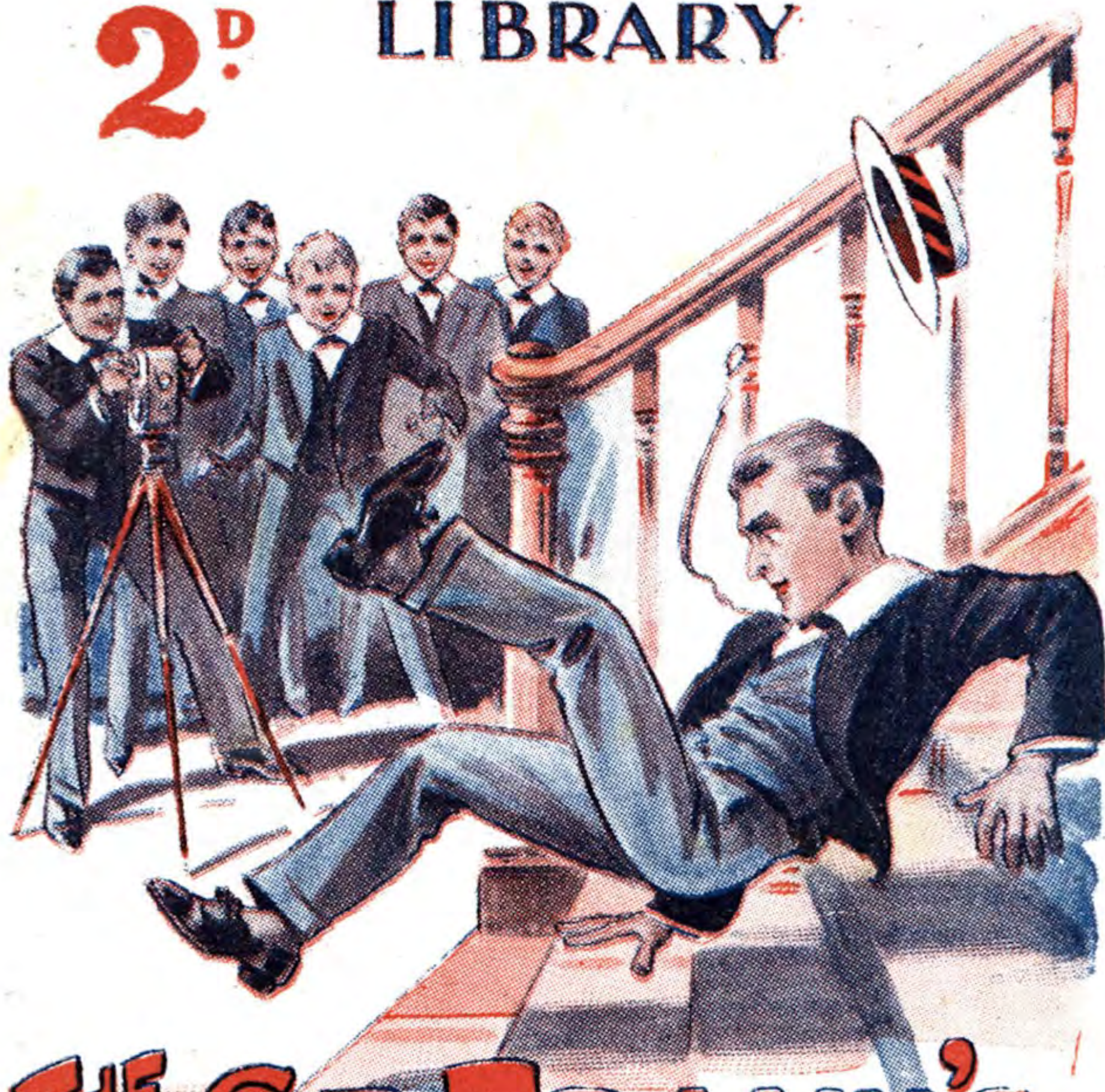


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THE ST. FRANK'S FILM ACTORS!

THE CHEERY CHUMS OF ST. FRANK'S IN A ROUSING LONG COMPLETE
STORY OF SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

New Series No. 110.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

June 9th, 1923.

"REEL" THRILLS! When Vivian Travers gets his film camera, it is decided that a number of Removites, together with three girls from the Moor View School, should "make" their own film. This they do—with dramatic, if perilous, results!

THE ST. FRANK'S FILM ACTORS!



By

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

(Author of the stories of St. Frank's appearing in "The Popular" every Tuesday.)

CHAPTER 1.

Corn in Egypt!

"FRIDAY," said Nipper soberly, "is a day that ought to be abolished by law!"

The genial skipper of the Remove at St. Frank's was leaning disconsolately against the Ancient House steps. Tregellis-West and Watson were there, too; to say nothing of Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey, of the West House. And all of them were looking as disconsolate as Nipper himself.

"Even if Fridays were abolished, it wouldn't make any difference," said Reggie



Pitt, shaking his head. "There would still be a day before Saturday!"

"Yes, and it would be just as stony!" grunted Tommy Watson.

There was, perhaps, some reason for the Removites' gloom. Between the lot of them, they had only been able to rake up three-pence-halfpenny in coppers, a French coin of aged and doubtful denomination, and an American dime. And it was nearly tea-time, and Mrs. Hake, over in the tuck-shop, had some very special cakes and pastries.

Moreover, the June afternoon was hot and sunny, and a large placard outside the tuck-shop announced that ice-creams could be obtained—to say nothing of cream sodas and sundaes, and similar luxuries.

"We shall be all right to-morrow, of course, when our pocket-money is whacked out," said Jack Grey hopefully. "But that's not much consolation, is it? What the dickens are we going to do for tea?"

"I suppose we shall have to go in Hall," said Nipper.

And a general groan went up.

"Of course, we might waylay old Archie, and do him down for half a quid," suggested Reggie Pitt. "But borrowing is a bad habit, even in an emergency. We'd far better remain broke until we get our own Saturday halfpennies!"

"Begad! We all agree with you, dear old boy!" said Tregellis-West.

"And you're a fine sort of fellow!" went on Reggie, glaring at the elegant Sir Montie. "What the dickens do you mean by spending your last quid on a postal order this afternoon?"

"Really, old boy——"

"You can't deny it, Montie!" said Nipper severely. "Right in the middle of this lean period you write off to London for some silly neckties, or something. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West looked pained.

"But, really, Nipper, old boy!" he protested. "I didn't know that everybody was so frightfully stony—I didn't, really!"

"I say!" broke in Jack Grey quickly. "Look there!"

The others turned to him, and saw that he was gazing hungrily across the Triangle, towards the main gates. And outside they beheld the carrier's van, from Bellton. The carrier himself was just shouldering a big, suggestive-looking box, and bringing it in. It was more in the style of a young packing-case, and it seemed to be fairly heavy.

"This needs investigation!" said Nipper briskly.

"Rather!"

Like a pack of hungry wolves, they hurried across the Triangle and surrounded the carrier.

"Here, hold on, young gents!" said the man suspiciously. "None of your tricks, now?"

"Who's that box for?" asked Nipper.

"It's addressed to Master Travers, Ancient House," said the carrier. "I'm just going to carry it in——"

"No, you're not!" interrupted Nipper. "We'll carry it in—and we'll sign for it, too! My sons," he added happily, "this is corn in Egypt!"

"Begad, rather!"

"A giddy box of tuck—just when we're broke and hungry!" said Reggie Pitt contentedly. "I've always said that Travers was a sportsman!"

They signed for the box, and the carrier went off, shaking his head dubiously. The Removites gathered round the prize, and regarded it with gloating triumph.

It was plainly addressed to "Master Vivian Travers, Ancient House, St. Frank's College." And, naturally, a box of this description could contain nothing else but tuck.

"Hallo! What have you got there?"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood, of Study I, came along, with Clive Russell, and a moment later Harry Gresham and Alan Castleton joined the gleeful throng.

"By glory!" said Castleton. "A box of tuck!"

"We'll all help to carry it!" offered Fullwood generously. "Russell and I were just going round, wondering where we could dig up some cash to buy some tea with."

"Don't bother about cash!" grinned Nipper. "There's enough for everybody here!"

Vivian Travers' box was regarded as public property. It had arrived out of a clear sky, and never could tuck have come at a more opportune moment.

"Does anybody know where Travers is?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"In his study, I think—slacking, as usual," said Gresham. "Anyhow, I caught a whiff of cigarette smoke as I came down the passage, five minutes ago. You know what a bounder Travers is!"

Nipper considered for a moment.

"Well, I suppose we ought to take the box to Travers, really," he said, after due thought. "It's his, and the least we can do is to let him have a share of the spoils."

The others chuckled, and many hands lifted the box and conveyed it into the Ancient House.

Fortunately, no other juniors came along, or Study H would have been very, very overcrowded. Even as it was, some of the fellows had to remain outside, half in the doorway.

"Well, well!" said Vivian Travers, as he faced the invasion. "Don't mind me, dear old fellows! Come right along in. Make yourselves at home."

The air of the study was tainted with the smell of cigarette smoke; but nobody took any notice. This was hardly the moment to rag Travers for being an ass. Besides, if he liked to smoke in his own study, it was his own concern—and his own risk.

"This box just came for you, Travers, by the carrier," said Nipper, as the prize was

dumped down on the floor of the study. "We thought you might like to have it opened at once, and so we brought it along."

"Very obliging of you, I am sure," said Vivian Travers, smiling. "Go ahead, dear old fellows! Open it as soon as you like. I shall be charmed to stand by and watch the proceedings."

"Good man!"

And the hungry, poverty-stricken crowd fell upon the box and proceeded to do their worst!



CHAPTER 2.

Not Very Palatable!

VIVIAN TRAVERS wore a whimsical smile as his visitors ruthlessly wrenched the lid from the box.

"Some of you fellows had better clear the table," he suggested. "We must have somewhere to put the stuff."

"We know where we're going to put it, old man," said Pitt sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go ahead!" invited Travers. "Personally, I'm not feeling particularly hungry. If it's a meal you want, you're welcome to the whole works!"

"Oh, you'll have your share, Travers," said Fullwood generously.

"Thanks all the same, dear old fellow, but my teeth aren't exactly what they used to be," murmured Travers. "I very much doubt if they could successfully tackle the stuff in that box!"

"You watch us, then!" grinned Nipper.

"Thanks most frightfully," said Travers. "I will!"

The lid was off now, and a layer of straw was revealed. Nipper and Pitt, who were the unpackers-in-chief, delved among the straw, and very soon a hefty brown-paper parcel was unearthed.

"Here's the first one!" said Pitt genially. "What's this, I wonder?"

"I wonder!" murmured Travers.

"A cake, I should think!" said Tommy Watson. "Rather a rummy shape, but it might be a chunk of slab cake. Who's got a knife?"

About six knives were available, and the string was soon cut. Tommy Watson pulled off the wrapping, and then he let out a yell.

"Here, this isn't a cake!" he shouted, in dismay.

"Oh, my hat!"

"What the dickens is it?" said Fullwood. "A camera, or something?"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," said Travers coolly. "Probably it's a camera. But then, on the other hand, it might be 'something'!"

"Hallo! What have we got here?" said Nipper, as he pulled something out of the

box. "A tripod, by Jove! A folding tripod!"

"There isn't any tuck in here at all!" roared Reggie Pitt.

Many pairs of glaring eyes were turned upon the smiling Vivian Travers.

"For the love of Samson!" protested Travers. "Why this concentrated gaze of hate?"

"Did you know there wasn't any tuck in this box, Travers?" demanded Nipper.

"Well, I suspected it, dear old fellow!"

"You rotter!"

"You spoofing bounder!"

"Let's slaughter him!"

"Well, well!" said Travers soothingly.

"Why am I blamed for this misunderstanding? It was you who jumped to conclusions, dear old fellows. It was you who assumed that the box contained tuck. And since you were so kind as to bring it into my study, I saw no reason why you should not open it."

"You giddy fraud!" said Reggie Pitt indignantly. "We've had all our trouble for nothing!"

"But you didn't give me a chance to explain," said Travers mildly. "After all, I did give you one or two broad hints."

Everybody in the study was looking indignant, and the box and its contents were of no further interest. The juniors felt that they had been swindled.

"But why all this clamouring for cat-ables?" asked Travers, in wonder. "Why this sudden hunger?"

"We're broke!" explained Fullwood. "It's Friday evening, and nearly everybody in the Remove is stony."

Vivian Travers chuckled.

"But there are still one or two fellows with money to burn," he said. "If it is merely a shortage of tin that is worrying you, kindly allow me to step into the breach. I have here an idle pound note, and a pound note, judiciously expended—"

"Thanks all the same, old man—but we'd rather not borrow," said Nipper.

"Then let us all repair to the tuck shop," said Travers good humouredly. "Surely you will not refuse to be my guests? I believe there are ice-creams and sundaes on the menu. It is tea-time, and I am more than willing to stand treat. Let me mention, in passing, that the aforesaid pound note has two or three companions."

"Thanks awfully, Travers!"

"You're a sportsman!"

"Hear, hear!"

Peace was restored, and all the frowns vanished. Since Travers had so decently invited them to feed at his expense, there was no further reason for indignation. And a belated interest in the box was now revealed.

"What is this thing, anyway?" asked Nipper, as he pointed to the camera-like object on the table.

"Unless I am much mistaken, my film outfit has arrived," said Travers calmly.

"Your film outfit?"

"I was expecting it this week," nodded Travers.

"But what do you mean—your film outfit?"

"Surely, dear old fellows, there can be only one meaning?" said Travers. "A film outfit, I imagine, is an outfit for the taking and showing of films."

"Well I'm blessed!" said Reggie Pitt, staring. "Do you mean to say that this thing is a film camera?"

"Exactly!"

"And will it really take films?"

"Unless my pater has been swindled, I believe it will!" said Travers. "You see, my pater wrote to me the other day, and said that he was sending me the box of tricks along. A complete affair, dear old fellows, together with instructions and everything. A home cine camera, films, projector, screen, and all the fixings."

"By jingo!"

"I say, what a lark!"

"What the dickens are you going to do with it, Travers?" asked Nipper interestedly.

"Well, I gather that the general idea is to take films, and show them!" said Travers smoothly.

"Ass!"

"It's quite one of the latest things," proceeded Travers. "No trouble at all—if one is to judge by the makers' claims. You just set up the camera, turn the handle, and the machine does the rest. As simple to operate as a sausage machine!"

"How about developing and printing the films?"

"That, of course, is done by the firm," explained Travers. "You just take your films, and send them away to be conjured with. When they return you shove the finished article through the projector, and have the somewhat doubtful pleasure of seeing your own phizog on the silver screen."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "How frightfully interestin'!"

"Yes, we ought to get some fun out of it!" agreed Travers. "But let us forget the subject for the moment. Tea-time is here, and the tuck-shop is calling. Remember, dear old fellows, that you are my guests."

And he led the way out of the study.

Five minutes later, the tuck-shop was crowded, and all the stony juniors were enjoying Travers' hospitality. But as soon as the edge had been taken from their appetites, they remembered the film outfit again, and by this time, too, the news had spread.

Everybody was exceedingly interested, and everybody was getting quite excited.

Vivian Travers, much to his amusement, was the centre of attention. He had become a man of importance.



CHAPTER 3.

The Film Enthustasts!

"G OOD gad!"

Archie Glenthorne, of the Remove, sailed gracefully down the steps of

Ancient House, his right leg high in the air.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crash—thud!

Archie sat at the bottom of the steps, on the ground. His straw hat had gone in one direction, his eyeglass in another. His elegant trousers were dusty, and his jacket was split.

"Splendid!" said Vivian Travers approvingly.

Click—click—click—click!

Travers stood a few yards away, surrounded by many grinning juniors. And Travers was operating the little handle of the cine camera, the whole thing being mounted on the tripod.

"Did you get everything?" asked Fullwood.

"I rather think it was Archie who got everything!" replied Travers. "Still, we haven't done so badly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Odds disasters and catastrophes!" ejaculated Archie feebly. "Help, and all that! I mean to say, S.O.S.! Laddies, kindly rally round, and man the good old boats!"

Archie Glenthorne was assisted to his feet by many willing hands, and everybody was chuckling.

"You did that jolly well, Archie!" said Fullwood. "Even better than if you had rehearsed it."

Archie started.

"Good gad!" he said, aghast. "You don't absolutely mean to tell me, you poisonous blighter, that the whole dashed thing was done on purpose?"

"Well, not exactly, Archie," replied Travers. "You see, there was a distinct element of chance in it."

"Chance?" repeated the genial ass of the Remove. "Oh, I see what you mean! Chance? Absolutely not, old thing! There was no dashed chance about the way I biffed down the good old steps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We only intended to 'take' an ordinary snap of you as you came walking down the steps, Archie," explained Travers coolly.

"Good gad!"

"Of course, we hoped you would do something special, but we never expected anything quite so good as this," said Travers. "And, having the expert cameraman's instinct, I naturally nabbed the whole scene."

Archie's expression was frigid.

Truth to tell, he was still very concerned over his undignified exit. Such an exit was not at all worthy of the dignity of the

Glenthornes. How the catastrophe happened Archie did not know. All he did know was that Travers had seized the unexpected opportunity and secured many feet of excellent film—excellent, of course, in the eyes of Travers himself and the other grinning juniors.

They thought Archie should feel honoured at being thus filmed.

Archie, however, did not seem to appreciate the honour. He had been made the star in a comedy scene, but there was no sign of gratitude in his demeanour.

"You see, Archie, I thought it would be rather a good idea to shoot you," said Travers smoothly.

"Eh? I mean, what?" ejaculated Archie, staring. "Shoot me?"

"Exactly!"

Archie adjusted his monocle, and regarded Travers with cold disdain.

"Well, of course, there's no limit to what you blighters will do!" he said. "I mean, you might just as well have shot me, while you were about it."

"But I did shoot you!" explained Travers. Archie leapt into the air.

"Odds horrors and gore!" he shrieked, gazing down at himself in consternation.

"You did shoot me?"

"Of course I did!"

"Help!" said Archie bleakly. "Laddies, kindly dash away and get Phipps. Tell him that the young master is somewhat riddled."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear ass, I don't mean that I've shot you with a gun," said Travers patiently. "I shot you with this film camera."

Archie blinked.

"The film camera?" he repeated. "Oh, rather! At the same time, dash you, I can't be bothered. I'm looking for the wound!"

"'Shooting' is merely a term that is used by all the best film producers," said Travers, with a chuckle. "When they 'shoot' a scene, it means that they take it. My dear old fellow, you've heard of a snapshot, haven't you? Well, it's just the same thing—only in films."

Archie looked intensely relieved.

"Good gad!" he murmured. "I see what you mean, laddie! But for a horrid sort of spasm I thought that you had admitted a spot of daylight into the good old interior."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Archie went indoors, very upset about the whole business. And the other juniors, crowding round Travers, were all shouting at once.

"I say, Travers, old man, be a sport!" urged De Valerie. "Take a few pictures of me while you're about it!"

"Same here!" said a dozen other voices.

"But why waste good film?" inquired Travers, pained. "Pray don't think that I am attempting to be rude. Far from it. But a film, in order to be a success, should depict something with action in it. As, for example, Archie's recent performance."

"He's quite right, you chaps!" said Nipper. "It's no good just posing in front of the camera, and making faces at it."

Church, of Study D, sighed.

"We ought to have had old Handforth here!" he said regretfully. "You'd have had plenty of good comedy then, Travers!"

The others grinned, and they were quite ready to believe that Edward Oswald Handforth, late of St. Frank's, would have performed some of his characteristic antics. But the great Handforth had now gone to St. Jim's, and Church and McClure were still disconsolate. However, it wouldn't have surprised the Remove if Handforth had walked in through the gateway at that very moment—for everybody was expecting him back, sooner or later.

Perhaps he would turn up again within the next two or three weeks!

"What we ought to do," said Nipper thoughtfully, "is to produce a real film drama. You'd be game, wouldn't you, Travers?"

"Game for anything!" replied Travers promptly.

"Then why not do it?" said Nipper, looking round. "A special film drama—with tons of action, and, naturally, plenty of good acting!"

There was much enthusiasm, and everybody crowded round, anxious to hear the details.



CHAPTER 4.

Ways and Means!

SILENCE for the chairman!"

"Order!"

Vivian Travers stood by with an expression of amusement on his face as he listened to the shouting and chattering in the Ancient House Junior Common-room. A meeting of the Remove had been called, and the majority of the West House fellows were on hand, too.

"Gentlemen!" shouted Nipper, as he stood upon the table. "I wish to say a few words

"Hear, hear!"

"Bravo!"

