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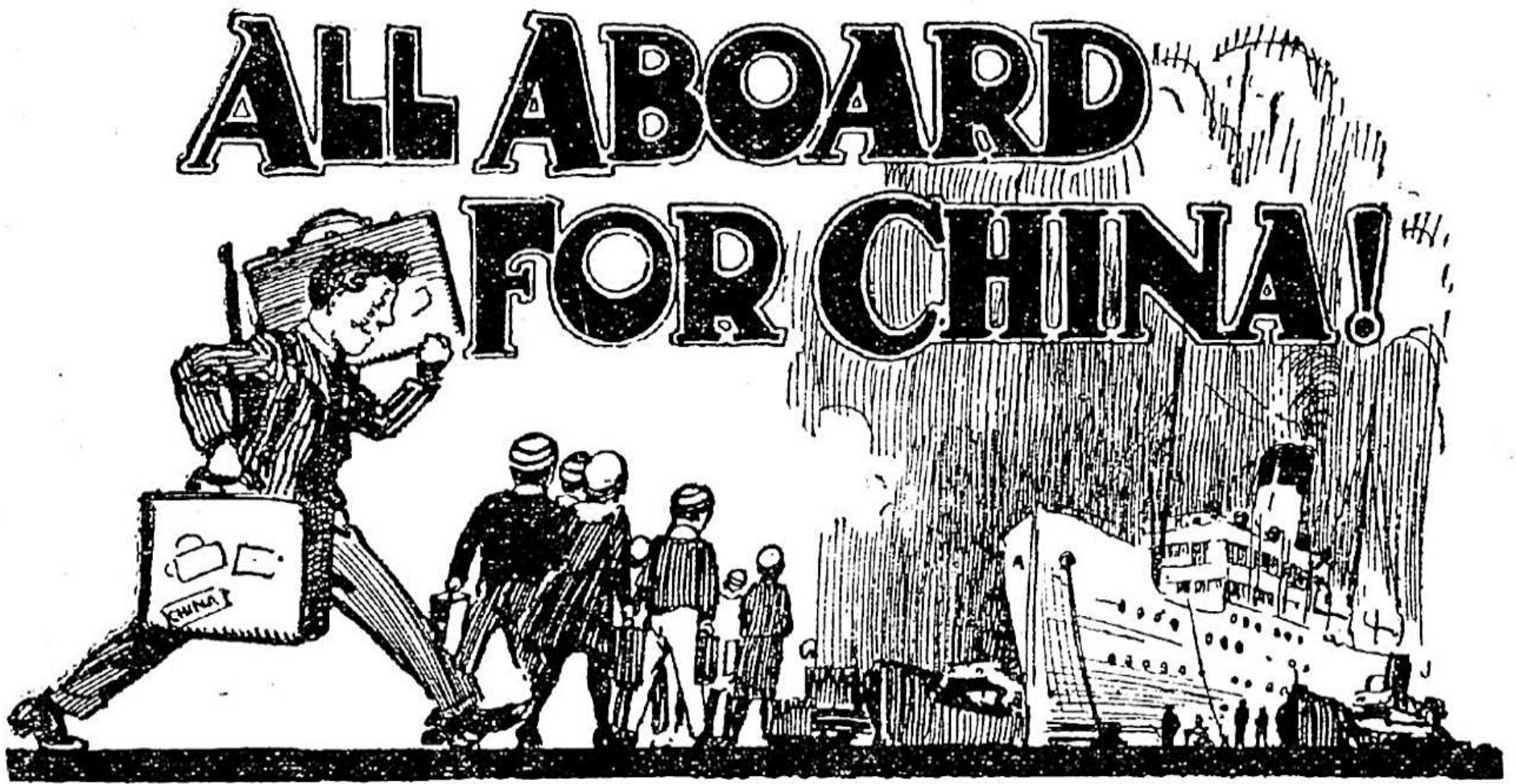
New Series No. 12.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

July 24th, 1926.



Doyle swayed giddily, as a blinding flash of lightning split the darkness of the storm. In that moment, he saw someone standing in the tall dormitory window—a man strangely attired!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The opening story of a stirring new series of holiday-adventure yarns. Travel with the Boys of St. Frank's to China!

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF THE STORM.

BOOM—boom—crrrassh!
The thunder rolled alarmingly and then ended up in a devastating clap which seemed to split the sky. The very earth shook, and the walls of St. Frank's trembled with the shock.

Seniors and juniors were awakened in all Houses, and one fellow in particular found himself strangely on the alert. Harold Doyle, of the West House, stared hard in the direction of the window.

"Must have been dreaming," he muttered. "My hat! Talk about ink!"

The darkness was certainly impenetrable. Doyle knew exactly where the window was, but there was utterly no sign of it. Although the blind was up, no outline was visible. The blackness of the night was as thick as the blackness of the dormitory itself.

Yet Doyle fancied that he had seen something during that split second when the lightning had filled the room with its uncanny bluish radiance. A figure, uncertain and shapeless, was moving between the bed and the window.

Doyle sat up, fully awake.

The silence which had followed the thunder was even more unnerving than the recent commotion. There wasn't a breath of wind, and no rain was falling. It seemed as though

the whole world was standing still and holding its breath. There was a deadening heaviness in the air.

Even earlier, when the Remove had gone to bed, the July night had been sultry and windless, and hardly anybody had covered himself with anything more substantial than a single sheet. Storms were about, for the grumbles of distant thunder had made themselves heard throughout the evening. Until this frightful clap had come, however, St. Frank's had known nothing of the actual storm. Even now it was only threatening.

Zizz-zipl

Another flash of lightning came, so intense that it seemed to crackle and sizzle as it changed the blackness into a blinding blaze. This time Doyle saw nothing but the outline of the window. In that fraction of a second he saw the framework, the curtains, and even the roof of the Ancient House opposite. And when the darkness shut down again it was a hundredfold more intense.

"Now for it!" murmured Doyle, waiting.

The thunderclap came at once, forceful and with the effect of artillery. But Doyle was easier in mind. He hadn't seen that figure again, and he concluded that he had been half-asleep. He wasn't afraid of a thunderstorm—in fact, he rather enjoyed it. There was something exciting about a good, honest, midnight thunderstorm.

"Just shows what the imagination can do," murmured Doyle, as he watched the window. "I expect I was thinking of Chingy. Since those half-castes tried to kidnap him a week or two ago, we've been on edge all the time. Rats! Who the dickens would break into St. Frank's to collar a harmless little beggar like Chingy?"

He dismissed the thought, and decided to go to the window and have a look at the storm. According to all the rules of every self-respecting thunderstorm, it would soon break in real earnest, and drench St. Frank's in a tropical-like downpour. It was only awaiting the right moment.

Doyle's companions in the dormitory were undisturbed, it seemed. At all events, he could hear them breathing regularly in the stillness. Yung Ching, the Chinese boy, was probably awake, however. He was a queer little chap, and seldom spoke unless he was addressed. Larry Scott, the third Removite in the room, was always a heavy sleeper.

There was some excuse for Doyle's momentary feeling of alarm. For a week or two earlier, prior to the great schoolboy Test match at Lord's—which had resulted in Young England winning the Ashes from Young Australia—Yung Ching had been mysteriously carried off, by two half-castes, who had smuggled him aboard an old tramp steamer.

Largely owing to Edward Oswald Handforth's dogged perseverance, Yung Ching had been rescued, and his kidnappers were now pondering over their sins in gaol. They had been sentenced to hard labour, and had attempted no defence. The police, indeed, had been unable to find any motive for the abduction of the cheerful little Chinese. And so the affair had been dropped, and forgotten by ninety-nine per cent of the St. Frank's fellows.

Doyle naturally recalled it, because he was one of Yung Ching's study-mates. And tonight's conditions were entirely favourable for the exercise of a schoolboy's imagination. And that outlined figure— Oh, well, of course, that was merely a fancied incident.

Doyle got out of bed, and padded silently to the window. It was wide open, and he leaned over the sill, and looked upwards. The blackness was so intense that he could see absolutely nothing. There was no difference between the ground, the building, and the sky. Everything was buried in the all-prevailing darkness. And the silence was so profound that a murmur of sleepy voices from the Ancient House came clearly across to the West House junior. He could hear the distant barking of a dog, and was certain that the animal was at least a mile away.

"By jingo, there's something coming this time!" muttered Doyle, rather thrilled. "Rummy thing there isn't any rain—Hallo! That sounded— Yes, here we come! Cupfuls at a time!"

The effect was most curious. Isolated drops of rain were falling—enormous drops which splashed down into the West Square

with distinct plops! One drop struck Doyle on the back of the neck, and it felt like a drenching. He pulled his head in hurriedly.

At the same moment a faint, mysterious rustling sounded in the distance. Doyle stood there, listening, puzzled for a moment. The rustling increased, and then a waft of hot air brushed against him. The wind was coming at last—but at first it was sultry and suffocating.

The lightning flashed once more, and it was directly overhead. Simultaneously the thunder crashed, and Doyle's ears were numbed by the force of it. He pulled himself back still further, startled. Much as he liked the thrill of a thunderstorm, this particular specimen was more than he had bargained for.

"We shall be lucky if we're not struck," he said anxiously. "I say, Scotty!" he added, turning round. "Aren't you awake yet, you giddy log? Come and have a look at this storm. My only hat! How on earth can the chap sleep through this commotion?"

He was by no means frightened, but he felt that he would like wakeful company. Besides, he wanted Larry Scott to witness this exceptional electrical disturbance with him. It wasn't often that St. Frank's had such a storm.

Doyle had only moved a few feet from the window when he came to an abrupt halt. He stiffened, and he could feel the hair at the back of his head rising—at least, that's how it seemed to him. And his heart increased its beat until it was thumping rapidly.

He had seen nothing, for the blackness was still Stygian, and he could hear nothing. That waft of hot wind had died down again, and the rain had proved to be a mere preliminary canter.

Why had Doyle become so suddenly alarmed?

He didn't know himself. He couldn't define his own feelings. His only sensation was an extraordinary one. Without any real justification, he felt that there was some presence near him. It couldn't be either of his dormitory mates, for their breathing was still even and regular. No, it was something else—something much closer.

Doyle hadn't seen this presence, and he hadn't heard it. But in some uncanny way he knew that it was there. The junior knew that he was scared, and he wasn't ashamed of himself. He was simply frightened stiff, and it was more than he could do to move a limb. It was the unknown which terrified him. There is always something horrifying in the unknown.

A sudden wave of giddiness assailed Doyle. He couldn't tell why, but he swayed as he stood, and the very movement destroyed that momentary helplessness. He backed away—away from the Presence which he could not see, but which he knew existed.

"Larry!" he panted hoarsely. "Chingy! Quick! I—I—"

His giddiness increased, and a wave of utter nausea swept over him, inexplicable and

alarming. And at the same second a dazzling flash of lightning transformed the darkness into a glare. Doyle's eyes were unready for such a blinding blaze, but, even so, he saw something black within a yard of him—a man, strangely attired.

The junior gave a kind of scream, and swayed. That dizziness was too much for him, and he sank to the floor. But he was still conscious, and he lay there, breathing heavily and with difficulty. He felt that he was choking, and everything was going round and round in his head.

He tried to speak, but failed. It was just like a nightmare—from first to last, the adventure was equivalent to a particularly nasty dream. Even now he wondered if it was really happening, and he tried to pinch himself.

And then his sense became more dulled, and he fell back.

Lightning again, but Doyle's only sense of it was subconscious. He was losing grip, and within the next few seconds everything faded, and he was either asleep or his senses were dormant from some other cause.

There was a movement in one of the other beds.

"Doyle!" came a soft voice. "You sleepee on floor?"

Doyle made no reply.

"You velly foolish," said Yung Ching. "Me watchee you, and——"

The Chinese boy broke off, and stiffened in very much the same way as Doyle had stiffened. He hadn't been awake long, and he had just glimpsed Doyle as he sank to the floor. But in his sleepy condition Ching had merely imagined that the other junior was too hot, and was lying on the floor as a relief.

But now Yung Ching changed his views.

There was somebody near him—and he was aware also of that same peculiar, nauseous sensation.



CHAPTER 2.

INTO THE NIGHT.

OUTSIDE, the rain was now descending in torrents.

Following the last clap of thunder, the clouds apparently burst, and delivered their burden in a drenching, blinding sheet of water. The rain hissed down with truly tropical violence.

And with it came the wind, whistling round the buildings, and driving the storm with shrieks of fury. The lightning flashes were now far less severe, and although they came frequently, they were of less intensity, and the pelting rain made it impossible for one to see far during these brief floods of light. The thunder was rolling overhead in continuous peals.

Quite a few fellows were at the windows, watching, as was only natural, but there was nobody in the whole of St. Frank's who suspected that something mysterious, something

strange, was taking place in the West House. Those who watched, gazed at the sky, waiting for the forked flashes. The ground below had no interest.

Yung Ching, sitting up in bed, never had any real chance of giving an alarm, or of attempting to defend himself. He was dizzy and weak, and although he felt that he was in peril, he could take no action. When he tried to move, his limbs felt enormously heavy and cumbersome. It was as though his nerves had become numbed and useless. His muscles were in a similar condition.

He remembered how he had been carried off on that earlier occasion, and he knew that this was another attempt. He was astonished, although by no means afraid. His Oriental stolidity was unaffected. They were after him, and he could do nothing. So what was the good of being scared?

Yung Ching was essentially Chinese, although his period at St. Frank's had made a great deal of difference outwardly. If he liked, he could talk almost perfect English, and only affected the "pidgin" lingo because his companions seemed to expect it, and it amused them.

He lived the same as any ordinary English boy, and preferred it. But, apart from these superficial habits and customs, he was still a real Celestial. And none of his Form fellows had ever been able to probe the inner workings of his mind. They had often tried to, but had always given it up in despair.

And now, as he felt the uncanny stupor stealing over him, he was aware of soft hands which raised him from the bed. In a far-off way, he felt that he was being lifted out, and that a rope was being placed under his shoulders. But he could do nothing. He could neither fight for his freedom, nor shout for help. His faculties were at a standstill, with the exception of his consciousness. He knew what was happening, but he was powerless to protest. And even this consciousness was slowly but surely fading away into a dream-like condition of torpor.

There was only one enemy within the room. He was silent, and his movements were snake-like in their stealthiness. Having fixed the rope round Yung Ching's shoulders, the Chinese boy was lifted and carried to the window. And then, swiftly, Yung Ching was lowered.

The rain soaked through his pyjamas in a few seconds. There had been no attempt to clothe him, or to take any of his things. He was dropped straight down, and strong arms were waiting to receive him.

Even if the opposite windows had been packed with watchers, it is doubtful if these movements would have been observed. The man at the window and the men below were indistinguishable from the surrounding darkness. Just black shapes, which, unless they moved, were like the night itself.

And Ching had been lowered between lightning flashes, to be enveloped instantaneously in a black robe, and blotted out. Not for one second did his new captors wait.

Invisibly they hurried across the West Square, their burden causing them no inconvenience.

They passed through the Arch, crossed the Triangle, and skirted the East House. Then, rounding the gym, they plunged into the depths of the little shrubbery, and made their way out into the lane at the corner of the wall. Then they hoisted Yung Ching over the wall as though he were a mere parcel. Then down the lane—down towards the sheltering blackness of Bellton Wood.

They did not pause until they reached a gateway—a spot where the lane widened slightly, and where the grass was thick along the border. Something was standing there—something which a flash of lightning revealed as a closed motor-car. It was a powerful Armstrong-Siddeley saloon, and not a light was showing.

A door opened, and Yung Ching was swiftly pushed inside. With a click, the door closed. A slight whir, and the engine started. Still without lights, the car slid silently off towards Bellton.

Travelling at no greater speed than fifteen miles an hour, and practically noiseless, the Armstrong-Siddeley went through Bellton village like a black shadow. It was still without lights, and the noisy fury of the storm made it impossible for any of the villagers to hear the car's progress. Even if there had been no storm, it is doubtful if this ghostly car would have been heard.

Not until Bannington was almost reached was there any alteration. Then the headlights were abruptly switched on, and the inky blackness of the road was transformed into a dazzling scene, with every roadside tree and hedge clearly defined. At the same instant the throttle was opened, and the Armstrong-Siddeley leapt forward at the touch. With the road well indicated, there was no longer any necessity for the earlier caution.

Once through Bannington, the speed was increased again, and the mystery car was soon humming along between forty and fifty miles an hour, and she was now on the Southampton road.

Arriving at Southampton, the car caused no comment. She was just an ordinary saloon, and the one or two policemen who were passed gave it a purely casual inspection. The storm had only touched Southampton lightly, and very little rain had fallen. The roads, indeed, were now practically dry. Proceeding sedately, the Armstrong-Siddeley threaded her way down to the docks, crossing numerous sets of railway tracks, and finally coming to a halt on one of the numerous quays. Comparatively near by, the mighty bulk of two trans-Atlantic liners reared up like mountains into the sky, twinkling with lights.

But close against this particular quay was a steam yacht. Her size was not impressive, but for sheer beauty she was wonderful indeed. A rakish-looking yacht, with scarcely anything but white-and-gold to be seen. Her brasswork gleamed and reflected the lights from the neighbouring arcs. A gangway was

in position, and there were one or two men on duty.

The door of the motor-car opened, and two well-dressed men emerged. They were Chinese, although thoroughly Westernised. They were wearing white flannel trousers, sports coats, and straw hats. And, laughingly, they were carrying a small wardrobe trunk between them.

A hail, and two sailors ran up and relieved the new arrivals of their burden. The Armstrong-Siddeley silently sped off, and was lost among the tangle of shipping in the distance. The two Chinamen, each with a suitcase, followed the sailors across the gangway.

The trunk was taken down a brilliantly illuminated staircase, along a passage, down more stairs, and into a cabin below the water-line. The sailors were dismissed, and the two men in flannels closed and locked the door.

They did not speak. Opening the wardrobe trunk, they removed the dazed and bewildered Yung Ching. He had only been locked up in that trunk for a matter of three minutes, and he had come to no harm. He was wearing nothing but a silken Oriental wrap.

One of his captors pointed to a complete outfit of clothing which was spread out upon the bunk—underclothes, shirts, suit, and everything necessary. They were ordinary English articles of attire.

Still without a word, the men took the trunk, and left the cabin, locking the door behind them. Yung Ching found himself alone. He knew at once that he was on board a ship, in spite of the fact that his senses were still numbed. As for the locality of this vessel, he had not the faintest idea. He could not even be certain as to its character, but it was obviously a vessel of some dignity, or it would not possess such a cabin as this.

Yung Ching sat on the edge of the bed and glanced round. His normal senses were rapidly returning. He was not excited and, indeed, he appeared to be but mildly interested. There was no porthole in the cabin, and the door was secured. Nothing but a ventilator in the corner of the ceiling communicated with the outer air, and this was covered with an ornamental grille.

In the meantime, the men in flannels had gone up the lower stairs, and they went along the electrically-lit corridor. They entered a doorway, and found themselves in a small, ordinary cabin. But, passing through this, they went straight from the West into the East.

The apartment was remarkable in the fact that it in no way resembled a ship's cabin. It was a room typical of China—a room with lacquered works of art, and every other symbol of the East.

A man was there, seated impassively on a big silken lounge. He was Chinese, attired in rich robes, and purely Celestial.

"Excellency, the work has been done," said one of the newcomers, speaking the language of Southern China. "Your orders have been obeyed."



"The boy is here?"

"Excellency, he is here," replied the man obsequiously.

"It is well. Now go."

Both the men bowed low, as though this impassive individual was a personage of great importance. Closing the door behind them, they left their master in solitude. He sat there without moving, and there was not even a sign of emotion on his face.

But his eyes gleamed with a contented light.



CHAPTER 3.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

DOYLE shivered.

Yawning, he moved slightly, and then winced. He was unaccountably stiff, and his head was throbbing. Rummy, too, for Doyle seldom suffered from a headache. He yawned again, and turned over.

What on earth was the matter with the bed? He hadn't felt it so hard for ages. He was chilly, and—

"Great Scott!" muttered Doyle, aghast.

He was sitting up now, and he found, to his astonishment, that he was on the floor, attired only in his pyjamas. No wonder he was stiff! No wonder he had a crick in his neck! He rubbed his left elbow ruefully, and looked round in a semi-bemused state.

Everything was quiet and still. Moonlight was streaming in through the open window, and there was a fresh, cooling breeze stirring the curtains. He shivered again, and frowned. He was trying to remember. How had he got on the floor? Perhaps he had fallen out of bed—

"By jingo!" he muttered. "That thunderstorm!"

Yung Ching was lowered by the mysterious figure to the waiting men, with the driving rain soaking through his pyjamas.

The shadowy figures caught him, and bore him silently away through the storm to the car that waited in the sheltering blackness of Bellton Wood.



He remembered now. Yes, of course, his last recollection was of the vivid thunderstorm, with its accompanying incidents. That strange feeling he had had—of another presence. With a start, he looked round afresh, but there was nothing to alarm him. The moonlight was sufficient for him to see that the staid little dormitory was devoid of any mystery.

Doyle rose to his feet, and felt very dizzy. He took a look out of the window, and could see the West Square distinctly. Everything was dripping with water. The paved pathways below were reflected in the moonlight, and there were any amount of huge pools. There had evidently been a great downpour.

Away in the East there was a glimmering in the sky—the first herald of dawn. Not a cloud could be seen, and the thunderstorm had apparently left a trail of clear weather behind it. The sultry heat of the previous evening had gone.

Doyle went to his bed, and pulled the sheet over him. He thought it advisable to spread one of the blankets, too. He was still trying to remember exactly what had happened, but his brain was heavy. This was rather strange, too, for as a rule he woke up with quite a clear head. It was as though he had been drugged, or something. But that was all rot—

Doyle started. Yung Ching! That was right—he suspected that somebody had broken into the school to kidnap Yung Ching! He could remember catching sight of a black figure, and he could recall that his senses had become numbed. What had happened afterwards? He had fallen to the floor, and then— But he couldn't get any further.

"Oh, rot!" he growled, snuggling down. "I must have had a giddy nightmare! That thunderstorm, too. I suppose that made me feel a bit rocky—it was particularly severe, as far as I can recollect. But why the dickens was I on the floor? Why—" He sat up in bed again, as a startling thought struck him. "My only hat! Perhaps I was struck by lightning!"

He was half scared at the thought. The idea was certainly an intriguing one, and he felt himself all over in a doubtful kind of way. He had often read of people being struck by lightning and rendered unconscious, and yet suffering no real harm.

Perhaps he had received just a little shock, and this had numbed him, without actually striking him down. As for Yung Ching, there was no reason why he should get melodramatic ideas into his head. He must have dreamed about that black figure.

Doyle glanced at Yung Ching's bed, and half grinned. The Chinese boy was fast asleep, as usual. Probably he hadn't been disturbed all night.

