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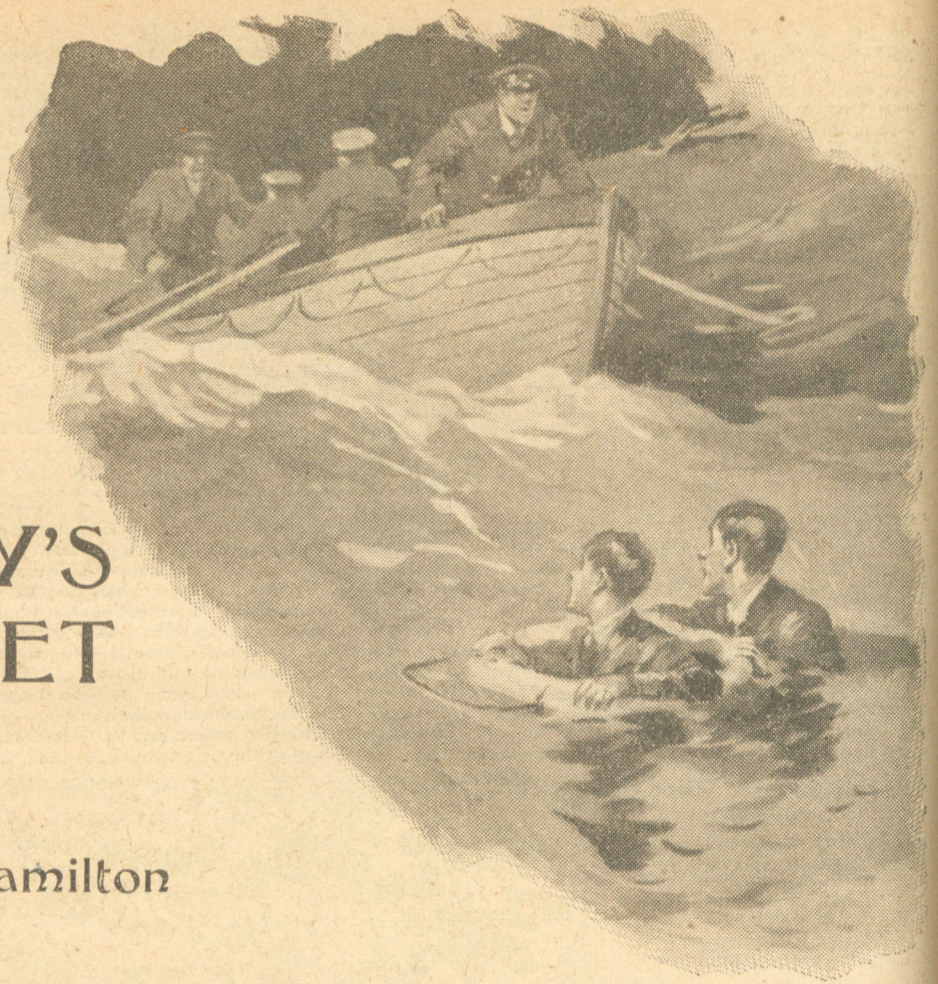
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BRITAIN'S £100,000 BID FOR A £100 CUP!— See page 3



A boat came surging over the wild waters, with Hall, the mate, in readiness to grasp the swimmers.



BUNNY'S SECRET

By Charles Hamilton

.....
• The adventures which Bunny Hare—miscalled the duffer of the family—longed for in his home town simply cannot be dodged now that he has shaken the sands of Margate from his feet. He has to put in some very brisk work to avoid destruction!
•

The Searchlight

THE sudden plunge over the rail of the yacht Albatross sent Bunny Hare into the heaving waters of the Bay of Biscay. Down, down he went, the water booming in his ears, the waves thundering over his head.

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

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

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

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

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

Yet the yacht could not be stopping to pick him up. Hall, the mate, had flung him into the sea in the presence of Mr. Earle, owner and master of the Albatross. He had been pitched ruthlessly overboard to keep the secret he had accidentally learned. And it was impossible that the plotters who had thus rid themselves of poor Bunny intended to pick him up and take him on board again.

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

"Oh crumbs!" Bunny murmured.

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

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

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

He was almost at the end of his strength. The beating of the heavy billows dazed and bewildered him. The darkness blinded him, and through it the red and green lights

of the Albatross gleamed like the eyes of some mocking demon. But that sudden and unexpected grasp in the black waters dragged Bunny back from death.

