a start.

"You hopeless chump!" growled McClure irritably. "What's the good of us escaping from the yacht in a swarming countryside like this? Why, by the time we got ashore there'd be about a thousand natives waiting to grab us! Within ten minutes we should be back on the yacht, our clothing ruined; and Foo Chow would probably lock us up to prevent a second attempt."

"H'm!" muttered Handforth, frowning. "Perhaps you're right."

"It's no good thinking of impossible things," said Church. "Of course, we could all swim ashore at a given signal, Handy. Nothing easier. But what would be the good? I say, look down there," he added, in order to change the conversation. "One of those shutters is defective."

"What shutters?" asked Handforth.

He stared down to the spot where Church was pointing. Church meant nothing by it. He only wanted to get his leader on another line of talk. And that imperfect shutter offered a good excuse.

The juniors had already noticed that all the portholes were provided with sliding steel attachments, which could be pulled over the ports by some mechanical device. Normally they were almost invisible. It was generally agreed that Foo Chow had had them built so that the yacht could proceed during the hours of darkness with all her lights obliterated. This vessel was no ordinary pleasure yacht, as she professed to be.

"I can't see the thing," said Handforth grumpily. "Oh, down there, you mean? Yes, that one seems to be jammed," he added with interest. "It's almost on the water-line, too. One of the store-rooms, I suppose."

"Just below our own cabin, too," remarked McClure. "That's our cabin port immediately above it, Handy. I say, let's go down and have a close look. It might be useful to know the exact position of that porthole later on."

Handforth agreed grudgingly, but his chums were satisfied. They had succeeded in getting him away from the other subject. As for the defective shutter, they weren't interested in it at all. It had only been pointed out as a means to an end.

There was no interference with the guests' liberties now—they were free to go where they pleased about the yacht. Handforth & Co. went to their cabin, and then passed down an iron stairway to the deck lower—which was beyond the limit of the highly decorated accommodation quarters. Here the carpeted corridors and exquisite cabins gave place to iron passages and store-rooms. Drab paint was on the walls, and only an occasional electric light gleamed.

The chums of Study D had no difficulty in locating the porthole they had seen from the promenade deck. It belonged to a dis-

used refrigerator-room, and the heavy port itself not only opened freely, but the shutter was heavily jammed. During some rough weather the sea had probably caused this effect. Handforth & Co. returned to their own quarters without adventure.

"What's the good of the place to us, anyhow?" demanded Edward Oswald. "Just like you fatheads to take me down there on a fool's errand! Let's go on deck again, and see what's happening."

Church and McClure were quite satisfied, for their object had been achieved. And, although they had only been below a comparatively short time, a great change was apparent in the scenery. The yacht had entered a wide gorge, where the current became swift and ugly. In many respects the river was almost a rapid, but the powerful engines of the *Dragon* were making light work of this handicap. The *Wanderer* was still steadily following, safe in the hands of her Chinese pilot, who knew the uncharted channel as accurately as the *Dragon's* own skipper.

And after another hour had elapsed, when dusk was falling, the last sign of human habitation had gone. Nothing but vast masses of rock frowned down upon the travellers—enormous formations which rose on either hand with towering majesty.

And a little farther ahead these rocks formed a complete barrier, the river rushing out of a low opening with fearful force. This, then, was the end of the journey? For it was impossible for any ship to get beyond that rock wall.

And then came an order. All prisoners were to be confined below! And once again the decks were forbidden, the ports were shuttered, and mystery enveloped the whole affair.

What was in the wind now?



CHAPTER 16.

A THRILLING ADVENTURE.

HANDFORTH gave a sudden start, and stared at Church and McClure, with a light of excitement gleaming in his eyes.

"By George!" he breathed. "I've just thought of an idea!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "Another?"

They were in their own cabin, preparing for bed, and all the other guests were similarly engaged. Two hours had passed, during which time dinner had been served, and Dr. Foo Chow had again expressed his regrets that he should be compelled to confine them.

"This is an idea of absolute brilliance!" went on Handforth modestly. "You remember how I discovered that loose shutter before dinner?"

"I remember how I discovered it!" said Church tartly.

"Well, that empty store-room is just below here, and I'll bet the iron ladder in the bulkhead at the end of this passage is unguarded. Let's creep down and get to that porthole! The shutter's jammed, and we shall be able to see out."

Church and McClure stared at him with growing excitement.

They crept out of the cabin, and glanced up and down.

Luck was with them. They found the iron door unguarded, and the stairs leading down into the bowels of the yacht were black.