"I wish to say a few words on the subject of Travers' film camera," continued Nipper severely. "If anybody wants to interrupt, let him wait until somebody else is speaking!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

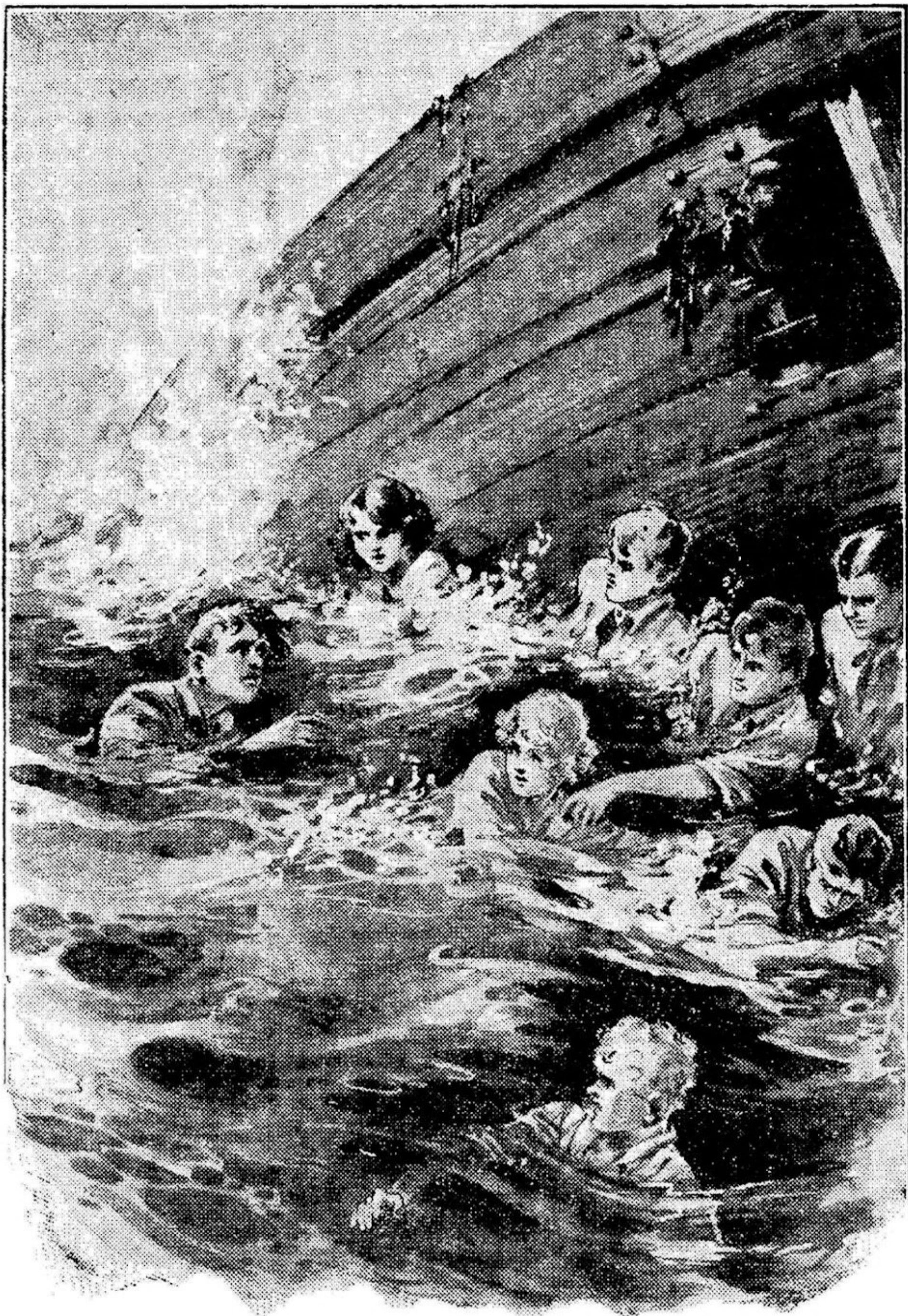
"The general idea is for us to produce a film drama," pursued Nipper. "And we are here to discuss ways and means. As you probably know, we need a scenario—"

"A which?"

"A plot," said Nipper. "We can't make a film play without a plot."

"I've seen hundreds of them!" said Reggie Pitt promptly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"



The big wave broke with a thunderous roar ; the foam came hissing in, lifting some of the juniors and girls clean off their hands and knees and battering them against the timbers of the derelict vessel. And Archie Glenthorne, trapped beneath the hulk, vanished completely !

"But ours, don't forget, is going to be a British picture!" Nipper pointed out. "And that makes all the difference. The first thing is to decide the type of drama that we shall make. Shall it be a costume play, or a boy-scout adventure, or what?"

There were all sorts of suggestions, the majority of them hopeless.

"Why not make a picture about pirates?" said Church thoughtfully. "Plenty of scope in a theme like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He thinks he's old Handy!" chuckled Fullwood. "Handy would have come out with a suggestion about pirates, or smugglers!"

Church turned red.

"Fathead!" he roared. "I was thinking about those costumes we've got."

"Costumes?" said Nipper keenly. "By Jove, Churchy, you're right!"

"There are lots of them up in one of the box-rooms," said Church. "We had them specially made for that amateur theatrical week in the winter, and they're still as good as new."

"That's settled it!" said Nipper firmly. "It's going to be a pirate drama!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Travers was more amused than ever. It was his camera—his film—his projector. But the Remove had evidently made up its mind to regard the outfit as a Form acquisition. Not that Travers minded in the least; he was thoroughly enjoying himself, and he would enter wholeheartedly into any scheme that might be evolved.

"Well, well!" he commented. "We seem to be progressing rapidly. But if we decide upon a pirate drama, dear old fellows, we shall have to be most frightfully careful."

"How do you mean?" asked Fullwood.

"Well, there are always liable to be fellows knocking about in the offing," explained Travers. "And the best of pirate dramas are apt to be spoilt by glimpses of sundry merchants in Etons."

"That's true enough," admitted Reggie Pitt. "Besides, a pirate play would mean acting on the sea-shore, or in a boat, or something. Wouldn't it be a bit too difficult, Nipper?"

The Remove captain was looking thoughtful.

"Well, to-morrow's a half-holiday, and we can spend a good few hours on the job," he said. "There's no important cricket match on, so we shall be free."

"Yes, we know all that," said Jimmy Potts. "But hadn't we better chuck up the pirate theme? It'll be awfully awkward, you know. Unless we're careful, we shall be showing telegraph wires in some of the scenes—or a distant view of a passing motor-car!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To say nothing of being bothered constantly by crowds of idle and gaping spectators," said Nipper pointedly.

"I suppose that means us?" demanded Gulliver, with a sneer.

"Not only the Remove, but the Fourth and the Third as well," replied Nipper. "It stands to reason that everybody can't appear in the giddy play. Nine or ten of us, all told, will be enough. So the only solution is to get right away from the madding throng."

"And how are we going to work this miracle?" asked Pitt interestedly.

"The Bo'sun will solve our problem for us."

"Tom Burton, of my House?" asked Pitt. "What can he do?"

"Hasn't Burton got a motor-boat, over at Caistowe?"

"Yes," said Pitt. "His pater gave it to him at the beginning of the summer."

"Very well, then," nodded Nipper. "We've seen that boat. It isn't a speed merchant, but it's handy. It'll carry over a dozen with perfect safety, and no end of baggage."

There were all sorts of curious comments.

"But what on earth's the good of crowding ourselves into Tom Burton's motor-boat?" asked Fullwood. "We shall be too cramped to do any acting. And what about Travers? Where's he going to be, with his camera?"

"Oh, don't mind me, dear old fellow," murmured Travers. "I'll sit athwart the bowsprit, or tuck myself abaft the main beam!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The motor-boat," said Nipper calmly, "will merely serve as a conveyance. I suppose most of you have heard of the Gull Sands, haven't you?"

"By jingo!"

"The Gull Sands, eh?"

"Everybody's heard of the Gull Sands, I should think," said Jack Grey. "They're a big stretch of firm, flat sands, about five miles from the mainland, nearly opposite Caistowe."

"But they're only uncovered at low water," said Nipper. "And I happen to know that the tide will be out at Caistowe to-morrow at about two o'clock in the afternoon. I also happen to know that hardly anybody ever goes to the Gull Sands. They're too far off, for one thing—and there's hardly anything to see there. They're isolated—and even the sailing yachts steer clear of them, because of the shoals near by."

"By Jove!" said Fullwood, his eyes sparkling. "You're suggesting that we should take the film on the Gull Sands?"

"If you can think of a better place, let's hear of it!" replied Nipper. "There's even an old hulk on the sands—the wreck of a schooner, or a brigantine or something. Where could we find a better background for a pirate film?"

Vivian Travers beamed.

"Nipper, dear old fellow, congrattars!" he said approvingly. "A brainy scheme—a masterly suggestion. On the Gull Sands our little film company will be able to devote itself wholeheartedly to the task of producing a master film. I hereby second the proposal."

But the proposal, as yet, was by no means carried!



CHAPTER 5.

The Decision.

"IT'S a rotten idea!" said Singleton, of the West House.

"Hopeless!" snapped Doyle.

"Idiotic!" said Gresham indignantly.

"If any of you can tell me how it is hopeless and rotten and idiotic, I shall be obliged!" retorted Nipper. "I'm always open to argument—"

"Am I going to be in this film company?" demanded Singleton.

"Well, no."

"Then, of course, it is a rotten idea!" roared Singleton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In fact, it's a swindle!" went on Singleton tartly. "We're not dotty enough to think that we can all appear in the play. But, hang it, there's no reason why we shouldn't watch the filming!"

"That's just what I mean!" said Harry Gresham eagerly. "Watching the filming will be half the fun! And if these idiots go off to the Gull Sands they'll be beyond our reach! They know jolly well that we can't afford to hire motor-boats to go all that distance!"

Nipper smiled sweetly.

"Exactly!" he said. "You've hit the nail on the head, old man. The company will consist of about nine fellows, I should imagine—and it might be a good idea to invite one or two of the Moor View girls."

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "I mean, what about a dashed heroine? We can't have a pirate drama without one or two heroines dashing in and out. There's got to be a good old maiden in distress."

"Well, we'll discuss that later," said Nipper. "And we'll also decide upon the company later—but if all you fellows will only be reasonable, you'll see that we can't produce a creditable drama while crowds of spectators are bothering about."

"Hear, hear!" said Reggie Pitt.

"And what about showing the film?" said Nipper. "There'll be no fun in it for the Form if everybody has seen the scenes being shot. My scheme is for us to make the play, and then it will come as a surprise to everybody, barring the actors, at the first showing."

"It's far more likely to come as a shock!" said De Valerie, with a grunt.

"On the Gull Sands, we shall have the ideal conditions," said Nipper. "No spectators—no modern background—no chance of a steamer butting into the way—nothing, in fact, except the sea and the sky and the sands."

"And the old derelict," said Tommy Watson eagerly. "Why, it's not merely an idea—it's a brain wave!"

"Perhaps you're right," admitted Gresham, with a grin. "Come to think of it, it would be a bit stale if we all saw the film being taken, wouldn't it?"

"The trouble is there wouldn't be much film taken!" observed Travers. "All my time would be taken up by shifting you fellows out of the line of fire. No; the only safe way is to allow the film company to go off on location—I think that's the correct term—and the Gull Sands were made for the job."

And so it was decided. The grumblers were not so noisy now, since they had reluctantly seen the light of reason. But they were very disappointed. They knew that they would have to wait several days before viewing the result of the "Film Company's" efforts.

In the end it was decided that the party should consist of Nipper, Tregollis-West, Watson; Travers, Archie Glenthorne, Fullwood; and Pitt, Grey and Burton, of the West House. Nipper wanted a few others to come, but Tom Burton's boat was only of moderate size, and its accommodation was limited. Besides, there wasn't any real need for a big crowd.

"Well, that's that!" said Nipper, after most of the Removites had drifted away to their studies. "The next thing is to pop over and have a word with Tom Burton. We might as well go over with you, Reggie."

"Couldn't do better," replied Pitt, nodding.

The rank and file had lost interest in the project now. They weren't to be allowed to see the film-making, and so they looked upon the whole affair as more or less of a frost.

And, after all, the outfit belonged to Vivian Travers, and it was up to him to invite just whom he pleased.

Nipper and Fullwood accompanied the West House fellows back to their own domain. It was highly necessary to have an interview with Tom Burton, of Study F. For everything depended upon the "Bo'sun." The sunny, good-natured son of Captain Burton, late of the Merchant Service, was an important cog in the wheel.

"Here we are!" said Reggie Pitt, as he thumped on the door of Study F, and strode in. "Good egg! The Bo'sun by himself. Dodd and Jarrow are in our common-room, I expect. All the better!"

Tom Burton looked up with a start.

"Swab my maindecks!" he ejaculated.

"What's the matter, Bo'sun?" asked Reggie keenly. "What's the idea of looking so startled?"

"It's all right, messmate," replied Tom, flushing. "I—I wasn't expecting you, that's all. Swab me! You came aboard like a bunch of buccaneers!"

"That's funny!" said Nipper.

"What's funny?"

"That you should be talking about buccaneers," replied Nipper. "We've come here to talk about pirates!"

But, strangely enough, Tom Burton did not seem to find anything unusual in this remark. It is doubtful if he heard it. He leaned back in his chair, and a number of lines had appeared on his forehead.

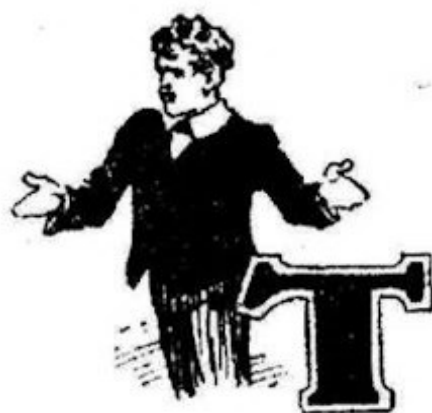
"Hold on, Nipper!" murmured Reggie. "There's something up with the Bo'sun! It isn't usual for him to be worried and depressed like this. Let's get it out of him before we broach the other subject."

"Just as you please," said Nipper. "If there's anything we can do to help, Bo'sun, just say the word."

Tom Burton coloured.

"That's very nice of you, messmate, but there's nothing wrong," he replied. "At least, I mean—Swill my scuppers! What are you all looking at me like this for?"

"Out with it, Bo'sun!" said Reggie Pitt briskly. "What's the trouble? We're not going out of this study until you've told us!"



CHAPTER 6.

The Worries of the Bo'sun!

TOM BURTON looked alarmed.

"Steady, shipmates!" he protested.

"There's nothing

wrong with me. I'm only—only— Well, it's all right!" he concluded lamely.

"You're only—what?" demanded Pitt.

"Nothing!"

"Worried, eh?"

"Well, a bit," muttered Burton.

"And why the dickens are you worried?" asked Reggie. "Out with it, O foolish one! Hast no sense of the fitness of things? Don't you know that we're your friends? And if you're in trouble, it's up to us to help you."

"Hear, hear!" said the others.

Tom Burton shifted his feet uncomfortably.

"Are you broke?" asked Reggie Pitt sternly.

"Swab me, no!"

"Had some trouble with old Crowell?"

"No, it's not that."

"Something to do with your family?"

The Bo'sun was silent.

"I say," broke in Nipper, "I hope your father isn't ill?"

"The good old skipper?" said Burton, looking up, and smiling in spite of himself.

"No, he's as well as ever. As tough as leather is the skipper."

"Your mother, then?"

"Oh, I suppose I'd better tell you!" said the Bo'sun in a low voice. "It's my uncle."

"By Jove!" said Reggie. "I remember now! You said something to me about your Uncle Stephen last week. In business, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"And things are not looking any too rosy?"

"That's it!" said Tom Burton. "I had a letter from my cousin this evening. They

live in Southampton, you know. Got a business there. Uncle Stephen only started it about a year ago, but things have been going from bad to worse. It's all because of lack of capital."

"Hard lines!" said Nipper sympathetically.

The juniors realised that this was a problem which they could not tackle.

"Uncle Stephen is such a jolly old boy, too," went on the Bo'sun sorrowfully. "He was full of hope when he started that business, but he must have struck some foul weather, because my cousin has been taken away from school. Uncle Stephen can't afford to pay his fees any longer."

"Oh, that's pretty rough!"

"He's quite cheerful about it, mind you!" said Burton quickly. "He hasn't written to me, grumbling. He's only wondering what's going to happen in the future. Uncle Stephen seems to think that unless he gets some capital in the business he'll go bankrupt. My father has done all he possibly can, but only big money can save the business."

"What do you call big money?"

"I believe he wants about eight hundred pounds."

"Phew!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'm afraid that's a bit beyond our means, old man," said Nipper gently. "We'd all club together, if there was any chance, and invest the money with your uncle. But a sum like eight hundred pounds, in these days, is a fortune."

"I know," said Burton wretchedly. "It's awfully decent of you, messmates, to even think of helping. But Uncle Stephen can't get money from capitalists; he's in such a rocky position that they won't trust him. They don't think it's a safe investment. But, swab me, I know Uncle Stephen! If only he could get that money he'd pull the business round and make a big success of it. He'd sail into fair weather, and bring his craft into port."

The others were silent.

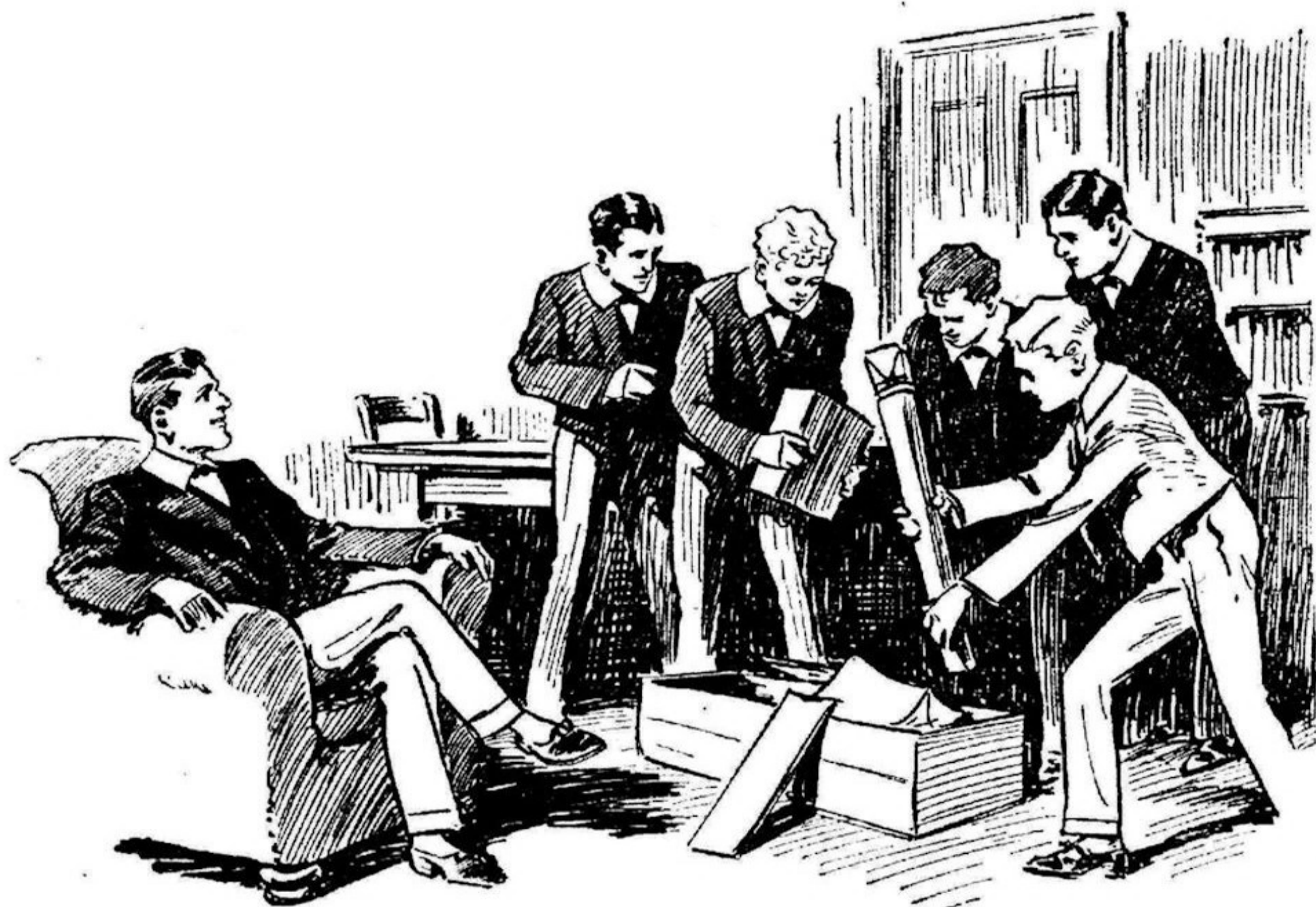
"As it is, he'll probably founder," added the Bo'sun sadly. "And I expect he'll go down with all hands, including my aunt and my cousins. Why can't people trust him?" he added fiercely. "If I had the money—"

He broke off, and suddenly rose to his feet. His sunny smile had returned, and his brow was clear.

"Splice my hawser!" he ejaculated. "What's the idea of letting me sail on like that, shipmates? It isn't fair that I should pour my worries into your ears. It's no good crying over spilt milk, anyhow. I dare say Uncle Stephen will pull through. Let's hope so, anyhow."

And the sunny Tom was almost his old self.

So the subject was tactfully dismissed. The St. Frank's fellows could not help in any way. The thing was beyond them, and so it was far better to forget it.



Thinking the box contained grub, the juniors unpacked it with feverish energy, the while Vivian Travers looked on amusedly. "Hallo! What have we got here?" said Nipper, as he pulled something out of the box. "A tripod, by Jove! A folding tripod!" "And there isn't any grub here at all!" roared Reggie Pitt indignantly.

"We really came to you, Burton, about your motor-boat," said Nipper.

"Swab me! My motor-boat, eh?" ejaculated the Bo'sun. "Why, I might sell it——"

"No, don't sell it!" said Reggie hastily. "At least, not until Monday!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not that it would be much good!" went on Burton, shaking his head. "She wouldn't fetch much. Sorry, shipmates! What about the old tub?"

