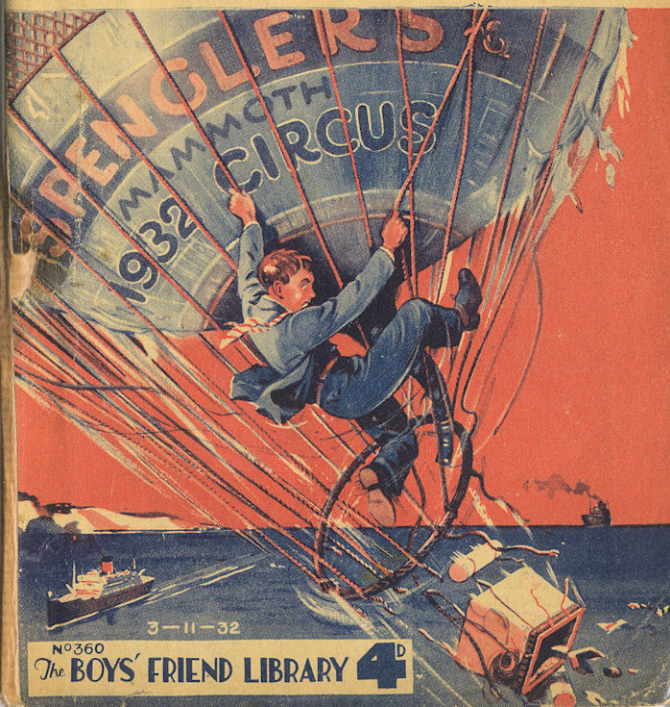


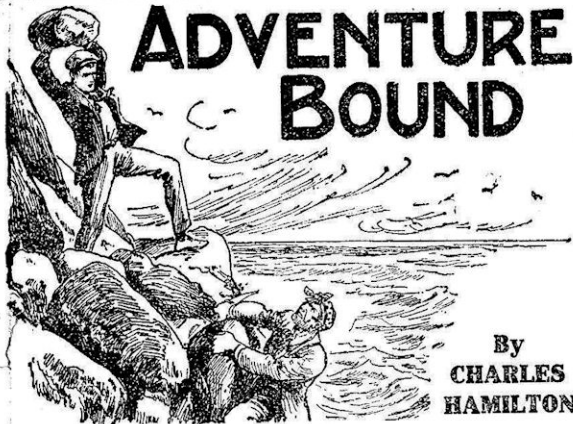
# ADVENTURE BOUND

*Tip-Top Story of Danger and Excitement*  
BY CHARLES HAMILTON



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# ADVENTURE BOUND

By  
**CHARLES  
HAMILTON**

*All his life Bunny has been looking for adventure—real adventure, thrilling quests in tropic seas and strange, foreign lands, with a spice of nerve-tingling danger and excitement thrown in. And he might still have been waiting for it to turn up, if he hadn't made up his mind to have that balloon ride, or if— But that's the story, a vivid, swift-moving yarn of startling experiences that might have happened to YOU!*

## CHAPTER 1.

On Margate Sands.

"**B**UNNY!"

Jack Hare did not immediately answer. It would have been wise to answer at once; for there was a sharp note in his uncle's voice, which showed that Mr. Austin Hare was rather cross that morning.

But Jack was busy and bothered. It was one of Jack's duties to water the garden at Wistaria Villa before breakfast, and he was having trouble

with the hose. He had fixed it successfully to the tap under the kitchen window, but for some reason the water would not come on.

With a waterless hose in his grasp, surrounded by a dry and arid garden, Jack had forgotten breakfast.

Mr. Hare stood in the doorway of the breakfast-room and called. Mr. Hare was the soul of punctuality. Every morning he left Wistaria Villa at 8.40 to the second, to catch the 9.10 at Margate Station for London and business. Breakfast was at 8.15;

and there was trouble at 8.16 if the Hare family were not all present.

His nephew, Jack, was not punctual. He ought to have been. His uncle had often told him so. His aunt had told him still oftener. Mr. Hare had explained to him that punctuality is the politeness of princes. Mrs. Hare had impressed upon him that procrastination is the thief of time.

But proverbial wisdom seemed lost on Bunny. Perhaps he inherited a certain carelessness of character from his father—a, rather irresponsible young man who had disappeared some years ago and was seldom mentioned in the family.

Perhaps Bunny gave too much thought to the big world that lay outside the garden walls of Wistaria Villa; beyond the sands of Margate; beyond the North Foreland.

He never saw a fishing ketch put out into the estuary of the Thames without following it with his thoughts to the deep sea, and when a great ship passed in view, far out at sea, Jack's eyes followed it longingly till it vanished in the blue.

For Bunny was only fourteen, and at fourteen the world was a wonderful place. And just beyond the horizon there were great marvels and thrilling adventures.

Which was probably the reason why Jack was having trouble with the hose. For in the distance a deep blue sky, flecked with white clouds, met a deeper blue sea, and against the blue glanced white and brown sails. Bunny's thoughts had fixed more on those glancing sails than on his uncle's tulip beds.

"Bunny!" Even his uncle called him Bunny. His name being Jack Hare, facetious fellows had, of course, turned it into Jack Rabbit, from which transition to "Bunny" was easy. And "Bunny" seemed to suit Jack somehow.

For although he is the hero of this story, it may as well be confessed at

once that he was not one of those brilliant, efficient fellows who do everything in exactly the right way at the right time.

His uncle and aunt regarded him as the fool of the family. His cousin, Gilbert, expressed it more forcibly as the fathead of the family. People are said to learn by making mistakes. If that was the case, Jack Hare must have learned a lot, for his mistakes were many.

"Bunny!" hooted Mr. Hare.

"Yes, uncle! Just coming!" called back Bunny, wrestling despairingly with the hose, which was still as dry as the Sahara desert or a lecture from his uncle.

Mr. Hare stepped out at the door. He gave a severe glance round the arid garden, and a still more severe glance at his nephew.

"You have not watered the garden, John!" he said accusingly.

Bunny groaned. When his uncle called him "John" it meant that the atmosphere was growing very electric.

"The water won't come on, uncle!" he said weakly.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Hare.

"I've tried and tried——"

"Nonsense!"

"Really and truly, uncle——"

Mr. Hare took the hose from his nephew. Not a trickle of water came from it. He frowned more deeply.

"It's turned on," said Jack eagerly. "You can see it's turned on, uncle. But the water won't come."

"I can see it is turned on at this end," said Mr. Hare in a deep voice. "But have you turned it on at the other end, at the garden tap?"

Bunny started.

"I—I—I think so!" he stammered.

"You think so?" said Mr. Austin Hare in a withering voice. "You do not know—you only think so! Still, I am pleased to hear that you think at all. It is news to me—and very gratifying news."

Bunny wriggled. His uncle had a gift of sarcasm, often exercised at poor Bunny's expense.

"Gratifying as it is to me to learn that you are capable of thought," continued Mr. Hare, "I should still like to know whether the garden tap is turned on or not."

"I—I think——"

"It has not occurred to you to ascertain?" inquired Mr. Hare, still pungently sarcastic. "Your intellect has stirred, but not so far as that? You do not think it worth while to walk across to the tap and ascertain whether you have been idiot enough to leave it turned off?"

"I—I'll go at once, uncle——"

"Don't hurry!" said the sarcastic Mr. Hare. "I can easily miss my breakfast; or, alternately, I can miss my train. Business considerations are matters of very little moment, compared with staring at ships over the garden wall."

Bunny waited for no more sarcasm. He flew across the garden to the kitchen wall to look at the tap. It was true that he had been thinking of ships and bronzed sailors and foreign lands and palm trees and strange tongues when he fixed the hose to the tap. It was quite possible that he had forgotten to turn it on.

And he had! The mystery of the waterless hose was explained at once when Jack reached the garden tap. It was still off!

Mr. Hare was holding the hose. He was holding it with the nozzle in his hand, pointing upward at his chin, while he watched his nephew with a sarcastic eye and waited for news. He expected Bunny to call out.

But Bunny, having wasted so much time already, remembered that punctuality was the politeness of princes, and that procrastination was the thief of time. He rectified his omission at once, turning on the garden tap immediately he reached it.

There was a gurgle of water in the hose. Swish!

"It's coming, uncle——"

It had come. From the nozzle of the hose shot a spurt of water, which caught Mr. Hare just under the chin. The yell that broke from Mr. Hare awoke every echo of Wistaria Villa, and must have been heard as far as Margate sands and the bandstand.

Mr. Hare dropped the hose as if it had suddenly become red-hot. He staggered back, drenched with water.

But it was really not judicious to drop a hose now in full play. The stream of water played on Mr. Hare's right leg—as he hopped it caught his left. It was still less judicious for a gentleman in such circumstances to lose his temper completely and kick the hose away. But that was what Mr. Hare did, and the wretched thing twisted over and shot a stream of water into his waistcoat.

"Yow-owoooooop!" roared Mr. Hare.

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Bunny. He rushed to retrieve the hose. He grasped it, and swung it away from his uncle. His only thought—and a very right and proper thought—was to save his relative from further drenching.

He grabbed the hose and swung the nozzle round. It was sheer ill-fortune that brought Mrs. Hare and Gilbert Hare to the door of the breakfast-room at the same moment, to look into the garden to see what the matter was.

What the matter was they learned immediately, as Jack swung the hose round and it played on them instead of Mr. Hare. There was a shriek from Mrs. Hare, and she faded out of the picture instantly. There was a roar from Jack's cousin.

"You young fathead! Turn that off!" roared Gilbert.

"Oh dear!" gasped poor Bunny.

He swung the hose away at once. No fellow could do more. Jack was



not to blame because Mr. Hare, rushing towards the house, came immediately into the line of fire again as the hose swung. This time the stream caught him in the right ear.

"You dangerous young idiot!" yelled Gilbert. He rushed across to Bunny. "Look here!"

Jack looked, as bidden. Naturally, as he turned, the hose turned with him. Gilbert got the benefit of it. The rush of water swept him fairly off his feet. He sat down in a pool of water, spluttering.

"Groooogh! Ooooch! Wooooch!" spluttered Gilbert.

"Bring me my stick!" Mr. Hare was bawling. "Jane! Gilbert! Bring me my stick! Bring me my stick immediately!"

Bunny, as already stated, was not one of those brilliant fellows. But without being as bright as polished steel, Bunny could guess what the stick was wanted for. It was borne in on Bunny's mind that a prompt retreat was indicated. He dropped the hose and negotiated the garden wall. It was only common sense to give Gilbert time to cool down and Mr. Hare time to catch his train to the City. Bunny headed for Margate sands.

Only a minute elapsed before Mr. Hare had his stick in his hand. But by that time Bunny had elapsd also.

## CHAPTER 2.

From Foreign Parts!

THE foreign-looking sailorman was lying on the sands, his shoulders propped against a jutting chalk rock, staring idly out to sea, smoking a thin brown cigarette that had a scent as pungent as a cigar. Bunny could not help looking at him as he came along.

Bunny had been in a rather worried frame of mind when he

quitted Wistaria Villa for parts unknown. But Bunny had a cheerful disposition, and worries never troubled him long.

He was walking along the sunny stretch of beach from Margate to Kingsgate, under the chalk cliffs. The tide was out, the sands shone in the summer sunshine, and there was a healthy smell of seaweed. That beach was probably one of the healthiest spots in the wide world. And Bunny could not help feeling merry and bright as he tramped the shining sands and drew in deep breaths of keen ozone-laden sea breeze. He was forgetting his troubles, and he forgot them still more completely when he sighted the foreign-looking man on the beach.

Bunny came to a stop and looked at the man.

The mere sight of him awakened all Bunny's dreams of far lands and foreign skies. He had a swarthy complexion, black eyes under jet-black lashes, and wore gold earrings in his ears. Bunny had never seen ear-rings in a man's ears before, and they quite fascinated him. And the man wore a red handkerchief twisted round his head in place of a hat.

He looked remarkably like one of the pirates of whom Bunny had read in books of adventure. But Bunny realised that he could hardly be a pirate. Pirates existed no longer, except in print. And Margate had never been a resort for pirates.

But the man evidently belonged to foreign parts. And Bunny, as he looked at him, thought of the blue seas, bluer than the waters that rolled off the North Foreland, of sunny skies, sunnier than the sky of Thanet, of enchanting coral isles set in glittering reefs, of birds of paradise and many-coloured parrots, and coconuts bunched on tall, slanting palm-trees.

The man, as he rolled a fresh cigarette, looked round suddenly, and

Bunny blushed deeply—realising that he had been staring at the stranger for many minutes. The black eyes, keen as a hawk's ran over Bunny, and the foreign-looking man smiled. Perhaps something in Bunny's chubby face made him smile. Bunny was about to pass on, when the man called to him.

"Ahoj, shipmate!" Foreign as he looked, he spoke English, though with a soft lisping accent that was music to Bunny's ears.

Bunny came towards him. To be hailed as "shipmate" by a foreign-looking sailorman was sheer joy to the romantic Bunny. This was just the sort of thing that happened in the adventure books that Bunny devoured in great quantities. He would not have been surprised to discover that the man had the chart of a treasure island tattooed on his brawny chest.

Bunny really had no time to waste if he was going to walk along the sands as far as Kingsgate. For the tide had turned and was coming in. And when the tide was in, the waves washed right up to the chalk cliffs at most points along the shore. And the cliffs were mostly as steep as the wall of a house. Here and there were gullies by which one could clamber up. But they were few and far between, and it really was not safe to risk being caught by the tide.

But Bunny was not thinking of that now.

"Yes?" he said. "Did you call me?"

"Si, senior!" answered the sailorman.

Bunny was enchanted. He knew that "Si, senior!" was Spanish, and that it meant "Yes, sir!" But it was the first time that such delightful words had ever fallen on Bunny's ears. Nobody had ever said "Si" in Margate. They said "Yes," and sometimes "Yus." And Bunny had heard American visitors say "Yep." Bunny felt that he was entering the realms of romance!

"What's the time, sir?" continued the man with the ear-rings.

Bunny would have preferred to hear the question in Spanish, though there would have been the drawback that he would not have understood it.

He took out his watch. Bunny had a very handsome gold watch, a present long ago from his father. His father had never been able to afford expensive presents, but it was a characteristic of Eustace Hare that he had generally bought things that he could not afford.

Perhaps that was one of the reasons why Bunny's father had departed for unknown spaces, leaving behind him many persons who were anxious to discover his address!

The black eyes of the foreign sailorman snapped at sight of the gold watch.

"Just eleven," said Bunny.

"Gracious!" said the man with the ear-rings, which Bunny guessed to mean "Thanks!"

He yawned, rose to his feet, and lighted another cigarette, which he rolled first in his brown hands. The pungent scent of that cigarette tickled Bunny's nose delightfully. Bunny, of course, did not smoke, and he did not care for the scent of the cigarettes that were common enough on Margate beach. But there was something strange and foreign and delightful in a cigarette that smelt like a strong cigar.

Bunny would have been glad of a talk with the man with the ear-rings, and to hear from him tales of the strange lands whence he came. It seemed as if the sailorman read his thoughts.

"Now I must hurry, or I shall miss my ship!" he said. "It is possible—yes?—to walk along this beach to reach Broadstairs?"

"The tide will be in," said Bunny. "But you can walk a good distance, and I can show you a way up the cliffs, if you like."

"You go—yes?—the way I go?" asked the sailorman.

"Yes. I'm walking as far as Kingsgate," answered Bunny.

"Muy bien!" said the man with the ear-rings.

And he started along the sands with Bunny. It was not the "season" at Margate, and there were few people on the sands at a distance from the town. At a farther distance there were none, and Bunny and his new friend had the beach to themselves.

The foreign-looking sailorman talked as they went in lisping English, with an occasional phrase in Spanish. He told Bunny that his name was Ruy Pinto—that he came from Cadiz—and he talked of voyages in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. But he did not mention how he happened to be on the beach of Thanet, or anything about his present ship.

Bunny talked, too, of his humdrum life at Wistaria Villa, of his longing to travel in strange lands and across strange seas, of his firm intention to go roaming some day and see the world. And he confided to Ruy Pinto that he had accumulated a little store from his pocket-money for that very purpose, and had changed it into a five-pound note, which he kept tucked away safely in an inner pocket.

Ruy Pinto seemed quite interested in Bunny's talk, especially when he mentioned the five-pound note, and in the course of half an hour he had drawn Bunny's whole history from him.

All the time his keen black eyes were either watching Bunny or scanning the sea, the beach or the cliffs. But Bunny was too interested in his talk, and in his own talk, to notice how extremely watchful Ruy Pinto was. The foreign sailorman came to a halt at last. They were well over a mile from Margate, and Kingsgate was still some distance ahead. On their left lay the wide sea, rolling in to the land. And behind them the water had already reached the cliffs, cutting off any possible return.

They stood in an embayment of the cliffs, which shut them in like walls. But ahead a narrow passage was still left by which one could walk on.

But farther ahead, as Bunny knew, a chalk headland jutted out into the sea, which the tide must be already washing. And at that point further progress was impossible.

They were, in fact, shut into the hollow of the cliffs, as Bunny knew if his companion did not, and there was no gully by which the cliffs could be climbed. Bunny was not alarmed, however, for he knew that beach like a book. And he knew one spot where the cliff could be climbed, a spot known to few, and not visible to the eye of a stranger.

Coming to a halt, the man with the ear-rings looked back at the tide dashing against the white chalk. He looked ahead, where, apparently at least, the way was still open. He looked up at the cliffs, towering seventy feet without a sign of any visible means of ascent.

And he smiled—a very unpleasant smile.

"And now, little senor, we must part," he remarked in his soft voice.

Bunny blinked at him.

"But before we part," continued Ruy Pinto, "you will have the excessive goodness to hand me your gold watch

—"

"Eh?" gasped Bunny.

"I may need to know the time again," said Pinto blandly. "Or possibly I may find other uses for the watch. You will be kind enough to hand me also the banknote you have spoken of, and any loose change that you may have in your pockets. You understand me?"

Bunny understood slowly. His face flushed. A gleam came into his eyes. Jack Hare might be a good deal of an ass in some respects, but he had plenty of pluck. And now that he understood that this rascal had led him to a secluded spot to rob him, he was not frightened but angry and defiant.

"You awful rogue!" he gasped.

Pinto grinned.

"In return for your gold watch and your banknote, little senior, I will give you a word of advice," he said. "Do not make friends so easily with strangers, and do not tell them too much. This advice will be useful to you if by some chance you escape the tide and continue to live. But now the tide is coming in, and I am pressed for time."

"Do you think I'm going to let you rob me?" roared Bunny.

"Si, senior!"

"Then you're jolly well mistaken!" Bunny jumped back, clenched his fists, and his eyes blazed at the swarthy face. "Hands off, you rotter, or I'll jolly well hit out!"

Ruy Pinto stooped, and from the leg of his sea-boot drew a long knife with a wicked-looking curved blade. The bright steel flashed in the sunshine.

"I think you will hand me your watch and your banknote, little senior," he said softly.

Bunny's heart pounded. He gave a wild glance round, but only the sea and the cliffs met his gaze. There was no help at hand. Far out at sea was the brown sail of a fishing-ketch from Broadstairs; too far off for the fishermen to see what was going on on the beach under the shadow of the cliffs.

"I wait, seniorito!" said Ruy Pinto, with a threatening glitter in his black eyes. "I wait!"

The flashing steel made a movement. There was no help for it. Bunny, in deep silence, handed over the watch and the banknote and two half-crowns that formed the total of his worldly wealth. Pinto slipped the plunder into a pocket and restored the knife to the leg of his boot.

"Gracias, seniorito!" he said. But the musical Spanish no longer had a charm for Bunny's disillusioned ears. "You are very good! Adios! I regret to leave you, especially as it appears to me that you will probably be drowned. If you follow me I shall knock you on the head. It would be uncomfortable if you should walk into the town after me,

Remain here, and perhaps the tide may spare you. I truly hope so. Adios, little senior!"

And the man with the ear-rings walked on and disappeared from Bunny's staring eyes beyond the cliffs.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Turning the Tables.

**B**UNNY stood rooted to the sand staring after the swarthy sailor-man till the bulging cliffs hid him from sight.

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Bunny.

There was an expression of deep discouragement on Bunny's chubby, usually cheerful visage. He could not help feeling that his adventure with the foreign seaman, which had begun so agreeably and ended so disagreeably, would, had his relatives known of it, have confirmed them in their belief that he was the fool of the family.

But Bunny's situation was not so serious as the rascal had believed; for in that embayment of the cliffs was the unknown path which was invisible to the eye of a passer-by, but which Bunny had discovered long ago. It was by that path that he had intended to guide Pinto to the upland had the rascal not shown himself in his true colours just then.

Slowly a grin dawned on Bunny's face. He knew his way up the cliff. It was not an easy climb, but he had made it several times already, and could make it again. He was in no danger whatever from the tide now roaring in with great boisterousness.

But the case was different with Pinto. He had gone on round the corner of the cliff where the way was still open, obviously in the belief that it was open all the way ahead. But where the shore curved back beyond that point of chalk there was a jutting headland, as Bunny very well knew, that barred the way. In a few minutes Ruy Pinto would make the discovery that he was caught by the tide.

The tide was coming in rapidly now. Already water was swishing round Bunny's shoes. He moved off towards the cliff, swishes of water following him. He reached the perpendicular chalk and clambered on the rough buttresses at the foot of the cliff. At a height of ten feet further climbing looked impossible. But Bunny knew of a jutting ledge along which a fellow could creep till he reached a gully high above.

Bunny clambered on the ledge and moved actively along it, holding on to the rough surface of the cliff with his hands. It slanted precipitously, was barely a foot wide, and was overhung here and there by bulging chalk. But Bunny was active, and he negotiated the difficult path with ease.

There was a sudden sound of running footsteps on the sand below, and a splashing of sea-boots in water.

Bunny looked down. Round the point of rock where the Spanish sailor had disappeared the man reappeared, running fast and splashing through the water that was now spreading all along the foot of the cliffs.

His swarthy face was set, his black eyes shining. Evidently he had discovered that there was no way along the shore.

Bunny grinned. The man came splashing and panting back into the hollow of the cliffs, where there was still a narrow space, close in, that the tide had not yet reached. This spot was almost directly below Bunny, now twenty feet up the face of the cliff.

"Dios!" he heard the man with the ear-rings exclaim in a panting voice. "Por Dios!"

The man stood close back to the precipitous chalk, staring about him. The waves washed at his feet and receded, to wash in again up to his knees. On either side the tide hemmed him in, and in a few minutes more it would be deep close in to the cliff. The rascal was trapped by the tide!

He looked up—not in expectation of

seeing Bunny, but in a desperate hope of discerning some lodgment on the cliff out of reach of the sea.

He started violently as he saw Bunny looking down at him from twenty feet above. His eyes brightened.

"Nino!" he called out. "There is a path? Yes?" He clambered up the rough chalk, and a rushing wave coming in after him drenched him from head to foot as he clambered.

Bunny hurried on his way. The slanting ledge ended suddenly. But five feet above the spot where it ended was a cavity in the face of the cliff, which widened higher up into a gully.

Bunny reached up to the cavity and drew himself into it. There he stopped. He waited there for the Spanish sailor.

On his own the man would never have found the ledge in the chalk. But he knew which way Bunny must have climbed, and he sought for the ledge and found it. Below him the tide was roaring. Great waves dashed against the cliff and splashed high, drenching Pinto with water as he clambered swiftly and actively along the ledge.

He reached the end where, from the opening in the cliff five feet higher, Bunny watched him coolly. And there was a large, jagged chunk of chalk in Bunny's hand now.

Pinto reached up and grasped the edge of the opening. The next moment he withdrew his hands with a howl of pain as the chunk of chalk came smashing down on his dusky fingers.

"Carambo!" he yelled.

Bunny grinned at him cheerily.

"My turn now!" he said. "Show your paws this way again if you want another rap, Mr. Pinto!"

The man with the ear-rings glared up at him. His black eyes blazed and scintillated with fury.

But Bunny was master of the situation now. The ruffian could not reach him, and assuredly he could not clamber into the opening so long as Bunny stood on guard there with the chunk of chalk in his hands. Indeed,

had Bunny chosen to hurl the chalk, it would have knocked the Spaniard off the ledge into the water that was seething below.

The man with the ear-rings panted with rage.

"Let me come!" he hissed. "Let me pass! The tide——"

"The tide won't reach you there," said Bunny. "It never covers that ledge. You're safe as houses. But you'll get wet!"

A great wave washed in and covered the ledge with water, reaching up the shoulders of the Spaniard as he clung to the cliff. He held on desperately, and the wave receded, leaving the ledge bare. The ledge at its top was well above high-water, but every incoming wave flooded it before receding.

"Boy!" gasped Pinto. "Por Dios! Let me pass! I cannot hold on here—the waves will wash me away——"

Bunny nodded cheerily.

"Very likely!" he agreed.

"Carambo! Do you wish to see me washed away to death before your eyes?" howled Pinto.

"Why not?" said Bunny coolly. "That was what you thought you were leaving me to, wasn't it?"

The tide washed up again, flooding the ledge and the man who clung to the face of the cliff. Pinto held on to the juts of the rock till the water receded. His face was set and desperate now. He clutched at the chalk to draw himself up into the gully. Bunny raised his weapon in both hands, and the Spaniard jerked back to the ledge.

"Just in time!" said Bunny. "If you get this rock on your napper, Mr. Pinto, it will be the very last thing that will happen to you!"

Pinto stooped and straightened up again with his knife in his dusky hand. He could not reach Bunny with the steel, but his hand was thrown back to hurl the knife. Bunny was watching him, and he dodged the flashing steel as it flew. The knife clanged on the chalk.

"Try again!" said Bunny. He picked

up the knife and flung it far into the sea. On the ledge below him the desperate man ground his teeth with rage.

"And now," said Bunny cheerfully, "you can hand over my watch and the banknote, Mr. Pinto. And two half-crowns, if you please. After you've done that I'll let you climb out."

Up came the washing waves again, up to the neck of the desperate man, and receded once more, leaving him streaming with water. He gasped and spluttered and choked.

"Say when you've had enough, old bean!" said Bunny.

The man with the ear-rings groped in his pocket. The watch, the banknote, and the two half-crowns were tossed up into the cavity beside Bunny, who picked them up and slipped them into his pocket. The man below eyed him like a wolf.

"Now let me come!" he gasped.

"No hurry!" said Bunny cheerfully. "I'm not trusting myself in your reach, Mr. Pinto, even without your knife. It will take me five minutes to climb out of this gully. Keep where you are till I'm gone. I warn you that if you climb up I'll drop this rock on your head!"

"Hasten!" panted the man with the ear-rings. "Pronto!"

"Keep your wool on!" Bunny backed out of his sight, and proceeded to clamber up the steep gully. The next minute he looked back. The head and shoulders of the Spaniard were in view as he came up.

Bunny's face set hard. He had no doubt whatever that if the desperate ruffian reached him he would be tossed into the sea. Bunny was not taking that chance. He had warned the rascal, and now he kept his word. The chalk rock left his hand and went thundering down.

But Pinto was watchful as a cat. He dropped back on the ledge again, and the rock rolled over his head and plunged into the sea. After which he was careful to keep out of sight for the stipulated five minutes.

Bunny clambered out of the gully to the green expanse on the top of the cliffs. He did not pause there. The little town of Kingsgate was in sight across the fields, and Bunny cut across the fields at top speed. By the time the drenched and desperate Pinto came clambering out of the gully, his eyes burning with rage and vengeance, Bunny was far away.

Sitting in the Broadstairs motor-bus on his way back to Margate, Bunny could hardly believe that that wild adventure had really happened. He had been in great danger, as he very well knew, and he had turned the tables on a dangerous and desperate ruffian in a way that Bunny felt was very creditable.

He wondered what Gilbert would say if he knew—whether Gilbert would still persist that Bunny was the fathead of the family. Gilbert, he was sure, would never have handled the man with the ear-rings as he, Bunny, had done. Still, it was no use telling Gilbert about it. His cousin would only think that he was romancing.

But Bunny did not want to tell anybody. His own knowledge of that exciting episode was enough for him. It thrilled him to think of it, and he enjoyed the retrospect all the way home to Margate. He was still thinking of it when he walked down the Northdown Road on his way to Wistaria Villa and lunch.

Indeed, he was so deep in happy thoughts that as he crossed the Northdown Road he very nearly walked under a taxicab. Somebody grasped him by the arm and jerked him on to the pavement.

"You silly fathead!" said a familiar voice.

It was his cousin, Gilbert.

"Trying to commit suicide?" asked Gilbert.

"Nunno!" gasped Bunny.

"I've a jolly good mind," said Gilbert,

"to give you such a thundering licking for drenching me with the hose this morning that you wouldn't be able to crawl home on your hands and knees. You made father lose his train—you've given the mater a cold—and you've ruined my grey suit. What makes you such a benighted idiot, Bunny?"

"Look here——" ejaculated Bunny.

"I suppose you can't help it," said Gilbert. "If I thought you could help it, Bunny, I'd give you such a wallop that you wouldn't know your own face afterwards! But you can't help being the fathead of the family!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, buzz off!" said Gilbert, and went on his way.

Bunny drifted homeward. He was still, in Gilbert's opinion, the fathead of the family. Yet he was sure he had handled the man with the ear-rings in a much more masterly manner than Gilbert could possibly have done. He drew comfort from that reflection, and it was a cheery and happy Bunny that arrived at Wistaria Villa—still in a glow of satisfaction from his first adventure.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### The Balloon's Breakaway!

**B**UNNY'S chubby face was bright. He was all eager anticipation.

Gilbert, on the other hand, had a nonchalant air. Gilbert was not the fellow to get excited about so simple a matter as an ascent in a captive balloon at a fair.

Gilbert, in fact, was not quite sure whether the whole affair was not a little beneath his dignity.

Bunny was quite sure that it wasn't beneath his. He was simply longing to find himself rising in the air, with Margate spread out like a map under his eyes, and the whole country unrolled to his gaze as far as the North Foreland, and farther.

Certainly he would have preferred a trip in an aeroplane. But the captive balloon at the fair was available, and



an aeroplane wasn't. Bunny had to cut his coat according to his cloth.

It was a bright, sunny Saturday afternoon, with a wind from the north-west. Mr. Hare had not yet returned from the City, and Mrs. Hare was busy with household duties, when the two cousins left Wistaria Villa and turned into the Northdown Road.

Bunny looked back at the villa in its bright little garden for a moment. Life at Wistaria Villa was not all roses. But Bunny had an affectionate heart, and he was fond of his home and fond of his relations, though his thoughts often turned to the big world outside Margate, and often to his father, who had vanished into that big world many years ago.

It did not occur to Bunny's mind at that moment that he was taking his last look at Wistaria Villa for many a long day.

Gilbert, tall and slim and elegant, lounged along with his nonchalant air of a man of the world. Bunny had to trot to keep up with Gilbert. The blare of a band greeted them as they drew near to the fair-ground, and, though not exactly musical in itself, it was music to Bunny's ears.

"Isn't it jolly?" said Bunny, as they went in.

Gilbert smiled his patronising smile. "Shall we go on the roundabout?" asked Bunny.

"Bit too kiddish for me," answered Gilbert.

"What about the switchback?"

"Give it a miss."

"Oh, all right!" said Bunny a little disappointed, but still cheerful. Nothing at the fair was too "kiddish" for Bunny, but he was accustomed to giving Gilbert his head.

So they arrived at the enclosure where the captive balloon strained at its rope in the north-west wind.

Rather to Bunny's surprise nobody was patronising the captive balloon. The car accommodated six passengers, but nobody was in it. The man in

charge looked round anxiously for patrons and found them not. It was true that the wind was rather fresh and the balloon likely to pitch and roll a good deal when it ascended. Perhaps that caused the public to turn their attention in other directions. Even Gilbert seemed a little dubious now that he had arrived on the spot.

"Step in, gents!" said the man in charge breezily. "Safe as houses, and a bee-yutiful trip! 'Arf a dozen counties to be seen, and France and the Channel! Safe as houses, sir!"

Bunny's eyes shone. On clear days he had seen the far-off cliffs of France from high places in Kent. That was all he had seen, so far, of foreign lands—of which he was destined to see so much. But to look down on a foreign country from a swaying balloon! The thought was intoxicating to Bunny.

"We shall really see France?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

The man gave him a cheery grin.

"You'll see the Froggies a-walking about, sir!" he answered. "Walking and talking jest as plain as if they was on the beach at Margate!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Bunny, who had the enviable faculty of always believing what he was told.

"Step in, gents! Five shillings, please!"

Gilbert glanced at the swaying balloon and then at the sky, where light clouds raced before a high wind.

"Look here, is it safe?" he asked.

"Think I'd let you go up if it wasn't safe, sir? I got my balloon to think of."

That was an unanswerable argument. The loss of Gilbert and Bunny the showman could perhaps have borne with fortitude. But the loss of his balloon would have been a very serious matter. Obviously, he would not have allowed an ascent had he not considered his balloon safe.

Gilbert still seemed to hesitate.

"Come on, Gilbert!" said Bunny, tugging at his sleeve.

"Nobody else is going," said Gilbert. "All the better for us. We shall have the car to ourselves."

With Bunny so eager, Gilbert could not confess to funk. He paid his five shillings and entered the enclosure, and Bunny eagerly followed him in. They took their seats in the car.

But the ascent was not immediate.

The balloon merchant wanted to fill the car if he could. It was adventure to Bunny, but it was business to the showman. For half an hour Gilbert and Bunny sat in the balloon car, while the man exerted his eloquence on passers-by and lookers-on without result. Bunny did not mind. It was exciting to him to sit in the car, with the gas envelope swaying and bellying overhead. But Gilbert grew very impatient.

"Look here! We're not sticking here all the afternoon!" he exclaimed at last. "If there's nothing doing we'll get out."

"'Arf a mo', sir!" said the man.

The half of a "mo" lasted some minutes. But it was clear that nobody else wanted an ascent just then, and the man made up his mind at last.

"Old on!" he said. And he let out the rope that held the balloon.

Bunny had an excited expectation of shooting up into the clouds like an arrow; instead of which the balloon rose quite gently as the rope was paid out.

In ordinary circumstances the captive ballon was as safe as a railway carriage. But now the wind was strong, and it rocked considerably as it rose.

Bunny and Gilbert held on. Bunny breathed deep, and his eyes danced with delight. Gilbert was not looking delighted.

"Blessed if I half like this!" grunted Gilbert.

"It's fine!" exclaimed Bunny.

"Nobody else was risking it," said Gilbert uneasily.

"Well, the man wouldn't risk having his balloon blown away, you know."

"Not if he knew it," grunted Gilbert. "But he's so jolly keen on business. He's here to make money. If that rope should break——"

Bunny stared. He was so accustomed to acknowledging the superiority of his Cousin Gilbert that it amazed him to see unmistakable signs of funk about that lofty youth.

"But the rope must have held this balloon lots of times," he declared.

"The more it's used the more likely it is to wear out, isn't it?" said Gilbert. "You are a fathead, Bunny!"

Bunny was silent. The rope was paid out to its full length, and the balloon rose two hundred feet over the fair-ground. Bunny gazed out delightedly.