Handforth & Co. were trembling with excitement as they felt their way down to the store-room. A patch showed itself opposite—the porthole, with the shutter out of position.

"We were right!" muttered Church breathlessly. "We can see here!"

They crowded to the porthole, and Handforth opened it, swinging the cumbersome frame back fully.

In the moonlight they could see the rocks towering up, and the *Dragon* was forcing her way against the current with grim determination.

"Look!" breathed Handforth.

Church and McClure were too amazed to make any comment. That enormous wall, weighing thousands of tons, was being raised! Slowly but surely, it was being hoisted upwards, and the yacht was making for the opened passage. Beyond lay a swirling mass of waters, surrounded by frowning crags.

And even the methods employed were apparent to the juniors. On both sides of the river were thousands and thousands of coolies, hauling and sweating at ropes. This mass of rock was being lifted by sheer man-power—a primitive kind of lock, worked entirely by manual labour! Such labour was at a discount here, for Dr. Foo Chow could demand as many thousands as he desired.

"Where are we going to?" whispered Handforth wonderingly. "We all thought the river ended here, but it's still navigable further on."

"Look over there!" murmured Church, pointing.

Near the shore was a motor-boat, moored to a little landing-stage. Several men were near by, apparently waiting to get in the boat at the right moment. When that rock barrier was lifted higher, the water would probably become smoother. And the motor-boat was to lead the way into the unknown region beyond. The *Dragon* was only creeping forward at a scarcely perceptible speed, although her engines were working with high power.

"My goodness!" muttered Church suddenly. "What's that up there?"

A figure had suddenly appeared high above, outlined against the sky on that moving wall! The figure was a small one, and there was something in its attitude which hinted at desperate intent. Something else, too—some-

thing which struck a familiar chord in the minds of the watching St. Frank's trio.

"It's Yung Ching!" shouted Handforth abruptly.

The figure had suddenly stiffened. Other figures came running up, and grasped at him.

Leaping desperately, he came downwards swiftly—into the rapidly flowing current of the river. Handforth & Co. caught a glimpse of him as he was swept down. Then he caught against the motor-boat, held, and pulled himself in.

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth. "Come on! Rescue, Remove!"

Before his chums could stop him, Handforth had wormed his way out, and had dropped into the river. Without a second's hesitation, Church and McClure followed. They were caught in a fierce eddy, which swirled them relentlessly towards the rocky bank and fully into the path of the motor-boat.

For this was free now, and was coming down on the current, with Yung Ching fighting desperately to beat off a number of coolies who were attempting to climb on board.

A moment later, three fresh figures clung to the drifting boat, and they hauled themselves in. Yung Ching stared at them, with joy and amazement in his eyes.

"Handy!" he gasped. "You here?"

"All of us!" replied Handforth, spluttering. "Crowds of us, old son! We've come to rescue you——"

"St. Frank's come to rescue me!" repeated Yung Ching, as though stunned. "I try to escape, but they catchee me. They takee me back to torture. One week and then——"

He broke off, for it was necessary to fight again. Other Chinamen were in the water, ready to put an end to this incident. Dr. Foo Chow's methods were swift and drastic. Fully a hundred men had been ordered into the river—much as they hated the ordeal—to pull the runaway boat to the bank by force.

Half an hour later, Handforth & Co. had been put on board the *Dragon* again—and this time they were provided with a powerful guard. Yung Ching had vanished into the night, held by his relentless captors. But during that brief interlude a wonderful thing had happened. For Yung Ching knew that his friends were here, waiting for their opportunity to rescue him.

And Dr. Foo Chow's yacht, carrying her load of unwilling guests, continued onwards into the gorge—into the very heart of this Chinese potentate's own domain. Already he had shown his fangs—already he had proved that he was a man of grim, unswerving determination.