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

"Hold on!"

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

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

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

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

"Mr. Earle!" Bunny gasped.

It was the yachtsman, Mr. Earle. Bunny was hopelessly bewildered. Earle had stood by, white, conscience-stricken, when the mate hurled him into the sea. And Earle had leaped after him with the lifebelt, risking his life—indeed, throwing his life away. For what chance

was there of the yacht picking him up again in the blackness of the night from the wild, tossing waters of the Bay of Biscay?

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

"You, sir!" breathed Bunny.

"There's a chance," said Earle quietly. "Hall will pick me up if he can. He loses everything if he loses me. Stick it out!"

Then from the blackness of the night there came a sudden, white beam that shot like an arrow across

the dark heavens. Bunny stared up at it, dazzled. The beam of light rose from the sea, spreading fan-wise over the blackness of the sky.

"A—a searchlight!" gasped Bunny.

He knew that the beam must come from the yacht. They floated together on the heaving surges, their eyes following the searchlight.

It flickered round in a circle, gleaming with a ghostly effect as it touched the foaming waters. Hall, evidently, was doing his best to pick up his commander. The red and green lights of the yacht alternately appeared and disappeared. The Albatross was circling round, looking for them, and round the yacht the

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

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

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

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

The red and green lights, both in clear view, gleamed over the water, nearer at hand. The circling searchlight touched the foam-crested waves not a score of yards from the spot where Bunny and Earle floated. A

Gripping the revolver by the barrel, Bunny struck suddenly, with all his force, at the man groping under his pillow.



searchlight circled. But the end of the falling beam did not reach the swimmers. They floated in darkness beyond its radius.

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

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

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

Earle peered at him.

little nearer—only a little—and they must be seen by the watching eyes on board the Albatross.

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

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

With beating hearts they watched it glide round in the darkness, an

(Continued on page 16.)

Bunny's Secret

(Continued from page 13.)

arrow of light from the dark mass of the yacht.

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

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

Hands Off!

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

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

Earle, it was clear, had agreed to the mate's desperate device to get rid of the boy who knew the guilty secret. Yet at the last minute his conscience had driven him to throw over his confederate, to plunge into the sea to almost certain death to save the boy. Wild, reckless, desperate as Earle was, he was a decent man at heart—or had not yet forgotten that once he had been a decent man.

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

Earle understood his look, and his lip curved sardonically.

"You're safe, boy," he said. "You'll be picked up along with me." "Not if Hall can help it," muttered Bunny.

"Hall is under my orders, you fool!"

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

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

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

It came, sweeping and surging over the wild waters. It shot past the swimmers, swept away by a billow.

But it approached them again, and Hall, the mate, leaned over and grasped Earle. His dark, narrow eyes glinted at Bunny.

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

Both were dragged into the boat. Earle was almost exhausted, but he still kept his grasp on Bunny. The mate bent over them, and Bunny felt his sinewy hand trying to unloosen the yachtman's grasp. Earle's voice rang out loud and sharp:

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Your room, sir?" gasped Gubbins. "Yes! Are you deaf?" snapped Earle irritably.

"Yessir!" gasped Gubbins. And he helped Bunny below.

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

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

drinking," added Gubbins, as that explanation occurred to his mind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hall, his hard face sullen and savage in the electric light, stood

looking at the yacht owner with glinting eyes.

"You're mad," he was saying—"mad as a hatter! You agreed—" "Take a drink, ol' man!" said Earle.

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

Hall made a savage gesture. "Keep sober, if you can!" he snarled. "I tell you you're mad! You agreed that the boy should go overboard as he would not promise to keep the secret—not that I'd have trusted his promise. And then—then, when all was safe, you dived for him, you madman! By heavens, if I could have carried the game on without your help, I'd have left you to drown with him!"

"I know that!" Earle laughed. "It was touch and go, anyhow," snarled Hall.

"I know that, too."
"Now what's going to be done? The boy knows all. He has only to open his mouth at Gibraltar, and the game's up. One word will be enough, if the insurance company get hold of it—one word, you madman. It means chucking up the game."

