

THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S ARE **CAPTIVES IN CHINA!** GREAT NEW SERIES
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HANDFORTH TAKES A CHANCE!

A Thrilling Long Complete Story of the Amazing Adventures
of the Boys of St. Frank's in China.



Handforth gave the Chinaman's pigtail a hefty tug ; to his amazement it came away in his hand. Handforth stared at it. " By George ! Out by the roots ! " he exclaimed blankly.

HANDFORTH TAKES A CHANCE!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The mysterious Foo Chow has the Boys of St. Frank's in his clutches—when Handforth makes a break for freedom! Things happen swiftly in this exciting long complete yarn.

CHAPTER 1.

JUST LIKE HANDFORTH!

"LISTEN!" said Willy Handforth tensely.

"Eh?"

"Listen to what?"

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon looked at their young leader in surprise. But Willy merely held up a warning finger and kept his head on one side in a listening attitude. The skipper of the Third Form at St. Frank's was sitting on the edge of his bunk, in the act of removing his shoes.

"Rummy!" he said at length. "Jolly rummy!"

"What's rummy?" demanded Chubby Heath. "Us being forbidden the decks, I suppose? But I don't see—"

"In fact," said Willy, "thundering rummy!"

He got up from the bed, crossed the state-room, and listened attentively near the port-hole, the exterior of which was covered with a sheet of steel, so that no glimpse of the outside world could be obtained. There was

an expression of wonder on Handforth minor's face.

"Yes, by jingo!" he declared. "Rummy isn't the word!"

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon fell upon him and forced him against the wall.

"Now then, what's the matter with you, you ass?" demanded Chubby indignantly.

"The engines are going!" explained Willy.

"Eh?"

"The engines are going!"

"The engines are going?" repeated Juicy Lemon in blank amazement. "What of it? Have you gone off your rocker, or something?"

"If you chaps would only think for a minute, instead of being flabbergasted at my shrewdness, you'd be a bit more useful," said Willy tartly. "We're on the *Dragon*, aren't we? We're all prisoners on Dr. Foo Chow's yacht. And the last thing we saw from the deck was a whacking great barrier of rock."

"That's right," agreed Chubby. "The yacht couldn't go any farther."

"Exactly," said Willy. "Well, she's going!"

"Eh?" said Chubby with a start. "Going?"

"Can't you feel the vibration from the engines?"

"Yes, but that doesn't prove anything," replied Chubby Heath. "You ass, we've simply turned round, and we're going down the river again. It's as clear as daylight. There's plenty of mystery on this trip, without you making——"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Willy grimly. "Let me try and shove a little ordinary common sense into your thick skulls. Let me outline the position, so that you can appreciate it to the full."

"We don't want the position outlined," retorted Juicy Lemon, as he prepared to unfold his pyjamas. "We're Foo Chow's prisoners, and he's treating us like real lords. As far as I can see, there's nothing to grumble about. I don't believe that Chinaman is half such a crook as those Remove chaps believe."

"Oh, don't you?" said Willy with a cold glance. "That only proves what I've always thought. When we started out on this trip in the *Wanderer*, as Lord Dorrimore's guests, the general idea was to save Yung Ching from the hands of his Chinese captors——"

"Half a tick!" said Chubby. "What's that you've always thought?"

"Don't interrupt!" said Willy. "But if you must have it, I've always thought that you and Juicy had about as much brains as a mentally deficient rabbit. Now you've proved it, that's all. But, to go on with what I was saying——"

"You—you insulting——"

"Dry up!" interrupted Willy sternly. "We set out to rescue Yung Ching, of the Remove. He's a St. Frank's chap, and he's fallen into the hands of this Chinese war lord. Well, old Foo Chow threatened to blow the *Wanderer* to smithereens unless we surrendered, and now we're his prisoners."

"That's the funny part of it," said Juicy thoughtfully. "Ever since we've been on board his yacht he's treated us like honoured guests. And now we're right into China, up this unknown river. One of the rammiest things I've ever heard of."

"Foo Chow is a millionaire, and he controls thousands of miles of land and millions of these heathen Chinese," went on Willy. "It's no joke to be in the clutches of a chap like that, I can tell you. And the farther we get into his own country, the worse it'll be for us. We'll have about as much chance of escape as lumps of ice in the crater of Vesuvius. We shan't be able to move a hundred yards without encountering Foo Chow's hosts. So don't you infants get the idea that there's nothing to worry over."

"Infants!" they roared indignantly.

"Infants in brain capacity," explained Willy, with a wave of his hand. "Just because Foo Chow treats us like guests you're

fooled into thinking that we're safe. But don't you believe it. The farther we go in this yacht, the less chance we have of seeing civilisation again."

"I say, do you really think that?" asked Chubby, looking startled.

"I don't want to put the wind up you, but drop all this talk about Foo Chow being a yellow saint," said Willy. "All day long we've come through a part of China that's never encouraged European customs. And when we come to anchor we are surrounded by towering rocks, with an impassable barrier in front of us."

"Yes," said Juicy, nodding. "The river's coming out of a narrow slit in the crags, and we can't go any farther."

"And yet," said Willy, "we're going!"

He listened again, and nodded slowly.

"That's the extraordinary part of it," he went on wonderingly. "We're going, you chaps! How? How the dickens are we continuing this trip up the river in face of that terrific wall of rock? I've heard of Chinese puzzles, but this is the biggest one I've ever come up against!"

Chubby snorted.

"You silly chump, haven't I told you that the yacht's turned round, and that we're going down river again?"

"And haven't I told you that you've got brains like a rabbit?" retorted Willy tartly. "Don't you understand that if we were going down stream again the engines would be hardly turning over at all? Listen! Can't you hear the laborious thumping? The *Dragon's* got engines like a destroyer, and yet they're working at high pressure. Why? Because we're forcing our way up-stream against this powerful current. Now do you understand?"

The other two fags looked thoroughly startled now.

"My hat! I believe you're right, Willy!" ejaculated Chubby. "The engines are thumping a bit, aren't they? Oh, but it's rot! How the dickens can we be going up-stream? There's no opening in the rock——"

"I say, let's go and tell your major, or Hamilton, or old Browne," suggested Juicy excitedly. "Perhaps we can get a peep outside, too. Now that we're on the move again the guards might be a bit lax."

"Not a chance of it," replied Willy. "They'll probably be more alert. Still, I'll pop along and have a word with my major, and hear what he's got to say."

He hurried out, and Juicy Lemon and Chubby Heath followed him. They were all in flannels, although they had removed their jackets and ties. The electrically lit corridor was empty—a lavishly decorated corridor, with exquisitely panelled doors and a richly moulded ceiling. Dr. Foo Chow's yacht was lavishly appointed in every way.

"Hold on a second!" whispered Willy warningly.

On tiptoe he crept to the angle at the end of the corridor and peeped round. From

this point he could see into the foyer, where the central staircase led upwards to the saloon deck. Four gorgeously attired soldiers were on duty with fixed bayonets. But they didn't see Willy Handforth.

He padded back to his chums and nodded.

"Thought so!" he breathed. "The 'forty thieves' are still on the job."

The simile was an apt one, for Foo Chow's personal guard strongly reminded the Britishers of the characters in a pantomime. These soldiers were specially trained men, and they were replete with the gorgeous colour and display of the East.

Creeping farther along the corridor, the fags softly entered the cabin which had been allotted to Edward Oswald Handforth and his faithful chums, Church and McClure. One glance was sufficient. The cabin was empty.

"Oh-ho!" murmured Willy. "So that's the game, eh? My major's up to some of his little tricks already! Now, I wonder—Easy! Good old Ted! Whenever he starts his little dodges he leaves a trail behind him."

Willy's glance had fallen upon a panel at the other end of the corridor. It was slightly ajar, for it was really a steel door, leading to an iron stairway which penetrated into the depths of the yacht. That end of the corridor merely led to the bath-rooms belonging to the state-rooms of this deck. So there were no guards here.

"I'll bet anything you like that Ted has gone down into the ship," murmured Willy. "Just like him to leave the door open! Anyhow, we'll go down and explore. We might get a bit of excitement!"

His chums were eager enough to accompany him, for they were always ready for any kind of mischief. Silently they passed through the doorway, closed the door after them, and went down the iron ladder.

There was nothing particularly exciting here, however, for the corridors were dim, with only a stray light here and there. The trio's feet padded upon metal, and the corridor walls were of drably painted metal, too.

The vibration caused by the throbbing engines was doubly apparent here, and the very air seemed to quiver with the effect. Willy & Co. walked aimlessly for a minute or two, and then paused.

"It's no good ambling about like this," murmured Willy. "We might go over half the ship without any success. I expect my major has been having a shot at escape. The hopeless chump! What's the good of trying to escape when there's hundreds of miles of hostile country between us and civilisation? That's the worst of Ted! He never seems to realise——"

He came to an abrupt halt. Distinctly, from some distance down the iron passage came a yell—muffled, but unmistakable.

"Hurrah!" it sounded. "Come on! Rescue, Remove!"

The fags were simply electrified.

"Your major!" gasped Chubby Heath.

But Willy was scooting along the passage. That call had been no shout for help—but rather a roar of triumph. The tone of it had been uttered in Edward Oswald Handforth's most impulsive manner.

Willy tried two doors in vain, but at the third attempt he paused, staring. A dark store-room met his gaze; but on the other side of it was a round patch of radiance—the moonlight streaming through an uncovered porthole!



CHAPTER 2.

THE PUNISHMENT.

IN three strides Willy Handforth was at the porthole. He found himself looking out upon the swift current. The water was startlingly close, for this particular porthole was only just above the water. The spray whipped into Willy's face, but did not impair his vision. The moon was shining brilliantly, and the whole scene was clear.

"Where's your major?" asked Chubby Heath frantically.

"Out here—in the water!" snapped Willy. "I was just going to dive in, but there's no need. Church and McClure are there, too—and they're all getting into a drifting motor-boat. Oh, the asses! What on earth can they hope to— Why, hallo! I could swear—— Yes! It is!"

"Is what?" said Juicy excitedly.

"It's Yung Ching himself!" replied Willy, leaning out farther. "I caught a glimpse of his chivvy just now! He must have escaped, and tried to get away in that boat. But there's about a thousand of Foo Chow's men in the water now—and it's all up. They're collared!"

"By jingo, you're right!" muttered Chubby. "But your major had a word with Chingy, didn't he? Perhaps—— I say, look there!" he added in a startled voice. "Look at those rocks! They're lifting right up, so that there's a passage left for us to get through!"

"Yes, I noticed that just now," replied Willy. "Didn't I say we were fighting our way against the current? There's something fishy about this, my lads! Once we get behind that rock barrier—good-bye!"

He kissed his hand significantly, and they stared at the scene with excited eyes. By this time Handforth & Co. were being conveyed to the bank of the stream, the motor-boat surrounded by a swarming mass of swimmers, who pulled it forcibly inshore. The yacht was making such imperceptible progress against the strong current that she seemed to be almost stationary.

There was every reason for Willy & Co.'s astonishment. On all sides the rocks towered above—not sheer down to the

water's edge, but sloping away in a majestic series of crags. The river, still broad, flowed through this great gorge with a silent swiftness which would have proved too much for any ship with engines of nominal power. But both the *Dragon* and the *Wanderer* were oil-burning yachts of very exceptional engine capacity, and they were able to fight their way up the stream against this flow.

Willy had no doubt that the gorge was utterly impassable during the winter season—for, with the rains, the river was probably converted into a roaring rapid. But at the present time of the year it was possible for a high-powered ship to navigate the current.

Near the water's edge the banks were comparatively low, and formed towing paths, up which the junk men could laboriously haul their clumsy craft. But it had seemed, the previous evening, that any further progress was impossible. For here the river flowed from beneath the frowning crags—emerging through the mountain by means of a low, tunnel-like exit.

But the watching fags could now appreciate the secret. The centre portion of that rock barrier was being lifted. Inch by inch it was being raised into the air, leaving a clear passage up the gorge.

And the methods employed for this remarkable feat were primitive in the extreme. Thousands of coolies were hauling upon ropes, sweating and straining. And they were winning by sheer weight of numbers. The exact nature of the mechanism could not be seen, but there could be no doubt that the central mass of rock was provided with roughly hewn slides, so that it could be eased back into its original position at will.

"You see, they don't think of using scientific methods," muttered Willy. "With all this water they could construct a hydraulic apparatus with ease, but they prefer manpower. Just like the Chinese! They always go the hardest and the longest way to work! They're a runny people!"

"But never mind about the Chinese!" said Chubby Heath. "What about us? We're making for that gorge—we're going clean into it! What's going to happen to us afterwards?"

"It's no good asking me; but we can pretty well guess," replied Willy soberly. "That rock barrier will be dropped again—so we shall be bottled up in real earnest. Even if we get a chance of escape, we shan't be able to take it, because the free exit to the sea will be barred. My lads, by all appearances we're just about pickled!"

"But—but Foo Chow wouldn't dare to harm us!" muttered Juicy Lemon. "We're British subjects. And the British Government would make him answer——"

"It's no good having those sort of hopes, old man," interrupted Willy gently. "Before Foo Chow captured the *Wanderer* our wireless was out of commission—busted by that

shell which caused old Dorrie to surrender. There's not a soul knows of this trip except Foo Chow and his men. After a few weeks the *Wanderer* will be posted as missing. There'll be a search, and in the end we shall be given up as 'lost with all hands.' And here we shall be, in the heart of Foo Chow's particular province, as helpless as tiddlers in a jam jar! We can't do a thing until he gives us our liberty."

Willy's chums were freshly startled.

"Then—then there's no hope at all?" breathed Chubby. "I say, what about our people? They'll be terribly cut up——"

"I didn't say there was no hope at all," put in Willy calmly. "I was looking at the position from Foo Chow's point of view. He thinks he's got us in a net, but where there's a will there's a way! Every net is as strong as its weakest strand, my boys—and if we don't find a weak strand somewhere I'll eat my shoelaces! But the best policy is to take everything calmly to begin with, and fool old Chu Chin Chow into believing that we're meek and submissive."

"That motor-boat's making for us," commented Juicy, after a moment.

Willy nodded. He had seen it already. In fact, he had noticed that a party of soldiers had hurried off up a rocky pathway, and it was no difficult matter to guess that Yung Ching was in the midst of them. The Chinese boy had made an attempt to escape, but he had failed, and now he was being hurried back to his prison. At the same time, his effort had not been entirely fruitless, for he had discovered that St. Frank's had come to his rescue. And although the holiday party was in the grip of Foo Chow, the little Chinese would be heartened nevertheless.

The motor-boat was filled with other soldiers, and within a few minutes they were climbing on board the *Dragon*, forcing Handforth and Church and McClure up the ladder before them. The yacht was still labouring onwards, and her progress had not been stayed by the recent incident.

"This is where we quietly retire," murmured Willy, as he backed away from the porthole. "Nothing else to see now. Foo Chow didn't want us to know the secret of this gorge, but we've discovered it in spite of his precautions."

"It was your major who found this porthole," said Chubby.

"Yes, he's doing wonders in his old age," agreed Willy approvingly. "But he's probably found a bagful of trouble, and it's up to us to get him out of it. In any case, we don't want to be found here. Foo Chow is bound to order a search, to find out how Ted and the other two chaps escaped. So the sooner we make ourselves scarce the better."

It didn't take them long to retrace their steps. So far there was no sign of a search, and the fags arrived in the state-room corridor without encountering any of the China-



One glimpse Willy had of his brother, strung up by his hands, then the flag ducked away from the Chinaman who grabbed at him. He went tearing along the deck. "Rescue, St. Frank's!" he yelled.

men. Here they secured the bulkhead door, and tiptoed forward towards their own cabin.

"Going to bed?" whispered Juicy.

"Not yet," replied Willy, with a determined light in his eye. "First of all we'll find out what's happening to Ted. You chaps stick here—better go in the cabin and wait. I'll do a little scouting."

"But we want to come——"

"Orders are orders!" interrupted Willy curtly. "Am I the skipper of the Third, or am I not? You know what happens to jibbers!"

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon retired obediently.

"Now for Ted!" murmured Handforth minor.

Some kind of intuition must have warned him that his brother was in dire straits. As a matter of fact, Handforth & Co. were on deck, facing Dr. Foo Chow himself. And the latter, although as inscrutable as ever, and apparently calm, had an ugly gleam in his eye.

The scene was a rather impressive one. The three Remove fellows, standing there in their soaked flannels and surrounded by a small army of the Chinese potentate's soldiery. Dr. Foo Chow was attired in European clothes, and his appearance was impressive. He was a tall man of about middle age, and his yellow, Oriental face

was rather refined. Indeed, at a casual glance there was nothing particularly compelling or sinister in his aspect. It was only when one took stock of the man that one became aware of his strange, hypnotic personality. And even then it was impossible to fathom the full depths of the Chinaman's character. One only received the convincing impression that here was a man of immense intellect, a man of immeasurable power.

"So!" he exclaimed softly, in English. "This is the manner in which you boys return my hospitality!"

"Hospitality!" echoed Handforth gruffly. "We're your prisoners!"

"Nevertheless, since the first moment of your captivity, you have all been treated with the deference that is due to valued guests. The elder members of your party have been wise enough to accept my rulings, but it seems that you boys are obstinate. It is essential that you should be taught a lesson. I have a method that might prove effective."

"You can go and eat coke!" retorted Edward Oswald defiantly. "You can't keep us tied down just as you please! We wanted to see what was happening, and I'm jolly glad we did, because we've had a word with Yung Ching, and we've cheered him up."

Dr. Foo Chow shook his head.

"The boy was foolish to make any attempt at escape," he purred. "I do not hold him

to blame, and he shall receive no punishment for the affair. The responsibility rests with his gaolers. They shall be beheaded before the moon again rises. No man serves me unless he serves me well."

"Beheaded!" muttered Church, with a shudder.

"My methods are swift and drastic," replied Dr. Foo Chow. "Those upon whom responsibility rests must answer. Somewhere in this yacht a man is responsible for a port-hole being open—the one through which you dived. That man shall also be beheaded. As for you, a flogging will meet the case. I do not intend you to indulge in any more of this high-spirited foolishness."

He turned and gave some swift orders to his soldiers. In a moment Handforth was singled out, and Church and McClure were hustled aside. Before Edward Oswald could realise what had happened, his shirt had been removed and his wrists were tied. The end of the rope was slung upwards, and a moment later Handforth was so held that only the tips of his toes were on the deck.

"You—you rotters!" he roared. "If you touch me——"

"You are to receive twenty-five strokes with the bamboo," interposed Foo Chow smoothly. "An innocuous punishment, but somewhat painful. Your companions will receive but ten strokes, since I hold you to be the ringleader."

"Hi!" yelled Handforth. "Rescue, St. Frank's! You—you giddy Chinese torturer! If your dirty slaves touch me——"

"So you are afraid?" asked Dr. Foo Chow contemptuously.

"That's a lie!" snorted Handforth, between his teeth. "I'm not afraid of you and your fiends! Go ahead with it, and if I howl you can lash me until I peg out! Huh! I'll show you whether I'm afraid!"



CHAPTER 3.

ST. FRANK'S TO THE RESCUE.

WILLY HANDFORTH stiffened. He was just at the angle of the corridor, unseen by the Chinese guards, and unsuspected.

A second before he had heard his major's voice, and he knew that his intuition had not been at fault.

"Rescue, St. Frank's!" he murmured. "I knew it! Those yellow rotters are putting poor old Ted through the mill! Well, this is where I do my celebrated eel act!"

He had made up his mind, in fact, to go on deck and see exactly what was happening. He had considered two possibilities. Should he make a sudden dash up the staircase, or resort to subterfuge? He decided upon the latter course. Those Chinese guards were armed with fixed bayonets, to say nothing of swords in their belts. It was quite conceivable that they would attempt

to stop a sudden rush, and Willy had no particular hankering to run full tilt into a levelled bayonet.

He turned the corner with his hands in his pockets, and emerged into the foyer. There was one of these elaborately decorated open spaces on every deck, with the wide staircase running up and down. The four Chinese guards were placed in front of the stairs which led upwards.

They merely looked at Willy with cautious eyes, and made no comment. The St. Frank's fellows had found that the majority of these Chinamen were quite simple fellows, by no means sinister, and ready to laugh at the slightest provocation. Indeed, the average native Chinaman would find life a drab affair but for his never-failing fund of good humour. But these particular men were the slaves of Dr. Foo Chow, and their very lives depended upon their obedience.

Willy certainly had no notion that one of the four would be held responsible if he slipped past the barrier, and that that one would stand a chance of being summarily executed. Otherwise he might have hesitated.

Those who failed to obey Dr. Foo Chow's orders suffered a grim, drastic penalty. Foo Chow was the supreme lord and master—the despotic ruler of millions of lives. His power in his own particular province was absolutely without limit.

Willy wasn't quite familiar with the customs of the country yet. He didn't know that the word "responsibility" is the solid foundation upon which the domestic and natural life of the Chinese is constructed. In every walk of life a Chinaman is held responsible for something or other—sons to their father, the father to the family as a whole, the family to the Head Man of a district, and so on upwards. Whenever Chinamen work in parties, no matter how trivial the labour, one man of that party is responsible for the rest.

And so with these four guards. No matter how they bungled their work, three would be immune from punishment. There was one man responsible. But then, again, somebody above him was liable to get the punishment—somebody who was responsible for placing the four guards at this particular post. Carried to its logical conclusion, this system meant that Foo Chow was finally responsible for everything that happened in the whole expanse of his province. But as he was the final link in the chain, there was nobody above him to call him to account. Thus he was the one man who was perfectly safe.

Willy wasted no time. For a moment he thought about arousing the rest of the St. Frank's fellows, but he decided that he would see what was going on first. As for getting past these guards, it was an easy matter.

With a sudden yell he made headlong for the outside man on the left. Then, in a fraction of a second, he changed his direction, dived low, and shot through the legs of the second man. The movement was so

uncannily quick, that by the time the guards looked round the fag had vanished up the stairs.