Not only the fair-ground, but all Margate and Cliftonville, Westgate and Kingsgate were spread before his eyes. On one side the green downs, on the other the shining sea. His eyes turned from one to the other, and to the winding Thames and to the North Foreland lighthouse. Tiny in the distance, the motor-bus from Broadstairs crawled into view. Bunny gazed and gazed, and did not notice that Gilbert was keeping his eyes to the interior of the car, and was growing quite pale and troubled. When he looked at Gilbert at last he was surprised by the lack of enjoyment in his face.

"Isn't it ripping?" exclaimed Bunny.

"Don't be a bigger fool than you can help, Bunny!" answered Gilbert. "When the thump is that ass going to wind us down?"

A gust of the north-west wind caught the balloon. It swayed wildly, and the car rocked and spun. They held on, Bunny grinning with glee, and Gilbert looking almost sick. There was a twang from the holding rope, and Gilbert fancied for a moment that it had parted.

He peered over the side at last. The man below was looking up, and Gilbert thought he detected an uneasy expression on the upturned face. He saw the man jump to the pulley that was

used to wind in the rope and bring the balloon back to earth.

The rope was taut now at a slant, the strong wind endeavouring to tear the balloon away from its anchorage, and the car tilted over wildly. Gilbert clung on, white as the chalk in the cliffs that stretched along the sea.

"Oh, dear!" he gasped. "If that rope goes——"

"It won't, old chap!" said Bunny.

"What do you know about it, fat-head?"

"Well, he's winding in now," said Bunny, with a sigh. "It won't last much longer."

Bunny was mistaken on that point. There was no doubt that the rope had seen service, and that the balloon merchant would have been well advised to replace it with a new one before allowing the balloon to ascend in a strong wind. The tug of the pulley at one end, and of the north-west wind at the other, proved too much for the rope.

It parted with a sudden snap.

There was a startled yell below, a gasp from Gilbert, an exclamation from Bunny. The fair-ground became suddenly a sea of upturned faces.

That was the last that Gilbert and Bunny saw of Margate as the balloon, released and spinning dizzily, shot away on the wings of the wind!

#### CHAPTER 5.

#### Up—Up—Up!

"OH, crumbs!" gasped Bunny. Gilbert had flung himself in the bottom of the spinning car, clutching wildly. Bunny held on to a rope, staring about him.

Gilbert—the lofty and patronising Gilbert—lay in a state of palpitating funk. Bunny, rather to his own surprise, was not conscious of anything like fear. Rather he felt himself in a state of throbbing exhilaration.

Always had Bunny longed for adventure. Adventures had always seemed

very far away from Wistaria Villa. But this was an adventure—there was no doubt about that!

The balloon was rising, and the force of the wind in the upper levels was amazing. The clumsy gasbag fairly spun along, revolving and swaying and plunging as it went.

A backward glance showed Margate a dim blur already. Fields and meadows and a railway line glimmered below. On the left was the line of cliffs bordering the sea. So far the runaway balloon was keeping over the land, but it was edging towards the sea, and Bunny's face became serious as he realised it.

Then Bunny made a sudden discovery, which he hastened to communicate.

"We're going down!" he shouted.

"Sure?" Gilbert gasped, sitting up.

"Yes, rather! My hat! I hope we shan't knock off any chimney-pots!" chuckled Bunny.

Gilbert, holding on with both hands, dragged himself to his feet. He ventured at last to peer over the rim of the car.

The balloon was sinking.

Probably the fierce wind had found some weak spot in the gasbag. The gas, at all events, must have been escaping, for the balloon was slowly but surely settling down to lower levels. Fields and cows grazing in them, house-tops and upturned, staring faces were now clear to the eye.

"We're all serene," said Bunny.

"We're near the cliffs—we're drifting out to sea!" Gilbert yelled. "Oh, crumbs!"

"We shall land before then," said Bunny comfortingly. "We're not heading straight for the sea. We've got to be ready to jump when she bumps."

Gilbert shuddered.

The balloon was drifting along more slowly now, as it drew nearer and nearer to the earth. Long minutes passed, which seemed like hours to Gilbert. Slowly, terribly slowly, the balloon sank and sank, and every moment Gilbert

dreaded that a sudden gust of wind might carry it beyond the cliffs, over the shining expanse of water that reflected the sunshine.

There was a crashing sound as the balloon's car, only a few feet up now, dragged away a fence in its career. A man with a plough stood and stared at it blankly, and shouted something that was lost in the wind.

Bump! The car touched the earth, and at the contact shot up again a dozen feet.

"Ow!" gasped Gilbert.

"We'd better hang on outside," suggested Bunny. "Then we can let go next time she bumps, what?"

Gilbert stared at him.

"You mad idiot!" was his reply.

"But it's the best way——"

"Shut up, you dummy!"

Not to save his life would Gilbert Hare have ventured to clamber outside the rocking car. His knees were knocking together.

"You got us into this," he muttered thickly. "You potty clown! You were always the fool of the family! Now you've got us both killed, you dummy."

"We're not killed yet," urged Bunny, "and if we hang on outside the——"

"Shut up!" shrieked Gilbert.

Bunny shut up. His plan was really a good one, given the required nerve. Bunny had the nerve, but the unfortunate Gilbert had not.

It was borne in upon Jack Hare's mind that his cousin was a helpless burden on his hands, and that if Gilbert was to be saved he, Bunny, had to save him. And Bunny, if he was an ass in some respects, had a way of getting his teeth into a problem and worrying it till he pulled it through. He had to save Gilbert, and for the moment he did not think of himself. Which was just like Bunny.

It did not occur to Bunny to be angry or resentful or scornful. His only idea was to soothe and reassure Gilbert and get him safely to land.

"Look here, old chap," he said. "There's a rope here——"

"What's the good of that?" moaned Gilbert.

"I can tie it to you," said Bunny, "and hold on to it. With me holding the rope you can hang on outside the car, and let go when you feel your feet on the ground. If you make a miss I shall have hold of the rope, and you'll be all right."

Gilbert shuddered. The balloon touched earth again, and bounded off. The edge of the cliffs were terribly near now, and at each bump the balloon drew nearer to the sea.

"I—I can't!" gasped Gilbert.

"It's the only way, old chap, if we're not to be carried out to sea," said Bunny soothingly, as if he were speaking to a child. "You've only got to hold on, and the rope will be there, with me holding to it. It's that or jumping out when she bumps."

Gilbert groaned. He had not the nerve to jump out when the balloon bumped. A jump mistimed by the fraction of a second would be fatal.

Bunny picked up the coil of rope, uncoiled it, and began to knot the end round his cousin, under the armpits. Gilbert allowed him to proceed. He was making up his mind to the effort of saving himself. In his concern for himself he was not thinking of Bunny. And neither was Bunny, for that matter.

"Now, old fellow——" murmured Bunny.

"Hold on, then, for goodness' sake!" muttered Gilbert, between chattering teeth.

"I'm holding on."

Gilbert shut his eyes as he climbed out on the rim of the car. He hung outside, holding on convulsively. Only the taut rope, held fast by Bunny, gave him the courage to make the attempt. The balloon settled down slowly on the green expanse of grass over the cliffs, and Gilbert's feet dangled only a yard or so above the grass.

"Ready, old chap!" Bunny was watching with a steady eye. "You're only three feet up now—only two feet—another second——"

Gilbert felt his feet dragging in grass.

"Let go!" shouted Bunny.

Gilbert let go, his feet on earth, and sprawled on the ground. Bunny let go the rope instantly, and it whisked over the rim of the car and fell beside Gilbert.

The balloon, relieved of Gilbert's weight, shot up like an arrow. So sudden and swift was its ascent that Bunny fell backwards in the car.

Bunny had not calculated on the result of the balloon being relieved of the weight of one of its passengers. He had been thinking only of saving Gilbert, and had given no thought to what would follow. What followed was a dizzy flight upwards almost to the clouds.

The car rocked wildly. Bunny clung to a rope and stared dizzily down. He had a glimpse of Gilbert scrambling to his feet in the grass below. And then Gilbert vanished, and the grass was a blur. Up and up and up went the balloon, and all below was blurred to the sight.

"Oh, crumbs!" panted Bunny.

He held on and waited. Sooner or later the balloon would settle down again, and then Bunny would jump. But the balloon was long in settling down this time. And when at last the descent commenced Bunny's gaze rested no longer on green land and white cliffs. The cliffs were a white line far away to his right, and below him rolled the waters of the North Sea.

#### CHAPTER 6.

##### Between Sky and Sea.

**B**UNNY stared about him with wide eyes.

The white cliffs of England were sinking to a low line far away. Beneath the swinging car the North Sea rolled, its wide waters heaving under the summer sunshine. Far in the distance Bunny made out a blur of smoke from a steamer. Closer to the shore was a little yawl with a patched brown sail—

a man standing in it, staring at the drifting balloon. But the yawl quickly dropped out of sight under the chalk cliffs. And the smoke of the steamer was too far off for Bunny to hope for help from that quarter.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bunny once again.

The balloon was still settling down, but very slowly. Sometimes a rush of wind caught it and swept it upward. But on the whole it was settling. And when it settled down into the water, as must happen sooner or later—

Bunny was a good swimmer, but he was too far from land for swimming to be of any avail.

His only hope lay in being picked up by a ship, or by some boat that chanced to be far out from the shore. He scanned the wide sea and failed to discern a boat. And he saw no sign of a ship save that trail of dim smoke that was disappearing northward.

The difference of Gilbert's weight doubtless accounted for the slowness with which the balloon was settling. But whatever was the cause, the descent was so slow as to be almost imperceptible. It would be a long time yet before it touched the waves that heaved below, and while there was life there was hope. If it remained afloat long enough, there were shores beyond the sea that he might reach. Bunny tried hard to recall his geography and make out to what coast the north-west wind was bearing him.

France, or perhaps Belgium—the wind would have to be direct west to carry him to Holland, and it was more north than west. And as he gave his attention to the wind Bunny found that it was veering more and more to the north, and consequently the flight of the balloon—the slave of the wind, was more and more direct to the south. It would be France that he reached, if he lived to reach land.

But it was not likely.

He knew that it was not likely. Yet he dwelt on the thought, and his eyes sparkled at the thought of treading a

foreign shore. It would be rather a catch to land among the Froggies, and Bunny's mind immediately switched off to an effort to remember the French he had learned—which was little enough. Mr. Hare had not been able to afford to send Bunny to an expensive school, and what French he knew he had picked up from Gilbert, who had studied it from a commercial point of view.

The wind was still veering. On Bunny's right the land came out of a dim blur into clear sight again, white cliffs shining in the sun, topped by grass. Then he made out a blur of buildings, and a great building that seemed familiar to his eye—and he remembered that he had seen it on picture postcards. It was Dover Castle.

He was passing over Dover, though at a great distance. And still the wind veered from north to east, and as the land faded away again Bunny knew he was drifting over the channel.

The water was twenty feet below him now; the balloon was settling down by inches, slowly. Bunny recalled that there were—or should be—plenty of craft in the narrow seas. He might, with luck, sight the cross-Channel steamer.

And now there were other white cliffs, other than those of his own country, in sight; cliffs that he had seen from high Kentish downs—the white cliffs of France. Both shores of the Channel were in Bunny's sight as he was drifting on in the runaway balloon.

But it was towards the southern shore, the shore of France, that the wind was carrying the helpless gas-monster. It seemed to have settled down now in the north-east, and it was blowing harder. The sea was heaving in frothy billows, and the spindrift blew and flew.

A boat with a brown sail danced into Bunny's sight. His face brightened, and he waved and shouted.

Two men were in the boat, men in jerseys and woollen caps, with olive faces, and they were staring at Bunny, while one steered and the other

handled the sails. The boat looked like a fishing craft, rigged as a cutter, and it was running before the wind for the French coast—Calais or Boulogne. Bunny could guess. Whether it was a French or English boat he could not tell, but the two seamen in it had a foreign look to his eyes.

He waved his cap and shouted. The boat was ahead of him, and he calculated that the wind would carry his voice to the seamen.

"Help!" shouted Bunny. "Stop for me, will you? Help!"

They stared at him and shouted back, but the wind carried their words away from him. The balloon, slanting before the wind, was moving faster than the boat, and Bunny feared that the swinging car might foul the sail. But the man at the tiller saw the danger and shifted his course. For some minutes the balloon drifted along by the fleeting boat, and Bunny, reaching out, could almost have touched the brown, patched sail. He shouted to the men below, who continued to stare at him; and now he caught their voices.

"Voyes! C'est un garçon!"

"D'ou venez vous, petit?"

Evidently they were French. Apparently they did not realise that the voyager was in danger, but supposed simply that he was crossing the Channel in a balloon. Bunny made a desperate effort to recall his French.

"A moi!" he shouted. "A l'aide!"

That was the way he called for help in French. Though even as he called Bunny could not help thinking that it was a queer way of putting it, for the men in the boat certainly could not come to his aid, though no doubt they would pick him up when he fell.

He saw that he was understood. One of them waved a brown hand to him and shouted.

Bunny looked down and drew a deep breath. He was fifteen feet now from the water tossing and churning in white foam. The boat danced on the sea like a cork. If he dropped, could they pick

him up before he went down like a stone? It was dubious, and Bunny gave a look towards the French cliffs, growing larger and whiter to the south. Already he could make out buildings on the shore—a hilly town, with a great white building close to the sea—ships and boats in a harbour—

To jump or take his chance of drifting ashore, that was the question for Bunny. It was resolved for him by the wind, which gave a sudden terrific gust and bore the balloon away from the vicinity of the boat. Bunny clung to the car as it heeled over, almost on its side. And for some minutes he had to hold on for his life.

When he was able to look down again the boat was distant. But it was following the balloon, the seamen evidently intending to stand by, if they could, and pick him up when he fell.

But the balloon, whirling in the wind, fled on faster than the fishing-boat could follow. The brown sail grew tiny astern, and the men in the boat became tiny figures in Bunny's eyes.

That chance was gone. If the balloon sank low, the boat would be too far astern for the French seamen to pick him up. Bunny set his teeth. The gusty wind carried the balloon higher, but only for a space. It settled down again, lower and lower. The gas was escaping faster now. The gas envelope was never intended, or planned, for such a voyage as this. The fierce wind beating on it had found many weak spots.

It seemed to the hapless Bunny that the sea was rushing up to meet him. He stared away towards the shore.

The coast of England was lost to his sight now; but the French shore was near. The balloon would never reach it. Bunny stared around the car for something to throw out to lighten it; but there was nothing detachable—nothing to help him.

There came a sudden swishing of water. The crest of a mountain wave had struck the car.

It was a matter of minutes now, and

the French shore, near as it looked, was still terribly far off. A few minutes—and then a plunge into the heaving Channel. Bunny could see figures on the shore and on the cliffs, their faces staring towards him.

There was still a chance, and he was still cool and clear-headed, ready to make the most of it. He took out his pocket-knife and opened the largest blade. He clambered into the network that held the gasbag, and slashed fast and hard at the ropes that held the car.

The knife was sharp, and Bunny's hand was strong—and desperate. Rope after rope parted under his slashes.

The car was dragging in the sea. Now it held on by a single rope, like an anchor to the sagging, whirling mass to which Bunny hung. He cut desperately at the rope.

It parted. The car slid into the water and vanished from Bunny's eyes, as the gasbag, relieved of its weight, shot upwards on the wind. Bunny, clinging to the ropes, was carried up from the sea—higher and higher, spinning breathlessly as the balloon spun upward and onward.

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## CHAPTER 7.

### Stranded!

**W**ITH hands and arms and legs Bunny held on, his brain in a whirl, his breath coming and going in spasmodic gasps.

The upward rush ceased at last. A hundred feet below now the sea heaved and frothed and billowed. Over him the gasbag sagged and wallowed. Great hollows were in its side as the gas escaped faster.

Very soon it was settling down again, and the shore was close. And as he hung and spun, Bunny glimpsed the white cliffs, and the hilly town, and the great white building, and the staring crowd. People seemed to have swarmed from everywhere to stare at the wreck of the balloon, with the boy clinging to it.



He swung on, hanging to the collapsing balloon—fearing every moment that it would totally collapse and drop, enveloping him in its folds. But the wind drove it on shoreward, slanting down from a height that promised to carry Bunny safely over the cliffs. Sometimes the shore, and the buildings, and the gazing crowd, disappeared from his sight—then he would see them again, closer and closer. Half Boulogne seemed to have turned out to greet this strange voyager.

Spinning and whirling, onward he went. He was sinking—sinking—but there was land below him now—land and a forest of hats and upturned faces. And still the wind carried him on, whirling over the heads of an excited, shouting French crowd.

His feet brushed something. It was a hat. The hat went west, and a startled face stared up, and Bunny heard an ejaculation.

"Mon Dieu! Mon chapeau!" gasped the Frenchman.

Bunny passed on, leaving the excited Gaul jumping after his hat. Hands grabbed at Bunny, with friendly intent, and missed him. Just when it seemed practical to drop, the wind lifted the balloon again, and Bunny was glad that he had not let go. Up he went—followed by a roar of voices.

Then Bunny was coming down again. That lift of the wind was the last effort of the expiring balloon. Once more Bunny's dragging feet established contact—this time with the back of a waiter's neck, on an esplanade overlooking the sea. There were little tables set about, with people round them taking coffee or smoking, and a waiter emerged—in an unfortunate moment for himself—from a door with a tray of coffee cups. It was the terrace of the casino, if Bunny had known it, which he did not.

The waiter caught both Bunny's feet with the back of his neck, plunged forward in great surprise, and crashed. He rolled in coffee and smashed cups, and roared.

People were on their feet on all sides.

There was a roar of voices, in French and English. Bunny dropped.

The balloon shot away as he dropped, once more relieved of weight and given a new lease of life. It sailed away on the wind over the roof of the casino, vanished from Bunny's eyes and Bunny's knowledge, and where it finally came down, or whether it ever came down at all, Bunny never knew and never cared.

Bunny knew where he came down himself—on a coffee-table, which crumpled under him and landed him on the terrace in a sitting posture.

He sat and gasped for breath. He had landed at last.

People gathered round him in a staring circle. The man who had been taking coffee at the crumpled table, and who had had a narrow escape of being crumpled himself, spoke in English.

"You thundering young fool, what sort of a game do you call this?"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bunny.

French voices buzzed round him, in every tone of astonishment. Through the excited circle a man in uniform pushed his way. Way was made for him, with the respect that in France a uniform always commands.

It was a gendarme. He stopped in front of Bunny, and stared at him.

"Vous arrivez d'Angleterre?" he demanded.

"Eh?" said Bunny. He stood up, made a mental effort, and grasped the question.

"Yes; I've arrived from England!" he answered.

"You young ass!" exclaimed the man whose table Bunny had wrecked, and Bunny glanced at him. He saw a rather tall, slim, well-dressed man, with a thin, keen face. "The bobby doesn't understand you."

"Is he a bobby?" asked Bunny.

"Yes—a gendarme."

"Ecoutez!" said the gendarme, tapping Bunny on the shoulder. "Vous venez ici d'Angleterre, n'est-ce-pas?"

"Say out, you young ass!" said the Englishman.

"Oui!" said Bunny. "Yes, old bean. Oui, oui, oui!"

"Montrez votre passeport, alors!"

"The bobby wants to see your passport, kid," said the tall Englishman.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bunny. "I haven't any passport, old thing. I hadn't time to get a passport before I was blown away in that balloon!"

The tall Englishman intervened.

"You were blown away in that balloon, kid?"

"Yes," said Bunny, "from Margate."

"It's clear that there's such a thing as fool's luck," said the Englishman. "Leave this to me—I'll explain it to the gendarme."

He turned to the officer, and fluent French streamed from him. Fluent French streamed also from the gendarme. Alternately they poured out words. And then the Englishman raised his hat, and the gendarme saluted, and with mutual smiles and politeness they parted.

Then the Englishman turned to Bunny again and scanned his chubby face with a curious look.

"I've made it all right for you," he said. "Know anybody in Boulogne?"

"No."

"Then you're stranded here?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd better come with me."

And Bunny, as there seemed nothing else to be done, was of the same opinion. He went! -

## CHAPTER 8.

### Dumbfounded!

"**B**ONJOUR, m'sieur!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Bunny.

He sat up in bed, and blinked at the French waiter. Bunny had slept soundly. But he had been dreaming of Wistaria Villa, and the sands of Margate, of the fair there, and of the runaway balloon which had carried him across the Channel into France.

He woke up, expecting to find himself

in his room in Uncle Hare's house at Margate.

Instead of which, he was in a room at the Fleur d'Or, in the French town of Boulogne-sur-Mer, and a French waiter was bringing in a tray of coffee and rolls—his breakfast.

He rubbed his eyes and blinked at the man.

"Bonjour, m'sieur!"

"That means 'Good-morning!' doesn't it?" asked Bunny. "Oh, and is that brekker?" he demanded, looking at the tray.

"Le dejeuner, m'sieur."

"I know brekker is dejeuner, old bean!" said Bunny. "But if you think this is a real brekker, you want educating on the other side of the Channel. When I'm at home—chez moi, you know," he explained—"I can generally scoff rashers and eggs for brekker!"

The waiter, having placed the tray on a table by Bunny's bed, made a gesture with both hands, signifying that he did not understand. Then he bowed and retired, leaving Jack Hare to a breakfast of rolls and coffee and thin honey.

Bunny was not accustomed to breakfast in bed. But he was tired after his adventure of the previous day, and quite willing to conform to the customs of the country in that respect.

He rather missed his usual substantial English breakfast, but he did full justice to the provender, such as it was. While he ate he reflected.

He was in Boulogne—in France—in a foreign country! There was joy for Bunny in that knowledge. His desire to travel had been gratified quite suddenly and unexpectedly by the runaway balloon from Margate fair.

In this strange town, in a strange land, he had been lucky enough to find a friend—a friend in need. That was satisfactory, so far as it went. But Bunny wondered what was to follow. Still, he was not worrying. He seldom worried. He had dispatched a telegram to his uncle at Margate, to tell that he

was safe. So his relatives would not be worrying about him. Neither did Bunny see any cause to worry.

He had nearly finished his breakfast when there was a tap at the door, and a tall man, with an eyeglass in his eye, came in.

It was the tall Englishman on whose table, on the terrace of the casino, Bunny had plumped down when he dropped from the runaway balloon.

"Good-morning, sir!" Bunny gave him a cheerful nod.

Mr. Herbert Earle—that was the name he had mentioned—gave Bunny a nod, and sat down on a chair astride, leaning his arms on its back, facing Bunny, with a cigarette in his mouth.

"Feeling fit?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!" answered Bunny.

He looked rather curiously at his new friend. Mr. Earle had befriended him—taken him in tow, led him to the Fleur d'Or, stood him a supper, and engaged a room for him at his own cost.

That, Bunny felt, was exceedingly kind of Mr. Earle. It was the way an Englishman should act towards a fellow-countryman stranded by accident in a foreign country.

Still, such kindness to a total stranger was unusual. And Bunny, as he scanned Herbert Earle's face in the clear morning light, did not read in it such signs of generosity and kindness as might have been expected from what he had done for the castaway.

Bunny was far from having a doubting or suspicious mind. Still, he wondered a little why that rather hard-faced young man had stood by him in such a generous way.

"You've told me," said Mr. Earle, lighting another cigarette, "that you were blown away in a showman's balloon from a fair at Margate.

"That's so," said Bunny.

"Yet you came across the Channel alive!"

"I had a lot of luck!"

"So I thought!" said Mr. Earle.

There was a long pause, during which Bunny finished his breakfast and Mr. Earle smoked several cigarettes.

"From what you've told me about yourself, my boy," went on Mr. Earle at last, "I should think you a good deal of an ass!"

Bunny coloured.

"Well, that isn't news to me," he said. "My uncle says I am the fool of the family. My Cousin Gilbert says I am a born fathead. I don't see it myself. I generally seem to land on my feet, anyhow!"

"Exactly," said Mr. Earle. "You are lucky! You have what is called fool's luck. I have come on such cases before. It is better to be a lucky fool than an unlucky wise man, Hare!"

"Well, that's something to be thankful for, then!" said Bunny cheerfully. "So long as my luck lasts, I won't grumble!"

"I saw such a case only a few days ago," said Mr. Earle, "at the casino. I saw an absolute thick head, playing with utter recklessness, win, while careful players like myself, calculating every move of the game, lost!"

"Did you?" said Bunny rather vaguely.

Bunny had heard of the casino at Boulogne, and he knew that a gambling game was played there called la boule, as in most French seaside resorts. But that was all he knew, and he was not curious to know more.

But it dawned upon him now that Mr. Earle was a regular frequenter of the casino.

It was on the terrace of that establishment that Bunny had fallen in with him—in fact, nearly fallen on him. And the lines on his face, the restless glinting of his eyes, told something, even to an inexperienced youth like Bunny. It occurred to him that Herbert Earle was an habitual gambler.

If so, Bunny's opinion was that, if there was a fool in the room, the fool's name was not Jack Hare. Bunny might be a bit of an ass, but a fellow had to

be a whole and complete ass to put good money on a gaming-table!

Bunny did not state that opinion, however. He waited politely for Mr. Earle to continue.

"Do you believe in luck?" asked Mr. Earle.

"Never thought about it!" answered Bunny.

"Probably you have never thought about anything!" said Mr. Earle, with a touch of sarcasm that reminded Bunny of his uncle at Margate. "Well, I believe in luck! An ounce of luck is worth more than a ton of experience. I've never had any luck. I've tried mascot after mascot, but it was always the same. No luck!"

Bunny stared. He wondered whether it was possible that any man in possession of his senses really believed that mascots could bring luck. Apparently Mr. Earle did.

But a gambler, after all, would believe in anything. He would believe anything except that he was a fool to gamble.

"Now," said Mr. Earle, "you're stranded here. I've stood your friend. You've told me that you lived with relations in England, and that you felt that you ought to get a job if you could. I'm going to offer you a job!"

Bunny brightened wonderfully.

"I say, sir, that's awfully good of you!" he exclaimed. "I'll jump at it, whatever it is. I just want to earn my daily bread!"

"It is an easy job, and a well-paid job," said Mr. Earle. "I'll give you a day's trial first, and see how it turns out. For the day, your pay will be two hundred francs. And here it is!"

He tossed a couple of hundred-franc notes on to the bed.

"Your morning's your own," he went on. "Turn up to lunch here at two o'clock. After that I shall want you. That's all for the present."

And he quitted the room, leaving Bunny dumbfounded.

## CHAPTER 9.

## Bunny's New Job.

BUNNY spent most of the morning wandering about the streets of Boulogne, staring at the craft in the harbour, taking rides on trams, and trying to understand the incessant clatter of a foreign tongue that was in his ears all the time.

It was a happy morning. Seldom, indeed, had Bunny been so happy. Many people glanced at his fresh, cheery, chubby face as he roved about Boulogne, and smiled.

Mr. Earle had told him that he was lucky, and Bunny could quite believe it. He was on his travels, and he had already bagged a job of which the pay was munificent. Two hundred francs, even at the present rate of exchange, was well over two pounds. And that was a day's pay—or, rather, half a day's pay, as his task, whatever it was, was not to commence till after lunch.

It was really delightful. Bunny wondered what his cousin Gilbert would have said to that, and whether his uncle and his aunt would still have considered him the fool of the family.

For a long time he had yearned to earn his own bread. Now—judging by his first day's pay—he was going to earn fourteen pounds a week. This was seven times as much as he wanted, and would leave an ample margin for sending something home to Wistaria Villa, where money was needed. That was a glorious prospect!

What he was to do in return for that munificent salary Bunny did not know. But he did not care what it was—he was going to do it, with heart and soul. Apart from the generous scale of pay, he was eager to serve the generous man who had befriended him.

But Bunny did not give all his thoughts to his new job and his salary. The sights and sounds of a foreign town were intensely interesting to a fellow who had never been abroad before.

He wandered down to the quay and watched the ships and the fishing-craft,

and particularly a handsome yacht that was moored close in. It was a very handsome yacht, and Bunny, who loved ships, stared at it long. A couple of very neat seamen on the deck were talking in English, so Bunny guessed that it was an English yacht; moreover, the name of it was the Albatross, which was English.

Bunny wondered to what fortunate man that beautiful yacht belonged, and wished himself in that fortunate gentleman's shoes. Had that yacht belonged to Bunny it would not have been lying at moorings; it would have been skimming the blue Mediterranean or the waves of the Pacific!

A man in a peaked cap came down to the quay while Bunny was admiring the yacht, and called to a man on board:

"Tell Rawlings to have steam up at nine."

Then he strolled away.

"That means we're going home," said one of the men on deck to the other.

"Time, too," grunted the other. "We've been hanging on here long enough waiting for his nibs to paint the town red."

"His nibs," Bunny concluded, was the owner of the yacht, apparently engaged in having a good time at Boulogne-sur-Mer.

He wondered at the two seamen being so keen to go back to England. But probably Boulogne was not so novel to them as it was to Bunny.

It was nearly two o'clock now, and Bunny decided to take a taxi back to the Fleur d'Or. With so much money in his pocket he could afford it.

A French taxi was a remarkable new experience for Bunny. He had seen reckless driving at home, but this made him jump. How the traffic sorted itself out without a general massacre was a mystery to Bunny. Ten times, at least, his taxi was on the verge of disaster. But it pulled through in some mysterious way, and landed Bunny safely at the Fleur d'Or. Still, he was glad to get out of it alive.

He expected to find Mr. Earle at lunch. But Herbert Earle was not in the hotel. Bunny lunched alone, and waited for his new employer to come in.

Mr. Earle did not come in. In the matter of keeping an appointment, he seemed to be a rather unreliable gentleman. Still, Bunny did not mind. If he was to earn his pay waiting for his employer, he was content. He did not feel at liberty to go roaming again, as Mr. Earle might come in any minute. So he sat in the lounge and spelled through a Boulogne newspaper to improve his French.

It was nearly seven when Mr. Earle finally put in an appearance. He looked tired and pale. He passed Bunny with the briefest of nods and went to his rooms, of which he had an expensive suite in the best part of the hotel.

When he came down again Mr. Earle was still looking a little pale and fatigued, but very handsome and very well dressed in evening clothes. He signed to Bunny to follow him into the salle a manger.

There they sat down to a dinner of many courses, which Mr. Earle hardly touched. Bunny, on the other hand, did it full justice.

He wondered whether Mr. Earle had been gambling again that afternoon. He looked like it. He spoke hardly a word during dinner. After dinner he signed to Bunny to follow him to his rooms.

"I could not get back to lunch," he explained. "I was occupied. A run of luck—with the vilest ill-luck to follow."

"Yes," said Bunny.

"You will come with me now," said Mr. Earle. "Your job begins this evening. But I must make a few changes first. A boy of your age would not be admitted to the casino."

"The casino!" repeated Bunny, startled.

"That is where we are going."

It was not for Bunny to ask questions or to raise objections. Mr. Earle called in his French servant, Antoine. To Bunny's amazement, Antoine, with a lurking grin, proceeded to decorate his face with an artificial moustache, and to give it a few touches of make-up. Bunny, looking in the glass, found himself transformed into a fellow of about twenty-two.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bunny.

"Voilà, monsieur!" said Antoine, evidently proud of his handiwork. "Voyez!"

"C'est bien!" answered Mr. Earle.

Bunny followed him down the stairs and into a car that was waiting. The car drove off immediately.

Before long it passed through a gateway and stopped at a flight of steps, above which was an imposing portico.

"Follow me!" said Mr. Earle.

Bunny followed him. Sounds of music greeted his ears. They passed through a large apartment, where people were dancing. They entered another apartment, from which a droning voice greeted them.

Bunny caught his breath. This was the gaming-room of the casino. A long green table was crowded on both sides and at both ends by punters, some sitting, some standing.

In the centre of the long table was a large hollow bowl, circled with figures from one to nine. A man stood at the bowl, with a rubber ball in his hand.

"Rien ne va plus!" said this individual, and he cast the ball into the sunken bowl.

Bunny had reached the table with his patron by this time, and he watched the progress of the ball curiously. It bounded round and round the sunken bowl, dancing from slot to slot, from number to number, till it finally came to rest in the slot numbered nine.

"Le neuf!" came the droning voice.

Bunny noticed now that the green cloth on the table was marked out into

squares, numbered up to nine. Every square was littered with counters, representing various values—two francs, five francs, or twenty francs.

A croupier with a long rake drew in all the stakes on the numbers excepting nine. Nine being the winning number, the stakes on nine went back to their owners, each accompanied by an amount seven times as much as the stake.

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs," came the droning voice, which Bunny knew to mean: "Make your game, gentlemen!"

Bunny's face was rather serious now. He had been carefully brought up at Wistaria Villa, Margate, and he had a properly strong opinion on the subject of gambling. He wondered why Mr. Earle had brought him there, and what this could possibly have to do with his new job. He was soon to discover.

Mr. Earle made a sign to a man who was hovering behind the players. This was the "changeur." He handed the changeur what looked to Bunny like a wad of banknotes. Immediately a large stack of bone counters was placed on the table before Mr. Earle. They were all red, which meant that each represented twenty francs. Mr. Earle pushed Bunny into a vacant chair.

"Play!" he said.

Bunny stared up at the tall gentleman beside his chair.

"Play?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes."

"But——" gasped Bunny.

"Play!" There was a sharp look on Mr. Earle's face, a glint in his eyes. His glance, as it followed the ball in the bowl, had a hungry aspect. The man was a gambler to the marrow of his bones.

"Play, fool!"

"But——" gasped Bunny.

"Don't you understand?" breathed Earle. "You're my mascot! You are lucky! I've brought you here to play for me!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bunny.

He understood now. This was his new job. The superstitious gambler, firmly believing in his luck, had adopted him as a "mascot." The lucky Bunny was to play, and woo the fortune that refused to smile on the gambler himself.

He was strongly tempted to rise from the chair and walk out of the building. But he sat tight. He had taken the man's pay for the job without knowing what it was. And the man had been kind to him, though with this object in his mind. And Bunny, looking at him, was conscious of a feeling of compassion.

The man was rich, educated, and had an intelligent face, yet so strongly was he under the domination of his ruling passion, the passion of play, that he could believe in superstitious nonsense that would not have deceived a child.

"Play!" repeated Earle. "Put the stakes where you like! If you lose, the loss is mine! Play!"

And Bunny, making up his mind to it, played.

#### CHAPTER 10.

##### A Mug's Game.

"FAITES vos jeux!"

Bunny threw a red counter on the nearest number. He knew nothing whatever about the game, such as it was, but as others were staking on numbers that evidently was the procedure to follow.

His piece rolled on the space marked 9, rolled farther, and rested on the next space, marked 7.

Whether it stopped on 7 or 9 mattered nothing to Bunny. He saw no reason why either number, or any number, should be backed. The chances were hopelessly in favour of the bank—even if the game was fairly played.

The game—to call it a game—was simplicity itself. You backed any number out of nine. If your number won, you received seven times the value

of your stake—not nine times, which would have made the thing fair. Even if the man who pitched the rubber ball was up to no trickery with it, the chances weighed heavily against the punters. Bunny was only a boy, but he had a cool head, and he simply wondered at the fatuity of the men up and down the table, playing what common sense must have told them to be a losing game.

"Le neuf!"

No. 9 had won, so Bunny's stake was lost, as it had come to rest on 7. He glanced up at Earle, who was standing by his side. This sample of Bunny's "luck" should have been enough, he thought.

"Take care!" whispered Earle. "Take care to let your stake remain on the number it falls on, otherwise you may lose your luck!"

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Bunny.

Certainly, in that instance, his stake would have won had it remained on 9. But it was all blind chance, as Bunny knew.