The bed was so comfortable that Doyle soon dozed off, calling himself an imaginative ass for getting such notions. He hadn't been struck by lightning at all, or anything. The heat must have affected him, and he had had a nightmare. That was all. Lots of

fellows rolled out of bed during a nightmare. Perhaps he had eaten something, too, that had upset his stomach. Those sandwiches of Goodwin's had seemed all right, but you could never tell. It was always better to be cautious during the hot weather—

His thoughts trailed away as sleep came to him, and in another minute he was soundly off. And even when the rising-bell clanged out at the usual hour he didn't move. The disturbances of the night had rendered him unusually heavy.

Larry Scott sat up and glanced appreciatively out of the window.

"Ripping morning," he observed with satisfaction. "It looked like being wet last night, but— My hat! What's up with the chaps? They're both sound asleep!"

Scott jumped out of bed, and callously whisked Doyle's blanket and sheet off, exposing him to the air. Doyle stirred, grunted, and sat up.

"Chuck it!" he said irritably. "Let a chap sleep in peace—"

"You hopeless ass, the rising-bell has just gone," interrupted Scott. "You can't lie here— I say, you look pretty wonky this morning," he added critically. "Didn't you sleep well?"

Doyle clutched at the bedclothes, and pulled them over him.

"No, I didn't," he retorted, yawning. "I've had a rotten time—dreams, and nightmares, and things. That thunderstorm, too—"

"What thunderstorm?"

"My hat!" snorted Doyle. "The lightning was enough to blind you, and the thunder sounded like half a dozen naval guns. And you slept through the lot! You're not a human being—you're a chunk of wood!"

Larry Scott grinned.

"When I sleep—I sleep!" he retorted. "I don't let a silly thunderstorm wake me up. But, I say, you do look a bit groggy," he added. "You'd better tuck down until the second bell."

"That's what I'm going to do," retorted Doyle grumpily. "Like your rot to wake me up for nothing."

Scott went across to Yung Ching's bed and repeated his former operations—for it was hardly likely that the Chinese boy had suffered from nightmares, too. Scott stood there with his fingers still grasping the sheet.

"Of all the tricky little beggars!" he said indignantly.

Yung Ching wasn't in bed at all. There was nothing there but a cunningly contrived heap of clothing. It had looked exactly like the sleeping figure of the little Chinese boy. The "head" had been nearly covered, but that was nothing unusual.

"Look at this, Doyle," said Scott.

"Look at what?"

"That young ass of a Chingy has—"

"Bother Chingy!" growled Doyle, looking up. "Great Scott! Can't you leave a chap alone? What do you want to worry me

for— Eh? Isn't Chingy here?" he added, with sudden vague sense of uneasiness.

"No—only a fake," replied Scott. "He must have got up early, and he prepared this trick business to fool us. I've never known Chingy to play a game like that before—"

"Wait!" gasped Doyle, leaping out of bed. "This—this wants thinking out! I believe—I believe— Great guns! Then—then it was real?" he added breathlessly.

"What was real?"

"They've got him!" shouted Doyle, in alarm.

"Got him? What the dickens—"

"Yung Ching! They've pinched him!" shouted Doyle excitedly. "Don't you understand? He's been kidnapped!"

"What on earth—"

"I tell you it's true," went on Doyle. "I thought it was a nightmare, but it must have been real. During that thunderstorm, you know. I thought I saw a black figure, and I suspected that something was wrong at the time. Then I woke up and found that I was on the floor. Chingy's bed looked all right, but Chingy wasn't there at all—it was only a fake! I tell you he's been kidnapped!"

Larry Scott listened to this outburst with amusement.

"Chuck it!" he grinned. "Of all the wild yarns—"

"But it's true!" howled Doyle hoarsely. "Don't you realise—"

"One of these days you'll make a fortune as a novelist," said Scott. "With an imagination like yours—"

"Look here, Scott, you cackling hyena!" panted Doyle. "This is honest Injun! Oh, what an ass I was not to give the alarm in the middle of the night! It might have been possible to stop them carrying him off. And now it's too late!"

Larry Scott still refused to be convinced.

"Don't let these fantastic ideas get possession of you," he said soothingly. "You've had a bad dream, old man, and that's all there is in it. Chingy simply got up early and played a trick on us."

"And what about those figures in the night?" roared Doyle angrily. "Do you think I'm such an ass that—"

"Chuck it, you chaps!" said Johnny Onions, looking in. "We can hear your voices down the other end of the corridor. What's the row about?"

"Yung Ching's been kidnapped!" shouted Doyle.

"What, again?"

"Don't take any notice of him," advised Scott, as Johnny Onions and Bertie Onions came into the dormitory. "The poor chap's had a nightmare, that's all. He's been raving away for five solid minutes."

"It sounds bad," remarked Bertie solemnly. "What's that you were saying about niggers in the fight?"

"Niggers, eh?" said Scott. "That's new! Still, he did say something about a black figure. But I didn't know there was any fight."

Doyle glared.

"I didn't say anything about a fight!" he retorted, exasperated. "Clear out, Onions, you ass! I never said anything about niggers—"

"Did I say niggers in the fight?" asked Bertie mildly. "Sorry! One of my mistakes again—I meant to ask you about the figures in the night."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just like Bertie to twist it backwards way," grinned Johnny. "And it's simply marvellous how he gets a totally different sense—"

"I wish you chaps would get some sense!" interrupted Doyle. "I'm not dressed, but you are. Dash off for the Housemaster, and tell him that Chingy's been kidnapped!"



CHAPTER 4.

THE ALARM.

JOHNNY ONIONS shook his head.

"If it's all the same to you, Doyle, old son, I'd rather you did your own dashing," he said. "Just because Chingy plays a trick on you, there's no need to get these dotty ideas about kidnapping—"

"Oh, you hopeless idiots!" interrupted Doyle thickly. "Don't I keep telling you that something rummy happened in the middle of the night? One of you had better tell the Housemaster, and another had better fetch the police."

"Splendid!" grinned Johnny. "I'll go to Mr. Stokes, and you can run down and rout out a constable, Bertie."

"There's bound to be a ban on the meat in the village," nodded Bertie.

"A ban on the meat?" said Scott. "What's that got to do with the matter? And why should meat be banned—"

"I meant to say a man on the beat," explained Bertie. "Sorry! But look here, Doyle, why should we all get excited? You say this affair happened in the middle of the night?"

"Yes, it did."

"Well, it was roaring with pain—"

"I suppose you mean pouring with rain?" interrupted Johnny gently. "Of course it was, Doyle. So if there were any kidnappers they must have left a lot of tracks behind 'em. It's not like you to get so dotty—"

"Shut up!" interrupted Doyle, who had slipped into his trousers by this time. "You can all go to the dickens! I'm off to fetch Mr. Stokes!"

He strode to the door and tore it open.

"Don't be an ass, Doyle—" began Scott.

"I know what I'm doing!" retorted Doyle fiercely.

He ran down the corridor just as he was, barefooted and with only his trousers pulled on over his pyjamas. Reggie Pitt and a

number of other juniors regarded him in astonishment as he dashed downstairs.

"Mad!" said Duncan, staring.

By a piece of luck, Mr. Beverley Stokes, the Housemaster, was coming upstairs at that very moment, and Doyle nearly collided with him. He pulled up, breathless.

"I was just rushing down to your study, sir!" he panted.

"Don't you think it would be better to dress yourself before you rush about the House?" asked Mr. Stokes severely. "You mustn't go on like this! Why, you haven't even washed——"

"It's urgent, sir," interrupted Doyle. "Yung Ching's been kidnapped again!"

The Housemaster gave him a sharp look.

"Yung Ching has been kidnapped again?" he repeated slowly. "Come, come, Doyle! I can hardly believe——"

"It's a fact, sir," insisted Doyle. "I've told some of the other fellows, but they only laugh at me. It happened in the middle of the night. I was drugged, or something, and couldn't do anything."

"This seems an extraordinary story!"

"I found myself on the floor just before dawn, sir—after the thunderstorm had gone," went on Doyle. "Chingy must have been gone by then, but I got back into bed and went to sleep."

"Indeed! Why didn't you report——"

"I thought he was still there, sir," panted Doyle anxiously. "They'd made a fake figure, and I never thought of pulling back the bedclothes. Besides, I was half-dazed from that drug, or whatever it was. I'm still feeling groggy this morning, sir. I wish you'd come upstairs and look."

Mr. Stokes nodded.

"Yes, I'll come at once," he replied. "Now then, boys—now then!" he added curtly. "There's no need to get so excited. Take my advice, and keep this affair to yourselves. We don't want any unnecessary sensation."

Quite a number of seniors and juniors were crowding on the stairs, in the lobby, and on the landing. They had all heard Doyle's words, and there was already a minor sensation afoot.

Mr. Stokes went upstairs, and entered Doyle's dormitory, and a crowd of juniors came pressing round.

They were disappointed when Mr. Stokes shut the door in their faces. Doyle was fairly trembling, and his agitation was genuine. Scott was just beginning to realise that his chum was really in earnest.

"Now then, Doyle, let me have the whole story," said Mr. Stokes quietly.

And Doyle explained everything to the best of his ability—how he had been awakened by the storm, how he had felt another presence in the room, and how that extraordinary feeling of nausea had come over him.

He described his awakening on the floor, his suspicions, and how he had finally got back into bed, concluding that he had merely had a dream.

"But it wasn't a dream, sir," he added. "Yung Ching isn't here, so it's clear that he was taken away——"

"No, Doyle, it isn't clear at all," interrupted Mr. Stokes. "Your evidence is purely circumstantial. You cannot say anything definitely—and even now you may have dreamed all this. But I will admit that it looks grave."

"But Yung Ching isn't here, sir," said Doyle. "Isn't that proof?"

"Not exactly," replied the Housemaster. "As Scott suggests, Ching may have perpetrated a little joke on you, so the sooner a search is made for him, the better. We mustn't get any melodramatic ideas until we have exhausted all other lines of inquiry. I wish you could be a little more certain about this peculiar adventure of yours."

"Well, it really happened, sir—I know that," said Doyle bluntly.

"How do you know it?"

"Oh, well—— I mean—— Dash it all, sir, I ought to know, oughtn't I?" asked Doyle.

"You ought, but unfortunately you have already proved that you are only positive because of this recent discovery," said Mr. Stokes. "Until Scott turned back Ching's bedclothes you were quite convinced that you had had a dream. Isn't that so?"

"Well—yes, sir."

"So you see the difficulty," continued the Housemaster. "You can tell us nothing of a positive nature, Doyle. We know the thunderstorm came, because many of us heard it—and saw it. But as for the rest of your story, it is certainly fantastic. A presence? A shapeless black figure? You must surely appreciate, Doyle, that one's imagination is liable to conjure up such things at the dead of night. No, we mustn't take anything for granted! The very fact that Ching was kidnapped once before only leads us to these hasty conclusions. We must be level-headed about the affair."

"I suppose you're right, sir," admitted Doyle, scratching his head. "It does seem rummy, now you come to put it like that."

"It also seems rummy that these kidnapers should choose such a remarkable period for their work," said Mr. Stokes drily. "They must have known that many boys were awake at the height of the storm, and they must have realised that quite a few were at the windows. Of course, they may have been working to a time-table, and—— And then, how could they get the boy out? Obviously, by the window, for it would have been too risky to use the corridors with so many of us wakeful."

The Housemaster walked to the window and leaned out. There was nothing of a suspicious nature to be seen. He turned back, and instructed Doyle to dress himself as quickly as possible.

"And perhaps you had better report to Dr. Brett," he advised. "If your head is so bad——"

"Oh, that's all right, sir—I'm heaps better now," said Doyle.

"Then go on just as usual, and don't let your imagination get the better of you," said Mr. Stokes. "I'm afraid there are already a number of alarming rumours circulating throughout the school. We must find Ching at once, and thus disprove these absurd stories."

Mr. Stokes went out, and decided to have a word with Morrow, the head prefect of the House. He instructed Morrow to institute a quick search for the Chinese boy, and Morrow promptly telephoned to all the other Houses, and got the prefects to work in these, too.

Mr. Stokes decided to say nothing to the Head until he had had Morrow's report, for there was no need to alarm Dr. Stafford unnecessarily. It was nearly breakfast-time when Morrow came into Mr. Stokes' study.

"Sorry, sir—not a sign of him," he announced.

"H'm! That's bad," said Mr. Stokes slowly.

"We've made a thorough job of it, too, sir," continued Morrow. "Everybody has been asking questions, and we've gone over the whole ground. There isn't a House that hasn't been ransacked. And Ching hasn't been found anywhere."

"Has anybody seen him this morning?"

"Not a soul, sir," replied the head prefect. "We've been particularly careful to make those inquiries, and there's no doubt that Ching hasn't been seen at all to-day. It looks a bit ugly, sir."

"You think——"

"Well, after what happened the other week, sir——" Morrow paused. "And Doyle is pretty positive about that experience of his," he added. "He told me all about it, and I think it looks fishy."

"I don't like this at all," frowned Mr. Stokes. "And yet we don't want to precipitate any alarmist action—— I mean we should look fools if we communicated with the police for nothing. I'll go to the headmaster, Morrow. I think he ought to know."

"You couldn't do better, sir, in my opinion."

Mr. Stokes nodded, and went to the Head's house, calling upon Mr. Nelson Lee on the way. The latter had heard the rumours, and he was by no means inclined to disregard the story.

"I'm afraid there's something in it, Stokes," he said, as they walked across Inner Court. "I've never been satisfied about that other kidnapping affair. Doyle may have exaggerated, and he may have used his imagination. But the uncomfortable fact remains that Ching is missing."

"Yes, that's the deuce of it," growled Mr. Stokes.

Two minutes later they were with Dr. Malcolm Stafford, and the Head listened in astonishment. He was inclined to be very sceptical.

"Incredible, Mr. Stokes—incredible!" he said at length. "This is sheer nonsense about black figures and mysterious presences! And Doyle is obviously wrong when he talks

of being drugged. No, I cannot believe this rubbish."

Both the Housemasters looked rather grim. "But Ching is nowhere to be found, sir," pointed out Mr. Stokes.

"Of course he isn't," retorted the Head. "The young rascal has probably gone off deliberately, in order to create a mild sensation. Certainly I shall not approach the police."

Mr. Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I am afraid you will have to approach the police sooner or later," he said quietly. "Yes, Dr. Stafford, I fear that something really serious has happened to Ching. And I will take prompt measures to examine his bed-room."



CHAPTER 5.

HANDFORTH ON THE TRACK.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH, the famous leader of Study D, in the Ancient House, was simply bristling with indignation. His face was red, his eyes were gleaming, and he was breathless with the strength of his emotion.

"Why it's an outrage!" he burst out fiercely.

"Eh?"

"What?"

Church and McClure both jumped. They had been reading a notice in the lobby, and were unaware of their leader's gathering fury. They stared at him in astonishment.

"What's an outrage, old man?" asked Church. "We didn't know you were here, Handy. We thought you'd gone over to see Boots about that caricature of you they pinned up in the Modern House yesterday——"

"Oh, I suppose you mean that was an outrage?" grinned McClure. "It wasn't such a bad effort——"

"Why, you howling fathead, they drew me with the ears of a donkey, and the body of a bullock!" roared Handforth hotly. "For two pins I'll smash you——" He paused, and breathed hard. "But I wasn't thinking about that beastly libel!" he added darkly. "Why wasn't I called in to the West House this morning?"

"Called in to the West House?"

"Yes. Why wasn't I put on the track?" demanded Edward Oswald. "Yung Ching's been kidnapped, and I didn't hear anything about it until two minutes ago. And now it's nearly breakfast-time!"

Church and McClure grinned.

"You don't believe that dotty yarn, do you?" asked Church.

"Of course I believe it!"

"Well, it's a rummy thing you didn't hear it earlier," said McClure. "The chaps have been talking about it ever since we got up. Prefects have been going about asking for

Chingy, and the whole school's treating it as a joke. It's only a rumour——"

"Of course it is, Handy," interrupted Church. "You've been so busy about that caricature that you haven't taken any notice of anything else. But you needn't believe that tosh about Ching being kidnapped."

"It isn't tosh," said Handforth curtly. "I've been expecting this for days—for weeks! Didn't I warn everybody that Chingy would be kidnapped again? Didn't I advise Mr. Stokes to get a couple of Scotland Yard detectives here to watch his bed-room at night? But nobody ever takes any notice of me!" he added bitterly. "Perhaps they'll learn in time!"

"But, my dear chap——"

"Ching's been kidnapped, and I'm going to find him!" interrupted Handforth firmly. "Doyle isn't much of a chap, but I believe him this time. Why, he couldn't invent a yarn like that—he hasn't got the imagination! I'm going over to the West House now, and in ten minutes I'll be on the track."

"But the breakfast-bell——"

"Blow the breakfast-bell!"

"You'll only get yourself into trouble——"

"It's an outrage that I wasn't called in at first," snorted Handforth. "I found Chingy last time, so I'm obviously the chap to find him again. If it hadn't been for me, he would have been half-way to China by this time, bottled away on an old tramp steamer."

"That's true enough," admitted Church, nodding. "You certainly came out strong that time, Handy. But there's no reason why you should jump to conclusions——"

He broke off, for Handforth was walking away. When the leader of Study D made up his mind to anything he never hesitated. He went straight ahead, and nothing short of a steel barrier would stop him. In this case, the steel barrier took the shape of his Housemaster.

For when he got to Yung Ching's bedroom, he found the door locked. And when he hammered upon it, Mr. Nelson Lee appeared.

"You mustn't bother me now, Handforth," he said curtly.

"I've come to investigate, sir," said Handforth.

"Oh, indeed?"

"Yes, sir," said Handforth, striding in. "I've heard about Chingy's kidnapping, and I've decided to take up the case."

"Oh, you have?" said Mr. Lee smoothly. "That's very interesting, Handforth—only I happen to be on the scene first, and Hamilton is the only assistant I require. So if you'll oblige me by retiring——"

"Retiring?" gasped Handforth. "Go to bed, sir?"

"You chump, of course not," grinned Dick Hamilton, who was just behind the Housemaster. "You always take things literally. Mr. Lee means you've got to buzz off. That's plain English, but you'll understand it better."

"Look here, you silly ass——"

"This is no time for wrangling, Handforth," interrupted the Housemaster-detective. "Yung Ching has disappeared, and I am conducting the investigation. I require no interruptions."

"But I've come to get on the track, sir," said Handforth indignantly. "I found Chingy last time, and I mean to find him this time. Of course, I don't mind you helping, if you want to," he added generously. "In fact, I should be glad of it. But I must insist upon a free hand. When I take up an investigation, I want every——"

"This is all very interesting, but if you are so anxious to conduct investigations you will kindly confine your attentions to the passage," interrupted Mr. Nelson Lee, pushing him firmly through the doorway. "If you were any other boy I would punish you for insolence. But I really think that you have no intention of being insolent. Thank you, Handforth."

The door was closed in Edward Oswald's face, and he heard the key turned in the lock. He gazed at the panels blankly, utterly unable to understand why his services should be scorned. He had a queer idea that he was an amateur detective, and this confidence in his own ability had been greatly strengthened by his recent success. The Ancient House had never ceased to hear references to Yung Ching's rescue.

"Well I'm jiggered!" gasped Handforth.

"You can thank your lucky stars you're not jiggered, you mean," said Reggie Pitt, who was in the corridor. "Mr. Lee's a brick to let you off with only a caution. If I'd been in his place I should have given you six months' hard labour!"

"But, you dotty lunatic, I've come here to investigate——"

"My hat! Don't go over all that again!" groaned Pitt. "If you're dying to conduct an inquiry, why don't you go and search for footprints in the Square? Chingy was taken out by the window, it appears——"

"Footprints!" interrupted Handforth, with gleaming eyes. "By George, I hadn't thought of that! If I'm quick, I can be on the ground before Mr. Lee."

He rushed off, and Reggie Pitt turned to Jack Grey.

"I wish him luck!" he grinned. "He's got about as much chance of finding footprints in the West Square as we have of finding diamonds in our study fireplace! But he's a wonderful chap—there's no limit to his powers. He'll probably find footprints, whether they're there or not!"

"Besides, Mr. Lee's had a look first," chuckled Grey.

Handforth's investigations were quite futile. Much to his chagrin, he found that there was nothing but a paved path below Yung Ching's bed-room window. And this paved path went right round the Square, and across it in all directions. Of course, he had walked along these paths hundreds of times, but until now he hadn't really realised that they were in-



"But I've come to get on the track of Yung Ching!" Hardforth protested. "Of course, I don't mind you helping if you want to, and I——" Mr. Nelson Lee smiled as he pushed Handy outside. Handforth as a detective was too much of a good thing!

capable of taking footprints. And even if the kidnapers had made any trifling impressions, these had naturally been washed entirely away by the sweeping rain.

Mr. Nelson Lee had come to this conclusion after one cursory glance. No matter which direction the alleged marauders had taken, there was no possible chance of tracking them. The rain had poured down in such torrents that even the gravel of the Triangle was a fruitless field of search. The heaviest of footprints would have been washed away by that downpour.

So the investigation was being confined to the bed-room itself—for to a trained eye like Mr. Nelson Lee's there might be something in the nature of a clue to pick up.

As it happened, there wasn't.

The detective only discovered Yung Ching's clothes—a significant fact in itself—and the usual indications of activity in a school dormitory. There was no trace of a muddy footprint, or any sign of a stranger having been in the place.

The presence of Ching's complete wardrobe, down to the smallest stud and button, was enlightening. It disposed of the theory that he had dressed and gone out of his own accord. For he would hardly have walked downstairs in his pyjamas. His sleeping-suit was the only article missing.

Later on, of course, the police were informed.

For when midday arrived and the position was still the same, even Dr. Stafford began to grow uneasy. Inquiries were made in every direction. Bellton was ransacked for people who might have seen something unusual during the night. But nothing came of these inquiries; there was no clue of any kind. Yung Ching had been spirited away.

But to where? And by whom?



CHAPTER 6.

DR. FOO CHOW.

YUNG CHING looked up from his book, and beheld a small opening in the top panel of his cabin door. It had just slid back, and a yellow face was beyond.

"My honourable master has bidden me place this food before you," said the yellow face impassively. "Should you desire any particular food, I am to take your instructions."

"Tell your honourable master that I have no message," replied Yung Ching.

They both spoke in their own tongue, and

the Chinese boy went forward and took a small, narrow tray. It passed easily through the opening in the panel, and the panel was shut down. Yung Ching was again alone.

He placed the tray on the table, sat down, and commenced eating. The food was of the best, and Ching ate as though there were nothing whatever unusual in this strange procedure. He was not a boy to show his emotions. He had accepted his imprisonment with true Celestial impassivity.

He was wearing the clothing that had been provided for him, and since his confinement in this ship's cabin he had been provided with everything that he could desire—good food, books, fruits, and many other items of luxury. But not once had he been allowed to move out—not once had anybody opened the door.