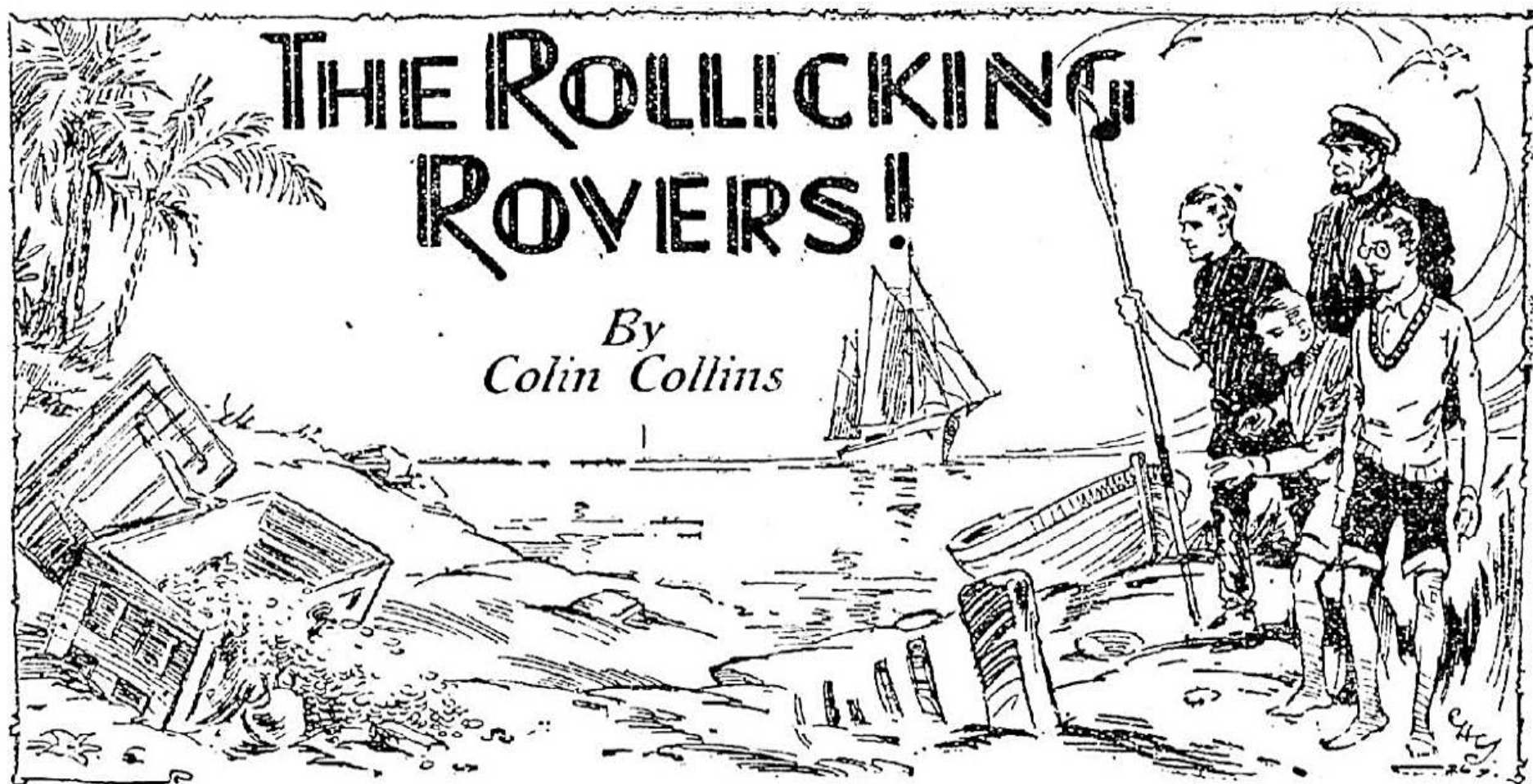
What would he do with his "guests" when he got them into his own stronghold?

THE END.

Handy distinguishes himself by some daring escapades in next week's grand long complete story of the Boys of St. Frank's in China, "HANDFORTH TAKES A CHANCE."

The Isle of Caves!

Start This Yarn To-day



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

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, who tells them of a chest concealed beneath a tree in their uncle's garden. They dig up the chest and find that it contains documents, a mummified head and hands! The papers are examined, and it is decided to accompany Ben on the Saucy Ann in a world quest

for the lost treasure. But there is a member of the crew named FOXEY, whom they do not trust, and it is arranged to leave him behind. In due course, the adventurers set off on the Saucy Ann, with a mysterious stowaway aboard. Strange ghostly manifestations occur, and the ship is believed to be haunted. They call at Boulogne, and then proceed to the Isle of Koba, off the African coast. A full account of their startling adventures on this island of wonderful caves in search of the hidden treasure is told in this week's thrilling instalment.

(Now read on.)

The Strange Island.

"THERE it is—there it is!"

The three young adventurers had climbed up into the rigging of the Saucy Ann to get the first glimpse of Koba Island.

Ben had spotted land, and there was a free fight for the binoculars, and Fatty got the first grab. He scrambled up a rope-ladder with his prize, and yelled in his excitement:

"Yes, there it is—there it is!"

The others were after him, and took the glasses in turn.

"There's the palace," cried Bob, "and I can see the gun on top!"

"And there are the volcanic interstices in the rocks below," Goggles announced.