"The boy's in our hands," said Earle suddenly. "If he gives his word he will keep it. I know a lad that can be trusted. You can trust nobody, Hall. And you're a fool for your pains. But if the game's up, let it be up. I tell you, Dick Hall, that the boy shall not be harmed. You've helped me to become a scoundrel and a swindler; you shall not make me a murderer! Mind, I mean every word I say! If anything happens to the boy after this, I'll put you in irons to take your trial for murder!"

Hall gritted his teeth. "You'll throw up the game—for that boy's sake! You fool—"

Earle rose unsteadily to his feet. "That's enough!" he said. "You've forgotten that I am owner and master on this yacht, and you're mate. I want no insolence! That's enough!"

"Look here—" hissed Hall. "That's enough, I tell you! Get back to the deck!"

Hall stood quivering with rage, his heavy fists clenched. His look showed how he longed to dash them into the handsome face before him.

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

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

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

Hall, trembling with rage, left the saloon. Earle resumed his seat, and

there was a gurgle of brandy and a swish of soda. He had said that he would think it out. But it seemed to come easier to him to drown thought.

Antoine's Antics.

"VOUS dormez toujours?" It was a low voice, speaking in French; and Bunny, half-awakening, heard it. He was still half asleep, and his eyes did not open. But though not fully conscious, he knew the rather nasal voice of Antoine, Mr. Earle's French valet. "On dorme! Bien!" The figure that bent over Bunny moved, and stepped back to the door of the state-room. It was then that Bunny's eyes opened.

He hardly realised for the moment

But it was not Mr. Earle, for Bunny could see that gentleman, stretched on the settee across the saloon. Mr. Earle was lying there asleep, and the listless, sprawling attitude of the sleeper told that it was the sleep of intoxication.

Antoine's whispering voice reached Bunny's ears.

"Il dorme toujours."
Bunny knew enough French to know that the valet was saying that he was still sleeping.

There was a low, growling whisper from the man outside, and Bunny recognised the voice of Hall:

"Speak English, you swab! What do you mean?"

"Pardon, monsieur! He sleep still."

"You're sure?"
"Tout a fait! I look—I see he sleep."

Bunny had been scarcely half awake. Now he was fully awake, and his heart was thumping. He lay still, without sound or movement, but every nerve was on the alert now. The voice of Hall, in that husky whisper, was more than enough to put Bunny on the alert. There was a movement at the door, and Bunny divined, rather than saw, that Hall was pushing Antoine aside to step into the room.

He wanted to know whether Bunny was really fast asleep, as Antoine had stated. Bunny lay quite still with closed eyes, breathing regularly. There was no sound, but he felt that the mate was bending over him, scanning him.


It required all Bunny's nerve to simulate sleep, with his enemy so close to him—the man who had tried to compass his death, and who would try again, he was certain, if it seemed safe to do so.

It was not till he heard whispering that he knew that Hall had withdrawn from the state-room again. He opened his eyelids a mere fraction, and peered from the dusky state-room to the lighted doorway of the saloon.

The stocky figure of the mate was visible now in the light. Antoine was in the doorway. Bunny had a glimpse of the valet's face. And from the look on it—cold, evil, sardonic—he knew that he had as much to fear from Antoine as from the mate. And he knew, too, that Antoine was one of the members of the ship's company who was in the plot—a party to the scheme to rook the insurance company. Whether any of the crew were in the secret, Bunny did not know. But he could not doubt that Antoine was. The husky whisper of the mate reached him.

"He sleeps soundly enough!"
"Mais oui, monsieur!" murmured Antoine.

"You know what's at stake, Antoine!" The mate's whisper barely reached Bunny's straining ears, near as he was. "That fool yonder would leave all to chance! The boy knows all—and I dare not lay a finger on him. That chicken-hearted swab won't stand for it!" Hall gritted his teeth. "We would keep his word, and clap me in irons!"



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where he was. Then he remembered. The soft bed, the downy pillow belonged to Mr. Earle. Bunny had had a long, sound sleep, but he awakened still tired. The long struggle in the waters of the Bay of Biscay had worn him out. It was pleasant and luxurious to lie without motion, and his head did not stir on his pillow as his eyes opened.

He was sleepy, and his eyes would have closed again, and he would have slid back into slumber—but for the sight that met them as they opened.

The light had been turned off in the state-room, but it was burning brightly in the adjoining saloon. The door was open, and Antoine stood there. He was speaking in a low voice to someone outside the state-room whom Bunny could not see.