However, when "Faites vos jeux" sounded again Bunny was careful to drop his stake in the middle of a square. This time it was 6.

"Le sept!" announced the croupiers a few moments later. Seven had won.

Again Bunny glanced up at Earle.

"Play!" muttered the tall man.

So Bunny played on. He dropped a red counter, or louis, on 5.

"Le cinq!" Five had won!

Bunny's stake was pushed back to him with a long rake, and seven red pieces along with it.

He heard Earle draw a deep breath. Like a true gambler, Earle did not allow his theory to be affected by the losses, but regarded it as confirmed by a win.

"Keep on!" he breathed.

Bunny kept on. For some time he found the game rather amusing. But presently the sameness of it made him rather tired. The spirit of gaming did not appeal to Bunny in the least. Moreover, he was simply an agent, and the



wins and losses did not affect him personally.

For a time luck seemed to favour the inexperienced player, and a pile of red counters mounted on the green cloth at his elbow. When he looked up at Earle he saw that the gambler's face was smiling, his eyes shining.

Evidently Earle was quite satisfied that he was right, that he had forced Fortune to his side by the intermediary of a fellow who had "luck."

Presently, however, the pile of red counters faded away again. Losses predominated over wins, as they always must at a gaming-table.

At last Bunny had nothing left. This, on his own theory, should have discouraged Earle. But a gambler is never at a loss for reasons to continue to play. He called the changeur again, and exchanged another wad of notes for a new stack of counters.

But whatever "luck" Bunny might have had was gone now. He lost steadily. Wherever he dropped a stake, that number seemed certain to lose, and the pile of counters diminished rapidly.

"Chucking it, sir?" asked Bunny, when his second pile of counters was gone.

He was surprised by the black look that Herbert Earle gave him in reply to the question.

Without answering, Earle beckoned to the changeur again, and that gentleman came up with smiling politeness. Again a wad of banknotes was exchanged for counters.

Bunny frowned. Evidently Earle was a rich man, and had plenty of money to lose. But it went sorely against the grain with Bunny to see it thrown away like this.

However, it was Earle's money, not his, and Bunny was there to carry out orders. He had already made up his mind that this evening should be his last, as well as his first, in his new job. But for the moment he was an employed person, and had to carry out instructions.

He played on quietly. He backed all the numbers in turn, two numbers at once, three at once, varying his play more and more as he went on in the faint hope of getting back some, at least, of the cash he had lost for his patron. But it was no use.

Every now and then came a win, but on the whole losses predominated, and the stack of counters faded away. Every red counter represented a louis, or twenty francs; that is, about five shillings in English money. How much he had lost Bunny did not know, but he knew that many hundreds of the red counters had been taken away. Money, it seemed, mattered little to the gambler. He let it run away like water. Again, and yet again, the changeur was called on for fresh supplies, and again those supplies were raked away by the croupier's rake.

Hours had passed. The evening was growing old. The crowd thickened round the table as night advanced. Punters stood in a thick row behind the chairs, tossing their stakes on the table. Still Bunny sat where he was, placing his hapless stakes, waiting for his patron to tell him when to stop. Earle, standing beside his chair, seemed tireless, evidently living only for the game, and regardless of everything else.

"Les trois derniers!" announced the droning voice at last.

It was approaching midnight. The usual announcement was made that only three more spins of the ball would take place before the game was closed down for the night.

Bunny played each turn, and lost every time. Then the ball was picked out of the bowl for the last time, and the announcement made that the game would be resumed the following afternoon.

The punters cleared away from the table. Three or four counters were left to Bunny. These should have been changed back for cash at the end of the game, but Earle did not regard them. He turned and walked swiftly away from the table.

Bunny jumped up. He followed his patron and overtook him in the vestibule. Earle seemed to have forgotten his existence. As the tall man was striding out into the night, Bunny touched him on the arm.

"Mr. Earle!" he murmured.

Earle shook off his hand impatiently, and strode away down the flower-scented walk to the gateway. Bunny, rather at a loss, followed him.

In the gateway he touched Mr. Earle on the arm again. He could understand that the gambler was occupied with his thoughts, and with his deep disappointment at the failure of his "mascot." Still, Bunny wanted to know what he was to do.

"I say, sir——" murmured Bunny.

Earle came to an abrupt halt and stared at him. His face was calm, though a little pale and set. But there was a glint in his eyes that Bunny did not like.

Bunny certainly was not to blame for the ill-luck, and it was quite unfair for his employer to be angry with him. But sweet reasonableness is not an attribute of the gambler's character. Earle was not only angry. He was deeply and bitterly enraged.

"You confounded fool!" he said. "You've lost a hundred pounds for me."

"Well, I couldn't help it, could I?" asked Bunny. "I did exactly as you told me, didn't I?"

"I thought you were a lucky mascot."

"Well, that's rot, you know," said Bunny.

"Fool! Leave me alone!" Earle turned away again.

"But—but what am I to do?" asked Bunny.

"Anything you like, so long as you get out of my sight and keep out of it," snapped Earle.

Evidently Bunny's job had come to an end. It was not necessary for him to sack himself on the morrow, as he had intended. He was sacked now!

"But—but I say——" stammered Bunny. "Shall I go back to the hotel?"

"If you want me to kick you out of it—yes."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Fool!" Bunny had been called a fool before, many a time and oft. But this time he could not help feeling that it was unjust. Undoubtedly there was a fool present, but it was not Bunny.

"I—I say——" he stammered.

Earle turned back to him, his eyes glinting.

"Turn round!" he snapped.

Bunny, in great wonder, turned round, wondering what on earth he was required to turn round for.

He quickly discovered. A terrific kick shot him through the gateway into the street. The disappointed and exasperated gambler seemed to put all his beef into that kick. It fairly lifted Bunny.

"Yooooop!" roared the startled Bunny, and landed on his hands and knees.

Earle turned and strode away into the night. When Bunny picked himself up at last, Earle had disappeared.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Stowaway!

IT was past midnight, and Bunny, all on his own, wandered through the dusky streets of Boulogne-sur-Mer.

He was not enjoying life now. Bunny's happy dreams had left him. His new job was gone, his patron was gone, and Bunny was on his own once more, alone at night in a foreign city. Obviously he could not return to the Fleur d'Or—one kick from Mr. Earle was enough for him. He had rather liked Mr. Earle, and felt sorry for him in his folly. Now he felt that he disliked that young gentleman very much indeed. He had no desire whatever to see anything more of Mr. Earle. But he was at a loss to know what to do.

In that deserted and desolate state, the thought of Margate and Wistaria Villa lingered in Bunny's mind. He walked for some time, thinking it out.

His extremely peculiar "job" was gone. And in a foreign city it was very unlikely that he would find another. He had money enough to pay his fare, and there was a night boat to Folkestone, he knew. And Bunny at last walked down to the quay.

It was not till he was there that he remembered that, having no passport, there would be trouble in getting a passage on the steamer.

"Oh crumbs!" he ejaculated.

He walked up and down the dark, deserted quay, thinking it out. He stopped to look at the steam-yacht that he had admired that morning. The vessel was still there, though Bunny recalled that the order had been given for steam to be up at nine. Bunny regarded the handsome little vessel with a thoughtful brow.

From what he had heard the seamen saying, he had guessed that the yacht was leaving for England that night. He wondered whether the owner would be willing to give a passage to a cast-away who wanted to get home.

The answer to that question, probably, was in the negative. Wealthy yachtsmen, as a rule, were not looking for such passengers.

Bunny, thinking hard, stood watching the yacht. No one was to be seen on her deck. No doubt there was a man on watch, but probably at that late hour he was asleep somewhere.

"Why not?" murmured Bunny.

Surely it could do no harm to slip on board the yacht, drop into some hiding-place, and emerge when she dropped her anchor in Folkestone Harbour. Bunny was willing to pay fare, if it came to that. All he wanted was a passage. He was tired, sleepy, and the idea of going to sleep in some quiet corner appealed to him very much.

He made up his mind at last. It was easy to get on the yacht. Bunny stepped quietly on board. He had been on vessels before, at Margate, and he knew his way about a small craft like this. He moved quietly towards the saloon stairs, and a voice called out from somewhere.

"That you, Bill? Is the boss coming to-night?"

Bunny started, his heart beating.

"Rawlings has had steam up since nine," went on the voice. "But that's happened before. Is the boss coming?"

Bunny had to answer, or be discovered.

"Oh, yes!" he called back. "You'll see him all right!"

And he slipped below. He felt that his answer was quite truthful. There was no doubt that the "boss" would come some time.

Electric light was burning in the saloon. But there was, fortunately for Bunny, no one there. He looked round him. On one side of the well-furnished room was a large settee. Bunny grinned with satisfaction. He crawled under the settee and found plenty of room.

It was when he found himself lying down that Bunny realised how sleepy he was. He pillowed his head on his arm and closed his eyes. About ten seconds later Bunny was fast asleep. He slept like a top. Sounds of footsteps on deck, of voices in the saloon, of opening and shutting doors, of throbbing engines and clanking chain, did not awaken Bunny.

The motion of a vessel under way did not awaken him. For a steady twelve hours Bunny's eyes, once they were shut, remained shut, and when he awakened he was rested and refreshed by that long sleep.

His eyes opened at last. Lifting his head, he banged it on the settee above him. That reminded him where he was.

He lay still and looked round. It was broad daylight. Evidently he had slept long. He wondered whether the yacht was across the Channel yet. From its motion he knew that it was at sea, and that Boulogne must be far behind.

Bunny was feeling hungry now, which was not surprising, as it was long past noon. But he decided to stay where he was. It was wiser to keep out of sight till England was reached.

There were footsteps close at hand.

Bunny had a view of a pair of shoes, and a section of a pair of trousers, passing the settee. There was a brushing sound, and he realised that somebody, probably a steward, was sweeping the room.

Bunny had just realised this, when the end of a broom was shoved under the settee. Bunny was unprepared, and had no time to get his head out of the way. Crash!

"Yarcooooh!" roared Bunny. His exclamation was echoed in the saloon.

"Great Scott! What's that?"

"Ow!" gasped Bunny. "Oh, my nose! Wow!"

"My eye! Who's that? Who's there? Can't be a stowaway! My eye! It must be a stowaway! Come out, you swab!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunny.

The broom lunged under the settee again. This, apparently, was a hint to Bunny to show himself. It caught Bunny on his waistcoat, and he gave a roar.

"You coming out?" shouted the steward.

"Ow! Yes!" gasped Bunny. He rolled out into view and scrambled to his feet. The steward stared at him.

"Who the thump are you?" he demanded. "Stowaway, eh?"

"Nunno!" gasped Bunny. "I'll pay my fare if you like—"

"I can see the boss taking it off you!" grinned the steward. "Still, he might—shouldn't wonder if he needed it, after his games at Boolong. You go up them steps, young shaver. You'll find the boss on deck, and when you tell him you've sneaked on the Albatross, I dessay he'll chuck you over the rail. He ain't in a good temper, the boss ain't, believe me!"

Bunny hesitated. He felt that it might be wiser to defer an interview with the "boss" till that gentleman was in a good temper. But the steward had to be reckoned with.

"Ook it!" he said, and gave Bunny a shove with the broom to help him in the direction of the stairs.

Bunny came out on deck in bright sunshine. The yacht, under full steam, was gliding swiftly along. Round her stretched the waters of the Channel, shining in the sun, and far in the distance, on either hand, were the white cliffs of France and England. Bunny did not observe, for the moment, that the yacht was passing down the Channel, and not approaching either range of cliffs. His eyes were fixed on a tall young man in yachting costume, with an eyeglass in his eye, who was pacing the deck.

"Oh crumbs!" Bunny groaned.

The eyeglass gleamed at him, as the yachtsman came to a dead stop.

"You!"

"Mr. Earle!" said Bunny blankly. He stared at the tall young man, stupefied. Not for an instant had it occurred to Bunny that the Albatross might belong to Mr. Earle. Why should it? Evidently it did!

Herbert Earle stared at him.

"You!" he repeated.

"Me!" said Bunny feebly.

"You young idiot, what are you doing here?"

"I—I—I—I came here on board last night!" stammered Bunny. "I—I say, I—I only want to be landed at Folkestone. That's all."

"That's all, is it?" Earle smiled with grim sarcasm.

"Yes," gasped Bunny.

"You fancied this yacht was heading for home?"

Bunny jumped.

"Isn't it?" he stuttered.

"You benighted young ass, no! We are bound for the Mediterranean."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunny.

Evidently the seamen, whose talk Bunny had heard, had not known of the "boss'" real intentions. Earle glared at him.

"Turn round!" he said.

This time Bunny guessed, quite easily, what he was to turn round for. And instead of turning round, he scuttled.

along the deck. Earle stared after him for a moment, then burst into a laugh and resumed his pacing. And Bunny, keeping at a safe distance, wondered what was going to happen next.

## CHAPTER 12.

A Soda S'phon.

**C**RACK! Bunny sighed. Smack! Bunny yelled. He was polishing glasses. The crack was caused by glass breaking in Bunny's hand, hence the sigh. The smack was caused by the heavy hand of Gubbins, the steward, which landed on Bunny's ear with a tremendous concussion. Hence the yell.

Bunny here dropped the broken tumbler and jumped away, just in time to dodge a second smack.

The steward of the Albatross glared at him.

"You clumsy young hass!" he snorted.

"I couldn't help it!" pleaded Bunny.

"Come 'ere!" said Gubbins.

Instead of coming, Bunny backed farther away, with a wary eye on Gubbins. His head was singing from one smack, and he did not want another.

The yacht Albatross was running down the Bay of Biscay. Far away the sierras of Spain loomed against the blue sky.

The treacherous bay was bright and smiling. From a sky bluer than Bunny had ever seen before blazed a sun brighter than the sun of Bunny's native land.

From a porthole, as he stood polishing glasses, Bunny had a view of the distant Spanish mountains, and Bunny's thoughts ran on sunny Spain—on mountain paths, and ancient cities, and Moorish ruins; on muleteers and mules with jingling bells, on dark-browed brigands. Bunny had a romantic mind, and he could not help it wandering a little. Perhaps that was why the glass cracked in his hand as he polished it,

Gubbins, the steward, was quite unromantic. Spain, to him, was a land where the mosquitoes bit you, where the smells were offensive, and where they cheated you in wine shops. He was not likely to understand Bunny.

"You clumsy young hass!" said Gubbins. "That's the third glass you've broke! You shove yourself on this hooker without being asked—a blooming stowaway! Instead of chucking you overboard, or giving you three dozen with a rope's end, Mr. Earle tells you you can make yourself useful. And this 'ere is 'ow you do it."

"I'm trying to be useful!" said Bunny, "and I'm not really a stowaway, Mr. Gubbins. I thought the yacht was going back to England when I got on at Boulogne, and I only wanted a passage home. And—"

"Old your row!" said Gubbins. "If you break another glass I'll take the tray to you. Oh, there's Mr. Earle calling! Go to him, blow you!"

Bunny was rather glad to get away from the steward. Gubbins had a heavy hand, and Bunny was feeling quite dizzy from that tremendous smack. He hurried to the saloon.

Mr. Herbert Earle was sprawled on the settee, the settee under which Bunny had hidden when he stowed himself away on the yacht.

On board the yacht, Earle was unable to indulge his ruling passion. But another vice was ready to his hand, and the amount of strong liquors that Mr. Earle disposed of made Bunny open his eyes wide. Yet Bunny rather liked the young man.

He had a hasty temper, and at times a savage tongue, but when he was in a good humour he could be very kind; and certainly he had been kind to Bunny.

Bunny had a grateful heart. He had all a healthy fellow's distaste for gambling and drinking. But he was sorry for Mr. Earle, who seemed unable to make a better use than this of his good fortune,

Mr. Earle was unaware of Bunny's grateful compassion. Had he been aware of it, probably he would have kicked Bunny oftener than he did. He was not in a good temper at the present moment. He was making an examination of several legal-looking documents, a task that seemed distasteful to him. He frowned at Bunny.

"I called you twice!" he snapped.

"Sorry, sir," said Bunny. "I——"

"Hold your tongue! Get me a brandy-and-soda—not too much soda."

Several times it had been on Bunny's lips to venture a hint to Mr. Earle that reckless consumption of strong liquors was exceedingly bad for him, both morally and physically. Bunny felt that this would be only friendly, after Mr. Earle's kindness to him, and nobody else on the yacht seemed concerned about it.

Mr. Earle glared at him.

"Did you hear me?"

"Oh! Yes!"

"Then why are you standing there blinking at me, idiot?"

"If you please, sir," said Bunny, "my uncle at Margate says that a man shouldn't put an enemy in his mouth to steal away his brains."

Mr. Earle sat bolt upright and stared at Bunny. He seemed at a loss for words. Bunny, encouraged by his silence, went on:

"You've had two brandy-and-sodas in the last half-hour, sir. It's awfully bad for you. My uncle says——"

Mr. Earle half-rose, as if meditating assault and battery. But he checked himself.

"Did your uncle ever tell you to mind your own business, Hare?" he asked.

Bunny opened his eyes in surprise.

"Yes, sir. How did you guess that? He told me so lots of times."

Mr. Earle, after another stare at Bunny, gave a short laugh.

"Your uncle appears to be wiser than his nephew," he said. "You will do well to remember your uncle's instructions while you are on board this yacht. Now

hold your tongue, and get me a brandy-and-soda."

"Very well, sir!" said Bunny.

There was a tray on a little table beside the settee, with the necessary articles. Bunny poured out the brandy successfully, and took up the soda-siphon. Swizzzz!

"Don't drown it, you fool!" said Mr. Earle.

Mr. Earle liked the brandy to predominate over the soda. Bunny, on the other hand, felt that it would be better for Mr. Earle if the soda predominated over the brandy.

"Do you hear me?" roared Mr. Earle. "Look here——"

Bunny looked. It was unfortunate that the Albatross gave a roll just then on the billows of the Bay of Biscay. Also, Bunny's head was still a little dizzy from the steward's smack. Certainly Bunny never intended to turn the nozzle of the squirting siphon on the owner and master of the Albatross. That, unfortunately, was what happened.

Squizzzzzz! There was a roar from the yachtsman as the stream of soda caught him between the eyes.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunny.

In utter horror at what he had done—and was doing—Bunny stood spell-bound, incapable of thought, for which reason the stream of soda continued to play on Mr. Earle. Swizzzz! Swish! Splash!

Mr. Earle leaped from the settee, like a tiger from his lair, at Bunny. There was a crash as the table went over. The brandy bottle crashed, the siphon dropped from Bunny's hand and crashed on the remains of the brandy bottle. Bunny made a wild leap to escape.

Not always quick on the uptake, he realised clearly that the sooner he got to a safe distance from Mr. Earle the better it would be for him. He fled for his life, barely escaping the frantic clutch that the yachtsman made at him.

Mr. Earle rushed after Bunny, letting out with his boot. Bunny yelled. The terrific kick almost lifted him, as he flew on wildly. Crash again! Gubbins was running in to see what the matter was. He met Bunny in full career, and went over like a ninepin.

"Ooooooch!" gasped Gubbins.

Bunny scrambled over him somehow and fled in haste. Mr. Earle, rushing after him, stumbled over Gubbins, and came down with a bump—on the unhappy steward.

"Woooooooooooch!" came in expiring tones from Gubbins, as Mr. Earle collapsed on his waistcoat.

Bunny did not stay to listen.

### CHAPTER 13.

#### A Sneeze!

"O H, crumbs!" mumbled Bunny. Rawlings, the engineer, stared at him, and demanded:

"What are you doing here?"

Rawlings had come rather hastily into his room, and almost fallen over Bunny, who, of course, had no business there; but it was a case of any port in a storm. Bunny had been there for a couple of hours, keeping out of sight. He was anxious not to meet either Mr. Earle or the steward until such a meeting could no longer possibly be avoided.

"Nothing, sir!" answered Bunny.

"You see——"

"Taking a rest in my state-room, what?" demanded Rawlings.

"Yes. You see——" stammered Bunny.

Rawlings did not wait for any explanation. He took Bunny by the collar, and with one swing of a sinewy arm sent him spinning out of the room.

"Oh, crumbs!" Bunny gasped, picking himself up and departing.

Bunny was not feeling merry or bright as he made his way back to the steward's quarters. As he had to turn up there sooner or later, he hoped that Gubbins was in a better temper by this time. That hope was ill-founded,

Gubbins was there, and as he caught sight of Bunny his look showed that his temper was not good—and so did his action. He seized the nearest article to his hand, which happened to be a plate, and hurled it at Bunny—thus proving beyond doubt that his temper was still bad.

Bunny faded out of the picture without waiting for the plate to reach him, and scuttled into the saloon, which was empty. He was in a rather dismayed frame of mind.

There seemed no refuge for the hapless Bunny. He began to wish that he had never set foot on that yacht. Bunny's desire to see the world was keen. But he felt that he was seeing it under disadvantageous circumstances.

He wondered whether Mr. Earle was still as ratty as Gubbins. It was very probable, for the yachtsman could not possibly have liked his drenching with soda-water. He could hear Mr. Earle stirring in his state-room, which opened on the saloon. He might emerge at any moment, and Bunny still had a lingering ache from the one terrific kick Mr. Earle had given him. He fixed his eyes on the yachtsman's door uneasily.

As he saw the door move, without stopping to think, Bunny made a dive for the settee, and vanished underneath it.

That settee had concealed him once before, and Bunny hoped that it would afford him safe cover again. He heard Mr. Earle's footsteps a moment later.

Bunny hoped that he was only going to pass through the saloon on his way to the deck. Mr. Earle commanded his yacht himself, though most of the watches were taken in turn by the two mates, Hall and Wilson. Bunny devoutly hoped that he was going up to take charge, which would keep him busy for a time, and give him an opportunity to forget Bunny.

But Mr. Earle did not leave the saloon. He paced to and fro, and



Bunny, under the settee, had recurring views of his shoes, as he passed and repassed.

Several times he muttered to himself, though Bunny did not catch the words. He seemed in an uneasy mood. Bunny heard him call out at last:

"Gubbins!"

"Sir!" answered the steward's voice.

"Ask Mr. Hall to step here."

"Yes, sir."

Earle resumed his pacing to and fro. Bunny suppressed a groan.

Had Mr. Earle seemed in a good temper, Bunny might have taken the risk of showing himself and trusting to luck. But the young man was evidently perturbed, uneasy, irritable. And so Bunny made up his mind to lie doggo.

A couple of minutes later Hall entered the saloon, and shut the door carefully behind him.

Bunny had seen a good deal of Hall, the first officer, though at the present moment all he could see of him was his feet. He did not like Hall. The man was a capable officer, but there was a look in his eyes that Bunny did not care for at all. Hall had twisted Bunny's arm once, very painfully, when Bunny had blundered into him on deck, and Bunny had not forgotten it. Now that Hall was in the room, Bunny was less inclined than ever to show himself.

"Sit down, Hall," he heard Mr. Earle say. "Help yourself." Bunny heard the swish of soda.

"I've been going over the charts," went on Earle. "I fancy I've selected the spot."

"In the Bay of Biscay?" asked Hall.

"No. In the Mediterranean."

"Safer!" said Hall.

"I think so. We have to touch at Gibraltar, and there we shall have a chance of getting rid of the hands we cannot trust."

Bunny heard Hall make a movement in his chair, as if he were looking over his shoulder.

"There's nobody in hearing!" snapped Earle irritably.

"Can't be too careful, Mr. Earle, in a matter of this kind," said the mate. "Where's that fool of a boy who's always loafing about?"

"Keeping at a safe distance, I think," answered Earle, with a curt laugh. "I'm going to cut the skin off his back when I see him again, and I dare say he knows it."

Bunny was glad that the ample settee afforded him good cover. Obviously it was not a favourable moment for revealing himself to Mr. Earle!

"Well, sir"—Hall's voice was low, but very clear—"there'll be risk in leaving the hands at Gib. They may talk."

"We must leave them somewhere—and Gibraltar's a good way from home. They will ship on other vessels, most likely, and scatter, and never hear what becomes of the Albatross."

"There's risk in it."

"Of course there's risk in it!" exploded Earle. "Ten thousand pounds isn't to be picked up without risk, I suppose. But what else are we to do? We can't have them on board when the yacht disappears, I suppose."

"No!" said Hall, and there was a tone in his voice that made Mr. Earle start and Bunny, under the settee, shiver.

"What do you mean, Hall?" asked the owner of the Albatross. "What villainy have you got in your mind?"

"In for a penny, in for a pound, Mr. Earle," answered the mate. "What's the place you've selected for the vanishing trick?"

"The Morocco coast. Plenty of lonely spots there."

"Good! Well, then, keep the crew on board until the last scene—and then—look here, Mr. Earle, we're taking a big risk in this. We can't afford to play the fool. The sea keeps a secret for ever."

"Do you mean—murder?" Earle's voice was husky, and Bunny, under the settee, trembled.

"That's a nasty word, Mr. Earle," answered Hall. "I mean that with long

stretches of penal servitude before us for swindling the insurance company we've got to take care of our skins. Leaving the hands at Gib means a lot of risk. It would be easy to send a boat's crew ashore on the Riff coast—"

"They'd be as likely to talk there as anywhere else."

"Not in the place I should choose," answered Hall. "I should not pick out the part of Morocco where Cook's tourists go. I know a spot where any white man landing would be cut to pieces by the Riffs before he had been an hour on land. Leave it at that."

Bunny began to wonder whether he was dreaming. There was a short silence, and then Earle's voice broke out, in low, passionate tones:

"You confounded villain. I suppose I've asked for this—I've thrown away a fortune playing the goat and I'm rogue enough to try to set it right by bringing off a swindle. I'm rotter enough to enter into a scheme with a scoundrel who's been in prison, and who ought to be in prison now. I've a mind to throw up the whole game! Better ruin—better the bankruptcy court—better—!" He broke off with a groan.

"I've merely thrown out a suggestion, Mr. Earle, for your safety as well as mine!" Hall's voice was perfectly calm.

Earle came to a stop in his uneasy pacing, and stood before the mate, looking at him with gleaming eyes.

"Mark this, Dick Hall," he said, between his teeth. "I'm going on with this game—I'm a ruined man, and I've left myself no other resource. But if you give a single hint again of bloodshed—if you dare to suggest that a life should be destroyed in carrying out this scheme—"

"Leave it at that!" said Hall calmly. "I was speaking more for your own sake than my own. Have your own way—I was bound to point out the risk!"

"Hang the risk!"

"Hang it, if you like!" assented Hall. "Call it settled, then—we strand the men we can't trust at Gib, steam across to the African side, and—"

"And there the Albatross disappears," said Earle. "Plenty of proof of the wreck—that can be fixed up easily by a cunning rascal like you, Hall—"

"Thanks!"

"With a new name, and a new coat of paint, the Swan clears off, leaving proof of the wreck of the Albatross," said Earle. "I draw the insurance money on this yacht, and you sell the vessel in an American port under her new name. The game's been worked before, and we can work it again."

"It has—and can!" said Hall. "And nobody's likely to suspect the wealthy Mr. Earle of such trickery. A reputation for wealth covers a multitude of sins." There was a sneer in the mate's voice.

"One word more," said Earle. "I—!" He broke off suddenly.

From the direction of the settee came a loud, prolonged, echoing sneeze.

#### CHAPTER 14.

##### A Perilous Secret!

**B**UNNY had struggled with that sneeze. In the close, confined space under the settee there was dust—and some of the dust was now in Bunny's nose.

In a state of terror at the danger of revealing his presence, Bunny struggled hard to control the sneeze. Long and hard he fought with it, and for some time he kept it in check. Then it broke loose—a tremendous sneeze, pealing thunderously from under the settee.

Mr. Earle stood transfixed with astonishment. Hall leaped to his feet.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bunny.

Hall bent down by the settee.

"The boy!" he said, in a tone that made poor Bunny's blood almost curdle

in his veins. "You young hound! Get out of that!"

Bunny, in dismay and terror, rolled out into view. Hall grasped him by the shoulder and jerked him to his feet. So savage was his grasp that Bunny felt as if his bones were cracking under it, and he gave a gasp of pain. The mate's hard face was convulsed with rage.

"Good heavens!" breathed Herbert Earle. "He's heard everything—the fool!"

"I—I—I—" stammered Bunny helplessly.

"He will not repeat what he has heard!" said Hall in a low voice, between his teeth. "Stand back, Mr. Earle!" His left hand gripped Bunny his right groped at his hip-pocket.

Bunny felt his brain swim.

"Mr. Earle!" he panted.

Earle started forward.

"Let the boy go, Hall! Are you mad? A shot—here—"

"Fool! The young scoundrel chose to listen—let him pay for it!" hissed Hall. "Fool! Stand back! Can't you understand? You were showing me the revolver—it went off by accident—that is all—an accident—"

His grip shifted to Bunny's throat, choking back the cry he would have uttered. His eyes burned at Bunny, and the revolver was in his hand now. There was murder in the wicked, enraged face that looked like a demon's to Bunny's starting eyes.

"Stop! Hall, you scoundrel, if you harm the boy I'll call the men to put you in irons—I'll denounce you as a murderer. I'll see you hanged for it—mind, I mean every word I say! Release him!"

Hall gave one glance at the white face of the yacht-owner. Slowly he thrust the revolver back into his hip-pocket. Slowly he released the almost suffocating Bunny.

"The game's up, then," he said thickly. "Have it your own way—the game's up! By all the powers that—"

"The boy will hold his tongue," said Earle. "Leave him to me. Get back to the deck, and leave him to me!"

Hall gave the boy one look, a look that Bunny long remembered, so full of savage hatred and rage was it. Then he left the saloon and went back to the deck.

Bunny was left alone with his employer. He stood gasping for breath, leaning one hand on the table for support, his throat bruised and aching from the mate's savage grip.

Earle walked up and down the room with rapid, irregular steps. Bunny stood gasping, waiting for him to speak. Only too well he realised how terribly narrow an escape he had had. He knew that the mate would have shot him like a rat to preserve the guilty secret that had been discussed in his hearing. He owed his life to Earle's intervention.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bunny.

Earle turned to him at last.

"You young rascal! I've been kind to you—I've allowed you to live in comfort on this yacht where you stowed yourself away—and you repay me like this—by eavesdropping—"

"I didn't!" gasped Bunny. "I—I never—"

"You heard what was said!"

"I—I couldn't help that!" gasped Bunny. "But I never meant to."

"Why were you hiding in this room, then?"

"I—I got out of sight when you came in, sir—"

"To listen?"

"Nunno! Because you were waxy!" gasped Bunny.

Earle stared at him.

"I've already seen that you're the biggest fool that was ever born, Jack Hare. And now—I take your word, boy—I dare say it was as you say. You're a born fool, but I don't think you are a rascal. Still, whether you intended to listen or not, you heard what was said a few minutes ago in this room."

"Yes," said Bunny.

"You heard it all?" asked Earle, scanning him closely.

"Every word," answered Bunny simply.

Earle, troubled and agitated and angry as he was, smiled. It had not even occurred to poor Bunny to tell a lie about it or to pretend that he had not heard all, though that way lay safety.

"And you understood?" said Earle.

"Yes."

The young man paced the saloon for some minutes before he spoke again. Bunny was still gasping, with a choking sensation in his throat. There was not only anger in Earle's face, but something like shame, too. Bunny thought he could understand the man's feelings.

Earle turned to him again at last.

"Can I trust you to hold your tongue?" he asked. "You know how Hall would have secured your silence?"

"Yes," gasped Bunny.

"No doubt you have supposed me to be a wealthy man—a very wealthy man" said Earle quietly. "I was so once—and not long ago. I have thrown away a fortune—and now I am making a bid for another—in league with a man whose name is a byword for every kind of villainy in every part of the world, but who is known on this yacht as Richard Hall, first officer.

"That is what folly has led me to—and it may be a lesson and a warning to you, Hare, if you have sense enough to profit by it."

"Yes, sir," mumbled Bunny.

"I am a ruined man," went on Earle in the same quiet tone. "But this coup will set me on my feet again. I have been kind to you, boy. Can I trust you to hold your tongue, and not betray me? What you have heard by accident you have no right to know, and no right to remember. Blot it all from your mind—forget it absolutely. I have saved your life—at a terrible risk to myself, for if you betray me I am a lost man. Can I trust you?"

Bunny did not speak. His brain was almost in a whirl.

"Answer me!" snarled Earle.

"I—I hardly know what to say, sir!" stammered Bunny. "I'd rather cut my tongue out than say anything that would harm you—"

"Keep to that and all is well."

"But—but—" stammered Bunny.

"But what, fool?" asked Earle harshly.

"You're going into an awful swindle, sir—with that brute Hall," said Bunny. "From what I made out, you're going to pretend that the yacht has been wrecked, and swindle the insurance company of ten thousand pounds. It's good enough for Hall, sir. But it's not good enough for you. My uncle at Margate, sir, says that good can never come of doing wrong," said Bunny, shaking his head, "and I'm sure he's right, sir."

Herbert Earle gave Bunny a very peculiar look.

"At the present stage of my affairs, Hare, I am afraid I cannot be ruled by the opinion of your uncle at—at Ramsgate—"

"Margate, sir."

"At Margate—though no doubt he is a very excellent man," said Mr. Earle. The sarcasm in his look and voice was quite lost on Bunny, however. "Now, Hare, let us have this plain. Will you keep secret what you have heard, or will you not?"

"You see, sir, I can't keep it secret and let a swindle go on," argued Bunny. "That wouldn't be cricket. The fact is, sir, it's jolly lucky for you that this happened. It gives you a chance to back out before that brute Hall turns you into a thief and villain like himself."

Earle drew a deep breath.

"I am not asking for your advice, Hare," he said. "I am asking you whether I can trust you to keep this secret unconditionally."

"Not unless you chuck it up, sir. You see—"

"That will do!" said Mr. Earle, and the look in his eyes was very strange as they dwelt on Bunny. "From what you have heard, you know that nothing will

be attempted till after we have touched Gibraltar. Will you hold your tongue till we reach Gibraltar, and say nothing on the yacht?"

"Certainly, sir!" answered Bunny at once. "Not a syllable, sir! I'm not a chatterbox! And by the time we get there, sir, I feel sure you'll have thought better of it——"

"That will do!"

Earle strode out of the saloon, and Bunny was left alone.

#### CHAPTER 15.

##### Man Overboard!

WITH nightfall the smiling calmness of the Bay of Biscay departed. Black clouds had been gathering over the summits of the distant mountains of Spain; and the sun set on the Atlantic in a red and angry glow.

With darkness came the wind, and the treacherous waters of the bay rolled and swelled and roared, in striking contrast to the smiling peace of the afternoon. Through the gloom of night and the swelling waters the yacht throbbed on her way, the booming of the billows almost drowning the pulsations of the engine.

Mr. Earle dined at his usual hour, unmoved by the roughness of the sea. Hall dined with him, and Bunny waited on them, assisting the steward. Bunny was hard put to it to keep his footing, and was in incessant dread of dropping plates or spilling soup or shooting headlong with a tray.

To his relief Hall took no notice of him whatever. To all appearance the man had forgotten the scene of the afternoon.

Mr. Earle was very silent, and paid no heed whatever to Bunny. Bunny noticed that he drank a good deal more than usual. Wilson, the second mate, was in charge of the ship.

Bunny had got on his sea-legs to some extent, but hitherto the Albatross

had had fair weather in her run down the Channel and out into the bay. His sea-legs rather failed him now.