"The whatsticies?" asked Fatty, always scornful of his cousin's scientific pretensions and love of long words.

"The caves," Goggles explained.

"Then why didn't you say so? But you can't see caves all this long way off."

"Yes, you can," Ben informed him. "That long, black, pointed arch on the left is the cathedral."

"The cathedral?" asked Bob. "Are they as civilised as all that? We thought they were savages and cannibals."

Ben chuckled, and explained that it was the name their uncle had given to the great cave, tall enough for a ship to sail into and anchor, and wide enough to shelter a small fleet.

The island was still miles away, and there was work to be done to make the ship ready for anchorage. The near prospect of touching land once more sharpened them all up. The lads, in their bare feet and jerseys, set to in true sailor fashion.

"It was when we first visited Koba Island, years and years ago," Ben told them, "that your uncle got into his head the crazy idea that we might raise a tidy sum on a cargo of pumice-stone alone, chipping it out of the caves straight into the ship—just a cargo of something for nothing, 'cept the chipping. Them caves is all pumice-stone, and it powders beautiful."

"You'll be able to clean your teeth and polish your nails for nothing now, Goggles," chipped Fatty.

The only one of the three who did not take keenly to the rough work of the ship was

Goggles, and they were always getting at him about it.

"Pumice-stone powder is neither used for teeth nor nails," said Goggles with great scorn. "It is a commodity in demand for polishing metals."

"What about that signal-gun, Ben?" asked Bob, when they drew nearer, and could see the little whitewashed palace of the sheik.

"They'll let it off as soon as they see us. I know the range. We'll shorten sail and stand outside till they welcome us with a cannon-ball, then slip in with our engine going and pop under."

Goggles was busy with the field-glasses.

"I see men moving on the top of that white place."

"They're loading," chuckled Ben. "It takes 'em ten minutes between shots. Get busy and let her swing for a minute. Run up the flag and wave the British Navy's pocket handkerchief."

There was very little wind. The rippling music of the waves on the ship's bow died down, and they lay to, a brazen sun overhead, and little puffs of hot wind coming off the island as from a furnace.

Boom!

The boys all jumped, and Ben yelled to them to duck. He roared with laughter to see them drop on their faces on deck. The whizzing old ball fell short, but unpleasantly near.

Thud went the auxiliary, and the screw began to churn the waters. The sheik and his men ashore beheld a sailing-ship without a sail steal shorewards—rather startling, that!

One effect of the gun was suddenly to rouse to life every native on the island. From holes in the spongy mountains, and from a thousand places along the cliff black figures began to appear, racing to and fro like ants. From out the caves dashed canoes full of wildly-paddling men.

It was easy now to mark the extraordinary formation of this "island on stilts," as it has sometimes been described. The sea seemed to have attempted to burrow underneath and wash it all away. In places pillars appeared to be driven into the sea, like piles under a pier, to support the mass above; where there were no towering columns there were arches, mightier than any ever fashioned by man.

The nearer one drew towards the shore the greater the size of the caves. The base of the island seemed cavernous when viewed from afar; seen at close quarters, it looked as if the land, at some far distant period, had been attacked by mammoth excavators intent upon burrowing into the interior.

Ancient legend accredited this place with being no ordinary island, but a piece of fallen star that dropped from the skies red-hot and boiled the sea around it for a thousand years; so that the waters in these parts, to this day, stand at a higher temperature than at any other place near the Equator.

This was one of Ben's yarns, which Goggles received with a shrug and eyebrows lifted, in pity for the poor fellow's ignorance.

"Under-water volcanic action," he observed to the others for their edification.

On close inspection the island proved a more pleasant place. The cavernous cliffs were of many colours; rich emerald green vegetation tipped the ridges and the rolling land as with soft moss. Date palms grew in the ravines; water trickled to the sea in silver rills. High up on the peak of the old volcano that formed the centre of the island, little patches of snow testified to the height of the mountain, which, from the distant sea, was but a slope in the middle. Yet a pale blue smoke circled from the crater's mouth further inland still.

"How big is this island?" Bob asked.

"About thirteen miles across," announced Ben. Then he added: "It's time for me to go and put on my brass buttons and pin a little gold braid round my hat. They don't think nothing of nobody in this place unless they're togged up. And I'm going to send up a rocket."

"A rocket! What for?" they all demanded in chorus.

"Just to let 'em know we've got a little powder aboard. You'll see why in a minute."

Now the sea was alive with canoes and catamarans filled to overflowing with glistening black and brown niggers. They were converging on the ship in hundreds, like an attacking fleet. If they all came aboard they would sink the ship.