He had discovered that the cabin was much better equipped than he had first believed. In addition to the sleeping-bunk, there was a narrow door which led into a tiny bathroom, and there was everything for his requirements. But he had no clock, and he could not tell whether it was night or day.

He judged, roughly, that he must have been a prisoner for at least twenty-four hours. He had slept, and he had spent the rest of his time eating or reading, or sitting on the divan staring in front of him. Yung Ching could sit for hours on end looking, apparently, at nothing.

He was well aware by this time that this was no ordinary case of abduction. He wasn't merely being held by some common criminals who were out for personal gain. There was something far bigger in it than that. He believed, indeed, that he was about to be taken to China.

He knew that his father was having a certain amount of trouble in one of the inner provinces. A neighbouring war lord was the main cause of this warfare, and Ching knew his father's ways well. He also knew that his father was in an impregnable position, with hundreds of thousands of loyal soldiers at his command, and ready to defend his lands against any host that cared to give battle.

But Ching's knowledge, after all, was only vague. He only knew a few details, most of them having been imparted to him by Mr. Tsen Wang, his temporary guardian in England. Mr. Tsen Wang was attached to the Chinese Embassy, and he was responsible for Yung Ching's safety during his school-days.

To escape from his prison was impossible. To communicate with the outer world was equally impossible.

Ching had already tested the man who brought his meals. This fellow appeared to be a kind of steward, but he stolidly refused to answer any questions, and it was clear that he was loyal to his "honourable master." So Ching remained in utter ignorance as to his precise whereabouts.

His chief thoughts concerned St. Frank's.

In his own way, Ching had grown to love the big school, and he did not relish the idea

of being forcibly taken away in this fashion. The fact that he was in the hands of his father's enemies—and this was an obvious fact—did not seem to disturb him. If only he could communicate with his chums of St. Frank's, he would be satisfied.

But what could he do?

There was no porthole in the cabin—he was far below the water-line—and he was never allowed to step outside the door. The ship was in port, and to all outward appearance it was probably a highly respectable vessel. The prisoner was confined below, unknown to those who glanced admiringly at the vessel's trim lines.

Indeed, even at that very moment, a brilliant gathering was forming in the sumptuously appointed saloon. The occasion was, apparently, an important one. Everything was of the very best. Beneath the gleaming, glittering lights the snowy white tables were resplendent with every imaginable luxury.

In short, Dr. Foo Chow, the famous Shanghai millionaire, was giving a farewell reception on board his private yacht, the *Dragon*.

The company was very distinguished.

Many members of that select party were titled people, and all of them were British. Since arriving in London, Dr. Foo Chow had created a mild sensation by his lavish receptions. Money had been spent like water, and some of the best people in the land had accepted his invitations. In many respects he had been the talk of the season.

And now he was just off home to his Chinese estates. He was travelling on his own yacht, which would sail on the morrow. And to-night this reception was to be the most luxurious of all.

Dr. Foo Chow himself was on board, welcoming his guests as they arrived. He was a tall, refined figure, almost wholly European in aspect, attired in spotless evening dress. Except for his yellowish skin, it would have been difficult to place him as a pure-blooded Chinaman. There was little or no hint of the Celestial about him. His English was perfect, his knowledge of European affairs profound.

A man of about middle-age, he was the soul of geniality—highly cultured, and with a brilliant gift of repartee. Indeed, he was celebrated for his witticisms, and none of his guests could possibly imagine him to be anything but a refined gentleman of Western tastes.

Nobody exactly knew how his wealth was derived. But it was a fact that he controlled vast business interests in Shanghai and other Chinese treaty ports. It was believed that he had further interests in the far interior. And he was a friend of Britain, and had always taken great pains to order his policy to the satisfaction of the British Government.

And yet Yung Ching was on this yacht!

The Chinese boy had been kidnapped from St. Frank's, had been brought to this vessel, and locked far below in a secret cabin. Surely it was unthinkable that this millionaire—this

power in international finance—had any knowledge of the circumstances?

Dr. Foo Chow was one of the greatest figures of the East. Surely he was too great a man to tinker in such extraordinary crookedness?

And what could his object be?

The party on the yacht was an enormous success. After the sumptuous dinner the guests retired into the ball-room, where one of London's most famous bands had been engaged for the ball. The place was gay with decorations. Highly coloured toy balloons were festooned everywhere, and the laughter and chatter of the guests filled the air. How could there be any hint of criminal work here?



CHAPTER 7.

THE UNSOLVED MYSTERY.

MEANWHILE, the hue and cry at St. Frank's continued.

Not that there was any concrete result. Nobody had been discovered who had seen anybody in the village that particular night, or in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's. In such towns as Bannington and Caistowe and Helmsford the police could report nothing of significance.

Even Scotland Yard was instructed to move, but their efforts were as unavailing as Mr. Nelson Lee's.

"It's a rummy go, that's all," said Reggie Pitt, as the subject was discussed in the Triangle, two days after the discovery. "Doyle was right, though!"

"I knew I was right!" declared Doyle. "Everybody thought I was just spinning a yarn, but I was right all the time. Yet even now I can't understand what happened to me."

"If you ask me, you had a jolly narrow escape," said Handforth darkly.

"A narrow escape?"

"Yes, rather," said Handforth. "I've been reading a lot about China since yesterday—I've made a point of getting some books on the subject. And it's a wonder to me you weren't knifed!"

"You hopeless ass!"

"Or strangled with a piece of string!" continued Edward Oswald. "These Chinese kidnappers are jolly murderous beggars! Why they didn't kill you, and push you under the bed, I can't imagine! Instead of that, they just gave you a dose of opium, or something, and put you to sleep."

"Where did you learn all this?" asked Pitt curiously.

"I've been reading books."

"Fine books!" said Dick Hamilton, with a sniff. "Why, you chump, you've been reading nothing else but bloodcurdling shockers—trash that no decent bookshop will keep in stock! And then you pretend to know all about the Chinese!"

Handforth glared.

"They're jolly good detective yarns," he declared. "The author must have known all about China, or he couldn't have described the place."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" growled Handforth. "But if anybody's going to find Yung Ching, I'm the chap! I'm going off to Caistowe this afternoon, to have a look at the ships in the harbour. I'll bet he's on one of 'em!"

"Of course, they'd naturally take Chingy to Caistowe Harbour," said Hamilton, nodding. "Criminals always do that sort of thing. It makes it so much easier for the police to collar them."

"You can be sarcastic," said Handforth darkly, "but I've read of things like this. That's just the cunning of it. The police won't dream of looking in the same place twice, so the kidnappers are safe. At least, they think they're safe. They don't know that I'm on the track!"

"As soon as they know that they'll tremble," said Pitt. "But take my advice, Handy, and stay where you are. Mr. Lee's on the job, Scotland Yard's on the job, and the local police have got something to do for the first time in history. Why deprive them of their chance?"

"Live and let live!" said Tommy Watson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a bit thick, you chaps cackling like this," complained Doyle. "Goodness knows what's happened to Chingy. He's not a bad little bounder in his own way, and Scott and I rather liked him. We're anxious about him, too. It's horrible to think of him being carried off, and hidden away in some secret prison."

"Prison be blowed!" said Handforth. "I wouldn't mind betting he's in an opium den. These Chinese kidnappers always take their victims to opium dens."

"I thought he was on a ship?" asked McClure.

"Eh? Well, he's either on a ship, or in an opium den," amended Handforth hastily.

"These guesses are no good," said Hamilton, frowning. "Nobody knows why he's been kidnapped. The whole thing's a puzzle. There seems to be no motive at all—"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "They're after ransom!"

"Gag him, somebody!" groaned Pitt. "He can only think of opium dens and smugglers' caves and holding people to ransom. No, Handy, there's nothing commonplace about this affair. Chingy's in a bad way, and I doubt if we shall ever see him again."

And this, indeed, was the general impression. And it is rather a sad fact to relate that most of the fellows at St. Frank's dismissed the whole subject and thought no more about it. They weren't callous, but Yung Ching was Chinese, and he wasn't regarded as exactly human. A Chinese chap could stand anything! Besides, he had never made any particular friends. Even Doyle

and Scott couldn't exactly regard him as a close chum. He had always amused them in his own way, but his pleasures had seldom been their pleasures.

Moreover, there was something of much greater import in the air.

The summer holidays weren't far off, and thoughts were already turning to the enormous possibilities. Other vacations were welcome, but the long summer vac. was in a class apart.

Plans were being made, and school was regarded as a necessary nuisance. The important exams. were over, the big cricket fixtures had been played, and there were only one or two minor games to be polished off. Yes, the holidays were the chief topic of the hour.

Handforth persisted in his determination to find Yung Ching, but he knew that he couldn't do much; and his chums gave him no support.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to go to China," said Handforth thoughtfully that afternoon.

"We'll pop there after tea," said Church, nodding.

"And get back to supper," added McClure.

"It ought to be a ripping place," went on Handforth dreamily. "We've been to the South Seas, and all sorts of other places, but the East has been given a miss. I've read lots about China. I've heard they eat cockroaches there, and rotten eggs, and slugs and things!"

"We MUST go to China!" said Church.

McClure shuddered, and gazed askance at the tin of sardines he was opening.

"Don't be so disgusting, Handy!" he said. "You're making me suspicious of these giddy sardines now. If you can't talk about something decent——"

"Of course, we shouldn't eat those things if we went," said Handforth.

"I'll bet we shouldn't!"

"And we might spot Yung Ching," went on Edward Oswald. "If he's been taken to China—and I'm pretty sure he has—we've only got to keep our eyes open, and we'll spot him."

"In China?" asked Church.

"Yes."

"Without knowing the exact locality he's been taken to?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, no reason at all!" said Church carelessly. "Nothing easier! After all, why shouldn't we? There are only about four hundred millions in China! We'll be able to spot Chingy in two ticks among that lot."

"Four hundred millions!" echoed Handforth with a start.

"You can't appreciate it by just saying it," said Church. "Put it down on paper, and have a good look at it! Four-nought-nought, nought-nought-nought, nought-nought-nought! Only a little crowd!"

Handforth scratched his head.

"Well, perhaps it would a bit difficult," he admitted. "But you never know your

luck in a place like China. Besides, Chingy's such a queer-looking little chap that we'd know him anywhere. He's a bit yellow, and——"

"Why, you hopeless fathead, they're all yellow in China!" snapped McClure. "And we should be coming across kids every hundred yards who look exactly like Yung Ching! The Chinese look all alike!"

"And they say that we look all alike," grinned Church. "I suppose we do—to them. It's a bit of an insult to handsome chaps like us."

But Handforth never abandoned an idea quickly.

"I'm thinking of the summer holidays," he went on. "Why shouldn't we get up a little party, and go to China? Even if we didn't find Chingy, we should have a good time. We could just go alone—the three of us. I was reading a ripping story about Hong Kong——"

"Wait a minute!" said Church ominously. "Are you serious?"

"Of course I am."

"Then you're mad," went on Church tartly. "Do you realise that China is nearly as far away as Australia—a terrific distance beyond India? Anybody might think it was just on the other side of the Channel, by the way you talk."

"By George, I hadn't thought of that!" said Handforth.

"And had you thought of the cost?" went on Church. "Of course, if you've got two or three hundred pounds to spare, and if the Head extends the vac. by a month or two, we might manage it."

Handforth reluctantly gave up the project.

"Well, it's a pity," he said gruffly. "Not that I'm surprised," he added with a snort. "It's just like these silly Chinese to live all that distance off! If they weren't such heathens, they'd choose a decent part of the earth to live in!"

Tea progressed, and Church and McClure were hoping that China was definitely finished with. Much as they regretted the misfortune to Yung Ching, they were not exactly anxious to hear his name again. They were fed up with the subject.

"By George!" said Handforth abruptly. "Dorrie!"

"What?"

"Old Dorrie!" said Handforth excitedly. "You know—Lord Dorrimore! Where is he?" He glared round. "Where is he?"

"He might be in the cupboard, but I don't think so," said McClure.

"Old Dorrie and the *Wanderer*," said Handforth, getting up. "He's taken us to the South Seas in his yacht during the summer vac., so why couldn't he take us to China? We haven't heard anything about him this year," he added indignantly. "It's like his nerve to neglect us in this way!"

Church became really angry.

"That's a bit thick!" he snapped. "Just because Dorrie acts as host to us sometimes you seem to expect it as a right! Hang it, we can't presume on the good-natured chap like that!"

"There's somebody just arrived," remarked McClure, by way of changing the conversation. "I heard a car drive through. Some of those Scotland Yard men, perhaps, or——"

"Let's go and see," interrupted Handforth briskly.

He dashed out, and Church and McClure breathed a sigh of relief. When Handforth got talking on impossible subjects he was very difficult to manage. They little realised how much justification he would soon have for crowing over them.

McClure had been right about a new arrival. It was Mr. Tsen Wang, the Chinese attaché—Yung Ching's guardian. He was a distinguished-looking Oriental, slightly over middle-age.

At the moment he was in close conversation with Dr. Stafford and Mr. Nelson Lee. He was scrupulously attired, and he spoke with a grave preciseness. He wore pince-nez, and was thoroughly Westernised.

"This news is most distressing, Mr. Wang," the Head was saying gravely. "So Scotland Yard has utterly failed to obtain the slightest clue? Dear, dear! That is bad. I need hardly tell you that my own concern is as deep as yours."

"I am grateful," replied the Chinaman impassively. "No blame attaches to you, Dr. Stafford. But I fear the great and terrible wrath of my noble master, His Excellency, the great Mandarin of Ngan-Chau-Fu. When this news reaches him he will be like a man of thunder. The whole province of Hu-Kiang will be aflame."

"That, of course, is a matter which we cannot very well deal with at this end," said Dr. Stafford quietly. "While the boy was under my control, Mr. Wang, he was treated in exactly the same way as the other scholars. You must remember that this is not a fortress, and we do not have guards posted on our battlements during the night. Yung Ching naturally lived in just the same way as every other boy——"

"No, no! Do not imagine that I am attempting to suggest responsibility," put in Mr. Tsen Wang, quickly. "Pardon, Dr. Stafford! I beg your forgiveness if I gave such impression. I am merely concerned over the boy's disappearance. His Excellency, my master, will hold me to blame."

"But surely that is not fair to you?" put in Mr. Nelson Lee. "Can you offer any explanation of Yung Ching's abduction?"

"There is trouble in China," replied the other guardedly.

"Is that not general knowledge?" inquired the Head.

"I do not refer to the coast, which, with its treaty ports, can scarcely be called

China," replied Mr. Wang. "There is trouble in the far interior, trouble which does not find an echo in the Western world. His Excellency, my master, has recently sent me strict orders to keep his son in England."

"In other words, the boy's father suspects that he may be interfered with?"

"Such, I fear, is the truth."

"He even believes that Yung Ching might be taken to China?"

"Yes."

"But why?" asked the Head. "For what reason?"

"It is a mystery I cannot explain," replied the Chinaman helplessly. "His Excellency, my master, knows best, however. He has reasons. And now Yung Ching has gone! I am distracted. I come here, hoping for some news. And there is none. I am afraid. I am broken."

Mr. Tsen Wang's concern was indeed great. Both the Head and Mr. Lee were sympathetic, but they could do nothing. Neither could they get to the bottom of this strange affair. In all probability Mr. Tsen Wang knew more than he would say.

But there was no doubt that Yung Ching had gone, and had left no trace.

CHAPTER 8.

YUNG CHING LEARNS THE TRUTH.



AT almost exactly the same time as this, the steam yacht, *Dragon*, was making active preparations for immediate sailing.

Dr. Foo Chow and his personal attendants were on board, and none of the previous night's guests remained. The yacht was in Southampton Water, waiting for the tide. She was ready to move.

All the members of her crew were either Chinese or men who were of the East—and all were true to their owner, from the captain downwards. This yacht appeared to be an ordinary pleasure vessel, and no living soul at Southampton imagined her to be anything else. Dr. Foo Chow was regarded as a great man, and a man of high integrity.

But while his vessel was waiting for the tide, Dr. Foo Chow himself had retired into his innermost apartment—that chamber which none could enter but himself and his most intimate attendants.

And Yung Ching, far below, received a summons.

There had been no change whatever in the situation. The Chinese boy was still imprisoned in his cabin, with no possible chance of escape. His meals had been provided regularly, and he had been treated with every consideration—save for the fact that he was a helpless captive.

He was sitting on the lounge when a key sounded in the door, and the latter was flung

open. Two Chinamen, in the dress of their own country, entered.

Yung Ching regarded them without moving a muscle. This was the first time that the door had been opened since his imprisonment, and he knew that a definite move of some kind was to be made. He recognised these men as those who had brought him here in the first place.

"His Excellency requires the immediate presence of your honoured person," said one of them smoothly. "You will accompany us."

"I am ready," said Yung Ching.

He went out between them, and was rather surprised that no attempt was made to blindfold him. But what did it matter now? The yacht was far from the docks, right out in Southampton Water, and the pilot had not yet come aboard. Before long Yung Ching's imprisonment would not be necessary.

He was taken along a corridor, up some stairs, and then into the main passage. Here there were windows, and the daylight was streaming through. It was a welcome sight to Ching after being for so long below. The wind was blowing in strongly, and he was glad to feel the healthy breeze.

But only for a moment. He was taken straight along, into a cabin, and the door was closed and locked. Then he was ushered through into the Oriental apartment where Dr. Foo Chow was waiting.

"It is well," said Dr. Foo Chow, waving a hand.

His attendants retired, the door closed, and captor and captive were alone. For a moment they looked at one another.

"You are well?" asked Dr. Foo Chow. "I wish you to understand that my desire is for you to be comfortable and happy on this voyage. If my slaves serve you ill, I shall expect you to tell me."

"Why have I been taken?" asked Yung Ching quietly. "Who are you? For what reason have I been removed from the school?"

Dr. Foo Chow smiled.

"You are inquisitive," he replied smoothly. "You are acquiring the habits of these young foreign devils. It is said that I am almost an Englishman. It is said that I am no longer a Chinaman. They who say that are foolish."

"Why have I been taken away from the school?" repeated Yung Ching. "Is it inquisitive to ask why I am treated as a prisoner? You are an enemy of my father's—although I know very little. But that you intend me harm I am certain."

"If your father is wise, no harm shall come to you," replied Dr. Foo Chow evenly. "It will rest with him whether you are allowed to live or not. If he decrees that you shall die, your death will be slow."

Yung Ching did not flinch.

"You are taking me to China?" he asked.

"Your honourable father will no doubt be glad to have you near him," replied Dr. Foo Chow. "You will be taken to the town of Yang-Fu—within twenty miles of the border line of Hu-Kiang. Who am I to deny him the pleasure of his only son's proximity?"

"Yes, I am his only son," replied Yung Ching, his eyes becoming sad. "My brother and my sister are dead—murdered when I was younger. Perhaps you know how they died?"

"Do not blame me for those sad fatalities," said Dr. Foo Chow, shaking his head. "Your honourable father was troubled with one of the numerous guilds of his province, and they took vengeance. I am not of your honourable father's province, but of another. My quarrel with him is bigger—greater—than a family feud. He stands in my way, and by the soul of Confucius he shall make way!"

For the first time Dr. Foo Chow revealed a trace of emotion. His voice had become grim, and his eyes took on a steely glint. But the next moment he was smiling and impassive again.

"You are to be held as hostage," he went on. "But fear not, my young friend. No harm shall come to you if your honourable father reveals the wisdom of his ancestors. If he does as I command all will be well. If—"

"My honourable father will take dictation from no man," interrupted Yung Ching hotly.

"Alas, then your agonies will be immeasurable!" said Dr. Foo Chow. "To the outer world, I am a merchant—a rich man of commerce. But to my own world I am the supreme War Lord of my section of the country. I desire your honourable father's lands."

"He will crush your army to dust!" said Yung Ching contemptuously.

"I fear there is much truth in your remark, my esteemed young friend," replied the other frankly. "What matters if I admit to you that my own army is much inferior to your honourable father's loyal hosts? Do I not know that I have no chance of crushing him in battle?"

"And so my honourable father is to be forced by cunning?" asked Yung Ching with a laugh. "You are a great man, but my honourable father is a greater! What service can you render your cause by taking me to China?"

"You are the only son of my enemy," replied Dr. Foo Chow, leaning forward. "It is upon you that he bases all his hopes. It is you who will rule over his lands when he joins his ancestors. For you—for your

safety—he will sacrifice much. I intend that he shall sacrifice all.”

“You are wrong!” retorted Yung Ching, holding himself erect. “I care not what you do to me. You will never defeat my honourable father by threats against my safety.”

“It shall not rest at threats,” said the other quietly. “Let me see—what is the date? We will use the calendar of these foreign devils, for perhaps you will understand it better. On the third day of August your honourable father will receive an intimation that you are held as hostage in my hands, and he will be given four days in which to surrender the lands I covet. Not all of them, my friend—but just the lands which border my own territory. I am not greedy. I do not desire to crush him entirely.”

“You desire the lands that provide my honourable father with his riches,” said Yung Ching bitterly. “Your plan is to reduce him to the status of your vassal. I am not deceived.”

“Your wits are sharp,” agreed Dr. Foo Chow, nodding. “Doubtless there will be a refusal. My great enemy will ignore my demands and prepare his soldiers for battle. But on the 10th day of August I shall dispatch to him the first finger of your right hand, with a further hint that he shall surrender his territory!”

Yung Ching didn't move a muscle, and yet he knew in his Oriental heart that this man meant every word of his ghastly proposal.

“Supposing that your honourable father is still obstinate, on the 17th day of August—exactly one week later—he will receive the remainder of your right hand,” continued Dr. Foo Chow, his voice maintaining its level tones. “And so on, my young friend—your left finger—your left hand—your left foot—your right foot. Do you think your honourable father will refuse to surrender? I trust he will not, since it is not my wish to torture. And I would not like to think of you as a limbless wreck.”

Yung Ching smiled.

“You will fail,” he said calmly. “Do you think my great and honourable father will give up his lands because I am mutilated? I will pray that he shall not—for I would rather be the wreck you intimate than the cause of your triumph. You will never be victorious over the might of the Mandarin of Hu-Kiang!”

“That will be seen,” replied Dr. Foo Chow. “Other methods have failed, and I am patient. It does not matter to me if I wait one month or twelve months. He will receive his son in small fragments for the first week or two, and then time shall be allowed while you heal. Later, you will lose further useful members of your body, and your honourable father will never withstand the persistent agony. Rest assured, Yung Ching, that I am the victor. I have told you now so that you shall be prepared.”

Yung Ching said nothing. He had received this dreadful, incredible news as though he was an entirely disinterested party. Never would he allow this fiend to see his inner feelings!

What would Dr. Foo Chow's distinguished British guests have thought of him now—this refined man with great wealth and the culture of the Western world? What would they have thought of his cold-blooded edict?

At heart, Dr. Foo Chow was a true Celestial—with all the immobility and patience of his race. For years he had been waiting, and for years he was prepared to wait. But he was undoubtedly a Chinaman of exceptional cruelty and cunning. His very success proved that he was a man of extraordinary ability.