He was handing a decanter to Mr. Earle when a sudden lurch of the yacht fairly spun him over.

The decanter flew from his hand and landed on Mr. Earle's white shirt-front. Bunny bumped into Mr. Earle, and threw his arms involuntarily round that gentleman's neck to save himself.

Mr. Earle swayed under his weight, and the decanter rolled to the floor, leaving streams of red wine over Mr. Earle's shirt and waistcoat. The yachtsman sprang to his feet with a yell. Bunny staggered away, and sat down as the yacht lurched again.

For an instant Earle glared at him like a tiger. But the savage look faded from his face quickly as if some recollection drove it away.

"I—I—I'm sorry, sir!" spluttered Bunny. "I—I couldn't help it——"

"Never mind, my boy," said Mr. Earle in so gentle a voice that Gubbins, the steward, stared at him in astonishment. He mopped wine off his clothes with a napkin, and sat down again.

Bunny staggered to his feet full of contrition.

Hall glanced at his master with a sneer. He did not speak, but Earle caught his look. He answered it with another look which Bunny did not understand, but which Hall evidently did, for he nodded. Afterward, Bunny knew why Mr. Earle had been so patient—afterwards, when he knew more. Bunny was glad when that dinner was over.

Hall went immediately on deck, and a few minutes later Wilson, the second mate, went off duty. Mr. Earle, standing in the saloon, felt in his pockets.

"I've left my cigarette-case somewhere, Hare!" he said. "Find it and bring it to me on deck."

"Yes, sir!" answered Bunny. He looked anxiously at Mr. Earle. "I say, sir, you're looking very pale," said Bunny, with concern. "I—I hope you're not feeling ill, sir."

Earle made no reply. He turned away and went up the saloon stairs. Bunny's glance followed him anxiously. He really liked Mr. Earle, and there was no doubt that the owner of the Albatross was looking strangely pale.

"Cheeky young sweep!" said Gubbins. "My eye! I thought the boss was going to flay you! Spilling wine over him like that——"

"I couldn't help it," said Bunny.

"There's too many things you can't 'elp, you young idiot!" responded Gubbins. "A jolly sight too many, if you ask me."

But Bunny did not ask him. He was searching for Mr. Earle's cigarette-case, which did not seem easy to find. Bunny found it at last in the state-room, and picking it up went on deck with it.

A dark sky with black clouds rolling before a high wind hung over the gliding yacht. The wind struck Bunny almost like a blow as he emerged on deck.

But he kept his footing, and blinked round for Mr. Earle. He sighted the tall figure standing by the rail, unmoved by the pitching of the vessel. By his side was the shorter, stumper figure of Hall.

Bunny, as he made his way towards them, with the wind in his face, heard Earle's muttering voice on the wind.

"If he'd given his word—if he'd only have given his word, I'd have taken it, and trusted him——"

"And you'd have been a fool for your pains!" came the deeper, growling voice of the mate.

"Perhaps!" muttered Earle. "But I'd have taken the chance—I'd have been glad to take the chance and the risk, rather—rather than——"

"Belay it!" said Hall hastily.

Bunny came up.

"Here's your cigarette case, sir!" said Bunny cheerfully.

Mr. Earle took it, with a trembling hand. Bunny could see how ghastly white the yachtsman's face was. The cigarette case dropped from Earle's

fingers. It seemed as if his hand was utterly nerveless.

Bunny stooped to pick it up. Hall made a movement, and Bunny, as he groped for the fallen case, heard Earle's husky voice:

"No—no! Not yet—— No!"

"Get away!" muttered Hall. "Leave it to me!"

Something in the mate's tone struck Bunny with sudden, terrible suspicion. Like a flash the truth came to him. He leaped up.

But it was too late.

Even as he sprang up, too brawny arms grasped him, and as the yacht swung to a heavy sea, he went whirling over the side. It was done in an instant, and before a cry could leave Bunny's lips, he was plunging headlong into the water. He had, or thought he had, an instant's glimpse of a white face that stared down after him from the rail.

Then the surging waters of the Bay of Biscay were over his head, and thundering in his ears. The yacht fled on her way through the night and left Bunny sinking in the wild waters!

## CHAPTER 16.

### The Searchlight.

**D**OWN, down he went, the water booming in his ears, the waves thundering over his head.

Instinct made him shut his teeth hard and hold his breath. His lungs seemed to be bursting when his head came up to the surface at last, and he gurgled wildly. He struck out for his life.

Bunny was a good swimmer. In the old days at Margate he had been absolutely at home like a fish. But the heaving billows of the Bay of Biscay were very different from the sea at Margate. Bunny was tossed like a cork on mighty sweeping waves.

He tried to look round him in the darkness to pick up the lights of the yacht. Through the gloom he saw

them glimmering—the red and green headlights of the Albatross.

They were at a distance, yet the fact that he could see them showed that the Albatross had changed her course, and was no longer gliding away from him. He had only expected to see the stern light.

Yet the yacht could not be stopping to pick him up.

He had been pitched ruthlessly overboard to keep the secret he had accidentally learned. And it was impossible that the plotters who had thus rid themselves of poor Bunny intended to pick him up and take him on board again.

Bunny swam his best; but he knew there was no chance. He was many a long mile from the Spanish coast, and in a few minutes, at the most, his struggles must cease, and the thundering billows would overwhelm him for ever.

"Oh crumbs!" Bunny murmured.

He had longed to see the great world that lay beyond the North Foreland. He had yearned for adventure. Now he was getting it—with a vengeance!

He fought on, exerting every ounce of strength in that desperate struggle with the overwhelming waters. The red and green lights of the yacht danced mockingly in the distance. Bunny thought he heard a shout, but he put it down to fancy. He was too far from the yacht to hear the loudest shout from on board.

Suddenly he felt a grasp. It sent a thrill through him—a thrill of horror, for instantly the thought of sharks flashed into his brain. But the next moment he knew that it was a human hand that grasped him.

He was almost at the end of his strength. The beating of the heavy billows dazed and bewildered him. The darkness blinded him, and through it the red and green lights of the Albatross gleamed like the eyes of some mocking demon. But that sudden and unexpected grasp in the black waters dragged Bunny back from death.

Someone was by his side—a strong swimmer. Bunny, bewildered, could see nothing, but he heard a voice, though the words were carried away on the wind. Something was pushed over his head and shoulders. He felt his arms dragged over a lifebelt. A glimmer of a white face came from the gloom.

"Hold on!"

He caught the words; but he did not need telling to hold on. He held on to the lifebelt for his life.

Who was saving him? Someone from the yacht, that was certain. Someone had leaped into the sea after him with the lifebelt, and had been left behind with him as the yacht rushed on. Bunny understood now why the yacht had turned. It was not to save him; it was to save his rescuer.

But who was it? Bunny, supported by the lifebelt, floated without further exertion of his exhausted strength. The unknown was swimming at his side, holding to the inflated belt with one hand. Who was it? Gubbins, the steward, Rawlings, the engineer, Wilson, the second mate? Or one of the crew? Not Hall, who had tossed him overboard, not Mr. Earle, who had stood by while the mate did that desperate deed. Who?

"Hang on, boy! There's a chance!"

"Mr. Earle!" Bunny gasped.

It was the yachtsman, Mr. Earle. Bunny was hopelessly bewildered. Earle had stood by, white, conscience-stricken, when the mate hurled him into the sea. And Earle had leaped after him with the lifebelt, risking his life away. For what chance was there of the yacht picking him up again in the blackness of the night from the wild, tossing waters of the Bay of Biscay?

Bunny peered at the white face so close to his own. It was a dim shadow to his eyes, but he could make out the handsome features of Herbert Earle, and the bitter, sardonic expression on them.

"You, sir!" breathed Bunny.

"There's a chance," said Earle quietly. "Hall will pick me up if he

can. He loses everything if he loses me. Stick it out!"

Then from the blackness of the night there came a sudden, white beam that shot like an arrow across the dark heavens. Bunny stared up at it, dazzled. The beam of light rose from the sea, spreading fan-wise on the blackness of the sky.

"A—a searchlight!" gasped Bunny.

He knew that the beam must come in their direction as they floated, their eyes following the searchlight.

It flickered round in a circle, gleaming with a ghostly effect as it touched the foaming waters. Hall, evidently, was doing his best to pick up his commander. The red and green lights of the yacht alternately appeared and disappeared. The Albatross was circling round, looking for them, and round the yacht the searchlight circled. But the end of the falling beam did not reach the swimmers. They floated in darkness beyond its radius.

Bunny heard a low, mocking laugh from the man at his side, who swam with one hand lightly on Bunny's life-belt.

"It's the finish!"—he heard Earle's voice. "They'll never find us! You fool, you've saved the insurance company ten thousand pounds, and lost your own life and mine!"

"While there's life there's hope, sir!" said Bunny stoutly. "My uncle at Margate, sir, always said: 'Never say die.'"

Earle peered at him.

"You are a born fool, Hare!" he said. "But you are a plucky fool. Are you not afraid?"

"I hadn't thought about it, sir," answered Bunny simply.

"Well, the game's up. I die a rogue, and you a fool," muttered Earle.

"We're not dead yet, sir," said Bunny. "Look! The lights are nearer, sir! They're trying back for us!"

The red and green lights, both in clear view, gleamed over the water, nearer at hand. The circling searchlight touched the foam-crested waves

not a score of yards from the spot where Bunny and Earle floated. A little nearer—only a little—and they must be seen by the watching eyes on board the Albatross.

It seemed to them that the glimmering beam approached by inches. Almost it reached them, when it turned and circled away over the shadowed sea.

Earle gritted his teeth. Round swept the searchlight, leaving the swimmers in darkness. But the headlights of the yacht were nearer, and if the searchlight circled round once more it must touch them.

With beating hearts they watched it glide round in the darkness, an arrow of light from the dark mass of the yacht.

"It's coming, sir!" breathed Bunny.

It came. Slowly circling, the long beam of light swept on them, and their faces glimmered from the water in its ghostly radiance. It passed, leaving them in darkness again; but it returned, and picked them up once more, and rested on them.

## CHAPTER 17.

### Hands Off!

"**W**ERE seen!" Bunny panted. They could hear, above the booming of the Bay of Biscay, the throbbing of the engines as the Albatross bore down on them.

"We're seen!" echoed Earle.

Bunny gave him a quick look. It came into Bunny's mind that Hall, anxious as he was to save the owner of the yacht, would not take the other swimmer on board if he could help it.

Earle, it was clear, had agreed to the mate's desperate device to get rid of the boy who knew the guilty secret. Yet at the last minute his conscience had driven him to throw over his confederate, to plunge into the sea to almost certain death to save the boy. Wild, reckless, desperate as Earle was,



he was a decent man at heart—or had not yet forgotten that once he had been a decent man.

But Hall was a very different character. There was no mercy in that hard heart. Only because Earle was essential to him had the mate of the Albatross sought to save him. Bunny was sure of that. And he would not save Bunny if he could help it.

Earle understood his look, and his lip curved sardonically.

"You're safe, boy," he said. "You'll be picked up along with me."

"Not if Hall can help it," muttered Bunny.

"Hall is under my orders, you fool!"

Bunny made no reply. Hall might be under his master's orders, but Bunny was certain that Hall was the leading spirit in the scheme to swindle the insurance company by the pretended loss of the yacht. Hall had the influence over his confederate that a man of absolutely ruthless character was bound to have over one who was half-hearted.

Still, Bunny hoped for the best. And he realised, too, that Hall would have to keep up appearances before the yacht's crew, who were not in the secret. He could scarcely leave Bunny to drown, under the eyes of the men.

The yacht's lights were stationary now. The searchlight still hung on the swimmers. They knew that a boat was coming.

It came, sweeping and surging over the wild waters. It shot past the swimmers, swept away by a billow. But it approached them again, and Hall, the mate, leaned over and grasped Earle. His dark, narrow eyes glinted at Bunny.

He dragged Earle to the boat, and had Earle let go of Bunny, there was no doubt of what would have happened. The mate would have taken care that the boy was not found; but Earle had a strong grip on Bunny, and Hall could not save him without saving the boy.

Both were dragged into the boat. Earle was almost exhausted, but he still

kept his grasp on Bunny. The mate bent over them, and Bunny felt his sinewy hand trying to unloosen the yachtman's grasp. Earle's voice rang out loud and sharp:

"Hands off, Hall!"

The mate gritted his teeth with rage. But he dare not betray himself to the boat's crew, and he desisted. The boat pulled back to the yacht. It was a difficult and dangerous pull, for the sea was running high, and there was incessant danger of the boat crashing on the hull of the Albatross and going to pieces. But Hall, scoundrel as he was, was a good seaman and a capable officer. He handled the boat in a way that Bunny, deeply as he disliked and feared the man, could not help admiring. Bunny hardly knew how he scrambled aboard, but he found himself on deck, dripping in a pool of water. As he lay, panting for breath, he felt someone kick him in the ribs, and Earle's voice rapped out:

"You hound, Hall!"

Bunny staggered up. The seamen were making fast the boat. Already the yacht was gliding on her way again. Hall swung away, with a black, savage face. A grasp on the collar supported Bunny as he lurched on the slanting deck, and he blinked round at the fat face of Gubbins, the steward.

"Nice goings on!" said Gubbins. "Falling overboard, and the boss diving after you! Ketch me diving after you, you young hass!"

Bunny did not answer. Gubbins, like the rest, supposed that Bunny had fallen overboard. And for the present, at least, Bunny wisely kept his own counsel.

"Take him to my state-room!" said Mr. Earle.

Gubbins stared. Bunny had hitherto bunked in a corner of the steward's room.

"Your room, sir?" gasped Gubbins.

"Yes! Are you deaf?" snapped Earle irritably.

"Yessir!" gasped Gubbins.

And he helped Bunny below.

Bunny left a trail of water behind him in the saloon as he was led to Mr. Earle's state-room, where the electric light was burning.

"My eye!" said Gubbins. "You may understand the boss, young shaver—I don't! Fancy Mr. Earle jumping into the Bay of Biscay arter a stowaway! Why, everybody thought he was a goner! I tell you, there wasn't a chance in a hundred of picking him up! I s'pose he'd been drinking," added Gubbins, as that explanation occurred to his mind.

"Rot!" said Bunny.

"Don't you be cheeky, young shaver, just because the boss went in for you, and says to me, says he, take you to his state-room," said Gubbins darkly. "Nice mess you're making the room in, too. Well, you'll have to clean it up yourself, that's one comfort. You're wet to the bone, you are, and you ain't got nothing to change into."

"I'm jolly glad to be alive!" said Bunny. "It was awfully good of Mr. Earle to go in for me."

"You wasn't worth it," said Gubbins. "Ketch me going in for you! Yes, sir—coming, sir!" Mr. Earle's voice was heard calling.

Gubbins hastened away, leaving Bunny standing in a pool of water that dripped from his wet clothes.

He came back in a few moments, however, with astonishment and disgust mingled in his fat face.

"Bust me!" said Gubbins. "You seem to be a favourite 'ere, young Hare, since you've give all this trouble. The boss says you're to turn in—in his own blooming state-room! And I'm to take your togs away and dry them. Bust me!"

"Mr. Earle's very kind," said Bunny.

"Oh, 'old your row, and get them things off!" grunted Gubbins, evidently very much put out by all this consideration shown to a nobody.

Bunny gladly stripped off his wet

clothes and towelled himself down. The steward snorted, gathered up the clothes, and left him, still snorting. Bunny was feeling terribly tired, and he was glad enough to turn in. He found the yacht owner's bunk much more comfortable than his former quarters in a corner of the steward's room.

As he laid his head on the softest pillow of his experience, Bunny began to think of what he was going to do. But in less than a minute more he was sleeping soundly.

He did not awaken when there was a step in the room, and so was unaware that Mr. Earle, still in his drenched clothes, stood beside the bunk for several moments staring at his chubby unconscious face.

The yacht owner passed into the adjoining dressing-room to which a bath-room was attached. Running water and splashing did not awaken Bunny. When Mr. Earle emerged from the dressing-room again he looked his usual elegant and well-dressed self. Save for a slight paleness, he showed no sign of the strenuous time he had been through.

He paused again by the bunk and looked at the sleeping Bunny. Then he went out into the saloon. Had Bunny been awake he might have heard then the familiar sound of splashing brandy and swishing soda. He might have heard a little later the muttering husky voice of Hall, the mate. But Bunny was fast asleep, and heard nothing.

Hall, his hard face sullen and savage in the electric light, stood looking at the yacht owner with glaring eyes.

"You're mad," he was saying—"mad as a hatter! You agreed—"

"Take a drink, o' man!" said Earle.

His look and his thick utterance showed that he himself had already taken too many.

Hall made a savage gesture.

"Have you thought of this?" he hissed. "The boy knows who pitched him into the sea. Do you think he will keep that dark? Do you think I'm going to let him live and bring that charge against me?"

"He knows that I was in it, too. He cannot betray you without betraying me. I saved his life."

"And you will trust to that?"

"I've got to trust to it, or let you make me what you never shall make me," answered Earle. "It's no good talking. And you'd better remember, too, that I am master here. I've a dashed good mind to run into the Tagus, and put you ashore there, and be done with you! Now get on deck, and let me be rid of you while I think it out!" snapped Earle.

Hall, trembling with rage, left the saloon. Earle resumed his seat, and there was a gurgle of brandy and a swish of soda. He had said that he would think it out. But it seemed to come easier to him to drown thought.

#### CHAPTER 18.

##### Lost Temper!

BUNNY'S eyes were wide as he gazed at the Rock of Gibraltar. Shaped like a crouching lion. It was a wonderful sight to him, and he could not take his gaze away from it as the Albatross steamed into Algeciras Bay.

Mr. Earle, who was talking with Hall, glanced at him, and his clouded face broke into a smile. The boyish wonder and delight in Bunny's face seemed to touch the hardened man of the world.

He left Hall, came over to Bunny, and touched the boy lightly on the shoulder. Jack Hare started and looked up. In his keen interest in the Rock of Gibraltar, and his memory of what he had read of its association with the heroism of British sailormen, Bunny had rather

forgotten that he was steward's boy on the yacht!

He supposed that Mr. Earle was about to remind him that he was not expected to stand on deck admiring the scenery, and he coloured.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bunny. "I forgot, sir—and I've got the silver to polish for Gubbins, and——"

"Never mind that now, Hare," said Mr. Earle.

"And I've got to——"

"Never mind, I tell you. Stay on deck, and stare at the Rock as much as you like, you young ass."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" said Bunny.

"You've never travelled before, kid?" asked Mr. Earle.

"Never, till I was blown away in that balloon from Margate, sir," answered Bunny. "Except once, when I had a trip in a charabanc to Canterbury. And I've been on a Thames steamer."

Mr. Earle laughed. Apparently he was not impressed by the extent of Bunny's travelling.

"I've always wanted to travel," said Bunny confidently. "I used to watch the ships at Margate and wish I was going in them. I'm a jolly lucky chap to get this chance of seeing the world. I've always been lucky," added Bunny complacently. "My cousin Gilbert says it's a fool's luck. But I don't care."

"You think you were lucky to get on this yacht?" asked Mr. Earle.

"Yes, rather, sir!" answered Bunny cheerfully. "It's topping to be on a splendid ship like this, with such a good man as you are, sir."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Earle, and stared down at the cheerful Bunny.

"Do you think I'm a good man, Hare?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," answered Bunny. "Of course, you've got your faults. You drink too much——"

"Eh?"

"And you gamble," said Bunny.

"But look at the way you jumped into the Bay of Biscay to fish me out, when the brute Hall chucked me overboard. That was awfully brave, and my uncle at Margate says that a brave man is never really bad."

Mr Earle screwed his eyeglass a little tighter into his eye. He seemed in doubt whether to laugh or to kick Bunny down the saloon stairs. Fortunately, he decided to laugh.

"You'd like to go ashore at Gibraltar, Hare?" he asked, after a pause.

Bunny's face fell.

"Of course, I can't object, sir, as I stowed myself away on this ship," he said. "You can land me where you like, of course. But—but I've tried to make myself useful helping Gubbins. I—I know I've broken a good many glasses—and—and I've spilt the soup sometimes——"

"I mean you'd like to go for a run ashore, you young ass?"

Bunny brightened at once.

"Oh, yes, sir, if you'd let me. Fancy trading on the Rock of Gibraltar itself," said Bunny gleefully, "and hearing the Spaniards talk Spanish!"

"You would hardly hear them talk anything else!"

"Nunno! I suppose not!" agreed Bunny. "But I've never met a Spaniard, only once, sir; that was a Spanish sailorman who was at Margate, and he wanted to rob me. His name was Ruy Pinto, and he wore gold earrings in his ears, like a pirate. But I'm to come back to the Albatross?" asked Bunny.

Mr. Earle smiled cynically.

"Do you think Hall would let you out of his sight, now that you know our secret?" he said.

"I've promised to keep that secret, sir!" said Bunny with dignity.

"I'm afraid Hall doesn't believe much in promises."

"Yes, he's an awful rotter, isn't he?" said Bunny. "I wish——" He broke off.

"Well, what do you wish?" asked Mr. Earle.

"I wish you'd sack Hall, and give up that rotten idea of swindling the insurance company, sir," said Bunny. "I'm certain it was Mr. Hall let you into it, because you're too good to think of such a rotten thing for yourself. I'd like to see you get rid of that brute. My uncle at Margate says that evil communications corrupt good manners."

"Never mind your uncle at Margate now, Hare," said Mr. Earle. "I am not getting rid of Hall, and I am not giving up the scheme. Do you still want to stick to the Albatross?"

"Yes, sir!" answered Bunny.

"Why?" demanded Mr. Earle. "You could easily get another job as good as you've got on this yacht: better, in fact, as I'm paying you no wages."

"I hadn't thought about wages," said Bunny innocently. "As I was a stow-away, I can't expect any, I suppose. But I'd like to stick to this ship!"

"Why?" repeated Mr. Earle.

"I suppose it's because I like you, sir," Bunny said. "Besides, I think I may be of use, sir."

"In breaking glasses or spilling the soup?" asked Mr. Earle sarcastically.

"I mean, I may be able to influence you into giving up that beastly swindle that Mr. Hall's leading you into," explained Bunny. "My uncle at Margate says——"

"Bother your uncle at Margate."

"Yes, sir. But he says that a good example has a wonderful influence on a weak character——"

"A weak character?"

"Yes, sir! It's because you've a weak character that you're letting Mr. Hall lead you into wickedness. Now, as I am perfectly honest, I'm a good example," explained Bunny. "And so I think I can say—— Whooooooop!"

For some reason unknown to Bunny, Mr. Earle lost his temper at that point in the conversation. For the second time he was undecided whether to laugh or to kick Bunny down the saloon

stairs. This time he decided on the saloon stairs. Bunny flew.

"Oh, crumbs!" he gasped, as he descended into the saloon, making a nose-dive under the propulsion of a hefty kick.

"My eye!" exclaimed Gubbins, the steward. "Falling down the stairs, you clumsy swab!"

"Ow! No! Mr. Earle kicked me down!" gasped Bunny. "I don't know why!"

"Well, you know why I'm going to kick you," said Gubbins. "It's because you've been loafing on deck and ain't polished that there silver. 'Ere goes!"

Bunny squirmed away from the steward's boot.

While the Albatross ran on into Gibraltar Harbour, between the North Mole and the South, Bunny polished silver and wriggled uncomfortably while he polished. Bunny was seeing the world. But there was no doubt that, so far, he was earning more kicks than hap'ence.

#### CHAPTER 19. An Old Enemy.

"JEVVER 'ear of such a thing!" ejaculated Gubbins, a couple of hours later.

Bunny eyed him warily.

"I couldn't help breaking that egg-spoon," he said. "I'd just got it beautifully bright, when it snapped in my hand!"

"Who's talking about hegg-spoons?" said Gubbins. "Seems to me you can break anything you like on this 'ere hooker, and no 'arm done. You seem to be a favourite with the boss, you do, though you've cost him a fortune in glasses you've broke, and spilled soup on his trousers, and sprayed him in the heye with soda-water. He's a queer codger, is the boss. One minute he kicks you down the stairs and the next he takes you ashore for a run. Jevver 'ear anything like it!"

Bunny brightened.

"I'm going ashore?" he asked eagerly. Since Mr. Earle had kicked him off the deck Bunny had rather given up hope of being taken for that run on the Rock.

"Jest that!" said Gubbins, in disgust. "You're to make yourself tidy, and go ashore with the governor. My heye! 'That young swab's got his work to do,' I says to the boss. 'Old your tongue, Gubbins!' he says to me—me, that's been stoard on this hooker for donkeys' years! If the pay wasn't good, and if a bloke didn't make a bit here and there, I'd chuck up the berth. I would that! Taking stowaway kids for a run ashore!"

"But p'raps he's going to 'and you over to the police for stowing yourself away on the Albatross," he added. "Pr'aps that's it."

"Oh crumbs!" said Bunny.

"Anyhow, you got to wash and make yourself respectable, and get into the boat along of the boss!" snorted Gubbins. "So cut off and do it, afore you break anything else!"

"What-ho!" said Bunny.

It did not take long for Bunny to get ready. The clothes Bunny had worn when he left England had suffered sadly from wear and tear, but he was neat and careful in such matters, and he made quite a respectable appearance. Mr. Earle, in whose nature a careless generosity was combined with a very uncertain temper, and who had an amazingly extensive wardrobe, had given him many things, which Bunny had cleverly cut down and fitted to himself.

So when he looked in Mr. Earle's tall glass after dressing to go ashore, Bunny was flattered by the reflection of quite a well-dressed fellow. And his chubby face shone with high spirits and a recent wash when he appeared on deck, where Mr. Earle was awaiting him with his usual irritable impatience.

"Oh, here you are!" he snapped.

"Yes, sir!" said Bunny brightly.

"Jump into the boat!" A shore boat

had stopped beside the anchored Albatross, with two dark-skinned Spanish boatmen in it. The harbour was as smooth as glass under a blaze of sunshine.

Mr. Earle remained speaking with the mate for a few minutes in low tones before he followed Bunny into the boat. Hall glanced down at Bunny over the rail with a dark look. A grim smile came over his hard, tanned face—a smile that Bunny did not heed at the moment, but which he remembered afterwards.

Bunny wondered dismally for a minute whether Hall was coming ashore also. That would have spoiled the excursion for Bunny. But if Mr. Hall had business ashore, he did not go in the same boat. Mr. Earle descended, and the Spanish boatmen pushed off from the vessel and bent to their oars.

Bunny, looking back, saw Hall watching him over the rail, still with that peculiar, grim smile on his face. But Bunny soon forgot Hall. His delighted glance roved round him as they pulled for the landing-steps. Ships of many nations met Bunny's view, and the dark faces of Moors and Arabs, and over all towered the great Rock.

Mr. Earle sat silent and morose, with a clouded brow. He did not look like a man going on a pleasure excursion. But the cheery Bunny was happy enough for two.

They landed, and Bunny realised, with a thrill of excitement, that he was treading the famous Rock at last. The sights and sounds of the streets were new and delightful to Bunny, and Mr. Earle, morose as he was, pointed out various objects of interest, and finally led him into the Alameda Gardens, where Bunny was delighted anew by the sight of gigantic geraniums—much bigger, he told Mr. Earle, than those grown by his uncle at Margate.

There were plenty of people in the Alameda, all of them interesting to Bunny, and he did not mind at all when Mr. Earle planted him on a seat

and told him to remain there till called for, as it were.

"I shall probably be occupied for an hour or so," said Mr. Earle. "Let me find you here when I return. I dare say you will find it amusing to watch the crowds."

"Yes, rather, sir!" answered Bunny.

The owner of the Albatross walked back into the town.

Bunny found ample interest in watching the people who strolled in the Alameda Gardens—English and American tourists, swarthy Spaniards, still more swarthy Moors from Tangier, brown Arabs, and long-bearded Jews.

A man in a wide-brimmed sombrero came swinging along with a light, panther-like step, though he was of sinewy frame, and Bunny's eyes picked him out from the crowd. It seemed to Bunny that that lissome, swinging walk was familiar to his eyes, and he looked curiously at the face under the sombrero as the man came nearer, walking by in front of the seat where Bunny sat.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Bunny, under his breath.

He knew the olive, rather handsome face, the glinting black eyes, the cynical curve of the lips—above all, the gold ear-rings in the dark ears. It was Ruy Pinto, the Spaniard, who had long ago robbed Bunny on the beach between Margate and Kingsgate in far-off Thanet.

Bunny sat very still. He had never forgotten Ruy Pinto, but he had not expected to meet the man again. And here he was in his own country, only two or three yards from Jack Hare's startled eyes!

In the Alameda Gardens of Gibraltar, in the passing and repassing crowds, Bunny felt that he had nothing to fear from the desperado, but he hoped that Pinto would pass him by unseen. The hour of Mr. Earle's absence had elapsed now, and Bunny did not want his employer to find him engaged in a row with a ruffianly Spaniard when he returned.

Pinto was not looking at him, but he stopped at the other end of the seat and sat down. Taking tobacco and papers from his pocket, he rolled a cigarette and lighted it. And Bunny remembered the aroma of the strong-scented cigarettes Pinto had smoked on Margate beach. As he smoked, Pinto idly watched the passing crowds in the flowery walks of the Alameda, and for some time did not glance at his companion on the bench.

Bunny could not leave the spot. Mr. Earle expected to find him there when he returned. And he shifted uncomfortably when at last the Spaniard's black eyes turned on him—carelessly at first, then with a surprised and fixed stare.

"Madre de Dios!" muttered Pinto. He moved along the seat towards Bunny, and his black eyes glittered. "It is you, muchacho!" he said in the lisping English that Bunny remembered so well.

"Hallo!" said Bunny feebly. He wondered whether Pinto had a knife in his boot, as he had had that day on Kingsgate beach. It was likely enough. Still, if he had, he could hardly venture to use it under a hundred eyes.

"You here—in Spain!" said Pinto.

"In Gibraltar," said Bunny. "This is British territory, Mr. Pinto."

Pinto's black eyes glinted at him. Desperado as the man was, he shared the feeling common to all Spaniards on the subject of the Rock. He did not like to be reminded that a foreign flag waved over even so tiny a corner of his native country.

"Little picaro," he said, "I have not forgotten that you struck me with a rock. And now you are here—in Spain! I kiss you the hands, *senorito!*"

That was a common phrase of Spanish courtesy, but evidently Pinto did not mean it in a friendly sense. He rose from the bench and stood before Bunny, and Bunny rose to his feet also. The Spaniard had a flexible cane under

his arm, and he slipped it into his hand. He made a gesture with it towards the distant Spanish mountains.

"Had I met you there, *senorito*, I should have used the *cuchillo*, not the *baston*. But here the stick must serve—for there is, as you have so politely reminded me, the British flag over us."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bunny. "Look here— Oh, my hat!"

He struck out as Pinto grasped him with his left hand and swung back the stick with his right. His knuckles dashed hard on the swarthy chin, but Pinto did not heed. The stick came down across Bunny's shoulders with a resounding whack.

"Ow!" yelled Bunny.

The next moment a sinewy hand closed on Pinto's collar, and he was jerked away from Bunny—and the swing of a powerful arm sent him sprawling on his back with a crash.

"Caramba!" panted Pinto, as he sprawled.

"Oh, crumbs! Thank goodness you've come, sir!" gasped Bunny.

## CHAPTER 20.

### In the Saddle!

MR. EARLE glanced at Bunny, then turned his eyeglass on the sprawling Spaniard. The crash on the earth seemed to have knocked Ruy Pinto out. He lay gasping, his black eyes glittering up at Herbert Earle like a snake's.

"What does this mean, Hare?" asked Mr. Earle quietly. "Cannot I leave you for an hour, without finding you in a row with a native when I come back?"

"I couldn't help it, sir!" gasped Bunny. "That's the man I told you of, sir, who robbed me at Margate—the man with the ear-rings."

"Caramba!" panted the sprawling Pinto.

A number of people had stopped, and were looking on curiously at the scene. Mr. Earle stooped, grasped the

Spaniard by the collar again, and swung him to his feet.

"Clear off!" he said tersely. "Anda!" And he enforced the order with a powerful kick, which sent Ruy Pinto staggering away.

Pinto swung round, his dusky hand slipping under his short velvet jacket. It was evidently his intention to draw a knife. His swarthy face was convulsed with rage, his black eyes burning. Mr. Earle picked up the stick the ruffian had dropped.

"Look out, sir!" gasped Bunny. "He's got a knife!"

Mr. Earle smiled contemptuously, and advanced on the Spaniard with the stick in his hand. It was not the stick, however, but the knowledge that a hundred pairs of eyes were upon him, that caused Ruy Pinto to leave his knife in the sheath. Escape would have been impossible, had he used the knife. And Pinto remembered it even in his fury.

"Por todos los santos! I shall see you again, señor!" he muttered, as he turned and hurried away, and disappeared in the crowd.

Mr. Earle tossed the stick away in the shrubberies.

"Come!" he said curtly. "You are attracting altogether too much attention here, Hare!"

"I couldn't help——"

"That will do!"

Bunny followed the yachtsman in silence. He kept his eyes open for Ruy Pinto as they left the Alameda, but the man with the ear-rings was not to be seen.

For some time, as they walked, Mr. Earle maintained a morose silence. No doubt the scene in the Alameda had annoyed him. It really had not been Bunny's fault. It really never was Bunny's fault when he landed in a scrape. Scrapes seemed to come along to Bunny of their own accord.

"You'd like a ride?" asked Mr. Earle suddenly.

"What-ho!" said Bunny.

"Have you ridden before?"

"Lots of times, sir, on the donkeys at Margate!"

"Great Scott!" said Mr. Earle.

"I—I really can ride, sir!"

"I have no doubt that you are perfectly able to witch the world with noble horsemanship, after your exploits on the donkeys at Margate!" answered Mr. Earle; and Bunny was glad to see him smile.

Apparently Mr. Earle had made arrangements for the ride during his absence from Bunny, for he stopped at a building where, in the courtyard, two horses were waiting, saddled and bridled. Bunny joyfully climbed into the saddle. He was not, perhaps a finished horseman, and the Spanish groom who held the horse grinned as he mounted. But a dusky grin had no effect on Bunny's cheery spirits. He could stick on a horse, at least, and Bunny loved horses. He made quite a creditable figure as he cantered away northward beside Mr. Earle.

They passed out of the town, and followed the road across the Neutral Zone, a barren, sandy plain. When they passed through "La Linea," Mr. Earle told Bunny that they were on Spanish territory.

They rode on for some time, turning from the road at last into a by-road that was rutty and dusty and burning with heat. The sunshine was like a blaze, and Bunny was perspiring, but he was enjoying himself. Mr. Earle apparently knew the country well. He rode on without slackening rein mile after mile, Bunny clattering by his side. They stopped at last at a little fonda, a wayside inn, where several dark-skinned men were gathered in the courtyard, all of whom stared very curiously at the two riders.

"We will leave the horses here," said Mr. Earle, dismounting. "We shall visit the forest on foot."

Bunny clambered off his horse. He could see that a message must have



been sent from Gibraltar, for it was plain that they were expected at the fonda. The horses were taken away under a lean-to roof that served as a stable, and a fat, swarthy man came bowing and smiling from the dark interior of the inn, whom Mr. Earle greeted by the name of Valdez. Bunny sat down on a bench in the shade of a great tree in the courtyard, leaving Mr. Earle in conversation with Senor Valdez.