"I say," cried Fatty, turning a little pale, "oughtn't we to have our revolvers? They've got bows and arrows."

"Those aren't bows—they're fishing-rods," Goggles declared, but he was looking round for some place of retreat, in case the fishermen should happen to want him for bait!

"Some have arrows—I can see them," Bob observed. "I wish Ben would tell us what to do. They're coming nearer."

Whiz! Whistle! Bang!

Something shot from somewhere and screamed over the heads of the occupants of the crowding boats. Every craft turned tail and fled for shore.

The lads laughed now at the magic of Ben's rocket.

There was no harbour at Koba, only a natural pool formed by a ring of great slimy rocks, which led to the wharf below the sheik's mud palace. This building looked like a fortress of impregnable strength. On the lower terrace a white-robed figure stood alone, surveying the intruders. Above the wall of the upper terrace the heads of his bodyguard were peeping, ready with a few firearms of great length that looked more like spears than guns.

Whenever anybody on the deck of the Saucy Ann moved, the heads above ducked; but the sheik stood like a statue and stared.

Ben, on his little bridge, saluted.

The sheik nodded slowly, then signed to his army. They appeared out of a square hole

and joined him. Then they all marched down a slope with the governor at their head, and waited on the wharf.

"You're—not—going to land, Ben?" the boys asked nervously.

"What's that you've got in the basket?" demanded Bob.

"Bottles of whisky," whispered Ben. "If he shoots, we'll turn tail and bolt, and he won't get 'em. If we land, he will. Ah, he has spotted me! He remembers me."

The sheik woke to life and affability. He made a sweeping bow and salaamed.

The boat now swung round, and the boys could see no more; they were busy with ropes and fenders, mooring the craft to the primitive quay. Ben landed and again saluted with one hand, while the sheik saluted with two. More bobbing and bowing, and Ben presented his bottles to the chief.

The mahogany-faced, black-bearded ancient signed to his army to disperse. One man stayed behind, a wrinkled veteran, who, at a sign from the chief, announced that he was an interpreter and "speke English little."

His English was very little; so little it was nearly all French. But Ben, who was accustomed to talk to the deaf and dumb, was able to make the interpreter understand, by signs and loud shouting, that the Saucy Ann was a pleasure yacht, and the lads in it were working because they loved the life and found it amusing. They wanted to see the Isle of Caves.

The man flung up his hands to heaven in astonishment at such lunacy as loving work for work's sake. The English were all peculiar. The caves were there, and he guaranteed that the natives should respect the British visitors and the British flag.

— — Foxy Again!

THE native boats treated the governor's harbour with respect. They viewed the wonderful ship from a distance.

But when the lads, by Ben's orders, made their way along the shore to take in water for the ship the occupants of the canoes landed also and followed.

One—who looked like a chieftain, to judge by his wonderful head-dress of feathers, his nose-ring and ear-rings—advanced with a shield and spear to parley.

This—the lads' first sight of a savage in full war-paint—was not reassuring, although the spear-head pointed to earth. They fingered their revolvers as they went on their way, each carrying a small barrel. The chief followed, and when they revealed their object, the taking of water, the great nigger began a war-dance of protest.

"What are we to do?" Bob asked, pausing on the edge of the stream.

Goggles stood and stared at the nigger hard through his horn-rimmed spectacles. The effect was odd. The nigger gazed fascinated at the first white man with glass

windows to his eyes that he had ever faced. He stooped and peered through the windows, then turned to the trailing blacks behind and flapped his arms like wings.

He was plainly saying:

"This is a bird-man. Where are his wings?"

"I don't like the way the blighters are following us," whispered Fatty. "What's he flapping like that for?"

"He's challenging Goggles to fight," said Bob with a grin.

"Shall I shoot at him?" asked Goggles nervously.

"Better not. Show him your six-shooter, and see if he understands it."

The nigger understood. He had seen white men before. He dropped to the earth on his knees and beat the ground with his brow and hands—to denote submission.

"He's all right," said Fatty cheerily. "He's some sort of dancer, I fancy. Let's get our water."

Again the friendly chieftain danced disapproval, and Fatty, bending low over the pretty silver stream, that looked so lovely and inviting, to lap a double handful, fell back coughing and choking and dancing, too.

"Ugh! Sulphur!" he gurgled. "And it's hot!"

The chief's concern was now understood; this water was undrinkable and came from within the volcano. They must find another spring. The nigger led them this time, and got another and nearer look at the horn-rimmed spectacles; he seemed as fascinated as a child.

"It's your goggles he's after," laughed Bob.