They explained the situation.

"Why, of course," said Burton promptly. "You're welcome to her—and I'll take command. I'll pilot you over to the Gull Sands to-morrow afternoon with pleasure."

"That boat of yours will hold a dozen, I suppose?"

"Comfortably," said the Bo'sun. "She's a lifeboat off one of the skipper's old ships. Her motor isn't very powerful, and I don't suppose she'll do more than five or six knots. Still, she's a handy craft."

And so it was settled.

After that it was necessary to ring up the Moor View School, and to have a few words with Irene Manners. It appeared that she and the other girls were gleeful with delight at the prospect, and they fell in with the plan wholeheartedly.

Then there were other things to see about. The costumes had to be raked out, and over-

looked. Most important of all, the scenario had to be planned. It is to be feared that this work was sadly skimped. The plot of the pirate play was of very secondary importance, in the opinion of the schoolboy film actors. In the true conventional style of film producers, they allowed the plot to look after itself.

But there was a hazy idea that two of the girls were to be captured by pirates, and held to ransom. The rescue party would come along, and there would be a big fight on the deck of the old hulk. That would be the big scene. Nothing else really mattered.

And in this somewhat haphazard style the preparations went ahead.



CHAPTER 7.

Off on the Adventure!

"READY, you fellows?"

Fullwood put his head into Study C, and found Nipper & Co. making their final

preparations. It was the following day, and the midday meal was over. Everything was "all set" for the big adventure.

"Just coming, Fully, old man," said Nipper, glancing round. "Shan't be a tick!"

"The bus is here," said Fullwood.

"Good egg!"

Outside, round the gateway, an envious crowd was watching. A small saloon bus had been hired for the occasion—Travers himself paying the exes. The others had thought about going on their bicycles, but Travers would not hear of it. It was his camera, and his production, and he believed in doing the thing in style.

And it was an undeniable fact that the bus was necessary. The juniors would have found matters very awkward if they had actually gone on their bicycles. For not only had the costumes to be carried, but the camera, and the tripod, and, last but by no means least, a big hamper of tuck. For a picnic featured largely in this programme.

The "company" reckoned to get on the Gull Sands by about two-thirty, when the tide was at its lowest. Then they would work hard at the film for two hours, and finish up with the picnic. After that it would be necessary to leave, since the water would completely cover the sands.

The hampers containing the costumes and the tuck had already been placed in the bus, and now the members of the company congregated.

As the day was warm and fine, they preferred to be free and easy, and so they were all airily attired in running shorts, cricketing shirts, and blazers.

"Well, here we are, all ready to start," said Vivian Travers cheerfully. "The sky is cloudless, the barometer is high, and there's a cooling breeze. What could be nicer?"

"It would be nicer if the girls were here," said Reggie Pitt, glancing up the road. "It's five minutes past the appointed time already."

"A mere trifle," murmured Travers. "We must give them half-an-hour, at least."

But a moment later three girlish figures appeared at the bend of the lane, and they soon arrived. They were Irene Manners, Doris Berkeley, and Marjorie Temple.

"Well, here we are—on time to the tick!" said Irene triumphantly.

"Ahem! I suppose our clock must be wrong," murmured Reggie Pitt.

The girls glanced at the school clock.

"Well, it's only five minutes past the arranged time," said Doris, chuckling. "That's pretty good for girls, isn't it?"

"Splendid!" beamed Travers. "We weren't expecting you for ages!"

Travers was politely requested not to be horrid, and the girls climbed into the bus, followed by the other members of the film company.

"Isn't your sister coming, Reggie?" asked Jack Grey.

"No," replied Reggie. "We really wanted Winnie and Mary Summers to come with us,

too—but they're playing in a tennis tournament, or something, and can't get away. Still, I dare say we shall manage all right with only three heroines!"

The others chuckled, and in a very short time the bus started off on its journey.

"Lucky bounders!" said Boots, of the Fourth, as the bus glided away.

"Oh, well, we shall have our fun when we see the film next week!" chuckled Harry Gresham. "I don't suppose it'll be all beer and skittles, making that film on the Gull Sands."

"No fear!" said Duncan. "There'll be sand flies by the million, and no shade, and the poor chaps will stifle themselves in those pirate costumes. I'm sorry for them!"

And, consoling themselves with these reflections, the rest of the juniors went off on their various amusements.

The film company, gleeful and joyous, bowled away towards Caistowe.

The conditions could not have been better for the afternoon's work. It was really a glorious June day, without any sign of a change in the weather, and the whole adventure was regarded as a spree.

Caistowe was soon reached, and the busy little seaside resort was found to be full of summer visitors. The beach was crowded, the pierrots were busy, and the band was playing. Everywhere, there was an atmosphere of light-heartedness and gaiety. Scores of people were bathing, and the sea looked intensely inviting.

"By Samson!" said Travers. "This looks good, dear old fellows!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie Glenthorpe. "I mean to say, absolutely! You can feel the good old ozone trickling throughout the priceless tissues. In other words, this is distinctly the stuff to give them!"

But the film company did not waste any time by viewing the scenery. The bus made straight for the quayside—some little distance from the pleasure beach—and before ten minutes had elapsed, everybody was on board Tom Burton's motor-boat. The hampers were on board, too, to say nothing of the film camera and the accessories.

It was rather a heavy load for the sturdy craft, but she made no trouble about it. The engine was small, but efficient; and although the motor-boat made no claims to speed, she was at least reliable and safe.

"Now we shan't be long!" said Nipper contentedly, as they purred out into Caistowe Bay.

From the shore, the sea had looked very calm and smooth. But, actually, the water was rather choppy. There was a stiff breeze blowing out here, and the surface was whipped up into little sparkling waves. Once beyond the bay, the boat rose and fell steadily to the rollers.

In fact, everything was exactly as it should be.

There wasn't the slightest fear of a change in the weather—and now that the film company was well off on its adventure, the thrill of the whole affair became more and more enjoyable.

Tom Burton, as he sat in the stern at the tiller, was a changed being. His worry of yesterday was forgotten; his sunny face was healthily flushed, and his eyes were sparkling. He was good to see, as he sat there, his curly hair waving in the breeze.

"Souise me! This is grand, shipmates!" he said heartily.

"What-ho!" agreed Archie Glenthorne. "A life on the ocean wave, what? Absolutely! A life on the rolling deep, and so forth!"

"It's lovely!" said Irene gaily. "Who's the genius who thought of this idea?"

"Don't make me blush!" murmured Nipper.

"So it was your wheeze, was it?" laughed Doris. "Well, Nipper, you deserve a medal!"

"Rats!" said Nipper, with a grin. "I don't like to be rude to a young lady, but I've got to repeat—'Rats!' If you want to throw bouquets at anybody, throw them at Bo'sun! If it hadn't been for his motor-boat——"

"Here, steady!" interrupted Tom Burton, shaking his head. "Hard aport, there, shipmate! What about Travers?"

"Ah!" murmured Vivian Travers. "What about me?"

"It's your film outfit that started everything," replied the Bo'sun. "So if we get down to rock bottom, we've got to thank you——"

"Full speed astern!" said Travers hastily. "Let's settle it by saying that we're all equally responsible. Then there can't be any arguments. Besides, what does it matter?"

"Not a bit!" chuckled Marjorie. "We're off on this adventure, and we're going to have a high old time!"

And they let it go at that.

CHAPTER 8.

On the Gull Sands!



T

HERE they are!" said Nipper, pointing.

All eyes were strained. Caistowe and the mainland

had dwindled away into the distance astern, and now, ahead, a long stretch of smooth, golden sands could be seen. They were only visible when the motor-boat rose to the top of a roller, and they looked inviting in the afternoon sunlight.

"There's the hulk, too!" said Irene, standing up in the boat. "I suppose that's going to be the wicked pirate ship, isn't it?"

"Well, according to the plot, there's going to be no actual ship," said Nipper. "The action of the play will take place ashore, and there'll be an old deserted wreck, containing Spanish treasure."

"Doubloons, and all that sort of thing, what?" asked Archie. "Pieces of eight, laddie!"

"You've got the idea!" nodded Nipper, with a grin. "First of all, I think, we'll take a 'shot' of all the pirates, gathered on the deck of the hulk just abaft the main mast!"

There were many chuckles, and the details of the pirate play were eagerly discussed. Meanwhile, the motor-boat grew nearer and nearer to the Gull Sands.

These consisted of a long, low stretch of perfectly smooth sands, almost out of sight of land. They were only exposed at low tide, and they were given a wide berth by all shipping. For there were some treacherous shoals in the vicinity, too.

"We'll steer a point or two to westward, shipmates," said the Bo'sun, as he moved the tiller. "The hulk lies on the edge of the sands, and we might as well get as close to it as possible."

"That's what I was thinking," remarked Fullwood, nodding.

They skirted along the edge of the sand-bank, and at last Burton steered the boat straight in, and while she was some little distance from the sands they felt her keel grating on the bottom.

"Now, all together!" shouted Nipper cheerily.

Half a dozen of them leapt out, knee-deep in the water. They were well prepared for this sort of work, for it didn't matter if their running-shorts were soaked. They were wearing no socks, and their canvas shoes would come to no harm.

"Heave ho!" yelled Reggie Pitt.

The engine had now been shut off, and the juniors, pulling hard, eased the boat up the sands, and at last she was high and dry.

The girls jumped out, splashing ankle-deep in the white foam. They, too, had come prepared. They were wearing summer gym frocks, of white drill, and they were not encumbered by any such unnecessary articles as stockings.

"It's wonderful!" cried Irene, as she stood at the water's edge, her fair, bobbed hair glinting in the sunlight and waving in the wind.

"Too gorgeous for words!" agreed Doris. "This is just what I love! No crowds—no pierrots or bands! Just the sea and the sand and the sunshine!"

"Let's have a race to the end of the sand-bank!" suggested Marjorie.

"It's not at all a bad idea, girls, but I had a vague notion that we came here to make a film," said Travers mildly.

"Oh, bother the film!" said Doris, with a chuckle. "At least, bother it for the next five minutes! Let's have a gambol!"

"Right!" said Travers. "I'll bet you a level five bob that you can't run to the end of the sandbank in two minutes!"

"You silly cuckoo!" retorted Doris. "I didn't say gamble! I said gambol!"

"Oh, sorry!" grinned Travers. "My mistake!"

The girls moved away, greatly interested in the gaunt old derelict which stood near by, high out of the sands, and listing heavily to starboard.

"Just a minute, shipmates!" said the Bo'sun, as the Removites were about to leave the motor-boat. "We can't take any chances."

"What do you mean—chances?" asked Jack Grey.

"Well, unless we secure this motor-boat we may find ourselves marooned!" grinned Burton.

"Good gad!"

"Marooned!"

"If the tide comes up, while we're busy on the film, and floats our boat off the sands, where shall we be?" asked the cautious Burton. "Don't forget we're five miles from the mainland, and practically out of sight. Swab me! We should be in a pretty pickle, shouldn't we, if we had no boat, and the tide came in? This sandbank is completely covered—and so is the hulk."

"That's true enough!" said Nipper, nodding. "Right where we're standing now will be the sea bed at high tide—so we can't be too careful. What do you suggest that we should do with the boat, Bo'sun?"

"Pull her up, right under the lee of the derelict," replied Tom Burton promptly. "She'll be safe enough there."

"Go ahead!" said Travers. "I'll be careful not to get the boat into any of the shots while I'm taking the film. While you're about it, you might as well tie a few ropes, too."

"One will be enough," said Burton.

It was a case of all hands, and by hard pulling the juniors got the motor-boat across the sands until she was close against the seaweed-covered side of the big hulk. She nestled closely against the old timbers, in a little hollow of the sand, and Burton made fast the rope to an iron ring in the hulk's side.

"That's better!" he said, with satisfaction. "Of course, we shan't need to trouble to shift her again. The incoming tide will float her for us."

And the juniors all felt satisfied.

Here, on these sands, they were utterly isolated from the mainland. And that motor-boat was their only means of getting back to the shore. Within an hour or two, the tide would relentlessly cover the Gull Sands, and would creep up and up rapidly until the derelict itself was under water.

That motor-boat was the link of safety!



CHAPTER 9.

The Pirates Bold!

"WHY haven't we ever come out here before?" asked Doris breathlessly, as she and the other girls joined the juniors. "It's too glorious for words! These sands are lovely, too! They're solid and smooth, and I've never known the breeze to be so exhilarating!"

"Exactly!" said Nipper. "We all think the same, Doris, old girl, but don't forget that we're here to take a film. The first thing for us to do is to convert ourselves into desperate pirates and distressed maidens!"

"Go ahead, then!" said Doris. "Let's get the old thing over!"

"Well, I like that!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "You don't seem so very enthusiastic about film acting!"

"It's so gorgeous out here that it seems to be a waste of time to act!" said Doris.

"But never mind! We're all game!"

Truth to tell, the Removites themselves were feeling very much the same. It was singularly delightful out there, on the Gull Sands. They felt that they had the world to themselves. No distractions, no interruptions, no embarrassing onlookers.

The very sense of isolation was good.

"Well, come along!" said Nipper briskly, as he bent over the costumes hamper. "I'm going to be the pirate chief, the horrid villain, and my job is to kidnap the fisherman's daughter. You're the fisherman's daughter, Irene."

"I suppose I've got to look timid?" asked Irene.

"That's the idea!" agreed Nipper. "Of course, it'll be rather hard for you——"

"Oh, you horrid thing!"

"But I daresay you'll manage it!" chuckled Nipper. "Tom Burton is going to be the fisherman."

"Swab me!" grinned the Bo'sun. "Any old thing you like, shipmate!"

Irene turned to him.

"Oh, daddy, may I go and paddle, please?" she asked, in a piping voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cheese it!" said Nipper smilingly. "You're not supposed to be an infant, Renie. For the purposes of the film, you'll be a sweet maiden of about eighteen, and so you've got to be sedate and guileless."

"Yes, Mr. Producer," said Irene demurely, as she curtsied.

"Where do we come in?" inquired Doris.

"Oh, you and Marjorie are going to be the heroine's girl friends," replied Nipper. "You're going to see her kidnapped, and you've got to take the alarm to her father. And then the dashing hero will arrive on the scene."

(Continued on page 16.)

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(Continued from page 14.)

"That's me!" said Reggie Pitt cheerily. "Fear not, sweet one, for rescue is at hand! Avast and avast! 'Twill be an evil hour for these dastardly pirates when I get my fingers on their unclean throttles!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!" said Nipper. "You won't have to strangle the pirates, Reggie. You're going to fight them with swords!"

"Oh, yes! I'd forgotten," grinned Reggie. "There's going to be a duel to the death, isn't there? After I've hit the pirate chief in the gizzard, the film's over."

"Not quite," said Nipper. "There'll be a close-up at the end, showing the hero embracing the fisherman's daughter."

"That's where I come in!" nodded Reggie. "That'll be the best part of the film!"

"It's a good thing Ted Handforth isn't here!" murmured Doris, glancing at Irene.

"Don't be so silly!" said Irene, colouring.

She had said very little about Handforth's absence from St. Frank's, but the others knew well enough that she missed the burly leader of Study D. For Handforth had been her special chum, and she, like Church and McClure, hoped that Edward Oswald would ultimately return.

"Of course, we shall need a comic relief," said Nipper. "Now, who's going to play the silly ass?"

"Archie!" said half a dozen voices.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The very man!" said Nipper promptly. "Where's Archie?"

He glanced round.

"Well, I'm blessed! Look at the lazy bounder! Hey, Archie!"

Archie Glenthorne was stretching himself full length in the sands, under the lee of the motor-boat. He had made a kind of couch for himself, and the sun was beating down upon his reclining person.

"Eh? Hallo!" he said, looking up and shading his eyes. "What ho! Come in, laddie! I mean to say, what about it?"

"We want you, Archie!" called Nipper.

"Want me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I see what you mean," said Archie.

"You want me?"

"Yes, you chump!"

"Absolutely! But why?"

"You're going to play the comic relief, Archie," said Nipper. "You've got to be a silly ass who keeps butting in."

"Oh, but, I say, dash it, you know," protested Archie, "I can't act!"

"That's all right!" said Nipper soothingly. "You don't need to act, Archie. Just be yourself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie. "Odds slurs and insults! If I wasn't so dashed com-

fortable, I'd get up and start a spot of bother!"

"Well, all right. You can stay there for a bit," said Nipper. "You're not needed until the first scenes have been shot. The rest of us had better get into our clothes as quickly as possible. We don't want to waste all our time jabbering."

So the articles of clothing were doled out, and the schoolboy actors and actresses prepared for work. It was a simple matter to don the costumes over their ordinary clothing, and in a very short time the beach was full of desperate-looking pirates.

Irene and Doris and Marjorie looked quite charming in their quaint frocks, with skirts which reached right down to their ankles.

"I say!" cried Doris gleefully. "Before we start on the actual film, let's take a little scene of the whole company!"

"There's no time to waste——" began Nipper.

"Oh, it'll only take half a minute!" urged Doris. "Just all of us together, and we'll all make faces at the camera."

"Go ahead!" said Travers amiably. "Why not get on the hulk, and line up against the rail? It will make an effective picture."

The others were all in favour of it, and a second later they were climbing on to the derelict, while Travers took his camera some distance back, and made his preparations.

It was no trouble to get on board the hulk. She was listing heavily to starboard, and near the stern the bulwarks were quite within reach. The deck was in good condition, and the tilt, although severe, did not prevent the boys and girls from walking with comparative ease.

"You'd better go up for'ard!" said Travers, waving them up the deck. "She's higher towards the bows, and I can get a better picture. Besides, I don't want to take the motor-boat in."

They all crowded forward, laughing and talking. Not one of them had the slightest inkling of danger. And yet, a second later, Nipper suddenly pulled himself up short.

"Stop!" he shouted. "She's moving!"

"What?"

"Great Scott!" said Pitt, as he clutched at the rotted bulwarks. "Nipper's right! I felt her give a distinct quiver just then!"

They were all lining the bulwarks, and they stood quite still, their hearts beating rapidly. And, sure enough, they could feel the great old hulk quivering from stem to stern beneath their feet!



CHAPTER 10.

The Disaster!

It was an extraordinary sensation.

Until that second, everybody had

thought that the

hulk was solidly embedded in the sands. Any



With a wave of the hand, Tom Burton plunged into the sea. "Good luck, Bo'sun!" called the others, but it was only half-hearted. For these boys and girls were marooned on a stretch of sands in mid sea, and Tom Burton was just starting upon a valiant attempt to swim for rescue; but they all felt that he was going to his death!

idea of her moving would have seemed preposterous.

But now that Nipper came to think of it, now he was face to face with this unexpected danger, he remembered that the derelict was perched high on the sands, and listing heavily to starboard.

In the space of a split second, the truth flashed into Nipper's mind.

The sands, constantly shifting by the action of the sea, had left the derelict in such a position that she was just on the balance! Any trivial weight applied to the starboard side was sufficient to set her moving! But even now Nipper did not really believe that there was any danger. He could not think that there was any chance of an actual disaster.

"We'd better go easy," he advised. "In fact, before we go any farther, it would be a good idea to make a thorough examination——"

"But our weight can't be doing anything!" protested Doris. "Hold still, everybody! I can still feel her moving a bit!"

"Hang it, there's no need to get the wind up, Nipper!" said Fullwood sceptically. "What is our weight, compared to the hundreds of tons of this old tub?"

"Our weight may be comparatively trivial, but it's the last straw that breaks the camel's back!" replied Nipper quickly. "A mountain crag may weigh a thousand tons, but the weight of a single individual can be

enough to send it toppling over. And it would be idiotic to take any chances. We'd better get off here as quickly and carefully as we can. Any sudden movement may be dangerous."

But even now the rest weren't convinced.

And then came the startling disaster.

Before anybody could move, before any single member of the company could shift a foot, the old hulk creaked and groaned in every timber. Then with a slow, deliberate movement she commenced heeling further and further over to starboard.

"Look out!" went up a general yell.

It was like slow-motion photography; the hulk lazily subsided. And yet it all happened in a second. Nobody could do anything to avert the crash.

"Archie!" screamed Marjorie Temple in sudden terror. "Archie, quick!"

She, like the others, was against the bulwarks, and she could see that Archie Glen-thorne was in danger. He was lying near the motor-boat, towards the stern, and the towering bulk of the derelict was leaning further and further over, threatening to fall upon him!

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie, opening his eyes.

He tried to scramble to his feet, but he was too late.

"Oh!" shrieked Marjorie, going pale to the lips.

With a quick lurch the hulk heeled completely over. An agonised yell came from the stern, and in a flash everything was confusion.

Cra-a-ash!

It was a rending, splintering sound of tearing woodwork. The schoolboys and schoolgirls leapt to the sand, fearing that the vessel was about to collapse on the top of them. None of them were hurt, however, and when they staggered round, they found that the old hulk was still.

There she lay, completely heeled over now, with her rotten deck at an acute angle. The extra weight had upset her balance, and she had gone over.

"Look!" said Nipper hoarsely.

He was staring towards the stern—towards the spot where Archie Glenthorne had been last seen. At the same moment Vivian Travers was running forward, having left his camera standing alone.

"Quick!" he shouted. "Archie's been crushed!"

"Oh!"

All the laughter and gaiety had gone, for every member of the party was filled with horror. What had happened to Archie?

Vivian Travers had seen it all, for he had been safely on the sands, watching. Looking up from his camera he had seen the hulk tilting over; he had seen Archie Glenthorne caught as he was in the act of rising. Then, before Travers could do anything, Archie had vanished, with rotten timbers falling about him. The motor-boat, caught by the dead weight of the derelict, had been crushed to matchwood, splintering and cracking like a matchbox.