They were speaking Spanish—a tongue unknown to Bunny—and for that reason, perhaps, they spoke in his hearing. Valdez looked several times towards the boy under his black brows, with a greasy grin that Bunny did not like at all. It seemed to him that they were talking of him; though why Mr. Earle should be discussing him with the greasy Spanish innkeeper was a mystery. Bunny caught the word "cuchillo," which he knew meant knife, uttered by the innkeeper, and Mr. Earle frowned and shook his head angrily.

"No, no! Prisonero!" he answered, and from the resemblance of the word Bunny guessed that it meant "prisoner."

"Si usted gusta!" answered the innkeeper, with an expressive shrug, and without knowing the words, Bunny knew that the man was saying "as you like." "Con todo mi corazon, senor." And as he laid his hand on his heart in speaking, Bunny guessed that that meant, "With all my heart."

Mr. Earle joined Bunny on the bench, and Valdez spoke in Spanish to two of the swarthy loafers in the inn-yard. They nodded, looked hard at Bunny, and walked away and disappeared.

"You're thirsty, I suppose, boy?" said Mr. Earle abruptly.

"Yes, rather, sir," assented Bunny.

"Will you try the wine of the country?" The innkeeper was placing flasks on the table under the tree.

"Thank you, no, sir," said Bunny. "My uncle at Margate says—"

"That will do. Drink what you like."

"Water's all right, sir," said Bunny.

"If you knew the ways of Spanish country inns, you would hardly think so," answered Mr. Earle. "But we can get some mineral waters."

So Bunny refreshed himself with Vichy water, while Mr. Earle sampled the red wine from the flasks rather freely. Bunny was inclined to warn him that wine-drinking in the heat of the day was not good for anybody, but luckily he held his tongue. Mr. Earle, with brief bursts of good-humour, had been growing more and more morose. It seemed to Bunny that he had something on his mind, and he wondered whether his conscience was troubling him on account of the plot to rook the insurance company by the pretended loss of the yacht.

That Mr. Earle had landed him at Gibraltar and brought him to this lonely place so far from the fortress with any ulterior object did not occur to Bunny's simple mind. Bunny never had been suspicious, and he liked Mr. Earle too much, in spite of his vagaries of temper, to doubt his good faith.

"Let us go," said Mr. Earle at last. They left the inn and walked down a dusty and broken track that led into the shades of the cork forest.

## CHAPTER 21.

### A Prisoner!

"O H, crumbs!" ejaculated Bunny suddenly, as he looked back towards the fonda.

Mr. Earle started sharply.

"What—what is it?" he exclaimed. His nerviness seemed to have increased since he had helped himself so freely to the red wine at the fonda.

"That merchant with the ear-rings, sir!" said Bunny.

Mr. Earle looked back. They were under the trees now on the verge of the forest. Behind them the fonda lay in sunshine and dust. At the open gateway of the courtyard a horseman

had stopped and dismounted. The sunshine caught the glitter of the gold earrings in his ears. It was Ruy Pinto.

"Oh! What does it matter?" said Mr. Earle carelessly.

"He must have followed us from Gib, sir," said Bunny, rather uneasily. "He's a savage brute—and you remember you kicked him——"

"Nonsense!"

Mr. Earle evidently attached no importance to Pinto. He was thinking of other things. He walked on by a trodden path into the cork forest, and Bunny followed him. Bunny soon forgot Ruy Pinto in his new surroundings. Tall, noble trees grew to a great height, great branches shutting off the glare of the sun, and the shade was delicious after the blaze of heat in the open.

"I say, isn't this ripping, sir?" exclaimed Bunny.

Mr. Earle did not reply. He walked on in a listless way, turning from the trodden track into the thickness of the wood. Here there were heavy undergrowths between the tall trees, shutting off the view, and countless insects buzzed in the leaves and twigs. Several times they had to part trailing branches and masses of bush to pass on their way.

Mr. Earle stopped at last.

"I dare say you are tired, Hare," he said.

"Not a bit, sir!" answered Bunny cheerfully.

"I think you had better rest for a time," said Mr. Earle. "Remain here till I rejoin you, Hare!"

"Yes, sir!" said Bunny obediently.

He would have preferred to ramble on, but it was not his place to argue with Mr. Earle. He threw himself on a bed of moss under a tree, while Mr. Earle went on through the wood, and in a few minutes was lost to sight and sound.

The moss was soft, the shade delicious, the buzz of the numerous insects lulling. Bunny found that he was, after all, a little tired, and he

stretched himself luxuriously and rested. He was feeling disposed to fall in with the custom of the country, the "siesta" or afternoon sleep. And when he tired of watching flashing insects and twittering birds in the branches, he closed his eyes.

But if Bunny dozed, he dozed lightly. His eyes opened quickly enough at the sound of a rustling in the underwood, and he jumped to his feet.

"Here, Mr. Earle," he said cheerfully.

The next moment Bunny gave a yell. It was not Mr. Earle who appeared through the thickets. Two swarthy, grinning faces met his startled eyes—the faces of the two men at the fonda who had left after a word from Valdez and a look at Bunny. And both of them leaped at him at the same moment and grasped him by the arms.

"Oh, crumbs!"

Both the Spaniards were lithe, sinewy fellows, taller a good deal than Bunny, either of them more than a match for him. They held his arms in a hard grip and grinned down at his startled face.

"Venga usted!" said one of them.

"Look here, let go!" exclaimed Bunny indignantly. "What's this game? If you're going to rob me——"

"Venga!"

"I suppose that means come along," said Bunny as the two Spaniards forced him away through the forest. "Look here! What do you want? Let go, you rotters, or I'll jolly well kick!"

"Por aqui!" said one of the braves.

Bunny struggled.

"Help!" he shouted. "Mr. Earle! Help!" He hoped that Mr. Earle might be within hearing.

One of the Spaniards jerked a knife from his hip, and the blade glittered under Bunny's eyes. Over it the man scowled at him blackly. He said something in Spanish, of which Bunny did not understand the words, but the tone and gestures were enough. Bunny ceased to struggle.

The man sheathed the knife again, and the two of them led Bunny on through the dark aisles of the wood. Bunny breathed hard as he went. Why the bravoes were marching him off he could not guess. The thought of Ruy Pinto came into his mind, with a chill to his heart. But he realised that this could have nothing to do with the revengeful Pinto.

These two rascals had left the fonda half an hour at least before Pinto had arrived there. They did not intend, apparently, to kill him. He was a prisoner. Why they could want to make the steward's boy of the Albatross a prisoner passed Bunny's understanding.

And then, in a flash, it came to him, and he knew why Mr. Earle had left him alone in the cork forest. He remembered the talk at the fonda—the mention of the word "cuchillo" by the fondista, and Mr. Earle's angry reply: "No, no, prisionero!" If Bunny was not bright, he could at least put two and two together and make four of it.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Bunny, in dismay.

This was the explanation of that run ashore, of that ride to the cork forest far from the town. This was what had been heavy on Herbert Earle's mind all that day. Bunny had been led into a trap, and he was a prisoner in lawless hands.

He owed that much to Earle; for had Hall had the ordering of it, he would have been stabbed and left dead in the cork forest. That, doubtless, was why Mr. Earle had taken the matter in hand personally—to make sure that no murder was done.

Bunny was a prisoner—to keep safe the secret he had learned on board the Albatross. Hall mocked at his promise, and even Earle could not believe that he was safe so long as Bunny had it in his power to talk. The boy was to be kept a prisoner in some remote spot, to ensure his silence. Bunny understood now.

He was dismayed, but stronger than his dismay was the feeling of pain that the man he liked, the man he had trusted, could be guilty of such treachery. No wonder he had had a weight on his mind; no wonder his face had been overcast.

Bunny knew now that he had left him in the Alameda at Gibraltar while he made the arrangements for this blow. That was why the rough crew at the fonda had been expecting the visitors.

"Oh, crumbs!" said poor Bunny.

He tramped on between the two Spaniards. They followed lonely tracks through the forest in silence, only giving Bunny a threatening glare when he lagged. They emerged from the forest at last, and Bunny looked round him hopefully in the open sunlight. But the country was lonely and deserted, and they followed a rough foot-track through broken country. There was no building in sight, but in the distance Bunny sighted a windmill on a low eminence, and his conductors were heading for the mill.

They were hurrying now, with quick glances round them, and for Spaniards to hurry in the heat of the day showed that they were anxious to get their prisoner into cover. Once again the knife was displayed to Bunny as a hint of what he might expect if he delayed, and he hurried on between the men who gripped his arms.

They passed through a tumble-down gateway into the yard of the mill. Then Bunny was led through a low doorway.

"Hola, molinero!" shouted one of the bravoes.

A black-bearded man, in a white, dusty coat, came from the interior darkness. He nodded to the bravoes, and grinned at Bunny.

"Look here!" exclaimed Bunny. He guessed that he had reached the place where he was to be kept a "prisionero."

The molinero, or miller, gave him a grinning nod, and spoke in English.

"No afraid—all right," he said. "You stop wiz me—yes! Venga usted por aca! Come zis way."

He took Bunny's arm, and led him up a narrow stair into the high upper room of the mill. And the black-bearded man, pushing him in, closed the door on him and bolted it on the outside.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Bunny.

He jumped to the little, dirty, cobwebby window. Outside, the sails of the windmill turned slowly and laboriously, under the wind from the Bay of Algeciras. Bunny sighted the two bravoos strolling away, laughing together.

No doubt they were returning to Valdez, at the fonda, to report their success. They disappeared in the distance, and Bunny sat down on a bench and fairly groaned!

#### CHAPTER 22.

##### In the Mill.

**S**TANDING at the little cobwebby window, Bunny heard the creaking of the rickety old stair under the heavy tread of the fat man who was ascending.

Bunny's usually cheerful, chubby face was dismal. From the window he could see the blue of the Bay of Algeciras in the far distance, with a glimpse of the cork forest. Somewhere beyond the forest to the south was the Rock of Gibraltar, out of Bunny's sight. Creaking in the wind from the sea, the sails of the mill turned slowly and heavily past the little high window, shutting out Bunny's view from time to time.

He had had a faint hope of escaping by the window, but it looked over a sheer drop of sixty feet. The small, dirty, evil-smelling room had no other outlet, save the door, which was bolted on the outside. Bunny was a helpless prisoner. And perhaps for the first time since he had started seeing the

world Bunny wished he was back home at Wistaria Villa, at Margate.

He turned from the window as he heard the heavy tread of the miller ascending. He looked round the room, in search of something that might serve as a weapon. The idea had come to him of knocking the miller on the head as he entered, stunning him, and so making his escape.

He picked up a stool, the only seat that the room contained. It was heavy and unwieldy, but there was no doubt that if Bunny had succeeded in getting one crack on the miller's head with it the miller would retire from active business for a time.

There was a jarring of rusty bolts withdrawn. Bunny placed himself behind the door, the heavy stool in his hand, a desperate gleam in his eyes. Then suddenly from outside he heard a familiar voice—the voice of Mr. Earle. The miller was not alone.

Bunny dropped the stool. One enemy he might have disposed of, with luck. But two made it hopeless. And there was a faint hope in Bunny's heart that perhaps the owner of the Albatross came as a friend, perhaps as a rescuer.

"Is he here?" Earle was asking. "In this den?"

"The boy—si, senor—yes, he is here," said the miller, in his imperfect English. "Here he is safe! The door—you see he is strong. The window—if he shall jump, he shall break him the neck!"

The door was thrown open. A tall, elegant figure stepped in, and Herbert Earle's eyeglass turned on Bunny. The fat miller remained outside the doorway on the stairs.

Mr. Earle looked at Bunny, and the boy returned his glance in silence, but with a reproach that brought the colour to the yachtman's cheeks. The young man seemed to find it difficult to speak, and Bunny waited for him to break the silence.

"I'm sorry for this, Hare," said Mr. Earle at last awkwardly. "But you

have only yourself to thank. If you had not heard Hall talking to me that time on the Albatross—"

"I never meant to."

"I know that—but you did!" said Earle irritably. "I am sorry, as I said. But it cannot be helped. You have only yourself to blame! Do not give the miller trouble. He is a rough fellow, and would use his knife as soon as not. I am sorry, my boy, for I really like you. You are such a fool that one cannot help liking you."

"Oh!" said Bunny.

"If we could have trusted you!" muttered Earle. "If you would have joined in the scheme for a share of the loot. Hall suggested that, but I would not think of it, Hare. You had better remain a fool than become a rogue. I will have no hand in making a rascal of you!"

"I couldn't have joined in that rotten scheme, sir!" said Bunny quietly. "It's dishonest, sir. And my uncle at Margate says that honesty is the best policy!"

Mr. Earle smiled faintly.

"I regret that I never had the advantage of your uncle's instructions, Hare," he said. "But you cannot do better than act on it yourself. I did not intend to see you here, boy. But I had to satisfy myself that you were well and safe. The Albatross will leave Gibraltar to-morrow. I shall never see you again. Remember me as kindly as you can."

He turned to the door.

"I shall always remember your kindness, sir," said Bunny. "And I know that this is Hall's doing, not yours. I don't owe you any grudge, sir. But I'm not going to stop here longer than I can help!"

Mr. Earle gave an impatient shrug.

"If you try to escape, Hare, you may be stabbed by one of these ruffians. I warn you!"

"I'll chance it, sir!"

"Oh, you are a fool!" snapped Earle. "But if you will be a fool, you must fare according to your folly!"

"Hold on a minute, sir!" said Bunny, as the young man was stepping out through the doorway.

"What is it?" Earle asked. "Cut it short!"

"I want to warn you to be on your guard, sir, till you get back to the Albatross," said Bunny. "That Spaniard, Ruy Pinto. If he gets a chance of sticking a knife into you, you will never get back to Gib alive!"

Earle stared at Bunny.

"You young ass!" he said. "Are you concerned about my safety?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" answered Bunny. "You were very kind to me on the yacht, and you fished me out of the Bay of Biscay. And though you're rather a beast now, I don't bear any malice. I believe that villain Pinto is after you, sir, and I'd be jolly glad to know you were safe back on the yacht!"

"Would you like me to send you word—in your prison here?" asked Mr. Earle sarcastically. "Good heavens! I made a mistake in having you shut up in this lonely mill, Hare. I should have found a home for idiots for you!"

With that the yachtsman walked out of the room and descended the creaking stairs. The grinning miller placed a large jar of water and a loaf on a wooden platter on the floor, then withdrew, closing the door and shooting the bolts behind him.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bunny.

Again Bunny looked from the little window. His heart was heavy. He saw the tall, elegant figure of Mr. Earle walking slowly along a path that led to the cork wood.

Several times the yachtsman looked back at the mill and paused, as if undecided. It was easy for Bunny to guess the doubt and remorse that were in the young man's mind.

Bunny felt no bitterness towards him. It was rather compassion that was in his heart as he watched the tall figure dwindling in the distance. More than once he hoped that Mr. Earle was about to turn back, giving rein to the scruples of conscience that

evidently were troubling him. But though he paused often he kept on, and disappeared at last in the dusky shades of the cork wood.

Bunny continued to watch from the window as the sun sank lower, gleaming red on the shining waters of the Bay of Algeciras.

A little later he saw the miller emerge and heard the creak of a rusty lock. The miller rolled away, and Bunny guessed that he was going to join his friends at the fonda, where there was drink and company. There was no sound in the mill after he was gone. The prisoner in the little high garret was the only tenant of the building now.

Bunny went to the door and groped over it. It was thick and strong, and secured by the iron bolts outside. There was no chance of beating a way through with the stool. Indeed, Bunny knew that if there had been any chance of escape he would not have been left alone in the mill.

His quarters were dingy enough, and the food and drink anything but luxurious. But Bunny was not worrying about such trifles. He was a prisoner, and he wanted his freedom. He had no doubt that Mr. Earle's warning had been given in earnest, and that his captors would not hesitate to use their knives if they found him escaping. All the same, his thoughts concentrated on escape.

The miller and the other bravoes were away now, doubtless drinking at the fonda on the edge of the cork wood. If Bunny could have got out he had hopes of finding his way back to Gibraltar, and once within the British lines he would have been safe. If he was to escape, it must be while he was left alone in the mill.

He looked down from the window and shivered. There was neither handhold nor foothold for a climber, and a fall was instant death. Likely enough, his enemies would not be displeased if he made the hopeless attempt and perished.

"I've got to get out!" said Bunny between his teeth. "Where there's a will there's a way, as my uncle at Margate says. But what's the way?"

The wind was freshening from the sea, and the great sails rolled past the little window. Bunny watched them idly. But slowly, as he watched, an idea came into his mind and a gleam into his eyes. He watched a sail pass by the little window, descending slowly as it turned, and approaching the ground.

"By gum!" said Bunny.

He breathed hard and quick. He felt his heart beating unpleasantly fast. But determination was growing on his face.

It was possible to clamber out of the window and catch a whirling sail as it swept round. If he caught a secure hold, he would be carried over as it turned and carried down to within a jump of the ground. If he missed a secure hold—

Bunny knew the chances were against him. He was not, perhaps, very bright, but he had a solid fund of calm common sense. And he could calculate chances. He knew that if he trusted himself to the sails of the windmill there was perhaps one chance that he would land on his feet to a hundred that he would be dashed to pieces.

What other chance was there? His idea of stunning the miller with the stool when he came in was a desperate one, most likely to end in a thrust of a long knife, and the end of all things for Jack Hare. As for remaining quietly a prisoner, Bunny refused even to contemplate that. Any risk to life and limb was better than submission to his fate.

His mind was made up at last. He crawled out of the little window and lodged himself on the narrow sill. Bunny was a good climber, with a steady head. He owed that to a boyhood by the Margate cliffs. But he carefully avoided looking down into the dizzy depth below.

The billowing sail went past Bunny, brushing him. From his precarious position he watched it with a steady eye, letting it pass. Fear had been left out of Bunny's composition, and it was with a steady eye and a cool, calculating brain that he watched the great sail whirling on earthward.

In another minute now he would be taking his chance, and in a few seconds after that he would either be free or dashed to death. And he did not hesitate.

Slowly the great sail revolved up and over, and at precisely the right moment Bunny clutched—and held. Had his heart failed him then, Bunny would have been lost. He was clutching, holding on for his life, and sweeping dizzily through the air.

Earth and sky swam round him. Down swept the sail, carrying Bunny with it. If he had miscalculated, if the jump was too great when the sail was at its lowest—that thought flashed in his mind, but it did not shake his nerve. He was for it now, live or die! He had taken the chance, and there was no retreat. He had to jump to safety or death. It was only a matter of seconds, yet it seemed ages to Bunny before the long arm of the windmill pointed to the earth and he let go his hold.

Over him the sails of the windmill whirled on.

"Ow!" gasped Bunny. "Wow! Oh crumbs!"

He felt for the moment as if he had dropped into a wasps' nest. There was a straggling bush into which he had fallen, and there were thorns in the bush. He struggled out painfully.

"Oh, crumbs!" he panted.

He was scratched by the thorns, but he realised that it was fortunate for him that the bush had been there. The drop had shaken him a good deal, but he was not otherwise hurt—except for the scratches. He rubbed the scratches ruefully, but his heart was throbbing with relief and delight.

He stepped away from the mill and looked round him cautiously. There was no one in sight. The windmill was in a lonely spot. Bunny grinned, thinking of the surprise and rage of the miller when he returned and found that bird had flown. But it was necessary to get clear of the place before the miller or his friends came back. If they came on him, he would be either murdered or recaptured.

Bunny started at a run in the direction he had seen Mr. Earle take, towards the cork wood. Once he was in the gloomy shades of the cork forest, he had no doubt of being able to dodge possible pursuit. He covered the ground very quickly, and panted with relief when he found himself within the wood.

He stopped there to open his pocket-knife and cut a stout cudgel from a thicket. If he came on the enemy before he found his way back to Gibraltar, Bunny did not intend to be dealt with easily. He felt better with a thick cudgel in his hand.

He tramped on by the winding path in the wood. He hoped to find his way to the road that led back to Gibraltar, but his first care was to place a good distance between himself and the mill. It was certain that he would be pursued as soon as he was missed, and he could not tell how soon that might be.

Bunny kept his eyes well about him and listened intently as he threaded his way among the great trees. It was probable that he was not very far behind Mr. Earle, and Bunny would rather have fallen in with any of the braves than with the owner of the Albatross.

Suddenly from the silence of the forest came a sound that made him start. It was a rustling, scuffling sound of a struggle, and to Bunny's ears came the panting of hurried breath.

Bunny stood quite still for some

moments. A desperate struggle was going on at a short distance, screened from his sight by the trees and interlacing underwoods. Prudence warned Bunny to keep clear of it. But as he stood hesitating, a voice came to his ears—a panting voice that Bunny knew. Not for a second longer did he hesitate. With the cudgel gripped hard in his hand, Bunny plunged through the thickets in the direction of the struggle.

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### CHAPTER 23.

#### From the Thickets!

**H**ERBERT EARLE leaned on the trunk of a massive tree, selected a cigar from his case, lighted it, and smoked slowly, his moody eyes fixed on the ground. His brow was black and troubled.

Many times, since leaving Bunny in the mill, Earle had been strongly tempted to turn back and release the boy from his imprisonment, at any risk to himself and to his plot. And though he kept to his purpose, his brow grew troubled. He strove in vain to dismiss the boy's reproachful face from his mind.

Long he stood there, leaning on the tree in deep and troubled thought. His cigar burnt out, and he threw away the stump. He did not hear a faint rustling in the thickets, and did not know that a pair of keen, glinting black eyes watched him intently.

Had he been on the alert he might have been warned by that faint rustle—might have discerned the gleam of gold ear-rings in the shadows of the underwood. But he was not thinking of danger. He had forgotten Ruy Pinto. Bunny's warning had made no impression on his mind.

From his cover in the thickets Ruy Pinto watched him, with gloating vengeance in his black eyes. Ruffian and thief as Pinto was, he had all

the lofty pride of a Spaniard. The humiliation of a kicking could only be wiped out in blood. And Pinto had followed the yachtsman from Gibraltar with savage vengeance in his heart. Of what Earle's business was at the lonely inn and in the cork wood Pinto knew nothing and cared nothing. All he cared for was the fact that he had tracked his enemy to a solitary place, where his vengeance could be satisfied.

For long minutes he watched the yachtsman, grinning as he noted how deeply Earle was buried in thought, how utterly he was off his guard, and unsuspecting of danger. But Pinto did not show himself. It was more likely than not that the yachtsman had a revolver about him, and it was not Ruy Pinto's intention to pit his knife against the Englishman's revolver. It was his game to take his enemy by surprise, without giving him a chance.

He stirred at last and crept away among the underwood, approaching by a circuitous route the tree against which Earle leaned.

In spite of his cat-like caution, there was several times a rustle; but Earle did not hear or heed it. Softly, silently, like a snake in the grass, the man with the ear-rings drew himself from the thicket behind the tree within a few feet of his unguarded victim.

Now he had only to leap round the massive trunk, and he would be upon his enemy. One thrust of the long knife that was in his hand would wipe out the score.

With his white teeth set, his eyes glittering, Pinto leaped suddenly into view and hurled himself at the yachtsman. The uplifted knife gleamed in a shaft of sunlight that filtered through the heavy branches above.

Earle, taken by surprise as he was by the sudden and unexpected attack, did not fall under the fierce blow as the ruffian anticipated. At the right



moment he sprang away from the tree, and the blade missed by inches.

"What——" ejaculated Earle. He leaped back again as Ruy Pinto followed him up, slashing with the knife. He twisted away from the slash, and the knife tore along his sleeve, grazing the skin and drawing blood from his arm. The next instant Earle had grasped the dusky wrist and was holding the knife off.

Ruy Pinto wrenched at his wrist to free it, but the yachtsman held it in a grip of iron. They stood almost chest to chest, their eyes meeting.

"You!" panted Earle. He recognised the man with the ear-rings, whom he had kicked in the Alameda. "You scoundrel!"

Pinto wrenched at his knife-hand again. But Earle's grip on his wrist was like steel; his life depended on that grip. The ruffian's sinewy left arm grasped round him, and they struggled.

All Earle's moody listlessness had left him now. He was fighting for his life, and he put every ounce of strength into it. To and fro they rocked, breathing hard and quick. Pinto's knife-hand still held in a grip of steel that prevented him from using his weapon. With his hand free for a single instant, he would have ended the struggle with a deadly thrust, and Earle held on for his life. He was taller than the Spaniard, and muscular. But Pinto was a mass of sinew, fully his equal in a struggle. Twice, thrice, the keen blade grazed Earle as they rocked, though he held back the weapon from a stab.

A long minute passed—another and another—and the struggle went on almost in silence. Each was exerting strength to the utmost; but fortune favoured the Spaniard. Earle's foot caught in a trailing root. As he tripped, Pinto threw his weight upon him, and the Englishman went heavily to the ground, the Spaniard over him.

Still he held the dusky wrist, though he was on his back in the herbage, and he had no chance to rise. Pinto's left hand grasped his shoulder. Earle, with his left, struck again and again at the swarthy, gloating face above him while with his right he still clung desperately to the ruffian's wrist. Ruy Pinto dragged up his knee, planted it on the fallen man, and dragged at his knife-hand to free it.

Earle was at a hopeless disadvantage, and it was only a matter of moments now. This was the end of his scheming; this was the punishment of his treachery. He had left the boy a prisoner at the mill to keep his miserable secret, only to find his death in the cork forest. In those gloomy shades he and his secret were to perish together. The man with the ear-rings grinned down at him.

"Now, senor——" chuckled Pinto.

"Help!" The shout left Earle's lips involuntarily. But it was useless to call in the solitary depths of the cork wood, and especially to call in English. The cry had left him almost unconsciously.

"Who will hear you in this forest, senor?" Pinto grinned. "You are sorry—yes—that you kicked me, in the Alameda?"

"You dog!" panted Earle.

Ruy Pinto wrenched at his knife-hand, with his knee jammed on the fallen man. His hand came free from Earle's desperate grasp. The long knife flashed high. Earle looked up at the flashing blade and the gleaming black eyes of the Spaniard, and looked for death. It was the end!

Neither of them had heard, or heeded, in the tense struggle the sound of a rustle in the underwood. Neither dreamed that anyone was at hand. But as the long knife flashed up a stocky figure leaped from the thickets, and even as the blow descended Bunny struck with his

cudgel, and the blow crashed on the descending arm.

The knife flew through the air, dropping a couple of yards away, and the Spaniard gave a yell of rage and agony as his numbed arm dropped to his side.

#### CHAPTER 24.

##### Fast Asleep!

UP went Bunny's cudgel again, as the enraged Spaniard, hissing with rage, spun round towards this new enemy. It came down with a crash on Pinto's head, and the man with the ear-rings reeled from the blow.

He rolled off his victim, and sprawled for a moment on the grass. Earle sat up dazedly, dizzy from his un hoped-for escape, amazed by the sight of the boy whom he had left a prisoner in the mill.

Bunny did not heed him for the moment. He leaped after Pinto, who was scrambling towards his knife. He struck again with the cudgel, and the Spaniard squirmed frantically out of his way and leapt to his feet.

"You rotter!" panted Bunny.

Earle staggered up. His hand slid into his hip pocket, and Pinto, as he saw the movement, gave up on the instant the thought of recovering his knife and continuing the affray. He leaped away into the underwood as Earle's hand came out with a revolver in it.

Crack! Earle fired instantly, but his hand was shaking from the desperate struggle, and the Spaniard's movements were swift. The bullet missed Pinto by a yard or more as he leaped away. The next moment the underwood had swallowed the Spaniard from sight.

Twice again Earle fired into the wood in the direction of the fleeing Spaniard, though with little hope of hitting him. The rustling of the

Spaniard's flight died away in the depths of the cork wood.

"He's gone, sir!" said Bunny.

Earle returned the revolver to his pocket. He was panting, exhausted by the struggle. The perspiration ran thickly down his face. He stared at Bunny as he might have stared at a ghost, but did not speak. He leaned back on a tree, gasping for breath.

Bunny eyed him rather warily. He had come to the rescue without thinking of himself. But now that the man with ear-rings was gone Bunny wondered what was going to happen. He was not going to be taken back to the mill, that was certain. And he watched Earle, prepared to dodge away into the wood at the first hostile movement.

Earle broke his silence at last.

"You've saved my life, boy!" he said huskily.

"Yes, sir," said Bunny cheerfully. "That was the man I warned you about! Wasn't it lucky I got here in time?"

"You got out of the mill?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it, sir?" grinned Bunny. "I told you I shouldn't stay there!"

"But how?" Earle eyed him strangely.

Bunny explained how he made his escape.

"You might have been dashed to pieces!" Earle muttered. "It's a miracle you were not—"

"It was rather touch and go, sir," agreed Bunny. "But it was a case of neck or nothing. You see, I wasn't going to stay there. If you're all right now I'll clear off. I've got to get back to Gib, somehow."

"Stop!"

"I—I hope you're not thinking of getting me back to the mill, sir," said Bunny anxiously, "because I'm not going!"

Earle smiled faintly.

"You young ass, do you think I would harm you—after what you've

done? You are going back to Gibraltar with me."

"Do you mean that, sir?"

"Of course I mean it! I've treated you badly, but do you think I'm an ungrateful hound?" muttered Earle.

"Oh, no!" said Bunny. "Of course I trust you, sir."

"Well, you shall show your trust," said Earle. "Come—we will go back to the inn, and take the horses to ride to Gibraltar."

He started at a rapid walk through the cork wood. Bunny followed him. Perhaps, for a moment, there was a faint misgiving in Bunny's breast. They were going to the fonda—where he would be in the power of the bravos again if Earle broke faith with him. But Bunny had a trusting nature, and there was something in Earle's conscious-stricken face that told him that he had no cause to doubt.

In the falling dusk they threaded the paths of the cork forest swiftly. A light was glimmering from the fonda when they came in sight of it. Earle strode into the courtyard with Bunny at his heels. Valdez, the innkeeper, came towards him, staring in blank astonishment at Bunny. He broke into a torrent of Spanish, and Earle interrupted him curtly.

"Horses!" he snapped. "Los caballos! Pronto!"

"Si, senor!" gasped the amazed innkeeper.

The horses were brought out of the lean-to stable. Bunny drew a quick breath as the fat figure of the miller appeared in the doorway of the inn. The man stared at him with starting eyes, and continued to stare blankly as Bunny clambered into the saddle. And as the horses clattered away the innkeeper and the miller stood together at the gate staring after them in astonishment, joined by three or four other swarthy fellows who stared also, and talked together in wondering

tones. Earle's change of programme had evidently astounded the rascally crew who had been hired to do his rascally work.

Earle rode at a gallop on the ruddy road, and Bunny kept pace with him. They reached the open road that ran through La Linea to the fortress, and rode on to Gibraltar.

The sound of the evening gunfire from the fortress had died away. In the velvety gloom of the night they galloped on. Bunny was aware that the gates of the fortress were shut at night, and he wondered whether they were likely to be shut out of Gibraltar. But a gate was open when they reached the Neutral Ground, and they rode into the town under the stars.

The horses were put up at the livery stable where they had been hired, and Earle made Bunny a sign to follow him. They reached the landing-steps, and Earle called for a boat.

Bunny sighed. He was safe back in Gibraltar now! And the time had come to part. In spite of all that had happened Bunny was sorry. Mr. Earle turned round to him and smiled faintly at his clouded face.

"You are safe now, Hare, and free to do as you like," he said.

"Yes, sir," answered Bunny.

"If you choose to remain in Gibraltar you may remain, and I will provide you with money to see you through," said Mr. Earle quietly. "I will trust to your promise to keep my secret!"

"You can trust me, sir!" said Bunny.

"Then you still stay here?"

Bunny was silent.

"If you choose to come back on the Albatross I shall be glad," went on Earle. "If—after what's happened—you feel disposed to trust me, Hare, come back with me to the ship."

Bunny's clouded face cleared.

"I'll be jolly glad, sir!" he answered cheerfully. "I don't want to part with you. You see, I like you."

"You young ass!" said Earle.

He stepped into the boat, and Bunny followed. The Spanish boatmen pulled for the yacht. In a few minutes they were alongside, and the ladder was let down for Mr. Earle. Hall, the mate, met him as he stepped on deck, with an eager look.

"You're late," he said. "I expected you back earlier, Mr. Earle. But—all's well, I hope?"

Earle smiled sarcastically.

"Quite!" he answered. "Come up, Hare!"

The mate gave a start.

"The boy—here?" he muttered. "What—"

His eyes gleamed at Bunny as he came on deck. His hard, tanned face was convulsed with rage. He stepped closer to Mr. Earle, glaring at him, unheeding the wondering looks of three or four seamen.

"What does this mean?" he snarled. "What—"

"That will do, Hall!"

"I tell you—"

"Hold your tongue!"

Mr. Earle signed to Bunny to follow him below. Hall was left on deck, staring, and muttering under his breath.

Bunny was fast asleep in his bunk when, next morning, the Albatross weighed anchor and stood away from Gibraltar across the rich blue Mediterranean!

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CHAPTER 25.  
OF MOROCCO.

BUNNY shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared through the shimmering heat towards the Moroccan coast. Round the yacht shone the intense blue of the Mediterranean. Overhead, the sky was azure and cloudless. Heat clung to the ship. The deck was hot to the touch, stanchions and bolts almost burning. Southward, hazy in the heat, loomed the mountains of Morocco; nearer at hand, the arid beach, the grim reefs

that are the terror of sailormen, the rolling lines of surf.

But the arid desolation of the shore, the burning heat of the sun, did not matter to Bunny. He was seeing Africa for the first time—except for the glimpse he had had when the yacht came through the Straits of Gibraltar. This, Bunny told himself, was real Africa! Behind those sand-dunes, dusty in the distance, lurked fierce Riffs. Away back in the mountains were savage tribes who disdained to bow their heads to the white man!

He could see no sign of a town, port, or harbour. The Albatross, after running across from Gibraltar, seemed to have picked out the loneliest spot on a lonely coast. Bunny was not surprised at that, knowing the intentions of Mr. Earle and Hall.

What was going to happen on board the Albatross required no witnesses!

Bunny had hoped against hope that Mr. Earle would give up his scheme of losing his yacht—that he would shake himself free from the influence of Hall. But it was only too clear that Earle was holding to his purpose, and that lonely spot on the Moroccan coast had been sought to carry out the pretended loss of the yacht.

Bunny ceased to look at Africa at last, and glanced about the deck. The Albatross no longer presented her former spick-and-span appearance. Since leaving Gibraltar there was a great difference.

Seven or eight new men, Spaniards and lascars, lounged lazily about, looking like anything but a yachting crew.

Bunny knew that they had been shipped in place of a number of the hands who had been left behind at Gibraltar. The English yachting crew could not have been drawn into the desperate scheme hatched between the owner and the mate, and they had been got rid of, these lounging lubbers taking their places.

There were a few of the original crew on board now, and those few, Bunny

guessed, were all in the secret. Even the cook and the steward had been left behind, and Bunny had had to turn to and do their duties as well as he could.

The look of the yacht now was neglected, even dirty. There was hardly a piece of brass that did not need polishing. The new hands were the men for desperate enterprise, not for industrious work.

Hall was scanning the reefs through a pair of binoculars. Mr. Earle lounged in a deck-chair, smoking a cigar.