Ben now came along with a couple of barrels and joined them, and, seeing the nigger bending over and peering into the face of the spectacled one, indignantly thrust him aside—just a push, and sent him sprawling on his face.

The enraged chieftain, with a howl, leaped up, but Ben had stooped and picked up his spear, and was pointing it at the nigger's chest. By the leap backwards of the frightened nigger, Ben found out what he wanted to know.

"Poisoned!" he growled, examining the spear-head. "Take care, you lads, and don't trust 'em."

Then, slipping a revolver from his belt, he banged at the ground in front of the nigger's feet. Away flew the gallant chief and all his following, returning helter-skelter to their canoes.

A little further on fresh water was found; and Dummy came along with more barrels. When all the vessels were filled they sat on them and smoked and rested, and enjoyed the novelty of ease on land after nearly three weeks at sea. The ship was in sight and safe; and they settled to a talk.

"And where next?" asked Bob.

"The cathedral, where your uncle took the ship; and that's where we lost him for a whole night."

"We shall go there by water?"

"Yes, we'll run in under power, and anchor there out of this blazin' sun."

It has been stated that the Saucy Ann was in sight; but her decks were high above the eye-level. And no sooner was Dummy gone ashore than the coil of rope over the trap that concealed the stowaway, Foxey Johnson, heaved up, and a head appeared, followed by a crawling body that slithered along the deck like a snake and took bearings.

Ben and his lads were settled ashore; the Saucy Ann was at the rascal's mercy. Foxey's movements were swift and peculiar.

He went to the nearest bunk and stole a sheet and a pillow-case. The pillow-slip he cut with his knife and wound round his head. The sheet he wrapped about his body and tied with a belt. In a few minutes, with the aid of a tin of brown boot polish, he was transformed into a very good imitation of a native.

Arming himself with a gun, a dagger and pistol from old Digby's curio shop, he might have passed for one of the sheik's retainers, and have walked into the mud palace unchallenged.

Over the ship's side he went and along the shore, out of sight of the fort, and further inland than the treasure-seekers, but in full view of them at a fair distance.

"Hallo!" cried Bob presently, looking up the hillside at the striding Moor. "One of the governor's men is on our track, and keeping us in view."

"All the more reason to get on board and out of sight, and enter the cathedral from the sea. He can't follow us there from the land," said Ben.

The lads would have loved to explore further inland; but the savage natives did not look safe. So back to the ship with their water, and, after a few more journeys, ready for food.

On their return from the fourth trip they found Dummy on board, dancing about the deck in a state of wild excitement. He beckoned Ben to him, and pointed to the litter of rags left purposely by Foxey.

"Some of those thieving natives must have crept aboard in our absence!" roared Ben. "What's bin taken?"

He dashed around, and the evidences of the raid were just what a travelled sailor in the tropics might have expected from primitive savages. Linen first and firearms next.

"Dang their eyes," he roared, "if they haven't been and taken my best sheets, and your uncle's jewelled Arab gun, and pistols and knives! Just nip round and see what else they've collared."

"Nothing else seems to be missing," Bob announced presently, "except some bully beef gone, and a tin of boot polish half-emptied."

"Ah, they've eaten the boot polish, have they?" cried Ben with savage satisfaction.

"I guess one nigger's got a pain under his pinafore by now!"

A most exhaustive search revealed nothing else gone but food. They came to the conclusion the thieves must have been disturbed.

"It only shows how artful they are," said Ben, "and it should be a lesson to you lads never to trust a thing out of your sight when savages is prowling!"

The Cavern of Mystery.

IT was resolved to leave the ship no more; at any rate, not without a watch.

The lads were eager for a visit to the "cathedral," and Ben agreed it would be better to enter it by day, in case the anchorage should be treacherous.

"The water was deep, if I recollect right," Ben told them, "but you never know—memories don't allus chart true. You, Mr. Bob, and you, Mr. Harold, had better keep for'ard and drop the lead, and take soundings every few yards. And you, Fatty, keep your eyes open as we go in for hatchet-marks."

"Hatchet-marks?"

"Yes; when your uncle hid anything he allus took an axe, and cut a cross here and there, 'cos when you get further on into the dark there ain't nothin' to tell you whether you're goin' in or comin' out. When he left the ship he took an axe with him, and a lantern."

"Let's get on at once," they all urged, the treasure fever growing anew and thrilling them once more. It seemed far more likely their uncle would choose a world-forgotten place like this for his hoard than a cellar in Boulogne.

"He was away all night, you say," said Goggles. "What were you doing that night?"