"Archie!" went up a general shout.

There was a rush, and the party crowded to the spot where Archie had disappeared. Nipper was first, and he began hauling at the wreckage.

"Archie!" he panted desperately. "Are you there, old man?"

"What-ho!" came a strained voice. "Don't worry, laddies. I'm not denying that the position is poisonous, but there's life in the old dog yet, what?"

"Oh, thank Heaven!" murmured Nipper.

"Archie!" breathed Marjorie frantically. "Where are you? What's happened? Why don't you come out?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I would, old girl, only something seems to be holding me. I mean to say, I'm slightly pinned, as it were."

The wreckage of the boat was pulled away, and then they could see exactly what had happened to Archie.

Mercifully, that hollow in the sand had saved him. The great bulk of the derelict, falling upon him, had not crushed the life out of him, as the others had feared.

But he was caught there—pinned down. Even now it was impossible to tell the full extent of his injuries.

As Nipper well knew, Archie was the kind of fellow to make light of pain. Perhaps his legs were broken, crushed beneath the old timbers. Only his head and shoulders could be seen, for the hulk came right down on the top of him like a roof. There he was, tucked in that cavity, and his face was deathly pale.

"Quick! Lend a hand, you fellows!" said Nipper. "Come along, Archie; let's have your arms. We've got to pull you out of here!"

"Oh, rather!" murmured Archie.

Nipper and Fullwood and Pitt crouched down and grasped Archie's hands. The others stood round, eager to help.

"Now!" said Nipper, between his teeth.

They pulled, but Archie did not move. Only an agonised hiss came from his compressed lips. They pulled again, but it was no good.

"Steady, old boys—steady!" muttered Archie shakily. "I mean to say, it's no dashed good. The leg department is positively null and void. In other words, I'm slightly anchored!"

And they stared at Archie with dull horror. He was pinned down—held there by the heavy hulk of the old derelict!

CHAPTER 11.

Archie the Hero!



STUNNED by the shock of it all, the juniors and the girls could not think clearly for the moment. They

only knew that Archie had been crushed by the derelict, and they were all afraid that he was gravely injured.

The film was forgotten. Nipper and several of the others had torn off their pirate costumes, and the rest now followed their example.

"What can we do?" asked Marjorie in agony. "Oh, Archie! Can't you tell us where you're hurt? Are your legs all right? Have you been crushed badly?"

Marjorie was in a rare way. She and Archie had always been particularly chummy, and now that a crisis had arisen Marjorie was indifferent to the presence of the others. She was on her knees, pulling at Archie's arm.

"It's all right, dear old girl!" murmured Archie. "Nothing to worry about. Absolutely not!"

"But you're hurt?"

"Good gad, no! A mere trifle!"

"Oh, I wish I could believe you!" said Marjorie breathlessly.

"Dash it!" protested Archie. "I mean, you're not doubting the good old Glenthorne word, are you? If you get down to brass tacks and rock-bottom, and all that sort of thing, it was entirely my own fault."

"No, no!" put in Irene. "It was our fault, Archie, for causing the ship to heel over."

"Oh, what's the good of this?" asked Nipper. "Nobody is to blame. The whole thing was an accident."

"Yes, dear old boy, but if I hadn't been so frightfully lazy, I shouldn't be here!" explained Archie. "I mean, I ought to have been with you lads and lassies on the galleon. Retribution, what? A dashed punishment for being a slacker. Now I've got to lie here and watch the good old proceedings, willy-nilly. A rummy sort of

For if Archie was seriously injured, his agony would soon be acute.

As for the others, their chief sensation was one of untold relief. The situation, serious enough as it was, might have been worse. It was a merciful thing that Archie Glenthorne was not utterly crushed to death. Only that hollow had saved him.

He was caught there, and the stout beams of the derelict were taking the main weight. Archie's head and shoulders were comparatively free, but the rest of his body was hidden by the mass of timber which lay over him. He was pinned by the legs, but no-

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expression, but it's the only one that fits. Absolutely willy-nilly!"

"Don't you believe it, Archie," said Nipper briskly. "We've got to get you out of that. You're hurt, and you probably need attention. Can't you explain exactly what has happened? Are your feet pinned down, or your knees, or what?"

"The fact is, I don't absolutely know," confessed Archie. "The good old legs, south of the knee latitude, are slightly numb. I rather think they're held down by a few tons of wreckage and what not!"

This at first sounded bad news. A crushed limb is generally numb at the beginning. The only consolation in the situation—if it could be called consolation—was that the full truth would soon be known.

body could tell how serious his injury was.

"Look here, can't we dig the sand out?" suggested Reggie Pitt suddenly. "Can't we all get busy and scoop the sand from under Archie, and then pull him free?"

"By jingo, that's a good idea!"

"Rather!"

"Oh, let's do it!" cried Marjorie.

"Steady!" warned Nipper. "We mustn't do anything in a hurry!"

"Why not?"

"Because we might do more harm than good," replied Nipper. "If we scoop the sand away, it's quite possible that the hulk will subside even further."

He said no more, but the others understood. How easy it would be to cause Archie's death! For, in all truth, if the old

ship shifted again, the trapped junior would assuredly be killed.

Nipper was on his knees, close against Archie, and he was watching the elegant junior's face. A little colour had come back into Archie's cheeks, and now he was smiling.

"Much pain?" asked Nipper, at length.

"Hardly any, dear old chappie," replied Archie. "Kindly refrain from worrying. I mean to say, there's no need to get the wind-up. The good old pins aren't crushed. They're only bruised a bit."

"You're sure of that?"

"Absolutely," replied Archie.

And Nipper felt more comfortable. Indeed, after another ten minutes had elapsed, and Archie was still without pain, there could be little doubt that he had escaped almost unharmed. It was impossible for him to get free, but he had not suffered any grievous injury.

"Let's have another try to pull him out!" suggested Fullwood.

They took Archie by the arms, and they pulled gently and persistently. But it was no good. In the end they were compelled to desist.

"Frightfully kind of you, laddies, but it wouldn't improve the good old situation if you pulled me limb from limb!" said Archie.

"I mean to say, you've nearly yanked my arms out of their sockets already. Good gad! The remedy is worse than the dashed disease!"

They were full of admiration for Archie's stoicism.

Yet at the same time they were in an agony of suspense and doubt. What could they do? Desperately they racked their brains for an idea. How could they get him free?

They were afraid to interfere with the hulk. Some of the fellows thought of tearing some of the timbers down, and then using them as levers, but these ideas were abandoned. They were too risky. For any sudden slip would mean Archie's death.

It was soon found, too, that it would be useless to scrape the sand away. Nipper himself made this discovery. Worming his way under the towering hulk, much to the consternation of the others, Nipper found that Archie was caught between two of the timbers—wedged there hopelessly—and any disturbance of the sand might easily cause the timbers to shift. And the slightest movement would be fatal!

"No, we can't do anything!" said Nipper in a low voice, after he had joined the others. "Poor old Archie is caught there—wedged! We can't possibly free him."

"But we must—we must!" said Marjorie frantically.

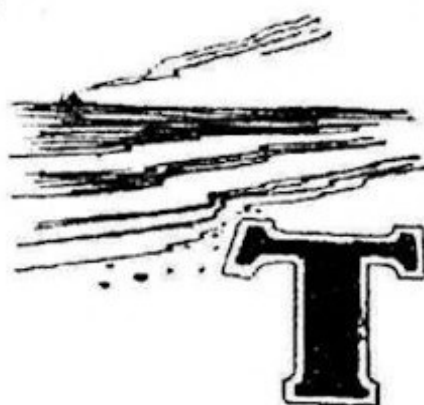
"If we don't, what will happen to him?" put in Reggie Pitt, staring. "Great Scott, Nipper! Do you realise what you're saying?"

"Yes, I do!" said Nipper quietly.

"The tide!" muttered Reggie, turning and staring at the placid sea. "What's going

to happen when the tide comes in?"

And that thought was in every mind.



CHAPTER 12.

Marooned!

THE tide!

Until this minute, the juniors had been so startled over Archie's fix that they had given no thought to the tide. But now, with a feeling of dismay, they realised the full horror of this situation.

Nothing on earth could prevent the tide from coming in!

And already it was on the turn—the little waves were creeping further and further over the sandbank! There was no hint of menace yet, but it was inevitable that the danger would presently be acute.

"The tide!" muttered Tommy Watson hoarsely. "Oh, a great Scott! We're practically on the edge of the sandbank here, and the water will swirl round the derelict before anything else. And Archie's down there—right on the level of the sands. What can he do when the water comes in?"

"Oh, don't—don't!" whispered Irene tremblingly.

Who could blame the girls for being pale and frightened? They weren't thinking of themselves; their anguish was all for Archie. Yet had they only realised it their own position was only a shade better than that of the trapped junior!

The blue sky meant nothing to them now. The sparkling sea had become a thing of horror instead of beauty.

Nipper walked away by himself, and suddenly he bent down and looked at the sands. He was near the water's edge.

"I say, you fellows!" he called. "Come and have a look at this!"

The others went there instantly, and they stared down at the sands at Nipper's feet. Irene & Co. had come running up, too, and they were eager and intent.

"What is it?" asked Marjorie quickly.

"Sorry to fool you all, but I had to do something to get you away," said Nipper quietly. "We can't discuss this thing in Archie's hearing. It's too—too awful! I wanted you out here, beyond his earshot."

"Oh!"

"We've got to look at the thing squarely—and it's horribly ugly!" went on Nipper. "We can't pull him free without the danger of the hulk shifting and killing him on the spot."

"Is there no way?" asked Marjorie, in agony. "No way at all?"

"Only the way I have already said," replied Nipper. "We can try to pull him out, but it will mean the risk of death."

"But he'll be killed, in any case!" said Marjorie, her eyes round and terrified. "When the tide comes up he'll be drowned!"

Drowned before our eyes, and anything is better than that! Oh, we *must* do something—we must, we must!”

“Steady, old girl!” murmured Irene, pressing her girl chum’s arm.

“Oh, how can I be steady?” asked Marjorie.

For a moment they were all silent.

“We oughtn’t to have come!” went on Marjorie tensely. “Oh, it was wrong of us! We oughtn’t to have come out here to these awful sands! It was mad—mad!”

“Nobody could have foreseen that mishap,” said Vivian Travers soberly. “We came out here for pleasure, and we’ve met disaster. Well, the only thing for us to do is to face it as calmly as Archie is facing it.”

“It’s easy to say that!” exclaimed Marjorie. “But Archie’s in danger, and we’re not!”

“Not?” repeated Travers, raising his eyebrows.

“Of course we’re not!”

“Oh, well, of course,” murmured Travers. “But I had rather a different impression.”

Marjorie suddenly looked at him with eyes that were wider than ever.

“Oh, you mean——” she began breathlessly.

“What’s the good of kidding ourselves?” broke in Nipper. “We’d better face this situation at once—and the sooner we realise the full danger of it, the better. Archie isn’t the only one who is in peril.”

“You’re right, shipmate!” said Tom Burton, in a very quiet voice. “Souse me! You’re right!”

He was looking at the wrecked motor-boat—splintered and shattered as it lay half beneath the listing hulk.

“You mean the boat?” said Tommy Watson.

“Yes, the boat!” nodded the Bo’sun. “We’re five miles from the shore. We’re practically out of sight of land. And the tide is coming in!”

“We can’t even signal!” said Fullwood, in horror. “Or, at least, if we do nobody will see us! We’re isolated out here—we’re away from everybody! We were glorying in our isolation not long ago, but it’s likely to be fatal!”

Some of the others were staring at Archie Glenthorne rather dazedly now.

For they were realising, with a sudden flood of apprehension, that he was not the only one in danger. They all shared his peril. And, if anything, their own position was worse, since the end, in their case, would be delayed. Archie, mercifully, would be the first to go.

The boat was crushed—smashed to match-wood! And that boat had been their only link of safety!

Now that the boys and girls had got their minds off Archie’s desperate position, they were able to think of their own. The tide was already creeping in, and after Archie had been drowned before their eyes they themselves would be overwhelmed.

It was an appalling thought.

They had no means of getting away—no means of getting back to the mainland! They could all swim, it was true, but it was five miles to the shore, and there were treacherous cross-currents! Not one of them could hope to survive.

What was more to the point, there was not one chance in a thousand that any other boats would come out in the direction of the Gull Sands that afternoon. The sea was too choppy. The wind was freshening even now, and the waves were becoming more and more boisterous. The turning of the tide had made a big difference, too, for the sea was now coming in from the open channel with much energy.

“We’re all in this same fix!” said Nipper steadily. “Archie isn’t the only one—and we’d better realise it at once. Within an hour these sands will be covered, and in less than two hours the water will be over six feet deep where we’re now standing.”

“Oh, my hat!” muttered Watson huskily.

“We can’t stand here doing nothing—just waiting for the worst!” continued Nipper grimly. “We’ve got to be active—we’ve got to work! It’s the only way to keep ourselves from going dotty! Come on! We’re going to make a big effort to get Archie free!”

“Oh, thank Heaven!” breathed the girls.

“Even if we fail, we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that we have done our best!” said Nipper quietly. “Come on, everybody! While there’s life there’s hope!”



CHAPTER 13.

The Sail!

IT was a wise decision.

To stand about, watching the incoming tide, would have been agonising. Every one of these marooned schoolboys and schoolgirls knew the danger to the full, and it would not improve matters if they allowed their imaginations to run riot. It was far better that they should be employed.

And what better work could they do than assisting the trapped Archie?

As Nipper had said, while there was life there was hope. And perhaps, by some miracle, they might be able to free the unhappy junior. Anything was better than waiting and watching—and seeing Archie drowned.

The film was forgotten; it had become a matter of absolutely no importance. The picnic, too, was wiped off the programme. Food, in this crisis, would have choked them. The knowledge of their own danger was grim enough; but Archie would be the first to go, and so it was Archie who needed immediate attention.

“How do you feel, old man?” asked Nipper cheerily, as he bent down near the hulk.



Slowly the towering bulk of the derelict heeled over, falling right on to the reclining figure of Archie Glenthorne. The Removite tried to scramble to his feet, but he was too late. Next moment the vessel had heeled right over, and there came a rending, splintering sound of tearing woodwork !

"All serene-oh," replied Archie promptly. "I mean to say, there's no need to worry about me, dash it! Absolutely not!"

"No pain?"

"Pain?" laughed Archie. "Good gad! What a ridic. idea!"

And yet, even while he was speaking, his face was strained and twisted. His stoicism was wonderful.

He was comparatively unhurt, but the awkwardness of his position was agonising in itself. He could not move, and thus it was impossible for him to get any relief. He was aching in every bone, owing to this unnatural attitude. And if his physical discomfort was such, what of his mental agony?

For Archie Glenthorne knew well enough what his fate would probably be!

But when he spoke, it was not of himself, but of the girls.

"Laddies, you mustn't waste any time on me," he said earnestly. "I mean to say, when young ladies are in distress, a mere cove like myself is absolutely unimportant, what?"

"Oh, don't, Archie!" whispered Marjorie.

"The good old boat is slightly bent!" continued Archie, glancing at the fragments of Burton's motor-boat. "I mean to say, it can't very well be used again, what? So I rather think a few of you lads should be getting busy on making a raft."

"A raft!" echoed Tommy Watson excitedly. "That's not a bad idea!"

The owners were all eager. But Nipper merely pursed his lips. He could not see much hope of making a raft. They had no ropes—no binding material of any kind. It had occurred to him that they might, when the final extremity came, support themselves on some of the loose timbers. But as for making a raft, the theory was sound, but there was very little hope of putting it into practice.

"Never mind about us, Archie," said Nipper. "We're thinking of you. You're taking this very splendidly, old man, and you must know that you are in danger."

"The good old tide," nodded Archie. "Coming in by the bucketful, as it were. I'm afraid I shall get dashed wet."

They were all silent.

"It's all frightfully rotten, of course," went on Archie, his voice now calm and steady. "But if I'm to go—well, I'll try to go smiling."

"But you're not going, Archie!" sobbed Marjorie. "We're going to get you free!"

"That will be rather priceless," said Archie. "But don't think I'm frightened, or anything poisonous like that. I mean to say, all these things are sent to try us, what? I don't like to be unsociable, or anything foul like that, but when the good old time comes I hope you'll all trickle away out of sight. I mean, so much better for all of us."

"Good old Archie!" murmured Nipper, with a lump in his throat. "You always were game, weren't you?"

Archie merely smiled.

"Don't be so frightfully ridic., old boy,"

he replied. "And as for you, Marjorie, you've got to smile. I mean, dash it, I'm smiling, aren't I? And when you get ashore —"

"I don't want to get ashore!" broke in Marjorie. "Not yet, anyhow! We've got to free you first, Archie!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "That's a somewhat priceless thought. Still, we'd better look on the dark side, what? And when you get ashore, Marjorie, old dear, I'd like you to trot along to the pater, and break the news."

"I can't stand this any longer!" said Nipper thickly. "You're not going to die, Archie—nor any of us! It's too—too horrible! Something will happen, so that we can save you, and get to the mainland. There's over an hour before the tide will reach you—"

"An hour!" murmured Archie. "Good gad!"

In vain, he had tried to keep his voice steady. Perhaps he had been hoping that the time would be shorter. An hour seemed an age to him. An hour of suspense—of agony! It would have been far better if the end was near. For that hour was likely to be one of sheer torture.



Slowly the towering bulk of the derelict heeled. The Removite tried to scramble to his feet, but and there came a rendin



ght on to the reclining figure of Archie Glenthorne. te. Next moment the vessel had heeled right over, sound of tearing woodwork!

Then, at that moment, a shout came from Jack Grey, who was at the back of the crowd. "Quick, you fellows!" he yelled. "There's a sail!"

"What?"

"A sail!" shouted Reggie Pitt. "By jingo, he's right, you fellows!"

In a second, they had all turned, and they were running down the sands. Out there, in the distance, a white sail could be seen, gleaming in the sunshine.

"It's a small yacht!" said Nipper breathlessly. "Yes, and she seems to be coming out in this direction, too!"

"Hurrah!"

"Help—help!"

They shouted at the top of their voices; they leapt up and down on the sands, waving their arms wildly.

But what hope was there? The Gull Sands were low, and it was practically impossible for anyone on the yacht to see them. Even as it was, she was nearly hull down. They could only see her white sail, and, occasionally, they could catch a glimpse of her stern as she rose and fell to the waves.

They could see the yacht quite plainly, but it was very doubtful if anybody on the vessel could see them.

"Let's all get on the hulk!" shouted Watson. "We shall be higher there—and they might be able to spot us!"

"No, no!" roared Nipper, as a general move started. "You mustn't do that!"

"Why not?" gasped Watson. "It's the only chance——"

"Yes, but what about Archie?" snapped Nipper. "If we climb on that hulk again, we shall only disturb it—and then Archie will be killed!"

"Begad, old boy, you're right!" said Tregellis-West, nodding. "We daren't risk it!"

"They're coming nearer—I'm sure of it!" said Irene tensely. "Look! That yacht is coming round—straight towards us!"

And they all watched, fascinated and yet fearful.



CHAPTER 14.

Tom Burton's Decision!

HE'S veering off!" said Travers bluntly.

For some minutes, they had watched; and everybody knew

what was happening. The yacht was making off towards the west, and her object, it seemed, was to sail between the Gull Sands and the mainland. Already her bows were round, and it was clear that she was not coming nearer to the marooned party. This, in itself, was evidence of the fact that they had not been seen.

"Yes, she's going!" said Nipper. "They haven't spotted us. Before long she'll be practically out of sight, too."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"What shall we do?"

"Let's yell again—let's wave!"

And they yelled and waved—but all to no purpose.

Tom Burton stood apart from the others, his usually sunny face strained and anxious. He, more than the rest, perhaps, had realised the dangers of their position. He had been the first to appreciate the dreadful nature of their predicament.

For Tom Burton had spent all his childhood at sea, and he knew what the relentless tide could do. It was easy to talk of making a raft—easy to think of floating to safety on loose planks and timbers. But when it came down to hard facts, what hope was there—what real hope—for this party of young people?

They were miles from the shore, out of sight, well beyond the point where any boats might perchance come. The wind was freshening, and the sea was choppy. Excellent swimmers though many of them were, they would be beaten by this task.

The Bo'sun was thinking of the larger issue. He believed that the unfortunate Archie was doomed; but was there any reason why every member of the party should be lost?

In a way, Tom Burton felt that he was responsible for this disaster. For he had caused the boat to be dragged up close against the hull of the derelict. If their "link of safety" had been left on the open sands, it would still have been safe and intact.

"Swab me!" muttered Burton suddenly. "I'll try it!"

He kicked off his canvas shoes, and at the same moment he unbuttoned his tennis shirt, and literally tore the garment from him. He stood there in his running shorts.

"What are you doing, Bo'sun?" asked Nipper.

"I'm going to swim out!" replied Tom Burton. "I'm going to make an attempt to get to that yacht!"

"No, no!" shouted Reggie Pitt. "You idiot! You'll never do it!"

"Don't try it, Bo'sun!"

"It's not worth the risk!"

"Risk!" shouted Tom Burton. "Swill my scuppers! What about the risk now? There's no chance for any of you unless a boat of some sort can be brought here."

"We might be able to make a raft——"

"Never!" interrupted the Bo'sun, with conviction.