But beneath his gloss of culture he was a fiend in human form.

•••FREE GIFTS!•••••

Look out for the “Nelson Lee” Man—he is visiting all the seaside towns this season. If he sees you carrying a copy of “The Nelson Lee Library,” he will make you a present! Keep this copy of the Old Paper where he can see it.

•••••FREE GIFTS!•••



CHAPTER 9.

THE CRAFT OF YUNG CHING.

R. FOO CHOW bowed gravely.

“We part, my young friend,” he said mockingly. “But always re-

member that you are my distinguished guest. Presently, after we have reached the open sea, you will be allowed to use my yacht as your own. Your imprisonment will be only when we are near land. For the moment, farewell.”

Yung Ching returned the bow, and was ushered out by Dr. Foo Chow's two attendants. From first to last he had displayed the utmost unconcern, although his Oriental heart had grown chill and cold at the pronouncement of those appalling words. It was only outwardly that he was a match for his captor.

He still kept up his pretence of indifference.

"Your excellent master is a man of humour," he said, as he was escorted back to his cabin. "We have talked entertainingly."

"It is with pleasure that we hear this information," said one of the men pleasantly. "We did not expect to find you in such a tranquil mood, young master."

"I am gay," declared Yung Ching, his manner light. "See, I desire these coloured balloons. They will amuse me—for are they not like our national kites? I may take them to my prison?"

The two Chinamen laughed with keen appreciation, for most Chinamen will be ready enough to enjoy a jest. This was rather a grim one, as they knew, but they fell in with Yung Ching's mood. They probably knew what Dr. Foo Chow had told him, and they also knew how little he cared for toy balloons.

A few minutes later, Yung Ching was once again in his cabin. The two gaily-coloured balloons were still in his hand, floating straight upwards on their strings. They were gas-filled, and buoyant in the extreme. Yung Ching placed them on a corner of the table, with a book resting on the end of the rings, so that they remained floating there.

And for some minutes he stood watching them—blowing them gently, so that they swayed to and fro. It seemed an extraordinary thing for the boy to do, after what he had just heard. He could play with these toy balloons now—when he knew that he was being taken to China so that he could be mutilated and tortured!

But Yung Ching was cunning—far more cunning than Dr. Foo Chow gave him credit for. Was it possible that he had some secret motive in taking those innocent toys? Had some ingenious scheme taken root within the Chinese boy's active brain?

It appeared so, judging by his actions.

Leaving the balloons just where they were, he went into the bathroom, taking with him one of his books. But he also took a pencil.

In the bathroom he was safer—away from that sliding panel in the door. His ears were keen, and if anybody came he would have time to conceal his actions and affect his usual indifference.

Yung Ching's next action was another indication of his ingenuity. He had no writing-paper, but just over the wash-basin in the bathroom was a tiny automatic container, filled with little sheets of the thinnest tissue paper, and obviously placed there for the purpose of shaving. For the Chinese boy's purpose, nothing could have been more suitable.

Removing several of the sheets, he rested them upon his book, and commenced writing. He did not use the Chinese characters, but wrote in English—swiftly, fluently, and legibly. His pencil never faltered. For a full hour he continued, writing without a second's pause, filling sheet after sheet.

And then a slight sound came from the

cabin. In one lightning-like movement, Yung Ching transferred the written sheets to the space beneath the bath. He strolled out with his book, yawning. A tray was being held through the aperture.

He took it, and the attendant went. And Yung Ching consumed the meal with the utmost rapidity. He knew, from previous experience, that the steward would not come back for at least an hour, and perhaps not then. He was allowed to go to bed when he liked, and within that cabin his freedom was complete.

Why not? There was no possibility of him escaping—no chance of him communicating with the outer world—at least, so Dr. Foo Chow thought!

Within five minutes Ching was writing again, continuing that same everlasting flow. Now and again he appeared to listen, but never did he pause. There was no throb yet—no sign that the engines were working. The yacht was still moored, still waiting for the tide.

At last Yung Ching finished. Collecting those thin sheets, he folded them with care, folded them until they were a compact little square. Although there were many, their substance was so slight that, with pressure, they became small.

He encased them in the fly-leaf from his book—a stout covering. He only used half the fly-leaf, and then secured it by means of threads carefully pulled from his shoe-lace. When the package was ready, it was an absurdly small one. And now there was a light of anxiety in Yung Ching's eyes. After all this trouble, would he be able to carry out his plan? Would the test be successful?

His pencil was a copying-ink one, and, having sharpened the point afresh, he wrote an inscription upon the package, in small but neat letters. And now he went into the cabin, and listened with extreme care. All was quiet, but he knew that everything would depend upon the next minute or two.

Taking those innocent-looking toy balloons, he tied one immediately above the other, and then secured his precious letter to the string of the lower one. With the anxiety showing in his eyes, he released them.

"Ah!" he muttered intensely.

To his joy, they rose not sluggishly, but swiftly. Being gas-filled, they carried the weight with ease, and hung at the top of the cabin, the topmost balloon pressed against the ceiling. In a moment Yung Ching had pulled them down, and again he listened.

Then, with a quick movement, he went to the corner of the cabin and climbed up. The ventilator-shaft was there, and the grille was merely an ornamental fitting. With one pull it came away, revealing a wide aperture. A certain amount of draught could be felt—drawing upwards, straight out of the cabin to the big ventilator on deck.

Ching was convinced that this shaft led straight upwards to one of those funnel-like objects which are to be seen on all ships. They are generally wide-mouthed and large.

Possibly other shafts led upwards to the same outer opening, but this was all to the advantage. For the wider the mouth, the more chance was there of success. In any case, there was no down-draught. On the contrary, the pull was decidedly upwards.

Without hesitating another moment, Yung Ching seized the balloons and held them upwards. Then he released his grip, and they floated swiftly and sedately into the shaft. He stood there, listening intently, holding his breath.

But he heard nothing, and his searching gaze could see no sign of the balloons. He sighed, and wondered if his cunning ruse had been successful. Had those balloons floated free? If so, there was a chance! For he had noted that the breeze was blowing strongly from the sea—he had seen this during the brief moment at the window.

His anxiety would have been allayed could he have been on deck at that moment. It was now dark, but if a couple of sailors who were standing on deck had happened to glance round, they might have seen something rather surprising.

Two round objects, with a tiny blob floating at the end of them, rose upwards from the yacht's deck, fouled a portion of the rigging for a moment, and hung there. Then the breeze caught them and wafted them clear. In a moment they had vanished into the night, floating strongly across Southampton Water, in the direction of Hampshire.

Below, Yung Ching secured the ventilator grille so cleverly that it was almost impossible to detect that it had been tampered with. Then he quietly and calmly prepared for bed. One might have supposed that he had done something of an ordinary nature. His anxiety had gone, and he was himself again. With true Chinese inscrutability he left everything now to Fate. He had done his best—he had cunningly accepted that one chance in a thousand which had offered itself. And now he could do nothing but rely upon chance. He was under no misapprehension.

He knew that his time had probably been wasted. Even if the balloons were free, there was hardly any likelihood that anything further would be seen of them. Perhaps they would drift for miles, only to fall into the sea somewhere.

Yung Ching knew that nothing could prevent him being taken to China, and he knew that any hopes of rescue were utterly remote.

But he had done his best—and what more could anybody do than that?



CHAPTER 10.

GETTING READY FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

"TOMORROW!" said Handforth happily.

"Seems like next year!" exclaimed Church, with a sigh. "It's only breakfast-

time now, and we've got to mess about in the

class-rooms all day! And it's as hot as the dickens, too! Haven't they got any consideration for us at all?"

He was probably right when he stated that the school would "mess about" in the class-rooms; there was little likelihood of any real work being done that day, for the long vacation started on the morrow.

Eleven days had elapsed since Mr. Tsen Wang had visited St. Frank's—eleven days since poor Yung Ching had floated up his toy balloons into the ventilator-shaft of the *Dragon*. And by this time the unfortunate Chinese boy had been practically forgotten by everybody at St. Frank's.

The hue and cry was dead—the police were no longer making any active search. And at the school, Yung Ching was a mere memory. Even Doyle and Scott were so busy with their preparations for the holidays that they ceased to worry themselves about their former study-mate.

Practically all the plans had been completed. Some juniors had invited other juniors to spend a week with them—the compliment to be returned later on. Plans of all kinds and descriptions were ready, and on the morrow St. Frank's would break-up for the longest holiday of the year.

Even the masters didn't expect that any work would be done to-day. Good-humour abounded everywhere.

Probably Handforth was the only fellow in the whole school who still clung to the idea of finding the Chinese boy. He was famous for his tenacity, and for the doggedness with which he hung on to an idea.

"Well, it's all fixed, then?" said Church happily. "We've got to come to your place for the first fortnight, eh?"

"That's it," said Handforth, with an absent nod.

"We've arranged it with our people," went on Church, "but I'm a bit doubtful about your pater, you know. Are you sure he'll stick us? There's your minor and Ena, don't forget. And I believe that Willy has had the nerve to invite Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon to your place."

"We shan't know anything until we get to London," put in McClure. "I don't believe Handy's had permission to invite us at all. I remember once before we took his word, and then we were nearly biffed out on our necks—"

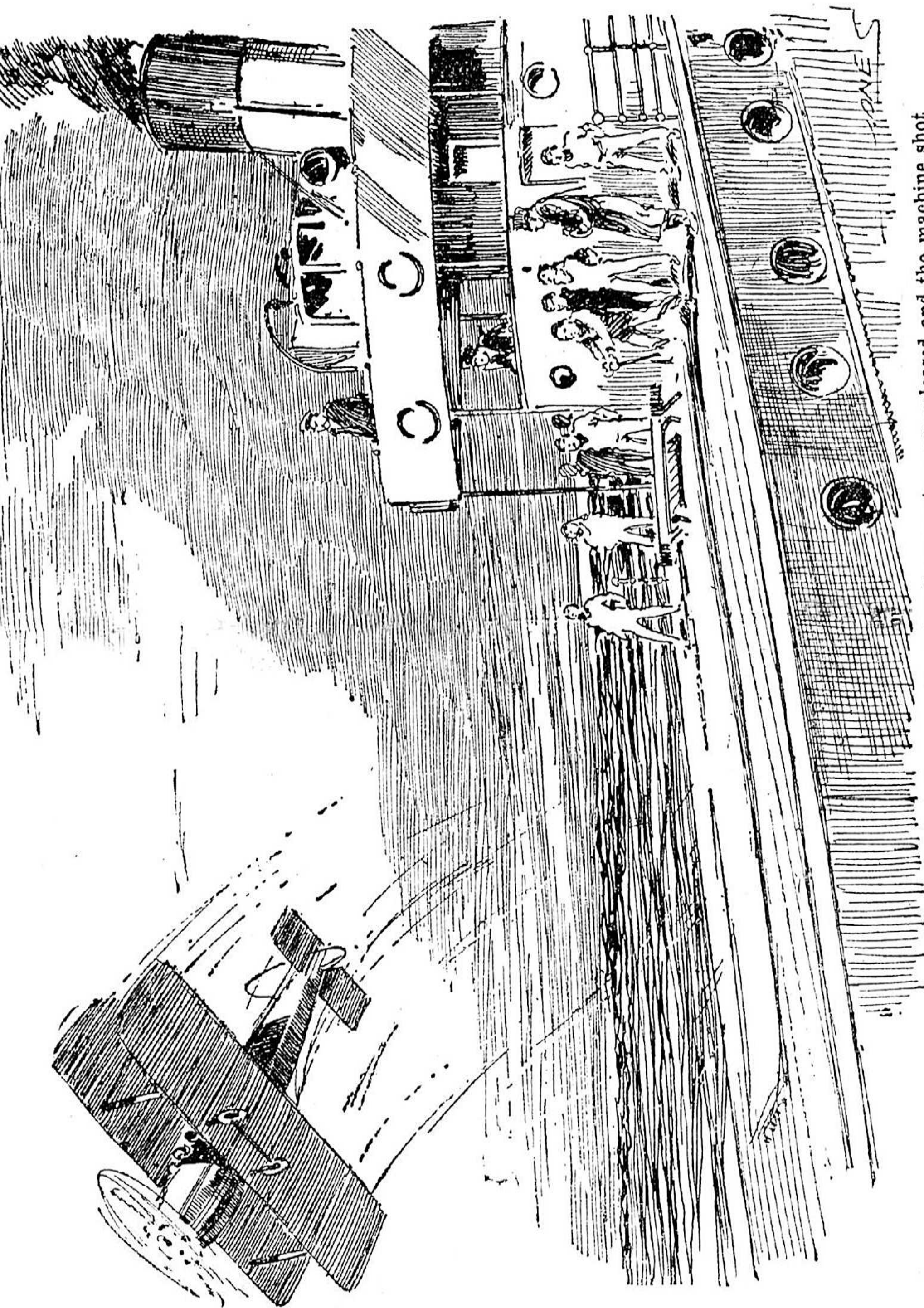
"I don't like it," said Handforth, shaking his head.

"Don't like what?"

"It seems a dirty trick," went on Handforth indignantly. "In fact, I've a jolly good mind to stay at St. Frank's for a few days—until we've found him. It seems so jolly shabby to go home for the vac. and forget all about him."

"Forget all about whom?" asked McClure, staring.

"Yung Ching, of course," said Handforth. "Yes, by George, that's not a bad idea! We shall have a free hand after the other chaps



With the aeroplane's engine racing at full power, the catapult apparatus was released and the machine shot
of rescue by the Boys of St. Frank's—bearing the junior away

have gone. We'll stay here and conduct our investigations until we've located him."

His chums exchanged helpless glances.

"Do you mean to say you're still harping on Yung Ching?" asked McClure, exasperated.

"You heartless rotter!" snorted Handforth. "The poor kid's been kidnapped! Perhaps he's imprisoned in a cave somewhere——"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Mac gruffly. "We're not heartless, but where Scotland Yard's failed, and where Mr. Lee's failed, we're not idiots enough to think we can succeed. And if you're going to stay on here until you've found the poor chap, we shall find you on the spot ready for next term!"

"H'm! It's a bit of a puzzle, I'll admit," said Handforth slowly. "Perhaps we'd better go home——"

"Letter for you in the rack, Ted," said Willy Handforth, as he strolled up. "Rummy thing you haven't spotted it. Registered letter, too. I'll help you to open it, if you like."

Handforth's eyes brightened.

"A registered letter!" he repeated briskly. "Good egg! That must be the usual remittance from the pater. Fare money, and a tip for me."

"Not to mention me," added Willy casually. "I think it's a bit thick, the way the pater always addresses these remittances to you. I've got to spend half my life dunning you for five-bobs!"

But Handforth was hurrying indoors, and he triumphantly seized his registered letter, and tore it open. It contained a fond communication from his mother, which he stuffed into his pocket without even reading. He was far more interested in the crisp notes which accompanied it.

"Ten of 'em!" he said gleefully.

"My hat! Ten quid!" said Church, with envy.

"No, you ass—five quid," replied Handforth. "Ten half-quid notes. What's the idea of that grubby paw, Willy?" he added, staring.

"It speaks for itself," replied Willy.

"By George! So it does!" retorted Handforth. "Of all the dirty-looking objects——"

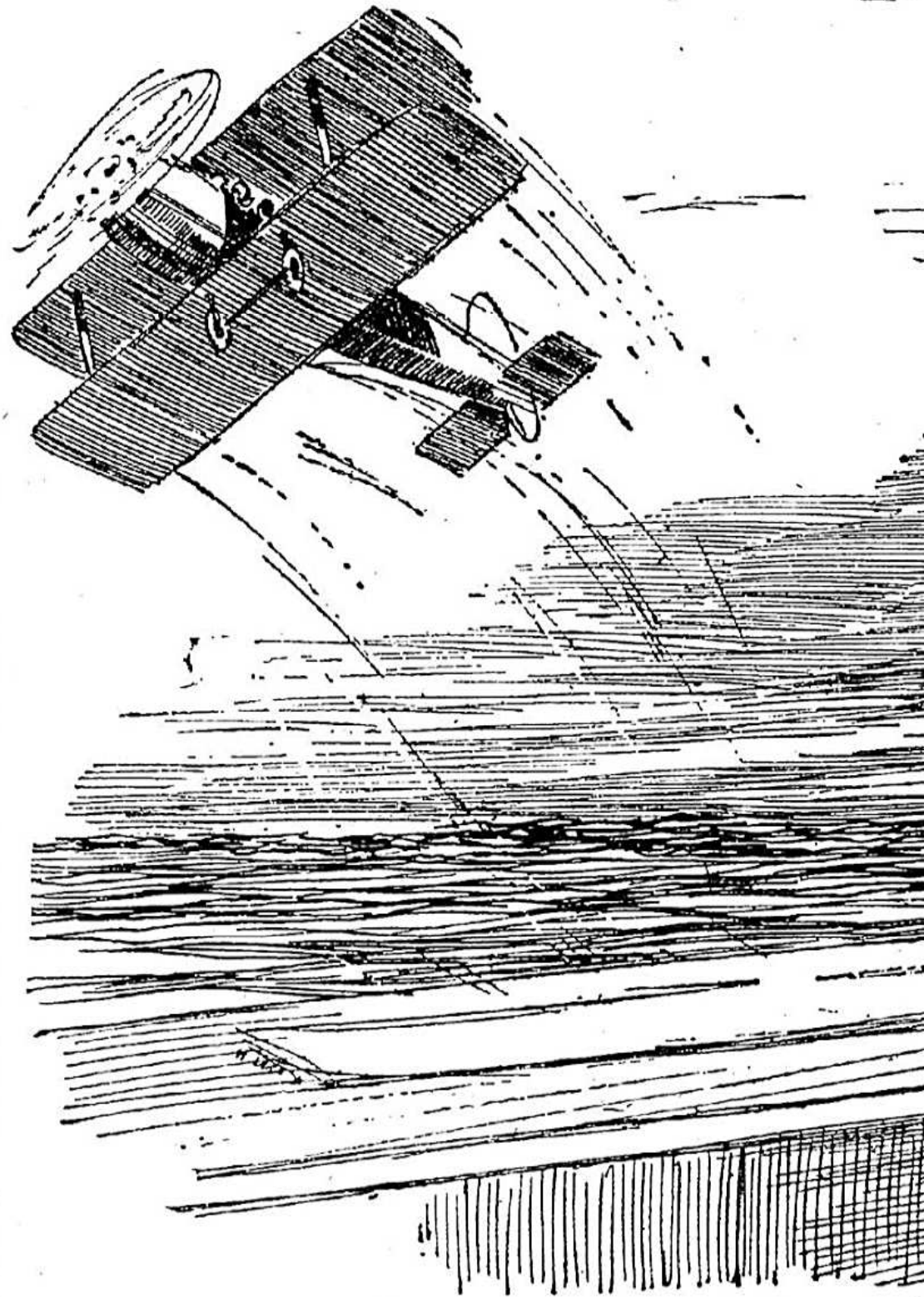
"Let's have two of those notes, and don't make a fuss," interrupted Willy. "I'll be satisfied with two, and you can pay my fare to-morrow. Never mind about my fist—I've been making some adjustments to my Silent Two. We motorists are always getting grubby."

"Well I'm jiggered!" shouted Doyle.

He was standing a yard or two away, and his voice was so full of blank astonishment that Handforth released two of the ten-shilling notes before he was aware that Willy had grabbed them. Everybody was staring at Doyle.

"What's the matter with you, ass?" asked Handforth tartly.

"Look at this!" yelled Doyle excitedly. "I've just got a letter——"



With the aeroplane's engine racing at full power, the plane dived into the air, carrying Yung Ching beyond hope of rescue into the sky.

"That's no reason to go dotty!"

"But—but look at it!" shouted Doyle. "I came over here to have a word with Hamilton, and I've only just opened this letter; tore open the flap as I came in, and— and look what I've found inside!"

The other juniors crowded round. The contents of the letter were certainly astonishing. Two toy balloons, or the torn and stained remains of them, with a much-soiled little package attached. The latter was muddy, and the writing upon it was scarcely readable. Doyle held them up in blank astonishment.

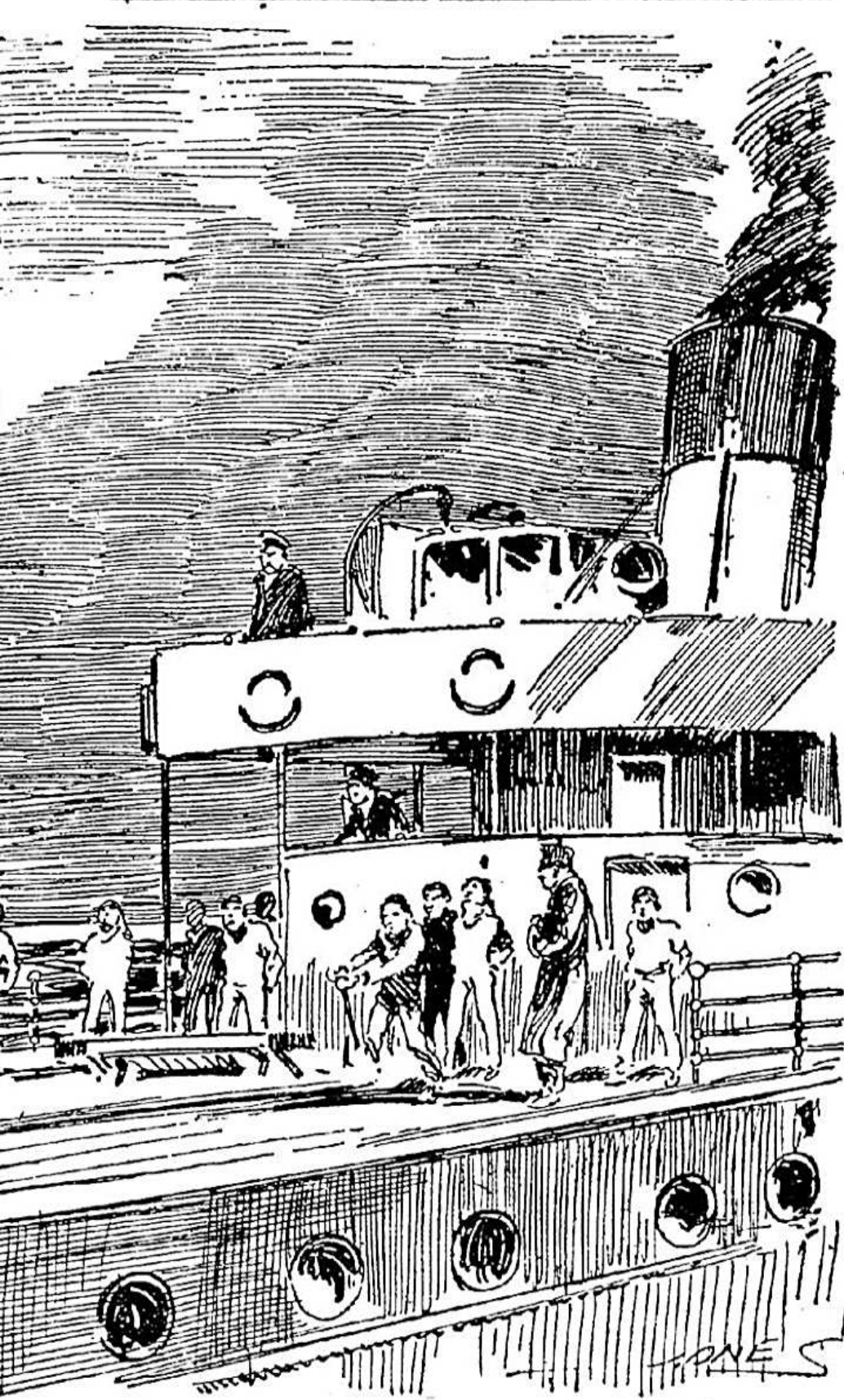
"Nothing to go mad about!" said De Valerie.