"Me and Foxey and the others was all asleep—at least, I was."

"Could he have got his treasure out of the ship alone?" asked Bob.

"He might. But he might have got Foxey to help him, or one of the others, though I never heard of it. You see, we sometimes dumped stores in cool places on an outbound trip, instead of carrying them around in the heat, and picked 'em up on the way back, when stores was runnin' short, or in case bad weather kept us out of port. You can't run a thousand miles round the corner to pop into a shop in these parts, young gentlemen!"

Once more they urged Ben to get a move on. But Ben was in no hurry. There was food to be prepared and eaten and water stored and many small things to do. It was late afternoon before they started.

The native craft followed at a distance for a mile, and then lagged behind. By that time there was no more shore landing, only mighty cliffs coming down in a sheer wall.

Soon the caves were reached, each one a monstrous, yawning hole going into pitch darkness.

Their wonder at the magnitude of these had scarcely died down when a jutting spur was rounded, and they came upon the entrance to the largest of all, a sight to set the heart throbbing with awe—the cathedral cave. An arch—some say the largest in the world—pointed at the top like a cathedral door, but high, so that the neck ached with searching for the top and the eyes dimmed.

The ship's bow was turned. They passed from gently lapping waves into a silent sheet of glassy water, the vessel seeming by comparison with its surroundings, just a little toy boat on a pond.

They looked up and grew dizzy at the entrance, and looked down to rest their eyes.

They looked up again, and the sky was gone. The world seemed to be roofed in with night, while the water below still glistened with the light coming in from the cloudless sky outside.

Ben's steering was done by memory, and keeping to the centre transept. Now the roof began to descend a little, till pillars of rock confronted them, barring the way.

To the right now, and into utter darkness. All lights were switched on.

Every sound of the engine could be heard distinctly. But the lights revealed no more than at sea on a pitch black night. Slowly, very slowly, they proceeded, with a sharp look-out for hidden rocks or obstacles.

When they had crept for nearly a mile a shout from one of the boys announced something ahead.

Dead slow now, and they stared at the thing that no native dared approach, and which they worshipped—the mystic "spirit" whom they had appointed their god.

At first it was truly alarming. It had all the appearance of a gigantic spider in a silver web; it was nothing more than an inflowing cascade of phosphorescent water charged with volcanic radio-active chemical. It broke into the cavern from some point in the roof—that is, from the surface of the island above—and its magic, shimmering glow was probably accentuated by rays of daylight coming through the cracks in the roof in the mountain side.

It gave off sound as well as light—a con-

tinuous hissing, exaggerated and echoed many times. Gushing from one bright centre, its arms, or legs, spurted in many directions, giving the quaint, live, spider-like aspect to the illusion; and the tributaries shivered and shook like the feelers of a giant silver octopus.

Ben had seen it before. The boys were impressed and awed to silence, and more than a little frightened by the amazing spectacle.

"Only water," shouted Ben. "Me and your uncle, when we first saw it, thought as it was quicksilver, and our fortunes was made. Keep a sharp look-out to the right, Mr. Bob; we are going to drop anchor where the water ends; it's an easy landing. Then look out for the marks on the rocks as I told you about."

But this was not the only way into the cathedral! There was a way in from above—a place known only to Uncle Digby—and Foxey Johnson.

That cunning gentleman was traversing the mountain side with his long Moorish gun flung over his shoulder and his cloak fluttering in the breeze.

FOXEY, in the garb of the Moorish conquerors of the island, was free from molestation by the natives, and secure from recognition by the visitors. His word was law—if he could have found words enough to make himself understood. He knew a few.

Foxey, on his way to the cathedral caverns, slipped up to the opening of a native hut and roared some words of command, which sounded impressive when accompanied by a commanding gesture. His words were actually:

"Now then, there, out of that—d'ye hear?"

To help along the illusion of authority he unslung his empty gun and motioned with it, beckoning them out.

Out crawled three lusty natives, who salaamed.

With a magnificent sweep of the arm, Foxey roared "Follow," and marched on a yard or two.

"D'yer hear, you black devils? After me!"

They understood, and tamely followed behind. Presently Foxey uttered the word "Carry," in the native dialect, and made signs of hoisting a burden on his shoulder.

(Continued on page 43.)

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*The League
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HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

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FORM No. 42.
SECTION
A
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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
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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.

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If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

THE ROLICKING ROVERS!

(Continued from page 41.)

They nodded. They understood that, too. They were accustomed to coolie work for their brown-skinned rulers—loading and unloading slave dhows sometimes. They would carry.