"Well, we can tear some of the planks and timbers free——"

"And what good will they be to you?" said Burton. "No, shipmates, it's no good fooling yourselves! We're five miles from the mainland, and after we're washed off this sandbank the tide will turn. There'll be the ebb, and planks or no planks you'll be swept out into the open Channel. And how long do you think you'll last?"

"By Jove!" muttered Fullwood. "I hadn't thought of that!"

Tom Burton pointed.

"Look!" he said tensely. "That yacht is sailing in between us and the mainland. She's a mile or two away, and she's not making much speed. If I can swim shorewards there's just a chance that I shall be able to cut her off before she gets too far away. Then, perhaps, they'll see my signals. Anyhow, it's a chance. I'm going, mess-mates, so you needn't try to hold me back!"

"But you'll have to swim a couple of miles!" ejaculated Irene, in alarm.

"What of it?"

"We all think you can do it, Bo'sun—but what about coming back?" asked Nipper quietly. "You'll have the help of the tide during your swim towards the mainland, but what about the return? Suppose you fail to attract the yacht's attention? What's going to happen to you?"

Tom Burton shrugged his shoulders.

"It can't be helped!" he replied gruffly. "We're all in a mess, and it's up to me to do the best I can."

"Let me go, instead," said Nipper promptly.

"No, shipmate!" said the Bo'sun. "You're a good swimmer, but you're not such a good swimmer as I am. And that's not boasting, either."

"We know that, Bo'sun, old man," put in Reggie Pitt. "He's right, Nipper! He's the best swimmer at St. Frank's, and not one of us can hold a candle to him. He's the only chap who can attempt this swim with any chance of success."

Nipper nodded.

"Yes, you're right!" he admitted. "Good luck, Bo'sun."

Without another word, and with only a wave of his hand, Tom Burton ran towards the sea and plunged in. Since childhood he had been accustomed to sea swimming, and he was at the top of his form. He was splendidly fit, and his muscles were like iron. He had always believed in keeping himself in tip-top condition.

"Hurrah!"

"Good luck, Bo'sun!"

But those shouts and cheers were very half-hearted. Tom Burton was in the water now, and only his head was visible. He was plunging out—swimming strongly. Not once did he look back. He swam outwards—towards the mainland, so that he could intercept that small sailing yacht.

Would he succeed?

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CHAPTER 15.

The Forlorn Hope!

"H E'LL never do it!" said Fullwood gloomily. "We oughtn't to have let him try!"

"We couldn't have prevented it, old man," said Nipper. "Besides, what difference does it make? We shall all be in the same boat before long."

"I wish you meant it literally, dear old fellow," murmured Vivian Travers. "The one thing I long for, at the moment, is a boat. I'm not saying I've got the wind up, or anything silly like that, but why should these sort of things happen? What have we done to deserve it? By Samson! I can't believe that we're all booked for the long journey!"

"And yet tragedies of this sort are happening every summer!" said Nipper quietly. "Most of them, of course, are due to recklessness or folly. People go out in sailing boats, and they don't know how to handle them. A squall comes, and they capsize. But nobody can blame us for anything foolhardy. It's just bad luck—or unkind Fate, if you like."

Doris Berkeley pointed.

"There he is!" she said tensely. "Can't you see him? I just caught a glimpse of his head for a second—There!"

"Your eyes must be pretty wonderful, Doris," said Nipper, as he shaded his own eyes. "I can't see him."

"Neither can I now," replied Doris.

They were all standing at the water's edge, staring over the choppy sea towards the distant mainland. For some little time they had caught an occasional glimpse of Tom Burton's head, as he swam strongly with the tide. By now, at last, he had completely disappeared.

And the sailing yacht, in the far distance, was keeping steadily to her course, her occupants unaware of the little drama that was being enacted on the Gull Sands.

"There's just a chance, of course," said Fullwood thoughtfully. "If only the Bo'sun can swim quickly enough, he'll intercept that yacht and then our troubles will be over."

"Well, we shall know before very long," said Reggie Pitt. "If the yacht doesn't change its course and come towards us, we shall know the worst. By Jove! Look how the tide's creeping in!"

Almost imperceptibly, the water had been encroaching upon the sands, and this insidious movement of the sea was general. The tide was not "coming in" as it does on the ordinary beach.

The sands were gradually being covered from all sides at once. On the further edge of the sands an occasional wave would come sweeping in with tremendous vigour, and would send the foam hissing and swirling. Then it would recede reluctantly.

The air was glorious, for the freshening breeze was delightfully cooling, and not a cloud was in the sky. The sea was just one huge expanse of blue, cream-capped little waves.

"Oh, I can't believe it!" murmured Irene. "It isn't right! It isn't just! I can't believe that we shall never see the shore again! It's such a glorious day, and everything is so full of life and so full of beauty!"

"We can only hope," said Doris quietly.

A sudden hail came from the other side of the sandbank.

"Quick, you fellows!" Fullwood was shouting. "The tide is nearly up to Archie! We've got to do something at once!"

Fullwood had just run over to the derelict, with Jack Grey and Tommy Watson. They had been staggered to find that Archie Glen-thorne was already being splashed by the encroaching waves—the advance guard of the wet army that was even now preparing for its grand attack.

"Archie!" muttered Nipper huskily. "Yes, we'd better go to him. But what can we do?"

"Our best!" said Travers simply.

"Yes, but we're so helpless—so weak!" said Nipper. "How can we possibly hope to shift that great hulk? How can we free Archie from his prison? In our very efforts to save him we shall probably cause his death! That's the horrible feature of the whole affair!"

"We can't do anything else but try," persisted Travers. "We must take the risk; and we mustn't be silly enough to stop and think. Thinking only makes things worse."

They were about to move off, when Tregellis-West gave a shout.

"Look!" he yelled. "Begad! Look at the yacht, dear boys!"

They all halted, and stared.

"By Jove!" panted Nipper. "She's changing her course!"

"Hurrah!"

"They've seen the Bo'sun!"

"Bravo!"

"Good old Bo'sun!" shouted Pitt. "He's done the trick!"

They stood watching, their faces flushed, their eyes eager. Surely enough, the sailing yacht had definitely changed her course. Her graceful white sail was fluttering; it slatted limply, and then the wind filled it once more. Away she went on her new course, bowling over the tumbling waters before the fresh breeze.

"Where are they going to?" cried Irene, bewildered. "Look! They're sailing in the opposite direction!"

"Out towards the open sea!" said Doris, in a hushed voice.

For a moment it seemed as though their hearts had ceased to beat. They had been filled with relief—with joy—with hope. Now, in a flash, they knew that something was wrong. The yacht, instead of swinging round towards the spot where Tom Burton would probably be swimming, had sheered off in the direction of the open Channel.

Instead of coming nearer to the sandbank, the yacht was getting further and further away from it—heading outwards for the open sea!

"They're going—they're going!" muttered Tommy Watson. "What does it mean?"

"It means, old man, that they haven't seen the Bo'sun!" said Nipper, in agony. "That's what it means!"

"Then—then he's failed?"

"He's failed to attract the people on the yacht!" nodded Travers. "I was afraid of it all along. Now, of course, it's n.g."

They've taken another course altogether, and they'll never spot him."

"Then he'll have to turn back!" said Pitt, between his teeth.

"If he doesn't, he'll be doomed!" replied Nipper soberly. "Poor old Bo'sun! And he had been so full of hope, too! What a shame!"

CHAPTER 16.

The Bo'sun Decides!



STUNNED and dazed, the marooned schoolboys and schoolgirls watched the choppy sea—waiting for some

sign of Tom Burton.

But no sign came.

Nowhere could they see his bobbing head,

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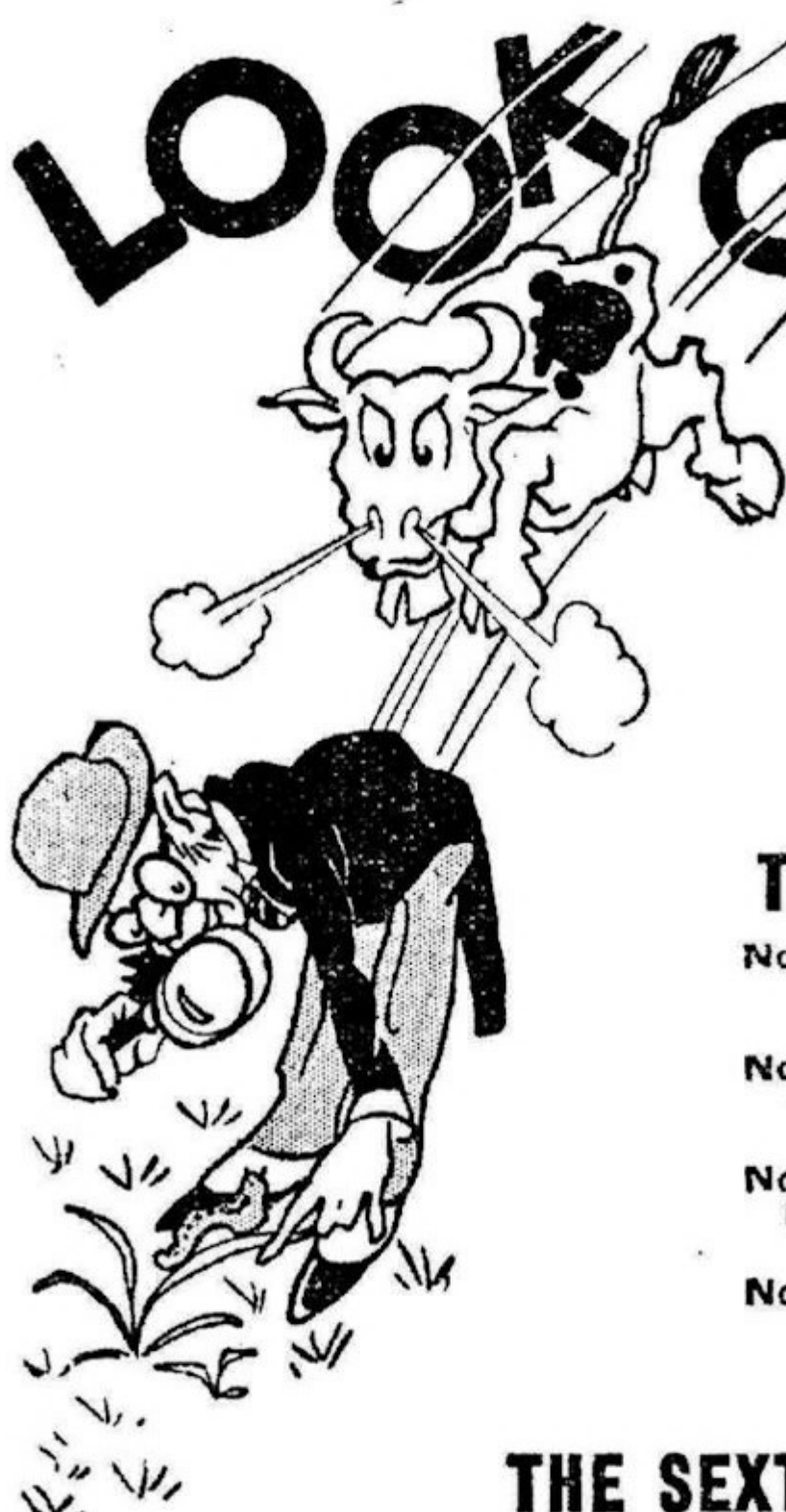
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as he swam back towards the sandbank. And, slowly but surely, they began to fear the worst. Surely it was obvious? The Bo'sun had been unable to fight the strength of the tide; he had found it impossible to battle his way back, and so he had given up the fight.

It was a terrible thought.

The one who had valiantly swum for help was the one to go first!

Archie Glenthorne, in spite of his appalling predicament, was still alive. The Bo'sun had gone—and all hope for the others was, indeed, dead.

"It was our only chance!" murmured Irene.

"Bear up, old girl!" said Doris steadily. "We've got to be game."

Irene nodded.

"Yes!" she whispered. "We will be game, too!"

But neither she nor the other girls could conceal the horror that was in their eyes. There was no panic—no fear. But the knowledge of this creeping death—this insidious, relentless fate—gripped them with devastating force. They were doomed now!

They watched the encroaching waves with fascinated eyes; they watched the foam as it came swirling over the sandbank, further and further every time! They watched the white sail of the little yacht, as it dwindled into the distance, the sunlight flashing on its gleaming canvas. By this time it was well beyond the sandbank—right out in the open Channel, miles distant. The vessel herself was hull down, and only half her sail could be seen.

As for Tom Burton—search as they would, the watchers could see nothing of him. Nothing but the foam-capped waves, charging onwards. The Bo'sun had gone—never to return!

"He's sacrificed his life in an attempt to help us!" whispered Marjorie, pale to the lips. "And now Archie— Oh, I daren't go over to the derelict! I can't—I can't!"

"The boys are going!" said Irene. "And we mustn't be idle now, Marjorie. Perhaps we can help—perhaps we can do something, too."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" sobbed Marjorie. "I—I didn't mean to be so weak! Yes, let's go over now! Let's see if we can help!"

While they went towards the hulk, fearful and agonised, a sturdy swimmer was plunging onwards, strongly and doggedly.

The Bo'sun was not dead!

Far from it, indeed. Never in his life before had Tom Burton felt so fresh—so vigorous—so imbued with energy and determination.

A short time earlier, he had experienced a shock.

Joy had been in his heart; the joy of achievement. As he lifted his head and shook the salt water from his eyes, he had seen the sailing yacht, less than half a mile away, and he knew that he would be able to reach the spot where she must inevitably pass. By keeping to his course, he would almost be

run down by her. And then it would be easy enough for him to signal, and for him to be pulled on board.

But then, when the Bo'sun had looked up the next time, he had seen that the sailing yacht had changed her course. She was setting off in a new direction—veering round in such a way that he would never be able to get near her.

He waved to the best of his ability, and he shouted. But it was all to no purpose. He was just a tiny, insignificant dot on the face of the sparkling ocean. He realised, too, that he was between the yacht and the sun. Anybody on deck, therefore, would be looking straight into the sun if they glanced in that direction; and, therefore, they would never see him.

He changed his course, too. He swam desperately for some little time. He was almost in a panic, and he plunged onwards, taking a good deal of salt water aboard as he shouted. And it was all so useless—so futile.

For, less than ten minutes later, the yacht was practically out of sight. She had passed out beyond the sandbank, and was getting further and further away. The Bo'sun considered the position. He trod water for some little time, and then turned back towards the sandbank. He swam on doggedly, only to realise that the tide was exceptionally strong. Perhaps the freshening wind had given it more force than usual; but the Bo'sun felt, in any case, that he was making practically no progress.

He turned again, and caught a glimpse of the mainland, green and fair in the afternoon sunlight; and distant—very, very distant!

And then Burton made his decision.

"By my timbers!" he muttered. "Why not? Even if I get back to the sandbank, I can do nothing! Besides, I doubt if I should make port. But if I swim on, towards the coast, I shall have the tide with me. Swab me! It's a chance!"

He wasn't thinking so much of himself. In that moment, he had determined to swim on towards Caistowe—in the faint chance that he might be able to reach the shore. Then, perhaps, he would be able to get a boat of some kind, and go out to the Gull Sands. There wasn't much chance that he would be in time, for this five-mile swim, in such a rough sea, was arduous and exhausting. But the Bo'sun was game right through.

He set his teeth, and swam on.

He swam as he had never done before; he felt fresh, and his muscles were as pliable and as vigorous as ever. He was filled with a great determination. He *must* reach Caistowe!

Gallantly he swam on through the choppy sea, and his progress was extraordinarily good. True, he was helped by the tide, and much to his joy he found that he was holding to a true course. This indicated that there were no cross-currents, as he had feared.

Every time he looked up, he found that he was getting nearer and nearer to Caistowe Bay. He was even startled by his own

progress. And, within, he was filled with the sheerest exultation.

For the truth was being forced upon his consciousness.

He would do it! He was strong, he was vigorous—and this swim, instead of being an impossible one, had now become a thing of comparative triviality!

The Bo'sun gloried in his own strength as he swam.



CHAPTER 17.

The Relentless Tide!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE shook the salt water out of his eyes and smiled.

"What-ho!" he remarked. "I mean to say, somewhat watery, and all that sort of thing! Well, I was always frightfully keen on sea bathing, old teacups!"

"Archie, don't!" panted Marjorie. "Please don't!"

"Dear old girl, what's the good of being scared, or anything poisonous like that?" asked Archie. "Good gad! There's nothing to worry about. The best thing to do, in circumstances like this, is to be chirpy and cheery. Absolutely!"

There was something very fine in Archie Glenthorne's exhibition of pluck. He believed that he was about to die—and to die a particularly terrible sort of death. Yet no word of complaint left his lips; and he continued to smile.

He was the "genial ass of the Remove," the lazy, slacking dandy. He was the butt of the Remove's jokes; and yet, when it came to a matter of crisis, he was as plucky and as steadfast as the best. It was just Archie's way to be game.

For the time being the others had forgotten their own peril. Archie's was so much closer—so much more acute.

Two-thirds of the sands had disappeared, it was true; but there was still a long stretch of dry, smooth surface. It was a stretch that was constantly being washed by the incoming tide. The waves would come in, swirling and hissing and foaming; then they would recede, as though angry.

Of all those young people on the Gull Sands, ten of them were in no immediate danger. Tom Burton had gone, and everybody believed that he was dead by this time. And Archie would be the next!

For Archie was trapped—pinned down by the derelict and unable to evade the on-rushing tide.

Every minute, now, the waves came in with greater vigour than ever before; they swept in, swirling round the derelict, the foam beating up against the old timbers and splashing back again.

These big waves came in series—a well-known phenomenon of the sea. Several

would come in in succession, and Archie would be lost for a few tense moments in the hissing foam. The others stood round, horrified and desperate, knee deep in the water.

And then, after these big waves, a succession of small ones would follow, and they would not reach the derelict. For a brief, merciful space, Archie would be untouched by the water.

But how long would this last?

Within a very short time, as everybody knew, the smaller waves would reach him—and then, when the succession of big ones came, he would be swamped, choked, suffocated. It was becoming a matter of minutes now.

Nipper and the others had one overpowering feeling—the feeling of helplessness.

It was easy enough for them to talk of doing something. But what could they do?

The old hulk weighed many tons, and their strength was puny in comparison to the task that had to be accomplished if Archie was to be released.

Yet it was impossible to stand there, watching—doing nothing.

The Bo'sun had gone, and it was useless looking out to sea in the expectancy that he would return. Now and again, the juniors and the girls would stare out towards the mainland, but they would see nothing. Not a sail now—nothing but the blue of the ocean—and there, in the background, the rising hills of the Sussex coast.

"The only possible chance is for us to dig the sand from under Archie!" said Nipper in a low voice, as he turned to the others.

"But we've tried it!" said Fullwood desperately.

"I know we have—but we can try again!"

"It's no good!" said Watson, with shrill excitement. "He's held down by the timbers—and we shall never be able to free him—"

"All the same, dear old fellow, it will be something to do," put in Travers gently. "Nipper is right. So we'd better have another shot at it."

"We can help, can't we?" asked Irene eagerly.

"Rather!" said Nipper. "All hands to the pumps!"

They went on their hands and knees, and swarmed round Archie under the towering mass of the listing hulk. Only Archie's head and shoulders were in sight; the rest of his body was held down.

"We're going to have another shot at it, Archie!" said Nipper briskly. "While there's life there's hope, you know!"

"What-ho!" agreed Archie. "Absolutely, dear old cheese! At the same time, I rather think that it's a case of nothing doing. Whoa! Look out, you lads! I rather imagine another supply of wetness is indicated!"

Archie was right. An extra big wave broke with a thunderous roar; the foam came hissing in, lifting some of the juniors clean off their hands and knees and battering them

against the timbers of the hulk. Archie himself vanished in the spume, to emerge, a moment or two later, gasping and spluttering.

Another wave came, and this time it broke against the derelict's side with terrific force. The old vessel shook from stem to stern, and the juniors and the schoolgirls backed away, blinded and bewildered.

"It's no good!" gasped Pitt. "We can't do a thing!"

"Archie!" shouted Fullwood. "Are you still all right, old man?"

"Oh, don't!" sobbed Marjorie.

It seemed terrible to her that such a question should be put to Archie. Could he be all right? What a mockery! A few more waves like that, and it would mean death. Not death by drowning—but by sheer battering.