Bunny glanced at him, and Earle's eyes met his. Very elegant and handsome the young man looked in his yachting garb. But there were lines of weariness in his face. He smiled faintly, and made Bunny a sign to approach.

"You're for it now, my boy!" said Mr. Earle.

"You're going on with it, sir?" asked Bunny.

"That is why we are here."

"And when?"

"To-night! I should have left you behind at Gib," continued Mr. Earle. "But you need have no fear, Hare. You will come in the lifeboat with me when the Albatross goes down. When she goes down officially, I mean," he added.

"Hall stays on board?" asked Bunny.

"Yes—with the new crew."

"Well, sir, I suppose you can make out that the Albatross has been wrecked, and draw the insurance money," said Bunny, "but if the ship remains on the sea she'll be traced sooner or later. Every ship is registered."

"The Albatross will change her name," said Earle. "She is going to be freshly painted—disguised in every way. She will be re-named the Swan."

"But, whatever you call her, how are you going to account for her?" said Bunny. "How will the Swan get on the register of ships?"

"She won't!" answered Mr. Earle. "The Swan will go into the West African trade, with forged papers."

"Forged papers?" repeated Bunny.

Earle smiled—a bitter and cynical smile.

"You do not know yet all the gifts of my gifted mate," he said. "Dick Hall has already served a term of imprisonment for forgery. Breaking stones did not rob him of his skill. I assure you, Bunny, that the Swan already has a set of papers that would satisfy anyone—out of the regular run of ports, at least. Hall will run her at night through the Straits, take her down the west coast, and sell her to a trader there with whom arrangements are already made.

"She will leave enough wreckage in the Mediterranean to convince the most suspicious underwriter that she has been wrecked. She will leave her survivors in a lifeboat. Then she will vanish into space. Hall and his new crew will take her away. You will be one of the survivors, Hare."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bunny.

Earle waved his cigar towards the rocky, surf-bound coast.

"This coast is famous for its wrecks," he said. "The Albatross will be one more—that is all. It is quite simple. The survivors will all tell the same story—and no one will doubt that the yacht is at the bottom of the Mediterranean. And you, Hare, will tell the same story as the rest."

"You mean, you'll tell a lot of lies, and I shall have to do the same, sir?" Bunny exclaimed.

"You shall not lose by it, my boy. I will see that you touch a fair share of what is going."

"I couldn't touch such money, sir!" exploded Bunny.

"A Roman emperor said once that the smell of all money is sweet!" answered Mr. Earle, with a cynical smile. "Perhaps you will change your mind. Go and get me something to drink."

Bunny went below with a clouded face and a heavy heart.

## CHAPTER 26.

## The Riffs.

THE sun went down behind the Riff Mountains. A myriad stars glittered in the dark blue vault over the whispering sea. The heat was so intense. It felt to Bunny as if a thunderstorm was brewing.

The Albatross was at anchor now in a bay half-hidden by great rocks. The shore was a dim blur. Through thickening dusk came the incessant boom of surf on rocky reefs.

Bunny moved about in the deep dusk—for the Albatross was not burning a single light—with a troubled, anxious face. With all his keen desire to see the world and to live a life of adventure, Jack Hare was wishing now that he was home at Wistaria Villa, at Margate!

Margate might be unromantic, lacking in adventure; his relations might regard him as the duffer of the family; but Bunny, just then, would gladly have exchanged Morocco for Margate.

He had clung to the hope that Mr. Earle would change his mind; that when the test came he would shrink from the crime he contemplated. Now the test had come, and that hope had failed Bunny. He could not regret that he had stuck to Mr. Earle, and tried his hardest to counteract the influence of Hall. But the prospect before him utterly dismayed Bunny.

Even now his life hung on Earle's protection. Hall would have tossed him overboard to secure his silence, as he had tossed him overboard in the Bay of Biscay. Any of the ruffians who now formed the crew would have stabbed him at a word from the mate. Only Earle's protection stood between him and death! And how could he turn on the man who had saved him! He could not! But how could he become a party to a false story, with a swindle as its object? That he could not do, either. Poor Bunny was on the horns of a dilemma, from which there seemed no escape.

He hung over the rail, staring at the starlit sea. It was very dark, in spite of the glitter of the stars. There was a smell of fresh paint in the air. Through long, hot hours the work of disguising the yacht had gone on. Already the "wreckage" had been thrown into the sea—many articles bearing the name of the Albatross, to furnish proof that she had gone down on the nearby reefs. Soon—very soon now—the lifeboat would be putting off with the "survivors," Jack Hare among them. Bunny thought it over, and groaned.

There would be perhaps a day in the boat; then they would be picked up. Every survivor would have to make his statement—Bunny among the rest. What was he going to do? What was he going to say?

Hall and Earle were below in the saloon. Three or four of the new crew lolled about the deck, smoking and muttering together. The water washed the hull with a deep murmur, and the Albatross stirred incessantly at her cable. Through the deep gloom came the boom of breakers on the rocky shore.

In the shadows on the dark sea it seemed to Bunny that he discerned darker shadows stirring.

He took little heed. His thoughts were on the crime that was about to be effected, a crime which seemed inevitable now that he would be forced to become a party. He liked Mr. Earle, and admired him, in spite of the weakness and unscrupulousness in his character. He found all sorts of excuses for him, laying the whole blame on the hardened villain, Hall. But he wished that he was anywhere but on board the Albatross.

What were those shifting shadows in the darkness? It seemed to Bunny that he heard a sound from the sea—the cautious plunge of a muffled car. He started and listened.

Surely it could not be a boat coming, off in the darkness from that arid, inhospitable shore? Who could be coming

off from that desert coast? Bunny strained his eyes in the darkness. A vague feeling of alarm was in his breast. In the gloom there was a gleam of bare steel. He jumped as he caught that gleam.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Bunny.

Dimly, half-seen in the gloom, he made out the shadowy shape of a long, low boat, crammed with men—dark faces lost in the night, but gleaming eyes catching here and there the sparkle of the stars.

Bunny's heart throbbed. A boat crammed with men was approaching the Albatross in the darkness, and the fact that no sound of rowing could be heard showed that the oars were muffled and handled with stealthy caution. A boat crammed with Riff natives, stealing out to the ship in deadly silence—dark-skinned men with fierce, rolling eyes, armed to the teeth, and not an eye on board the yacht watching, except Bunny's startled eyes.

In a flash he understood what was coming. On the wild Moroccan coast Nature was red and raw. No doubt, during the long, hot day, while the yacht had lain at anchor in that solitary bay, greedy eyes had watched her from behind the sand-dunes. To the fierce tribesmen of that desolate beach her coming meant plunder—rich booty for a beggarly crew. And Bunny knew beyond the shadow of doubt that it was a matter of minutes—that if that savage crew set foot on board the yacht, not a man would be left alive to tell what had happened!

He sprang away from the rail. Breathless, a moment later, he was rushing into the saloon, where Earle and Hall sat smoking and drinking brandy-and-soda, while they discussed the last details of their plot—the plot which, all unknown to them, had brought them within the shadow of death.

"Mr. Earle!" panted Bunny.

"You swab—get out!" Hall roared, leaping to his feet.

"Get out, Hare! What do you want, confound you?" exclaimed Mr. Earle irritably. "I've heard enough of your talk. Get out!"

Hall made a stride towards the boy, his heavy fist clenched. But Bunny took no heed of him.

"Mr. Earle, there's a boat coming alongside!" panted Bunny. "A boat crammed with men—armed men!"

Hall stopped dead. He glared at Bunny.

"What! You young swab, you lie! There's not a sound!"

"They're coming—they'll be alongside in a minute!" panted Bunny. "Mr. Earle, I believe they mean to attack us—I'm sure!"

Earle dropped his glass and the liquor ran over the table.

"We never thought of that, Hall!" he exploded. "This is a dangerous coast—ships have been looted in these waters before!"

"It's a lie!" snarled Hall. "There's not a soul on the coast! The boy's lying!"

Mr. Earle burst into a laugh.

"What an end to our game—to have our throats cut by a mob of Riffs! Ha, ha!"

The reckless, sardonic laugh made Bunny shiver. He caught the yachtsman by the arm.

"Mr. Earle, for goodness' sake—They'll be on us in a minute!" he gasped.

Hall, grabbing a revolver from his hip pocket, plunged up the stairs to the deck. Mr. Earle laughed again.

"As good an end as any other," he said. "If they cut my throat to-night, I shall die an honest man! Hark!"

Bang! It was the roar of a heavy revolver on deck.

"Hall seems to believe you now, Hare!" said Mr. Earle. "He's firing on them. Listen!"

The shot was followed by a furious outburst of yells that woke every echo. It seemed as if a crew of demons had suddenly given voice. Startled shouts

from the men of the Albatross mingled with the yell, and there was a pattering of hurried feet on deck.

"Sir!" gasped Bunny. "Get your revolver—for goodness' sake!"

There was a bump of a boat on the side of the Albatross. Wild yelling rang through the night. Pandemonium had broken loose, where a few moments before all had been so silent.

"You're right, boy!" said Mr. Earle. With perfect coolness he looked to his revolver. "Antoine! Antoine!" he shouted.

"Monsieur!" gasped the terrified valet, running into the saloon with a pale face.

"Get hold of something, Antoine, and follow me on deck," said Mr. Earle. "If you want to save your neck for the hangman, you will have to fight for it now, mon garçon!"

With revolver in hand Mr. Earle hurried up the steps. Bunny stared round for a weapon, and caught up a heavy stick that belonged to Mr. Earle. With the stick gripped in his hand, he ran up to the deck, and Antoine, with a revolver in shaking hand, followed more slowly.

#### CHAPTER 27. The Lifeboat.

**B**UNNY stared round him wildly. The scene on deck was one of the wildest confusion. The attack had come suddenly. Every mind on board had been concentrated on the work on hand—the disguising of the yacht, the trickery of the floating wreckage, the preparation for the survivors to leave the vessel at midnight. No man on board had given a thought to what might be hidden behind the dusky sand-dunes on that solitary, savage coast.

And now the sand-dunes had revealed their secret!

But for Bunny's warning, the Riffs would have swarmed over the low freeboard of the yacht and swamped the vessel with their numbers before a shot

was fired or a hand raised. The crew would have been cut to pieces almost before they knew they were in danger.

Bunny's warning had prevented that. Hall had rushed on deck, revolver in hand, only half-believing, to see the boat creeping to the yacht's side, hardly three fathoms away. And the mate, knowing that every life on board hung on a thread, began to shoot instantly, pitching his bullets into the thick of the brown-faced, wild-eyed crew of the pirate boat. And with the first shot pandemonium broke loose.

The Riffs, seeing their stealthy approach discovered, gave up stealth and pulled hard and fast for the yacht. Hall stood at the rail, pitching bullets into them, yelling to the crew. The startled men of the Albatross, roused from complete security to sudden danger, shouted and scurried in the gloom.

At that moment Hall would have been glad of the British seamen he had left behind at Gibraltar. But only the rough crew of braves and lascars were there to back him up, and most of them were yelling with panic.

The long, low boat had hooked on. The dark-skinned ruffians swarmed up the side, the low freeboard giving them little trouble. Mr. Earle had joined Hall, and was shooting with a steady hand, and a cynical grin on his face. It might almost have been fancied that Earle was glad that this had happened—that he welcomed the wild fight and the danger. In an hour more he would have been away in the lifeboat—committed to crime! Now he was fighting for his life, the plotting forgotten.

Two or three of the crew backed them up with knives or belaying-pins. The Riffs were swarming, but for the moment they were held in check. Both Hall and Earle fired fast, and with deadly aim. Unheeding the fallen, the savage brown men swarmed on, yelling fiercely. Bunny rushed forward to help in the defence, and his stick crashed across the face of a savage ruffian clambering over the rail, hurling him back into the boat.



"Well done, boy!" came Mr. Earle's voice. "Stick to it!"

"Yes, sir!" Bunny gasped.

Rawlings, the engineer, came rushing on the scene, grasping a belaying-pin. Antoine joined up with his revolver, though his hand was shaking so that the bullets flew wide and wild.

"Buck up, you swabs!" Hall was roaring to his crew. "You hounds, do you want your throats cut! Fight for your lives, you scum!"

His revolver was empty. He clubbed it, and crashed the butt into a savage face. Three or four Riffs had gained the deck, and the rascally crew of the Albatross, attacked at close quarters, were fighting. But heavy, sweeping scimitars wielded by desperate hands beat knives and belaying-pins in the hands of panic-stricken men. There were howls of despair, mingled with the ferocious yelling of the Riffs.

Hall was fighting like a madman, his clubbed revolver in his left hand, a belaying-pin in his right. Earle, his own revolver empty, snatched the weapon from Antoine's shaking hand. With a perfect coolness he pitched his bullets, and not one of them missed. Bunny, wildly excited, was lashing out fiercely with his stick. He saw Antoine back away and scuttle off into the lifeboat.

Already provisioned, the lifeboat hung overboard in its davits, all ready for the departure of the survivors if the plot had been carried out. It seemed unlikely now that there would be any survivors to depart. For desperate as the defence was, heavy as was the toll taken of the Riffs, the unequal conflict could only end one way.

Already the dash of oars told that another boat with a new piratical crew was coming out from the darkness of the shore to share in the plunder. The odds were heavy, and in a few minutes they would be overwhelming.

Bunny heard Earle laugh—a strange sound in the midst of darkness and confusion and death.

"The game's up, Hall! Fight it out!"

Antoine, in the lifeboat, was making a frantic attempt to lower it, bent on escape. But to lower both tackles at once required a cooler head than the panic-stricken valet's. He cast off the forward tackle, holding it fast while he jumped to the other davit, seeking to lower both at once. But the rope slipped and flew, and the boat's nose dropped to the sea.

Antoine, with a howl, plunged down into the water, and held on to the boat—which now hung down from a single davit—shrieking.

Hall gave a maddened glare round him. Seven or eight Riffs were on the ship now, and the crew of braves and lascars who were to have sailed the stolen ship down the coast with Hall had been cut down or were seeking hiding-places below.

The game was up. For a moment the savages held back from the desperate group who defended themselves—Hall, Earle, Rawlings, and Bunny. Savage as they were, they were daunted.

But the respite was only a brief one. Forward and aft the Riffs were clambering up. The second boat had hooked on now. There were sixty or seventy of the villains, and as soon as they gathered for the rush all was over.

Hall made a rush for the lifeboat, hanging by its after tackles. He said no word. The others could follow him if they liked. Antoine was shrieking from the water as he held on the nose of the hanging boat.

Rawlings was after the mate in a moment, his face streaming with blood from a deep cut.

Bunny caught Mr. Earle's arm. "Mr. Earle—quick—come—there's a chance to get away! Quick, sir!"

"Save yourself, Bunny!" Earle laughed. He was watching the crowd of brown faces and rolling black eyes, taking advantage of the pause to cram fresh cartridges into his revolver. "Cut for it, kid!"

"Not without you, sir!" said Bunny. "You young ass—hook it!"

"I'm sticking to you, sir!" said Bunny. "Come, sir!" he panted. "They're getting the boat away! For goodness' sake, sir—"

"I'll come! I'll follow you, kid! They'll rush us if I turn my back. Get away!"

Hall was sawing at the tackle desperately with a knife. It parted, and the boat slid down into the water.

It was touch and go, for it was as likely as not that the hanging lifeboat would plunge bows under as it went. Fortunately, though it shipped a sea, the boat floated. The next second Hall leaped down into it, Rawlings was at his heels. The mate landed in the boat. The engineer missed it, and plunged into the water, vanishing from sight. Hall did not give him a look or a thought. He grasped an oar and fended off.

"Mr. Earle!" yelled Bunny. He fairly dragged the yachtsman to the side. Earle stopped to pitch one more shot into the Riffs, now crowded on the deck of the yacht, held at bay like wolves.

"It's too late!" gasped Bunny. "They've got the boat away!"

"Earle!" came Hall's voice from the dark sea. "Jump!"

"Jump, boy!" said Earle.

"You first, sir!"

"Fool—jump! They're on us! Jump while I keep them off! I'll follow! Jump, you fool!" roared Earle.

And Bunny obediently jumped, while Earle turned on the Riffs again with blazing revolver.

Bunny landed in the boat, and sprawled headlong there. Hall, apparently taking him for Earle in the darkness, fended off with his oar. Bunny scrambled up and yelled.

"Stop for Mr. Earle! Stop!"

"You, is it?" Hall ejaculated. In his rage he struck at Bunny with the oar, and the boy narrowly dodged the fierce blow. "You—always you!"

"You beast!" yelled Bunny. "Stop for Mr. Earle!"

"It's too late!" The mate drove the

oar against the hull of the yacht. Bunny leaped at him, grabbed his arm, and tore down the oar.

"You shall stop, you beast!" panted Bunny. A shadowy figure flitted in the gloom. Herbert Earle leaped down. Bunny heard a splash in the sea.

"Mr. Earle!" he shouted. The boat was surging away from the yacht, and Earle had dropped in the water between. But his hand grasped the gunwale the next moment.

"Here!" he said coolly. Bunny panted with relief as he grasped him and helped him into the boat. Antoine had already dragged himself in. Of Rawlings nothing was to be seen—the engineer had gone down like a stone.

Hall fended off, while the rail above was lined with savage faces, and a dash of oars told that a Riff boat was groping along to cut off the escape.

"Get hold of an oar, Bunny."

"Yes, sir—I've got one!" said Bunny. He ran the oar into the water. Hall, on the other side, did the same. They pulled hard, and the lifeboat shot away from the doomed Albatross.

Mr. Earle took the lines. Antoine was crouching and shivering in the bows. From the deck of the yacht came a hoarse yelling of Riffs. But the dash of oars in pursuit, which they had dreaded to hear, was not to be heard. The escape of a few survivors mattered less to the Riffs than a share of the plunder. The ruffians were swarming over the yacht, and the lifeboat pulled about to sea unheeded.

Dawn came, red and rosy, on the blue Mediterranean. All through the night the four survivors of the Albatross had pulled in turn by pairs, seeking to place a greater distance between the lifeboat and the Riff shore. When dawn flushed over the sea they rested.

As the light strengthened, Bunny looked back. But only the blue expanse of sea met his gaze. Far off, a

dim blur on the sky marked the mountains of Morocco. But the shore was not in sight, and on the sea there was no sail.

Hall sat scowling, but Bunny saw a smile on the face of Mr. Earle. Antoinette sorted out food from a locker for breakfast. Bunny rubbed his tired eyes.

"Safe now, boy!" said Mr. Earle, smiling.

"Yes, sir!" said Bunny. "I wonder what they've done to the Albatross?"

"I doubt whether two of her planks are holding together by this time," answered Mr. Earle. "The Riffs are old hands at this game. They won't leave anything for a gunboat to pick up. What they cannot carry off they will sink."

"Then—the yacht's gone?"

"Quite."

"You don't seem to mind, sir!" said Bunny, in wonder.

"Why should I mind?" said Mr. Earle coolly. "The Albatross was fully insured."

"Insured?" repeated Bunny. "But—"

"The insurance covers loss at sea, even in such an unusual way," said the yachtman, smiling.

"Oh!" gasped Bunny.

"And your tender conscience, so carefully trained by your estimable uncle at Margate, may be perfectly at rest now," added Mr. Earle ironically. "The Albatross has been lost—really and truly lost—and I am entitled to draw the insurance money."

"Of course you are, sir, as she's really lost by accident," said Bunny. "I hadn't thought of that!"

"No need to tell any lies about it," said Mr. Earle. "A plain statement of facts is enough."

"Oh, good!" said Bunny.

"I lose nothing. Only Dick Hall here loses on the deal," said Mr. Earle. "It's a real loss of the yacht, instead of a pretended one. The ten thousand pounds insurance money will be paid, but the five thousand that the yacht was to be

sold for is gone for good." He turned mockingly to Hall: "That deal's off, Hall. You lose your profit and keep your conscience, man!"

"The company mayn't be in a hurry to pay up if they learn we were hanging around the Moroccan coast at night!" Hall snarled.

"My dear fellow, the yacht's lost, and the company have to pay. We lose the extra five thousand we were going to make by a swindle. But don't look so glum," added Mr. Earle scornfully. "I lose as well as you. We've lost the game, and had a lot of trouble and expense for nothing. And I'm glad of it!"

"You were always half-hearted!" snarled Hall. He stared back savagely towards the vanished coast of Morocco and gritted his teeth. "To be beaten like that at the very finish—at the very finish. And by such a chance! Who'd have thought that—"

"We're lucky not to have lost our lives as well as our game! But for the boy warning us—"

"Hang the boy!"

Mr. Earle laughed.

Bunny was smiling now. The loss of the Albatross, tragic as it had been, had put an end to the plot. Chance had intervened at the last moment!

"If we'd chosen some other spot—" muttered Hall.

"We chose the safest place—we never bargained for the Riffs," said Mr. Earle. "It's no good crying over spilt milk, Hall. The Albatross is gone, and the five thousand she would have sold for is gone, too. I lose as much as you do—except that the insurance money may be a little beyond her value," he added, with a grin. "Cheer up, man! I'll see that you get a couple of hundred out of it."

Hall grunted.

"How long do you think we shall be in this boat, sir?" asked Bunny.

"Not long, I hope. We shall be picked up before night," answered Mr. Earle. "We're in the track of plenty of steamers."

The sun rose higher, blazing down on the floating boat. Four pairs of eyes watched the sea anxiously. It was towards noon that the smoke of a steamer was sighted. Mr. Earle watched it through a pair of binoculars.

"It's a steamer coming east—likely enough from Gibraltar to Algiers or Tunis," he said. "They're bound to see us."

Hail made no movement. He seemed plunged into deep gloom by the failure of the plot. But Bunny was glad to see that failure had come rather as a relief to Mr. Earle. Certainly his handsome face looked more free from care than Bunny had seen it for many a long day. Antoine wildly waved a signal to the distant steamer, and she was seen to alter her course and bear down on the boat. Half an hour later the life-boat was picked up, and the survivors of the Albatross were treading the deck of the steamer, bound for Tunis.

Bunny was feeling happy and elated. But a thought came into his mind that rather dashed his satisfaction.

"You'll be going back to England now, sir, I suppose?" he asked Mr. Earle.

"By the first steamer for Marseilles, when we get to Tunis," answered Mr. Earle.

"And you will get another yacht, sir?"

"It won't run to yachting again for me, Bunny!" Mr. Earle laughed. "When I touch the insurance money of the Albatross I shall either pay my debts—which will wipe out most of it—or—"

"Or what, sir?"

"Or try my luck at Monte Carlo!" said Mr. Earle. And the well-remembered glitter came into his eyes which Bunny had seen in the casino at Boulogne.

"Oh, sir," said Bunny, "I hope you'll decide to pay your debts!"

"I hope so!" said Mr. Earle, laughing.

"But—but you won't want a steward's boy any more, sir," said Bunny.

"Do you want to stick to me, you young ass?"

"Yes, sir, if—"

"I'll take you back to England with me, at all events, and see you safe home," said Mr. Earle.

Bunny shook his head.

"Perhaps I can get a job at Tunis," he said. "My uncle at Margate says you can always find a job if you look for it."

And though he was sorry at the prospect of parting with Mr. Earle, Bunny looked forward with considerable anticipation as the steamer ran down to the one-time pirate city of the Mediterranean.

## CHAPTER 23.

### The Man in the Veil!

BUNNY had been walking for hours, so keenly interested in the strange sights and sounds of Tunis that he did not heed the heat that made the perspiration drip down his chubby face. The heat, the dust, the discordant noises, the endless babble of tongues in uncounted languages, did not worry Bunny. He enjoyed it all.

He was ashore in Africa, walking the streets of the Orient. His desire to see the world was fully gratified at last. His old day-dreams at Wistaria Villa at Margate were coming true.

Bunny had time on his hands. He was feeling quite a gentleman of leisure. Mr. Earle, before he departed in the steamer for Marseilles, had presented Bunny with five thousand francs as a reward for his services. Which was generous pay for the steward's boy of the Albatross.

Five thousand francs seemed illimitable wealth to Bunny—plenty to see him through until he found a job. Plenty and to spare, Bunny thought. He had found a cheap lodging in a little street near the Avenue de France, and when he was left on his own he "did" Tunis as thoroughly as any Cook's tourist.

In the New Town there were shops where Bunny was able to buy nice clothes, so it was a well-dressed Bunny who roamed through the city, drinking

in sights and sounds that were so new to him—so different from Margate, as the innocent Bunny said to himself.

Bunny did Tunis, and Tunis still more surely "did" Bunny. Close to Tunis, as he knew, were the ruins of ancient Carthage. And in the Soks were many antiquities for sale, recently dug up—so the native dealers told the tourists.

In simple faith Bunny had bought all sorts of shams and swindles, which he duly posted to his relatives at Margate, to remind them that Bunny had not forgotten them.

Walking the sun-splashed streets, Bunny often thought of them—Uncle Hare catching the 9.10 to the City; Cousin Gilbert trotting down the North-down Road to the office in Cliftonville; and Aunt Hare, with a keen edge to her voice, talking to Jane. It was an affectionate Bunny, but he was glad he was in Tunis, seeing the world. And though he had started his travels as a steward's boy, which was not exactly splendid, he still counted on making a fortune to take with him to Margate some day.

In the meantime Bunny was having the time of his life. Hours and hours he had walked on this particular day, nearly a week since he had been left on his own in Tunis. When he realised that he was tired, in the falling dusk, he was far from his lodging. He was not hungry, for he had lately consumed a large quantity of sweet sherbet and sticky cakes in a dusky little shop in the Sok-el-Berka.

But he was tired—which led him to take a short cut. Strangers who take short cuts in Tunis are liable to find themselves going a long way round, and Bunny made that discovery. He turned from one narrow, dusky street into another and into another, and then into another still more narrow, shut in by high white walls of buildings that seemed to possess neither door nor window. And so he arrived at a blank wall that closed the street—found that he had reached the termination of a cul-de-sac, and stopped.

It was very dark in the narrow street,

and the hour was growing rather late. Bunny was quite tired now, and he decided to rest before seeking his way out of the labyrinth into which he had plunged. In the wall which closed the narrow street, lighted only by the glittering stars in a dark, azure sky, there was a small door, painted green. Whether it gave admittance to a house or a walled garden Bunny did not know.

He leaned on the wall to rest, as there was no seat in sight, and turned over in his mind the various streets by which he had reached that secluded spot. He came to the conclusion that tracing his way back was a hopeless task.

But Bunny was not alarmed by the discovery that he had lost his way in a strange city after nightfall. When he had had a rest he was good for many miles' walking, and there were plenty of people in Tunis who spoke English, and still more who spoke French, as the place belonged to France. He could ask his way easily enough in either language, though it was perhaps doubtful whether the people who spoke French would understand what Bunny said to them in that language.

Bunny had learned, so far, only one native word, which was "sok," meaning "market." But with even that one word, he considered, he might derive information from a native, for if he could find his way back to the Sok-el-Berka, where he had had his sherbet and cakes, the rest was plain sailing.

And so it occurred to Bunny to tap at the door near which he was leaning, and ask the porter for directions. If the man spoke English, all was well; if he spoke French, Bunny hoped that all was well; while if he spoke only Arabic, the word "sok" would be enough to tell him where Bunny wanted to go.

Having decided on that simple course of action, Bunny moved along to the green-painted door and tapped with his knuckles. To his surprise, the door moved under his touch. It was a heavy

door of solid wood, clamped with iron, and looked as if it would require a heavy push to move it, even if unlocked. And Bunny had not supposed that it was unlocked.

But evidently it was unsecured, and the hinges were well oiled, for the door swung open under his tap.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Bunny, as he stared into the narrow gateway. Beyond was a garden, with nodding palm-trees black against the sky. In the distance the white walls of a house. It was one of the high-walled gardens common in Tunis and all eastern cities, where the inquisitive eyes of strangers are carefully shut out.

Bunny hesitated. There was no sign of a porter, no sign of life in the garden, brilliant with flowers under the stars. He was new to the Orient, but he knew the risk of a European entering unbidden within the walls of Moor or Arab. He stood looking past the open green door into the garden.

A path led through shrubberies to the house, but Bunny realised that he had better not follow that path. The deep silence seemed to indicate that no one was near the garden door. There was no one of whom he could ask his way.

Bunny looked back along the narrow, dusky street behind him. It was silent and deserted. No footfall broke the stillness. He looked into the garden again. Bunny's relations at Margate did not consider him bright, but he was bright enough to know that he had better not enter that walled garden. And he reached to the door to pull it shut, with the intention of closing it and going his way.

There was no handle or knob on the outside of the green door. Bunny had to step into the gateway, cut in the thickness of a thick wall, to grasp the edge of the door to pull it shut.

The next moment Bunny gave a startled howl. As his fingers closed on the edge of the half-open door a black hand, strong as steel, flashed out of the dusk and gripped his wrist.

Before Bunny knew what was hap-

pening an irresistible tug dragged him headlong into the garden, and the door slammed behind him.

"Oh, crumbs!" panted the bewildered Bunny, reeled, stumbled, and fell. The steely grip still on his wrist, he scrambled to his feet, and as he scrambled he had a glimpse of a brawny black Nubian in a red fez, who was grasping him. The next moment a second Nubian loomed from the shadows, and Bunny was picked up from the ground as if he had been an infant and carried away.

He did not struggle. He was too utterly amazed, for one thing. And for another, either of the brawny Nubians was a match for two or three Bunnies! But as he recovered his breath he expostulated.

"I say, look here, you know!" gasped Bunny. "Leggo! I wasn't doing any harm! I wasn't coming in— I say —"

One of the Nubians spoke in a low, growling voice. Whether he was speaking his own dialect or Arabic was all one to Bunny; he did not understand a word.

"I say——" gasped Bunny.

"Taisez-vous!"

It was French this time, and Bunny understood that it was an order to be silent. But he was not disposed to be silent in the grasp of two black men who were bearing him away like a bundle into the interior of the mysterious walled garden.

"Look here—leggo! Oh!" gasped Bunny, as he felt a keen point pressed to his neck. For an instant his blood curdled, and he expected sudden death. But the dagger was withdrawn. It was only a hint to Bunny to keep silent.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Bunny.

And he was silent and unresisting as the two Nubians bore him away in the deep, dusky shadows under the palm-trees.

It was useless to argue with men who couldn't understand a word he said, he decided. The only thing to do was to go quietly and see what turned up.

## CHAPTER 20.

## A Fruitless Search.

BUNNY was completely bewildered. The two silent Nubians had stopped under a colonnade. From an open arched doorway that communicated with a large apartment, where Bunny caught a glimpse of a tessellated floor and a marble fountain, and high walls adorned with gilded arabesques, came a glimmer of light.

He was set on his feet, and he staggered against a stone column. One of the Nubians held his shoulder in a grasp of iron. The other passed through the arched doorway and disappeared into the house. Bunny waited. He could do nothing else with a vice-like grip on his shoulder, under which it seemed to crack.

His brain was in a whirl. He had heard, and read, a great deal about the jealous and suspicious dislike of native Moors and Arabs for the intrusion of a white man within their secretive walls. Even under the French rule, a white man who intruded unbidden into a Moorish house was in danger of his life. But poor Bunny had not meant to intrude. He had been dragged in almost by the hair of his head.

He hoped that there was somebody who understood English to whom he could explain, but he had a shuddering anticipation that his head might be cut off before he had a chance at explanation. If he had to deal with some savage and suspicious Moor, he was in dire danger.

He waited anxiously. Apparently the Nubian had gone into the house to tell of his capture. Bunny, trying to think it out, realised that someone must have been expected to enter by the green door; that the two Nubians had been lying in wait there in ambush for the man who was expected to enter. That much seemed clear. And it was clear, also, that Bunny, butting in by sheer chance, had been taken for the expected comer, and seized in mistake for him.

Who were the denizens of this

mysterious house? For what unwary visitor had that ambush been laid at the green door, intentionally left unfastened to admit him into the hands that waited to grasp him?

All he could fathom was that someone had been expected and watched for, and that he—Bunny—had most unfortunately taken his place. He had a way of falling into scrapes, though, as a rule, he tumbled out of them again right end uppermost. But he wondered dismally whether this was the last scrape he was destined to fall into.

The minutes while he waited passed on leaden wings. The Nubian holding him stood like an ebony statue. In the dusk of the colonnade his face was a black shadow; only the gleam of his eyes was visible to Bunny.

The other Nubian emerged at last. It was only a matter of a few minutes, but to the anxious Bunny it had seemed an age. The two blacks took Bunny by either arm and walked him forward. They entered by the arched doorway into the apartment beyond.

Bunny stared round him. The light came from a swinging silver lamp, hung on silver chains. The scene was like one from the "Arabian Nights"—to Bunny's eyes—the tessellated floor, the tinkling fountain, the walls traced with golden arabesques, the gorgeous rugs, the rich divan, covered with brightly-coloured stuffs, on which a man was seated.

After one dizzy glance round Bunny's eyes fixed on the man on the divan. He was dressed in European clothes, which was a relief to Bunny. It was not some savage and suspicious Moor he had to face. But what struck Bunny strangely was the fact that the man's face was concealed by a gauzy veil, such as the native women wore.

Dimly through the gauze the face was discernible, but not clearly enough for Bunny to make out the features. What reason the unknown man could have for hiding his face Bunny could not guess. But it was evident that he desired to keep his identity a secret.

The veiled man reclining on the divan was smoking a hookah. But as Bunny was led before him he dropped the mouthpiece of the pipe and sat bolt upright, staring.

Bunny was conscious of a penetrating stare from a pair of very keen eyes behind the gauze. If Bunny was in a state of astonishment himself, he realised that the man on the divan was also surprised. Evidently it was not Bunny's chubby face that the veiled man had expected to see.

He stared hard at Bunny for a long moment. And it was Bunny who spoke first.

"I say, sir——"

"Oh, you are English!" exclaimed a voice from behind the gauze.

"Yes, rather, sir!" answered Bunny. "Who are you?"

"My name's Jack Hare, sir," answered Bunny. "I'm usually called Bunny," he added, with cheerful simplicity. "You see, sir, my name being Jack Hare, fellows at school turned it into Jack Rabbit, and from that it got to Bunny."

The veiled man made him a sign to be silent, and turned to one of the Nubians, whom he addressed as Yussuf. Bunny caught the name, but he did not understand what was said in some native tongue. But he could see that the veiled man was questioning Yussuf sharply. The Nubian replied in the same tongue, and the veiled man turned to Bunny again.

"Why did not Latour come himself?"

"Eh?" ejaculated Bunny.

"Is he ill?"

"Ill?" repeated Bunny blankly.

"Why has he sent you?"

Bunny could only stare.

"If you have the sheepskin, well and good. I am aware that Aboo Marish was expecting him this evening as usual. If something has prevented him from coming, no doubt he has sent the sheepskin."

The man rapped out the words in a sharp, metallic voice that sounded very unpleasantly in Bunny's ears.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Bunny. "I—I say, sir, you'd better let me explain! I—I got in here quite by accident——"

"Have you the sheepskin?"

"Eh? No!" gasped Bunny.

"Bah! You are lying! If Latour has sent a messenger instead of coming, he would send the sheepskin. Give it to me!"

An eager hand was held out. Bunny blinked at it.

"Do you hear me, boy? Do you understand that either of these Nubians would slice off your head at a sign from me? Give me the sheepskin!"

"But—but I haven't——" he stammered, and shuddered. "I—I think you're taking me for somebody else, sir!"