"Easy!" said Willy, grinning.

He dodged up, found himself on the promenade deck, and slid easily round three soldiers who attempted to bar his progress. Then he halted, and stared.

There was his major, hanging by his wrists, with an enormous Chinaman about to wield a wicked-looking bamboo stick. Dr. Foo Chow was standing placidly by, and Church and McClure were held in readiness for their own punishment.

"Cheer up, Ted!" yelled Willy, making up his mind on the flash. "We'll have you out of that in two shakes of a monkey's tail!"

Dr. Foo Chow spun round.

"Seize that young fool!" he commanded, in Chinese.

A dozen men attempted to carry out the new order, but Willy Handforth was prepared. He dodged the first two, leapt round another couple, and then found himself menaced by a fifth. He doubled himself, and the soldier, running forward, went clean over his back. In the confusion, Willy shot down the stairs with the speed of a hare, and he hardly noticed those four luckless guards at the bottom. He was past them before they had time to grasp the fact that this young "foreign devil" had beaten them again.

Bang! Thump! Crash!

Willy rushed down the corridor, thudding his fists on every door. All these state-rooms were occupied by the youthful members of the *Wanderer's* holiday party. Mr. Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, Mr. Beverley Stokes, and the other grown-ups were accommodated on another deck, as also were the Moor View girls.

"Rescue, St. Frank's!" yelled Willy, in a continuous roar.

Doors opened, and sleepy-eyed fellows appeared in their pyjamas.

"What's the excitement?" asked Dick Hamilton sharply.

"Smother that young idiot, somebody!" snorted Fullwood.

"Grab him!" advised Reggie Pitt.

"You asses! My major's being flogged!" panted Willy. "Anybody seen Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon? I left 'em in the corridor— Oh, there they are! I thought they'd been pinched, or something! Come on, everybody! I'll lead the way!"

"One moment, Brother William—one moment!" said Browne, of the Fifth. "What is this call to arms? I trust there is no fishiness about the clarion note? If there is any leading to be done, rely upon me."

Dick Hamilton grabbed Willy by the shoulders.

"Your major?" he snapped. "Being flogged?"

"Yes—honest Injun!"

"Good enough!" shouted Dick. "Come on, the Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

In a perfect flood, and with Willy, Hamil-

ton, and Browne leading, the fellows swept into the foyer. The four guards started back, but made no attempt to bar the progress of this determined-looking throng. They turned on their heels and fled, their nerve forsaking them. There was something about these white youngsters which rendered them helpless.

"We're here, Handy!" went up a combined roar.

The St. Frank's party flooded the promenade deck, and in another moment they were surrounding Edward Oswald Handforth. Hamilton and Watson slashed through the rope and released his wrists. The other fellows were commencing what promised to develop into a free fight.

"Let me get at him!" hooted Handforth fiercely. "Where's Foo Chow? I'm going to smash him! He ordered me to be flogged, but you chaps came along before they could start the job! Lemme get at him!"

But Dr. Foo Chow had uttered a few sharp words, and his men faded away in all directions. At the same moment Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore came hurrying along to see what all the noise was about, having found the staircase unguarded in the general commotion.

"Your presence at this moment is welcome, gentlemen," said Dr. Foo Chow smoothly.

"Perhaps you can control these excitable young firebrands with greater success than I. Had I not ordered my men to retire, there would have been a most unfortunate fracas."

"What's the trouble, anyhow?" asked Dorrie, looking round.

"Why, Foo Chow was going to flog me!" shouted Handforth. "His men strung me up and bared my back—just like I am now! Willy came along and gave the alarm. Good man! I haven't thanked him yet!"

"What does this mean, Dr. Foo Chow?" asked Nelson Lee quietly.

"Are you in a position to question my orders?" said the Chinaman, without turning a hair. "However, it is my desire to maintain our amicable relations. It is my wish that you should remain my guests. It is true that this boy was prepared for a flogging, but it was merely intended as a lesson."

"What particular offence had he caused?" asked Lee.

"He not only ignored my orders, but led two of his companions to a lower porthole, and actually dived into the river," said Dr. Foo Chow lightly. "In order to impress him with the necessity for obedience, I staged a mock flogging. I trust he has learned his lesson."

Dr. Foo Chow bowed and retreated, but turned after a few strides.

"You are free to return to your cabins, gentlemen," he said. "Since three pairs of eyes have seen the secret of this gorge, there is nothing to be gained by further precaution. The guards will be removed forthwith, and you again have the entire run of the yacht. I beg of you to regard this vessel as your own, to give orders as you will, and to

report the slightest act of discourtesy on the part of any worthless underling."

Nelson Lee and Dorrie glanced at one another after Foo Chow had gone.

"Well, that's that!" said his lordship. "Handy, my son, what on earth have you been doing?"

"I don't believe a word of old Foo Chow's denial!" said Handforth gruffly. "He meant to half-skin me, sir! But he thought better of it when you and Mr. Lee came up! Anyhow, they can't keep me down!"



CHAPTER 4.

THE CITY OF YANG FU.

MR. NELSON LEE was looking very thoughtful.

He and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Beverley Stokes were sitting under the

awning on the promenade deck, and the *Dragon* was steaming sedately onwards through wild, rocky country, under the blaze of the morning sun. The current was much more placid here, and the river itself had widened considerably.

"And this is exactly what you saw, Handforth?" asked Lee.

"Yes, sir," replied Edward Oswald defiantly.

He had been closely questioned regarding the night's escapade, and he was stubbornly maintaining that his actions had been justified. At breakfast that morning Dr. Foo Chow had been as amiable and as charming as ever. He was a perfect host, careful to the tiniest degree that his guests should be satisfied in every shape and form. Considering that he had it in his power to treat them all like galley slaves, he was indeed a remarkable captor.

"You are certain that the boy who flung himself into the river was Yung Ching?" asked Nelson Lee. "You say you spoke to him?"

"Rather, sir," agreed Handforth. "Chingy recognised me, too, and you ought to have seen the gleam of welcome in his eyes! The poor old bounder was half-dotty with joy when I told him that a whole crowd of us had come to his rescue."

"I hope you mentioned that we were in the same fix as himself?" asked Dorrie drily.

"There wasn't any need, sir—he knew it," replied Edward Oswald. "At the same time, our being near him will give him heart. What's the date, anyhow? They're not going to start torturing him until the tenth of August, are they?"

"It is more than likely that Foo Chow will completely change his plans," said Nelson Lee grimly. "And your assumption that we shall be near to Yung Ching is unjustified, Handforth. As far as we know, the unfortunate boy is imprisoned somewhere in the city of Yang Fu."

"Can't we find him, sir?"

"Good gracious, Handforth, don't you realise how hopeless it is," asked Lee sharply. "The sooner you boys understand that we're absolutely in this Chinaman's power, the better. I'm the last man in the world to adopt a pessimistic tone, but it would be a fatal mistake to under-rate Foo Chow's power. He is the supreme despot of this part of China—and that means that we are literally surrounded by millions of enemies. As for finding Yung Ching in the city of Yang Fu, you had better remember that Yang Fu contains hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, and looking for a needle in a haystack would be child's play by comparison."

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth, looking blank.

He wasn't quite so optimistic now. Even his particular brand of supreme confidence had received a setback. As Nelson Lee had said, he wasn't the kind of man to preach pessimism, but this situation had to be faced squarely and with no nonsense. Dr. Foo Chow's pretence of cordiality was an unknown quantity, and it might come to an end at any moment.

Indeed, while the more youthful members of the captured party were tranquilly entertained by their novel surroundings, their elders were in a condition of grave, acute anxiety. In particular, Nelson Lee was on tenterhooks.

He knew something of China, for in his wide experience he had not only visited the country, but he had had many encounters with Chinamen. And he had found them to be more inscrutable, more cunning, than any other race. When a Chinaman was possessed of European culture, when he had endless resources at his command, he was a man of infinite menace.

At any hour Dr. Foo Chow might change his tactics. He could afford to play with his victims now—to amuse himself by pretending that they were his guests. It was one of his whims that he should toy with them, and attempt to fool them into a placid sense of false security. And then, in one instant, perhaps, he would show his real claws.

A swift order, and every member of the holiday party could be clapped into the most poisonous native prison imaginable—a place of indescribable horror. There was nothing whatever to prevent Foo Chow resorting to such a measure at any moment he chose, for his prisoners were helpless. Surrounded by countless miles of hostile country, and myriads of Chinese, the outlook was utterly black.

How long would it be before Foo Chow dropped this pose? How long would it be before he pounced? Nelson Lee, at least, knew that all the members of the party were at present living in a false paradise. And although Lee desired to give some hint of warning to the boys, he did not like to alarm them unnecessarily.

And the famous detective, too, felt that he was in a large measure responsible for the

present disastrous situation. Yung Ching, of the *Remove*, had been kidnapped from St. Frank's, but he had managed to get a letter to his chums—a secret letter which had not been delivered until he was well on his way to China.

The imaginations of the St. Frank's fellows had been fired, and they had eagerly sought for some method of going to Yung Ching's rescue. For it was known that he was to be tortured and mutilated. Lord Dorrimore had come to the rescue with his yacht, and the *Dragon* had been ultimately overtaken, only for the would-be rescuers to learn that Yung Ching had been transferred to China by air.

On the top of that, Foo Chow had shown his fangs. For the *Dragon* proved to be a warship in disguise, and the *Wanderer* had been taken captive, and all her guests transferred to Foo Chow's own vessel. Since then he had insisted upon treating them as his guests—a pose which did not deceive Nelson Lee for a moment. This man was only awaiting his moment to strike. Perhaps that moment would come when they were hopelessly buried in the interior of China.

"Upon the whole, Handforth, I am glad that you had those few words with Yung Ching," said Lee thoughtfully. "No harm has been done—since nothing can alter the gravity of our position—and it is just possible that the poor boy's sufferings will be mitigated by the knowledge of our presence. But for the rest, I want you to conform to our host's wishes. No good can come of defiance and obstinacy. We are all in the same boat, my boy, and I want you to be guided by me."

"Oh, rather, sir," said Edward Oswald earnestly. "I wouldn't dream of going against your wishes, sir."

"But at the first opportunity you'll dot Foo Chow in the eye, eh?" smiled Dorrie. "You must curb that volcanic nature of yours, young 'un. Dotting Foo Chow in the eye might seem a rippin' pastime from your point of view, but we should probably all suffer in a bunch. These Chinamen aren't so discriminatin' as they ought to be."

"But—but can't something be *done*, sir?" asked Handforth incredulously. "I mean, can't we appeal to the Government, somehow?"

"The Government is Dr. Foo Chow," replied Lee quietly.

"But what about the officials in Peking, sir?"

"The officials in Peking have no more power in this part of China than you have yourself, Handforth," replied Nelson Lee

gravely. "Indeed, the so-called Government of China is almost a farce. There are, perhaps, two forms of this Government—one in Peking, in the North, and the other at Canton, in the South. But their power in the distant provinces—such as the one we are in now—is negligible. You must remember that there are scarcely any telegraphs here, and no railways at all. This part of China is about the same to-day as it was thousands of years ago. Indeed, since the overthrow of the Manchu Emperors, the lot of the common people is infinitely worse."

"Then Foo Chow is a kind of ruler himself, sir?"

"There you have hit it exactly, Handforth," nodded Nelson Lee. "The provinces are ruled by the Tu Chuns, or Governors. These men are laws unto themselves. There is no redress from their activities, and absolutely no check is placed upon their movements. And they are always more or less at war among themselves—particularly the North against the South, and vice versa. So

perhaps you will understand the nature of the country we are in."

"It seems to be a pretty lively place, sir," admitted Handforth.

"Give me Central Africa any day," remarked Dorrie, with a sigh. "You may come across a few cannibals now and again, but they're not such bad chaps when you know how to deal with 'em. But these Chinks beat me every time!"

"But look here, sir!" said Handforth with a start. "You say these governors are

despots and tyrants. Well, isn't Yung Ching's father the Governor of the Province of Hu Kiang?"

"Yes—the province adjoining Foo Chow's domain."

"Then Ching's father is a beastly despot, too?"

"That remains to be seen," smiled Nelson Lee. "Personally, I have a shrewd idea that Yung Li Chang is an exception to the general rule. He is a cultured Chinaman belonging to an old and honoured family. The people of his province, at least, are ruled without despotism, although it naturally follows that the age-old customs remain in force. These may possibly seem tyrannical from our point of view, but it is not for us to judge. Yung Li Chang has done an immeasurable service to humanity by his rule in Hu Kiang. And our smooth-tongued host is jealous of his neighbour, and desirous of acquiring his lands, which have become rich and prosperous under their governor's progressive regime. China is a land of abject poverty, and a rich province such as Hu Kiang is

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naturally the envy of all its neighbours. Where Foo Chow keeps his own people in a half-starved condition, Yung Li Chang allows his 'subjects' to have their share of the universal prosperity."

"But his soldiers are more powerful than Foo Chow's, sir."

"Much more powerful," agreed Nelson Lee. "That is the very reason why Foo Chow has kidnapped his son. Foo Chow intends to force his rival to surrender—through threats. If necessary, he will torture Yung Ching, and so bring about the desired victory. That is his plan."

"All right, sir; I'll remember what you said," remarked Handforth, nodding. "I'll bottle myself up a bit, and be more careful in future."

"Splendid!" smiled the detective. "My advice to all you boys is to be prepared for anything, but not to resist. For, believe me, such resistance may precipitate an absolute massacre. Remember that, Handforth."

Handforth did remember it, and he went across to Church and McClure and a group of other juniors and spread the warning—as Nelson Lee had intended.

Just at the moment, however, the holiday party was interested in the passing scenery. The city of Yang Fu was close at hand, and nobody wished to miss it. For Yang Fu was the capital of Dr. Foo Chow's province—the very centre of this Chinese potentate's power.



CHAPTER 5.

WHENCE?

"WHAT-HO! A somewhat extensive slice of China's teeming millions, and all that sort of stuff, laddies," observed Archie Glen-thorne, screwing his monocle into his eye and surveying the scene. "Good gad! A beehive is a dashed centre of idleness by comparison, what? The populace appear to be somewhat frightfully ant-like."

There was every reason for Archie's remarks. For some little time the *Dragon* had been steaming along through agricultural districts, having left the rocky country behind already. Here was a valley, with cultivated lands spreading into the far distance, and with endless villages to be seen. But the city of Yang Fu was an enormous place—all the streets crowding in huddled confusion on one side of the river. The city was purely native, for there was not one indication of European influence. No telegraph wires, no railway lines, no vehicles in the streets other than the most primitive native contrivances.

The only incongruous objects in the whole landscape were the two steam yachts—for the beloved *Wanderer* was still steaming along in the rear—manned by her own cap-

tain and crew, but piloted by a native, and guarded by a host of Foo Chow's soldiers.

The Chinaman had an object in bringing Dorrie's yacht so far inland. It had vanished from the face of the known waters, together with those who had been on board. No matter what search was made, she would never be found here.

"So this is where we're going to be landed, eh?" remarked Fullwood, as he leaned over the rail. "By Jove! I hope old Foo Chow allows us to remain on board. This town's a bit smelly, to my mind!"

"It must be dreadful in those dusty, narrow streets," said Winnie Pitt with a little shiver. "Do you really think we're going to be landed, Ralph?"

"Well, isn't this Foo Chow's capital?" put in Irene Manners. "Where else can we go to? I'm beginning to get terribly frightened—although I'm pretending not to show it," she added frankly. "There are so many yellow faces! Nothing but yellow faces everywhere!"

Handforth grunted.

"No need to be so anxious, Irene," he said gruffly. "You girls can be pretty sure that we'll look after you."

"But—but this place frightens me, too," said Doris Berkeley. "It's so awfully Chinese! I mean, there's not the slightest hint of Western civilisation anywhere. Look at those junks and sampans! Look at the way the people are swarming over them. How can they live?"

But this was a question which nobody could answer—for none of the Britishers could believe it possible that these river folk could exist in such conditions. It is almost impossible for white people to appreciate the amazing endurance of the Chinese.

These people can endure every variety of temperature, from tropical heat to Arctic cold—and be at home in either sphere. And when it comes to overcrowding, the Chinese provide a staggering example. On these river boats the people live in the most appalling conditions. The rivers of China are her main means of communication. Some of the sampans are not more than twelve feet long by four feet broad, and the only covering is a matting construction over the greater part of the boat. And here, within this confined space, perhaps two families will spend their lives. They don't endure these cramped quarters solely while they are just on a fishing expedition, but always—for every day and night, year in and year out. And the amazing fact is that they seem to be perfectly happy and contented.

As far as the travellers could see, the city folk were in no better fettle, for they were swarming in every street in the most confusing manner. And yet this was just an ordinary day, and the population was going about its ordinary work.

Those on the riverside were gazing at the *Dragon* as she passed. Yellow faces were

everywhere; and the persistent absence of anything familiar was beginning to tell upon the St. Frank's party. Scores of times had they attempted to picture China in their own minds, but never had they realised the true nature of the country.

A land overcrowded with people, cultivated and civilised after its own fashion; but a land where such modernities as sanitation and road transport had no existence. A land that might have looked exactly the same as this in the time of the Ancient Egyptians. And this—this was the real, inner China!

"Yellow faces!" murmured Irene. "Nothing but yellow faces!"

She glanced at her companions, as though to get a relief from the other picture. And this growing dislike—a dislike amounting to fear—was easy to understand. For practically every scene on the riverside, whether near a city or not, spoke of poverty-stricken conditions.

Beggars would sometimes crowd on the banks, appealing for alms—for in certain places the yacht would easily pass within throwing distance. These beggars were repulsive in the extreme. Crowds of tattered, degraded, and frequently appallingly disfigured mendicants met the gaze of the holiday party. No doubt these had been ordered to their posts by their chief, for in China there are beggars' guilds, or unions, in every big city and town. Woe betide the hapless merchant who refuses to pay his amount of "squeeze"!

"I can't understand it!" declared Reggie Pitt, shaking his head. "Surely these people have got enough sense to improve the general conditions? Why doesn't Foo Chow introduce some up-to-date methods?"

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "I mean to say, I had a bright idea that Yang Fu would turn out to be a priceless sort of spot, as it were. Wide streets, jolly old tramcars, electric lights, and all that sort of rot. But I mean, dash it! What have we? Nothing, absolutely, but most frightfully antiquated methods. No dashed street lighting, no motor-cars——"

"I've seen a few wheelbarrows," said Brent.

"Oh, rather," agreed Archie. "In fact, wheelbarrows and sedan-chairs appear to be the sole conveyance for the populace. And I mean, it seems to be the general practice to use the jolly old road as a refuse heap. Garbage thrown here, what? Dash it, we shall all get fever!"

"That's not at all unlikely, Archie," put in Dick Hamilton. "Plague and pestilence is always sweeping through these provinces of China—and mainly because there are no systems of sanitation. The people simply throw their rubbish into the street. We've only seen the surface from this deck, you know. You'd have a fit if you went into some of those narrow streets!"

"Laddie, I've nearly had a fit already," confessed Archie, with a shudder. "But the

queer thing is the majority of these yellow chappies seem frightfully braced. I mean, they'll grin at the slightest provocation, and I'm dashed if they don't seem cheery."

"Yes, they're not the opium-smoking, sinister crowd that one might think—if one judged by cheap detective stories," smiled Dick. "The majority of these Chinese are like children—utterly simple and harmless. They're nothing but serfs, compelled to work for Foo Chow and his soldiers. It's just the same in other parts of China, too. Foo Chow isn't much different to other governors, except that he's had heaps of experience in Europe, and has gained a sort of international air."

"Then why doesn't he introduce modern methods here?" growled Handforth.

"Simply because he knows his own people," replied Dick Hamilton. "They wouldn't tolerate them, old man. If you show the average Chinaman something that's going to help him in his work, he'll look at it in just the same way as a child will watch a conjurer producing playing cards from the back of his hand. The Chinaman wouldn't dream of using the labour-saving device himself, no matter how simple it was. They don't like anything newfangled, and that's the root of the whole stagnation. What was good enough for their ancestors is good enough for them."

"Odds blessings and salvations!" ejaculated Archie. "Then it's a frightfully good thing, perhaps, that these yellow chappies are so bally obstinate! I mean to say, as far as I can see, I'm a whole-hearted believer in the good old war-cry, 'China for the Chinese,' what? It seems to me that China is the best place for the blighters!"

"But there's one thing I want to know," said Tommy Watson bluntly.

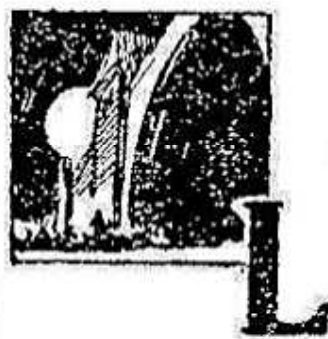
"Speak, and thou shalt be answered—perhaps," murmured Reggie Pitt.

"This is Foo Chow's capital, and the yacht isn't stopping!" said Tommy. "What's the meaning of it?"

"It's a good thing I said 'perhaps,'" replied Reggie. "For, to tell the truth, I haven't the faintest idea. I was half-afraid that we were to be landed and bunged into chokey. But we're continuing the trip."

This was true enough. Without any alteration of speed the *Dragon* was slipping past the crowded shores of the city, and was making for the broad, open river beyond.

Where were the prisoners being conveyed?



CHAPTER 6.

IN SIGHT OF THE STRONGHOLD.

UNCHEON intervened, and Dr. Foo Chow was the same suave, polite host as ever. So far he had given no indication that he was contemplating any change in the existing

order of things. He did not discuss his plans, but confined his conversation to subjects of general interest—the conditions of the country, the possibilities of advancement, the problem of overcrowding. Anything, in fact, except the subject which was uppermost in all minds.

And his prisoners were altogether too reserved to ask him any pointed questions. The elders, at least, were glad enough to know that the existing conditions were being maintained.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore had a feeling that they were all living on the edge of a volcano; Mr. Stokes wasn't quite so fearful. But they had been to China before, and Mr. Stokes hadn't.