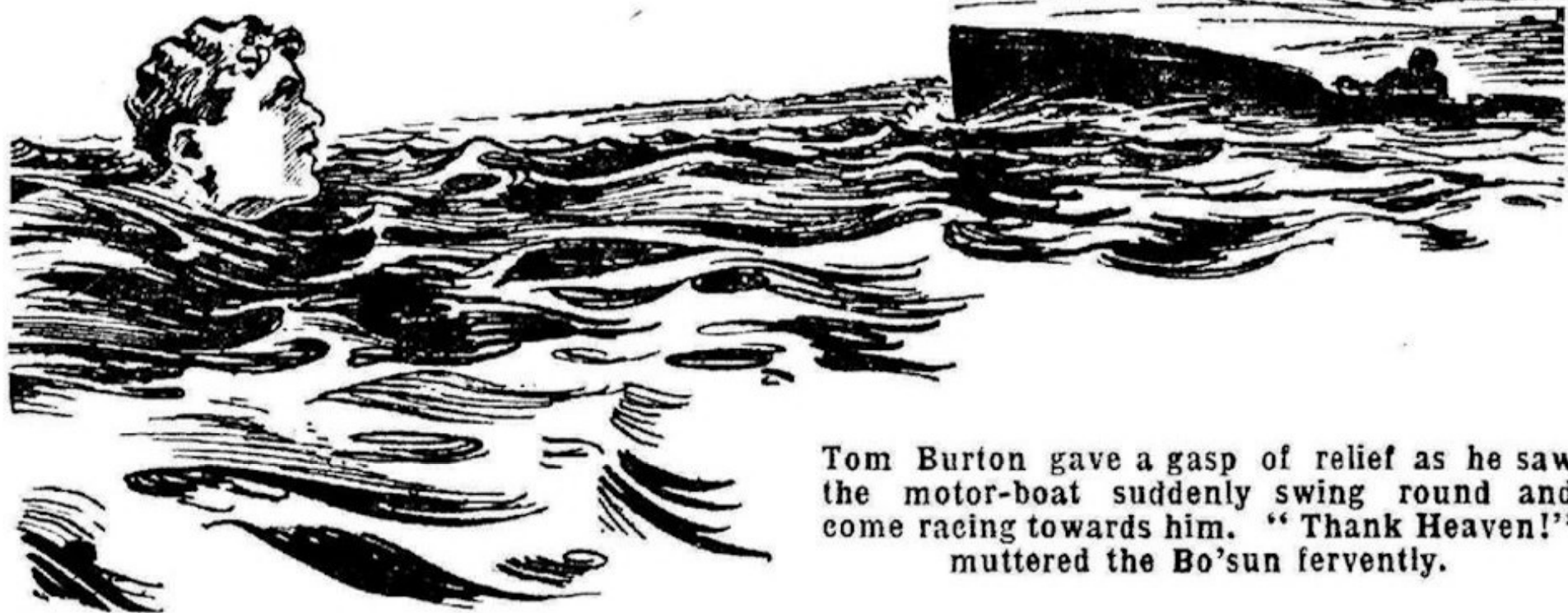
The great wave receded, hissing and bubbling, and once again Archie could be seen.

"Whew!" he gasped. "Here we are again, what? As long as I hold the good old breath

time the hulk lifts, I shall probably know absolutely nothing. Swift and sure, what?"

"Archie, Archie—you mustn't die!" cried Marjorie hysterically. "Oh, why can't we get him free? Nipper—Travers—Fullwood! Do something—oh, *do something!*"

But the others were dumb with misery. Their helplessness had numbed them. For they had done everything within their power, and they were helpless still!



Tom Burton gave a gasp of relief as he saw the motor-boat suddenly swing round and come racing towards him. "Thank Heaven!" muttered the Bo'sun fervently.

while the wave lasts, I can come up smiling every time. Absolutely! All the same, lads and lassies, I think it's about time that we said toodle-oo! I have a foul inkling that the hulk will do a bit of subsiding next time."

"Has she shifted at all?" asked Nipper quickly.

"Absolutely!" nodded Archie, his face pained and haggard. "The good old lower section is getting slightly numb. In other words, the pins are pinned more firmly than ever!"

His stoicism was astounding. Death was very close to him by now, but he was still brave.

"We'd better get away!" said Fullwood hoarsely. "Oh, what's the good of staying here? We can't look on—we can't see the poor chap killed in front of our eyes! Let's get away—let's go and look for the Bo'sun. Archie would prefer it!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I mean, it positively gives me the pip to see you gazing at me in this frightful fashion. The next



CHAPTER 18.

The Wonder of the Sea!

NIPPER'S eyes suddenly took on a determined gleam.

"Look!" he said, nodding towards the sea. "Some more big waves are coming in now!"

"Oh, my hat! So they are!"

"And Archie will be——"

"Listen to me!" broke in Nipper. "Marjorie is right! We've got to do something!"

"Oh, but what—what?" cried Marjorie.

"You three girls must get hold of Archie's arms and be ready to pull!" said Nipper swiftly. "The rest of us will put our backs to the hulk and do our best to ease her."

"Dear old fellow, do you realise what you're saying?" said Travers wonderingly.

Nipper glared at him.

"Yes, I realise!" he replied. "I know perfectly well that it will be useless. But, hang it, Travers, we've got to do something, haven't we?"

"You're right!" said Travers, nodding. "Sorry!"

"Besides, there is a chance!" put in Reggie Pitt. "That last big wave shifted the hulk a bit. I believe she's still on the balance—still ready to go over. And if we take advantage of the wave, when it hits the side of the derelict, we might be able to lift the weight from Archie's pinned legs, and then the girls'll be able to pull him free."

But Nipper was quite certain that this was a forlorn hope. There wasn't one chance in a million that they would be successful. Still, it would be something. To go away, and to leave Archie to his fate, was unthinkable.

"Come on!" yelled Nipper. "Look out—the wave's coming!"

The seven Removites crouched under the hulk's timbers, knowing full well that they might easily be crushed. For if the old vessel shifted, and fell, they would be killed in one second. But they did not hesitate.

The girls were on their hands and knees, grasping at Archie.

"It's no good, old dears!" said Archie, pained. "I mean to say, why take such a dashed risk? It absolutely isn't worth it!"

With a roar of white foam, the big wave came breaking over the sandbank—for the derelict was on the exposed side, broadside to the open Channel, and so she received the full, devastating force of the incoming tide.

The next second the girls were hidden by the masses of water, and the juniors found themselves choking and spluttering in the spray. The foam surged round their legs, round their bodies, and it did its utmost to lift them from their feet.

"She's moving!" gasped Fullwood.

It was true. The hulk quivered in every timber, but the movement, after all, was trivial. The wave receded, baffled and impotent.

The next one came with even greater force, and this time it had a definite effect.

With a roaring smother of fury the wave crashed against the hulk's side, and it was impossible for the juniors to keep their positions. They were swept away by the receding water, carried along the sands, gasping, helpless. The girls, too, found themselves dragged back towards the sea by the relentless backwash. There they were strewn, like so many scraps of flotsam, struggling in the white, hissing water.

One by one, they managed to get to their feet. Fullwood and Travers helped Irene up, and Nipper saved Marjorie from being drawn back into the next great wave.

"It's no good!" panted Nipper. "Don't you see how impossible it is? We can do nothing against the sea!"

"What of Archie?" whispered Doris. "Is he still alive?"

They looked towards the hulk, and they could just see Archie's face, close down against the sand, where the water had just receded. A hand waved, and a voice came to the others above the tumult of the sea.

"Good-bye, and all that!" sang out Archie. "Cheer up, old things!"

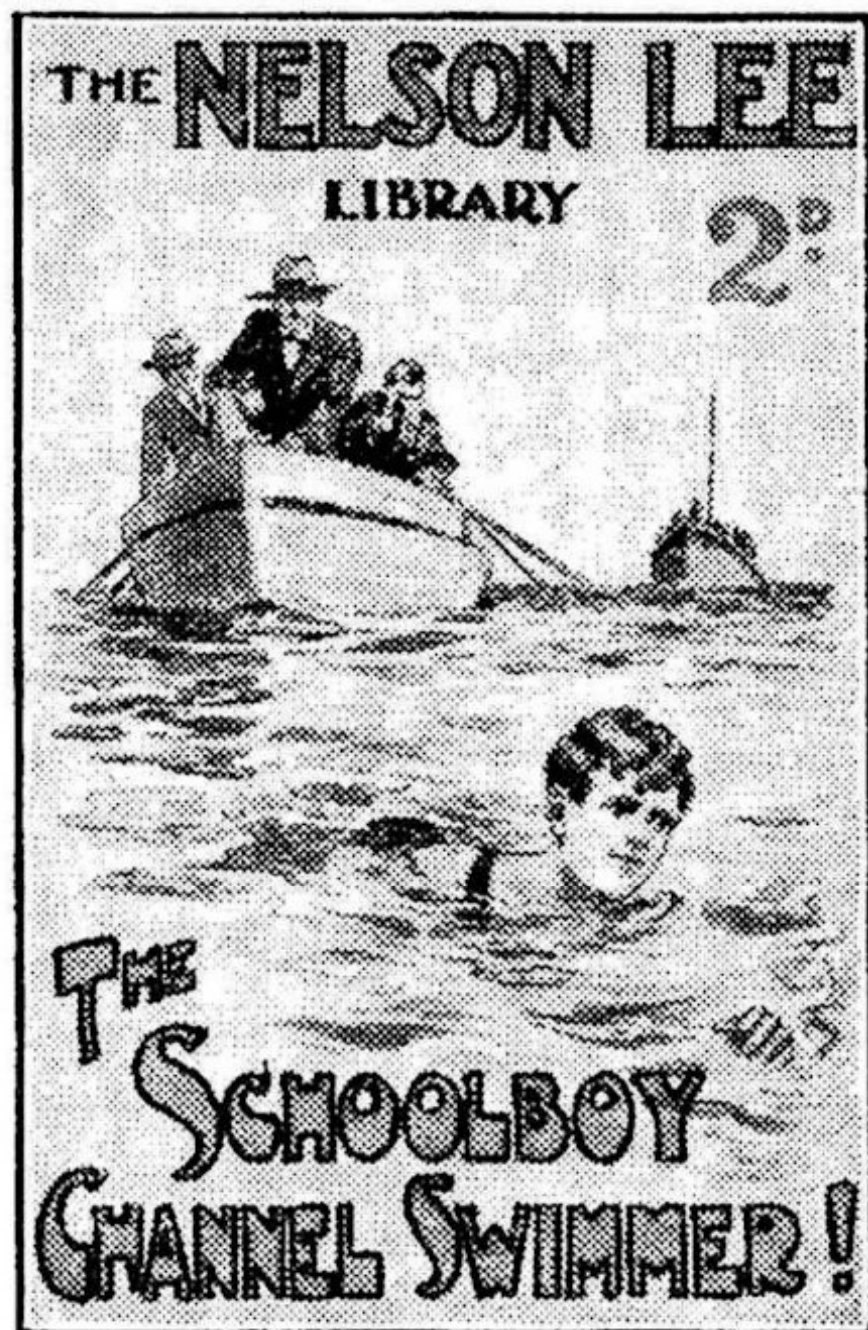
A great shout came from Fullwood.

"Look!" he yelled, in a horrified voice.

An enormous wave was coming in—a towering menacing monster of the sea. It was an extra large one—as sometimes will happen. It came surging in, its great crest capped with foam.

"Look out, there!" shouted Nipper urgently.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



They ran, for there was no sense in waiting to be dashed by that wave against the timbers of the hulk. It would mean death for them all.

Boom—boom!

The wave broke, and the full force of it was sent hurtling against the broadside of the derelict. It struck those old timbers in a horribly solid way—a great, devastating, overpowering blow.

And the hulk heeled upwards and over, shivering from stem to stern.

The water boiled round her triumphantly, hissing and splashing; then it receded, and the hulk listed back to her original position with a slow, deliberate movement.

Nipper and the others ran back into the sea, splashing knee-deep through the water. The immediate danger was over, and in every heart there was the one thought. Archie was dead!

The hulk, falling back, must inevitably have killed him. But they could not resist the temptation to make sure. They were horrified, dazed with dread, yet they could not keep back.

"S.O.S.!" came a feeble cry. "What-ho, the lifeboat! Rescue, laddies!"

"It's Archie!" screamed Watson. "He's still alive!"

"Oh!"

"It's impossible!" sobbed Marjorie. "He can't be alive—after that!"

"THE SCHOOLBOY CHANNEL SWIMMER!"

When Tom Burton tells the Removites that he intends to attempt to swim the Channel, he is laughed at. He, a mere junior of fifteen, trying to do what fully developed men have failed to do! It seems ridiculous. Besides, there's the expense of the thing and other difficulties in the way.

But when Mr. Fielding, the prominent Caistowe sportsman, says that Tom Burton has a chance, that he will help him, the Removites change their opinions. They become just as enthusiastic as Tom Burton himself.

And so it finally comes about. Burton sets out to swim the Channel.

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"Archie—Archie!" roared Nipper.

And then they saw. Down there, in the spume and smother, an arm appeared for a moment. Right in the waves—ten or twelve yards from the hulk!

"There he is!" yelled Nipper. "Come on, you chaps! Quick! He's been washed back by the wave! He's freed!"

"For the love of Samson!" said Travers hoarsely.

With one accord they ran; they went charging out into the sea, splashing and half-swimming. They could see Archie now, and they soon grasped him. The next wave came in—a much smaller one this time—and they were all lifted by it and sent hurtling up the sands.

And then they were left, with Archie in their midst, and they saw that he was safe.

What they had been unable to accomplish the sea itself had done!

For that tremendous wave had hit the hulk broadside, and had pitched it clean over. And Archie, released, had been drawn back towards the sea by the irresistible force of the backwash. He had not been crushed to death, as the others had supposed. He had been saved!



CHAPTER 19.

Waiting!

At first, there was nothing but a feeling of joy and untold relief.

Archie was carried high up on the sandbank, well beyond the reach of the waves; there he was stretched out, and it was soon found that he was comparatively intact. His left leg was badly bruised, his right foot was partly crushed. Otherwise, he was unharmed. No bones were broken.

Yet he was nearly unconscious, for he had swallowed a great deal of water, and the shock of the whole thing had been devastating. But now, gradually, he was coming round. The sunshine, beating down upon him, was having a beneficial effect.

"Odds mysteries and wonders!" he murmured, opening his eyes. "I mean, what about it? Are we dead—or what?"

"Archie!" breathed Marjorie, who was resting his head on her lap. "You're safe, Archie! It was the sea that saved you!"

"The sea?" repeated Archie lazily. "Oh, the sea! Absolutely! I see what you mean, old girl! The sea did the trick—what!"

"It shifted the hulk, and you were washed back," said Nipper. "Thank Heaven, Archie! We all thought that you were doomed!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie, trying to sit up. "I gathered something of the same impression myself. And so we're still bright and chirpy, as it were. How dashed rummy! I thought it was all up with me!"

His escape from death had almost been a miracle. Those ten youngsters had been unable to do anything to help their trapped companion. Yet the sea, with just one wave, had accomplished the task.

Now that it was all over Nipper and the others could appreciate the wonder of it. For if a succession of big waves had come Archie would have been killed.

It was that extra huge wave that had saved him. For, with one blow, it had lifted the derelict and had dragged him to safety.

But had the sea only played this trick in a spirit of elfin mischief?

Had it saved Archie, only to delay its ultimate triumph? Nothing could alter the fact that the party was marooned on the

Gull Sands, and nothing could alter the fact that the Gull Sands were being rapidly engulfed.

In an incredibly short space of time the hulk was now surrounded by the incoming tide. The waves were splashing round her aged timbers, and the spume was dashing over her decks.

The long strip of sand had become a mere ribbon of yellow, a yard or two wide, and not more than fifteen yards long. On every side the sea was sweeping over that final strip. Wave after wave came, and it was only occasionally that the sand could now be seen.

"Well, we're all in the same fix now," said Nipper quietly. "Archie is with us, thank goodness, and we can all face the peril together. We shall have to swim for it soon."

"Swim for what?" asked Pitt.

"We can just swim, that's all," replied Nipper. "It will be impossible to reach the shore. But there's always a chance that a boat might come within hailing distance."

The others, looking out at the blue sea, felt their hearts thudding with apprehension. Not a sail was in sight, not a glimpse of anything floating.

Archie was on his feet now, and he pluckily maintained that he was not in much pain. The water was surging round their ankles, swirling up towards their knees. The last of the sand had gone. There was nothing but white foam, with each wave making it deeper.

"Poor old Bo'sun!" said Fullwood huskily. "He tried, but he failed! If not, he would have come back. Poor chap, I expect he swam on until he was exhausted, and then gave up the fight."

"Oh, what a shame!" said Irene fiercely. "Why did you let him go? No, I don't mean that!" she added. "He went for our sakes, didn't he? Dear old Bo'sun!"

They were all standing together in a little clump. With astonishing rapidity now the water was rising. Already it was up to their waists. Before long they would be lifted off their feet, and would be compelled to swim. Even as it was, an occasional wave would come, and they would lose the bottom for a moment or two.

"There's only one thing to do now," said Nipper. "We've got to get to the hulk—and it'll mean a short swim, because the water is deep there. But the hulk is standing well above the sea yet, and we might as well get on her deck."

"Won't it be rather like prolonging the agony, dear old fellow?" asked Travers. "Is it worth it? There's not a sail in sight—"

"But we've got to do it, all the same," said Nipper quietly. "I've said it before to-day, but I must repeat it—while there's life, there's hope! And we've got to get on board the derelict! Come on!"

They plunged out, swimming strongly—two or three of the juniors helping Archie Glenthorne. Within a few minutes they were climbing over the bulwarks of the hulk.

The deck was still well out of the water, and they stood there, waiting. At least, this old vessel was a haven for the time being. She, too, would be under water when the tide was at its full. But, as yet, she formed a little island—a refuge.

The sandbank was now a thing of the past. Not a speck of yellow could be seen. Only the white foam, and even this was changing to blue as the water deepened. The waves were no longer breaking, but rolling straight on towards the mainland.

So near, and yet so far!

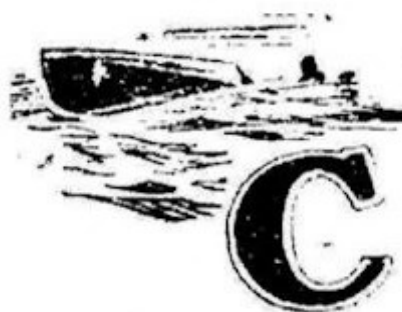
They could see the cliffs, the rising hills, green and fresh, with the afternoon sunshine upon them. They could see tiny specks, which were houses—and cottages.

But the sea itself, between them and the coast, was empty. Not a sail—not a boat!

Out in the other direction, in the Channel, steamers could be faintly seen, hull down on the horizon. But no steamer would come anywhere near these marooned schoolboys and schoolgirls. The Gull Sands were avoided by all shipping.

And so they waited—without hope!

CHAPTER 20.



The Bo'sun Does the Trick!

AISTOWE BAY was sheltered and calm.

Tom Burton, as he swam in past the harbour mouth, had an excellent view of the graceful, curving beach. Not that the Bo'sun took much trouble to look. He was concentrating his energy upon swimming, and he only glanced up now and again, shaking the water out of his eyes to make sure of his direction.

The beach was full of people, with little ice-cream stalls dotted here and there, and deck-chairs by the hundred. Beyond was the esplanade, and the hotels rising majestically.

Near the beach, a number of boats were distributed about, and the Bo'sun had experienced a pang of disappointment when he noted this. He had been hoping that he would encounter a boat or two at the very mouth of the bay, so that he could speed up the work of rescue.

The task of swimming in the sheltered harbour was ridiculously easy to Tom Burton. After his powerful swim from the Gull Sands, through the rough sea, this final lap of his journey was child's play.

But not a thought of triumph was in his mind. He was thinking of his companions out there on the Gull Sands. By this time the sands would be covered completely—even the derelict itself might be under water. It seemed to Burton that he had been swimming hour after hour. He had lost all count of time. He only knew that the afternoon was well advanced, and that the tide was in.

He was torn with agony regarding the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls—out there, helpless. Would he be in time? Would he be able to get a rescue party out to the spot before the unfortunates were drowned?

He looked up again, and this time his heart gave a thump.

Speeding comparatively close by was a motor-boat! The Bo'sun was so surprised that he ceased swimming, and bobbed there in the water, staring. He could hear the hum of the engine now—a powerful, throbbing roar. It was the one stroke of luck that he had been praying for!

A motor-boat—and not a mere pleasure craft, capable of plugging along at a ridiculously slow speed only, but a racer! A long, rakish, wicked-looking craft, with sleek bows.

"Hi!" yelled Burton. "Help—help!"

He leapt up and down in the water, waving his hands frantically. He realised, suddenly, that his shouts would not be heard. But there was a distinct chance that he would be seen, so he continued to perform his antics.

Much to his relief, the motor-boat suddenly swung round, and came darting towards him. He heard the throb of the engine cease, and almost before he could realise it the craft was swinging by, and its solitary occupant was leaning over the side towards him, staring.

"All right!" sang out a voice. "Hold out for another minute—I'll come round alongside."

"Thank Heaven!" muttered the Bo'sun fervently. "It's Mr. Fielding!"

He recognised the occupant of the boat in a moment. Mr. Fielding was a well-known Caistowe sportsman. He was rich, and his hobby was the making of powerful racing motor-boats. Indeed, this very craft was due to be raced in the Solent, in a week's time.

"It's all right, sir—I'm safe enough!" panted Burton, as the boat, slowing down, edged towards him. "Swab my decks! I've never been so pleased to see anybody in all my life!"

He was hauled on board, and he dropped into the cockpit, dripping water.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Fielding. "You're one of the St. Frank's boys, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir—Burton, of the Remove."

"Of course—of course!" said the other, grasping the Bo'sun's hand. "Captain Burton's son, eh? Splendid! Just having a swim, my boy, I suppose? Upon my word! I thought you were in difficulties!"

Tom Burton clutched at Mr. Fielding's arm.

"I want you to go out to the Gull Sands, sir!" he said tensely. "There are about a dozen out there—St. Frank's chaps and three girls from the Moor View School! Their boat was smashed, and they're trapped on the sandbank. The tide's in now, and——"

"Steady—steady!" interrupted Mr. Fielding, staring. "What are you saying, my

boy? Are you telling me that there's danger for these boys and girls out there?"

"Terrible danger, sir!" urged the Bo'sun. "It seems hours since I left them. I've just swum from the Gull Sands——"

"You've done *what*?" roared Mr. Fielding

"I've just swum from the Gull Sands, sir——"

"Nonsense!" said the famous sportsman. "You can't tell me that, young Burton! It's over five miles, and the sea is rough out there."