The veiled man rapped out a word or two in the native tongue, and the two Nubians seized Bunny and threw him to the floor. Bunny yelled. He supposed that his last moment had come. But he discovered a moment later that the object was to search him. Bending over him, the two Nubians searched him with greatest thoroughness.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Bunny. "There go my francs!"

But he was mistaken. All the articles, including his money, taken from his pockets were replaced. The Nubians were searching for the sheepskin of which the veiled man had spoken. Bunny's pockets having been drawn blank, they proceeded further, searching every garment down to the skin. Not so much as a pin could have remained hidden on Bunny after they had finished. They turned from him at last and showed empty hands to their master.

Bunny staggered to his feet. The sharp, penetrating eyes behind the veil watched him, glittering with rage. The failure to find the mysterious sheepskin was evidently a bitter disappointment to the veiled man.

He made a sign to Yussuf, who, leaving his comrade holding Bunny, crossed to the wall and took down a Turkish



scimitar that hung there. He came back to the divan with the bare blade in his hand, the subdued light of the silver lamp glimmering on the bright Damascus steel and showing a keen edge like a razor.

Bunny shuddered.

"I—I say!" he stammered. "For goodness' sake——"

"Silence! Listen!"

"If you'd let me explain——" gasped Bunny.

"Silence! Yussuf has told me that you seemed to hesitate before entering at the green door. Had you any reason to suspect that there was an ambush within? Did you throw away the sheepskin?"

"No—no!" stuttered Bunny. "You see——"

"Latour must have sent it! If he did not come himself, he must have sent it! That is certain. Abou Marish expected him and the sheepskin. You dog!" the metallic voice snarled through the gauze. "Tell the truth, or die under Yussuf's hand!"

"You haven't given me a chance to tell you!" gasped Bunny. "I'm trying to explain. I—I don't know anything about a sheepskin—I don't know anybody named Latour—I've never heard of Abou Marish—I don't even know what house this is, or who you are——"

"Cease your lying!" came the metallic voice. "Fool! Do you think you can deceive me so easily as that?"

"I give you my word, sir——"

"Listen to me, boy! You must be in Gaston Latour's confidence, or he would not have sent you in his place. Tell me the truth! Is the sheepskin still with Latour at the Hotel les Courlis?"

Bunny had seen the Hotel les Courlis, in the Avenue de France, in the modern quarter of Tunis. Evidently the unknown Latour was staying there. But for the rest, all was bewilderment to poor Bunny. He had fallen into some extraordinary intrigue that was a hopeless mystery to him.

"Answer me, boy!"

"I—I don't know. I——"

"Enough! Where is the sheepskin?"

"I don't know anything about any old sheepskin," groaned Bunny. "But if you're so keen on sheepskin, there's plenty for sale in the Sok-el-Berka when it opens to-morrow."

The veiled man stared at him blankly. He seemed to control his rage by a great effort.

"Then you do not know the value of the sheepskin, though Latour entrusted you with it to bring to Abou Marish?" he exclaimed. "Listen, boy! That sheepskin is worth hundreds of thousands of francs, and if you place it in my hands I swear I will give you a share of the Carthaginian treasure."

"The Carthaginian treasure?" Bunny faltered.

"I tell you that sheepskin contains the clue to the state treasure of Carthage, buried and hidden before the Romans took the city, two thousand years ago!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Then you did not know?"

"No!" gasped Bunny. "You see, I——"

"Now you know! I tell you I will make you rich! Whatever Latour may have promised you, I will double it. Now speak!"

The veiled man leaned forward eagerly.

"But I can't tell you anything!" gasped Bunny. "You see, I don't know anything about it."

For the moment the veiled man was evidently about to make a sign to Yussuf to strike with the scimitar. Bunny's blood ran cold. But the sign was not made.

"You persist in lying," said the veiled man between his teeth. "But I will have the truth from you, if I have to tear it from your lips by torture! Speak, you dog! I tell you, every night Gaston Latour has come here to talk with Abou Marish, who was born among the ruins of Carthage and knows every inch of the ground. But he has not yet shown him the sheepskin—he clings close to his secret."

"But this night he was to place it his hands—I tell you they were heard speaking together, and Latour has consented to let the Moor see the sheepskin and take his judgment upon it. If he has not come himself he has sent it, for he knows that Abco was to leave Tunis to-morrow for Tripoli, not to return for months. You dog, what have you done with the sheepskin that Latour sent by your hands?"

The man leaned forward on the divan, his eyes burning at Bunny through the gauze veil.

"Oh dear!" mumbled Bunny.

"Speak!" almost yelled the disguised man. "By heavens, your blood will be upon your own head if you dally with me longer!"

"I—I can't tell you anything!" gasped Bunny. "I'd lost my way, and—and——"

"Silence!" roared the veiled man. It was clear that he did not believe a word of that statement. "How long have you known Latour? He has been well watched, but you have not been seen with him."

"I don't know him at all," faltered Bunny. "You see——"

"One more lie, and I will order the Nubian to strike off your head!" said the veiled man in a concentrated voice.

Bunny was silent. He was telling the truth. But it was natural, in the strange circumstances, that a suspicious man should not believe him. The two Nubians stood like black statues. The burning eyes under the gauze devoured Bunny's dismayed face.

"It is certain," the veiled man spoke at last, though he seemed rather to be speaking to himself than to Bunny, "Latour had made up his mind to trust the Moor with a sight of the sheepskin, unwilling as he was to let any eye but his own read the secret. The Moor's knowledge of the ruins of Carthage was necessary to him. He was to come with it to-night—they were overheard—and if he has not come he has sent it, for after to-night it will be too late. The boy has it—or had it!"

He half-rose from the divan.

"For the last time," he said. "I know that you feared or suspected something when you entered the garden, for Yussuf has said that you hesitated at the door. Did you hide it before you entered—did you throw it into the garden when you were seized? Tell me, what have you done with it?"

"Nothing!" gasped Bunny. "I—I've never seen it. I tell you, I don't know anything about it——"

The veiled man spoke to Yussuf in the Tunisian dialect. The Nubian's black eyes glittered, and his hand closed hard on the scimitar. The bright blade circled over Bunny's head.

"For the last time!" said the veiled man, in a tone of deadly menace. "I have told the Nubian to strike off your head when I lift my hand as a signal."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Where is the sheepskin?"

It was useless for Bunny to answer, as he had nothing to tell. He made a sudden and desperate effort to break loose from the man who was holding him. If he could have torn himself free and darted through the open arched doorway of the colonnade into the garden—— But he could not break free.

"Die, then!" hissed the man on the divan, and lifted his hand as a signal to the Nubian.

Crack! Sharp and clear, with an effect almost of thunder in the stillness of the African night, a pistol-shot rang out from the dark colonnade outside the arched doorway. The scimitar crashed clanging on the marble floor, and the Nubian gave a scream of pain as his arm dropped to his side, smashed at the elbow by a bullet!

#### CHAPTER 30.

"What a Night!"

**B**UNNY stood dizzily, his limbs sagging under him. Yussuf, blood streaming from his smashed arm, fell groaning to the floor, a crimson pool forming on the marble pavement.

The other Nubian in his startled amazement released Bunny and spun round towards the arched doorway. The veiled man leaped to his feet, staring in the same direction and groping at his hip for a weapon.

In the arched doorway, his back to the dark colonnade the light of the swinging lamp on his face, stood a short, sallow young man, with bright, snapping black eyes that gleamed over a revolver, still smoking. The revolver was at a level and a finger was on the trigger.

Trying to pull his dazed thoughts together, Bunny blinked at him. The thick-set young man was a Frenchman, he saw that at a glance. And it flashed into his mind who he was. No doubt Gaston Latour had arrived, entered by the green door in the garden, and followed the path to the house—not dreaming of anything amiss till he saw what was going on in the tessellated hall from the colonnade when he reached it.

His prompt intervention had saved Bunny's life, and it showed that he was a man of action and quick decision. His black, snapping eyes, gleaming from his sallow face, watched like a cat's as he stepped in from the colonnade.

From the veiled man came a muttered word, and the Nubian who had released Bunny leaped towards the newcomer, drawing a dagger from his girdle as he did so. So swift was the leap that he had almost reached the Frenchman when the latter fired, as coolly as if he were shooting at a jackal in the desert, and the brawny Nubian rolled at his feet.

"Sapristi!" ejaculated the newcomer.

The veiled man had made cunning use of the second during which the Frenchman was occupied with the Nubian. A revolver was in his hand now, and aimed at the newcomer.

Bunny jumped at him. There was no time to think. Bunny acted without thinking. His head butted the man on the divan as he was pulling the trigger and pitched him over, and the bullet

flew in the air. The man sprawled and rolled off the low divan, the revolver falling from his hand.

The Frenchman stepped forward over the body of the Nubian who lay at his feet. The veiled man leaped up, gave one fierce, wild glare round him, and darted through a low doorway hidden by curtains. The Frenchman fired after him, the bullet missing by a fraction of an inch as the man disappeared.

"Corbleu!" exclaimed the newcomer. He gave the Nubians a sharp look, and then came quickly to Bunny. "You are English?" he asked. "See you! I come here visit my friend Aboo Marish. I find this! I shoot—yes—I save you the life! But where is Aboo? My friend, is he safe with these coquins in the house—they are thieves—murderers—what? Aboo—is he kill?"

"That brute said he was bound hand and foot in the house with his servant," Bunny answered.

The Frenchman made a sign to Bunny to stay with the Nubians and watch them, and then rushed through the curtained doorway by which the veiled man had disappeared.

Bunny picked up the scimitar. He was ready to look after the blacks, and to deal with them if needed. But neither of the Nubians was dangerous now. Yussuf lay groaning with his broken arm. The other was unconscious, sorely wounded. Bunny waited for the Frenchman to return.

A few minutes later he came back through the curtained doorway leading an old white-bearded Moor who leaned heavily on his arm. A trembling Arab servant followed them in.

"Did you find that rotter, sir?" exclaimed Bunny.

"Sapristi! He was gone—fled—what you call he bunk," said the Frenchman. "If he bunk not I shoot him like one jackal. Volla, mon ami!" he went on, as he assisted the aged Moor to the divan where he sank down on the cushions.

He handed Aboo Marish the amber

mouthpiece of the hookah. The old man nodded and sat silent.

The Frenchman turned to Bunny.

"Explain! Make clear all this! How do I find you here—who are you—what shall it all mean?"

"Oh," said Bunny, "I—I suppose you're Monsieur Gaston Latour, the chap who's got the sheepskin."

The Frenchman started.

"I am Gaston Latour! But what know you of the sheepskin?"

Bunny jerked out his explanation. Latour listened to him, staring in amazement. To Bunny's surprise he laughed when all was told.

"Head of pudding!" he said. "One other time you think twice before you knock on a door once when you are in a city like Tunis! Are you not what they call in your language a head of pudding?"

"I think it's jolly lucky for you!" said Bunny warmly. "If they hadn't bagged me at the door they'd have been waiting there for you still, and what would have happened to you when you came in?"

"Sapristi! It is the true truth!" said Latour, smiling. "It is the mouse that saves the lion, as they tell us in the fable. Mon Dieu! I suspected nothing—even now I know not what is that man who knows so much of my affairs. I knew not that he watch me, that he know of the Carthaginian treasure. He know too much, sapristi. You saved me the life, mon garçon, with your head of pudding. Regardez! You have a mouth—you know how to keep it shut?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Bunny.

"Shut up the mouth verree tight, then," said Latour. "Say nothing of all this. It is not good to talk of treasure in Tunis. Selim shall take you to the Avenue de France, where you shall find your way to your lodging. For you there is nothing more to do here. But tomorrow you come to the Hotel les Courlis and ask for me, Gaston Latour. It is understood?"

"Yes, certainly!" said Bunny.

Latour spoke to the Arab servant in Arabic, and Selim made a sign to Bunny to follow him. Bunny glanced back as he went, and saw Latour deep in talk with Aboo Marish, gesticulating with both hands as he talked, and apparently already forgetful of Bunny's existence.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Bunny, when he found himself in a palm-shaded street under the stars. "Oh, crumbs! What a night!"

He followed the silent Arab till they reached the broad Avenue de France, from which Bunny knew his way easily. There Selim salaamed and left him, and Bunny pursued his way alone.

In his dreams that night Bunny scrambled among the ruins of Carthage, seeking golden treasure, pursued by a veiled man and brawny black Nubians brandishing scimitars. He was glad when the new day came and the bright sunlight filtered in at his window.

## CHAPTER 31.

### Spondulics!

"QUATRE-VINGT-DIX!" said the tired French clerk in the bureau of the Hotel les Courlis. Having made that—to Bunny—mysterious reply, he turned away, and resumed fanning off the flies with a palm-leaf.

Bunny Hare blinked a him. It was morning in Tunis, already hot, with a blaze of sun that baked the dusty streets, and Bunny had been glad to turn into the hotel out of the sun-glare. At the bureau he inquired for Monsieur Gaston Latour, and received the above cryptic answer.

"Catter what?" asked Bunny.

"Quatre-vingt-dix!"

The Courlis was not the best hotel in Tunis. It was hot and stuffy, with a smell of cooking all over it. Except for the porter at the entrance, with faded gold lace on his cap, and the tired clerk in the bureau, there seemed to be nobody about. But there were plenty

of flies. The clerk's chief occupation seemed to be fanning off flies.

"Oh!" said Bunny, reflecting. "That's a number, I suppose."

He realised that the clerk had given him the number of Monsieur Latour's room, and the man seemed too busy with the flies to give him any more attention. So Bunny stepped away and thought it out.

"Quatre—that's four!" he murmured, remembering his French, such as it was. "Vingt—that's twenty! Dix—that's ten! Four-twenty-ten! That's a queer way of making ninety. Here goes!"

In the Hotel Magnifique a gold-laced magnifico would have shown Bunny the way. In the Hotel les Courlis he evidently had to find it for himself. So he negotiated the staircase. At the top he paused and looked around.

Bunny guessed it to be the cheapest part of the Hotel les Courlis. Gaston Latour apparently was not one of the wealthy patrons.

Bunny passed along the corridor looking at the half-obiterated numbers over the doors. There was nobody in the passage. Probably the occupants of the rooms were all gone about their business at eleven in the morning. All the rooms seemed very silent.

He stopped at a door and peered at the indistinct number. It began with a nine, so he was near his destination. Bunny had just made out that the second number was a "2," when the room door opened and a man stepped out so suddenly that he almost stepped into Bunny. Bunny stepped back quickly.

"Sorry!" he said. "I was just looking at the number."

The man's glance fell on him carelessly. But the next moment it became fixed, and he started as if he found something familiar in Bunny's chubby, cheerful face.

He was a man of medium size, with lithe, supple limbs, and dark face with clear-cut features and straight nose. His eyes were intensely black, and as

they fixed on him in a stare of surprise it seemed to Bunny that he had seen those sharp, glittering black eyes before, though the rest of the face was unknown to him.

The glitter in the black eyes, the sudden contraction of the brows, made Bunny step another pace backward.

"I was only looking at the number," he explained wondering at the swift, fierce anger in the dark face. "I'm looking for number ninety, and the numbers aren't very clear!"

The man seemed about to speak, but checked himself and strode away along the corridor to the stairs.

Bunny stared after him. The man knew him, and his fierce anger could not have been caused by finding Bunny outside his door. Where had he seen those glittering, penetrating black eyes before?

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Bunny. He was almost sure that those black eyes had glittered at him the night before through a disguising veil of gauze. Bunny was sure—or almost sure—that he was the man whom he had seen in the house of Aboo Marish; the man who had kept his face hidden—the man who sought to rob Gaston Latour of the sheepskin that held the clue to the treasure of ancient Carthage! Bunny whistled.

As the even numbers were all on one side in the corridor, No. 92 was next to No. 90. If this was the veiled man, he was Latour's next-door neighbour in the Hotel les Courlis.

The man paused on the landing and glanced back. As he saw Bunny staring at him he turned quickly away again and disappeared down the stairs.

"It's him!" said Bunny emphatically and ungrammatically. "That's how he's been watching the French chap—sticking in the same hotel with him—in the next room. He's the man!"

Bunny moved on to the next door. Over this he made out an indistinct "90," and he tapped.

"Entrez!" called out a voice.

"Ongtray means come in!" murmured Bunny, rather proud of his French. And he opened the door and stepped into the room. It was small and barely furnished. There was an unmade bed in a corner, and at a table, sipping his morning chocolate, sat Gaston Latour, half-dressed, and with a cigarette in his mouth. The atmosphere of the room was dense with smoke, and Bunny coughed as he entered.

Latour—his sallow face looking more sallow than ever in the morning light—gave him a nod, and exclaimed:

"I am glad to see you, mon garçon—top of the morning, as you say in English. Fumez?" He held out his cigarette-case.

Bunny shook his head.

"Thank you, sir; I don't smoke. My uncle at Margate says it's bad for a fellow of my age."

"Comment? Ah! C'est un drôle! Head of pudding, as you say in English! What? Very nearly they cut you off the head when you poke into the house of Aboo Marish. Some day you lose that head of pudding if you stay long in Africa. Yes!"

"Look here, Mr. Latour!" said Bunny. This did not seem to him a very polite greeting after he had taken the trouble to call on Monsieur Gaston Latour.

The Frenchman smiled.

"Sit down, mon garçon. I am late this morning. Last night I stay very late with Aboo Marish." He sipped his chocolate, and blew out a cloud of smoke from his cigarette. "I am glad to see you, boy. I do not forget that you save me the life in the house of Aboo Marish, when that man who veil his face is there—yes. But for you I lose the sheepskin—my life along with him—yes! This day I leave Tunis for Carthage. You like to come avec moi?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Bunny brightly. "Just what I would like."

"You have said nothing, hein, about what passed in the house of Aboo Marish, about the sheepskin?" asked Latour.

"Not a word," answered Bunny.

"Bon! Listen! Give me an ear, as you say in English. What for do you smile?" asked Latour.

Bunny was smiling at Monsieur Latour's English, as Monsieur Latour would probably have smiled at Bunny's French. Fortunately the Frenchman did not wait for an answer to his question.

"Give me an ear," he went on. "Last night I placed the sheepskin before Aboo Marish. That Moor, he know the ruins of Carthage like—like one volume, as you say—"

"Like a book, sir," said Bunny.

"A book, he is a volume," said Latour. "Aboo Marish understand the sheepskin better than me, and he give me what you call a point—"

"A point?" asked Bunny, puzzled. "Oh, a tip!"

"A tip, he is a point," said Latour, who apparently considered that his English needed no further improvement. "He give me a point—many points, because he know Carthage so much better. He is an honest man—I trust him—but I am glad he leave Tunis this day and go to Tripoli. But now he have give me those points I shall know where to seek. Comprenez?"

"I see, sir," assented Bunny.

"Mais, not one word!" said Latour, waving his cigarette significantly. "If they hear of this in Tunis it is all up! Too many would want to take one finger in a pie, as you say in English. This pie, he belong to me. I have given one thousand francs for the sheepskin. And if I find the treasure it shall belong to me. The Government shall go and eat coal, as you say in English."

"Coke, sir," murmured Bunny.

"Aboo Marish, he do not believe in the treasure," went on Latour. "These Moors do not believe anything. So much better. But I believe, and you shall help me to find him. You shall take one share of what we find. Sapristi! Now I know that I am watch, that I am follow, that I am dog by someone unknown, it is better not to

go alone. I do not desire to take anyone into the secret. But you I trust."

"Thank you, sir!" said Bunny.

"You shall watch, while I shall dig," said Latour. "Isn't it? That is so much the more safe for me. You have a head of pudding, but you can keep the eyes open and the mouth shut, hein? You shall have a good share—and Aboo Marish, he shall have a good share, because he is my good friend, though he believes not in the treasure. I am what you call hard down—"

"Hard up," murmured Bunny.

"There is no spondulics," said Latour. "These spondulics, as you English call money, they are verree short. But when I dig in the ruins of Carthage, mon ami, I roll in spondulics—I walk in spondulics, my boy! I shall be rich—I, Gaston Latour! So rich that when I return to Paris they shall say, 'Voila Latour, millionaire!'"

He waved the cigarette emphatically.

"But we lose the time!" he went on, jumping up. "Attend for me below, mon ami, and I come verree soon. Isn't it?"

"Certainly," said Bunny. And he left No. 90 and went downstairs, to wait in the dingy hall for the treasure-seeker to join him, turning over in his mind the possibilities of this new treasure-hunting adventure to which he was committed.

#### CHAPTER 32.

##### Tracked!

THERE was a crowd in the clanging tram that started from the depot in the Avenue. Most of them were tourists, English, French and American, some with red-covered guide-books, all perspiring in the heat of the African sun. Bunny and Gaston Latour crammed in among them, and the tram rolled away for Carthage.

Latour, who seemed to Bunny a very effusive and loquacious young man, had talked incessantly during the walk

from the hotel to the tramway. He was full of his intended treasure-hunt in the ruins of the ancient Punic city, and, hard up as he was at the present time, clearly believed that there was only a single step between him and fortune.

On the way to the train he told Bunny the history of the sheepskin. He had bought it from an Arab for a thousand francs, which Bunny admitted to be cheap if it really gave a clue to the State treasure of Carthage buried two thousand years ago to save it from the grasp of the Romans.

Bunny, in his days at Margate, had been a great reader, and he remembered much that he had read of Carthage and the Punic wars. He wondered how a document could have survived the wear and tear of two thousand years. But Latour explained to him that the sheepskin was a copy of a copy—the original document had long perished. Nevertheless, it told where Mago, the Carthaginian treasurer, had buried the vast mass of gold when it became certain that Scipio would capture the city.

Bunny wondered why the treasure had never been unearthed since; but he admitted that the utter destruction of the city by the implacable Romans had no doubt hidden it deep from search. That, however, seemed to Bunny's simple mind to render the present search a rather dubious one.

Carthage had been totally destroyed by the Romans. A Roman city had risen on its ruins, destroyed in its turn. Vandal and Arab had contended there. All that now remained was ruins here and there traced and excavated from their winding-sheet of dust and sand. It looked to Bunny as if Gaston Latour had set himself a task of some magnitude.

He would have liked to look at the sheepskin, but Latour did not offer to show it to him. Bunny had seen it in his hands—it looked like a square of leather about seven inches in diameter. But what was marked on it Bunny did not see.

Bunny had a hopeful nature, and he would have been very pleased to join in unearthing a buried treasure. But he could not help feeling that the volatile Frenchman was strongly influenced by the hope of getting rich quick, and that he thought more of the treasure than of the evidence of its existence.

Still, there was the fact that the veiled man in the house of Aboo Marish had taken such desperate measures to get hold of the sheepskin. That showed that there was another believer in its value.

Twice Bunny had tried to tell Latour that he fancied he had recognised the veiled man in a guest at the Hotel les Courlis. But the young Frenchman talked so incessantly that he could not get it out.

In the tram, however, Latour ceased to talk. There were too many ears to hear. Bunny looked over the crowded passengers, and he was not surprised to spot the man with the black eyes at the end of the vehicle—the man who had come out of No. 92 at the Hotel les Courlis.

The man did not glance in his direction; but Bunny surmised that he was following them. He tapped Latour on the arm. Latour glanced at him.

"Look at that johnny at the end of the tram," whispered Bunny. "The man with black eyes, dressed in grey."

Latour glanced at the man carelessly. "You've seen him before?" asked Bunny.

"Mais oui! He stay at the hotel," said Latour. "He is a verree pleasant fellow—I make friend with him sometimes. He is one Greek—Marizelos."

"A Greek!" said Bunny. "But he speaks English!"

"But how know you?" asked Latour in surprise.

"I've seen him before," whispered Bunny. "I'm pretty certain he is the man at the house of Aboo Marish who kept his face veiled."

Latour started violently.

"You think?" he ejaculated.

"I'm almost certain."

Gaston Latour's light, careless face set hard, and his brows wrinkled.

"Sapristi! It is possible!" muttered Gaston. "If he follows us to Carthage we soon find him out. We put some pepper on his tail, as you say in English."

"Salt!" murmured Bunny.

"Look not at him," whispered Latour, "but keep open the eye. We leave the tram at El Aouina, and if he leave also we shall see—nous verrons, pardieu!"

The tram rattled on, between the Djebel Merkez, heading northward for Carthage. At the first stop outside the city Gaston rose to his feet and picked up the heavy valise he had brought with him, as if intending to leave the vehicle. Bunny rose, too. And the man with the black eyes rose, as if that were his destination, too.

Latour sat down again. Bunny sat down. And the Greek, after a moment's hesitation, sat down. And the tram rattled on again by the shore of the lake. Bunny's eyes met Gaston's.

That simple trick had made the Greek show his hand. Evidently he had intended to leave the tram if the two companions left it. And as they did not leave, he did not. It was fairly certain now that Marizelos was shadowing them and did not intend to lose sight of them.

Gaston's lips shut hard together. Bunny had not the slightest doubt now that the black-eyed man was the veiled man of the night before, and Gaston evidently shared his belief. The tram rattled on. In half an hour it had reached El Aouina, which was about two-thirds of the distance from modern Tunis and ancient Carthage.

When the tram halted Gaston rose to his feet once more and picked up the valise. The Greek remained seated. But this time Gaston quitted the tram, followed by Bunny. And just before the vehicle rolled on its way again towards Marsa Plage and



the ruins of Carthage the Greek alighted.

"We have seen!" muttered Latour. "Now it is certain! He follow us, mon ami! He is the man of the veil—he is the man who has tried to rob me of my sheepskin! Yes!"

With the heavy valise in his hand, Gaston Latour walked away from El Aouina, Bunny trotting by his side. Several tourists had alighted at the same place. But Latour and Bunny, following a path that led away from the lake shore, soon dropped them out of sight.

Carthage was still some miles to the north, but Bunny's eager eyes discerned here and there traces of the ruins of the suburbs of the ancient city—though whether dating from Punic, Roman or Vandal times Bunny could not have undertaken to say.

Latour evidently knew the ground well, and Bunny guessed that he had already been over it many times with his invaluable sheepskin in his hand. They entered a shady olive-grove, a welcome shade from the glare of the African sun. A narrow path wound among the trees, and Latour followed it, Bunny at his heels.

The Frenchman stopped at a spot where a great mass of masonry, the remnant of some ancient building, lay half-embedded in the earth, thickly surrounded by olives.

He left the path and moved behind the masonry, signing to Bunny to follow him. They crouched down in cover and watched the path.

"Comprenez?" whispered Latour. "If he follows us he come now! We shall see, isn't it?"

He put his finger to his lips and Bunny nodded in silence. They waited in the drowsy heat. But they had not long to wait. In scarcely more than a minute there were soft footsteps on the path among the olives. Latour's eyes glistened.

Bunny felt his heart beat fast. Peering from his hiding-place he saw the

Greek, Marizelos, coming up the path—and the keen, intent expression on his dark face, the glitter of his black eyes, told that he was playing the part of a hunter.

He came on softly but quickly, and passed the mass of ancient masonry behind which Bunny and the Frenchman crouched.

What happened next came as a surprise to Bunny. He had supposed that Latour was only seeking to ascertain beyond doubt that the Greek was shadowing them. He was not prepared for what followed. Latour made a sudden spring, his revolver grasped in his hand by the barrel.

Sudden as he was, the Greek spun half-round, watchful as a cat, and then leaped away, his black eyes blazing. But he was not swift enough to escape. The heavy metal butt of the revolver crashed on his head, and Marizelos, with a cry, fell senseless to the earth.

### CHAPTER 33.

#### Ruins of Carthage.

"O H, crumbs!" gasped Bunny. He started to his feet in surprise and horror. The Greek lay motionless in the path, stunned by the single blow. Bunny stared down at him.

"He will follow us no farther," said Latour coolly, as he slipped the revolver back into his hip-pocket. "Allons, mon garçon—do not waste time staring at that son of a thousand pigs! Let us bunk, as you say in English!"

"But—but—" stammered Bunny. The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Sapristi! He is not one dead man!" he exclaimed. "In dix minutes he will sit up and take some notice, as you say. Head of a pudding, he would kill us for the sheepskin—look!"

He stooped over the insensible man

and drew from his pocket a revolver and a sheathed knife. He tossed them away into the depths of the olives.

Bunny breathed hard. The Greek, he knew, was the veiled man of the night before—the man who would have taken his life. And there was little doubt with what intentions he was following them to the ruins of Carthage. But Bunny would not reconcile his mind to this drastic method of dealing with him. Still, it was too late to raise objections now. After all, the man was only stunned, and he well deserved a headache for his rascality.

"Allons!" repeated Latour impatiently. "Head of a pudding, allons!"

He picked up his valise and strode on. And Bunny, with a last look at the insensible Greek, followed him.

The Greek, certainly, could shadow them no farther. They were free to go on their way unwatched. They proceeded in silence, Bunny still rather troubled in mind. The olive-grove where Marizelos lay senseless was left several miles behind them.

In the distance Bunny could see the blue of the Mediterranean, beyond the point of land on which ancient Carthage was built. But Latour did not intend to approach the shore, where there were villages, bathing-places and crowds of tourists.

He was keeping to inland paths, and Bunny now could see in many directions traces of the ancient city and its suburbs. Carthage itself was buried deep under the dust of ages, though modern excavations have revealed many of its secrets. But remnants of old buildings were to be seen. Several times they passed parties of tourists and natives carrying baskets of fruit. But it was in a solitary spot that Gaston Latour halted at last, in the shade of a bunch of fig-trees.

"Is this the place?" asked Bunny eagerly.

Latour stared at him <sup>then, for a moment,</sup> then laughed.

"Non, mon garçon! The treasure, he is not here!"

"Then what are we stopping for?" asked Bunny, disappointed.

"Ma foi! Manger—what you call grub in English!"

"Oh!" said Bunny, brightening. "Right-ho! J'ai faim!" he added, to appraise Monsieur Latour that he could speak French.

But Monsieur Latour looked puzzled.

"Jay farm!" he said, repeating Bunny's pronunciation. "That is some English I do not know!"

"I was speaking French," said Bunny, with dignity. "Jay farm—I am hungry!"

"Ha, ha! Mon garçon, speak you the English—I shall comprehend you better! English, I speak him so well as my own language. But when you speak Francais, mon cheri, it is to laugh. It is a thing for to laugh!"

And Monsieur Latour laughed, and Bunny laughed, too. He found Gaston's English quite as entertaining as Latour could have found his French.

They sat down in the shadow of the fig-trees, and Gaston opened the valise. There were various implements packed in the bag, which Bunny guessed were to be used for excavating the treasure—when found. There were also several bottles, and sandwiches and other things.

Bunny ate with a good appetite. When the lunch was finished Latour repacked the bag, stretched himself in the shade, and lighted a cigarette. Bunny was glad of a rest, for the long walk in the dusty heat had tired him. He lay in the shade, his head resting on his hands, and dozed. The drowsy heat and the buzz of the insects lulled him to sleep. A tap on the shoulder awakened him, and he opened his eyes to find Latour grinning down at him.

Bunny rose, yawned, stretched himself, and followed the Frenchman

once more. The rest had refreshed him and he was full of energy, and the volatile Frenchman was sparkling with eagerness. Apparently they were drawing near the spot where Latour was to seek for the hidden treasure treasure of Carthage, for he consulted the sheepskin from time to time, though he never showed it to Bunny.

Bunny had one accidental glimpse of it, but all he saw was a number of lines and two or three words in Arabic characters. It occurred to Bunny that a document left by the Punic treasurer should have been in Phœnician characters. But as the sheepskin was the copy of a copy, no doubt the original Punic had been translated—if it was genuine. Bunny hoped it was genuine, more for Latour's sake than his own, though he was to share in the treasure if found. The Frenchman was so hopefully counting on success that disappointment would have been a crushing blow to him.

"It is sure! It is a deadly cert, as you say in English!" said Latour, stopping to wipe his perspiring brow. "Before this time I was beat, but since I have consult Aboo Marish he has told me much that is utile—useful—to me. For it is certain that this is the ancient aqueduct that is marked. And this—is not this a cistern? Certainly it is a cistern. For the Carthaginians shall keep much water in cisterns. Yes, yes!"

He stared at the sheepskin again and nodded to Bunny.

"Yes, yes! Certainly he is one cistern," he said. "But it is not known that there is one cistern on this spot. No one shall have seen him. But Aboo Marish, when he is one boy, he wander around about this place, and he tell me he almost fall into this cistern, which is hidden by bushes. How fortunate that I consult Aboo Marish! It was a striking of the luck, as you say in English, that he knew where is the cistern."

He stared at the sheepskin again and slipped it into his pocket. It was easy to trace the ancient aqueduct which had run inland from the Punic city on the sea. Fragments of it were still in existence, though the greater part of the building material had been removed centuries ago for new buildings. Much of the old town of Tunis is built of what was once Roman and Punic Carthage. But Latour, eager and sanguine as he was, seemed a little at a loss now, in spite of the sheepskin and the information he had gained from the old Moor of Tunis. Many times he retraced his steps.

Meanwhile the sun was sinking lower and lower in the west, and shadows were lengthening.

Bunny began to wonder whether they were booked for a night out. Not that he minded. In fact, it seemed rather an attractive adventure to Bunny to camp for the night in the ruins of the city of Hannibal.

The sun dipped at last, and darkness rolled over the plain and the waters of the Mediterranean.

"Sapristi!" grunted Latour. "Let us rest. We must wait for the moon."

Bunny sat down on a broken fallen column which had once adorned a Roman amphitheatre. Latour sat by his side and lighted a cigarette. He smoked in moody silence. His failure to discover so far the ancient cistern that he sought seemed to have dashed his volatile spirits.

So far as Bunny could gather from his disjointed remarks, he believed it was in that cistern that Mago had hidden the state treasure when Scipio came with his legions. It was no doubt a likely hiding-place—if the cistern could be found. But it seemed to Bunny that it would not be easy to find it after it had remained hidden from all human eyes since the year 146 B.C.

The darkness that followed night-fall was deep and intense. Plain and

hills and sea were wrapped in blackness. Through the gloom the end of Latour's cigarette glowed red. Suddenly he jerked the cigarette from his mouth and squeezed the end out between his fingers.

In the dense darkness there was a sound of a footstep. Bunny's heart throbbed. His thoughts went at once to the Greek who had been left lying senseless in the olive-grove far away.

There was a clink of a loose stone moved under a foot, and the footsteps passed on. The darkness wrapped them like a cloak, and they could neither see nor be seen. The footsteps died away in the night.

"He's gone!" breathed Bunny. "The Greek——"

"Non!" Gaston shook his head. "He would never find us! Some Arab thief—there are many thieves here. They will cut you the gorge for ten piastres. But he is gone!"

He took another cigarette from his case, but on second thoughts replaced it, guessing that it was the glow of the cigarette he had been smoking that had guided the unknown wanderer of the night to the spot. They waited in silence till the moon rose over the ruins of Carthage. Then Latour rose to his feet.

"Allons!" he said huskily. And in the bright, clear light of the moon, hanging like a burnished silver bowl over what had once been Carthage, the quest was resumed.

#### CHAPTER 35.

##### The Cistern.

"OH!" roared Bunny. It seemed to the hapless Bunny that the solid earth had failed him, and he gave himself up for lost.

The hour was late. For several hours, under the bright moon, Latour had pursued his search, with Bunny at his heels. He had entered upon a tract of thick, thorny bushes. And

Bunny, as he followed them, received several scratches from the thorns. Bunny's legs were aching by this time, and he fervently hoped that Gaston would either discover the Punic treasure or give up the search till morning. And then suddenly the disaster came.