They knew that deep down in the hearts of these Chinese there was an ill-concealed hatred of everything foreign—a contempt for the foreigner and all his customs. Once out of the personal presence of Dr. Foo Chow, the Britishers were likely to get short shrift. For the Chinese, in spite of their everlasting good-humour, can always be indescribably cruel.

But was Foo Chow himself any better? Nelson Lee had an idea that he was infinitely worse. His very behaviour now was a form of refined cruelty—just that type of cruelty which the Chinaman delights in. He was playing with his victims. While this whim lasted he was treating them as his guests. But never for a moment did Lee lose sight of the fact that it was only a whim.

And he was dreading the fateful moment of the sudden change to come. He believed that this, indeed, was Foo Chow's main object. To bring about the change in one fateful hour. A complete and utter descent from luxury into the unnameable horrors of a native prison. What would happen if this tragedy occurred Lee could not picture. These unsuspecting schoolboys; these laughing, innocent girls! The very thought was enough to cause a cold hand to grip the detective's heart.

And his feeling of impotence was deadening. Dorrie felt it, too. They could do nothing, absolutely nothing, to avert the tragedy. It was all a question of how long Foo Chow would maintain his pretence of host. Perhaps the end was within sight already!

To plead with him would be useless. Lee knew this well enough, although he was prepared to humble himself in the uttermost degree for the sake of the boys and girls. But all the time he knew that Foo Chow would only laugh at such pleadings. He held the whip hand.

"The question is, what are we going to do?" remarked Handforth, as he leaned over the rail during the heat of the afternoon. "We're in the open country again now, and it looks like another gorge ahead. What was the idea of passing right through Yang Fu?"

"It's no good asking us," said Church, frowning. "I'm thinking of old Chingy. He's in Yang Fu, isn't he? We must be eight or nine miles away by now."

"We ought to make a big effort of some kind," growled Handforth. "Why couldn't we all pass the word round, and start a fight at a given minute? It wouldn't take us more than ten minutes to throw all these Chinks overboard!"

McClure glared.

"What did Mr. Lee warn you?" he asked tartly.

"Eh?" said Handforth. "Oh, well——"

"Didn't you promise him to keep these war-like emotions down?" said McClure sternly. "What's the good of suggesting a lot of impossible ideas, Handy? Even if we did chuck these Chinese overboard we should be swamped by a few thousand others in less than half an hour."

"But Chingy, you know," said Handforth, scratching his head. "I'm thinking about that poor beggar! There he is, awaiting his torture, and we can't do anything to help him. I say, look over there!" he added, staring. "Isn't that a road?"

"What about it?"

"It's a road," said Handforth. "A proper highway, with a surface good enough for any motor-car. Who told me there weren't any roads in China?"

Dick Hamilton strolled up and overheard the words.

"I think I'm the chap who told you that, Handy," he said. "And I was right, too. The roads in this country are just tracks, caused by the feet of people as they pass from one town to another. We've seen some of them—worn right down below the level of the ordinary ground. In the winter-time they're converted into miniature canals of mud."

"Then what about this one over here?" demanded Handforth.

Dick nodded.

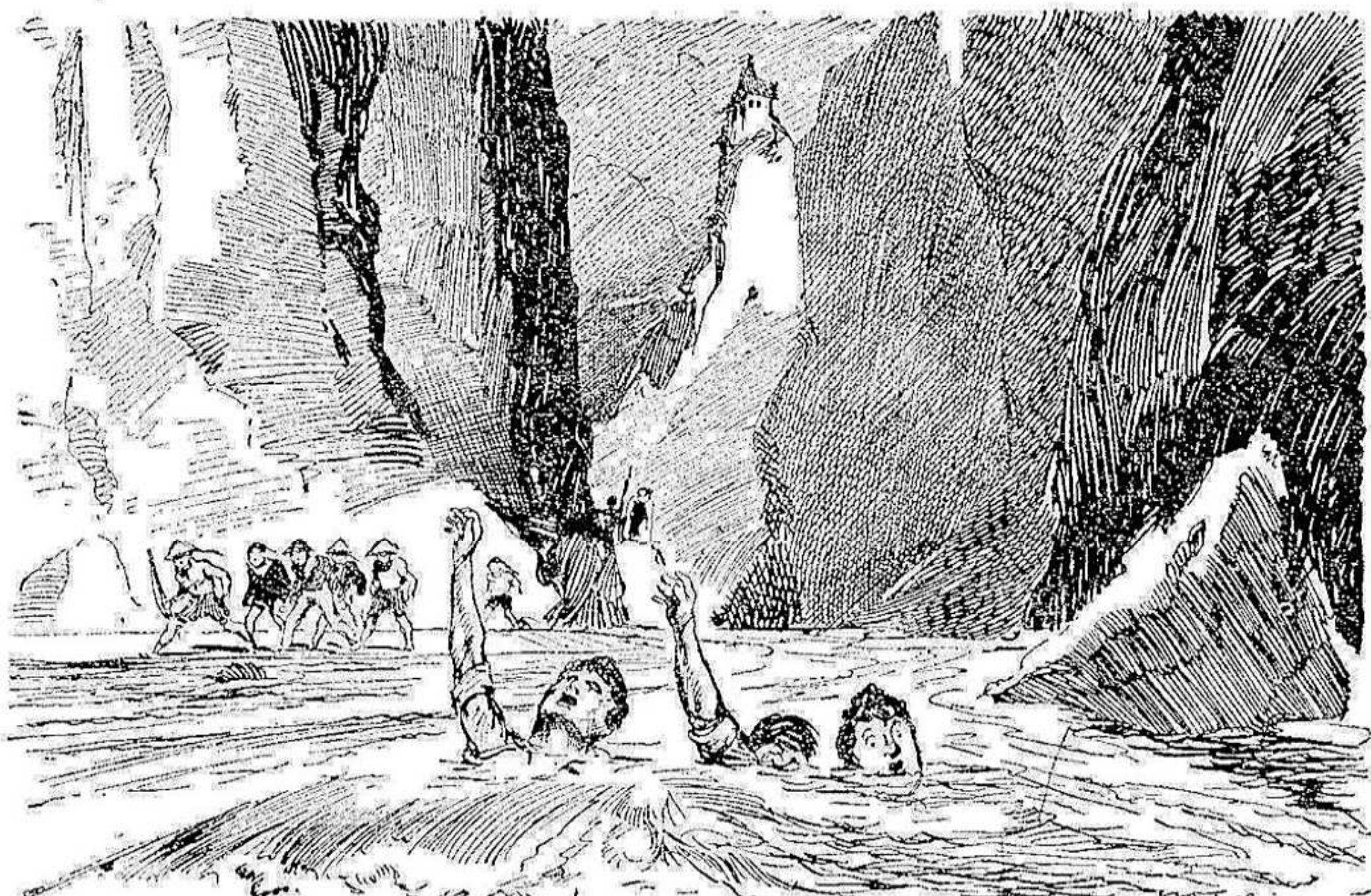
"That's an exception," he replied. "Mr. Lee and Dorrie were just talking about it. They think that Foo Chow must have built it for some special purpose. It leads from Yang Fu into those hills over there. He's probably got motor-cars, and motor-cars aren't any good in China unless some suitable roads are specially constructed."

"I say, perhaps Foo Chow's headquarters are right in those hills," said Handforth eagerly. "He uses his cars to go to and from the city. By George, that's about it!"

"Oh, rot!" growled Church.

"For once Handy's right, I think," said Dick. "Anyhow, that's what Mr. Lee believes. Foo Chow has grown so accustomed to real civilisation that he doesn't care to live in the native city. Anyhow, we shall soon see. Something's in the wind. Haven't you noticed how the sailors are hustling about?"

This was a fact; the decks were active in



"Help—help!" Handy croaked feebly, then his head dipped beneath the surface of the swift-flowing river and he disappeared with his chums. To the running coolies on the bank it looked as though the intrepid trio must drown—and that's what Handy wanted them to think.

every quarter. Men were making all sorts of preparations, and there was a kind of stir which hinted that the journey was nearing its end. The *Dragon* was now passing through country which was too wild to be cultivated. Another stretch of rocky land, where the river wound its way into the gorges of a low range of hills.

Presently the view was cut off, for the rocks rose sharply, and the river flowed silently and mysteriously between the walls of the gorge. But here the water was as broad as ever, and the current was correspondingly moderate. Only when the river narrowed did it become swift and treacherous.

"We're coming to something now," remarked Lee tensely. "I'm scared, Dorrie; I don't mind telling you that I'm scared."

"You!" said his lordship, staring.

"Thou, Umtagati!" boomed Umlosi, the African chief. "Thou art afraid? Wau! Are mine ears at fault?"

Nelson Lee smiled and shook his head.

"I'm not scared for myself," he replied quietly. "I don't need to tell you that, do I? But I'm frightened because I don't know what's going to happen to these young people. And because, whatever happens, we can do nothing. Dorrie, I've never felt so infernally helpless in my life!"

"Yes, there's somethin' in that," agreed his lordship, rubbing his smooth chin. "By glory! I'd rather be surrounded by a hundred herds of wild elephant! Hang it,

I should know what to do. But here——"

He broke off with a shrug.

They regarded the rocks as they swept past. It was perceptibly cooler here, and the change in the atmosphere seemed to send a chill to their hearts. There was something infinitely sinister—something full of dread—in this silent entry into the hills.

"Hallo! There are two rivers ahead!" said Fullwood a little later.

"No, I think it's the same river, but two branches of it," replied Buster Boots, staring. "That must be an island in the centre. I expect we'll take the right-hand branch—it seems broader."

Conversation was curtailed soon afterwards, for there was a great deal to see and everybody to watch. It was soon obvious that Boots' suggestion was the correct one—that there were not two rivers, but merely a great widening of the one, leaving a rocky island in the middle.

The *Dragon*, with her engines only just turning over, was creeping up now, her sailors on the alert, gangways out and ropes ready. Obviously the voyage was nearing its end.

The river island, as far as the watchers could judge, was about a mile long, and nearly half a mile broad. It was no ordinary island, either. It rose sheer out of the river, with every shore a perpendicular cliff, varying from fifty to a hundred feet in height. There was no bank in the ordinary way. The water lapped this cliff and swirled

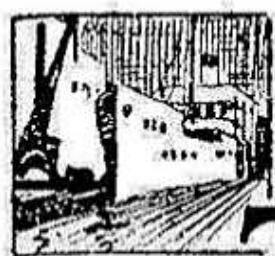
past the jutting rocks. And, above, a strong wall could be seen, entirely encircling the island.

Here and there were glimpses of vegetation, green peeping up over the wall at different points. But nothing further was revealed of its mysteries. The island stood there, in mid-river, a place of hidden secrets.

"Our prison, Dorrie!" muttered Lee sombrely, as they stared up at the wall. "This, without question, is the stronghold where Foo Chow intends to keep us incarcerated. Good heavens! Did you ever see such a spot? Escape from there will be impossible indeed!"

"An' what about the conditions?" asked Dorrie.

"Old man, I daren't let my thoughts dwell on them!" murmured Lee.



CHAPTER 7.

INTO THE UNKNOWN.

THE *Dragon* slowly and gently warped into her position against the quay. Men ashore made the ropes fast, and the yacht was held. All along her rail were interested faces—the faces of the St. Frank's holiday party.

Here, at last, was a glimpse of *real* civilisation!

And everybody responded to the sight surprisingly. They felt more cheerful—they felt more optimistic. It was so good to see something familiar after the countless spectacles of pure Chinese primitiveness.

The quay was of solid concrete, built at the foot of the gorge, and just beyond it were concrete buildings—storehouses, and one building where the steady puff of an oil-engine exhaust could be seen. And all along the quay were graceful electric standards.

"It's like a miniature port," said Irene enthusiastically.

"And for a very good reason—it is a miniature port!" exclaimed Dick Hamilton. "But isn't it queer? A place like this, right in the hills, with concrete storehouses, electric light, and everything! By Jove! Foo Chow is simply full of surprises!"

"I thought we were getting deeper and deeper into the heart of primitive China," remarked Tommy Watson. "And now, without warning, we strike this! I wonder what's going to happen next?"

Beyond the quay they could see a great causeway—a winding, stone-paved road which led upwards through a man-made gap. Undoubtedly it led to the higher level—to the level of that island!

Nelson Lee was more acutely alarmed than ever as he saw the eager excitement of the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls. Were they to receive a dreadful shock soon, or was this fool's paradise to continue?

Dr. Foo Chow appeared. Until now he

had been attired either in white European clothing or ordinary native silks. But now he was different. He was simply gorgeous in a rich, immaculately fitting uniform. His buttons, the chains upon his shoulders, the ornamentations on his helmet—all were of solid gold. And more than one enormous precious stone gleamed and scintillated on his dress.

"Gentlemen, I appeal for your assistance," he said smoothly, as he bowed before Nelson Lee and Dorrie. "Our journey is ended, and you are about to be escorted to my palace—which, I beg, you will regard entirely as your own. My one aim is to make this enforced visit as happy and as enjoyable as possible, and I desire your co-operation."

"Does this mean that we are to be flung into prison?" asked his lordship bluntly.

"Prison!" echoed Dr. Foo Chow, pained.

"That is an unpleasant word, Lord Dorri-more! I am distressed that you should jump to such hard conclusions. Have I not proved that my intentions are sociable? Prison! My palace is the one great pride of my life—the gem which shines like a beacon in this wilderness of mountain and confusion of sordid antiquity. I am placing it entirely at your disposal, and my delight will be all the greater if you take my expressions literally, and regard yourselves as the masters."

Lee and Dorrie knew how to take this superlative talk. Every educated Chinaman deems it mere ordinary politeness to subordinate himself to his guests.

"What is this co-operation of which you speak?" asked Lee quietly.

"Within a brief half-hour my picked troops—my special guard—will line the causeway, and provide a cordon of honour for our passage," replied Foo Chow. "You, gentlemen, can deal with our young friends better than my officers. I desire you to prepare them in processional form, as you think best, so as to be in readiness for the stately march to the palace."

"It shall be as you wish, Dr. Foo Chow," said Nelson Lee.

"I am gratified," purred the Chinaman. "I can promise you a few delightful surprises. But I will not say more. A man who spoils his surprises by giving hints is but a poor host."

He bowed and went away.

"I wonder what these surprises are going to be?" asked Dorrie, in a low voice. "Delightful, eh? By the Lord Harry, I doubt it! The dungeons for us, I expect!"

"Conjecture will not help us," muttered Lee, between set teeth.

However, there was nothing to do except comply with Dr. Foo Chow's orders. The fact that they had been expressed as wishes did not alter their real character. And it was certainly better for Lee to give the necessary instructions.

"Now, all of you," he said, as he faced the crowd of boys and girls. "I want you to remain as calm as possible, and to put on an

indifferent front. We don't know what we're going into, but there's no backing out. Just try to be natural and calm."

"All right, sir!"

"Rely on St. Frank's, sir!"

"And the Moor View School, too!" said the girls.

Lee proceeded to give the few necessary instructions, and within a few minutes there was a hurried scramble below, particularly on the part of the girls, who were not only anxious to change for the shore trip, but to take valises and handbags. It was learned, however, that nothing could be carried. All the baggage would be conveyed to the palace by servants. Foo Chow would not hear of his guests demeaning themselves by carrying the lightest article.

Did this mean that they would never see their belongings again? It was impossible to tell. It was a case of wait and see.

Activities were already afoot on the quay and up the causeway. Companies of soldiers had appeared, and were lining the route. These soldiers were very similar to those on the *Dragon*, but they were bigger men, and their uniforms were bewilderingly brilliant in their dazzling colours. There was, indeed, an air of wonderful pageantry about the whole affair.

Was this the climax of Dr. Foo Chow's whim? Were they to receive this guard of honour and then be cast, with benumbing swiftness, into one of China's indescribably horrifying prisons?

At the moment, nothing could be guessed. Already Dr. Foo Chow had made one deep, lasting impression upon these prisoners of his. They knew him to be a man of mystery—a man whom it was impossible to read. Even now, when they were on the point of going ashore, they did not know what awaited them. Even Mr. Nelson Lee, with all his experience of men, had been unable to fathom the personality of this amazing Chinaman.

Bugles sounded, and in the far distance there was the echo of beating drums. The air seemed to quiver with a throb of expectancy. Sailors were preparing a huge gangway—one that had been brought from a building on the quayside. It was wide, gaily painted and decorated, and formed a graceful, sloping pathway down to the quay.

Down the river the *Wanderer* could be seen, and it was becoming fairly evident that she would be moored close behind, in mid-stream, since there was no accommodation for her at the quay.

Lord Dorrimore glanced back at his beloved yacht.

"Gad, there's some consolation in knowing that the good old tub is close at hand, anyhow," he muttered. "Eh, Umlosi, you old rascal? We shan't be quite so lonely."

"Even as thou sayest, N'Kose, it is well that thy ship-of-great-speed should be near

at hand," agreed Umlosi. "But I long to test my spear against the pigmy swords of these yellow dogs! Wau! It is ill that warriors such as thou and I should suffer this indignity!"

"I can understand your point of view, old man, but it's a case of 'have to,'" replied his lordship. "But you never know—perhaps we shall have a chance to show our teeth before long."

"May it come soon, O my master!" rumbled the African.

Bugles were sounding again, and Dr. Foo Chow, accompanied by his two personal attendants, gave a signal. He made a move for the gangway, and the procession ashore commenced.

It was a well-ordered affair, the whole party going in lines of four, in orderly state. Handforth found himself at the end of a line which contained his two chums and his minor. They were all looking about them with keen interest, and with a vague sense of uneasy expectancy in their hearts.

"Well, we're on the move now," said Edward Oswald, as they reached the quay. "Up the causeway, eh? I'll bet we're being taken to that island."

"But how?" asked Church. "We're ashore."

"There must be a bridge, or something, connecting the island to the ordinary river bank," remarked Willy. "On this side the channel is comparatively narrow. Anyhow, we shall soon see."

The procession was more like a pageant than ever.

With Foo Chow at the head, and with the way deeply lined with hundreds of gaily attired soldiers, it certainly seemed as though this potentate was intent upon honouring his guests to the best of his ability.

The causeway was not long. It wound round, and after a comparatively short walk the holiday party found itself on the higher ground, and here they came upon a great concrete road. This led off in one direction far down into the valley where Yang Fu lay. On the other side it ended abruptly in a sheer chasm, and across this chasm was the rocky island, with its protecting walls and its sheer cliffs.

Here, from this side, the wall was much higher, and immediately in front stood a pair of enormously massive doors. They were of solid wood, quaintly carved, and with two fearsome dragons, one on either side.

In every other direction the country was wild—nothing but rocks and crags, and with scarcely the faintest hint of green. A more desolate spot could scarcely be imagined.

Foo Chow, leading the procession, hovered at the very edge of the abyss, where the road came to a sudden end. It was thus obvious that the party was being led on to the island, beyond those enormous doors.

Now had come the moment of the real imprisonment!



CHAPTER 8.

WITHIN THE GATES.

LOOK!" said Irene, clutching at Mrs. Stokes' arm. "Hush!" murmured Mrs. Stokes. "Remember, we've got to keep our heads and not to get excited!"

Evidently Mrs. Stokes was in a state of nervous tension, and she was doing her best to hide it. She felt herself responsible for the safety of these Moor View girls, and she was stunned by the possibilities of what might be coming. Imprisonment in a Chinese fortress would be appalling for the strongest nerved men. What would it be, then, for these cultured girls?

"Look!" repeated Irene.

Those towering doors were sliding open. They were not swinging outwards, but rolling back on invisible runners. They were tremendously high, rising up with majestic grace. But, even after they had been opened, it was impossible to see on to the island. For another great structure was revealed—a high mass of decorative girder work, which at first puzzled the newcomers.

Slowly, however, the thing lowered itself, and then became revealed as a drawbridge. It was an enormous affair, and it dropped into position with scarcely a sound, and evidently by means of hydraulic power. There was nothing primitive about the methods employed here.

The gap between the mainland and the island was fully a hundred feet, so this drawbridge was an affair of impressive proportions. With scarcely a sound it came to rest, and the road was now complete, straight on to the island.

Foo Chow waved his hand, and the procession continued.

"My only hat!" muttered Dick Hamilton, staring.

"Dear old boy, it's not quite so frightful as we feared," murmured Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Begad! Tropical gardens, by what I can see!"

"It's amazing!" said Tommy Watson.

They were walking over the drawbridge now, and the view through the vast gateway was opened before them. A scene of gorgeous splendour was provided, totally and absolutely different from what they had expected.

Dr. Foo Chow was a man of surprises!

Stepping upon the island and passing through the gateway, the prisoners found themselves transported into the midst of tropical luxuriance. Palms grew gracefully alongside the road, lawns stretched away on either side, and flower-beds of riotous colour were cunningly surrounded by pathways. In places there were miniature forests of pigmy trees. The whole scene, indeed, was entrancing, and the air was filled with the heavy perfume from the countless blossoms.

All this, in conjunction with the pageantry of their entry, filled the newcomers with a fresh sensation. Perhaps this amazing Chinaman was not so black as they had been painting him!

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth, staring round in amazement. "I thought we were going to be marched into a fortress and chucked down into the dungeons! Instead of that, we've come into a kind of park!"

"It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen!" said Church. "Look at those avenues over there, shady and cool, and those fountains playing in the middle of that lawn! Why, this is a kind of paradise! Here, in the middle of this river, surrounded by barren hills! I've never known such a rummy go!"

"Dorrie, when will this man cease his wonders?" murmured Lee, as they walked on. "Are we to be reprieved still?"

"Looks like it," chuckled his lordship. "Upon my word, Lee, I don't believe he's half such a blighter as you seem to imagine!"

"Don't be fooled, Dorrie," warned the detective. "It pleases him to treat us with this display, but nothing can alter the fact that we are his prisoners. His soldiers are swarming everywhere, and once that drawbridge is raised we are still further cut off from the world."