"Who sent them?" asked Fullwood. "And why?"

"That's—that's just it!" panted Doyle. "I haven't read the letter yet, but I've looked at the package, and it's Yung Ching's handwriting on it!"

"What!"

"I tell you——"



ult apparatus was released and the machine shot the Boys of St. Frank's—bearing the junior away of China!

"Yung Ching's handwriting!" roared Handforth. "What did I tell you? I promised that I'd get on the track—"

"Dry up, Handy!" interrupted Fullwood quickly. "I say, Doyle, are you sure of this? It may be important! You'll have to take it to the Head, and he'll probably send it on to the police! What does the letter say?"

Doyle was unfolding it shakily, and it proved to be quite a brief note.

"Read it out!" demanded a dozen voices.

"It's from somebody in Winchester," exclaimed Doyle breathlessly. "Here you are: 'Dear Master Doyle, the enclosed might be of interest to you. I happened to pick it up to-day on the roadside near this town, while rescuing my hat, which had blown off. One of your schoolboy chums, no doubt, sent up the balloons as a little experiment, and perhaps you have a wager on the result, eh? Anyhow, I am sending it on to you, and I hope that you'll be the winner.—Yours faithfully, William Mitchell.' That's what it says!"

"He's wrong, of course," said Dick Hamilton, who had come up in time to hear. "There's no wager about this. That letter is from Yung Ching, and you'd better let me take it to Mr. Lee. It might be vital—"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "Let's hear what it says!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Open it, Doyle!"

Doyle was so excited that he could scarcely unfold the outer paper. Nobody thought of contesting his right—for the little package was undoubtedly addressed to him, and if he preferred to open it in public, all the better. Indeed, there would have been a considerable row if he had kept it to himself.

The dying interest in Yung Ching was revived again—to fever pitch. Handforth was so eager that he could hardly keep his hands still. He wanted to grab that letter, and read it for himself. But his good manners got the better of his anxiety, and he held himself in check.

"Buck up!" he said quickly. "Open it, you ass!"

Doyle removed the outer paper at last, and then, with growing surprise, unfolded the thin sheets of shaving-paper. He was further surprised at the number of them.

"My hat, look at all this!" he gasped.

"Chingy must have been hard-up for paper," said Fullwood. "It's as thin as a wafer, and— No, I expect he used it deliberately, so that it wouldn't weigh much. But it was a jolly rummy way to send you a letter. Aerial post, I should think."

"Dry up, Fully!"

"Let's hear what it says, Doyle!"

They crowded round, and were exasperated because Doyle insisted upon reading the opening page to himself. His face was flushed, and he was quivering with excitement.

"Yes, it's from Chingy!" he muttered. "No doubt about that! I'd know his handwriting in a thousand!"



CHAPTER 11.

THE AMAZING LETTER.

HANDFORTH simply danced with impatience.

"Never mind about his handwriting!" he snapped.

"Let's hear what he's got to say! I've got a feeling that this is going to be dramatic. I'll bet he's in the hands of smugglers, or—"

"Read it out, Doyle!"

"All right—give me a chance!" replied Doyle, as he tried to get nearer to the light. "Out of the way, there! I can hardly read it—the paper's so thin, and it's only written in pencil. Besides, it's so crumpled that—"

"I'll read it!" offered Handforth curtly.

"No, you won't," interrupted Doyle. "It's my letter, and unless you chaps can keep cool, I'll take it away and read it alone. I'm not sure that I ought to do it—"

A howl of protest interrupted him.

"All right—only be quiet!" he said. "There's no address on it, and no date, but I suppose it was written days ago. Perhaps it's been lying on that road ever since Chingy was kidnapped."

"That's it!" said Handforth eagerly. "He threw it out of the window of a motor-car, or something——"

"What's the good of making conjectures when the letter itself will explain?" interrupted Hamilton sharply. "You fellows don't seem to realise how important this is. Chingy's guardian is nearly mad with anxiety—and this might be a definite clue. Go ahead, Doyle!"

Doyle went ahead.

"There's no address, and no date," he repeated, "and it starts straight off. Listen!

'Dear Doyle and Scott.

'You will be surprised to get this letter in such a way, and I shall be much more surprised if you ever do get it. I am only writing it on chance, and there is little hope of luck. But you never know. Perhaps it will get to you. I do not know where I am, except that I am imprisoned in a cabin of a ship. I do not know the port. I do not know the name of the ship.

'I was taken away from St. Frank's on the night of the thunderstorm, and I was brought here by motor-car. But I do not know which direction it took, as I was drugged, and hardly knew what was happening. I was brought on board in a trunk, and saw nothing——'

"Oh, rats!" shouted somebody, interrupting. "It's a fake!"

"Of course it is!"

"Some practical joker!"

"It's not a fake!" shouted Doyle, his excitement greater than ever. "Do you think I don't know Chingy's handwriting?"

"You can't fool us!" said Hubbard. "Of all the rot! Doesn't know where he is, or how he got there, or anything. Carried on board in a trunk! Why, the whole thing's dotty!"

"Absolutely!"

"Chuck it, Doyle!"

Doyle glared with anger.

"Everybody who doesn't believe in this letter can jolly well clear off!" he snapped.

"I believe every word of it——"

"You hopeless ass, Chingy talks in rummy English——"

"I don't care how he talks!" roared Doyle.

"But he can't write proper English——"

"Yes, he can!" put in Scott. "He can talk proper English, too, when he likes. He can write much better English than most of you fellows, too! There's no doubt about this

letter at all—I know it's from Chingy. His handwriting is distinctive. Besides, who else could have written it? And what cad would play such a mean practical joke?"

"Don't take any notice of these fatheads!" said Handforth grimly. "Go ahead with the letter, Doyle!"

Doyle continued reading. Now and again his voice was broken by an exclamation of astonishment—as Yung Ching described the nature of his prison, and how he was kept securely under lock and key. He could not even tell the name of his captor, for he had never heard it, although he clearly indicated that he was a well-educated Chinaman of great wealth. The name of the vessel was unknown to him, and he could only tell that its destination was China. And then he described, with an astonishing wealth of detail, his interview with his captor. He told of the latter's plans to force his father into a surrender of his lands. Yung Ching missed out nothing. Almost exactly as Dr. Foo Chow had spoken the words, so Yung Ching recorded them, stating quite boldly that he was to be mutilated and tortured if his honourable father refused to bend to his enemy's will.

"I say, it's a bit too thick!" interrupted Church, with a shiver. "I believe that letter is from Chingy all right, but it's—it's unthinkable! Nobody on earth could be so horribly cruel as to cut off his fingers and hands."

"Its too awful!"

"It can't be true, Doyle!"

Doyle was looking scared and pale.

"It does seem thick," he admitted huskily. "But yet—yet—— Why should Chingy write it if it wasn't true? I do believe it!" he added fiercely. "Haven't we all heard about the way the Chinese torture people? Poor old Chingy is being taken to China to be simply carved up! Great Scott! It's too ghastly to think about!"

"Finish the letter!" said Hamilton quietly. "I'm sorry you read it out now, Doyle—I was afraid of something like this. I wanted you to take it to Mr. Lee in the first place, but you wouldn't. But now you've gone so far, you'd better finish it."

"Yes, let's have the rest," muttered Handforth.

He was subdued—and everybody was feeling the same. There was something gripping and terribly sinister about this letter. And somehow it carried a world of conviction with it. Yung Ching had written hurriedly, but he had written with a brilliant pencil.

Doyle cleared his throat and went on reading. Young Ching explained how he was planning to get his letter away from the ship, and frankly admitted that he had very little hope of it ever reaching St. Frank's. But, if it did reach the old school, he urged Doyle to take it immediately to Mr. Nelson Lee, and to ask Mr. Lee to communicate with Mr. Tsen Wang.

"I was half-expecting that," said Dick Hamilton, nodding. "You can't refuse now, Doyle—you've got to show it to Mr. Lee

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This makes all the difference in the world. It'll give the gov'nor a definite line to work on. Perhaps he'll be able to track that ship."

"It'll be half-way to China by now," said Tommy Watson. "Doesn't Yung Ching say that the ship was on the point of sailing? And this letter must have been written nearly a fortnight ago!"

"Yes, by Jove!" said Dick grimly. "That's so! Those balloons just drifted, and either burst in mid-air or became deflated of their own accord. And the letter must have been lying on the roadside for days. What an extraordinary piece of luck that it should fall near a road!"

"That's one reason why I believe it's a fake," said De Valerie thoughtfully. "It seems to me that somebody dropped it down on purpose—just as a practical joke. After all, it's too mad to be true. Even in China they don't cut people's fingers off in that ghastly way. Besides, this man that Chingy talks about is refined and educated—"

"That's nothing," interrupted Dick Hamilton grimly. "Ask Mr. Lee! There are some educated Chinamen who are, under the surface, just as heathen as ever. And you mustn't run away with the idea that all Chinamen are torturers, either. They don't look at things in the same way as we do. Human life isn't valued much over there. Doyle, you'd better come with me to the gov'nor, at once."

Doyle was looking doubtful.

"It's from Chingy all right," he muttered. "But it seems so rummy! I—I wonder if it's really true? Perhaps the poor kid's gone dotty, or something? He may have been affected by that drug, and perhaps it's gone to his head. I mean, it's simply too horrible to be really true."

"Well, Mr. Lee will be able to judge," said Dick. "I'll admit it's enough to chill anybody's blood, but that letter can't be kept to ourselves. Come on! We've got to—"

"There goes the breakfast bell!" said somebody.

"We can't bother about breakfast!" snapped Dick. "Come on, Doyle!"

They went, and Handforth insisted upon accompanying them. There was no time to argue, so they allowed him to come. And they found Mr. Nelson Lee in his study.

He was rather surprised at the sudden invasion.

"Can't you defer this until after breakfast, boys?" he asked. "The bell has gone, as you probably know. If it is very important—"

"It is, sir," said Dick.

"Something about the holidays, no doubt?" smiled Mr. Lee.

"No, sir; it's about Yung Ching," replied Doyle. "I've got a letter from him here, and I think you ought to see it. If it's true, he's in about the most terrible position any chap could be in!"



CHAPTER 12.

DICK HAMILTON'S SUGGESTION.

MR. NELSON LEE held out his hand.

"A letter from Yung Ching?" he said evenly.

"I find this difficult to believe, but I can assure you that it will be very welcome—if it is an authentic letter. Scotland Yard has utterly failed to obtain the slightest clue to his whereabouts."

"There's no clue here, either, sir," said Dick Hamilton quickly. "Ching only knows that he was taken on board a yacht. He can't even name the port. Please read the letter, sir, and tell us what you think."

Nelson Lee took it, and beckoned to the couch.

"Sit down, boys," he said. "I take it that you are neglecting breakfast for the moment? Under the circumstances, I approve. Breakfast can wait. How did you receive this letter, Doyle?"

Doyle handed over the envelope and the letter from the obliging Mr. Mitchell, of Winchester. The Housemaster nodded as he glanced at them.

"Very natural, of course," he said. "Any rightminded man would have done exactly the same—since Yung Ching's letter was plainly addressed to you. Now let me read what the boy has to say."

For ten full minutes there was silence in the study—except for continued whispered comments from Handforth, who simply could not hold himself in check. But at last Mr. Nelson Lee had finished. He placed the thin sheets of paper on the table and thoughtfully covered them with a weight.

"Well, sir?" asked Dick eagerly.

"This letter is genuine," replied the Housemaster quietly.

"You—you mean it's all true, sir?" said Doyle.

"Every word," replied Mr. Lee. "A letter of that kind could never have been deliberately concocted. It carries complete conviction in every line. Poor boy! What a dreadful outlook for him. And by this time he is well on his way to China, for the yacht must have left over ten days ago."

"Yacht, sir?" asked Dick. "How do you know it's a yacht?"

"I do not know—but I suspect," replied the great detective. "But there is something else I wish to say. Has this letter been shown to anybody else?"

Doyle looked rather guilty.

"I read it out in the lobby, sir," he confessed.

"That's a pity; but it can't be helped," said Mr. Lee. "I don't blame you, Doyle; you weren't to know how vitally important it is."

"Not many of the fellows believe it, sir, anyhow," said Hamilton. "They think it's a fake."

"I don't wonder," replied the Housemaster. "It seems altogether too appalling actually to be true. But I know sufficient about China to be convinced of its genuineness. Poor Chang is in the hands of a human fiend, and the man means to carry his villainous purpose through. Something must be done—and quickly, too."

"But what, sir?" asked Handforth. "Can't we follow? Can't we send cablegrams and things, and have that ship stopped?"

"Unfortunately, we don't know the name of the ship," replied Mr. Lee. "Without any positive evidence, we cannot move hand or foot—at least, not officially. And yet it is equally impossible to leave Ching to his fate. There is something singularly pathetic in this letter, Doyle."

"It's—it's knocked me over, sir," muttered Doyle huskily.

"That poor boy—a stranger in a strange land, almost—has taken a desperate chance to communicate with you," went on the Housemaster. "His ruse has succeeded—with the aid of Providence. If we possess a single ounce of humanity we must take action. Under no circumstances can we leave Ching to such a dreadful torture."

"But does he really mean that, sir?" asked Doyle. "I mean, will he have one of his fingers cut off? Oh, my hat! It makes me go all shivery to think of it, sir."

"Unless some steps are taken to rescue

the boy, I doubt if there will be any hope for him," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "A man such as he describes is not likely to utter idle threats. I am prepared to believe in this letter implicitly. I might hesitate if it were from any other boy, or if it had arrived under any other circumstances. Let me think."

He sat back in his chair and closed his eyes.

He knew more than the juniors. For even now, without making any further inquiries whatever, he felt practically certain that the celebrated Chinese millionaire, Dr. Foo Chow, was the man—and he was equally certain that the *Dragon* was the yacht.

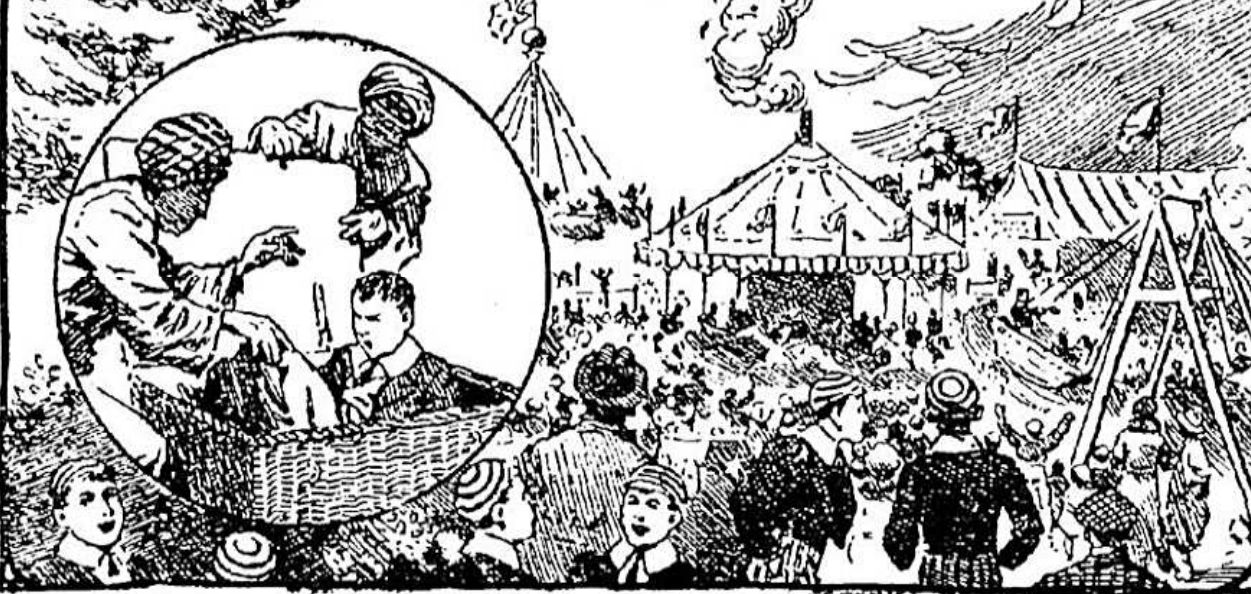
The very day following Yung Ching's disappearance, Nelson Lee had discovered the presence of the Chinese millionaire's yacht in Southampton. At the time he had had vague suspicions, but had had no proof. He had even requested Scotland Yard to move in the matter—he had tried to induce them to search the vessel. But they had refused.

Dr. Foo Chow was a man of power—a man who had had the highest possible reputation in financial and social circles. To order a search of his yacht, without an atom of direct proof, was impossible. The police, indeed, regarded Nelson Lee's suggestion as incongruous, and did not share his suspicions.

But the Housemaster-detective had been right.

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On the table in front of him lay the proof—not sufficient proof to satisfy the police or any Government department. But the circumstantial evidence was overwhelming, and Nelson Lee knew that he had hit the right nail on the head.

Earlier he had taken no action because the police refused to help him, and because his own suspicions were vague and almost unjustifiable. But now it was different.

Yung Ching had stated that he had been taken to a well-equipped ship. He didn't know the name of it. But who could doubt that it was the *Dragon*? Yung Ching had described his captor as a Chinaman of culture and refinement—an enormously rich man who had evidently had a great deal of European experience. Who could fit that description better than Dr. Foo Chow?

More conclusive still, Ching declared that the boat had sailed that same night—roughly, eleven or twelve days earlier. And the *Dragon* had left Southampton at that very time! Why, it was as clear as daylight.

Even the wind had been blowing up in the right direction, so that the balloons had drifted towards Winchester. The wind had remained steady for days—blowing from that direction.

Nelson Lee thought of all these things, and he was half inclined to speed straight to London and place the whole matter before the Foreign Office. But he dismissed this idea. For even if the Minister for Foreign Affairs was convinced of the truth, he could take no action.

Without direct proof he could never order the Chinese millionaire's yacht to be stopped by a British man-of-war and searched. Such a thing was utterly out of the question. Even if he had had the proof, it is doubtful if he could have acted. For Yung Ching was not even a British subject. He was Chinese. And no British Government department had the right to interfere.

If anything was to be done, it would have to be done privately.

That fact was absolutely evident. The quest would be a thrilling one, indeed; and the rescuers had one big advantage. They knew exactly where Yung Ching was, and if the *Dragon* could only be overtaken before she reached Chinese waters there was just a chance— But Lee pulled himself up short. He was thinking too fast.

Dr. Foo Chow had made a grave blunder in taking Yung Ching into his confidence so early. If he had denied himself that pleasure until the yacht had got away, no rescue party would have been possible. As it was, Dr. Foo Chow had no inkling that all his plans were known in England!

Not that he could be accused of carelessness. He had taken such precautions that he had never dreamed that Yung Ching could get any communication away from the yacht. The Chinese boy's ingenuity was solely responsible for this happy development.

"Well, sir?" asked Dick Hamilton at last. "Yes, sir," gasped Handforth. "What are we going to do?"

He hardly knew how he had held himself in check for so long, and now he jumped up and gazed excitedly at the Housemaster.

"For the moment we shall do nothing," replied Mr. Lee quietly. "Ching is well on his way to China, and a mere hour or two will make very little difference. But you may safely satisfy yourselves that I shall not let this infernal monster carry out his plans if there is any human way of preventing him."

"By George, that's good hearing, sir!" panted Handforth. "Couldn't we get a destroyer, or something, and chase the rotter? He's only got about ten days' start! Or perhaps we could go by an ordinary liner—"

"Hold on, sir!" exclaimed Dick Hamilton eagerly. "I've just thought of something. What about Dorrie and the *Wanderer*?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I have already thought of them," he replied smoothly.

"It was Handforth's remark that put Dorrie into my head, sir," went on Dick. "The *Wanderer* is faster than a destroyer. She may be only a private yacht, but she's the fastest thing afloat."

"Why, that's my idea!" ejaculated Handforth, with a violent start. "I suggested the *Wanderer* days ago, to Church and McClure! The rotters simply cackled at me! I thought we could get hold of Dorrie—"

"One moment—one moment," interrupted Mr. Nelson Lee. "It is all very well to talk about Lord Dorrimore, and to suggest these wonderful ideas, but there are difficulties. You are proposing, Hamilton, that we should attempt to rescue Yung Ching privately."

"Why not, sir?"

"There are a good many reasons why we should undertake this mission, and not many why we should not," replied the detective grimly. "But time is the essential factor. If we are to achieve any success we cannot afford to waste a single day."

"Then why not get Lord Dorrimore to—"

"Lord Dorrimore is not available," broke in Mr. Lee. "He and the *Wanderer* are, I believe, in Egypt at the moment. And I am not certain that he is free to engage in any such chase across the world."



CHAPTER 13.

JUST LIKE OLD DORRIE!

ON the faces of the three juniors there were disappointed expressions.

"But—but couldn't we cable to him or something, sir?" asked Handforth, quickly recovering. "Or couldn't we get a cruiser to chase the ship that Ching's on? Oh, but we don't know which ship it is—"

"I think we can guess, Handforth," interrupted Mr. Nelson Lee smoothly.

"Guv'nor!" gasped Dick. "Does that mean you *know*?"

"Virtually, yes."

"By jingo! Then—then——"

"You can put all ideas of an official chase out of your mind," interrupted the Housemaster. "Such an expedition is utterly impossible, for it might lead to grave complications. And China, as you know, is not exactly in a state of peace just now. There is no chance of official action."

"But what about taking on the job ourselves, sir?"

"A private expedition—yes," said Mr. Nelson Lee. "Ching has given us the name of his actual destination, and that is a matter of tremendous importance. Yang-Fu is the town in China to which he is being taken, the place where he will be imprisoned to undergo these appalling tortures."

"Then we've only got to go to Yang-Fu, and we shall find him, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"That is rather a big 'only,' Handforth," replied Mr. Lee. "It will not be such an easy matter as you seem to imagine. Indeed, any kind of expedition will be fraught with difficulties and dangers. You must not hope that you will be able to accompany the party. It will be a task for desperate men."