Bunny's Secret

"C'est ca," murmured Antoine. "It is so—yes."

"If the boy lives till we reach Gib the game is up. My hand must not be seen in it, or, I tell you, that fool will keep his word. But you—"

"Moi, monsieur?"

"You're as deep in the game as I am, Antoine. You stand to lose your share if the game's thrown up—and thrown up it must be if the boy's silence cannot be secured."

"C'est ca!" murmured Antoine again. "But how?"

"Earle's revolver is under his pillow—the boy's head rests on it now." Hall's voice sank to a yet lower whisper. "I shall be with Earle when the shot is heard—that will see me clear. You understand? The boy found the revolver there, handled it, it went off—such accidents have happened before with a fool handling firearms!"

"C'est ca!" breathed Antoine.

"The boy is exactly the fool to do such a thing. You cannot be suspected. You will get away by the dressing-room door on the alleyway, and come running into the saloon at the sound of the shot."

There was a low laugh.

"Leave it to me, mon ami! He will not be the first. It is not for nothing that I have been an apache of Paris!"

"Make sure, Antoine."

"Bien sur, ami!"

The state-room door was almost shut. Only a narrow ribbon of light fell in from the brilliantly lighted saloon.

Antoine was on the inner side of the door. Bunny could hear his soft breathing in the gloom. Bunny, in the darkness, stirred without a sound.

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His hand glided under the pillow, seeking the revolver which Mr. Earle kept there. His gliding fingers found it, and closed on the barrel. Bunny's heart was beating hard!

From the saloon he heard Hall's voice, loud and sharp now, speaking to Earle as he shook the sleeping man by the shoulder:

"Wake up, man! Wake up, Mr. Earle!"

Earle sat up on the settee, and passed his hand over his eyes, staring dizzily at the mate in the bright light of the saloon. His brain was still confused with the fumes of drink.

"What are you waking me for?" he grunted. "Can't a man sleep on his own ship? Why have you left the deck?"

"Wilson's in charge now, and I've come down for a talk," answered Hall. "We've got a lot of things to settle."

"Leave them till to-morrow, then!" snapped Earle.

Hall sat on the end of the settee.

"To-morrow won't do," he answered. "Pull yourself together!"

Bunny lay still. In his hand the revolver was gripped by the barrel. Close beside the bunk he heard the stealthy movements of Antoine.

To draw the revolver from under the pillow—to shoot him dead as he lay in sleep—to place the discharged weapon in his hand—that was the scheme!

An instant would be enough for Antoine to slip away through the dressing-room, which had another door on the alleyway, and from that point he would rush into the saloon, as if suddenly alarmed by the shot.

Bunny understood it all quite clearly. But, unfortunately for the ruthless rascals, Bunny was wide awake, and the revolver was already in his grasp.

A thrill ran through him as he felt the stealthy movement of Antoine's hand slipping under the pillow, seeking for the revolver that was no longer there.

From the saloon came the sound of Hall's voice and the muttering, irritated tones of Earle in reply. While he talked, the mate was listening for the shot which would tell that the "accident" had happened.

But he did not hear it. What he heard was a groan, followed by a heavy fall—as Bunny, gripping the revolver by the barrel, struck suddenly and with all his force at the head of the man who was bending by the bunk, groping under the pillow.

That crashing blow, landing on the side of Antoine's head, sent him spinning. Bunny had put all his strength into it, and Antoine went down like a slaughtered ox. One faint groan escaped him, and he fell senseless beside the bunk.

Honour Bright!

EARLE started to his feet, and with an exclamation stared across the saloon to the door of the state-room. The blow, the groan, the fall had been heard distinctly by both men in the saloon.

Hall sprang up. Something had

gone wrong. There was a change in the programme—that was clear. Earle's eyes turned on him fiercely, accusingly.

"What is that, Hall? What—"

"How should I know?" snarled Hall, between his teeth. "I can't see through an oak door!"

Earle strode across the saloon. His step was unsteady, but the fumes of liquor seemed to have passed from his brain. He tore open the door of the state-room, and flashed on the light within. Bunny, sitting up in bed, blinked in the sudden light.

Earle stared at him, and then his glance went to the huddled, senseless figure that lay on the floor.

"Antoine!" he exclaimed. The French valet did not stir or speak. The blow had stunned him, and he lay huddled beside the bunk, unconscious. Earle's glance, as he stood with one hand on the doorpost, went back to Bunny again.