"Yes, that's true," admitted Dorrie. "But, after all, imprisonment of this sort isn't such a bore as bein' hurled into a murky dungeon. I suppose this is what Foo Chow calls his summer home, eh? Good glory! He must have spent a fortune on this place!"

"What does Foo Chow care about fortunes?" asked Mr. Stokes. "With all these myriads of people in a state of poverty, taxed until they are on the point of starvation, it is small wonder that Foo Chow can afford these luxuries! But it must have taken him twenty years to bring this place up to its present pitch of perfection."

"Twenty years at least," agreed Nelson Lee. "And the labour of tens of thousands of his coolies, too. I don't think there is any other place on earth where a man could do such things as this!"

Turning a bend in the leafy roadway, they passed through an imposing gateway and came within full sight of the palace itself. It was impossible to repress the murmurs of admiration and delight, for this was no ordinary Chinese construction.

Most of the Chinese buildings, whether belonging to rich men or not, are more or less tawdry from a European standpoint. But Dr. Foo Chow's palace could not be termed tawdry in any sense of the word.

It was literally a palace. In some respects it followed the dictates of Chinese custom, with its gracefully curved roof at the corners and at the gables. But the building itself was of white marble, shimmering and glistening in the sunlight. There were palms round it, with delightful conservatories and fountains playing on a wide terrace. Great glass doors stood invitingly open, and at the main entrance, grouped about the marble

steps, were scores of household servants, all of them spotlessly clean in white. There were numerous women, too.

Many of the juniors rubbed their eyes, hardly believing that this vision was real. It seemed like some fantastic dream.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, I trust you are pleased with my humble abode?" asked Dr. Foo Chow, as he called a halt and faced his prisoners. "As I have already intimated, it is my desire that you should regard this palace as your own. My servants are your servants. They will take orders when you please and as you dictate. Swift punishment will fall upon those who fail to please you in the most trifling detail."

"Dr. Foo Chow, I am making no unexpected confession when I declare that we are all amazed," said Nelson Lee quietly. "But would it not be better to dispense with this—theatrical display? We are your prisoners, and that fact is undeniable. Is it your intention to—"

"Nay, I urge you not to question me," interposed Dr. Foo Chow purringly. "I do not care to regard you all as my prisoners. Have I not repeatedly asked you to be my guests? Can I do more? My servants will now escort you to your individual suites, and later a gong will announce an early meal. Under the circumstances, I must crave your forgiveness for dinner being so early in the day; but to-morrow, no doubt, we shall get into more regular habits."

He turned aside, and Nelson Lee gave Lord Dorrimore a helpless glance. It was impossible to get anything satisfactory out of this man.

He was true to his word, however.

The "guests" were directed to their suites—the men in one direction, the boys in another, and Mrs. Stokes and the girls in a third. And all of them were provided with a little army of personal servants—obsequious domestics who were ready to fly at a word of bidding.

Irene & Co. were each given their own maids, and the apartments themselves were a fresh source of wonderment.

For there were no indications of Chinese habits here. Every room was decorated and furnished with exquisite artistry, in a mingled style which was European but, nevertheless, Oriental. Softly shaded electric lamps were in every quarter, and the floors were covered with soft and silky carpets.

Dr. Foo Chow was keeping up this farce endlessly!

Just when his prisoners had been expecting a series of unknown horrors, they were plunged into undreamed of luxuries. It was more like a chapter out of the "Arabian Nights" than an actual happening.

"I'm speechless!" declared Handforth firmly. "I simply can't say a giddy word! I'm dumb! Here we are in the middle of this enchanted castle, and our people at home are probably watching one of the Test matches! Rot! It simply can't be! We shall wake up soon!"

"For a dumb chap you're doing pretty well," grinned Church. "But you're about right!" he added breathlessly. "It is more like a dream than anything else. I suppose we've got these rooms to ourselves, eh?"

"Seems like it," said McClure. "A bedroom and a kind of lounge, and a bathroom, too! I say, look at this bathroom! Ye gods and little fishes! I'll bet the President of the United States hasn't got one as good!"

The bathroom was a joy of green marble, with not merely a shower bath, but a big swimming pool, too. In the sleeping apartment the beds were provided with the snowiest linen, and there were any amount of soft, luxurious lounges.

And almost before the juniors could indulge in the joys of a wash, their bags and trunks arrived. Foo Chow had kept his promise, and when the guests came down they were able to appear in fresh white flannels, and the girls were resplendent in the best of their frocks.

It was found that complete liberty was the order. Every apartment was open and available, and Dr. Foo Chow had vanished. He had retired into a private suite of his own, leaving the St. Frank's party to get accustomed to its new surroundings without any embarrassment.

"Well, old man?" asked Lord Dorrimore, as he and Nelson Lee stood upon a balcony and looked at the younger members of the party strolling through the grounds.

"Well, Dorrie?" smiled Lee.

"What about it?" asked his lordship.

"To tell you the honest truth, I'm at a loss," replied Lee frankly. "I certainly believed that we were to feel Foo Chow's sting to-day. But apparently he is reserving that for another occasion."

"You honestly think that he'll suddenly change?"

"My dear old man, what else is there to think?" asked the detective. "Why should he continue to lavish every luxury upon us? In his heart he hates us like poison. I know it—I can't tell you why I know it, but I do. Sometimes I glimpse a little gleam in his eye—a gleam of half amusement, half contemplation. I think the man's waiting, and when we least expect it he'll sweep all this luxury away and plunge us into a living death."

"But why? Man alive, why?"

"Because he is a Chinaman; because we have dared to interfere with his plans," replied Lee grimly. "What does a day matter to Foo Chow? A day, or a week, or a month? He is playing with us as a cat plays with a mouse, and the more he makes us believe that we are safe, the greater will be his pleasure when he reveals his true intent. At least, that's how I read him."

Lord Dorrimore shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, as long as he remains patient, all well and good," he said philosophically. "I'm not grumblin' at this mode of life,

anyhow. They say that the Chinese are the most patient people on earth. If old Foo Chow waits a month or two, he might wait a bit too long!"

"Exactly!" muttered Lee tensely. "Our policy is to pretend to be submissive and resigned. Perhaps we can evolve some scheme, Dorrie. I don't hold out the slightest hope, but one can never tell. So let us be thankful that we are still in a condition of comfort. We are prisoners, but an idea has recently occurred to me which may contain a gleam of hope."

"Gad, what is it?"

"Not now, Dorrie, not now," replied Lee softly.



CHAPTER 9.

DR. FOO CHOW EXPLAINS.

DINNER was an even more sumptuous meal than any that had been served on board the *Dragon*. It was, indeed, a purely European feast, as excellent as any that the Savoy could provide.

Dr. Foo Chow presided with all his usual charm, and during the dessert he became rather more talkative than usual. Perhaps the excellent wine had loosened his tongue slightly, perhaps he had already made up his mind to be a little more confidential.

"I am happy to see so many signs of contentment," he said softly, as he glanced round at the various tables in the great dining-hall. "It is my wish that you should all spend an enjoyable holiday in this charming setting. You may be sure that I shall not detain you longer than is absolutely necessary."

"Does that mean that we shall ever get away?" asked Dorrie.

The Chinaman looked his surprise.

"Do you assume that I shall keep you here permanently?" he returned. "Nay, I cannot expect you to honour me with such a continuation of your presence. I will admit that the circumstances are difficult. The element of compulsion is regrettable. But I am in such a position that I cannot have it otherwise."

Nelson Lee decided to pander to Foo Chow's mood, and to assume apparently that his words were in earnest.

"When do you believe that we shall be at liberty to go?" he inquired politely.

"I would like to say that you were at liberty to leave me in desolation at any moment, but that would be merely paltering with the distressing truth," replied the host sadly. "I am not in a position, at this moment, to give any approximate date. But you can be assured that it will be as early as possible. In the meantime, you are perfectly safe. I have given orders that you must not be interfered with under pain of instant death to the culprit. Any servant

of mine who reveals the slightest trace of insubordination will be dealt with drastically."

"I take it that we have the freedom of this island?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Exactly," replied Dr. Foo Chow. "But let me say that I shall regard it as a breach of etiquette if there is the slightest attempt to escape." He smiled. "Not that you will offend me by making any such foolhardy move. I would remind you that there are hundreds of my soldiers on this island, that the drawbridge is constantly guarded, and that the river is deep and treacherous, with a deadly current that means death to any swimmer. I hope I have made it clear that the perils would be big?"

"Quite clear, thanks," said Dorrie, nodding.

"I would add that such a breach of etiquette would only have one result," said the Chinaman. "Those who so affronted me would immediately sacrifice my hospitality, and would be treated as real prisoners. And in this country a prisoner is not a person to be envied."

It was more than a subtle hint—it was a direct threat. As long as the holiday party behaved itself, all well and good; but the instant there was any defiance, the unruly ones would be submitted to the harshest possible treatment.

"But why are you honouring us in this way?" asked Nelson Lee smoothly. "Why are you suffering our presence for this indefinite period?"

"There is no reason for further secrecy, so I will tell you," returned the host. "My plans for the overthrowing of Yung Li Chang are nearly complete. The province of Hu Kiang is rich, replete with mineral lands and endless resources. In order to carry out my ambitious enterprises I need those lands. I have needed them for many years."

"But you've never had the ghost of a chance of getting them, eh?" said his lordship. "I understand that Yung Li Chang is a pretty powerful mandarin, or governor. His armies are a tough bunch?"

Foo Chow frowned.

"The armies of Yung Li Chang have defied the pick of my troops year after year, in battle after battle!" he replied grimly. "I fully realise that this guerilla warfare is a waste of time. It will continue for years with no definite result. And at last I am determined to create a climax. And just when I reach that determination you come upon me and threaten to wreck my most elaborately conceived plans. Are you surprised that I should take drastic steps to silence you?"

"By making us your compulsory guests, I take it?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Unfortunately, yes," said the Chinese millionaire. "What would have happened if I had taken no action? Remember, I cannot submit to delay or interference. What would

you have done had I allowed the *Wanderer* to proceed on her voyage?"

"We should probably have made representations to the Canton Government," replied Nelson Lee candidly. "Our British code is different to yours, Dr. Foo Chow. We know that you have taken Yung Li Chang's son to torture him. And, were it in our power, we would prevent that horror with every fibre of our beings."

"Hear, hear!" chorused a dozen of the St. Frank's fellows.

"We'll prevent it yet, too!" said Handforth defiantly.

"Ah, our young friend is still irrepressible!" purred Dr. Foo Chow. "For his own sake, I trust that he will not indulge in any more escapades. The next one might have a tragic result. But to continue my former theme. You say that you would have made representations to the Canton Government? I need hardly assure you that I snap my fingers at those petty officials. At the same time, I have enemies in Canton, in Shanghai, in Hong Kong. There are men of my own race who are jealous of my wealth and of my success. With such a story in their hands they would stir up endless trouble and harass me. Other neighbouring provinces would pitch their soldiers into this fight, and in the resulting war my own soldiers might have succumbed. So, in order to avoid that possibility, I brought you all with me. I mean you no harm. I wish you no ill-will. My one desire is to remain on the friendliest possible terms. And ultimately you will return to your own country."

"Ultimately?" asked Mr. Stokes.

"It may take a few weeks for my plans to reach fruition," replied Dr. Foo Chow. "But when Yung Li Chang has surrendered his lands into my keeping, and my rule is proclaimed over Hu Kiang, then will this little comedy be over. Then will you be replaced on board the *Wanderer* and escorted to the open sea."

"And do you expect us to keep your secrets?" asked Dorrie.

"It will be a matter of indifference to me whether you keep them or not," replied the Chinaman blandly. "For when I am master of Hu Kiang I shall also be master of Yung Li Chang's powerful army. And I can defy the rest of China if it is foolish enough to interfere with me. You see, so much depended upon your silence that I could do nothing but bring you into my own country. Am I not a man of kindness and consideration? Had I liked I could have killed you all, and thus ended everything. But no. I like the British, and I am a lover of British ways and customs. As the construction and furnishing of this palace will tell you, I am no enemy of your country. And why should I kill so many promising young lives when such a step is unnecessary?"

"And in the meantime?" asked Nelson Lee grimly. "While we are your guests, that unfortunate boy is to be brutally tortured?"

Dr. Foo Chow shrugged his shoulders.

"That," he purred, "is my business!"



CHAPTER 10.

HANDFORTH, THE INCORRIGIBLE.

THOSE words of Foo Chow's were remembered by all the members of the holiday party after the dinner was over. The torturing of Yung Ching was *his* business! The cool, gentle manner in which he had made the assertion had sounded inexpressibly cold-blooded.

"The brute!" said Irene Manners indignantly. "Oh, the callous demon! To talk like that of a helpless boy! And we can do nothing!"

"That's the worst of it," murmured Mary Summers. "The fact that we've got every luxury here only makes matters worse. It seems such a shame that we should be treated so well and Yung Ching should be tortured and mutilated!"

Dick Hamilton looked rather distressed.

"We're all as cut up about it as you are," he said. "But it's no good talking to Foo Chow, and it's no good thinking of escape. Perhaps Mr. Lee might be able to devise some plan——"

"It's no good waiting for that," interrupted Handforth firmly. "After all, Chingy belongs to the Remove, so it's up to the Remove to rescue him."

"But, my dear chap——"

"If the Remove won't do anything, I've got to do it singlehanded!" went on Handforth with obstinacy. "Didn't we come all this way on purpose to save the poor chap from having his fingers lopped off?"

"Oh, don't!" said Irene, with a shiver.

"Sorry, but facts are facts!" said Handforth sternly. "It's no good being squeamish. Yung Ching is going to be chopped up, so we've got to act at once. We came here to do the job, and——"

"Wait a minute, you hopeless dummy!" snapped Dick. "What's the good of saying that we came out on purpose? Don't we all know it? There's one concrete fact which you can't push aside. We're on a rock, in the middle of the river, with sheer cliffs on every side, and we haven't the faintest idea where Yung Ching is imprisoned."

"That's nothing!" said Handforth airily.

"Incidentally, there are just about a thousand soldiers within call," added Dick Hamilton. "We can't move ten yards without these soldiers keeping us in sight. Nothing, eh? When you look at this thing from a sensible angle, Handy, you'll realise that, in spite of our best hopes, we're helpless."

"He's right, Ted," said Irene gravely.

But Handforth wouldn't admit it for a moment. When he had made up his mind on a subject, nothing but actual experience would make him alter. Poor Church and McClure had a terrible time of it.

"Escape!" said Handforth firmly. "That's the only thing!"

"But, you chump——"

"I don't want any 'buts,' my lad," interrupted Handforth. "Where there's a will there's a way! But there's no such word as 'impossible' in my dictionary! I've made up my mind, and there's an end of it!"

"There'll be an end of you if you don't chuck this madness," said McClure, with acute alarm. "Handy, old man, we're serious. Didn't you hear what Foo Chow said? If you try to escape he'll have you beheaded, or something!"

Edward Oswald regarded his chums coldly.

"I'm surprised at you!" he said, with biting scorn. "You believe everything you hear. Thank goodness, I'm different! I don't take any notice of Foo Chow's bluff. I'm going to escape from this island, and I'm going to rescue Chingy. Let's go and have a look at the wall. It might be a good idea to dive down into the river and make a swim for it."

Most of the members of the party were out in the open, enjoying the cool of the evening. Handforth & Co. approached the nearest section of the wall and leaned over. It was only about four feet high from the inside, although it looked much higher from the level of the river.

Bending over, the juniors could gaze straight downwards at the swiftly flowing current far below, with a sheer cliff dropping to it.

"You can jump in if you like," said Church gruffly. "But I thought your idea was to help Chingy? You can't do much in that line if you commit suicide!"

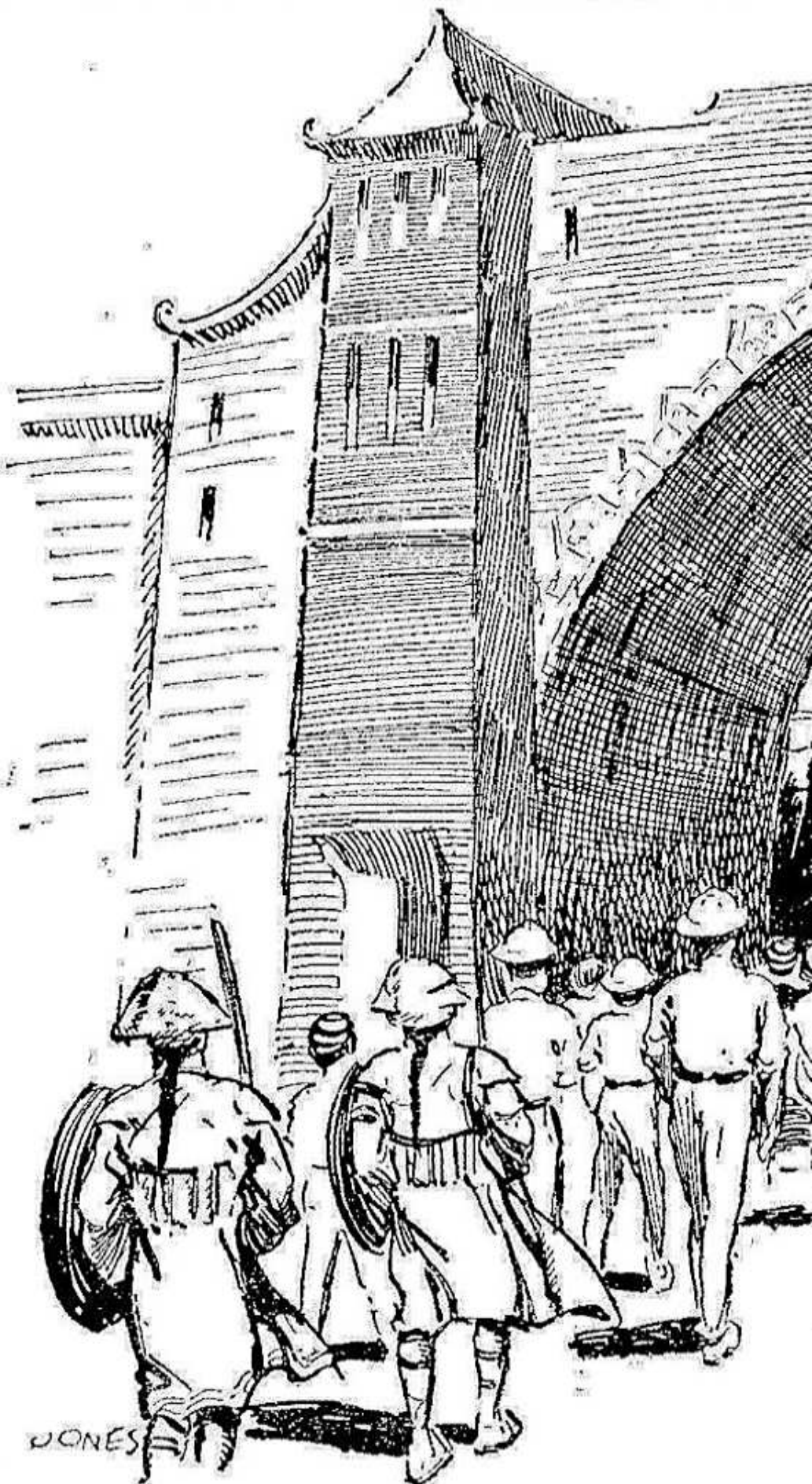
Handforth grunted. He was compelled to admit it would be an act of insanity deliberately to dive into that current.

"There's plenty of time," he growled. "Foo Chow won't start his torturing stunt until to-morrow, anyhow. And by that time I shall have thought of a good scheme. You chaps had better leave me alone. I want to concentrate."

Church and McClure were only too ready to oblige, but they didn't go far. They remained quite close, keeping a watchful eye on their impulsive leader. They had a fear that he would do something drastic.

"The more we urge him to be sensible, the worse he'll get," muttered McClure. "So the best thing we can do is to keep mum. The ass doesn't seem to understand that Foo Chow's a living fiend. We were nearly flogged on the yacht. This time it'll be worse."