"I've done it, sir, I tell you!" insisted Burton, becoming frantic. "First of all I tried to intercept a sailing yacht, but it veered off, and I couldn't attract their attention. So I decided to swim straight on to Caistowe."

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Fielding, staring at Burton harder than ever. "But, man alive, you're fresh! You're as fresh as paint! There's not a sign of exhaustion——"

"That's because I'm not exhausted, sir," broke in Tom Burton. "The swim didn't affect me. I could do it again—on my head, too! Swab me! I'm not a weakling, sir."

"By the Lord Harry, you're certainly not!" agreed Mr. Fielding, in amazement. "So you've really swum from the Gull Sands! Bless me! What an extraordinary boy!"

Mr. Fielding seemed far more intrigued by Burton's swim than by the knowledge of the party's danger.

"It's incredible!" he said. "Positively incredible!"

"What about those chaps, sir?" said the Bo'sun urgently. "What about those three girls? They'll be drowned! Even now they might be swimming at their last gasp. We've got to go out there, sir! Where's the engine control? Let me get at it!"

Mr. Fielding suddenly became active.

"You're right, boy!" he snapped. "Gad! Until this second I didn't quite realise what you were getting at. The Gull Sands, eh? We'll be there within five minutes! This little craft can shift!"

He sat down at the wheel, and the engine gave a terrific roaring burst of sound. Tom Burton clutched at the edge of the cockpit, and his breath was nearly taken away. Like a live thing, the motor-boat leapt over the sea, heading straight outwards beyond the bay.

"Souise me!" gasped Tom.

"We'll soon be there!" said Mr. Fielding grimly. "And if they're still alive, we'll get them ashore. But, by gad, I'm mystified! You've swum five miles in this rough sea, and you're still as fresh as paint! Extraordinary!"

As Mr. Fielding opened the throttle even wider, he gave Tom Burton a glance of sheer wonderment. It was surprising enough to know that this schoolboy had successfully accomplished the swim.

But it was a hundred times more surprising to see him as fit as though he had only done a hundred yards!

CHAPTER 21.

In the Nick of Time!



TOM BURTON himself couldn't quite understand it. He had known from the very first that he would be able to accomplish that swim to Caistowe. He had said nothing to the others, for fear of being set down as a boaster. But even he had believed that he would arrive in a semi-exhausted condition.

And yet he was feeling fresh—energetic and full of vigour. He felt that he could have kept on swimming hour after hour, mile after mile. But for the anxiety that had constantly wracked him, he would have revelled in that great feat.

But now he could hardly give it a thought. He was staring out over the bows of the racing motor-boat—staring towards the spot where the Gull Sands had been.

And he could see nothing—absolutely nothing!

The sands had gone, the derelict itself was now under the water. The all-conquering tide had done its worst.

The motor-boat was tearing along at an amazing speed. It was a dashing, exhilarating race across the water. The Bo'sun clung to the edge of the cockpit, his very breath forced back down his throat by the terrific rush of wind.

"Easy, sir—easy!" he yelled, turning his head. "A point or two to starboard! We're getting near now!"

Mr. Fielding nodded.

"I'm watching!" he said. "But, by heaven, young man, I'm afraid we're too late!"

The motor-boat swung round in a graceful curve, her speed decreasing as Mr. Fielding partially closed the throttle. Then, at the same moment, both he and the Bo'sun gave a shout.

"I can see something!" roared Tom. "Look, sir! Swab me! There's somebody waving! They're not all dead!"

"We shall soon know the truth!" said Mr. Fielding grimly.

If their feelings were tense, what of the feelings of the others? What of the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls?

Five minutes earlier, all hope had gone. They had definitely settled themselves to a watery death.

For the tide had come up, and the derelict had vanished beneath the surface of the sea. One by one, the members of the party had been forced to swim for it. They kept together as much as they could, and at last they were all in a little group, too desperate to talk much. There seemed to be no hope for them.

There was still no sail in sight. Nipper and Travers were supporting Archie Glen-thorne between them. Some of the other fellows were helping the girls—although Irene and Doris and Marjorie declared that

they needed no help. They were all good swimmers.

But what was the use? At the best they could only keep afloat for twenty minutes, or perhaps half an hour.

"It's no good trying to reach the coast!" Nipper had said. "We must just keep afloat—we must conserve our strength. Float on your backs, if you can—anything to keep your strength."

They all knew the fantastic nature of Nipper's words:

"Don't try to reach the coast!"

Over five miles! Good swimmers they were, but such a distance was impossible.

Nipper himself, perhaps, might have succeeded, after an exhausting fight—but such a thing was doubtful, for the tide was now on the point of turning. At least, it would turn long before any swimmer could get within appreciable distance of the mainland. And the battle against the ebb would be futile.

No, the only thing to do was to keep afloat. The Bo'sun had gone—he was dead—but there was always the faint chance that some sailing craft might come within signalling distance. It was a fine afternoon for sailing, and there were plenty of boats out from Caistowe. If one would only come near enough—

"Pity about the camera!" remarked Vivian Travers, as he trod water. "In the excitement I forgot all about it. Brand-new, too!"

"How can you speak of the camera now?" asked Fullwood gruffly.

"Why not, dear old fellow?" said Travers coolly. "We might as well have something to talk about. Rather rough on our film, too, eh? Just as we were going to start the shooting. Well, well! It only proves how uncertain everything is in life! You never know how the cat's going to spring!"

"Don't!" said Marjorie. "It sounds so—so callous!"

"But why?" asked Travers. "We're in no danger—yet! We're good for a full half-hour—or perhaps an hour, with luck. And anything might happen in that time!"

"Something's happening now!" said Nipper, in a strange voice.

"Oh, what do you mean?" asked Doris, swimming nearer to him. "Why do you speak like that, Nipper?"

Nipper laughed—and that laugh of his had a hard, strained, false note in it.

"There's a boat coming!" he said huskily. "Either that, or I'm seeing double!"

"A boat?" shouted the others.

"I saw it just now, as we were lifted up by that wave," said Nipper. "It's a good way off yet, but it's heading straight for us, and—"

"Yes, yes!" cried Irene excitedly. "Oh, look! I saw it then! It's coming!"

"Hurrah!"

It was a spluttering kind of cheer, for nobody had much breath left. But almost

before they could gather their wits together—before they could realise the dramatic nature of their deliverance—their ears became filled with the throbbing hum of the speeding motor-boat.

They could see her now—tearing onwards towards them. They waved madly, and more than one junior swallowed a pint of water in his excitement.

But the ordeal was over—rescue had come!

CHAPTER 22.

The Champion!



DURING those joyous moments it was assumed that the occupants of the motor-boat had seen them by chance—that the craft had come up accidentally.

But this impression was soon changed.

Nipper was the first to realise the truth.

"Look, you fellows!" he yelled joyously. "Look, girls! Can't you see who's in the boat? It's the Bo'sun himself!"

"What?"

"There he is!" shouted Nipper. "He must have been picked up——"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Bo'sun! He's saved us!"

Tom Burton himself, on the motor-boat, could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes. During the last few seconds he had

been counting—desperately. To his delirious joy, he saw that there were eleven swimmers, and then, at last, he succeeded in picking out Archie Glenthorne.

"Swab me! I don't know what's happened, but it must have been a miracle!" he said, turning a flushed face to Mr. Fielding. "Archie's there! He's safe—he's swimming with the others!"

"That's fine!" said Mr. Fielding. "Then there's been no tragedy, my boy."

At last the motor-boat swung round, and closed in upon the swimmers. One after another they were hauled on board, and the girls were accommodated in the cockpit. The others sprawled themselves over the racing craft, wherever they could find an inch of room. But what did they care? It was hot in the sunshine, and now all danger was over. They could have laughed aloud at their former fears.

"You only came in the nick of time, sir!" said Nipper, after he and all the others had fervently thanked Mr. Fielding. "We tried to kid ourselves that we were good for another half-hour, but I doubt it. Some of us were on the point of giving up."

"Why talk about it, young 'un?" asked Mr. Fielding. "You're safe—and that's good enough! But you've got to thank Burton for your rescue. It was he who swam into Caistowe and——"

"Swam into Caistowe, sir?" broke in Nipper, staring.

"That's what I said."

"But—but he couldn't have done it!" put in Fullwood. "It was over five miles!"

(Continued on page 42.)

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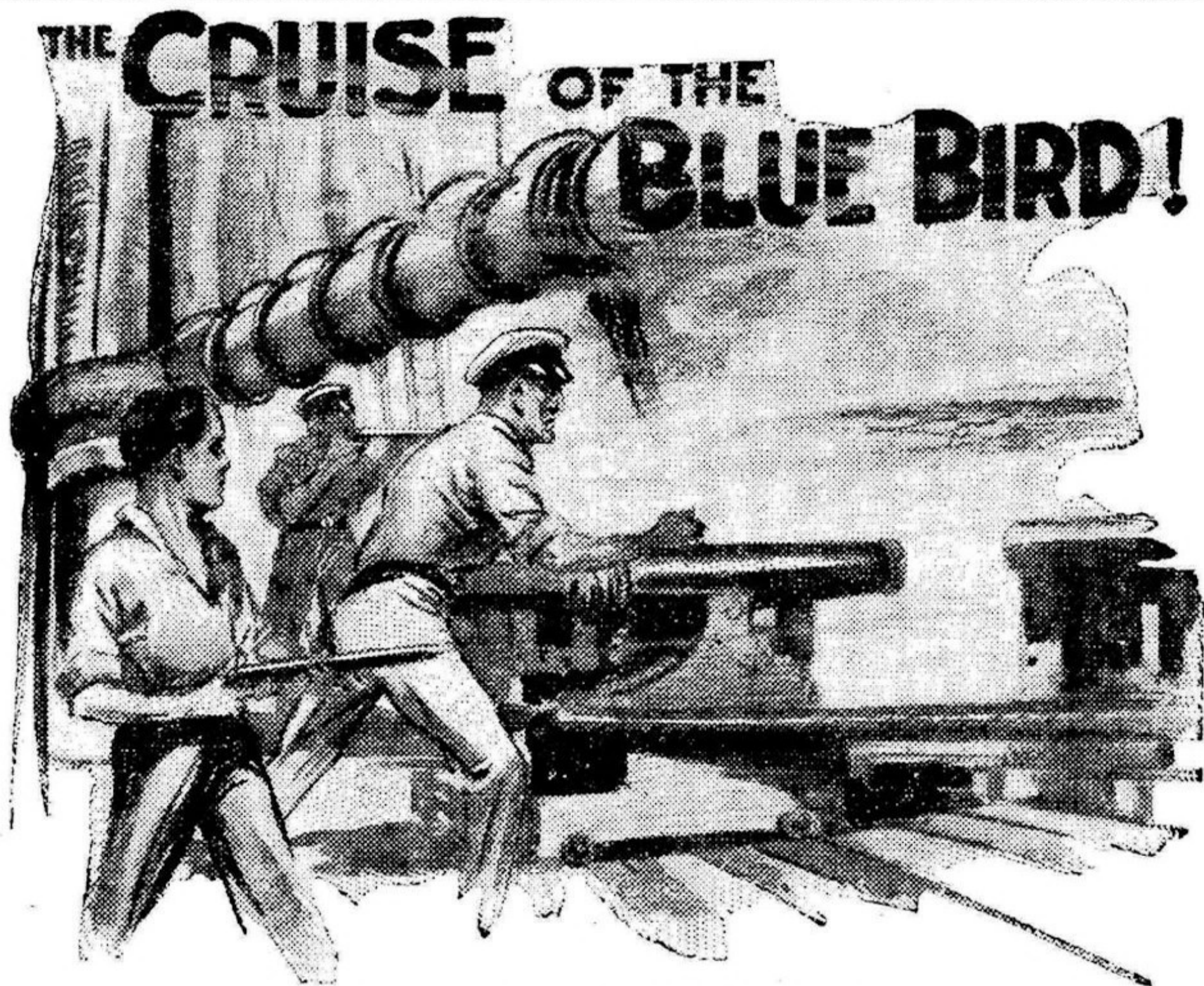
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Captain Manby!

THE sea still ran high, though the gale had fallen to a brisk breeze, before which the schooner Blue Bird reeled off the miles in a style that rejoiced the heart of her skipper and owner, Captain George Manby, late of his Majesty's Navy.

Captain Manby was a typical British naval officer—strong, lithe, hawk-faced, with fair hair, and keen eyes that seemed for ever searching the far horizon, yet never missed anything going on near-by.

At the end of the Great War, knowing that promotion would be slow, and life in the peace-time Navy dull after the excitement of active service, he had resigned his commission, and, taking his wife and only child, made Brisbane, Queensland, his headquarters.

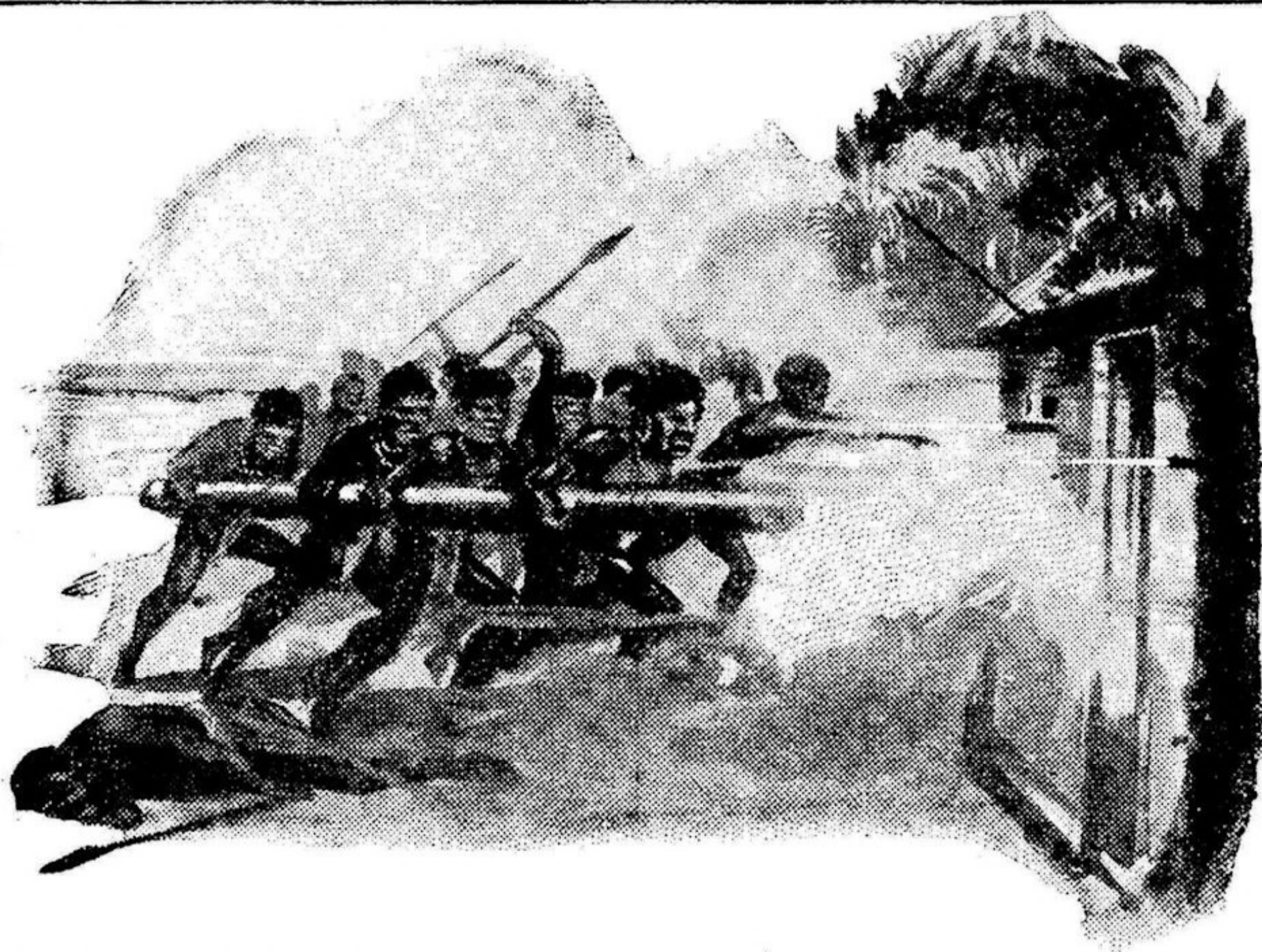
He had been a daring and resourceful cruiser commander. He brought the same

qualities to his trading ventures amidst the islands of the Pacific, readily taking big risks to gain big profits. With characteristic audacity, he had, four months before, bought up the whole copra crop of Graden Island, though neither he nor its owner had any means of knowing at that time whether it would be good or bad.

It had been a pure speculation, but luck had been with Captain Manby. Word had come that the crop was the best known for many years, and now Captain Manby was on his way to collect it, with the pleasant knowledge that he would make a great deal more money than he had dared to hope.

He stood aft by the wheel of the Blue Bird now, glancing from the straining, reefed top-sails to the long, high swells that every moment threatened to fall inboard over the stern, but always slid harmlessly under the counter.

—AND DON'T FORGET TO TELL ALL YOUR PALS ABOUT IT!



Two boys stood beside him. Jack Manby, his son, at sixteen, promised to be a second edition of his father when he attained manhood. For the past year he had accompanied him on his voyages, finishing his education in the school of the sea. He had all Captain Manby's daring spirit, but so far he lacked judgment, and was apt to be rash.

The other, Ned Sutton, was the son of Manby's widowed sister. He bore a strong family likeness to his uncle and cousin. A few months older than Jack, an English Public School had prepared him to take his own part in the rough-and-tumble of life. He had jumped at the chance of joining Captain Manby, and had arrived in Brisbane just in time for the voyage to Graden Island. In many ways, he and Jack were very much alike, but he was naturally more cautious. Jack was likely to act first and think afterwards. Ned did his thinking beforehand.

"Well, how do you like your first taste of sailing in a small vessel, Ned?" asked Captain Manby, with a smile. "It's rather different from your voyage out in the liner—eh? The seas look a lot bigger from a schooner's deck, don't they?"

"They look like mountains, sir," replied Ned. "What would happen if one came on board?"

"We'd all get very wet," said Manby lightly. "But there's no fear of that. Wind and sea are going down rapidly, and any moment now we should sight Graden Island."

As though the words had been a cue, there came a long-drawn howl from aloft.

"Land oo-oh! Land on the po-ort bow!"

Captain Manby sprang to the after end of the low deck-house, took the telescope that hung in slings by its door, and went aloft. In a minute he was down again.

"Graden Island, right enough," he said, and handed the glass to Ned. "Here, lad, take your first look at a Pacific island. You can see it as we rise on a swell. There!"

Ned, steadying himself against the deck-house, brought the glass to bear. At first he saw nothing, then out of the waste of tumbling waters appeared a tiny speck of blue-grey, surrounded by flashing foam.

"Got it?" asked Manby. "What d'you think of it?"

"It looks very little and lonely, and there seems to be a lot of surf round it."

"There is. There must be a tremendous sea running on this side, but luckily the entrance to the lagoon's on the other, so we'll get in easily enough; you'll be able to stretch your legs ashore before midday."

"And we'll go shooting," put in Jack. "Plenty of pigeons, I expect. We'll have pigeon-pie."

"Don't eat your pie before you've shot it," chuckled Manby. "Anyhow, breakfast's ready."

Ah Moy, the Chinese cook and steward, had appeared abruptly in the deck-house doorway, grinning invitingly.

"Cully chop allee leddey," he announced. "You likee Chinee egg, Mlistah Neddee? Me got."

"Thank you, Ah Moy—" began Ned uncertainly. Jack cut in:

"How old is it, Ah Moy?"

"Man say hunded year, but mebbe tellee lie. Mebbe only flifty."

"A trifle too ripe," said Captain Manby. "Better polish it off yourself, Ah Moy. He means well," he added, as the Chinaman vanished. "But you'd need a lifetime of practice to enjoy some of the things he likes. Anyhow, his curry is good, so come along before it gets cold."

Excitement on Graden Island!

WHEN the three came on deck again after breakfast, Graden Island lay within a mile—a long strip of land, rising to less than two hundred feet at its highest point, covered with palm-trees, and fenced by reefs that on this side lay close along the shore. Though the wind had fallen, heavy waves thundered on it, casting spray high in air.

Tubby Sinclair, the mate—a burly, fat little man, nearly as broad as he was long—was at the wheel, while the Kanaka crew, a dozen men all told, stood by ready to go about. They were from the Fijis, or the Tonga Islands, sailors who had learned their craft in a dozen schooners. They had all sailed with Captain Manby before, and would cheerfully have followed him anywhere, for the captain had the happy knack of being friendly with his men without in the least relaxing discipline.

Swiftly the schooner neared the end of the spouting reef, the mate bellowed suddenly, the helm went over, she swung round into the lee of the island, and half an hour later glided through the gateway of the lagoon, and was at once in smooth water. With only wind enough to fill her sails, she ran towards the upper end of the lagoon.

"Just beyond that wooded point is the planter's house," said Captain Manby. "He and his assistant manage the island for old Fox, the man from whom I bought the whole of this year's copra crop."

"What is copra, sir?" asked Ned. "The stuff that coconut-matting is made from?"