In that extensive thorny thicket, Gaston told Bunny, was the opening of the ancient cistern into which Abco Marish had nearly fallen when a boy. Gaston was certain of it—and a few minutes later Bunny was equally certain; for as he forced his way through the bushes the earth gave way under his feet and he shot downwards.

Bunny's startled yell echoed far and wide. Evidently he had trodden over some opening hidden by the sprawling bushes, and before he could think of making a movement to save himself he was shooting down into the depths of the earth.

In that fearful moment it seemed to poor Bunny that he died a thousand deaths. Suddenly he splashed into muddy, foul-smelling water. But his feet touched bottom as he scrambled wildly, and he stood, gasping and spluttering, with the water up to his waist. The depth was little more than a couple of feet. The ancient cistern had been replenished by tricklings of rain from above in the rainy season.

He stared round wildly. Black darkness encircled him, and noisome smells. Overhead was darkness, save in one spot, where Latour was frantically dragging the bushes away from the opening into which Bunny had tumbled. Through that opening came moonlight, glimmering on Bunny's pallid face, twelve feet below.

The opening was darkened by Latour's bent head silhouetted against the moonlit sky.

"Allez! You are not kill?" panted Latour.

"No fear!" gasped Bunny. "Grough! I've fallen in water! There's water here, two or three feet deep!"

"Bon!"

It did not seem very "bon" to Bunny, drenched and dripping at the bottom of the Punic cistern!

"Bon!" repeated Latour, and Bunny heard him chuckle with glee. "We have found it! This is the cistern! This is where Aboo Marish nearly fall when he is one boy. This is what he tell me. We have found it, and you, mon garcon, you tread upon the treasure of Carthage!"

"I think I'm treading on mud!" answered Bunny. "It feels frightfully sticky and oozy round my feet. This water is filthy! Groogh! I say, how am I going to get out?"

"It is good luck for you, mon garcon, that the water is there, or perhaps you break you the neck!" said Latour. "Head of pudding, why did you not use your eyes?"

"Look here——"

"But we have found it," said Gaston, and he chuckled again gleefully. "The sheepskin he tell the truth. This is the cistern, and it is here that Mago bury the treasure of Carthage. Bon, bon!"

"How am I going to get out?" bawled Bunny. "In mud and water and darkness and foul smells the treasure had lost its appeal for him.

"Patience! It is not necessary to get out. I shall join you there. I have a rope. When I fix him I come down. I will lower the valise on the rope. You call out when he is near the water, and then I fix the rope and slide down him."

"I say, it's jolly wet——"

"Allons, head of pudding!" snapped Latour.

The valise, fastened to the end of a rope, came swinging down into the pit. "Stop!" called out Bunny when it had nearly touched the surface of the water.

Gaston secured the rope, and a few moments later he came scrambling down it into the ancient cistern. Head-

less of the water which washed round his legs, he landed beside Bunny.

"How are you going to see in the dark?" asked Bunny.

"Head of a pudding, I have electric torch in my pocket."

Gaston fumbled in his pocket. There was a sudden splash as the suspended valise plunged into the water, and the rope came slithering down from above and fell across Bunny's head.

Bunny gave a yelp.

"Oh, crumbs! The rope's fallen in! You never fastened it! Oh, look!" yelled Bunny, pointing up to the moonlit orifice high above.

The rope had not fallen. It had been untied and thrown down. Gaston's startled eyes followed Bunny's finger. In the moonlit opening above a head blocked the light, and a dark face with glittering black eyes grinned down at the prisoners in the cistern.

"It is Marizelos the Greek!" gasped Latour.

"The veiled man!" murmured Bunny.

There came a low-pitched, cackling laugh from the darkness above. The sound dispelled all doubt as to the identity of the man who had unclosed the rope.

Bunny shuddered. In all his many strange adventures he had never before been in such a tight corner as this.

The Greek above was not armed—that Bunny knew, for had not Latour taken away his revolver and dagger when the man lay insensible in the olive grove?

But the fate that confronted the two prisoners in the pit was worse than any death from a revolver shot. Marizelos' devilish scheme became clear to Bunny in a sudden flash of inspiration.

They would be left in that cistern of stagnant water to perish of starvation and exposure. Nobody was likely to find them in that desolate spot before the end came. When their bodies were found—if ever—it would

be thought that the rope had fallen into the pit through being insecurely tied.

The metallic voice that Bunny remembered well came ringing down.

"You did not strike hard enough, Gaston Latour! Look for the treasure, you dog, in your tomb!"

Latour tore the revolver from his pocket and fired upwards. But the head was instantly withdrawn, and a laugh followed the shot.

Treasure or no treasure, Bunny had a shuddering certainty that the Greek spoke the truth, and that what they had found was a tomb in the depths of the ancient hidden cistern!

#### CHAPTER 35.

##### The Rivals.

BUNNY listened to a steady, uninterrupted stream of words from his companion in darkness and misfortune. Gaston Latour was expressing himself very decidedly.

It seemed to afford Gaston some relief, for he kept it up for quite a long time. Bunny, wiser, saved his breath. He was trying to think of a way out of this awful scrape. He had to admit that he could not think of a way.

Had they tumbled into any of the old cisterns revealed by modern excavations, and known to guides and tourists, there would have been good hope of rescue when morning dawned.

Bunny stared up at the opening twelve feet over his head through which he had fallen. The cistern was roofed over, the roof hidden under earth and thick bushes, which accounted for the fact that it had never been found by the many explorers of the Carthaginian ruins. Only in one spot was there an opening, which had been thickly covered with sprawling bushes before Bunny tumbled in. Now it was clear, and the moonlight glimmered down into the pit.

He could see a patch of azure sky spangled with stars. There was no possibility of climbing out. The sides of the old cistern, lost in the surrounding darkness, were far from the opening, which seemed to be in the middle of the roof. It was impossible to get out without a rope from above, and the rope by which Latour had descended lay in the water. And there was no help!

Only the Greek, Marizelos, lurked above. Since he had tossed the rope down after them, and shouted a word of mockery, they had not seen him. Bunny wondered whether he was gone. There was no sound at all save the splashing of the dark water as they stirred and the stream of words from Gaston Latour.

"Look here," said Bunny at last. "Chuck it, you know! I'm getting tired of listening to you!"

"Bah! Head of pudding!" snapped Latour. This seemed to be his favourite expression for Bunny.

"That's all very well," said Bunny argumentatively. "I couldn't help falling into this blessed place, as I stepped into the hole without seeing it! But you ought to have looked round before you came down, and made sure all was safe. It's you that's the pudding-head, if you ask me!"

"Bah! How shall I know that that Marizelos man is about?" growled Latour. "Did I not leave him stunned in the olive grove miles away? How shall I know that he track us here?"

Gaston gripped his revolver, and stared up savagely at the moonlit opening.

"If he would but show his head!" he muttered. "Sapristi! Gladly I blow him out the brains!"

"If he has any he won't let you blow them out!" said Bunny.

The Greek, if he was still there, was careful not to show his head over the opening. He was well aware that a bullet from below was ready for him.

"Ma foi!" said Gaston, calming down a little at last. "We are lost, mon ami. We are in a scratch, as you say in English."

"A scrape!" murmured Bunny.

"We find the cistern, as it is marked on the sheepskin!" muttered Gaston. "We find the place where is hidden the treasure of Carthage! Here, mon ami, is the secret place where Mago buried the gold two thousand years ago to save it from the Romans! Our feet tread on great riches. There is spondulics, as you say in English. But these spondulics—what shall they serve us if we perish in this dismal place?"

"If the jolly old treasure's here, I'd give it all for a twelve-foot ladder!" said Bunny.

The silence was broken by a voice calling from above. It was the metallic voice of the Greek. Marizelos was not gone!

"Gaston Latour! You hear me?"

"I hear you, pig!" answered Gaston.

A shadow fell across the opening above. Gaston gripped his revolver hard. But the Greek did not show himself.

"Your lives are in my hand—yours and the boy's!" came the voice of Marizelos. "Will you ransom them with the sheepskin?"

"Never!"

"Fool! Of what use is the sheepskin to you now?" snarled the Greek. "Listen: If I leave you here, I close up the opening. No mortal eye will ever look on you again. You will perish miserably of hunger in the darkness! Will the treasure of Carthage save you?"

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Bunny.

"Is it that I would trust you?" sneered Latour. "With the sheepskin in your hands, will you save us from this pit? Non! I keep him, and if I perish here at least your rascal eyes shall never see him!"

"Die, then!" answered the Greek. "I will return, and descend to take the sheepskin from your body!"

There was a rustling sound from above. A mass of thorny bush fell across the opening, blotting out most of the light. The Greek was covering the opening! If Bunny had nourished some faint hope that the hidden cistern might be found by some explorer of the Punic ruins, it was gone now. Marizelos was leaving nothing to chance.

Bunny touched Gaston's arm.

"If we could make terms with him—the sheepskin's no good to us here, sir—if he would save us in return for it—"

"Head of pudding! He would kill us all the more surely to keep the treasure for himself!" snapped Latour.

Bunny felt that it was only too true, and he said no more. It was impossible to trust to the good faith of the rival treasure-seeker.

Another mass of bush fell over the opening above. Every vestige of the moonlight was blotted out now. The Greek was doing his work thoroughly. Masses of the scrub were stacked over the opening, and it was soon even more thoroughly hidden than it had been when Bunny tumbled into it.

Utter blackness surrounded them now. The covering of the opening shut them off from all human knowledge. And Bunny shuddered to realise that they were in a tomb!

"La mort!" muttered Gaston.

Bunny shivered, but he tried to pull himself together. He was hopeful by nature, and though there seemed little room for hope now, he was not the fellow to give in without a struggle.

"We're not dead yet, sir!" said Bunny. "No good giving in!"

Only a mumble answered him. All the Frenchman's volatile spirits had left him, and he seemed to have abandoned himself to despair.

There was no sound from above. No doubt the Greek had gone—to return, as he had said, when he would have nothing to fear from a descent into the ancient cistern. He had left his victims in a tomb, to darkness and despair.

Bunny might be a bit of an ass in

some respects, but there was nothing the matter with his courage or his nerve. He groped in the darkness and touched Latour's arm.

"Buck up!" said Bunny.

"Tout est perdu!" muttered Gaston.

"Tooty be blowed!" said Bunny.

"How do you know there mayn't be some way out of this? You've got an electric torch in your pocket. Get it out!"

"Head of a pudding, we are lost! We die here like rats in the dark! It is better to finish—"

"Look here, don't be a silly ass!" exclaimed Bunny. "There's some grub in the bag. We can fish it up out of the water. It will last us a day at least. While there's life there's hope. What's the good of knuckling under? Don't be a funk!"

Gaston breathed hard.

"Head of pudding," he said, "you have a large cheek, as you say in English, but you have reason. At least we will see where we are to die. We will look at the tomb."

He groped in his pocket and produced the torch and flashed on the light. The bright beam glittered round the dank cistern as Gaston held the torch above his head. The cistern was of great extent. The walls were far from them, on all sides thick with slime, and the light showed crawling things in the slime. Two thousand years ago the cistern had held pure water to supply the city. Now, after that lapse of time, it reeked with filth.

"There might be a way out," said Bunny hopefully. "Let's look, anyhow."

Gaston did not stir. He was plunged in despair, and seemed for the moment incapable of exertion. Bunny gave an impatient grunt. His practical mind did not understand this facile yielding to emotion. He took the torch from Gaston's hand and waded through the water towards the nearest wall.

Gaston remained where he was. It was plain that he had not the slightest hope of Bunny making any useful dis-

covery. Bunny's hope was slight. But so long as Bunny had a kick left in him he was going to kick. There was plenty of time for despair, in Bunny's opinion, when every chance had been tried.

They could not keep on their feet many hours, and once they grew too chilled and weary to keep their footing it was death to sink under the foul waters. Every minute was precious.

Bunny reached the wall of the sunken cistern. It was built of large blocks of stone, but covered with ooze and slime. Slowly Bunny passed along the wall, the water swishing round him as he moved. Up and down the wall he flashed the light, hoping against hope that there might be some opening.

It had come into Bunny's mind that it was quite possible that the cistern was connected with another. For it was certain that there must have been many such cisterns in the ancient city. Some, indeed, had been discovered and excavated, but probably there were many more still undiscovered.

He had made almost a complete circuit of the cistern—an immense circumference—when suddenly he stopped and uttered a shout that woke strange echoes in the dismal depths.

"Comment! You find something?" called Latour's voice from the darkness.

"A tunnel!" shouted Bunny.

Gaston came splashing through the water towards the beam of light. He joined Bunny, gasping.

Bunny stood with the light gleaming on the oozy wall. Three feet above his head was a cavity in the wall of the cistern, an orifice about two feet wide and three high.

"Bon!" Gaston gasped. "It is a chance! Perhaps there is another cistern!"

"What-ho!" said Bunny brightly.

In the volatile manner of a Latin he jumped from the depths of despair to bounding hope.

"It is a way!" he said. "It is a way! It will be necessary to crawl on all the four, as you say in English."



"On all fours!" grinned Bunny.

"Yes, yes! Give the light and I lead the way!"

"Hold on!"

"Name of a name!" exclaimed Gaston impatiently. "Is it that you desire to linger in this tomb? Allons!"

"But hold on! We'd better take the bag."

"I had forgotten. Head of pudding, you think of things that I forget. We will take the valise."

They groped back to the middle of the tank, where the valise had fallen. Gaston kicked about with his feet till he found it, stirring up horrible smells from the water.

"It is here!" he said.

"Good! How are we going to get it up?" asked Bunny. He was not willing, if he could help it, to stoop in the filthy water and grope for the bag. "Look here, if we could get hold of the rope that's tied to it—"

"You know not la savate?" Gaston laughed. "A Frenchman can use his feet as well as his hands," said Gaston. "I am verree good at la savate. I can punch my enemy on the nose with my foot. Voila!"

Standing on one leg, Gaston fished for the bag with the other. In a minute or two his foot rose to the surface, with the handle of the bag looped over the toe of his boot. The valise was fully packed and heavy, but Gaston lifted it easily to the surface with his foot.

Bunny was quick to grasp it and secure it. The rope was knotted to the handle. Gaston drew up the rope till he recovered the end, which he tied round his waist. Then they returned to the spot beneath the tunnel in the wall.

The lower edge was beyond the reach of Gaston's hands, and there was nothing on the smooth, slippery wall to assist a climber.

"Give me a bunk up," said Bunny. "I'm lighter than you."

"Bon!"

The Frenchman bunked Bunny up, and he grasped the edge of the cavity and pulled himself in. He flashed the light of the torch round and saw the low, narrow tunnel leading away into blackness.

"There is a way?" called out the Frenchman anxiously.

"Yes. It leads somewhere."

"Give me help, then."

Bunny laid down the torch, and, resting his chest on the edge of the cavity, reached his hands down to Latour. Gaston scrambled actively up. It seemed to Bunny for the moment that his arms would be pulled out of their sockets. But the Frenchman was active and swift, and in a few seconds was sprawling beside Bunny in the tunnel.

He rose quickly to his feet and gave a howl as his head knocked on the roof of the tunnel.

"I crack me the head!" he gasped.

"We shall have to crawl," said Bunny.

"Oui, oui, we go on all the four!"

Gaston pulled up the bag and, dragging it behind him by the rope tied to his waist, crawled along the tunnel, the electric torch in one hand. Bunny crawled after him.

## CHAPTER 35.

### Too Late!

"COURAGE, mon ami!" breathed Gaston. Bunny grinned as he received that encouragement from the Frenchman, who was crawling ahead. It was not Bunny who had needed bucking up. But Gaston was now as exuberantly hopeful as he had before been despondent.

Bunny hoped, but could not be sure, that the slimy tunnel was a way out to light and life and safety. But the Frenchman did not allow himself to doubt. Already, in his mind's eye, he was a free man again, and carrying off the treasure of old Carthage.

It was not easy work crawling

along the tunnel. The stone was slimy and dank and slippery, and the air noisome. They coughed and panted as they crawled on their way, which inclined continually upward.

The tunnel seemed to wind endlessly. Bunny could not help feeling that there was danger of suffocation as they penetrated deeper and deeper into it. But that did not deter him. It was neck or nothing now, for there was no doubt that it was the only way out of the cistern. Fouler and fouler the atmosphere grew as they advanced.

Gaston turned a disgusted face back to Bunny.

"He smell," he said. "He is what you call in English niffy! Isn't it? But we will go to be free!"

"I hope so!" grunted Bunny, mopping his perspiring brow.

Gaston stopped at last, so suddenly that Bunny jammed his head on the Frenchman's boot. Then Bunny stopped, too.

"What's up?" he gasped.

The Frenchman held up the light, flashing it on a mass of stone and rubble that closed the way onward.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bunny, in dismay. The tunnel had come to a sudden end.

"Courage!" repeated Gaston reassuringly. "This is not one wall; this is one heap of rubbish that has fallen with itself some time. We shall force a way!"

"We'll try!" declared Bunny.

Gaston flashed the light over the obstacle. Obviously it was not a wall closing the tunnel. Stones of all sizes and shapes were mixed with loose sand and mud and rubble. It looked like a crumbling mass that had fallen—such a rubbish heap as lay in scores round about the ruins of Carthage.

"We must be near the end!" Bunny declared.

"Eh? Why do you think?"

"Because this rubbish can't have fallen from the roof of the tunnel! The roof is of square stones fitted together. Look! This stuff must have fallen from the open end!"

"It is true! Perhaps quite close to us is open air and the light of the moon!" said Gaston. "Now we go to work!" He opened the valise. In it were packed a pick, trowel, and spade, in sections that fitted together. The tools were soon made ready for use, and Gaston began to wield the pick.

It was difficult work, for he had to kneel to it, the tunnel here being nowhere more than three feet high. The sweat poured down his face. There was room for only one to work at a time, and Bunny crouched behind and held the light.

The rubble was loosely heaped, and the fragments rolled fast from the blows of the pick. Bunny helped to drag the rubbish away as it was loosened. They sweated and panted and choked in the dust, working for their lives. As stones and chunks of masonry rolled loose, Bunny rolled them back along the tunnel behind him to make room.

Suddenly Gaston Latour dropped the pick with a yell that rang reverberating along the narrow confines of the tunnel.

"Sapristi! The light!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Give me the lamp!" yelled Gaston.

Bunny hurriedly passed him the electric torch. He wondered what the Frenchman had seen to startle him so.

Gaston flashed the light on an object that lay among the loosened rubble. It was the iron head of a pick. The handle had long since rotted away, though a fragment of wood still adhered to the iron. Gaston gazed at it with wild eyes. Bunny, for the moment, did not realise the full import of that strange find.

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Gaston groaned. Once more he fell from the height of buoyancy to the depths of despair.

"But—what the thump——" gasped Bunny. "It's only a bit of an old pickaxe. What does it matter?"

"Head of pudding! Is that a tool of a time of Mago of Carthage?" howled Gaston. "Is that a Phoenician pick? Non! It is old—it is rusty—but it is not of the Carthaginians! Someone has been here before us!"

"Oh, good!" gasped Bunny. "That shows it's the way out!"

"But the treasure!" yelled Gaston.

"Oh, the treasure!" said Bunny. He had forgotten the treasure in his anxiety to escape from a living tomb. "What about the treasure?"

Gaston groaned again.

"I tell you we are close to the treasure. It lies by the old cistern, for it is marked on the sheepskin. Yes! But if someone has been here, why for he come? He come for the treasure! This pick show that he dig. He leave the pick—he have finish to dig! Helas! Is it not because he has found the treasure?"

"Looks like it," said Bunny. "But blow the treasure—so long as we get out of this!"

"Head of pudding!" Gaston. In the shock of that dismaying discovery, had forgotten the peril in which they lay. He picked up the fragment of iron and examined it. It was eaten deep with rust, and was evidently very old—more than a hundred years, in all probability. A century, perhaps, had passed since that hidden spot had been visited. Obviously the tool had not been left by any modern explorer. The old pick had been handled there at the time when a pirate Dev reigned in Tunis. Gaston groaned dismally.

"Well, after all," said Bunny, "if that sheepskin's been through a lot of hands, a lot of people must have looked for the treasure, you know!

Somebody was very likely to find it before us. Anyhow, let's get on!" he urged. "I'm suffocating in this filthy dust! For goodness' sake, get on!"

As Gaston made no movement, Bunny started in with the spade, clearing away the rubble. Gaston sat leaning against the side of the tunnel, haggard despair in his sallow face. Bunny worked industriously. He, at least, had no time to waste in vain regrets.

"But perhaps—perhaps that unknown one, he dig for the treasure, but find him not!" said Gaston at last. "Perhaps all is not lost! What you think?"

"I think we're lost if we don't get out of this fearful hole pretty quick!" gasped Bunny.

"Bah! Head of pudding!"

Clang! The spade, as Bunny wielded it, suddenly struck metal in the midst of the shifting rubble. A loud metallic clang answered the blow.

"What the thump——" ejaculated Bunny.

Gaston flashed the light forward. In the gleam of the electric ray there was a yellow glow. Gaston scrambled forward with a yell.

"Gold!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

The Frenchman grabbed up the gold ingot. It weighed heavily in his hands. He almost hugged it in his glee. Then the satisfaction faded out of his face as he realised what it meant. The treasure had been hidden at that spot. It had been dug up, and that single ingot had been overlooked when it was carried away. It could mean nothing else!

"It is gone," said Gaston dejectedly, "and this is all that remains! But perhaps there is more! Make room for me! Give me some room for an elbow, as you say in English."

He plied the pick with feverish energy. The rubble rolled from his blows; the dust filled the tunnel!

chokingly. Bunny laboured at dragging away the rubbish back along the tunnel. Deeper and deeper the Frenchman excavated, but no further gleam of gold rewarded his sight.

"Oh, crumbs!" spluttered Bunny, spitting out dust. "Oh!"

"It was here!" said Latour. He paused in his labour and pointed to a spot he had cleared, where it was evident that at some distant time a flagstone had been removed from the tunnel floor. "This was the place—yes. Here was buried the treasure of Mago, and here it was dug by some scoundrel who have come before us. Yes, yes! We come too late!"

"A hundred years or so too late," grinned Bunny. "That Johnny, whoever he was, had a long start of us."

"It is frightful!" groaned Gaston. "After all this trouble, this danger, we have a piece of gold that is worth perhaps twenty thousand francs. And I think myself of hundred thousand francs—of million francs. I think of a great heap of spondulics!"

"Yes, but get on with it," urged Bunny.

"All the spondulics gone!" moaned Gaston. "I am ruined!"

"You'll soon be a goner, too, if you don't get a move on!" said Bunny brutally but practically. "We shall suffocate. Dig, man—dig!"

Gaston plied the pick again. There was no time to lose on repining, for the dust in the tunnel was thicker than ever, and it was difficult to breathe. But suddenly as the pick struck there was a rush of cool, sweet air.

Bunny gasped with relief. Sweeter than nectar came the fresh air. The pick had struck through the obstacle into the open air at last! At that moment the sweet, cool air seemed to Bunny worth all the treasures that had ever been piled up in the ancient city of the Phoenicians!

## CHAPTER 37.

## The Last of the Sheepskin.

"GLORIOUS!" gasped Bunny. He stood in the open air at last. The tunnel ended on a sloping hillside littered with fragments of ancient buildings. In ancient days the opening of the tunnel had been built over, and it was the falling structures that had choked the entrance.

It was glorious to stand in the open, breathing in great gulps of fresh air. Bunny breathed hard and deep. The night was growing old. They had been many long hours underground. Already in the east was a faint, pale hint of dawn.

"Alors! We are still alive!" said Gaston. "It is something to be still alive, mon cher! That Greek, that Marizelos, he think we are dead and buried in the cistern! But we live, though we find not the treasure."

He peered at the golden ingot in the dim light. A deep sigh left his lips. What must the treasure have been if the lucky man who had unearthed it had carelessly left behind him an ingot worth a hundred pounds at least!

"That's something, Mr. Latour," said Bunny encouragingly. "Better than nothing, anyhow."

"But I shall not return to Paris rich," said Gaston. "They will not point me out in the Bois de Boulogne and say: 'Voilà Latour, millionnaire!' I shall not roll in the spondulics. To think that some unknown scoundrel he is before us a hundred years! Blow him, as you say in English!"

"What about getting back to Tunis?" hinted Bunny.

Gaston nodded with a sigh. It was not easy for him to recover from his disappointment, though he certainly derived comfort from the possession of the ingot. He packed the cube of gold into the valise and locked it.

"Say nothing in Tunis," he said. "It is little enough. But there would be many fingers in this pie if he was known. Allons!"

They started down the slope of the hill, picking their way through thorny scrub, patches of olive, and half-buried chunks of masonry. The light of dawn, strengthening in the east, was sufficient to show them the way. Far off, the waters of the Lake of Tunis caught the gleam of the rising sun, and the scarlet flamingoes woke and skimmed on the water. Bunny was thinking chiefly of getting back to Tunis and turning into bed for a long sleep. He grunted when Gaston caught him suddenly by the arm and stopped him.

"Taisez-vous! Look!" he said.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Bunny, as he followed the direction of the Frenchman's pointing finger.

Seated on a broken marble column, leaning back against a fragment of an old crumbling wall, was Marizelos, the Greek. He was fast asleep.

"That rotter!" murmured Bunny, his eyes gleaming.

Gaston laughed softly.

"He sleep!" he said. "He do not go back to Tunis. He do not wish to go far from that sheepskin so valuable. If we remain in that cistern we die before morning, and he come back for the skin. Sapristi! I give that sheepskin now to anybody. I chuck up, as you say in English. I chuck up one sponge. But, silence!"

Treading on tiptoe, Gaston approached the sleeping Greek. Bunny followed him as silently. In a few minutes they stood close to the unconscious man. Latour drew the revolver from his pocket.

Bunny caught his arm. For the moment he feared that the Frenchman was about to take a deadly vengeance on the man who had abandoned them to death in the buried cistern.

"Head of pudding!" muttered Gaston.

He tapped the Greek lightly on the head with the barrel of the revolver, and Marizelos started into instant wakefulness.

He leaped to his feet, and as his startled eyes fell upon Latour and Bunny he gave a hoarse cry. For a second, perhaps, the startled man fancied that it was the ghosts of his victims that stood before him.

"Bonjour, monsieur!" said Gaston affably.

The Greek stared at him with starting eyes.

"Non, it is not a ghost," said Gaston, grinning. "It is not two ghosts. We are alive and to kick, as they say in English."

"No thanks to you, you rotter!" growled Bunny, with a glare at the Greek.

Marizelos stared at them in silence, the startled look on his dark face giving place to rage and fear. He eyed apprehensively the revolver in the Frenchman's hand.

"Non, I do not blow you out the brains!" said Gaston contemptuously. "You think we die in the cistern, monsieur. But there is one way out, and we find him. Comprenez?"

The Greek's eyes scanned the clothes of the two adventurers, caked with mud and slime and dust. He could see what they had been through. The rage in his glittering black eyes intensified.

"You have nothing to say?" grinned Latour. "You do not ask me for that so precious sheepskin?"

Marizelos gritted his teeth.

"I will have it yet!" he muttered. "You shall never touch the treasure of Carthage!"

Gaston shrugged his shoulders.

"That treasure!" he said. "I mock myself of it! I am what the English call fed-up! I have had enough! I gave an Arab a thousand francs for the sheepskin, and I shall sell him again in Tunis. And if you would dog the steps of the treasure-hunter, monsieur, it

is the steps of someone else that you must dog. To the first that shall offer me five thousand francs I shall sell the sheepskin!"

He turned to Bunny.

"Come, mon garcon! It is a long way to Tunis!"

"Stop!"

Marizelos started forward as the Frenchman was turning away. Gaston glanced back at him.

"You lie!" muttered the Greek. "You will not sell the sheepskin! If you will sell I will be the buyer. But you will not sell."

"Mon ami, I sell that so priceless sheepskin to the first that offer me five thousand francs," answered Gaston. "I tell you I am fed-up. I have had enough of crawling underground. I shall be once more an officer on the Tunis railway. I crawl underground no more!"

"I will buy the sheepskin if you are in earnest," the Greek said eagerly. "Many have sought the treasure before and have lost heart. But I will buy the sheepskin. I will buy it gladly. If I had dreamed that you would be willing to sell I would have offered before. But you are jesting!"

His black eyes scanned Latour's face eagerly.

For answer, Gaston drew the sheepskin from his pocket.

The Greek's eyes blazed. Evidently he had seen the precious sheepskin before while spying on the treasure-seekers, though he had not been able to see what was inscribed on it. It was clear that he knew the square of leather in Gaston's hand. He stretched out an eager hand towards it.

"You are in earnest?" he muttered, his voice husky with eagerness. "You will sell?"

"I have said so!"

Marizelos drew a wallet from his pocket, and with fingers that trembled counted out five notes for a thousand francs each.

"There is the price!" he said huskily.

Gaston Latour took the notes and tossed the sheepskin to the Greek.

Marizelos clutched it greedily.

"Allons, mon garcon!" said Latour.

"But—I say!" stammered Bunny.

But Gaston drew Bunny away. They followed the track down the hill. Bunny, at a little distance, looked back. The Greek was standing with the sheepskin in his hands, scanning it in the light of the rising sun, his black eyes scintillating, his dark face irradiated with greedy triumph.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bunny.

Latour merely grinned. They pursued their way, and the Greek was left gloating over the treasure clue. When Bunny glanced back again he was lost to sight.

Gaston Latour hummed a song as he walked airily, and they struck into the road to Tunis.

"But—but, I say," said Bunny at last, "that jolly old sheepskin is no use to him, Mr. Latour, when we know that the treasure's already been lifted."

"But Marizelos—he does not know that," answered Latour.

"No, but we do. And——"

"Head of a pudding! Do you dream that I should sell him the sheepskin if there was still a treasure? But since there is no treasure, is he not welcome to the sheepskin? He is very welcome, and to me also five thousand francs is welcome. He would kill us in the cistern, parbleu! And now I do him in the eyes, as you say in English. I go to make one fool of him." And Gaston chuckled.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bunny.

His tender conscience was a little troubled by the transaction, rascal as the Greek was. But Gaston whistled and hummed cheerily as they walked back to Tunis.

A few days later Gaston Latour had disposed of the ingot. Bunny was given

a thousand francs as his share. Gaston returned to the post he had given up on the Tunis railway when he became a treasure-seeker.

Of Marizelos Bunny saw no more. No doubt the eager Greek was hunting and searching in the ruins of Carthage, with the invaluable sheepskin as a guide, for the buried treasure of Mago. And Bunny wished him joy of the search!

And the next day Bunny boarded a boat for England. Before he sailed he had an interview with the consul in Tunis, and that gentleman fixed him up with a passport and necessary papers to get into England again.

In just over a week Bunny was stepping off the gangway at Southampton. It was five o'clock in the afternoon when he knocked at the door of Wis-taria Villa.

His uncle and aunt had been previ-

ously warned of his homecoming by the telegram he had dispatched from Tunis. Uncle Hare forgot to be his usual pompous self in the gladness and excitement of seeing his nephew safe and sound. Mrs. Hare melted, while Cousin Gilbert forbore to pass any comments on Bunny being "the fool of the family."

It was a jolly party that sat down to tea that afternoon, and Bunny was grateful for English food after having been subjected to the mysteries of foreign cooking. There was a tinge of regret to his thoughts as he cast his mind back over the adventures he had experienced, knowing that the old hum-drum life would seem tame in comparison. But, Bunny consoled himself, there was always adventure in store if you went out and looked for it!

THE END.

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## OUR MAGAZINE CORNER

# TEN MILES UP!

### THE FIRST BALLOONS.

This is indeed an age of record-breaking feats—on land, on water and in the air. And among the latest and of great scientific value is the amazing balloon ascent of the famous Swiss scientist, Professor Piccard. Man first rose into the air by the aid of a balloon, and it was the queer-looking old "gas-bags," as they were called, that were the forerunners of the aerial marvels of to-day. Many strange and grim adventures befell these balloonists, but until the professor's first ascent in his specially constructed craft last May, such a terrific height as ten miles was deemed far beyond the endurance of man.

It seems almost incredible that this latest triumph of the professor's was wholly accomplished within twelve hours. He left Dubendorf Aerodrome at 5.5 a.m., and without any hitch or difficulty sailed 10½ miles up into that region known as the stratosphere, accompanied only by his fellow scientist, M. Cosyns. In the cause of science these two men faced innumerable and unknown dangers.

### DANGER IN THE AIR.

Forty thousand people cheered the balloon as it left the ground, and with the sun glinting on the little globe-like gondola it was visible to the naked eye almost the whole time that it was in the air. A wireless transmitting set was carried aboard, and almost continuous contact was kept with those eagerly listening on the ground. The professor did not commence his descent until about 11.40, and then the balloon was drifting at some 25 miles

per hour towards Italy. It was about this time that those two in the gondola felt the intense cold to such an extent that they feared they might freeze to death.

### HAPPY LANDING!

Back at the base cars specially chartered by the Aeronautical Society of East Switzerland patrolled the roads, following the course of the balloon as closely as possible in order to be at hand should the scientists be compelled to make a forced landing and need assistance. An aeroplane which followed the balloon for a part of the time was soon outdistanced and had to leave the engineless monster of the air to carry on her adventure unattended.

At last, however, the flight was concluded in safety, the balloon landing in a wheatfield at Cavallaro di Monzambano, close to Lake Garda, Italy. When leaving the gondola both scientists collapsed, overcome by the sudden change of atmosphere. The flight was considerably shorter than was expected, but this was due largely to the fact that the professor was afraid of being blown over the Adriatic Sea. They were equipped with sufficient oxygen to last 36 hours, while their food supplies consisted of quantities of fruit, chocolate, bread and water.

### OTHER ASCENTS.

In the first flight of Professor Piccard's, last May, he did not quite reach the ten-mile mark, and their adventure nearly ended in disaster.

*(Continued on page iv of cover.)*

(Continued from page 96.)


his ascent from Augsburg, a. with M. Kipfer his balloon best to those on the earth, and anxiety was felt for his safety. was fully justified, for the uncraft, with its little tin and aluminum alloy gondola, only 10ft. in diameter, was being blown over the Tyrol mountains, and, descended, night was drawing on. However, was with the adventurists, for instead of landing on jagged rocks of some mountain which would have spelt immediate disaster, they came down on the relatively level surface of the Eurgl Farner glacier. Even then were not out of danger, for there means of communicating with the villages below, and they had the night in this bleak spot above the sea. In the light of the following morning the professor and his companion roped themselves together and commenced their descent to safety. But their balloon had been seen by villagers the previous evening, and on the way down they encountered a rescue party which had set out in search of them.

The best balloon ascent previously was made by a German named Herr Kolhorster, who attained the height of nine kilometres, or about six miles, and, previous to that, by the American scientist Victor Hess, who, however, only reached just over the three-mile mark. Of course, far greater heights have been attained by what is known as free balloons. These are balloons, usually of the thinnest rubber, to which are attached special scientific instruments which automatically record data, including the limit of height reached. One sent up by Professor Wigan of Hamburg reached an altitude of 21 7-8 miles (some 100,000 ft.), but although this is about twice as high as Professor Piccard's attempt, the difference can readily be appreciated when one considers the dangers which Professor Piccard faced in order to study the stratosphere for himself.

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