They were thankful when dusk fell and everybody went indoors. Dr. Foo Chow



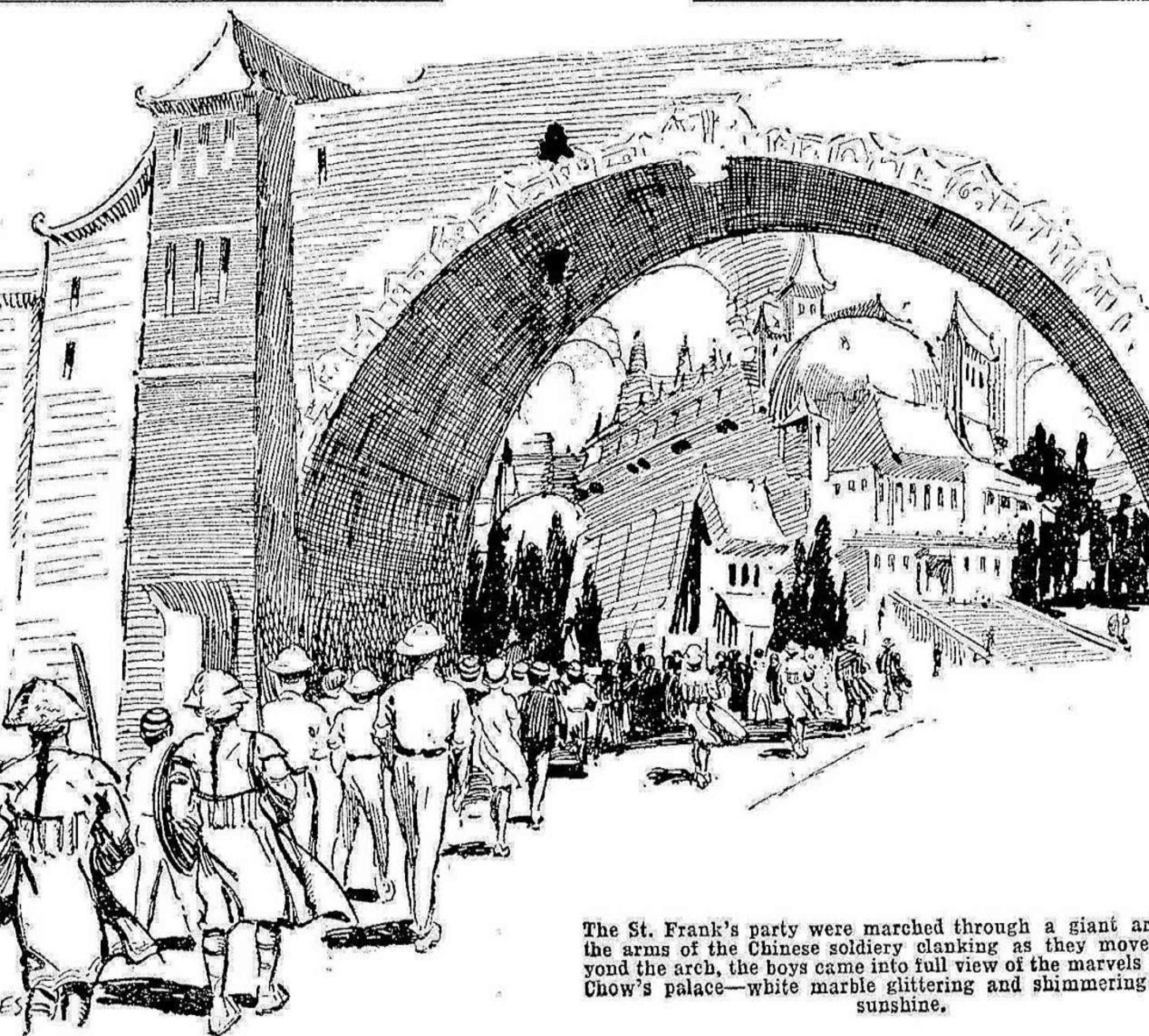
was acting the host again, and he was amiability itself.

"Perhaps the young people would care for a little dancing?" he suggested. "We have music if you desire it. The latest fox-trots, by means of the gramophone—— But one moment! Eight-forty-five? Then the time must be shortly after one o'clock, midday, in London. Let us see what 2LO has to give us!"

"Wireless?" ejaculated Dorrie. "All this distance?"

"A trifle!" laughed Dr. Foo Chow.

He led the way into the ball-room, a truly wonderful apartment with a perfect floor. The wireless set was a formidable affair—with at least twenty valves. A little delay while Foo Chow tuned in, and the pure tones of music came from hidden loud speakers in various parts of the apartment. The entire room was filled with the soft strains, which were almost devoid of atmospherics.



The St. Frank's party were marched through a giant archway, and the arms of the Chinese soldiery clanking as they moved beyond the arch, the boys came into full view of the marvels of Chow's palace—white marble glittering and shimmering in the sunshine.

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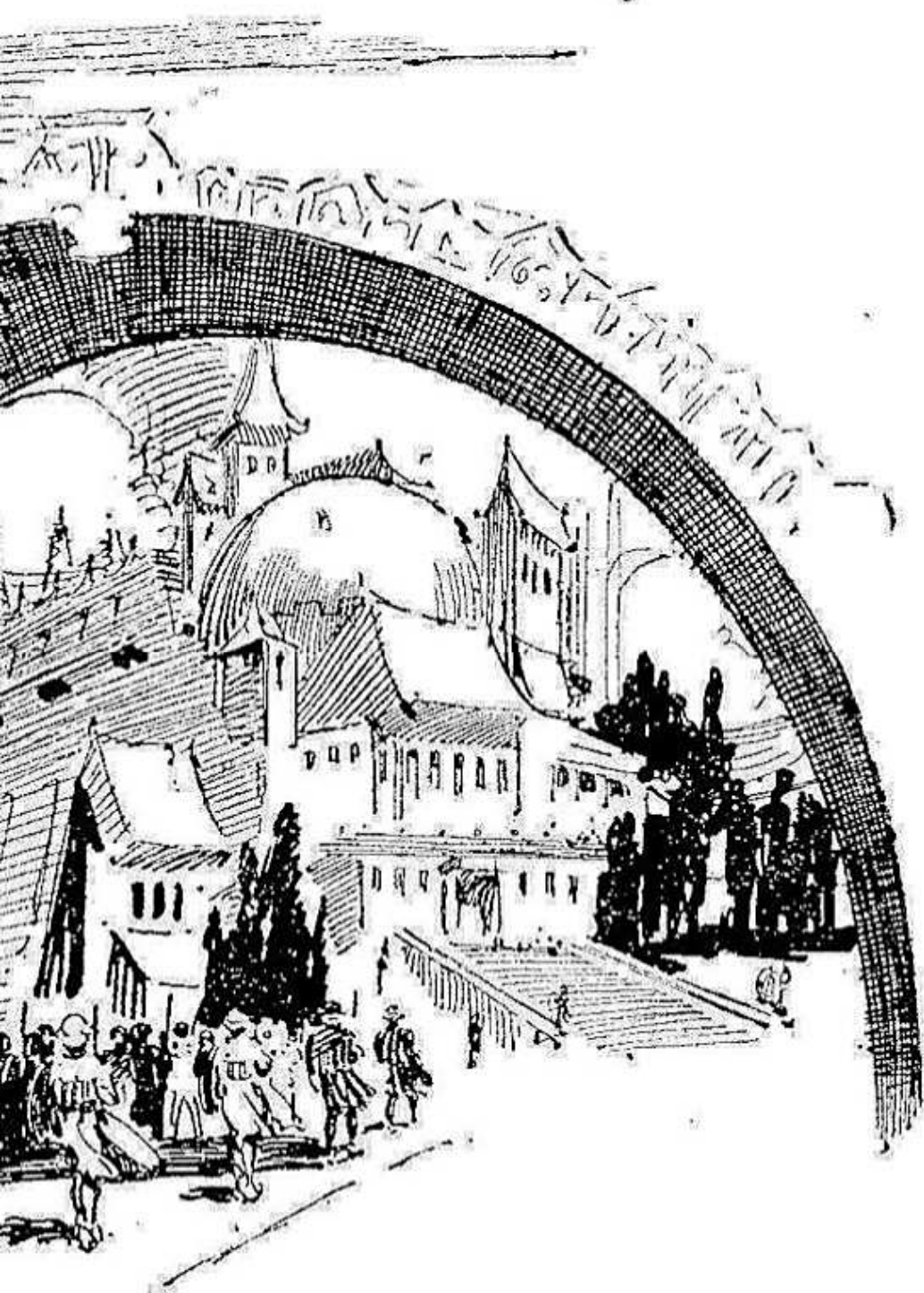
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"By George!" he muttered. "So nea
...yet so far! Here we are, prisoners in
...outlandish place, thousands of miles
...civilisation, and we can listen to lunch
...music from London! It's—it's uncanny

There was an informal sort of dance
...none of the guests was feeling much in
...for gaiety, and after a short while
...retired for the night, only too glad t
...out of Dr. Foo Chow's presence. I
...body was growing to detest him more
...more, in spite of his pretences of frien

"Now, Lee, old man, what about
...idea you had?" asked Lord Dorrimore,
...he and the detective were alone. "You
...expect me to wait until mornin', I sup
...Out with it!"

They were in Nelson Lee's apart
...seated upon a lounge, smoking.



Frank's party were marched through a giant archway, the Chinese soldiery clanking as they moved. Beneath the arch, the boys came into full view of the marvels of Foo Chow's palace—white marble glittering and shimmering in the sunshine.

"It is my aim always to have the best," explained the Chinaman smoothly.

The music came again, another popular fox-trot, and even Handforth forgot his escape plans for a moment.

"By George!" he muttered. "So near and yet so far! Here we are, prisoners in this outlandish place, thousands of miles from civilisation, and we can listen to lunch-time music from London! It's—it's uncanny!"

There was an informal sort of dance, but none of the guests was feeling much inclined for gaiety, and after a short while they retired for the night, only too glad to get out of Dr. Foo Chow's presence. Everybody was growing to detest him more and more, in spite of his pretences of friendship.

"Now, Lee, old man, what about that idea you had?" asked Lord Dorrimore, when he and the detective were alone. "You can't expect me to wait until mornin', I suppose? Out with it!"

They were in Nelson Lee's apartment, seated upon a lounge, smoking.

"Not so loud, Dorrie," murmured Lee. "I don't trust these walls. We are in a strange building, and our friend, Foo Chow, is in possession of the latest, most modern devices. For all we know, there may be detectophones fitted in every apartment."

"Good glory!" said his lordship, startled.

"I am not saying that such is the case, but we cannot be too careful," breathed Lee. "I am far from being an alarmist. As for the idea, we can't count on it. I mentioned that it only contained a gleam of hope, didn't I? And that gleam, Dorrie, is a dull one, I'm afraid."

"But let's have it," urged Lord Dorrimore.

"It is merely this," replied Nelson Lee softly. "This river was unknown to us when we first entered it, but now we are aware of its identity."

"Are we?" said Dorrie. "The first time I knew it."

"My dear fellow, surely it's obvious?" said Lee. "We know that we are in Foo Chow's province, and we also know that Yung Li Chang's country is beyond, farther inland. I studied the map very carefully before starting on this trip, and I found that there is one important river which flows through both provinces. This must be that river, although, on the map, it is marked as a very unimportant one near the coast."

"Gad! Perhaps you're right."

"I must be right, for the simple reason that two and two make four," replied Lee, smiling. "Hu Kiang lies farther inland, up this stream. The gleam of hope I mentioned is rather forlorn, Dorrie, so don't bank on it."

"You mean—escape?" whispered his lordship eagerly.

"Yes."

"But—but how?"

"Not down the river—since that way merely penetrates Foo Chow's own country, where there is nothing but hostility," replied Nelson Lee. "Up river, however, it is only a comparatively short journey into Yung Li Chang's province. You see? In order to escape we must penetrate farther into China. But what does that matter if we get into the hands of friendly natives?"

"By the Lord Harry!" murmured Dorrie. "There's something in it, old man!"

"There's nothing in it at all—unless we can get clear of this island, and recapture the *Wanderer*," said Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "And as that's just as about impossible, we needn't build any hopes. With the *Wanderer* beneath us, and an open course up the river, we could possibly make a break for freedom. Sorry, old man!" he added ruefully. "I told you not to expect much, didn't I?"

His lordship was sitting there with clenched fists.

"It seems a wild sort of dream now, but who knows?" he muttered. "Somethin' is always liable to turn up. Somethin' un-

expected, perhaps, which would give us our chance."

Lee pursed his lips.

"We can only wait," he replied. "But it is just as well to have a skeleton scheme in our minds, just in case that opportunity should come. Now, old man, I think we'd better turn in. We can talk all night and come to no satisfactory point."

Lord Dorrimore was not fired by any foolish hopes. He was prepared to put the suggestion into the back of his mind, to be brought forward in case a chance should crop up. But he knew quite well that this was no subject to be talked of openly. The others might count upon it, and then receive a terrible disappointment.

And while Dorrie prepared for bed, the unhappy Church and McClure were having a terrible time with Handforth. For Edward Oswald was so full of his purpose that he had no desire for sleep. He wanted to prowl about, to find out if there was any chance of a midnight break for freedom.

"You'll drive us dotty in the end!" groaned Church, thoroughly exasperated. "Look out here, you lunatic! Look at those soldiers!"

They were at the window, and Church pointed downwards. The grounds were softly lit by electric standards, and one might have believed that they were merely the guests in a palatial hotel in some tropical holiday resort. But in various places the gleam of soldiers' uniforms could be seen. The palace was guarded by a strong force, and it was only reasonable to suppose that it would be guarded throughout the night.

"Couldn't I dodge 'em?" murmured Handforth.

"With all these lights everywhere?" snapped McClure. "Chuck it, Handy! You'll be better in the morning. You need a good night's sleep, old son. You ought to thank your stars that we're all safe and sound—"

"Chingy isn't safe and sound!" interrupted Handforth sternly.

"Poor kid!" muttered Church miserably. "Mac and I are just as cut up as you are, Handy, but we've got sense enough to realise our helplessness."

To their intense relief, Handforth at last gave it up. Until he made this pronouncement, his chums had been unable to get to bed, for they were literally afraid to allow their leader out of their sight. He was in one of his impulsive moods, and an impulse in Dr. Foo Chow's stronghold was liable to lead to nothing less than death!



CHAPTER 11.

STILL AT IT!

LORD DORRIMORE filled his pipe and sighed.

"We shall be bored to tears after a day or two of this," he complained. "I was never much of a chap for idleness. If Foo Chow is goin' to make a move, I hope he'll start quickly."

It was the following morning, and breakfast was over. Everybody was outside, exploring the wonders of the tropical gardens. Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were strolling along one of the numerous paths.

"We can only accept the position as it stands, Dorrie," declared Lee. "I hope you haven't said anything about this subject we discussed last night?"

"Good gad, no," replied his lordship. "But I've been thinkin' a bit. You know, I'm infernally dubious about Foo Chow's integrity. I don't believe the beggar means to let us out of his sight again!"

Lee glanced at him keenly.

"I've come to the same conclusion," he replied. "That's why I made that tentative suggestion last night. Unless we make some move ourselves, Dorrie, we shall stay here for the rest of our lives. And the rest of our lives may be only a brief week or two."

"All of us for the Lord High Executioner, eh?"

"Yes," returned Lee grimly. "Foo Chow will never dare to let us escape. I'm convinced of that. He'll wait to hear full reports regarding the search for the *Wanderer*, and he'll know when we have all been given up as lost. Then he'll finish us."

"That's cheery!" laughed Dorrie. "You mean he's keepin' us alive in case somebody has got hold of a clue, or somethin'? There's bound to be a frightful stir when the *Wanderer* is posted as missin', an' when we're all given up as dead. Heaps of inquiries, too. You think that Foo Chow just wants to keep us alive so that he'll be on the safe side in case we're traced?"

"That's my supposition," agreed Lee. "When all hope is dead, then our fate will be sealed. Foo Chow is playing with us at present, for his own amusement. But I don't think we're in much danger for a week or two. I don't think he'll even dare to maltreat any of us. And that gives us time to think, Dorrie—time to make plans, perhaps."

This little talk cheered them both up, for it certainly did seem that there was a great deal of shrewd reasoning in Nelson Lee's thought. If Foo Chow was treating them well in order to be safe in case they were traced, then the period of reprieve would be prolonged. And the circumstances seemed to point to this one conclusion.

Foo Chow hated them all, and he would never treat them as guests unless he had some selfish motive. It would be better to

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maintain an air of resignation, and to make him believe that they were hoodwinked.

But there was one member of the party who had no belief in the policy of waiting. Edward Oswald Handforth was worse than ever this morning, and Church and McClure's nightmare was growing.

"There you are!" said Handforth, as he stood within sight of the drawbridge. "Look how easily those chaps are going out!"

"Which chaps?"

"Why, those cooks, or whatever they are."

Handforth indicated two members of the household staff—men dressed in white, in the native fashion, and apparently going on affairs of domestic import. They were carrying baskets, and were allowed to pass the guards without the least trouble. This wasn't at all surprising.

The drawbridge was down, and had been in this lowered position all the morning. Why shouldn't it be? There were at least fifty of Foo Chow's soldiers posted at the gates.

"I don't see what you're getting at," remarked Church bluntly.

"Well, if those men can get out, why can't we?"

"Why can't——" Church paused, and breathed hard. "Try it!" he said tartly. "Try to get out, and see what happens! You—you doddering idiot, can't you see that those chaps are Chinamen? They're naturally allowed to pass to and fro."

Handforth gave a violent start.

"Then it's easy!" he gasped. "By George! I've got it!"

"Eh? Got what?"

"We've simply got to get disguised as Chinks, and we can pass the guard!" said Handforth excitedly. "How's that?"

"Rotten!" said Church.

"Madder than ever!" snorted McClure.

But Handforth was so imbued with the scheme that he didn't even hear them.

"Why the dickens didn't I think of it before?" he asked blankly. "The very scheme! As simple as A B C, too! We've just got to borrow some of those clothes, make our faces yellow, and we can escape!"

"I'll fetch all the rest of the chaps," threatened McClure. "I'll tell 'em what you're saying, and they'll tie you up to one of these trees! Supposing, by some unbelievable miracle, you *did* pass the guards—what the dickens are you going to do then?"

"Go straight to Yang Fu and rescue Chingy," said Handforth promptly.

"By Jove, that's a stunning idea," said Church, with mock admiration. "I suppose you'll find the prison without inquiring the way? Or it's quite likely that these Chinamen will take it as a matter of course when you spout English to 'em? You're a genius, Handy!"

Edward Oswald waved these trivialities aside.

"I'm going to get disguised!" he said firmly. "No, I don't want you chaps with me—I'm fed up with you! All you can do is

to growl and grumble. You can go and eat coke!"

He stalked off, and his chums hesitated.

"Let him go!" breathed Church. "He can't do any harm if he goes into the palace. He'll only wander about for a bit, and then give it up as a bad job. We'll just hang round and wait for him. Phew! Looking after Handy is worse than being tortured by old Foo Chow!"

Handforth had no exact ideas as to how he should disguise himself as a Chinaman, but the first essential was a Chinese native dress. All the servants had been ordered to obey every command, under pain of death. So it ought to be easy.

Handforth marched into the main entrance, hesitated, and then went up the great staircase. First of all he would go to the bedroom, and try a few experiments on his face. He had a yellowish Fair Isle pullover among his things, and it might be possible, with hot water, to get some of the dye out—at least, Handforth thought so. When he got to the bedroom, he halted and stared. A Chinaman was at work there, and in the act of folding up one of Handforth's own suits.

"This is providence!" said Handforth enthusiastically.

He closed the door, and advanced upon his victim. The Chinese servant was a harmless-looking specimen, and he grinned cheerfully as Handforth approached.

"Off with these clothes of yours!" ordered Edward Oswald curtly.

The man looked blank.

"Buck up!" said Handforth. "I can't wait all day!"

Unfortunately, the Chinaman knew no English whatever, and he merely shook his head and grinned again. Any sort of conversation, under these conditions, was liable to be difficult.

"Can't you hear me?" roared Handforth. "Oh, my hat!" he added. "I'd forgotten that you can't understand English! Where the dickens do they drag you chaps up? Fancy getting to your age and not being able to understand a real language! Clothes!" he thundered, under the impression that noise might perform some sort of miracle. "I want your clobber!"

Still the Chinaman failed to understand, although he backed away in some alarm at Handforth's vigorous roar.

"These things!" said the junior, pulling at the fellow's cotton garments. "Off with 'em! Come on! I'm just about tired of this!"

Without further ado he yanked away, and succeeded in half-pulling the upper garment off. Happily, the man began to understand, and it was evident that he had a thorough appreciation of his orders from Dr. Foo Chow. Without hesitation he removed all his outer garments and tremblingly handed them over.

"Good man!" said Handforth tensely. "Now the cap! And I'd better have your

shoes, too. What are those whacking great thick soles made of—paper, or what?"

At this point Handforth gave a start. He had just caught sight of his companion's pigtail, and it gave him a shock. But he had no intention of being foiled by the mere lack of a pigtail.

"This, too!" he said curtly.

He gave the unfortunate Chinaman's queue a sharp and hefty tug, and to his own surprise it came away easily. He stared at it.

"By George! Out by the roots!" he said blankly.

But a glance told him that it was a false pigtail, which many Chinamen wear. Nothing could have suited Handforth's purpose better. He had got everything he wanted, and he was quivering with excitement.

"Now, my son, you can scoot!" he said, pointing to the door.

The unhappy Chinaman took him at his word, and bolted.

"Why, you giddy fraud!" snorted Handforth, after the man had gone. "He pretended that he couldn't understand English, and he knew it all the time!"

It never occurred to Handforth that his pointing finger had been sufficiently eloquent. Left to himself, he rapidly donned the cotton garments over his own white flannels. After fifteen minutes had elapsed—fifteen minutes of worry and trial—he surveyed himself in the mirror. He beheld a

weird and wonderful reflection. Under no circumstances could he have been mistaken for anybody else but Edward Oswald Handforth—but the scrutiny apparently satisfied him.

"Fine!" he murmured. "The only thing is, the face! I can't stop to turn it yellow. It doesn't matter, anyhow. These clothes are enough to see me through. By George! Just wait until I rescue Yung Ching single-handed! That'll make the rest of the chaps sit up!"

The extraordinary part of the whole affair was that Handforth actually thought that he could accomplish the impossible task. He had an unlimited amount of faith in his own powers, and he was always liable to err on the optimistic side when it came to a matter of disguise or other detective work.

He opened the door and glanced out. Church and McClure were just coming along the wide, sunlit corridor. They halted, stared, and only succeeded in controlling themselves by a superhuman effort.



CHAPTER 12.

HANDFORTH, THE CHINEE.

CHURCH walked up casually, after he had given McClure a swift and insignificant nudge.

"Blessed if I can make out where he's got to, Mac," he said, merely

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giving Handforth a cursory glance. "There's only that Chink here, and he can't understand a word of English. Ugly-looking beggar, isn't he?"

Church regarded Handforth with greater interest, and McClure joined him.

"Most of these Chinks are ugly," he agreed. "This one's about the worst specimen I've ever come across, though. By Jove! What a nose he's got! And his ears stand out like cabbage leaves."

"You—you——" began Handforth thickly. He checked himself with a gulp.

"I hope he can't understand what we're talking about," said Church, with a start. "I wouldn't like to offend the poor chap. He can't help his face, can he? I say, you Chinese chap, where's Handforth?"

Edward Oswald could do nothing but swallow his fury. After all, his chums had failed to recognise him, and if they couldn't see through his disguise, who could? It was a triumph in every way! And perhaps the pigtail and the clothing made his face look a bit rummy. Anyhow, they hadn't spotted him.