"What does this mean?" he panted.

"Mr. Hall can tell you, sir," answered Bunny.

"Hall! What—"

The mate's stocky form appeared by the yacht owner's side. He glared into the state-room with burning eyes, taking in the scene at a glance. Bunny was still holding the revolver by the barrel as he sat in the bunk. The mate panted with rage as Earle's grasp was laid on his shoulder.

"What does this mean, Hall? Answer me, you villain!"

"How should I know?" muttered Hall thickly.

"What was Antoine doing here?"

"How should I know?" repeated Hall stubbornly. The look in his eyes, on his furious face, told that he could barely restrain himself from springing at Bunny.

Bunny changed his grasp to the butt of the revolver.

"Keep off, Mr. Hall!" he said. "I'm not such a fool with firearms as you think, and I can handle a revolver without blowing my own brains out. When I was at Margate—"

"Tell me what this means, Hare," said Mr. Earle quietly.

"Certainly, sir!" said Bunny cheerfully. "Antoine was going to shoot me with your revolver, and get out of the dressing-room by the other door. You were going to suppose that I'd shot myself by accident. That was why Mr. Hall woke you up—so that you'd know that he had no hand in it. Isn't that it, Mr. Hall?"

The mate ground his teeth.

"So you were awake?" he panted. "I was jolly well awake!" agreed Bunny. "And if it wasn't for Mr. Earle I'd call out now and tell the whole crew what you've done!"

Earle stood breathing hard. He looked at Bunny, and looked at the savage face of the mate. There was a long silence, broken by a moan from Antoine. The one-time apache of Paris was coming to his senses. His eyes opened, and he stared up wildly.

"Mon Dieu!" he groaned. His hand went to his aching, throbbing

nead. "Mon Dieu! Nom d'un nor! La tete—la tete!"

He grasped at the bunk and raised himself to his feet, his dizzy eyes turning from Earle and Hall to Bunny. Bunny gave him a nod.

"I suppose you've got a pain in your jolly old tete?" he remarked. "I gave you rather a cosh on the napper."

"Mon Dieu!" gasped Antoine. His eyes burned at Bunny, and then turned apprehensively to his master.

Earle burst into a bitter laugh. "So that was it!" he said. He turned on Hall, and struck full at the dark, scowling face with his clenched fist.

The mate of the Albatross went spinning backwards into the saloon and crashed on the floor, then leaped up. Earle, his eyes flashing, followed him up, and struck again, and the mate fell like a log.

"Now get on deck!" said Earle, between his teeth, his eyes blazing down at the sprawling mate. "And mark this, Dick Hall—I'm warned now, and if anything should happen to the boy before we reach Gibraltar, whether your hand can be traced in it or not, you go into irons, to be handed over to the law! Get out of my sight!"

Hall rose slowly to his feet. He stood for a moment, as if undecided how to act, his face working with rage. Then, as Gubbins came running into the saloon, he hurried away and went on deck. Mr. Earle did not heed the staring steward.

He turned back into the state-room. "Antoine, you dog—"

"It was Hall that commanded, monsieur—" stammered Antoine,

shrinking from his master's blazing eyes.

"I'll teach you to obey my commands, not Hall's, while you are in my service!" said Earle.

He grasped Antoine by the collar, spun him out of the room, and kicked him across the saloon.

Gubbins stared, open-mouthed.

Antoine staggered away, yelling. "Oh, sir!" gasped Gubbins. "What has—"

"Mind your own business," snapped Earle, "and get out!"

"Oh, my eye!" gasped Gubbins. And he got out.

Mr. Earle turned back to Bunny. For a long minute he looked at the boy in silence.

"You're safe now," he said at last. "Neither of those scoundrels will dare to lift a finger against you after this. You're safe now—to live and betray me at Gibraltar!"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Bunny. "You can't think I'd say a word to hurt you, sir—whatever you did! Not a syllable, sir. My uncle at Margate—"

"Confound your uncle at Margate!"

"Yes, sir; but my uncle at Margate always said that one good turn deserved another," said Bunny. "I won't say a word, sir! I—I don't know whether it's wrong or right; but after you saved my life, how could I say a word against you? I couldn't, sir!"

Mr. Earle gave him a long, searching look.

"That's honest?" he asked.