"No. That's coir, the fibre that grows outside the nut. Copra is the inside, the meat of it. When the nuts are ripe, the native labourers gather them, split them in two with a blow of a heavy knife, and leave 'em to dry off a bit. The meat curls away from the shell as it dries, then it's collected and stored for shipment. The coconut oil pressed out of it is used for margarine, and cattle food is made from the squeezed pulp, so there's not much waste—eh? What's that smoke rising over the point, Mr. Sinclair?" the captain added, turning to the mate.

"Natives burning brush and weeds, I expect, sir. A plantation needs a lot of

cleaning up." The mate stopped abruptly, for from somewhere beyond the point came a sharp, ringing report, followed by two heavier, duller ones. "What's that? Sounds like shooting, sir."

"Rifle and shotgun!" said Captain Manby. "There they go again. That sounds as though they might be having trouble. Confound the smoke!"

The dying wind had revived gustily for a moment and brought a thick cloud of heavy smoke swirling across the lagoon. For a minute the shore was blotted out, then the schooner passed the point and drew clear of the obscurity.

There, in plain sight across half a mile of smooth water, was the planter's bungalow, a squat building, roofed with corrugated iron, its walls plastered with dazzlingly white coral lime. Set in the midst of a space of lawn, and backed by the dark mass of coconut palms, it looked very picturesque.

But nobody thought of that just then, for round the white walls and over the emerald lawn pranced a mob of at least a couple of hundred nearly naked brown savages, brandishing knives, spears, and clubs, and howling furiously as they hurled great chunks of coral at the narrow windows, while a gang dragged a tree-trunk towards the door.

"Humph! They seem to be having labour trouble!" remarked Manby coolly. "Take her in a bit closer, Mr. Sinclair. Those fellows with the tree are going to use it as a battering-ram against the door, I think. Jack, get a cartridge for the gun. Ned, a bag of nails from the carpenter's stores. Jump to it! Serve out rifles and ammunition, Mr. Sinclair, as soon as you have anchored."

With the words, the captain sprang into action. He crossed the deck to the Blue Bird's one gun—a short-barrelled, big-bored brass cannon, intended solely for signalling purposes, but capable of doing damage if well handled—cast off the lashings, hauled it round by main force, and made fast a thick rope to restrain the recoil.

Jack returned with a cartridge, Ned with a bag of three-inch nails, a sort much in request in the islands, and the gun was loaded. Meanwhile, the schooner was running in towards the shore, the lead going, for now the water shoaled rapidly. Fourteen, twelve, ten, six fathoms.

Active as a cat, Captain Manby had raced into the cabin and returned with a Service-rifle, and a couple of light Winchesters, which he handed to the boys.

"See what you can do with these," he said. "Try at three-fifty. Aim at the fellows with the log."

So far, the raving mob of brown men had been too engrossed to heed the approach of the schooner. A tall man, who waved a sort of pike made by lashing a knife at the end of a pole, seemed to be the leader. With wild howls that rose above the din his followers were making, he urged on the men

carrying the log. Yelling madly, they dashed towards the door at a run.

Crack! Bang-ang!

Rifle and shotgun cracked and boomed from the house; two of the foremost attackers reeled and fell, to crawl away wounded, but the discharge didn't stop the others. With a thundering crash that echoed across the lagoon, they brought the head of their log battering-ram smashing against the door.

Crack! Bang!

Another man dropped, but not before the log had swung once more against the door, while from either side a shower of spears

the shore, laid down his rifle, stooped over the brass gun, kicked in the wedge under the breech to depress the muzzle a trifle, and whipped over the lever that served as a trigger.

The gun was built to make a noise. With a terrific, clanging bellow, it spoke, sending its charge of nails whining over and into the yelling mob. Such a load at that range could do but very little real damage. None the less, a lot of the brown men were tickled up with flesh wounds, while the awful noise completed what the surprise had begun. Like one man, they turned and bolted for the cover of the trees, pursued by the bullets of



The big savage swung his club to strike Jack—and then went over with a yelp of pain as Ned brought the butt of his rifle against his shins!

flew towards the loopholes from which the defenders were firing. A couple of men, armed with axes, crouching low, darted in and began to hack at the weakened door.

"Five-ee fathom!" wailed the leadsman from the schooner's bows.

"Bring up! Let go!" yelled Tubby Sinclair.

The anchor splashed, as the Blue Bird came round into the wind with shivering sails. Captain Manby raised his rifle and let drive at one of the men hacking at the bungalow door. Over he went. The boys fired, but their bullets fell short, throwing up spurts of sand on the strip of dazzling beach between the edge of the lawn and the water.

"Up fifty and try again!" snapped Manby, fired a couple more shots, then, as the schooner swung, bringing her broadside on to

Manby and the boys. In ten seconds only a half-dozen wounded men making for cover, and a couple who would never crawl again, remained within sight.

"Cutter's crew away!" shouted Manby.

"Ay, ay, sir!" responded Mr. Sinclair, who was passing out rifles and bandoliers to the crew. As they received the weapons, the half-dozen of the boat's crew ran to the cutter and swung her outboard; the falls squealed and rattled, the boat dropped into the water and was instantly manned. Pausing only to fill his pockets with clips of cartridges, and give more ammunition to the boys, Manby dropped into the sternsheets, while Jack and Ned tumbled in forward.

"Get the cloth off her, Mr. Sinclair, but keep an eye lifting!" ordered Captain Manby to the mate, who was remaining on board the Blue Bird. "If you see those beggars

returning, brown 'em. Give 'em some more nails, or any old iron, from the gun. They look a tough lot."

"Yes, sir," replied Tubby Sinclair. "Solomon Island boys by the cut of their jibs, and they're hot potatoes. Look out for yourself, sir. They are mighty tricky."

"Right! Give way, men!" bellowed the captain.

The boat shot shorewards, no great distance. As she grounded on the glittering white beach, the men, tumbling out into the shallow water, ran her up high and dry.

"Close up. No shooting till I give the word, and then fire low and don't waste a shot!" cried Manby, and led the way up to the house at a run.

How the Trouble Started!

HE knew very well that, despite the superiority of weapons, the odds were terribly heavy; at least a couple of hundred half-demented savages against the twelve Kanakas, Ah Moy, who was no fighting man, Mr. Sinclair, the boys, and himself, and the two planters. Eighteen against two hundred! For the moment the two hundred were scared, but when they saw how small was the force opposed to them, they would almost certainly make another attack.

But Captain Manby's face was calm, his voice jovial, as the bungalow door opened and two men in whites came out, their unshaven chins bristly, their eyes red from lack of sleep.

"Hallo, gentlemen! You seem to be indulging in a general strike!" he said cheerily. "Are you hurt at all?" he added, catching sight of a bandage about the second man's head.

"Only a sliding scrape from a fish-spear, but nothing serious. I'm Hutton, the manager of this show when it's working, and this is Mitchie, my assistant. You've come just in the nick of time. They had the door split."

"Oh, we haven't finished with 'em yet, I'm afraid. I'm Captain Manby. I've bought the crop from Mr. Fox. But never mind that just now. We must keep these fellows on the run. If they rally, there are enough of them to smother us. Where would they bolt to?"

"Their village, probably, across on the other side," replied Hutton. "But about that copra——"

"Hang the copra!" exclaimed Manby. "We must follow them up and try to bag the leader. He seems to be that big chap who was waving a spear made of a knife lashed to a pole."

"Yes, that's Rua-Rua, the cause of all the trouble. He——"

"Tell me about it as we march. You, Mr. Mitchie, stay here." Manby turned to his bo'sun, a big Tongan. "Timo, you stay along white boss. Them Solomon boys come, you shoot, savee?"

"Me savee," replied Timo, and squatted by the door, his rifle across his knee.

"Lead on, Mr. Hutton—and keep your eyes open for an ambush, boys," said Manby. "Once we get this Rua-Rua we may be able to reason with your erring flock, Mr. Hutton. What was the beginning of the trouble?"

"The natives here have their own bits of ground, and they won't work more than they can help, so we have to get in labour from other islands," began Hutton, as he led the way along a path cut through the palm grove. "This batch is from the Solomons, a hard-bitten crowd, two hundred and twenty-seven of them. Rua-Rua is a sort of sub-chief at home, so I made him gang boss,

and all was well till I gave him a tin of salmon for a bit of extra work on our boat. He's a good carpenter."

"Men from the Solomons usually are. They build good canoes," agreed Manby, with a nod.

"Yes. But that tin of salmon was a mistake. Rua-Rua was mad to get more. You know how it is?"

Manby nodded. Odd as it may seem, Polynesians, who live amidst seas swarming with splendid fish, have a passion for tinned stuff.

"He wanted some more, but we were short of it," continued Hutton. "He struck work, and stopped the whole gang. I had to stop their rations to bring them back to their senses. Then I found the storehouse broken into, and all the salmon sneaked. Mitchie did a bit of 'tec work and caught Rua-Rua devouring the last of the stuff, caught him with the goods on him, as you might say.



JACK MANBY

Well, when that sort of thing starts, one has to make an example, so I fined Rua-Rua double the value of the stuff and a month's wages. We pay 'em in baccy and trade stuff, you know."

"And that started the revolt?"

"Yes. They rose the day before yesterday and nearly got us in the open, and they've been trying to get us ever since. Made an attack every hour or so, and we've had no sleep. Then I found that the cartridges for my rifle were mostly duds, while Mitchie had only small shot cartridges for his scatter-gun. I tell you they'd have got us if you hadn't turned up."

Captain Manby smiled grimly. It seemed to him quite possible that the savage Solomon boys might yet succeed!

A Perilous Position!

MEANWHILE, Jack and Ned had marched amongst the trees parallel with the path, drawing ahead of the rest of the party.

"If we could only bag this chap who is the leader, the rest of them would knuckle under and be good, I s'pose," said Jack. "I'm going to draw a bead on him if I see him, and—What's the matter?"

Ned's hand had closed on his arm, halting him. He pointed ahead. A bird, not unlike a thrush in size and shape, but with plumage of a dark, metallic blue, had flitted silently between the close-growing trunks ahead, slanting down towards a clump of bushes growing in the midst of a tiny clearing made by the fall of palm some while before. It was in the act of alighting upon a twig, when, with a sudden convulsive effort, it flung itself into the air and darted away, screaming.

"Like a blackbird at home!" exclaimed Ned, in a whisper. "I believe there's someone in those bushes. Hold on!"

But he spoke too late. Jack had stooped, picked up a stone, and thrown it into the bush. It dropped with a thud—and like a jack-in-the-box up came a black top-knot above a brown face, and next instant a spear whizzed past Ned's ear to stick quivering in a trunk behind him, while a tremendous yell rang through the grove.

Instinctively the two boys threw up their rifles and fired, then, without waiting to see whether they had scored, sprang back to the path.

"Close up. Take cover behind the trees. Fire low!" roared Captain Manby.

What followed was like a wild, confused nightmare. Lithe brown forms darted from tree to tree, hurling spears and big stones as they advanced; rifles cracked, diabolical yelling echoed and re-echoed till it seemed the voice of thousands.

Jack and Ned, crouching low behind neighbouring trees, fired and fired again, aiming at the momentarily-seen shapes flitting through a gathering haze of thin powder smoke, while on either hand the rifles of the remaining members of the Blue Bird's "shore" party banged steadily.

And then, as suddenly as it had begun, the attack ceased. Instantly Captain Manby divined the cause.

"Fall back!" he cried. "Fall back steadily to the house. They are trying to cut us off. Stir your pins!"

They began to move back at a jog-trot, that grew faster as they heard the ominous patter of many feet moving parallel with them through the grove on the right-hand side. The path curved to the left, so that the pursuers must cross it to cut off the retreat.

The mouth of it, with bright green turf and the sparkling sea beyond, showed clearly

ahead, and already Tom Cheese, stroke of the cutter, who was leading, was nearly there, when a couple of leaping brown men suddenly appeared before him with upraised spears, while again the horrible yell rang through the woods.

Tom fired from the hip, dropped one man, took the spear of the other through a thigh, clubbed his rifle and sent the fellow crashing to the ground. Hutton jumped forward, steadied Tom as he staggered, then rushed him hopping out into the open.

Whizz! Whang-ang! Spears buzzed, stones rattled against the trunks. One, rebounding, took Jack on the side of the head, and sent him sprawling, half-stunned and wholly bewildered. Almost as he reached the ground, a big savage, with hair frizzed out like a huge mop, whirled out from behind a tree, swung up a club to finish him—and went over with a yelp of pain as Ned brought the butt of his empty rifle against his shins.

Quick as a cat, the great brute writhed himself to one knee, shortened his club—and fell forward as a rifle roared at Ned's ear.

"Good for you, boy!" cried Captain Manby, and lugging Jack to his feet,



NED SUTTON

propelled him forward. "Are you much damaged, old son?"

"N-no! Orright in a jiffey!" Jack gasped. "Knocked me silly for a moment. Orright now!"

"Then run! Scuttle, Ned!"

Ned nodded and made as if to obey. But before he could get away a savage suddenly appeared out of a nearby clump of trees, club upraised. Things looked bad for Ned, but Ned was ready for him. He dived at the man's legs, collared him in a Rugby grip and brought him to the ground.

In falling the savage caught his head on a stone, partially stunning him. The grip round Ned's neck lessened and, quick to take advantage, the boy wriggled away and rejoined Captain Manby, who was just returning to assist him.

They were all close to the end of the path now. With a final shot or two they emerged, the captain wheeling to fire as he reached the open, then dragging the boys with him in a last sprint for the bungalow.

Across the lagoon floated a wild cheer. The six men left aboard the Blue Bird, with the mate and Ah Moy, lined the schooner's rail, shouting joyously as they saw that their skipper and the boys were safe. Then, as the horde of yelling savages appeared in hot pursuit, Tubby Sinclair barked an order, a ripple of fire ran along the schooner's beam, while Ah Moy, no rifle-shot, added his bit by banging madly on the ship's dinner gong.

The shots took effect, but now the Solomon Island men were worked up to such a pitch of fighting frenzy that they disregarded losses. There before them were the white men, who, for the moment, they detested, though only a day or two before they had regarded them as the providers of all good things. If they could only kill them, a wealth of tobacco and knives and hatchets, tinned salmon, and curried chickens, would be theirs. On they came!

No time to enter the house and make fast the battered door; no time to do anything but face round as they reached the group of men along the front of the house.

"Fire!" cried Manby, and gave the example. And, as he let drive, came the boom-oom of the Blue Bird's brass gun, loaded to the muzzle with nails and oddments of old iron.

The load caught the flank of the racing horde, dropped one or two, peppered others, but still they raced on aflame with the lust to kill. The rifles flamed in their faces, they clutched at the men who held them even as they fell. Like a brown wave they swept upon the handful!

(How's that for a fine first instalment, lads? Promises plenty of excitement to follow, doesn't it? And you won't be disappointed, either. Captain Manby and his party are in a desperate plight, but next week something turns up—something that surprises them and will surprise you, too!)

THE ST. FRANK'S FILM ACTORS!

(Continued from page 35.)

"Swab my maindeck!" growled Tom Burton. "I'm not such a rotten swimmer as all that, am I?"

"Rotten swimmer!" echoed Nipper. "Why, you're a marvel!"

"That's what I think!" agreed Mr. Fielding, nodding.

Long before Caistowe was reached, almost every member of the party was feeling fit again. Mr. Fielding had ambled along, and the sun had dried the soaked schoolboys and schoolgirls. They were merry and jolly. Life seemed good now—and the sea had regained its sparkle and its glorious blue.

And Tom Burton was the wonder of all.

"Never mind about me, messmates!" he said gruffly. "How about Archie? We've got to take him to hospital——"

"I'm not denying that I'm slightly biffed about," said Archie. "I'll even go to the length of admitting that I'm a crock. But I'm going back to St. Frank's in the good old bus, and a large dose of the dreamless will then work wonders. So kindly dry up."

Burton dried up, grinning. He and the others were quite certain that Archie Glen-thorne would be himself after a day or two in bed. So perhaps it was just as well that he should return to St. Frank's with them.

"As for you, Burton, I am proud of you!" said Mr. Fielding, clapping the Bo'sun on the back. "You swam that five miles as though it were five yards! At the end of it you were just as fresh as when you started! That's the marvel of it! Why, man alive, you ought to go in for swimming the Channel!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They all laughed at this sally.

"Confound you, I'm serious!" said Mr. Fielding, frowning. "I wasn't just having a joke!"

"Souse me!" gasped the Bo'sun. "You don't think I could swim the Channel, do you, sir?"

"Think it!" retorted Mr. Fielding. "I'm certain that you could put up a magnificent fight—yes, and you'd have a chance of beating the record, too, if you swam as well as you swam to-day!"

And all the rest of that day, after the party had returned to St. Frank's—after the whole school had got over the excitement—Tom Burton thought of Mr. Fielding's words.

But even he doubted if the dream would ever come true!

THE END.

(That dream does come true, however, as you will see for yourselves when you read next week's rousing yarn entitled, "The Schoolboy Channel Swimmer!")

And don't forget, lads, that the early adventures of the St. Frank's boys are now appearing every week in "The Popular," every Tuesday, price 2d.)



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers; send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

The New Serial!

BY this time, I expect, you have all read the opening instalment of Coutts Brisbane's serial, "The Cruise of the Blue Bird," and now I'm anxiously awaiting your verdict. I want you all to write to me and tell me what you think about it. Every boy likes a story containing plenty of thrills and real-life adventure, and this, in my opinion, is just what "The Cruise of the Blue Bird" contains in plenty, with the picturesque and romantic and colourful Southern Seas as the background.

Coutts Brisbane is an expert in handling stories of this kind, and he writes in such a way as to make his readers feel that they are actually with his characters; he paints a fine pen picture of the blue waters of the Pacific, the gently waving palm-trees on the coral-surrounded island against which the foam-crested breakers crash with a thunderous boom.

In Jack Manby and Ned Sutton you have two of the very best; lads you'll come to regard as true pals. And Captain Manby is the type of Britisher everybody admires; strong, calm in the face of danger, brave to the last.

Look out for plenty of thrills in next week's topping instalment.

A "Popular" Companion!

Reggie Pitt of the West House at St. Frank's has thousands of admirers, and to them this paragraph will be of particular interest. Other readers will be equally interested if they are keen to read about the early adventures of Nipper & Co., for there's a series of stories dealing with them now appearing weekly in our companion paper, "The Popular," which is published every Tuesday, price twopence.

This week's story is entitled "How Reggie Pitt came to St. Frank's!" N.L.L. readers are well advised to secure a copy of "The Popular," for in addition to the foregoing there are many other interesting features.

A Great Man Of The Past!

"Jack Straw" (Tadmorden) seems to have been plunging into a giddy exam. Anyway, he asks a question about the Comte de Frontenac. Who was he? This distinguished personage was Governor of New France, otherwise Canada, in the later years of the reign of King Louis the Fourteenth of France. Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac, was born in Bearn, the native place of Henry the Fourth of France. The Comte made a good Governor, and worked for the prosperity of Canada when France had an empire in the West. He developed trade, showed himself a first-class administrator, and was fair to the Indians, who respected him. Biographers say the man had a bad temper, but he did not show it to the Red Indians. He died at Quebec in 1698.

Which Is Biggest?

There has been a pretty hot argument at Chorley as to which is the biggest school, namely St. Frank's, Greyfriars, St. Jim's, or Rookwood. A staunch partisan of Handy's establishment vowed St. Frank's took the palm. As a matter of fact, Greyfriars was always supposed to be the largest school,

(Continued overleaf.)

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OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

(Continued from previous page.)

with St. Jim's and St. Frank's coming in a dead heat for second place. There is not much in it, anyway, seeing that all are top in their special line.

Fencing, Skating and Languages!

F. Hoadley, 62, Nasmyth Street, Hammer-smith, London, W., sends me a particularly interesting letter about the League. He wants to hear from readers in France and Germany about fencing, etc. He writes and speaks both French and German. Congratulations to him on this fact. He should find no difficulty in getting pen clubs in Europe.

Special!

W. Brand, Gleehurst, Arnold Road, Pottswood, Southampton, wants to hear from cycling readers. He is starting on a bike trip from his town to Wales via Bristol, and back via Liverpool, Worcester, Gloucester and Newbury. A grand tour. G. Buck, 20, Hornerton Terrace, Hornerton, London, E. 9, has a collection of 700 stamps for sale. Now then, philatelists. Miss Vera Masters wishes to hear from girl readers interested in films and music. Address, 10, High Street, East Grinstead. She reads the "N.L.L." and "Gem." and thinks them just right. Girl Guide Olive Gillard, 396, Sharrowvale Road, Hunters Bar, Sheffield, would like to hear from some of the many girl readers of the "N.L.L."

Habla v. Espanol?

That means: Do you speak Spanish? James L. O'Vell, 115, O'Vell Road, Ipswich, does speak the language of the hidalgos, and he would like to correspond with readers who can also chat in the tongue of Spain. Harry Morgan, Liverpool, does not know how to join the League. He has only to send in the name of a new reader on the form which is printed from time to time in the "N.L.L." Then a certificate and badge of membership will be sent to him.

League Members Please Note!

From now onwards all correspondence appertaining to the St. Frank's League should be addressed to:

St. Frank's League,
5, Tallis House,
Carmelite Street,
London, E.C.4.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

A. Briceon, 5, Carlton Mews, Pall Mall, London, S.W., would like to obtain the series concerning "Petticoat Rule at St. Frank's." Write stating price.

Ronald E. Wright, 56, Napier Street, Ardwick, Manchester, wishes to correspond with London members. Interested in painting and cartoon work.

G. Johnson, 72, Cobden Street, Leicester, wishes to correspond with readers in Colonies.



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