"No savvy English," he said, making his voice deep and gruff, instead of high and shrill, as he should have done. "Me no un'stand. No see anybody. Clear off! I—I mean—— No savvy!"

"The beggar understands a bit of English, after all," said Church curiously. "Still, I don't suppose he understood what we said about his face. Did you hear our remarks about your face?" he added, pointedly.

"No savvy face?" replied Handforth promptly.

This was rather good. He was giving his disguise a thorough test.

"That's all right, then," said Church, with relief. "We'd better be going, Mac. This chap's dial gets on my nerves. It seems familiar, too. Do you remember ever having seen anything like it before? It's sort of reminiscent——"

"I've got it!" said McClure, nodding. "It's just like that villainous-looking face on old Sharpe's door-knocker in Bellton village. One of those gargoyles!"

Handforth nearly lost control of himself.

"You insulting—— No savvy!" he gasped. "That is, I mean—— Allee samee heap chop velly solly."

He hardly knew how he managed to get it out, but he felt certain that he had saved the situation. Those remarks about his face had made him see red. After all, his face wasn't even disguised.

"Hallo!" said Church. "What's the Chink getting excited about? I say, you Chinese cracker, where's Handforth? Big chap—allee same fine feller! Handforth! You see him?"

Edward Oswald realised that it was up to him to understand.

"Han'floor?" he repeated, with an exaggerated shrug. "No savvy!"

"You must have seen him," insisted Church.

"No savvy chop chop," replied Handforth stoutly, warming to his work. "No heap see."

"But you must have seen him," put in McClure. "Once anybody's seen Handforth he can't forget him! Handforth's got a face that haunts you for ever afterwards!"

"Oh, has he?" roared Handforth unguardedly.

"Rather!" said McClure, ignoring the outburst. "A fine, handsome face—rugged and fearless. You must have seen him, my lad! A big chap—a sort of cross between Rudolph Valentino and Ivor Novello! A dashing fellow, with curly hair, merry blue eyes, and a gentle voice!"

"That's him, exactly!" agreed Church, nearly exploding.

Handforth was so mollified that his ire subsided. He was learning exactly what his chums thought of his appearance for the first time.

"Chop chop all same, yes," he replied enigmatically.

"Eh?"

"Me see Han'floor just now," replied Edward Oswald. "Me spotee him one time chop, yes. Heap minute ago."

"This chap can talk pretty good English," said McClure, in surprise.

"You howling asses!" said Handforth, in his natural voice, and whipping off his cap. "It's me all the time!"

His chums gracefully fainted into one another's arms.

"Great Scott!" gasped Church dazedly. "Handy!"

"Handy!" breathed McClure dizzily.

Edward Oswald surveyed them triumphantly.

"Can't disguise myself, eh?" he said, with scorn. "I couldn't fool you, couldn't I? Why, I had you clean dished all the time!"

Loyalty prevented his chums from telling him the dreadful truth. Besides, after those early remarks about his face, it might have been decidedly unwise.

"But—but how did you do it?" asked Church, standing back and gazing at his leader with rapt admiration. "Even the pigtail, too! It doesn't look quite so well lying on the floor, but that's nothing! I say, did you cut that pigtail off one of these Chinks? Wasn't that a bit thick?"

"It was a loose one," explained Handforth breathlessly. "Now, look here, I'm going outside, and I shall walk straight past the guards and get to Yang Fu. I don't want you with me, because you'd give the game away."

"But—but——"

"Good-bye, my lads!" went on Handforth, gripping them each by the hand in turn. "If I'm not back to-night, don't worry. I'm off!"

"It strikes me you've been off ever since yesterday!" muttered Church.

But Handforth didn't hear him. He was striding down the great corridor already, having quite forgotten the fact that his pig-

tail was lying on the floor. Church and McClure gazed after him, and then glanced at one another.

"Let him go!" breathed Church. "He'll never get out, and they'll only think he's having a bit of fun. It'll teach him a lesson!"

"Good egg!" murmured McClure. "Perhaps he'll chuck up these escape ideas!"

Just as Handforth turned the corridor he remembered his pigtail. He paused, startled. It would never do to risk the escape without a pigtail! He would have to go back— But at that moment another Chinaman came down a side corridor, eyeing Handforth rather askance, as well he might.

"Yours'll do!" said Handforth briskly.

He seized the unfortunate Chinaman's pigtail as it swung round, and gave it one violent pull, expecting it to come away as the other had done. The luckless Chinaman gave a wild screech of terror, and he dived head-first into Handforth. This particular pigtail happened to be genuine! Handforth lost his balance, and sat down with a hard thud.

And his victim, howling with fright, ran like mad.

"You—you cruel wretch!" said Church, running up. "Were you trying to pull that chap's hair out by the roots?"

"I thought it would come off like the other one did!" gasped Handforth.

"Well, you shouldn't take things for granted," said Church. "Here's your first pigtail—you're welcome to it! We can't leave the greasy thing littered about all over the floor! Haven't you got a safety pin, or something?"

"Why not fix it to his head with a tin-tack?" suggested McClure. "It would have a good solid fixing!"

"Gimme that pigtail!" said Handforth tartly. "We've wasted enough time already. Fancy that idiot having a real one! There's never any telling with these Chinks—they're always doing something dotty! Now then, don't expect me back until this evening. And don't worry! So-long!"

He hurried down the main stairs and strode out into the open, several of Foo Chow's domestics staring at him blankly as he passed through the great hall. Church and McClure followed at a respectful distance behind.

"By George!" breathed Handforth gleefully.

William Napoleon Browne and Horace Stevens, of the Fifth, were just on the terrace, chatting with Archie Glenthorpe and Irene Manners and Mary Summers. Here was an opportunity to give his disguise a second try-out!

He folded his arms, hunched his shoulders, and trotted forward as no living Chinaman on earth would do.

"Allee samee heap wantee dlinks?" he asked, as though he were a servant sent out purposely.

"Why, Ted," said Irene, staring, "what-ever have you done to yourself?"

"Eh?" said Handforth blankly.

"One moment!" said Browne. "Let us examine this remarkable object with care. It appears that Brother Handforth is in one of his celebrated frisky moods. Entirely for our gratification he has made himself up as a cross between Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin."

"A frightfully comic get-up, by gad!" agreed Archie approvingly.

Handforth stared indignantly.

"You silly asses, you can't recognise me! I'm not Handforth! I—I mean— You're not supposed to— Eh? Oh, my hat!"

Browne nodded benevolently.

"We will forgive this confusion on your part, brother," he said. "You are naturally overwhelmed at our complimentary remarks. But would it not be better to defer these masquerades until a more fitting occasion? I have no wish to be carping and critical, but I have always understood that the pigtail is worn at the rear, and not suspended from the left ear. A trifle, but open to criticism."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure fairly howled as they came up.

"He—he thought he was going to fool you!" cackled McClure. "Don't stop him, you chaps! He's just going to slip out past the guards at the drawbridge! He's going to rescue Yung Ching from the city!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

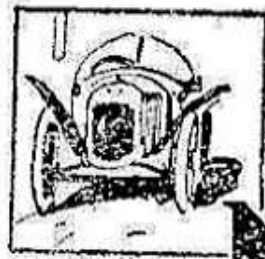
"A noteworthy project," agreed Browne heartily. "Let us escort Brother Handforth to the drawbridge. Let us encourage him in these laudable designs. But why, may I ask, was it necessary to dress yourself as a pastrycook's assistant, Brother Handforth?"

"You ass, I'm disguised as a Chinaman!" said Handforth coldly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is as well that we should know these facts," proceeded Browne. "Brother Handforth is disguised as a Chinaman. Upon the whole, I think it would be better if he retired indoors, and disguised himself once more as a human being. It will be extremely difficult, but he can but try."

Amid the chorus of laughter, Handforth succeeded in escaping. But he didn't go back indoors. For just at that moment a soft purr made itself heard, and a great motor-car came rolling up the main drive.



CHAPTER 13.

THE AUSTIN SEVEN.

NELSON LEE and Lord Dorimore were glad to hear the fellows laughing so heartily. It was good to know that their spirits were as light as ever.

"Handforth fooling again, isn't it?" asked his lordship, as they strolled nearer.

"Yes, apparently he has disguised him-



While the exhausted Church and McClure slept amidst the rocks, Handforth looked out on the dark river. The gorge looked dim and menacing, and the whole outlook was cheerless. The chums had escaped from Foo Chow's stronghold—but were they any better off? Even now thousands of Chinese soldiers would be scouring the countryside for them.

self-as a Chinaman," smiled Nelson Lee. "I shouldn't be surprised if he intended it quite seriously. If so, all the nonsense has been knocked out of him by this time. Handforth is a remarkable boy. He has an unlimited amount of courage, he has a heart of gold, but——"

"But he's a plain chump, what?" grinned his lordship. "Well, I'm not sure that I don't like him all the better for it. Supposin' we go an' do our little bit of chippin', too? Anythin' to relieve the monotony."

They, too, heard the sound of the approaching car, and they paused when the big automobile came to a halt on the wide drive.

"By glory!" murmured Dorrie. "A nineteen-twenty-six Rolls-Royce!"

"Foo Chow is a millionaire," explained Lee. "I am not at all surprised to see this. He probably has a whole fleet of Rolis-Royces, similar to many of our Indian potentates. That concrete road, leading to Yang Fu, was not built for nothing, Dorrie."

The car contained Dr. Foo Chow, sitting in comfort at the rear. It was an open tourer, with two gorgeously attired men in front. The absence of number-plates looked rather queer, but the car was otherwise a standard one.

"I trust you will forgive my brief absence, gentlemen," said the Chinaman smoothly. "I find it necessary to visit Yang Fu at once, but I will make a point of being back in time for luncheon."

"Don't bother yourself," said Dorrie. "Please don't come back on our account. We've got the run of the place, an' we're makin' ourselves thoroughly at home."

"Splendid," said Foo Chow. "I am gratified."

Quite a crowd had collected round the car by now, including Handforth, who had forgotten his incongruous attire. For, having discarded his pigtail and cap, he looked neither one thing nor the other.

"I see you are already indulging in some of your schoolboy frolics," smiled Dr. Foo Chow, nodding pleasantly. "There is nothing I like better. My palace and my gardens are entirely yours."

Handforth turned rather red, but made no comment.

"As a matter of fact," proceeded Dr. Foo Chow, "I am visiting Yang Fu on quite a trivial matter—an amputation."

"Indeed!" said Lee sharply.

"A perfectly simple operation," nodded the Chinaman. "A finger. It will not even be necessary to use an anæsthetic. The finger will be skillfully removed, and the patient will merely suffer a little agony for a few minutes—although the wound will doubtless trouble him afterwards."

There was a dead silence. Foo Chow had discussed the matter as though it were an ordinary, everyday incident. His coolness was calculated, his indifference a deliberate piece of show.

"You are referring to—Yung Ching?" demanded Lee.

"Who else?" smiled Foo Chow.

"By Heaven! You——"

"Well?" asked the other, as Lee checked himself suddenly.

"I have nothing to say, Dr. Foo Chow,"

"I am glad," nodded the Chinaman. "For, after all, have I not already told you that this is my business? Owing to certain circumstances, I find it necessary to conduct this initial amputation forthwith. Do not concern yourselves over my absence. I shall return in time for luncheon."

Handforth simply couldn't hold himself in.

"You'd better not return at all, you callous brute!" he shouted thickly. "By George, I'd like to smash your face in! Sitting there and talking about poor old Chingy as though he were a piece of wood! You—you butcher!"

"Steady, Handforth—steady!" muttered Mr. Stokes.

He entirely agreed with everything that Handforth had uttered, but he was afraid for the junior's own sake. Dr. Foo Chow, however, merely smiled again, although his eyes glinted in an ugly fashion.

"It is hardly expected that you can regard these matters with the same indifference as myself," he said. "I bear no malice for these harsh comments. I am distressed that it should be necessary to harm the boy, but his father must be forced into a state of reasonable submission."

He was about to give an order to his chauffeur when a characteristic hum sounded—a hum which caused Handforth to give a sudden start. He stared down the long drive and then flushed.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated. "An Austin Seven!"

"So it is!"

"A baby Austin—here!"

"Is that very singular?" inquired Dr. Foo Chow. "I have acquired quite a fleet of the little cars. They are handy means of transport for my staff. Petrol is not easy to convey to this out-of-the-way part of the world, so I am compelled to practise economy."

"Why, it's exactly like mine!" said Handforth, as the Austin came nearer. "The same colour, the same body, and everything! You might think it was my giddy little car coming along!"

Edward Oswald was the proud owner of an Austin Seven, and he looked at the car with loving eyes.

"This is quite interesting," said Dr. Foo Chow mildly. "So you possess one of these handy little runabouts? Excellent! Here is an opportunity for me to prove that I bear the young gentleman no ill-will for his thoughtless remarks of a minute ago."

He gave a signal, and brought the Austin Seven to a stop. Speaking in Chinese, he apparently gave an order, for the driver—one of his officers—immediately descended

and walked off. The Austin was left there, with the engine still gently ticking over.

Dr. Foo Chow waved his hand towards Handforth.

"It is yours," he said calmly.

Handforth started.

"Eh?" he gasped. "Mine!"

"Use it just as you please," replied the Chinese millionaire. "I have many, so why should I deny you this little pleasure? You say it is exactly similar to your own car, so you will doubtless derive some satisfaction from it. Until lunch-time, ladies and gentlemen, adieu!"

He waved his hand, and the Rolls-Royce glided majestically off, a thing of grandeur compared to the humble little Austin.

"Did—did you hear him?" asked Handforth in amazement. "He's given this Austin Seven to me! After I slanged him, too! Did you ever know such a queer beggar in all your life?"

"He's the most remarkable man I've ever come across," declared Dick Hamilton. "But don't worry about that Austin, now, Handy. There's something more important to discuss."

But Handforth was so interested in the car that he had forgotten everything else. He climbed eagerly into the driving seat, and felt the familiar controls.

"Just like mine!" he muttered.

Church and McClure were standing beside the car, looking anxious.

"Did you hear what Foo Chow said?" asked McClure.

"Hop in!" interrupted Handforth.

"But look here——"

"Hop in, you asses; I want to give her a trial."

His chums glanced at one another, but obeyed. This wasn't like their leader—who was celebrated for his soft-heartedness. He was apparently so excited about the Austin Seven that he had no time to think of Yung Ching's terrible predicament. Such heartlessness almost stunned Church and McClure. They didn't expect this sort of thing from the susceptible leader of Study D.

"By George, she goes pretty fine, too!" said Handforth enthusiastically, as the Austin sped forward under his hand. "Just like mine in every particular! In fact, you might think I was at the wheel of my own bus!"

"But Chingy——" urged Church.

"I expect she's got plenty of petrol aboard," went on Handforth tensely. "Anyhow, there'll be enough to last a good bit."

"You—you callous rotter!" burst out McClure indignantly. "All you can think about is your own beastly pleasures! Don't we keep telling you that poor old Chingy——"

"Let's go for a spin round this long drive," suggested Handforth.

And Church and McClure, in amazement gave it up.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"THE PRISONERS OF FOO CHOW!"

Tigers! Handforth snaps his fingers at them.

If that isn't enough, his famous right is sufficient to settle any tiger's hash!

It's just Handy's bull-headed audacity which pulls him through.

Handy's episode with the tiger is only one of the very many exciting events in next Wednesday's great yarn. All the stories in this adventure-series are good, but next week's is quite the best we have yet had.

The Boys of St. Frank's aren't satisfied, neither are Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi.

They all want a fight—and they have it!

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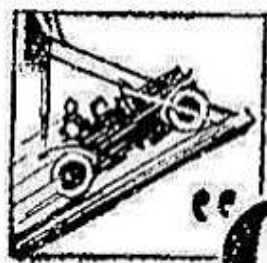
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NEXT WEDNESDAY!



CHAPTER 14.

HANDFORTH'S DESPERATE BID.

"O H, Mr. Lee, can't we do something?" asked Irene Manners earnestly.

"Can't we try, sir?" muttered Dick Hamilton.

Nelson Lee stood there with set lips and agonised eyes.

"It's no good, Irene," he said. "It's no good, Dick, my boy! How can we possibly attempt to avert this ghastly mutilation? In a way, I admire Handforth for blurting out the truth as he did, but that sort of thing won't do any good. Foo Chow is a fiendish cur! But to tell him so to his face might only precipitate tragedy."

"Then, by glory, let it precipitate it!" roared Lord Dorrimore. "I'm sick of this pretence. When Foo Chow comes back I shall knock him down! I tell you frankly, Lee, that I shall knock him down!"

"My dear fellow——"

"And I shall knock him down so hard that he'll need all the physicians in this accursed country to bring him to!" shouted his lordship furiously. "If we've got to have a fight, let it come at once!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Dorrie!"

"Let's try and rescue Chingy now!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yes, yes!" shouted the girls excitedly.

Nelson Lee was the only one who remained calm.

"At the cost of appearing heartless, I must absolutely forbid this wild outburst," he said curtly. "Dorrie, I'm surprised at you."

"But, man, you don't seem to realise that that poor little kid is goin' to be tortured this very morning!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore with a gulp. "Foo Chow has gone off to superintend the amputation of the boy's first finger. Without anaesthetics, too! The infernal cur made quite a point of that! I'll wring his neck——"

"Dorrie, I'm surprised at you!" repeated Nelson Lee sternly. "What kind of example is this? Listen, all of you! You know well enough that our feelings are identical with regard to Yung Ching. I am just as deeply grieved as any of you; but, happily, I am keeping my balance in this unhappy affair. No matter how we rave and storm, we cannot save Yung Ching from this morning's terrible trial."

"Listen to Mr. Lee, boys," urged Mr. Stokes. "He's right. If you'll only think for a moment you'll see that there can be no possibility of rescue. We must calm ourselves, and silently pray that the youngster's sufferings may not be acute."

"Thank you, Barry," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"But why can't we try something, sir?" asked a dozen voices.

"Because the handicaps are overwhelming—as you'll appreciate if you'll only think for a moment," retorted Nelson Lee. "We can neither get off this rock, nor reach the city of Yang Fu. We have no knowledge of Yung Ching's prison, and, above all else, we are like a drop in the ocean compared to the thousands of hostile natives. Can't you see that we are utterly helpless?"

"Yes, it's no good being foolish about it," murmured Doris. "Mr. Lee's right, girls. That poor boy has got to suffer, and we can't help him. Isn't it dreadful?"

"It's too awful for words!" muttered Fullwood.

Lord Dorrimore controlled himself.

"But we can store this away for future reference," he said ominously. "We can make Foo Chow pay later on—when our time comes! By glory! I'll take good care that I have at least one healthy smack at the hound before I go under. Anybody else is welcome to him afterwards!"

He turned away, sick at heart, made utterly desperate by his own helplessness. Dorrie was essentially a man of action. And this imprisonment amid such surroundings of luxury was exquisite torture. The luxury, indeed, only seemed to aggravate the whole position.

Dorrie bitterly reflected that Nelson Lee's surmise had been correct. Foo Chow was lavishing every comfort upon them purposely—as a refinement of their mental torture. Dorrie hadn't seen it at first, but he was realising it now. The cunning of Foo Chow was deeper and more subtle at every turn.

His present of the Austin Seven to Handforth was yet another instance of his methods. There wasn't the smallest doubt that he would obtain vengeance of his own cruel kind when the right time arrived. And Handforth had calmly gone off in the car, seemingly indifferent.

Church and McClure, in fact, were stunned by their leader's attitude.

He was shooting round the drive now, testing the speed of the Austin, and accus-

toming himself to the controls. At last he slowed down, and they continued at a sedate pace, in a spot some distance from the other fellows."

"Good!" said Handforth. "She's fine!"

"Perhaps you'll think about poor old Chingy for a bit now?" asked Church bitterly. "Now that you've got over the excitement of your new toy——"

"You—you dense idiots!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "Do you think I'm not worrying about Chingy all the time? I'm more than worrying—I'm determined to rescue him!"

"What?" gasped his chums.

"Foo Chow gave me this car, and it must have been an act of Providence," went on Handforth, his voice throbbing with excitement. "He's placed the means of escape in our hands! Don't you see? We're going to run the gauntlet in this car, and we're going to get free!"

Church and McClure, who had fondly imagined that their leader had given up the hare-brained idea, were more staggered than ever. They stared at him in dazed bewilderment.

"Get free!" gurgled Church. "But—but you don't mean——"

"You're mad, Handy!" broke in McClure. "We'll never do it!"

"Won't we?" rapped out Handforth. "Wait and see! While you idiots were thinking that my heart had turned to stone, or something, I was planning how we could do the trick. Chingy is going to be tortured this morning! We'll see about it! Foo Chow has got to deal with me first!"

"You mean we're going to rush the drawbridge?" asked Church breathlessly.

"Yes!"

"My only hat!"

Handforth's chums were thrilled at the very thought. They didn't even attempt to dissuade him from his desperate purpose. Indeed, he had imbued them with his own spirit. After hearing Foo Chow's words their feelings had changed, and they were ready to undertake any sort of desperate chance. They were in the mood for a rash enterprise.

"We'll do it now!" went on Handforth grimly. "The drawbridge is still down, and we shall be over it before those guards can know what's flashed by them. If any of them attempt to get in the way they'll have to go under. I shan't swerve an inch!"

"But you'll give them warning?" asked McClure quickly.

"Come on, let's get on with it!" retorted Handforth, pressing his foot down upon the accelerator pedal. "Hold tight, my sons! We're off to Yang Fu! This is where we make history!"

The sturdy little engine fairly hummed as the revs. increased, and with rapid acceleration the Austin leapt along the paved roadway. By the time it passed the groups of

other juniors it was doing forty miles an hour.

"Handy!" yelled a dozen voices in alarm.

"Look! He's making straight for the drawbridge!"

"Oh, the hopeless madman!"

"Come back, Handy, you ass!"