"Honour bright, sir!" said Bunny.

"Let it go at that, then," muttered Mr. Earle. "I—I'm not sure I shall carry out the game. Heaven knows.

I'm sick of it already! If there were any other way—"

"My uncle at Margate, sir, always said that honesty was the best policy," said Bunny.

"For goodness' sake hold your tongue!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" said Bunny.

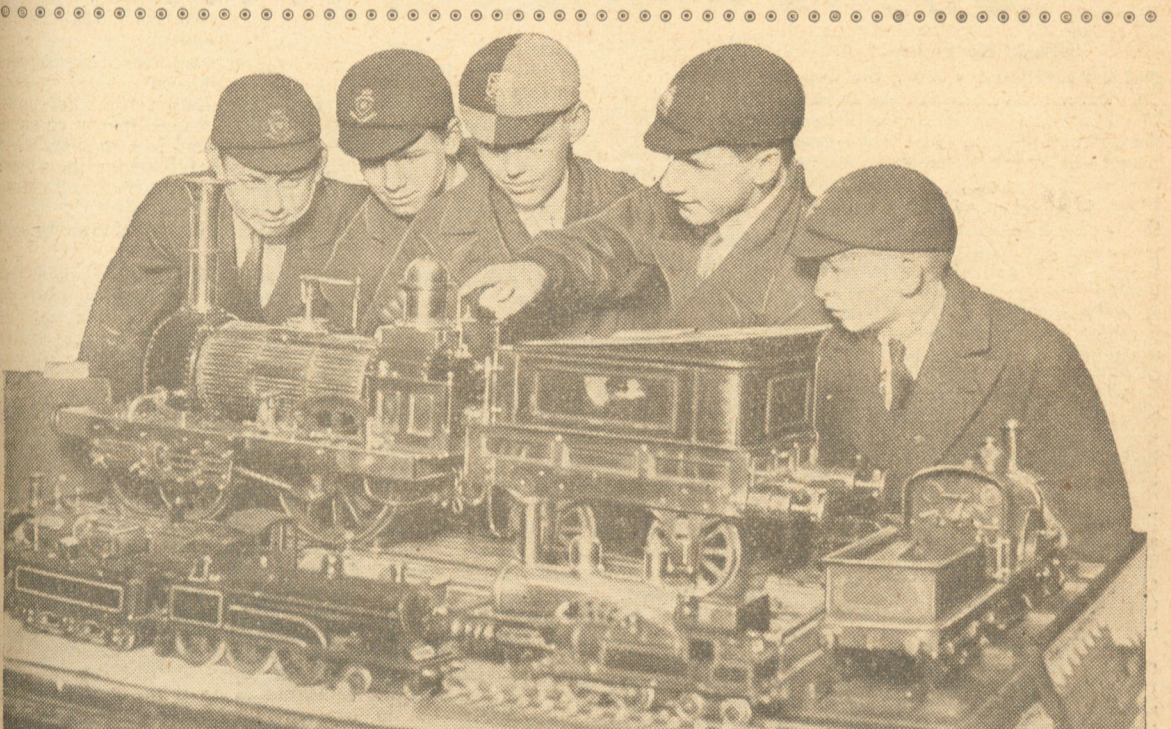
Next day Bunny resumed his duties as steward's boy. Hall spoke no word to him. Antoine avoided him, though sometimes his black eyes glittered at Bunny.

The Albatross steamed on down the coast of Portugal, heading for the Straits of Gibraltar. As the yacht neared the Straits, Bunny had plenty of food for thought. He was not in fear of Hall now, nor of Antoine. And Mr. Earle was uniformly kind to him. Every hour his attachment to his master grew stronger in Bunny's grateful heart.

But he was troubled in mind. His promise to Mr. Earle bound him to silence, and Bunny was not sorry that he had given the promise. Yet if Mr. Earle did not abandon his scheme, Bunny's silence made him something very like a party to a crime. That was a sore trouble to Bunny's honest mind.

He could only hope that Mr. Earle would draw back from what he contemplated doing, and that hope was growing stronger. But poor Bunny's mind was still sorely troubled by doubt and perplexity as the Albatross turned her stern to the Atlantic and ran through the Straits of Gibraltar.

(Another splendid Bunny story in next week's MODERN BOY—with poor old Bunny deeper in the soup than ever!)



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