"Oh, I say!" said Handforth in dismay. "Can't we——"

"Handforth, I want you to realise that nothing whatever can be settled now," interrupted the Housemaster curtly. "Lord Dorrimore is at Port Said, and there is just a possibility that the *Wanderer* will be available. If so, there is a further possibility that Lord Dorrimore will invite a few of us for this trip. In that case, I should make it a stipulation that no boy should undergo any risks. It is one thing to make a trip to China, and quite another to penetrate to the interior, where there is warfare. But all this talk is a waste of time—until we can communicate with Dorrie."

"Are you going to do that, sir?" asked Dick Hamilton eagerly.

"I will dispatch a cablegram to him within the hour," replied Mr. Lee briskly. "Have no fear, I will make it quite comprehensive, regardless of expense. A human life is at stake, and although the human life is a Chinese one, it belongs to a St. Frank's scholar. In such a matter as this, blood matters nothing. Yung Ching belongs to the St. Frank's Remove, and if there is any possible way of rescuing him, we shall do so."

"By George! If only old Dorrie——"

"Conjectures are quite useless," continued the Housemaster. "I advise you to go to your breakfasts, and do your utmost to keep calm. And if any of the other boys get excited, try to cool them. It will do no good to allow a lot of wild rumours to get into circulation. Doyle, you had better come

with me to the headmaster. I will show him this letter of yours, and explain the circumstances."

Dick Hamilton and Handforth went off, and out in the corridor they halted, and looked at one another.

"Do you think there's a chance?" breathed Edward Oswald.

"I do," said Dick. "A good chance."

"You—you mean Dorrie will come up to the scratch, and take us off to China in the *Wanderer*?" asked Handforth feverishly. "Why, it seems almost too good to—— I can't think clearly," he added breathlessly. "And how the dickens can we wait until Dorrie sends a reply?"

"We've got to wait—and there's an end of it," replied Hamilton. "And there's no sense in starving ourselves in the meantime, so let's get some brekker."

What with the excitement of the holidays, and the usual last-day rush, most of the fellows had no time for thinking about the affairs of Yung Ching. Indeed, though the majority of the boys heard the rumours of that letter, they took little or no notice. The yarn seemed altogether ridiculous, anyhow.

Only a comparative few gave it real credence—Dick Hamilton, Reggie Pitt, Doyle, Scott, Fullwood, and some others. The greater number of fellows were full up with their own plans for the holidays, and there was not the sensation about Yung Ching which Mr. Nelson Lee had feared. He was glad, indeed, that the school was preparing to break up on the morrow. Otherwise the rumours would have gained rapid ground.

Just before tea-time a telegraph messenger arrived, and both Dick Hamilton and Handforth spotted him at once. They ran up to the telegraph boy and grabbed him.

"Have you got a cablegram for Mr. Lee?" they demanded.

"Why, yes, young gents——"

"I'll take it," said Dick briskly.

"I dunno as I ought——"

"Don't be a young ass!" interrupted Dick. "I'm Hamilton—isn't that good enough? Mr. Lee and I work together sometimes. Come on—hand it over!"

The telegraph messenger finally decided that it would be all right, and delivered up the cablegram. Dick sped off with it at once, with Handforth at his heels. Church and McClure were in the rear.

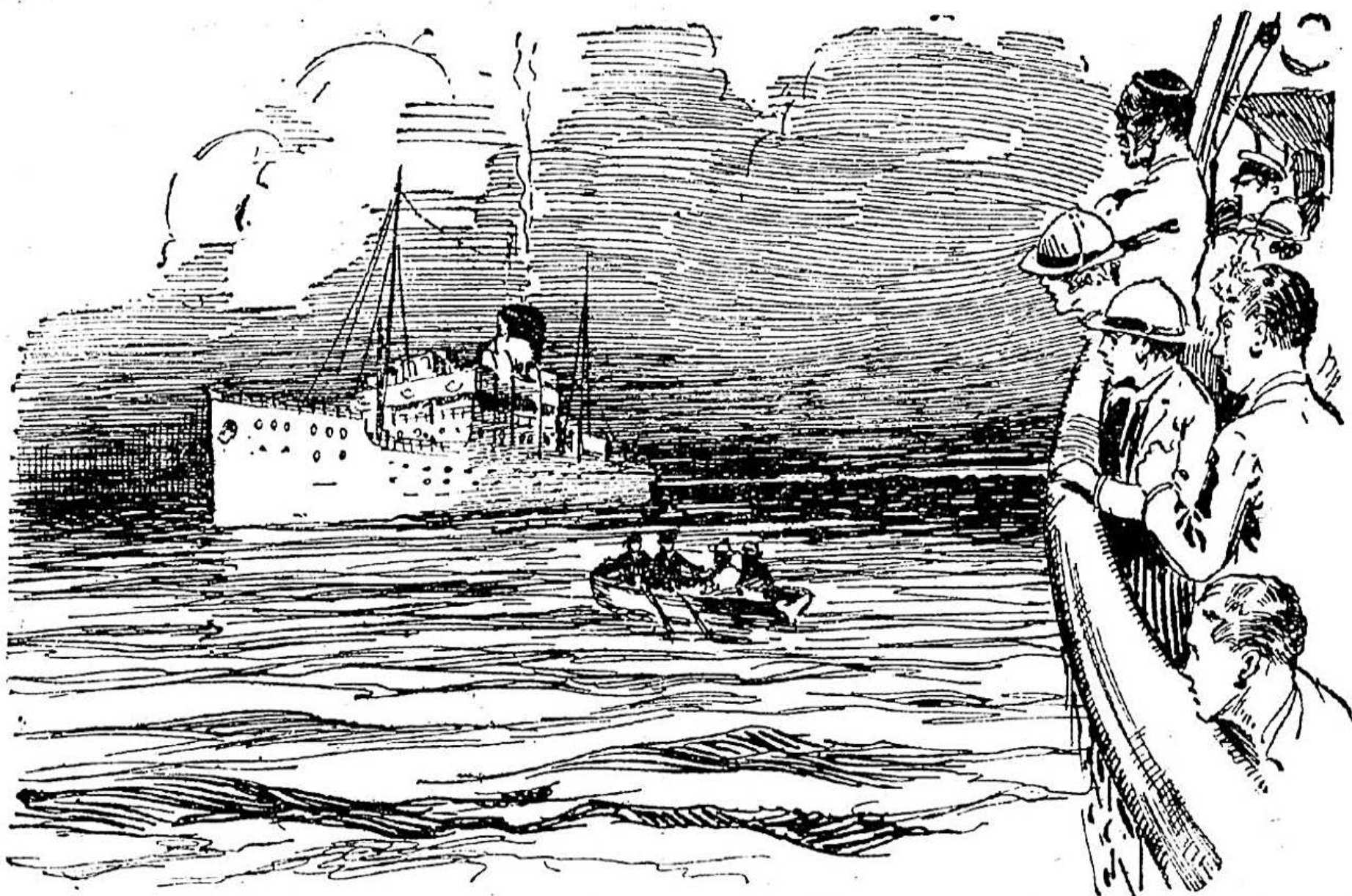
"Better wait, Handy!" panted Church. "We can't all barge in——"

"Of course we can't!" interrupted Handforth. "You're not coming, anyhow. Unless you leave me alone I won't take you to China," he added threateningly.

This had no effect, but Church and McClure hesitated when they reached the Housemaster's door, and they hovered about outside. Dick Hamilton and Edward Oswald hurried in.

"Wire, sir!" said Dick breathlessly.

"You have evidently concluded that it is



With straining eyes the boys watched as the boat from the "Wanderer" pulled towards Foo Chow's yacht. Umlosi, the Zulu chief, grunted as he folded his arms. "Wah! It were better to fight like men than to barter with these yellow dogs!" Handy heard him growl.

from Dorrie?" asked Mr. Lee. "That is by no means certain. Let me have it, young 'un."

He tore it open and read the message. At a rough estimate, Handforth reckoned that he took four hours to read it. At least, it seemed like four hours to the impatient Edward Oswald. It was ages before the Housemaster looked up.

"Yes, this is from Dorrie," he said slowly.

"Is it all right, sir?" asked Dick.

"Read it for yourselves, my boys."

They took the sheet, and the words leapt at them:

"Just what I've been longing for. Yes, come along at once. *Wanderer* available. Ready for sailing three days. Bring the crowd—same bunch as usual, with as many more as you like.—DORRIE."

"Just like old Dorrie!" breathed Dick. "By Jove, Handy, what do you think of it? We can go in the *Wanderer*, and she'll be ready for sailing within three days!"

"It's—it's marvellous!" said Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "And it's my idea, too! I told Church and McClure——"

"There is no need for us to hear what you told Church and McClure," interrupted Mr. Lee. "Dick, I shall be infernally busy with all the details that must be arranged. Indeed, I must go to London at once, to acquaint Mr. Tsen Wang with these develop-

ments. I want you to fix up this party. Dorrie intimates 'the usual crowd,' so there will not be much difficulty. It will all depend upon who wants to come."

"The girls, too, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Certainly, if they can get permission from their parents," replied Mr. Lee. "But don't forget that there'll be no leisure this time. We shall have to leave not later than the day after to-morrow. And it is quite understood that the *Wanderer* will not carry its guests into any danger zone. The actual rescue expedition can be arranged at leisure—after Chinese waters are reached."

"Do—do you think we can get there before Yung Ching, sir?"

"If the *Wanderer* can start in three days, and develop her usual turn of speed, it should be quite easy," replied the Housemaster-detective, his eyes full of eagerness. "I don't mind admitting, boys, that I am enthusiastic about this chase. Yung Ching's letter has worked me up to a pitch that I have seldom before experienced."

"I think we're all feeling the same, sir," said Dick Hamilton tensely. "But look here—how on earth shall we get to Port Said in three days?" he added. "You say we've got to start the day after to-morrow——"

"We shan't get to Port Said on earth at all," interrupted Mr. Lee drily. "There are such things, nowadays, as aeroplanes, young 'un. It will be a comparatively easy matter to charter two big aeroplanes at Croydon, and fly direct to Port Said. Indeed, it is the only possible way of achieving our end."

"My hat! This is getting better every minute!" muttered Handforth. "I shall pinch myself soon to make sure that I'm awake! I say, sir, can we go and tell the others?"

"I am leaving that to Hamilton," replied Mr. Lee. "It will be better to say as little as possible regarding Yung Ching. So far as you boys are concerned, the trip will be purely a pleasure one—a holiday journey to China. So look at it from that angle."

"Good enough, sir," said Dick Hamilton briskly. "Come on, Handy—we'll begin to make arrangements at once. Only just in time, too—while we've got everybody here. We'll only make preliminary arrangements to-day, and fix a big meeting in London somewhere, for the final details."

They hurried outside, and Handforth exploded.

"A pleasure trip, eh?" he roared. "Does that mean that we're not going to take any part in rescuing Chingy?"

"Handy, old son, simmer down!" said Dick. "If Mr. Lee thinks that we're going to be left out of the actual fun—well, he's never made a bigger mistake in all his life!"



CHAPTER 14.

SOMETHING LIKE AN ADVENTURE!

CHURCH and McClure stared incredulously.

"Then it's really true?" gasped Church, at last.

"Absolutely fixed!"

grinned Handforth.

"We're going to China?"

"Starting the day after to-morrow, my lads!"

"Why, it's—it's almost impossible!" said McClure. "What about our people? We can't arrange things at such short notice—"

"All those who can't arrange things will stay behind, that's all," interrupted Handforth calmly. "Simple enough, isn't it? Old Dorrie has given us *a la carte* to bring as many as we like—"

"I suppose you mean *carte blanche*?" grinned Church.

"What's the difference?" roared Handforth. "I've never known such chaps for quibbling over trifles! Old Dorrie has told us we can bring the crowd, so if the crowd can't get a hustle on, it'll stay behind. What did I tell you chaps at the beginning of last week?" he added triumphantly. "Didn't I say that we should go off to China on Dorrie's yacht?"

"You certainly did!" agreed McClure, scratching his head. "There's something uncanny about it!"

"Uncanny be blowed!" roared Handforth. "You've only got to trust your uncle, E. O. H., and everything will go all right. Let's go and hear what the others are saying."

The others were saying all manner of exciting things. The abruptness of the invitation took most of them off their feet, and many were dubious as to whether they would be able to get the necessary permission from their parents.

But there was one powerful argument.

They had been with Lord Dorrimore before. As soon as it was known that this was one of Dorrie's special trips, there were not likely to be many objections. For, although such trips generally led to excitement, his lordship always took good care of his guests. He did things on a lavish scale, and any passenger on the *Wanderer* was certain of a good time.

So no insuperable obstacles were anticipated by the fellows who were chosen to accompany the rescue expedition. It was very fortunate indeed that everybody would be going home for the holidays on the morrow. For there would be time to discuss matters with parents, and to make a hasty round of the London shops, and buy the necessary equipment.

"It's all frightfully priceless—it absolutely throws a chappie off his balance!" said Archie Glenthorne, the genial ass of the Remove, "I mean to say, Phipps won't have a dashed minute to do things. I can't possibly be ready inside a week."

"Hard luck, Archie," said Pitt. "You'll be left behind."

"Odds horrors and abominations!" said Archie. "Absolutely not! Good gad! Archie will absolutely go, even if he has to grub along with only a dozen suits!"

Dick Hamilton grinned.

"You'll be lucky if you're allowed to take two suits, my lad," he said. "We're travelling to Port Said by aeroplane, remember. And you can't carry a blessed vanload of goods with you. We shall have to reduce our luggage to the minimum. So you won't really need Phipps on the trip."

Archie started.

"But what about the good old valeting?" he asked feebly.

"If you've only got two or three suits, Phipps' services will be superfluous—"

"I absolutely decline to move a dashed yard without Phipps," interrupted Archie firmly. "Good gad! What will Phipps do without the young master if he is left alone in England?"

"You mean, what will the young master do without Phipps," chuckled Brent. "Don't worry, Archie. You'll be allowed to take Phipps, I expect."

Handforth had taken it upon himself to rush off to the Moor View School to acquaint the girls with the stupendous news. Irene Manners & Co. simply wouldn't believe it at first—which was scarcely to be wondered at, for Handforth was always getting hold of things backwards. But when Dick Hamilton arrived with the official invitation, the girls no longer doubted the reality of it.

"We'd simply love to come, but however can we get ready in time?" asked Irene

COMING NEXT WEEK!

"IN THE DRAGON'S CLUTCH!"

The "Wanderer" shelled!

The Boys of St. Frank's forced to surrender to the might of the hidden guns aboard Foo Chow's yacht!

They are taken prisoner by the mysterious Chinaman who has kidnapped Yung Ching.

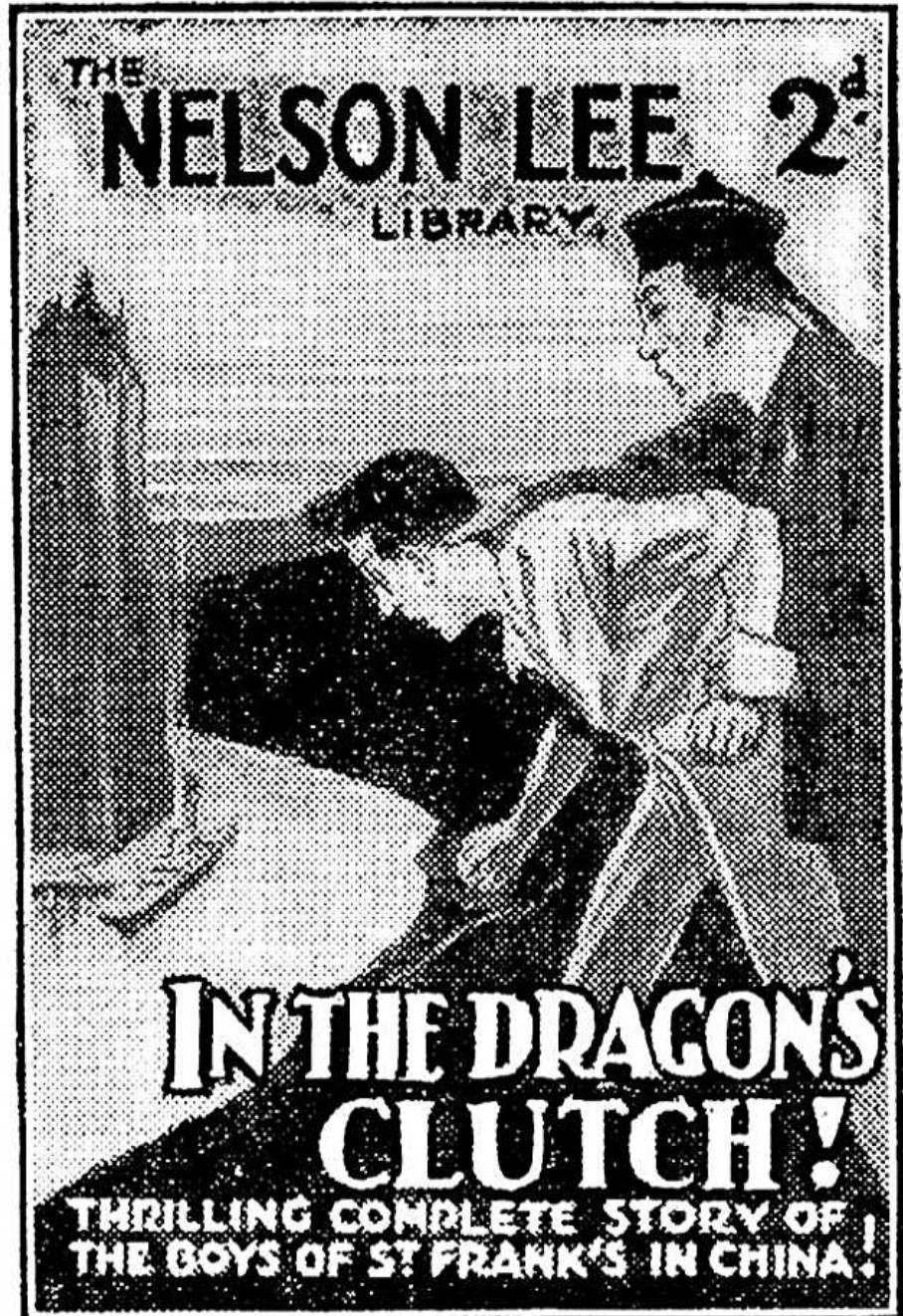
Handforth doesn't like it a bit. Fancy being in the clutches of a heathen Chinese!

And when it does come to a scrap, good old Handy wades in like a two-fisted tornado, fighting side by side with the Zulu warrior—grim Umlosi.

There are thrills a-plenty in next week's great yarn—and loads of fun, too. Imagine Handforth trying to conform to Chinese customs! You will enjoy this stunning story, and you will like next week's chapters of our great adventure yarn—

"THE ROLLYING ROVERS!"

Don't take a chance—order in advance!



Held prisoner by the mysterious Foo Chow! The Boys of St. Frank's are in a terrible plight—look out for this cover next week.

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

breathlessly. "I expect my people will be cut up, too, because they were going to take me off to Wales in August—"

"China's better than Wales any day," interrupted Handforth firmly. "If you have any trouble, just get hold of me, and I'll soon convince your pater and mater."

"We've simply got to work them round, that's all," said Winnie Pitt. "Of course, Reggie will fix up everything for me, so I shan't need to worry. And I don't think the others will have many difficulties. We've been on the *Wanderer* before, and our people won't need to worry. Besides, they wouldn't stand in the way of us accepting such a wonderful invitation."

"And aren't we really going for something more than a mere pleasure trip?" asked Mary Summers. "We've heard that there's been a development about that Chinese boy. He's in danger—"

"Strictly on the quiet, we're off to rescue him," said Handforth confidentially. "We're going to penetrate into the heart of China,

and drag him away from his torturers. That's the real idea."

"We're certainly going to rescue Yung Ching if we can," agreed Dick; "but Mr. Lee and Dorrie will decide upon the actual course of action. As far as we're concerned, it will be a ripping holiday. A trip to the China seas! We can safely leave the rescue of Chingy in the hands of the grown-ups."

"But I expect we shall get some of the excitement," said Irene gleefully. "If we don't, I shall be very much surprised!"



CHAPTER 15.

ALL ABOARD FOR CHINA!

ORD DORRIMORE wrung Nelson Lee's hand with a grip of delighted welcome. "This is a pleasure I hardly expected this summer, old man," he said enthusiastically. "By

the Lord Harry! So we're off again on another of our adventure trips, eh?"

"So it seems, Dorrie," smiled the great detective. "I must say you're looking disgustingly healthy—in spite of the smells of Port Said. What on earth possessed you to stay here?"

"I'll tell you all about it later," replied his lordship. "Too busy now. I've got to go and greet the boys and girls. They're pilin' on board in regiments, by gad! Good luck to 'em all!"

Dorrie was his old self—bronzed, good-natured and breezy. There was something about this sporting millionaire which stamped him as a thoroughbred in every line. His courage was famous, his sunny temperament was a by-word, and in many respects he was as boyish as the most youthful of his guests.

The past two or three days had been so crowded with incident for the St. Frank's party that they could hardly realise that they were now actually on board the *Wanderer*. It seemed only an hour or two since they had been at the old school. And yet here they were in Port Said, under the sweltering sun of a semi-tropical sky, and with the thermometer in the nineties.

The *Wanderer* was like an old friend. To the St. Frank's boys and the Moor View girls it seemed like coming home. They knew every inch of the yacht—her saloons and lounges and her cabins. And not one of the young guests could help feeling a thrill as they found themselves upon this familiar ground again.

There had been two feverish days in London. Arguments with parents—rushing about and doing the impossible—buying things and making a hundred-and-one preparations for the departure. Then the journey to Croydon, and the trip by air! That alone had been a glorious experience.

The whole party had been conveyed in two of the largest Imperial Airways liners—enormous machines where the saloons were almost as comfortable as those of a sea-going ship. In spite of the long journey, it had been over all too soon. But there was ample compensation in the fact that here was good old Dorrie to meet them—and the friendly *Wanderer*, with steam up, and ready to set off for China without a minute's delay.

Mr. Nelson Lee had been largely responsible for the smooth running of all the arrangements. It was he who had booked the aeroplanes—he who had mapped out the timetable—he who had made flying trips to various parents, at the behest of feverish juniors, to convince them that their sons would be in good hands.

And nobody had been left behind.

All the prominent fellows had come along—Dick Hamilton & Co., Archie Glenthorpe, Fatty Little, Fullwood and Russell, Handforth & Co., Doyle and Scott, Willy and his stalwarts of the Third. Indeed, there were so many members in the party that Dorrie was nearly an hour in greeting them all.

It certainly did seem like the beginning of a real holiday trip. It was hardly possible to realise that there was a grim purpose behind this dash into the China seas.