But the Austin Seven was now roaring at fifty, and her electric horn was sending forth a siren call of defiance. With Handforth crouching low over the wheel, and his chums clinging to the rear seats, the tiny car raced onwards like a live thing.

The soldiers on guard had no misapprehension about this charging little monster. They scattered hurriedly, and the air was filled with shouts. And then, while the car was still fifty yards from the great gateway, the drawbridge slowly rose upwards.

"Handy!" screamed Church. "Stop!"

"The drawbridge!" gasped McClure in horror.

Only for a second—a split second—did Handforth hesitate.

"We can do it!" he snapped, treading hard on the accelerator.

He had made a swift calculation, and he knew, at that speed, that it would be almost impossible to pull up in time. By rushing the bridge, however, there was a distinct chance that the little car would leap the gap and alight without harm.

In the rear the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls were staring with dull horror. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Stokes were dumb. They could only watch with their hearts in their mouths.

The next second would be the fatal one.

Everybody believed that Handforth & Co. would meet with a shocking accident, probably resulting in their instantaneous deaths. Nelson Lee, at all events, knew that the Austin Seven could never alight on an even keel. It would crash down after turning a somersault, with every possibility of crushing the three juniors to pulp amid the wreckage.

But there was an unexpected factor in the affair.

The drawbridge had risen at almost express speed. By the time the car was roaring along the first twenty feet the angle had become acute. The bridge was standing up at almost forty-five degrees, and, in spite of the racing speed of the car, this steep incline checked it immediately.

But the check was not sufficient.

Handforth & Co. realised their terrible predicament. Handforth knew that he had led his chums into a death trap. And everything had happened within the space of a second or two, and there was no time to have many connected thoughts.

"It's all up!" panted Handforth. "Forgive me, you chaps—"

And then, with a sickening lurch, the little car toppled clean over the edge of the rising drawbridge, and plunged headlong into space.



CHAPTER 15.

HANDFORTH & CO.'S FATE.

HERE was such a deliberate motion about the car as it took the plunge that it almost seemed to those watching as though it were a fragment out of a slow motion cinematograph picture. This was because the Austin had almost lost its way at the crucial moment. She had had just sufficient left to carry her over the brink.

And but for the desperate nature of the whole affair, there was something almost comical in the way Handforth & Co. toppled out. As the car tipped over they were shot into the air with that same deliberate motion. They fell sheer, within a foot or so of one another.

And the car dropped immediately in their rear.

A series of tremendous splashes sounded. Handforth & Co. plunged into the swift current of the river, and mercifully escaped being caught by the falling Austin. The latter dived beneath the surface, and did not reappear.

But the chums of Study D found themselves struggling desperately in the swift flow of the river. They were carried down past the island, and all their efforts to swim shorewards were in vain. The current was so strong that they could do nothing to conquer it.

On the island, consternation and horror were in charge.

"Ted!" shouted Irene desperately. "Oh, he's gone!"

"They're all killed!"

"They've gone over into the river!"

"It was Handy's fault for being such a rash idiot!" shouted Boots. "Why couldn't he listen to reason? He ought to have stopped—"

"Quick—run to the wall!" interrupted Dick Hamilton. "If they're still afloat they'll be swept down in this direction, and perhaps we'll see them!"

"My hat, yes!"

With one accord they all ran madly for the wall at the nearest spot, for here they would be able to gaze down. They were on the side of the island which lay below the drawbridge, so that the current, carrying the juniors along, would sweep them past and then downwards.

"There they are!" shouted Willy Handforth, in agony. "Look! There's my major! Ted—Ted!"

"Handy!" roared the whole chorus.

Down below there, struggling in the water, were three figures. There was no sign of the car. A hand came up and waved.

"They heard us!" breathed Willy, white to the lips. "Oh, why don't those Chinese put a boat out, or something? Why can't they do something to help? They're leaving Ted to drown!"

"It's dreadful!" sobbed Irene.

"Perhaps they will be rescued from the river lower down," said Nelson Lee, with infinite relief. "Don't be alarmed, young 'uns! They are all good swimmers, and there are no dangerous creatures in these waters. I was terribly afraid that they were killed in the crash. But they are all swimming, and there is no reason to anticipate a tragedy."

"But the current is awfully swift, sir!" panted Willy.

"If they keep their heads, and just concentrate upon keeping afloat, they will ultimately reach quieter waters," replied Lee. "But we shall naturally be anxious until we see them again."

Practically everybody believed that Nelson Lee was saying this merely to calm them. It seemed almost certain that Handforth & Co. were being swept down to their doom. In any case, what would happen after they were pulled out of the water—even if they were pulled out? Foo Chow would probably hold them close prisoners then, and it was impossible to guess what punishments he would devise.

It was a curious fact that no Chinese attempted to effect a rescue. They had received no orders, and so they did not bestir themselves. And perhaps they knew that they could never get a boat across the current in time.

In mid-stream, Handforth & Co. were being whirled down at a surprising rate. They were almost exhausted by their efforts to force their way inshore against the strength of the current.

"It's no good—we can't do it!" panted Handforth, at last.

"We shall be drowned!" muttered Church desperately.

"Tread water—tread water!" ordered Handforth. "Reserve all the strength you can, and perhaps we can hold out for a bit. Just allow yourselves to relax, and let the current take you down."

"It's a chance!" breathed McClure.

They were all surprised to find themselves still alive and unhurt. And Handforth's advice was good, too. After five or ten minutes they were feeling partially recovered. Little or no effort was required to keep their heads above water. They just floated and reserved their strength.

And by this time they were well below the *Dragon* and the *Wanderer*—far down the gorge, past the quay, and with barren rocks on either side of them.

The water was comparatively warm, so there was little fear that they would suffer any ill effects.

"We shall do it!" muttered Handforth, at

last. "I'm feeling miles better already, and the current isn't so strong here. By George! We've escaped!"

"Yes, but what's to become of us?" asked Church.

They were still clinging together, and were almost invisible out there in mid-stream, with only their heads showing above water.

"Never mind what's to become of us," said Handforth. "We've escaped from that island prison, and we're floating down towards Yang Fu! Didn't I tell you all along that we should get away?"

His chums were startled at this frank assumption of credit.

"You ought to be jolly lucky that we're still alive!" said Church, recovering sufficiently to speak indignantly. "It's all very well to talk about escaping, and getting to Yang Fu! But how do you think we can evade Foo Chow's soldiers? We shall be recaptured, and thrown into a dungeon."

"You ass, they won't even search for us!" declared Handforth keenly. "They'll think we're dead! Foo Chow will take it for

granted that we've all been drowned. That gives us a tremendous advantage."

"I'm glad you can see it!" replied Church. "Because I can't!"

"Look!" said McClure. "There are some men on those rocks over there. I believe they've spotted us, too."

Handforth's brain

was particularly acute.

"A chance!" he said swiftly. "Quick! Pretend to be in difficulties, and then, at the word, dive down and stay under as long as you can. They'll think we've gone, and they'll report our death to Foo Chow."

It was certainly a brainy suggestion, and one which was adopted without a moment's hesitation. Church flung up his hands and appeared to be in genuine difficulties. McClure went to his aid, but Handforth was at his last gasp, judging by his action.

"Help—help!" he croaked, waving a feeble hand.

One after the other they sank down into the river and vanished. The men on the bank—coolies who were loading rocks on to a moored junk—saw the whole thing. They saw the three juniors go under, and then there was no further sign of them.

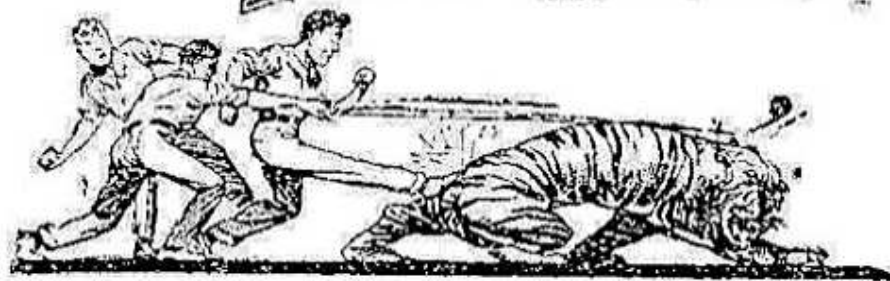
There was a bend in the river just here, and just round it the heads of the three juniors came above water again. And they needed the air, too! Church, indeed, was almost at his last gasp.

"I—I can't stick it!" he muttered dully.

"All right, old man—hang on to me!"

..... NEXT WEDNESDAY!

PRISONERS OF FOO CHOW!



.....

whispered Handforth. "Don't try to exert yourself at all. We'll soon be out of the wood! That ruse was successful, too—we did it in first-class style!"

"Can't—can't we get ashore?" asked Church, panting heavily.

"Soon—soon, old man," replied his leader. "You're all right. Grab hold of me, and I'll keep you going. You all right, Mac?"

"Yes, for a bit," gurgled McClure.

"Stick it! The further we float down, the better," said Handforth. "I seem to remember some woods at the end of this gorge, and that's the place to get ashore. We can make one dash and get into cover."

And so they stuck it. But it was Handforth who bore the brunt of the ordeal, and at last he had to admit himself on the point of exhaustion. He was afraid to risk it any longer, for they might not have sufficient strength to fight their way to the bank.

But the current was much less powerful there, and in a section of the gorge where the hills were beginning to fall away, and where signs of vegetation were showing, they managed to pull themselves out of the river.

And there they remained, spreadeagled on the rocks, all in. The hot sunshine was pouring down upon them, however, and there was no fear of catching a deadly fever or a serious chill. Gradually they recovered, the steam rising from their drying clothes.

Handforth was the first to arouse himself.

"Phew! That's better!" he said hoarsely, as he sat up. "By George, you chaps, it was a pretty near thing! But we'll be as right as ninepence within another half-hour. Feeling better, Mac?"

"Rather!" said McClure wearily. "But it was a pretty stiff tussle, you know. Poor old Churchy's just about finished. Look at him! He's completely done, poor old beggar!"

Church sat up and grunted.

"Who's done?" he said gruffly. "I shall be all right soon."

"Good man!" exclaimed Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "We've escaped—Foo Chow will think us dead—and there's no telling what we can accomplish! My sons, didn't I tell you that we were going to make history?"



CHAPTER 16.

WHEN THE NIGHT CAME.

R. FOO CHOW was looking grave.

It was evening, and he had only just returned from his journey into

Yang Fu. He found the St. Frank's holiday party subdued, grim, and sombre. Not one word was spoken as he entered their presence.

"I can appreciate your sadness," said the Chinaman softly.

"We would rather you didn't keep up this pretence of being host," growled Lord Dorri-more, with a glare. "I don't want to be ill-mannered, Dr. Foo Chow, but——"

"Wait!" interrupted Foo Chow. "I have reconsidered my decision regarding the boy, and there will be no mutilation until another two days have passed. My preparations are not quite complete, so the delay is essential. Let us remain amicable. I am all sympathy with you for the sad loss of the three boys who died in the river to-day."

Willy Handforth came up, tense and pale.

"That's not true!" he panted. "They're not dead! You know they're not dead! You're only saying that to hurt me, you demon! One of those chaps is my brother——"

"Then the blow will be all the more severe for you," interposed Dr. Foo Chow. "I would like to assure you that there is some hope. But, alas, there is none. It has been reported to me by eye-witnesses that the poor boys were definitely drowned."

"May Heaven forgive you, Dr. Foo Chow, if you are causing us this pain without foundation," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Ever since the boys plunged into the river we have been hoping against hope that some news would come——"

"It will come, sir!" declared Willy stoutly. "Ted's not dead! I know he isn't! I don't care if a thousand men tell me he's dead! I won't believe it!"

"My poor boy——" said Foo Chow.

"I'm not your poor boy!" shouted Willy passionately. "I don't believe you! I don't believe you! I tell you that Ted isn't dead!"

All the girls were sobbing hysterically, and some of the juniors were looking moist about the eyes, too. They had feared this piece of news, and they somehow felt that Dr. Foo Chow was speaking the truth. Willy and his sister Ena were the only two who steadfastly refused to believe the dread story.

"All three victims were seen to struggle to the end," said Foo Chow quietly. "They were seen to sink, and they did not come to the surface again. As I abide by the laws of Confucius, I am telling the truth! I do not lie when it is a matter of death."

Willy turned away, unable to trust himself to speak. He went over to Ena, and she looked at him in that calm way of hers.

"Cheer up, Willy," she said steadily. "Ted's alive."

"Of course he is," replied Willy, with scorn. "It takes more than a river to kill Ted! Foo Chow is simply trying to torture us a bit more, but he can't fool me. But, all the same, sis, I'd give my right hand to know something definite," he added, with a catch in his voice.

The others had very little to say. Words, indeed, seemed useless. And they all held Foo Chow responsible for the tragedy. He was the cause of all their troubles—he was the root of the whole evil.

And in the meantime, what of the "dead"

Matters were not so desperate with them. Handforth & Co., in fact, were sound asleep in a snug crevice of the rocks. Considering that they were supposed to be dead, this was rather grimly humorous.

They had been afraid to venture down the gorge in full daylight, and Handforth had suggested a rest until darkness fell. So they had crept into the crevice, where the sun beat in, drying them thoroughly. Sleep had overtaken them, and that precious restorative worked wonders.

Handforth was the first to awaken, and he was startled to find himself a trifle chilly, and the world looking dim. He rose to his feet stiffly, and looked down at the dark river.

"My hat!" he muttered. "It's nearly night! We must have been sleeping for hours! Don't I feel better, by George! Hi, Church, my son! Mac, old scout! Up you come, lazy bones!"

His chums aroused themselves, and after a good stretch they were surprised to find that they were feeling perfectly fit and normal, except for a slight aching of muscles. And they were hungry, too—in fact, famished.

"What are we going to do, Handy?" asked Church seriously. "Hadn't we better decide upon something sensible?"

"I *have* decided upon something sensible," retorted Handforth. "We're going to make our way down the river until we get to Yang Fu; then we're going to look for poor old Chingy. Those fiends have lopped off one of his fingers by this time, but we might be able to save the rest of him."

"Hadn't we better make our way back to the rest of the party?" asked McClure, grasping Handforth's arm. "Listen, Handy! We can't do much on our own, and it's only fair to think of the others. If we go back, it's more than likely that Foo Chow will do nothing to us."

"But we shall be prisoners again, you ass!"

"I know that; but aren't we prisoners now?" said McClure. "We can't move a mile in any direction without coming upon enemies. Be sensible, Handy! What's the difference? Let's get back and relieve the rest."

"By George!" muttered Handforth. "My minor, you mean? And Ena? Oh, but we needn't worry about them—"

"They'll probably be thinking that we're all dead," urged Church. "It's not fair to leave them in a state of suspense—"

"A few hours longer won't make much difference," interrupted Handforth firmly.

"We're alive, aren't we? Well, that's good enough! We'll turn up after we've accomplished our mission. What about Chingy being in a state of suspense? It's a question of proportion, my sons. Chingy's suspense must be a thousand times worse than Willy's and Ena's, because they know me too well to believe that I should go and get drowned! Don't you worry about them—they'll be all right. We've come out to find Yung Ching, and we're not going back till we've done the trick!"

To argue was absolutely useless. So Handforth's chums didn't even attempt it. Later on, perhaps, he would realise the folly of this project and change his mind. In any case, they were liable to run into Foo Chow's soldiers at any moment, and then they would be taken back to the island by force.

Before the darkness completely settled down, Handforth & Co. won clear of the gorge, and found themselves at the edge of the fertile valley, where almost every inch of ground was cultivated. In the distance lay the city of Yang Fu, but there were many villages intervening.

In the heart of a bamboo wood the juniors halted, and here they felt themselves comparatively safe. They had managed to pull up a few vegetables from some of the fields, and although this meal was primitive and frugal, it nevertheless sufficed.

"We'll stay here until nearly midnight," declared Handforth. "By that time the whole countryside will be asleep, then we can creep out and make our way across these fields to the concrete road. It's bound to lie over to our right here. To-night, my lads, we're going to make history!"

"So you said before," murmured Church. "But I'm not exactly pining to be a history maker! Still, if you say so, Handy, Mac and I will back you up. That's a bargain!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed McClure.

But Handforth did not change his plans. He had made up his mind, and this time he wasn't to be shifted.

And while they lay hidden there in the wood, the main body of the St. Frank's holiday party remained helpless on Dr. Foo Chow's island stronghold. Another episode had come to an end, and it seemed as though a deadlock had been reached. There was utterly no hope for any of them.

Foo Chow was the supreme master, and his power was without limit.

THE END.

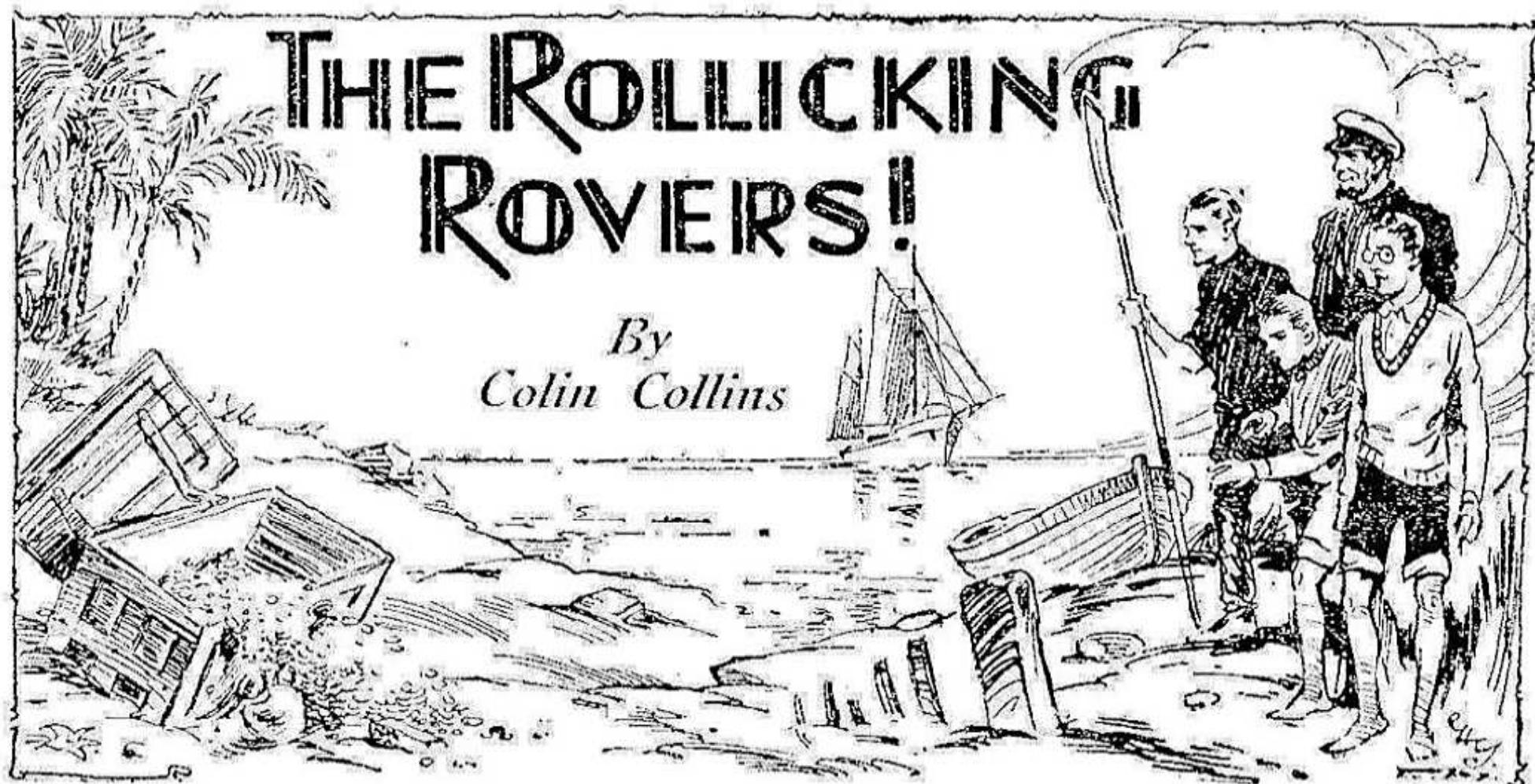
(Read how Handy knocks out a tiger in next week's thrilling yarn:—"THE PRISONERS OF FOO CHOW!" Make sure of your copy by ordering in advance!)

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THE BOYS' REALM?

..... READ ALL ABOUT IT ON PAGE 39!

Get to know our adventure-hunters—they'll keep you thrilled!



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. They call at Boulogne, and then proceed to the Isle of Koba, off the African coast.

In a large cave, high up on a ledge, Ben finds the chest in which the treasure is supposed to be hidden. While the party return to the ship, Foxey, disguised as a native, reaches the ledge by another route and removes the chest, to discover that it contains only—

(You must read all about it in the following instalment.)

Goggles on the Track.

THRILLING with triumph, and quite sure they had located Uncle Digby's treasure at last, the adventurers began the descent of the rugged side of the cathedral cave.

With no suspicion of treachery, no idea that any other knew of the hidden chest, and had already removed it, they climbed down to the ship for rope tackle to lower the precious burden to the water level.

"Didn't I tell you my memory was a good 'un?" cried Ben, stamping about the deck in triumph. "Didn't I tell you I knew your uncle's little ways?"

"Rope—let's get rope," Bob urged, so excited that he could scarcely gasp out the words.

"There's no hurry now, me lads, no hurry now!" cried Ben, walking round with his lantern in search of tackle. "No hurry, the box won't run away."

"We can ease it down—the four of us, can't we?" asked Fatty. "We mustn't risk a drop into the water."

"Here's a coil of rope," cried Goggles. Dummy looked on and nodded approval, understanding, without words, what was a-

foot. He lent a hand, and a steady one, for the others were bungling with hands shaking—even Ben's—and all talking at once.

They secured a lantern each before attempting the journey, and then went up like Alpine climbers, knowing better now than they did before what a dangerous ascent it was.