Foxy marched on, scrambling over the broken, rocky ground beneath which ran the mighty caves, picking his way with care, and looking eagerly for signs. At last he struck the path where, at every twenty yards, someone had hacked a cross on the soft lava stone.

The way lay down between boulders which hid them all from view until a winding track led to a wide hole a few feet wide.

This path led by easy stages to the very spot where Ben had resolved to anchor and search for the ledge where Digby might have hidden his treasure chest.

But Ben was not there yet. If he had been, it is unlikely that he would have detected the crawling figures, dropping lower and lower into the gloom, mere pygmies among the jagged boulders.

It was through this crevice that the mystic ray of light came in to fall upon the centre of the gushing cataract below. The beam made the descent easy, and, to the natives, this unknown tunnel looked very like a thousand others on the mountain side. Curiosity overcame their fear.

Down and down, hand over hand—always the way was steep, but always with something to cling to. Foxy grunted joyfully at each coarse landmark he discovered hacked on the boulders, some he had made himself.

A few feet more and he uttered a joyous cry, almost a howl. He stepped right down on to the great wooden chest which he and his master had deposited there some years before—he being silenced by a cunning pretence on the part of his skipper, for Digby had assured him this was a food dump to be hidden where no native dared venture.

Often before he had worked on jobs like this. Foxy recalled now that never before had any load been so heavy as this one. He attempted to lift the chest single-handed, and could scarcely shift it. He was about to call his niggers to come down lower when a weird, booming sound floated up—the echo of human voices.

He was too late!

He leaped away, clambered a few yards upwards out of sight, and signed to his niggers to lie

down and keep silent, upon pain of death. With one finger on his lip and another on his knife he made that quite plain.

There were several voices now; and Ben's loudest of all.

"Up the slope—there are marks all the way," he heard him say.

"Here's another!" cried Bob.

"I've found one higher yet," added Fatty. "And there's daylight ahead, coming down a hole. My, what a way up we've climbed! He could never have carried a box up here alone! Why, look! Here it is!"

A yell of excitement announced the discovery of the chest at last, and Fatty beat his fists on it to convince those below. The others came up, Ben last of all, and bent over the dark thing, examining it by the light of the lantern.

If they had known it, they were never nearer to death than at that moment.

The foiled and enraged rascal above fingered his knife and calculated his chances of one against four—and Ben equal to two—and the doubtful assistance of unarmed niggers, who would surely make a bolt at the first start of a scrimmage.

The voices below were arguing. Foxy listened, nervously fingering his knife, and still calculating his chances. He remembered another blade, his sailor's knife, drew it out, and clutched it in the other hand. Thus equipped, he might win by springing in the dark upon unprepared men, hurling them from their narrow ledge into oblivion in the deep water below.

The next words stayed his hand. They came from Bob.

"I say, Ben, we can't get this down in the dark, with only our hands; we shall want some sort of tackle. Let's go back for ropes now; it would never do to have it topple over and take us with it."

"You're right, me lad; ropes is what we want," cried Ben. "Come down easy—don't get flurried. It was easier comin' up than it will be climbing down."

Foxy drew a long breath—a sigh of relief.

The voices were receding, and the lantern glow was getting smaller and yellower in the gloom. He could see the lighted ship below as well, and realised he was only just in time. He had not expected them for hours yet.

At a sign his niggers came down and seized the chest. With his assistance they shouldered it and began the ascent, for the going up was easy here, winding, with a few ledges and steps, and one or two long heaves in which all gave a hand. Finally they got it

(Continued on next page.)

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE.

Look out for a special message about

BADGES

From the Chief Officer

VERY SHORTLY!

THE ROLICKING ROVERS!*(Continued from previous page.)*

out of the opening in the hillside and dumped it down.

The niggers wanted to rest, but Foxey urged them to shoulder the chest again and follow.

He led them now, by many wandering tracks, along the boulders, where none but a bloodhound could have been successful in pursuit. At last there were trees and scrub and some moss-grown, rocky caves. Into one of these, where the floor was hard, he led the way and ordered his coolies to drop their burden.

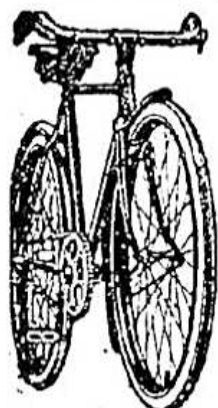
Exhausted and staggering, they obeyed, but clumsily. The box dropped with a crash on one corner and split open all down one side. Foxey gave a yell when he saw glinting silver bulging out of the crack.

The box rolled on its side, crumpling into loose boards, and out rolled—

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