Nelson Lee's plans, however, were made. He had obtained information from several sources that the *Dragon* was proceeding leisurely on her journey to Shanghai. And it was the *Wanderer's* task, if possible, to overhaul the Chinese millionaire's yacht while she was still in the open sea. Mr. Lee had his own ideas as to what would happen then. His one aim was to rescue Yung Ching at once—at the very first dash. If that failed, there was liable to be a string of almost insurmountable difficulties.

And it seemed that the programme stood a good chance of success. As soon as Nelson Lee could get hold of Dorrie alone, he gave him a full account of the facts, and an outline of the plan.

"It sounds pretty good," said Dorrie, at length. "Too rapid—that's all. If we dish this Foo Chow merchant straight away, where's all the excitement comin' from?"

"We can do without excitement this time, old man," said Mr. Lee quietly. "This fiend intends to torture Yung Ching in the most horrifying manner. And unless we rescue the boy in the open sea, there is a distinct probability that he may be spirited into the interior of China. And what chance will there be then? Answer me that, Dorrie!"

His lordship nodded.

"You're right—we've got to make a spring, and pounce on the cur at once," he agreed. "Are you proposin' a bold move? Do you suggest that we should overtake the *Dragon*, an' force her to heave to, an' then search her?"

"Precisely that."

"There might be trouble——"

"I don't think so," interrupted the other. "Foo Chow will never dare to make any official complaint. We know too much about him. His reputation will be utterly wrecked if he invites an inquiry. No, Dorrie, he will probably hand the boy over, and be only too glad to escape so lightly. Afterwards, we can go for a holiday trip just wherever it pleases us."

"If it suits you, it suits me," smiled Dorrie.

But certain events were taking place just then which were liable to upset these plans. At that very moment the *Dragon* was approaching the Bay of Bengal—a position rather out of the ordinary trade route for China. But, apparently, Dr. Foo Chow had his reasons.

The weather was blazing, and the Chinese yacht steamed ahead on a glassy sea, with the sun beating down with overpowering ferocity. There was a certain amount of activity on deck. Men were at work there—men in overalls, who appeared to know their business well.

An aeroplane was being assembled.

It was a tiny, rakish-looking machine, the entire nose of which was composed of engine. It was one of the latest type fighting 'planes, originally designed as a single-seater, but altered by Dr. Foo Chow's mechanics to accommodate two.

It was one of those tiny speed demons which can annihilate distance at a rate of anything from a hundred and fifty to two hundred miles per hour. It was silver grey, and the lines of the machine were wicked.

In point of fact, it was entirely British, and one of the most expensive models of its type which could be purchased.

That evening the engine was thoroughly tested, and Dr. Foo Chow, who conducted these tests personally, pronounced himself to be thoroughly satisfied.

"To-morrow, Yen, you will make your start—at dawn," he said softly to a small, wizened Chinaman who looked much older than his actual years. "You are confident of success?"

"Excellency, the journey will be as nothing in this machine," replied Yen. "Five hours—six hours at the most!—and then Yang-Fu! I am eager, Excellency."

"I trust you, Yen," said Dr. Foo Chow.

Yung Ching was just on the other side of the deck, watching the operations; at sea the Chinese boy was allowed perfect freedom, and his captor had consistently treated him as an honoured guest. There was something incongruous in the arrangement, when Foo Chow's dastardly intentions were considered.

"It will not be long now before you see your native country again," said Dr. Foo Chow, as he smiled upon Yung Ching. "Are you not proud? Are you not pleased at the thought?"

"I am pleased at the thought of seeing my country, but I did not believe that I should re-enter it in this way," replied Ching impassively. "But you will never vanquish my honourable father. Never!"

"No?" murmured Dr. Foo Chow. "What a pity! I have grown to like you during these days. It will grieve me to see you maimed and mutilated. Your honourable father must be a man of steel to withstand the assault which I shall make upon—his heart!"

He moved off, and Yung Ching stood there, staring out over the sea. He was thinking of St. Frank's—of those days which now seemed far off, when he had spent happy hours at the old school. It seemed almost impossible that they had been quite recent. He idly wondered if that message of his had ever found its destination. Probably not. Indeed, Yung Ching was inclined to call himself a fool for ever having built any hopes.

For now there would be no chance of rescue! At dawn he would be beyond all reach—secure in the power of his enemies, in the fastnesses of inner China.

But Yung Ching slept well that night. With his Oriental temperament, he remained immobile and calm.

Dawn was breaking when he was escorted on deck. The tiny aeroplane was ready, her engine running. Yen, the pilot, was already in his place, and Yung Ching was wrapped in warm garments, and lifted into the special cockpit which had been prepared for him.

"We part, but only for a brief period," said Dr. Foo Chow smoothly. "I shall miss you, son of my enemy. But we will make up for the loss when we meet at Yang-Fu."

Yung Ching made no reply, for it seemed to him that none was required. And he was interested in the activities around him. He had been strapped in—possibly to prevent him hurling himself into space. For Dr. Foo Chow did not lose sight of the fact that his victim might prefer to end everything in one swift dive than to await the inevitable torture.

There were numerous orders and one or two shouts. And then, after Yung Ching had received a command to hold tight with all his strength, the flight began.

With the engine racing at full power, and making the air hideous with its devastating roar, a great catapult apparatus was released. With a rush, the tiny machine leapt clean off the deck and soared upwards amazingly—pulled sheer by the very power of its enormous engine.

It climbed giddily—driving steeply into the dawn-lit sky.

Up and up until it became a mere speck. And then, at a speed approaching two hundred miles an hour, it vanished into the haze of the early morning.

Dr. Foo Chow gave orders to his men, and every trace of the catapult apparatus was removed.

"And now we resume our normal course to China," he said to his captain. "We can journey placidly and peacefully, indifferent to any possible interference. Our plans are going well."

And in less than an hour the *Dragon* was steaming towards the southward, ready to take up her original course for China. This deviation had wasted a considerable time, but it had been worth it.

The aeroplane, flying straight over Burma, was seen by none.

For the pilot flew at such a height that he was invisible from the ground. Hour after hour the journey continued—until Yen brought his machine lower, with the green countryside of China below. By compass he continued his course. And just when he expected it—according to all calculations—he saw a great column of black smoke, far, far away to the north-west. It was a signal that had been arranged.

Bearing in this direction, the little aeroplane arrived at the town of Yang-Fu, and alighted on its appointed ground. Yung Ching had been transported into the heart of China—delivered into the hands of his father's relentless enemies.



CHAPTER 16.

A SHOCK—AND A DECISION.

"IT'S the *Dragon*!"

"But it can't be—we didn't expect to overtake her for another two days!"

Dick Hamilton and Reggie Pitt were staring out over the *Wanderer's* rail. A smart steam yacht was in the distance, the *Wanderer* having overhauled her rapidly during the past hour. It was late afternoon, and every member of the party was feeling thoroughly at home.

The China seas had been reached! And there was a feeling of adventure in the air. Even now some of the fellows were inclined to ask one another if they were awake. Everything had happened so swiftly and dramatically.

But there was no doubt about it—they were in the China seas.

"By gad, it's the *Dragon*, sure enough," Dorrie was saying, on the bridge. "What's the matter with your calculations, Lee, old man?"

"I cannot quite understand this," said Nelson Lee, with a frown. "I don't like it, either. I have a feeling that Foo Chow has beaten us, Dorrie. He has evidently made a detour for some reason. What reason? I am inclined to act at once."

"We'll go aboard now, as soon as we come up with her."

"Yes," replied Lee grimly. "There's no sense in wasting time."

He was anxious. Everything was going altogether too smoothly to be satisfactory. They had expected to experience much difficulty in locating their quarry. And yet they had come upon the *Dragon* by sheer chance. Luck of this sort couldn't be genuine.

"We shall have to go very warily," continued Nelson Lee. "Although we are convinced that Foo Chow is the kidnapper of Yung Ching, we have no positive proof. So we can make no direct accusations."

"But, man alive, there isn't a thousand-to-one chance that we're on the wrong track!" protested Lord Dorrimore.

"And yet that one chance may be confronting us, Dorrie," replied the detective quietly. "And what a ghastly blunder if we should be wrong, and if we accused this powerful Chinese millionaire unwarrantably. No, we must be very careful, and I hope you will leave the talking to me."

"My dear old man, you're welcome to it!" said his lordship promptly. "It's a good job you gave me this tip, though, or I should probably have started the proceedings by treatin' Mr. Foo Chow to a playful uppercut."

The *Dragon* very readily stopped her engines, and hove to in answer to the *Wanderer's* signals. And when the two yachts were lying within a hundred fathoms of one another, the decks of the *Wanderer*

were crowded with St. Frank's fellows and Moor View girls as they watched the proceedings.

Mr. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and two of the yacht's officers put off. There were no others. Handforth, of course, was considerably disgusted, for he had reckoned to take an active part in this business. Among the watchers, too, was Umlosi, the African chieftain—one of Lord Dorrie's staunchest friends, and his companion in many a fight. He was disgruntled because he had been left behind, but he only expressed his disapproval by rumbling deeply within himself.

Dr. Foo Chow was awaiting to receive his visitors as they mounted the gangway. The Chinese millionaire was attired in white drill, spotless and immaculate. It is doubtful if he guessed the identity of the new arrivals, and the object of their visit. But he was not long in doubt. Within the first minute Dr. Foo Chow knew that his secret plans were in the hands of these Britishers. And he was amazed and alarmed without showing either emotion. For it seemed impossible to him that, after all his precautions, the truth could have leaked out.

"This, gentlemen, is an honour I had hardly dared to hope for," said Dr. Foo Chow smoothly as he bowed to Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore. "It is beyond all my deserts that my humble yacht should be graced by your august presence."

"Am I right in addressing you as Dr. Foo Chow?" asked Lee.

"That, indeed, is my miserable name," admitted the celestial.

"Allow me to introduce Lord Dorrimore, whose yacht you see slightly astern," continued the detective. "My own name is Lee, and we have been urgently desiring to get in touch with you, Dr. Foo Chow. It is rather providential that we should have sighted your yacht to-day."

"My curiosity is roused," admitted Dr. Foo Chow politely.

"We have reason to believe that a Chinese boy, named Yung Ching, has been smuggled aboard this vessel," continued Nelson Lee. "He is a scholar of St. Frank's College, and I am a master there. The boy was kidnapped, and we believe that he was brought on your yacht."

..... NEXT WEDNESDAY!

IN THE DRAGON'S CLUTCH!



.....

Dr. Foo Chow appeared gravely interested. Beneath the surface he was filled with rage, for these foreign devils might prove very awkward—especially if they took their story to the Chinese Government. But Dr. Foo Chow was a past master in the art of bluff.

"Surely there must be some mistake?" he asked mildly.

"As I said before, Dr. Foo Chow, we have every reason to believe that the boy is here," said Nelson Lee quietly. "It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that some members of your crew performed this act of abduction, and that they have now got the boy concealed. I can assure you that we would not make this suggestion unless we had the most excellent grounds."

"Who am I to place any obstacle in your way?" asked the Chinaman readily. "Although I am convinced that you are labouring under a lamentable mistake, I will make every effort to assist you."

He turned, and spoke rapidly in Chinese to one of his officers.

"I have given instructions to have the yacht searched," exclaimed Dr. Foo Chow. "Ten men are about to accomplish the task. Would you care to accompany them? Or will you honour me by coming below and partaking of a little refreshment?"

"Thank you, Dr. Foo Chow, we will leave the search in the hands of your men," replied Mr. Lee.

"You may be sure of that," agreed the Chinaman, as he escorted them below. "My men will do their work thoroughly."

The search, as Lee had suspected, proved futile. The officer returned after twenty minutes and reported that there was no boy to be found, and no indication that any such stowaway had been smuggled aboard.

"My meagre tongue is incapable of expressing my regrets," said Dr. Foo Chow evenly. "It grieves me to send you away empty-handed, but I can only assume that your information is at fault. May I crave the honour of your presence at dinner?"

"That's deucedly kind of you, Dr. Foo Chow," said Dorrie. "But the fact is I have quite a number of guests, and——"

"Splendid!" interrupted Dr. Foo Chow, smiling. "Perhaps you will honour me by accepting an invitation on behalf of your entire company?"

"We're an awfully big crowd——" began his lordship.

"The honour will be thus all the greater," urged Dr. Foo Chow.

"Under those circumstances we will gladly accept," put in Nelson Lee, before Dorrie could refuse. "At what hour shall we invade you?"

"A happy invasion, I will warrant," declared the Chinese millionaire. "Shall we say seven o'clock? I am most grateful, gentlemen, for this condescension, and can

only repeat my utmost regrets that your mission has failed."

Five minutes later the boat was bobbing its way back to the *Wanderer*, and Lord Dorrimore was rather amused.

"Quite a harmless old buffer," he observed.

Nelson Lee returned his lordship's smile.

"I am afraid you would be a dismal failure at my line of business, Dorrie," he said dryly. "Dr. Foo Chow has succeeded in bluffing you. But he has not bluffed me."

"By gad! You don't mean——"

"I mean that the search was a farce," interrupted Lee grimly. "I mean that Dr. Foo Chow is not the 'harmless old buffer' he appears to be. Indeed, Dorrie, although I had no proof of his duplicity when I stepped across his gangway, I have it now."

Dorrie looked his astonishment.

"Perhaps you noticed a curious ring on the little finger of his left hand?" went on Lee. "No? Well, it was there. And that ring belongs to Yung Ching!"

"Good glory!" ejaculated his lordship, staring.

"Obviously, Dr. Foo Chow was taken by surprise; he had no idea that we were coming on board to inquire after the boy, or he would not have worn the ring," continued Lee keenly. "Why should he wear it? I should suggest that he has taken it so that he may send it to Yung Ching's father with the first intimation of his triumph in capturing the boy."

Nelson Lee, in fact, was pleased. He had not revealed his hand to the cunning Chinaman, and the latter was off his guard.

"But we're goin' to dinner with the blighter!" protested Dorrie.

"I very gladly accepted that invitation," nodded Nelson Lee. "We are at grips with the enemy, Dorrie, and I have a slight idea that the forthcoming dinner-party will be of an unusual type."

"I'm hanged if I can follow!" confessed Dorrie, bewildered.

Nelson Lee did not say anything further. But he was determined to make a bold move at once. So far he had been unable to give any indication of his purpose, but now he had all the proof he needed. Yung Ching had told the truth in that dramatic letter of his!

The first episode was over, and although the Chinese boy was no longer on board the *Dragon*, succeeding events were calculated to produce some results that would have staggered even Mr. Nelson Lee's iron nerve if he could have glimpsed into the immediate future!

THE END.

(What will happen now? The boys of St. Frank's will not be easily thwarted, and next Wednesday's exciting yarn, "IN THE DRAGON'S CLUTCH!" will hold your interest from the very first chapter. To make sure of reading it order your NELSON LEE LIBRARY in advance.)



BETWEEN OURSELVES

Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with his readers.



NOTE.—If any reader writes to me I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Flectway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter will be acknowledged in these columns, and if of very special merit will be starred.

E. S. B.

AS there are heaps of letters to acknowledge this week, and as quite a few of them call for comment, I shan't waste any time on "tosh," as one reader generously described my opening paragraphs. But he needn't think that he's had the slightest effect upon me. I've only got one page, and if I don't get these comments in, I shall be in trouble with lots of you.

* * *

Cynthia Martin (Gravesend), H. S. (Birmingham), Charles R. Colwell (Birmingham), Jack Radcliffe (Bootham), E. Thackeray (Bermondsey), John Keith (Huntly), T. W. Gilpin* (Penrith), Miss Dorrie* (Wolverhampton), Sydney G. Hamilton* (South Hackney), Jack Thomas Bayles (Willaura, Vic.), Ernest A. West (Tauranga, N.Z.), Eileen Byrne* (Christchurch, N.Z.), Pat Thompson* (Dublin), A Regular Reader (Churchtown, Ireland), X. Y. Z. (Dublin), J. R. Wilkinson (Edmonton, Canada), J. Miller (Tufnell Park), R. P. J. R.* (Birmingham), Leslie Bowden (Exeter), Eric Best (Nottingham), Charlie Goodwin (Quarry Bank, Staffs), D. Torrington (Winnipeg).

* * *

What a lot of starred letters this week! That's the way it goes, you know. Sometimes I get a batch of letters that don't include a single one worthy of being starred. Another time I feel that I'd like to star the whole lot. For example, that letter of yours, T. W. Gilpin, was not only well written, but it contains heaps of interesting matter. I'll freely admit that I'm an "old scallywag," but that's just between ourselves. Hubbard's Christian name is Arthur, and Cecil de Valerie shares Study G in the Ancient House with the Duke of Somerton. Justin B. Farman is in Study P, in the West House, with Owen major and Hart. Hal Brewster and Co. are still very much alive, as you now probably know, if you have bought "The River House Rivals" (No. 27 of "The Schoolboys' Own Library"), which appeared quite recently, and is still available. This yarn is all about Hal Brewster and the River House School, although, of course, I haven't forgotten the St. Frank's chaps and the Moor View girls. With regard to the yarn called "Handforth Minor," this appeared in No. 386 (Old Series) of Our Paper.

* * *

You are quite right, Miss Dorrie. It IS something like a Chinese puzzle to please all of you. But you are wrong when you imagine that I sometimes despair. No, I'm an optimist, and even if I don't please all of you all the time, I hope (vainly, perhaps) that I please some of

you all of the time, and all of you some of the time. I think Abraham Lincoln, or somebody like that, said something of the same sort once. So don't accuse me of trying to be clever.

* * *

Yes, your typewritten letter looked very neat, Sydney G. Hamilton. As a matter of fact, I receive quite a lot of letters in typewriting, so you must not think that yours was an exception.

* * *

Thanks for your offer to let me have information about Australia, Jack Thomas Bayles. Yes, rather! I am always ready to learn, and I should be awfully obliged if you would send me the descriptive matter about Victoria and Tasmania. There's nothing like getting it from the people who live there, and if you are generous enough to take the trouble, I should be a hoor if I did not gladly accept your very nice offer.

* * *

No, I have never been to New Zealand, Eileen Byrne. That is one reason why I am rather afraid to take the St. Frank's chaps over there. I expect I should receive too many criticisms! But if I ever get the chance I shall certainly make the trip, and that will mean a visit to Australia, too. Unfortunately, neither New Zealand nor Australia are yet within a few days' journey. Wait until we get a three hundred miles per hour aeroplane service in operation! Then I'll drop over to Christchurch for a week-end!

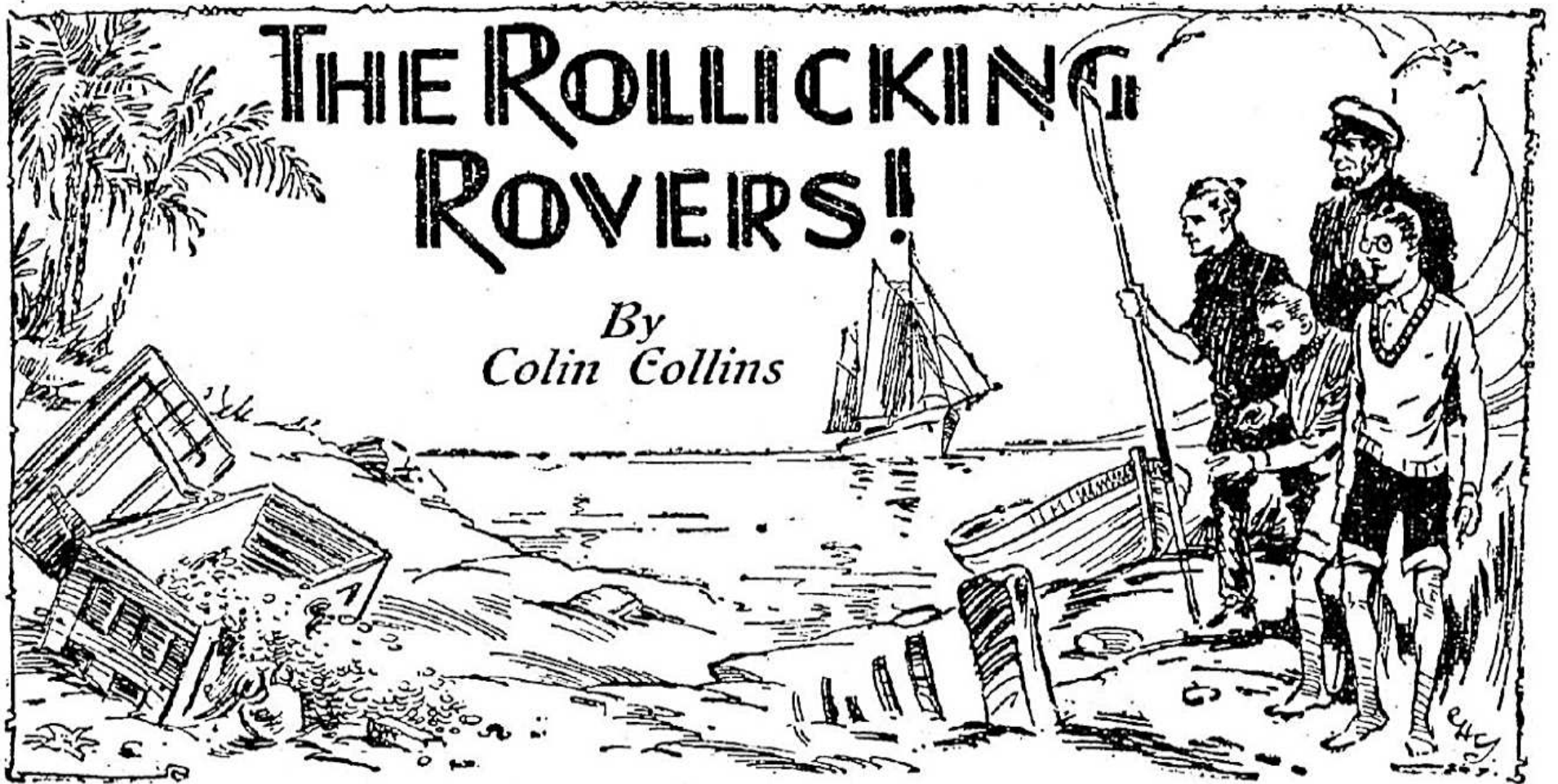
* * *

Sorry, R. P. J. R., but I certainly DO disapprove of girls indulging in boxing. I don't think the general run of readers would like Irene Manners and Co. better if I allowed them to engage in feminine boxing matches. Somehow, it doesn't seem very ladylike, does it? Boxing is essentially a sport for boys and men.

Yours until next week,

Just Started!

Rousing Adventure!