The first lantern went quickly, with athletic Bob making great springs from ledge to ledge, and the others following when he tugged the rope. In this way the original location of the chest was reached.

"There's nothing here—we've come the wrong way!" Bob cried out to the others; but Ben, from the rear, urged them all up, declaring that he had followed the marks all the way.

"Here, let me come up," he grunted, elbowing his way past them all and lowering his lantern to the actual ledge where the supposed treasure had rested.

"It's gone!" he roared.

"Nonsense; it was never here. It must be higher up," Bob declared.

"I tell you it was here. See, the mark of the corners in the dust and—and—"

"And what?" asked one of the boys.

noticing that his speech faded out from sheer, gasping rage and amazement.

"Footmarks!" roared Ben. "It's been took! It's gone!"

"Gone?" they all cried.

"Footmarks of bare feet!" cried Ben. "Boots as well—the marks are all here, and fresh prints, too. Where does this hole lead up to?"

"We can't get any higher, can we?" asked Bob.

"Yes you can. Up quick, one of you lads, and see."

Then began a scramble farther up, and someone cried out:

"There's daylight up here."

"Them natives!" yelled Ben. "They knew of it, and they knew what we was after! There's a way in from above. Up you go, and take the rope, and help haul us up."

"It's quite easy; no need for any rope," Bob shouted down, for he was now far above them. "Broad daylight here, and a way out. Come on—quick!"

If the box had been removed it must have been done only a few minutes ago.

"Marks up here where it's been dragged," shouted Bob's voice above, as they clambered up.

Soon they all stood on the hillside and looked about them. On one side, and below, over the cliff, was the limitless ocean; on the other a barren, treeless, jagged hillside, studded with boulder and scrub, and no path offering to lead them anywhere, except to more boulders.

While they stared at one another in consternation, Goggles was on his knees with his spectacled nose nearly touching the ground.

"I say, you fellows, don't forget I was a scout at school. Leave it to me."

"What are you findin'?" asked Ben.

"The trail."

"On this stuff?"

"Yes, there is lava dust everywhere, and footprints clear as if they were in sand."

All were at once on the same tack, bending to earth, and finding nothing, and then something, and then nothing. Goggles continued his crawl, and it was he, the despised scientist, who nosed out the trail, a yard at a time.

It took a long while; and they left him to it, murmuring approval when he grunted out:

"Another, and here's another! They rested here. Here are the nail marks of a boot. There were three of them—two niggers and a European."

"I don't believe it!" Ben declared in his despair and consternation. "How did anybody know what we was af'r, and where it was?"

"Nobody knew but us," Bob added.

Goggles straightened his back and knelt up, adjusting his spectacles and observing quietly:

"That was a very big cave, large enough to have held other people besides us."

"Oh, get on!" they urged, jumping with impatience.

Goggles continued his crawl until the knees of his trousers threatened to wear through. Then came a patch of sandy dust with the footprints plain for all to see, and the imprints brought them to a cavern half hidden in scrub and bush.

Ben seized them and held them back.

"Steady there, youngsters, go easy."

Like Indians on the trail they approached, and cautiously entered the now deserted cave.

Here they found the supposed treasure-chest smashed to boards, and shining tins lying about all over the floor—those that the niggers and Foxey had left behind after removing all they could carry away.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" roared Ben. "Bully beef tins!"

The boys stood round, silent in their consternation and disappointment.

"It's an infernal shame!" said Bob. "And all this for nothing; all this way to find that he hid—only this bully beef!"

"Just like him," growled Ben, thinking of Digby. "Allus afraid he was goin' to the work'us, with his pockets full o' money; and allus afraid he would starve, with the ship full o' food."

"We're rather short of tinned beef aboard, Ben," said Goggles calmly, heaving a regretful sigh. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to carry some of these along—and go back."

"I suppose we'd better," Ben agreed; "but if I could lay my hands on them niggers I'd bash their black brains out with one of these tins."

Reluctant to move, they stood looking at the tins, when one of the blacks, having carted off his load of tins, returned for another, and poked his head round the entrance to the cave.

Ben saw him, roared and jumped.

The nigger ran, and Ben after him.

"Can't Ben run!" observed Goggles. "I bet you he gets him!"

"I bet you he don't," Fatty retorted. "Where are they? They've disappeared. Let's follow—come on—quick!"

The Slave Dhow.

DODGING round boulders, Ben stumbled, rose and continued his chase. He caught sight of a vanishing leg and was after it, shouting as he went—when—Thud!

From behind a rock the butt end of a rifle swung. There was a flutter of white linen, and a blow on the back of his head laid Ben on his face, where, for a moment, he lay dazed and stunned.

The blow had knocked the rifle out of Foxey Johnson's hands; and the shouts of the searching lads, coming nearer, upset his nerve. Ben, with a groan, rolled over and on to the gun. A brown hand reached down and dragged the gun from beneath—clutching very near Ben's face. Ben, in his

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EVERY WEDNESDAY—PRICE TWOPENCE

daze, only saw the hand, but it was very near his eyes. All he remembered was a row of bony knuckles and a long scar right across the back of the hand.

The next he was conscious of was a pair of spectacles peering down, while someone was feeling his heart under his shirt.

Goggles, watch in hand, was on his knees, and Ben heard him counting.

"Heart beats fairly regular now—he is alive."

"Of course he is, fathhead!" cried Bob. "He's been swearing and muttering for the last five minutes. What is he saying now?"

"Something about Foxey."

"Mind still wandering."

Ben slowly sat up and yelled:

"He got ahead of us—he's on the island!"

"Nonsense, you're dreaming, Ben! It was one of the chief's men we saw bolting away with a bully-beef tin under his arm, and a gun in his hand. He gave you a nasty biff."

"I tell you it was Foxey! He got here first. I know them knuckles, don't I? I ain't worked and hauled alongside of 'em for fifteen years without knowin' Foxey's paw when I see it! And it was your uncle's gun. Ha—and the boot polish!"

"He's still wandering—I hope his brain isn't damaged," observed Bob.

Goggles attempted to examine the sitting patient's head for holes; but Ben pushed him away.

"Get out, I ain't wandering! A little tap like that! I'm—I'm all the better for it—but it'll be the worse for Foxey! It was him as boarded our ship—not the natives. It was him stole the gun, and my best linen sheets—and the boot polish, to colour his face. Only let me get my hands on him!"

"It was a Moorish chap, Ben."

"It was Foxey, dressed up, I tell you. He got here afore us. He knew that chest was hid. He got it fust. And what did he get

for his pains—bully beef! Ha, ha, ha! Bully beef!”

“I saw a man in white walking on the hillside when we set out, and I guessed he was watching us,” said Bob. “But—if it was Foxey, how did he get here?”

“Get here!” cried Ben scornfully. “There’s ships and fast ships. We came at a crawl. And there’s boats from the mainland sometimes, I s’pose. In fact, I know there is—slavers! The thing is, what are we going to do about it?” and Ben rubbed his sore head.

There they stood on the rocky hillside, looking out on to the burning, glassy sea beyond.

Boom!

“What was that?”

It was the gun on the fort. They turned their eyes that way and saw out at sea a queer-shaped sailing-vessel, with one tall, pointed, leg-o’-mutton sail, a Moorish vessel.

“There y’are! What did I tell yer?” cried Ben, pointing out to sea. “That’s a slave dhow, and making for the island. Look at the way all of them little boats is scurrying to shore; them niggers know what that is, and what it means.”

“It’s not making for the harbour,” said Bob, shading his eyes.

“No, that’s what the gun means, and what it’s for. The governor mustn’t let ’em land—oh, no, not officially! But he can shoot the waves, and say he acted ’arsh, and then go round to the back door and wait for them to come and fill his pockets.”

“Shameful!” cried Bob indignantly. “Are we to stand here doing nothing, and watch a slave raid?”

“Suppose they made for the cathedral cave—what would happen to us then?” asked Goggles.

“Aye, what?” growled Ben.

“We must scoot,” suggested Bob.

“But we can’t get out without running into them,” Ben reminded him.

“Hadn’t we better make a bolt for the ship, and put out our lights and lie quiet deep in the darkness of the cave?” Bob suggested.

“You’re right, me lad!”

Their return to the ship was hastened by the appearance of several more black gentlemen, hunters of bully beef, who had been brought by friends to visit Foxey Johnson’s cavern.

The lads retired in good formation, fronting forward, but glancing behind most of the way, ready for pursuit; but the harmless natives were for the cavern, and cold meat, just now.

The way back was found with some difficulty. Soon the mariners were dropping down to where they had left their rope.

Foxey Finds Friends!

UP above, on the cliff, Foxey Johnson was awaiting the arrival of the slaver. As Ben had stated, Foxey was no stranger in these parts. He knew that these slavers, flying the Moorish

flag, were manned by crews who wore the native costume, but spoke many tongues, even English.

Convicts who had broken jail, crooks flying from justice, scuttlers of ships, seashore thieves—all find a common refuge on unregistered native boats. Piracy is not dead—but it is a dangerous calling. Slave-raiding is a shore business, lucrative, and beyond the power of civilised nations to stamp out on coasts where slavery is still the custom inland.

On the sea, European navies may intervene; but in dangerous waters, where only small craft ply, and the mainland is but a day’s sail, the slaver runs little danger. The primitive nigger is still the easiest prey—and the island nigger the most helpless and ignorant of all.

Where guns are ineffective, often the glittering presents of glass and metal, so highly esteemed, are enough to effect a deal, and surplus children and captives of tribal warfare are traded by the greedy savages.

The resident governor of Koba Island was not averse to selling his subjects, on the quiet, after primitive expeditions necessary to keep order and put down cannibalism.

“Allah is merciful,” he would say, with a pious shrug, “and how much better for a man to live and be sold than to be killed and eaten.”

Foxey made his way down to the shore and stood behind a rock at the entrance to the cave. The men on the ship knew their way. As a matter of fact they also knew ways out of the cave at the far end, where our treasure-seekers were lying. They were going to anchor at exactly the same spot, and make a stealthy raid inland while the governor snored in his palace fort.

The fort had fired at them, and warned them off. Later, someone would call at the fort and leave something pleasant at the back door for his mahogany excellency.

Foxey appeared on his rock and waved his gun. The men on the dhow feared no single armed man on this island, and waved back.

“Parley vous?” yelled Foxey.

“Oui, oui,” came a reply.

“Any English?” was Foxey’s next question.

“You bet,” answered a voice, and a rufian waved his hand.

“Is that Froggy Martin?” asked the astonishing Moor on the rock.

“Yes, and who are you?” demanded the English rascal.

Foxey began to remove Ben’s best linen sheeting and stood revealed as a shaggy mariner of the European variety. From a pocket he produced a woollen cap and put it on.

“It’s Foxey Johnson—don’t you know me, Martin?”

“Who’re you gettin’ at?” growled the pirate, staring suspiciously.

The slave dhow had reefed sail and now lay swinging idly a few yards from the rock, all eyes staring. Foxey produced a rag from

a pocket and began to rub clean some patches of white on his face.

"He's white all right," muttered Martin, but still a little suspicious.

"Now you know me, Froggy Martin, or have they spoiled your eyesight in the French prisons—same as they spoiled your beauty?"

The man Martin now began to proclaim his astonishment in French, his mother's language; he was a jail bird from a Moroccan prison, stripped to the waist and scarred all over by irons. For years he had been a rover and a vagabond, as much in demand by the French as by the Moorish authorities, and living by plunder.

"Whose ship, Froggy?" asked Foxey.

"Mine."

That nickname Froggy was enough to recall Foxey Johnson to recollection—a reminder of the days when Martin was an English and French speaking sailor, well known in Moorish ports, in the days before he offended and went into chains and captivity.

"Can I come aboard?" asked Foxey.

"Joining us?" asked Martin suspiciously.

"Yes."

"Then swim for it. But if you're in anybody's pay——"

"On the same lay as you, Martin," Foxey explained, and slapped a pocket. "There's a boat in there."

He jerked his thumb towards the cavern.

"What flag?"

"British."

"Holy smoke! Gunboat?"

"No, a tame duck."

"Whose?"

"Ours—if you like!"

"What cargo?" demanded Martin.

"Fools," chuckled Foxey. "Treasure hunters!"

"What treasure?"

"The real thing. I'm coming aboard."

With a dive, Foxey plunged into the sea, first slinging his gun on his back.

The Conspirators.

WHEN Foxey had climbed on board, Martin led him to the bow of the ship, where he could sit, and dry, and talk. Foxey's first appeal was for food, and something was brought him.

The boat was manned by a ruffianly crew

of several nationalities; but mostly Moorish rascals of the most villainous and dirty type. Lying about in every corner were guns and spears; in the belt of every man either pistol, knife or revolver, these last of very modern pattern. There were also some significant heaps of ropes and chains ready to hand for binding their miserable captives.

"Now then, about this ship," demanded Martin, when the traitor had gobbled down food, and had drunk from a greasy, leather bottle.

"It's Digby's old boat, done up fancy fashion for pleasure cruising, and fitted with an auxiliary electric light, and all that. Ben Toppet in charge, with the nephews of the old man out on a hunt for a fortune."

"A nice boat," observed Martin. "Anything aboard worth lifting?"

"Not yet. It's like this. The old boy spent his last months at sea, treasure-hunting in South America. I was with him. But he was very artful, and, though I helped him on the old Spanish wreck, and got out lots of junk in boxes, clothes and such-like, armour, and daggers and swords that he was cracked about, he gave out as there wasn't anything on the wreck worth the job."

"There never is!" growled Martin, an expert on wrecks.

"There was, though. He was took peculiar from that time on, always afraid of being boarded, by Customs or anybody. And he was odd in his ways, chuckling with joy

one day, and the next worried into a sweat and watching everybody. And he took to calling at all sorts of strange places, for no reason as anybody could understand. He gave up trading, and lived like a gent.

"He'd got something aboard, eh?" asked Martin.

"Yes, and he wanted it out of the ship and put away safe."

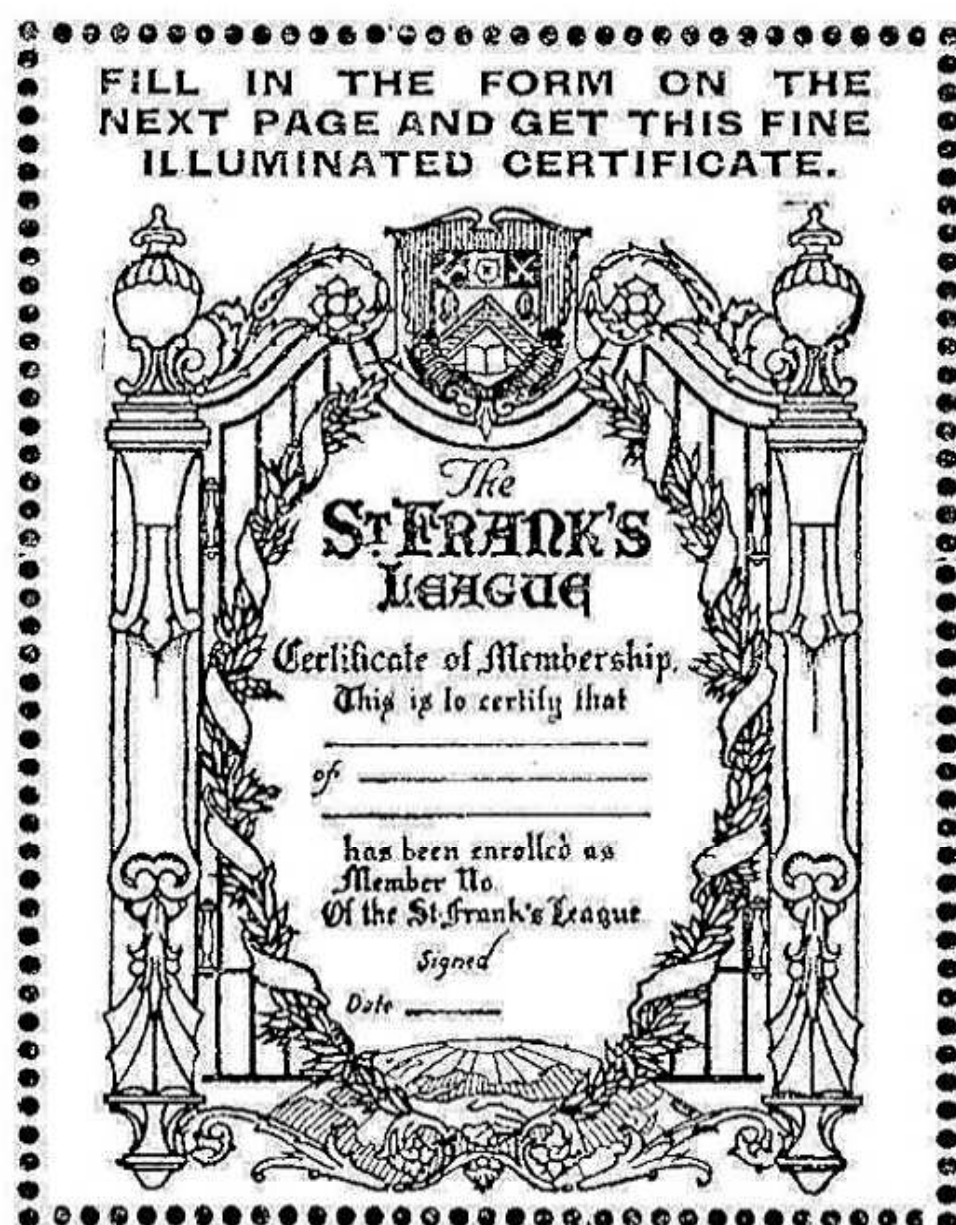
"Why?"

"'Cos he was afraid, if anybody got wind of his find, he'd have the world after him, and all sorts of people and governments claiming a share."

And then he told him all about Silas Digby's treasure and the boys who hunted it.

"So they don't know where his treasure chest actually is?" said Martin, at last.

(Continued on page 43.)



HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION

FORM No. 43.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

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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.

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THE ROLICKING ROVERS.

(Continued from page 41.)

"Not actual."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Martin.

"Well, Martin," said Foxey, speaking slowly and insinuatingly, as to a superior person. "I guess you're tired of this life by now, and wouldn't object to a nicely-fitted ship of your own—to share with me—and cruise in new waters, following the tracks of old Digby as I know 'em, and us looking for what they're after—instead of them."

"And what's to become of them?" asked Martin, with a glance into the great hollow ahead of them.

"The water in the cathedral is—is deep, Martin."

"If there's so much hanging to it, why don't you do the business yourself, Johnson?"

"There's four of 'em. And one man couldn't run a boat of that size."

Martin grinned, and gave a glance at his crowded crew of cut-throats. Then another glance at Foxey, who began to guess the thoughts in the rascal's brain.

"No, it's no good your thinking you could do the job alone, without me, and what I know, and with no knowledge where to go. Don't think of it that way, Martin."

"Well, I was thinking about it that way—that it's about time somebody made a wide stir in that wheezy old throat of yours. The Sancy Ann is a sizable boat."

"You couldn't run it in these parts, Martin, you couldn't, really; you couldn't account for it," pleaded Foxey respectfully, fearing for his throat. "Be advised by me, and go share and share equal, in the boat and all we find—as gentlemen. It'll be worth your while, it really will, Martin. You would be skipper."

"It wants thinking out," observed Martin unexcitedly.

The prospect of wiping out a boat's crew gave him no qualms.

"White men out treasure hunting has a way of talking," he said, after a while. "If they was missed, they might be searched for."

"Not at all. That's just it. They've done this secret-like, and no one knows where they'll anchor next, once they're gone."

"Is that so? More promising that," observed Martin. "Do you propose I should do this business with my men, or alone with you?" he added

softly, fondling the handle of the knife in his belt.

"Your men might talk," suggested Foxey gently, "but two or more might be useful."

"Only three lads, and old Ben?" snarled Martin. "Couldn't we do that together, you and me? What's come to you—growing soft?"

"Ben is a large man."

He had entirely forgotten to mention Dumb Dummy.

"Your nerves ain't what they used to be, Foxey," laughed the ruffian.

"I'm run down a bit—short food and being stored away in the dark for weeks don't strengthen a man's muscles, Martin."

"Biding your time, eh? And what was the worth of this treasure?"

"About a hundred thousand, so old Digby declared; but that was outside the mark, I should say."

"Some prize!" gurgled Martin. "If we could touch it! Anyway, the ship will be worth taking, and good enough to go on with. At the worst we could sell it to a coasting trader who'd ask no questions."

"We could, Martin, we could," Foxey agreed eagerly. "You must decide what you're going to do; they'll be coming out any moment now. If you meet them, you'll have to use your men."

"There's other ways of getting in," observed Martin.

"Yes, there is. Get your men to lay to, and wait here, and I'll show you a way in over the top—one you don't know."

"I know several ways," Martin declared.

"But not this one."

"You ain't much of an admiral, are you, Foxey?" Martin observed, with a contemptuous grin. "While we was going round behind they might come out in front, and my men would have to let 'em pass—unless I was there. My boat must go in as far as the bend, and lay there, and block the way. Then you and me will try this rat hole that you know of, and take 'em in the rear."

Martin gave loud orders and harangued his men in a strange tongue, and there

was a search for some immense oars with which to propel the vessel through the still waters of the cave. But first they grazed the rock from which Foxey had dived, and he and Martin clambered on it.

A few more instructions, and the vessel was thrust off and rowed into the darkness, while the pirate and his fellow conspirator began the ascent.

(Another stirring instalment next Wednesday.)

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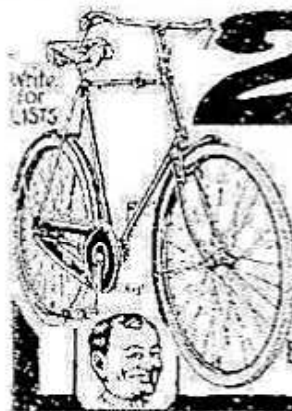


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