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

BOB DIGBY, HAROLD DWYER and FATTY VOSS are left a large fortune, to be divided equally between them. The fortune is left them by their uncle, Silas Digby, and the wealth is hidden in a chest which he has buried somewhere during his travels round the world. They have no clue to the whereabouts of this fortune, but enlist the aid of BEN TOPPET, the skipper of the Saucy Ann, who tells them of a chest concealed beneath a tree in their uncle's garden. They dig up the chest and find that it contains documents, a mummified head and hands! The papers are examined, and it is decided to accompany Ben on the Saucy Ann

in a world quest for the lost treasure. But there is a member of the crew named FOXEY, whom they do not trust, and it is arranged to leave him behind. In due course, the adventurers set off on the Saucy Ann, with a mysterious stowaway aboard. Strange, ghostly manifestations occur, and the ship is believed to be haunted. They arrive at Boulogne. While they are examining papers from the old chest, a bony, shrivelled hand appears trying to clutch at the papers. A lamp is overturned, and they are plunged in darkness!

(Now read on.)

The Gendarme.

THE first thing to do when a lamp is overturned, and a room is plunged in darkness, is, naturally, to strike a light.

But you have to have a match on you, or you can't do it.

"Light the lamp—pick it up!" cried Bob.

The mysterious hand had been withdrawn through the curtains of the window of the Boulogne lodging-house, and the four occupants of the fisherman's parlour were clawing at each other in the pitch black. Soon all were feeling in their pockets for matches—which had been left on the table that had overturned with the lamp.

Fortunately the lamp extinguished itself; otherwise there might have been worse than darkness to contend with. At last someone hit on the matchbox, knelt down and struck a light to see the extent of the damage. It was Fatty who found the matchbox, he being practically knocked over and trodden under by big Ben, and his sprawling hand had hit it.

The glimmer revealed the other occupants of the room retired to the walls—as far

as they could recoil from the window—and Ben actually in one corner with his shoulder against it, looking as though he were trying to push his way through. His eyes were on the curtains, that still flapped gently in the breeze.

"Yes, it's gone!" cried Bob. "Hold the light. I'm after him!"

Bob made a dash and drew the curtains back, to disclose only the night sky, a few twinkling lights on the masts of boats in harbour, the plank leading from the Saucy Ann's gunwale to the window, and—nothing else!

The match went out; and by the time a second had burned out, the table was righted by Goggles, the lamp set on it, and the globe replaced. The damage was small. The restoration of light brought Ben back to the table, his eyes still bulging like glass marbles, and his hands trembling.

"Has it—really—g-g-gone?" Ben gurgled.

"Yes," replied Bob from the window, leaning out, "and he got away along this plank—by the way he came!"

"He!" gasped Ben. "It weren't a he, it was an 'and!'"

"With a man behind it," replied Bob. "I'm going over to the ship, and all of you come, too, and we'll hunt him down. Though it's dark, I can see every part of the vessel, and he can't slip off without my spotting him."

"I told you it was an 'and!" persisted Ben.

"And a sleeve," added Goggles.

"And behind the sleeve was a man," Bob insisted. "Where's that rascal Dummy?"

"In his bunk, asleep, Mr. Bob," replied Ben.

"Oh, is he? Well, we'll see."

Bob mounted the side table and proceeded to crawl out of the window and along the plank; they heard him drop on the deck.

"I'm going, too," said Goggles, but Ben held him back.

"No, no, Mr. Harold; you stay here with me, my lad, and help tidy up. Here's the box and all the papers, and nothing taken as I can see."

They scrambled the papers together and pushed them into the box, Ben leaving the actual putting back to the boys; he hardly fancied handling that box.

"There ain't nothing in it—at the bottom?" he asked nervously. "The 'ead ain't come back by any chance?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, you never know. The 'ands did, 'cos we saw 'em, and the 'ead weren't far off, I reckon."

"Bob will find out about all that," said Fatty, leaning out of the window. "It would take a lot to frighten Bob, and he'll make short work of Dummy if he catches him."

"It's all very quiet," whispered Ben, leaning out, too. "Turn down the light inside, so we can see better. Ah, there he is—moving around," he added, pointing to a gliding shadow. Then he called out: "That's not the way to Dummy's bunk, Mr. Bob!"

Bob's voice answered presently from the other end of the ship, where Dummy's bunk was, replying: "All right, he's here, and snoring. Come on."

Although the night was dark to them after the lighted room, it was not at all dark to a lonely gendarme on the quay. That official usually saw little on his beat at this hour; nevertheless, it was his duty to keep watch, in case prowlers took it into their heads to board a boat and lift a coil of rope, or walk off with a net, or an armful of saleable old iron.

The gendarme saw a window on the quayside light up and then go dark. He heard voices. He saw a shadow creeping along a plank, and beheld, in imagination, a first-class burglary in progress. Whether the ship was being burgled from the house, or the house from the ship didn't matter at all. He jumped in the air and drew his sword, and sprinted along to find the nearest harbour watchman and order a boat to put off and board the ship.

Blissfully unconscious of the craft stealing along the inky sea and creeping under the lee of the Saucy Ann, well out of sight, Bob darted to and fro along the deck, chasing something that looked like a man—or a ghost, for it had glided without sound, appeared and vanished, and left him as helpless and as wise as he was before.

Dummy was in his bunk snoring; he knew that for certain—and he was after that shadow.

Ha! There it was, rising over the edge of the ship slowly, coming higher and higher; it was throwing a leg over when Bob resolved upon one big dash and a grab.

He made the dash all right; he sprang like a mastiff at that very substantial shadow and hit him on the chest with both fists in a blind attempt to catch at his throat.

There was a yell as the gendarme toppled down on the head of the boatman and into the boat, which tipped and dipped. There was another roar, followed by a splash as the rolling gendarme fell into the sea.

"Hi, hi! Come on, there!" Bob yelled back at the open window. "I've found him."

The boatman was finding it very hard to grip the soaked officer, but he succeeded in catching a shoulder-strap and held him above water, and then assisted the blowing, bellowing gendarme back into the boat.

"Arrest him—he assaulted me! Catch him! After him!" roared the policeman in French that was so wet with sea water that his words sent a shower of spray into the air as he spluttered his official rage.

Away across the plank came the others, Fatty, Goggles and Ben, each taking his turn, for it was a very narrow plank, and rather thin.

"Come on! Come on!" they heard Bob shouting valiantly in the dark.

The boys were at his side; but Ben, on the plank, was not so quick. The wretched board bent and curved with his weight, and although he sat astride it and edged along a foot at a time very carefully, the curve bent lower and lower till—crack!—it broke.

There was another yell, a splash, and some gurgling and swishing as Ben swam round to the other side of the Saucy Ann, where the rescued gendarme was just climbing up the ladder for a second boarding.

"He's talking French," said Bob to the others, and backing away as the stranger's head rose level with the deck once more. "Shall we pitch him over again?"

At that moment the climbing gendarme found himself taken in the rear, as it were, by something that crawled out of the sea and put a great hand beneath his coat-tail and just lifted him aboard, and followed. It was Ben.

"A light! A light!" cried the gendarme, dancing in his rage.

"What's he say?" asked Ben, rolling on deck. "And who's the other in the boat?"

"Cendarme, 'darme, 'darme!" yelled the little policeman, fairly dancing with fury.

"'Ere, don't you swear at me! Who are



Bob barged headlong into the French policeman. There was a startled grunt, the gendarme heaved backwards, to crash on top of the boatman, and then to plunge into the black waters of the harbour.

yer?" roared Ben, thrusting forward in the dark and clawing a handful of padded chest, ready to shake the offender into attention. "Why, he's all wet—like me—and he's in uniform!"

"Engleesh t'ief!" shouted the officer, turning and pointing to the open window.

"Why, he's a French policeman!" cried Ben. "We're being boarded. What is it—customs? You no specky English—what? Do you hear what I say?" he roared.

Goggles, the only one of the lads whose French could hang a sentence together, managed to interpret: "Qui voulez vous, m'sieu?"

"You Engleesh! You are arrest'—all! Comprenez? I blow you on ze 'ead if you not permeet me to arrest you," spluttered the gendarme.

The man accompanying the officer had stepped aboard quietly and groped about till he found a switch. Light flashed out of the open door of the captain's cabin and all could now see each other. The harbour man knew many languages and talked English.

"You are arrest'. These gendarme—he see you boarding these sheep from zat window."

"It's our ship," interposed Fatty indignantly.

"Yes, ours," added Bob.

"I'm skipper of this craft. What about it?" roared Ben angrily. "Come in my cabin and see. Not you, little 'un"—this to the excited gendarme—"I can't understand your lingo."

In the cabin there was light; and a long explanation followed. The harbourman translated Ben's story to the gendarme, which was not all true, but good enough. The boatman told the French policeman:

"The captain says he has rented a room in that house, and finds the plank quicker than the roadway. It is all a mistake."

"But where is ze other—zare are only four 'ere. I see ze other one—where is 'e?" demanded the gendarme.

"Tell him we've been coming across and across, and there's only four of us, and one asleep in his bunk."

The officer was not satisfied until they routed out Dummy from the fo'c'sle. He came out blinking and staring. The gendarme asked him if he spoke French, and when told that the fellow was deaf and dumb, looked at the harbourman with suspicion in his eyes. Dummy only stared back and blinked, still half-asleep.

The gendarme wanted to arrest somebody for throwing him overboard, but the harbourman explained that it was only natural, in a harbour, for a boarding party to be mistaken for ship thieves in the dark.

The harbour man led the gendarme away and they embarked. When they were gone Bob suddenly remembered the deed box in the house of the fisherman.

"Well, well, it'll be safe there," Ben growled, "and if the ghost walks he'll walk there and not here. Let's turn in, and to-

morrow we'll get ready for Koba Island—a nice long trip and a quiet one."

"What's the island like?" demanded Bob.

"You wait and see, my lad. But I can tell you it ain't like any other places you've ever set eyes on. A day or two here, to get in stores and letters from home, and off we go. I shall rest in my bunk comfortable to-night, knowing as that box ain't here."

There was no plank to take them back to the house, and, the front door being locked inside, they resolved to sleep aboard and not trouble about the hired bed-room. They turned in, and—all save Ben slept soundly. He kept his light burning till morning, and dreamed uneasily of floating heads and hands.

The others dreamed of a tropic isle, and cannibals, and palm-trees, and alligators, and snakes, none of them having been any nearer the equator than in geography books.

Very soon there was a new surprise in store for them.

The Isle of Caves!

A GLORIOUS sunny morning in harbour.

All thoughts of ghosts and clawing hands seemed absurd on this beautiful day, with all the bustle of the quay-side and the home-coming of the fishing fleet. The lads were astir before Ben, and Dummy was at work, as unruffled as ever.

The boys, however, watched Dummy, especially the way he had of turning his head quickly the moment anyone stepped near—as if he heard the step as well as they.

"Do you think he's really deaf?" Bob whispered to Goggles. "I'm wondering if it's all a fake, and that it was he who played larks on us to get possession of the box!"

"Why should he?" asked Goggles. "But if you want to find out if he's deaf, there's a way of testing him. I've got a revolver in my bunk. Suppose we let it off just behind him when he's busy. If he jumps, he can hear. If he doesn't—well, he's as stone deaf as he pretends."

Fatty was for trying the experiment at once, and went for the weapon. He returned with it in his pocket. They waited until Dummy was busy polishing a brass rail, polishing and polishing and taking no notice of anybody. Fatty stole up behind.

"If you hold the thing like that he'll jump all right," Bob whispered, seizing Fatty's arm. "Don't point the thing at him. Do you want to put a bullet through his leg?"

"I've removed the bullet."

"Very well, then, point it down. Now!"

Bang!

Dummy went on polishing and hissing and polishing. But not a flicker of notice—till he smelt smoke, and sniffed.

The test had failed—or succeeded!

"What fools we are," said Bob, when

they walked away, leaving Dummy sniffing smoke. "Of course, if he's not a deaf mute, he heard all we said, and was prepared. It was no test at all."

"Well, let's try again," suggested Fatty. "Let's go behind him, and I'll tell you out loud that next time he stoops down I'm going to run a pin into him—deep—half an inch. Then I'll go close up and see if he doesn't flinch."

"Very well," they agreed, and came and talked freely of their intention, as though it were a joyous schoolboy lark. They had a pin, and Dummy might have seen it if he had looked.

"Don't really stick it in," Bob whispered, as Fatty stole nearer.

Closer, closer, but only hissing and polishing. Dummy stooped most invitingly, and it was hard, very hard, not to actually use the pin. But not a blink! Dummy stooped, and rose, and stooped and polished. He once turned upon them an appealing eye, pointing to his work, as much as to say: "How's that for bright?" If he could have talked he would have said it.

"He's deaf all right, and dumb, too," sighed Bob. "But that doesn't prove he wasn't the ghost! Let's look in his bunk while he's busy and see what we can find."

This was easy. Bob was told off to go alone, while the others kept guard over the polisher.

And Bob found something!

What he found down the square trap that led to Dummy's sleeping hole was nothing less than Ben himself, on the same errand.

"After what you lads said," Ben explained, "I thought as I'd make sure. There weren't no other living soul aboard but Dummy, and if it weren't a ghost, it were Dummy. There ain't nothing here—'cept a book. He knows a lot, does Dummy; and he's allus reading."

"Not such a fool as he looks, eh?" said Bob, still unconvinced.

"And not such a fool as to play any pranks on me, his skipper. There ain't many as would sign him on, and he wouldn't risk being shot off on foreign soil just for the sake of seeing me shiver."

"That seems reasonable," Bob agreed. "All the same, I don't believe in ghosts."

"Neither does I—till I sees 'em," Ben protested. "And this place—the Island of Koba—as we're going to, is full of 'em. The king of the island is a sperrit as is never seen, only heard."

"A spirit?"

"They lives on sperrits; they worships 'em, makes sacrifices to 'em; and you can hear 'em 'owling."

"Where?" asked Bob, deeply interested.

"In the caves. It's a place of caves—all caves; sort of honeycomb island standing up out of the sea on legs, so to speak. You can travel as far underneath as you can on top almost."

"Is it big?"

"No, quite small—a mile or so across each way, and part of that a worked-out volcano; more like a sponge than solid earth, all holes and passages."

"And the natives?" asked Bob.

"Black and brown—and mixed."

*All of them—no white men?"

"Mostly black and brown. It belongs to Morocco—when Morocco remembers it. But it's mostly forgotten, and the governor is a sheik in a white nightshirt and a turban, with twenty wives and about twenty soldiers. He has a palace on the shore."

"A beautiful one?"

"As beautiful as a brick kiln, and built rather that way, only it's whitewashed. He has one gun, of which he's wonderful proud; an old cannon on the top of his palace what he lets off whenever he's out of temper, and the echoes roll about the island like roaring bulls, and all the population falls on its face. He's only the governor; not the king—the king of the natives, I mean."

"Hospitable people?" asked Bob, recalling stories of poisoned arrows, man-eating savages, and yelling hordes of blacks.

"Mostly. Whenever a ship calls, which ain't often, it does so at its peril—the governor's gun is let off, and it's only your luck if it don't hit you."

"Why does he do that?—Just spite?"

"No, no; just friendliness—and bad aim. The sheik can't get out of his head that when a cannon is let off it's got to have a ball in it—no blank charges for him. Your uncle has argued with him, but it's no good; he must shoot something—he won't waste good powder unless there's a target. It's just his politeness."

"Some day he'll sink a ship that way," said Bob.

"I'm rather of opinion his politeness runs that way, and though he says it's just joy at greeting a welcome stranger, I fancy he'd rather see any ship come ashore in pieces than anchor in his harbour."

"He boards every ship himself, and the way he looks around at the brass and iron makes you feel he's regrettin' he ain't pickin' up the bits from the shore to add to his palace instead of having sent another good cannon-ball sunk to the bottom of the sea."

"You mean to say we shall be shot at?"

Ben grinned and chuckled.

"I know the range of that gun. We shall just loiter outside till the ball falls short, and then slip in under before they've time to ram home another charge!"

"Why did my uncle go there?"

"Ah, that's just it! There weren't no reason—but the caves. He got wonderful interested in caves. The Isle of Caves the place is called in the African lingo, and your uncle was particular concerned with one which I remember."

"What sort of cave?"

"One that can only be reached by water.

and big enough for the Saucy Ann to sail right in, masts and all. We spent one night there—and your uncle was up all that night. He was gettin' peculiar in his ways at that time and I took no notice. Now I wish I had."

"How soon can we get off?" asked Bob, warming up and feeling distinctly thrilled by the prospect.

"As soon as I've heard from Martha and your Mr. Endersleigh—for I promised your lawyer I wouldn't go nowhere definite without lettin' him know first, in case——"

"In case what?"

"In case we never came back; then he'd know where to look for our bodies, so to speak."

There was a thrill in that idea, too. Bob hurried off to tell the others, and so thrill them also.

Foxy's Cunning.

THE Saucy Ann was revictualled and almost ready to start before letters came from home. From the lawyer money arrived, with much good advice on economy. From Martha came an astonishing communication that sent Ben roaring about the ship and stamping and calling for the boys.

"What's up?" they demanded, seeing him waving and slapping his letter.

"What d'ye think?" he cried. "Read it, read it!"

They crowded together, and while Bob held the letter the other two heads were thrust over to read also.

"My dear Ben,—When I got home I had the surprise of my life. I knocked at the door and had to wait a long while for an answer. At last a strange man opened it. I just gasped. He was in his shirt sleeves and smoking a pipe, and looking as if he was very much at home.

"Apparently Foxy had signed on a ship for South America and had left the man in charge, so I packed him off and paid him his one week's money, and he cleared out. Just fancy Foxy behaving like that!"

The rest of the letter was advice to her husband about taking care of himself and the boys—especially the boys, whom she seemed to regard the more important.

"Did you ever hear the likes of it?" roared Ben, "and us standing on this very deck and watching Foxy standing at the door, as we thought, and him off to South America! South America!" shouted Ben. "And d'ye know why? D'ye know why he wanted to get at that deed box under the tree? He's off to the wreck where your uncle got his chest of gold, hoping to find another, and make his fortune that way."

(Continued on page 43.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION
FORM No. 41.

SECTION A	READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP. I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me.
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SECTION C	NEW READER'S DECLARATION. I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."
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INSTRUCTIONS.

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If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

THE ROLICKING ROVERS!

(Continued from page 41.)

"Well, let him," said Bob. "I guess uncle didn't leave anything worth having behind. And if he finds treasure that belongs to nobody—well, let him take his luck. Anything so long as he doesn't come after ours. Let's get below for dinner; Dummy is making signs that it's ready."

When they entered the saloon for this midday meal—the last before setting out on the long trek to the African coast—they found Dummy dancing round the table, and thrusting his face almost into each plate, and grunting abominably.

"What is it, Dummy?" asked Ben, who always talked in words to the man, who could hear nothing, unless he wanted to give definite orders, when he used his fingers and eyes and arms and shoulders, and talked in a mixture of pantomime and the deaf-and-dumb alphabet.

Dummy, with much finger work, informed Ben that he had put three new potatoes on every plate when he set out their meals, and after an absence of only a minute came back to find only two on each plate.

Ben growled his impatience at all this fuss about a mistake in counting. But there was more than that. Dummy had secured, as a treat, a last feast of fresh meat. In his absence from the cookhouse his own portion had vanished from the pan!

"Either you can't count, Dummy," cried Ben, sitting to his plate unconcernedly, "or some dog has jumped aboard from that old schooner lying alongside, and put his nose in your frying-pan."

Dummy was waved impatiently away and went off shrugging and grunting and looking very angry.

"Things are happening now in broad daylight," said Bob, with a wink at the others. "But dead hands don't claw beefsteaks out of frying-pans, do they, Ben?"

"There's someone else besides ourselves aboard this 'ere craft," cried Ben.

"A stowaway?" asked Fatty excitedly, hoping to realise in real life another story-book incident, and enjoy the excitement of hauling some poor, half-starved devil out of the coals.

"P'r'aps," Ben agreed. "P'r'aps there ain't no ghost after all. Afore we set sail we'll examine the hold and every part of the ship. We don't sail before my mind's at ease."

"Very well," they agreed.

As they were sailing that evening, a council of war was held in Ben's cabin, and all sat round his table to talk things out. It was no use calling Dummy to council, so he, as usual, went off and slept and was forgotten.

The cabin door was almost closed, and while

the council was in session voices rose high, especially Ben's. No one in the neighbouring ships troubled to note the movements of anybody aboard such a fancy craft as the Saucy Ann; nor did anyone see a lean, unshaven, skinny sailor, dirty as a sweep, crawl along on his stomach till his head was level with the crack of the cabin door.

Foxy Johnson—for of course it was he—listened and heard all. He heard of the coming search for a stowaway, and started in some alarm. Then he grinned, stood up and walked undismayed to the ship's side, slipped down and disappeared, like any other harbour sailor, into the moving crowd on the quay-side.

He went for a walk, a much-needed stretch of his legs. Later, with his cap drawn over one eye, his growing beard trimmed but not shaved, he took up a point of observation among a pile of fish boxes on the quay, and watched all that went on aboard the Saucy Ann.

He saw Ben striding about the deck and looking here and there and everywhere, carrying a hammer; and the boys at his heels, moving about like ferrets, and tipping up things that wouldn't have hidden a dog—but still, doing their bit!

They asked Ben what he wanted the hammer for. He explained that a stowaway is apt to prove troublesome when suddenly disturbed.

Ben, who knew his ship better than he knew the wiles of Foxy Johnson, explored every cranny; the boys crawled and peeped till they were all satisfied that nothing more alive than a rat existed on the ship besides themselves and Dummy. The only part of the ship they ignored was the coil of rope on which Dummy lay asleep and snoring.

"Now then, all to your bunks and get a rest for an hour or two!" commanded Ben. "We'll all be busy soon—some of us all night. The breeze is fresh, and there's the chill of rain in it, but we've got to get out on this tide."

Hardly in the mood for rest—they were all so excited—the youthful crew retired, and Ben also. A few minutes later Foxy climbed up and boarded the ship. Dropping on his face the moment he was on deck, he crawled on all fours to the place where Dummy slept, and found him lying over the very spot where he must go down to his secret stowaway hole so snugly prepared.

Enraged and desperate, he drew his knife and crept nearer, but realised that a knife was no use. Dummy's coat lay close by. With this in his hands, spread out, Foxy slithered nearer, made a dart, whipped it over the sleeper's head, rolled the half-awakened man over and over, bound him round and round with yards of rope, and then emptied his pockets of loose money and tobacco, spilling a little on deck and gurgling in his delight.

(Continued on next page.)

THE ROLLICKING ROVERS!

(Continued from previous page.)

Not a sound! Dummy was helpless, at any rate, for the time being. Foxey lifted the coil and the plank with it, dropped in, drew what was left of the coil as far back as possible, and—vanished!

When the time came to set sail a search was made for Dummy—and they found him. "Muffled and robbed in broad daylight!"

roared Ben. "And we never saw the robber come or go! This is the work of one of them French harbour rats, and a police job. But we can't wait. Up, Dummy, and tell us what he was like."

But how could he? And his loss was only just three and fourpence, a screw of tobacco, and a pipe.

Without further delay they set sail for the Isle of Caves.

(To be continued.)



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