

THE GRIMSLADE CRUSOES!

BY
FRANK
RICHARDS

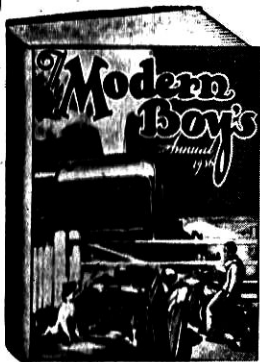


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THE GRIMSLADE CRUSOES!

By
FRANK RICHARDS



Stranded on a tropical island with their headmaster, "Sammy" Sparshott, Jim Dainty & Co., of Grimslade, are living the lives of modern Crusoes and facing perils and adventures galore. Do they mind? Not a bit . . . they're on the trail of a vast treasure. ;

CHAPTER 1.

The Hunted Rebel!

JIM DAINTY sat up suddenly in the dusky shade of the tropical forest on Castaway Island and listened intently.

Jim was one of the party of six juniors from Grimslade School, in Yorkshire, who had been wrecked when on a cruise, and cast away on a tropical island, together with their headmaster, Dr. Samuel Sparshott.

After many adventures in their company, Jim Dainty had voluntarily cut himself off from his companions—a rebel against the authority of Dr. Sparshott.

"Sammy" Sparshott was deeply

angry with Dainty for having defied his orders by swimming in the lagoon, in consequence of which piece of disobedience Jim Dainty had nearly lost his life at the jaws of a shark. The boy's subsequent desertion of the castaways' camp had only added fuel to the flame of Dr. Sparshott's wrath. There was no doubt that Jim Dainty was booked for a warm time at the hands of Sammy when he was caught.

But Jim did not mean to be caught!

He was sitting at the foot of an immense ceiba-tree. The great trunk was more than fifteen feet in width, and it was quite a good walk round it. Not that it would have been easy to walk round it, for other trees grew close.

mingling their branches with those of the big ceiba, and thick lianas hung like tangled ropes from the boughs.

It was scarcely possible to see ten feet in any direction, so luxuriant were the tropical undergrowths. But it was possible to hear, and to Jim Dainty's ears came a sound of rustling and brushing, that told of someone unseen forcing a way through the wood.

The rebel of Grimslade sat up and listened, with a glint in his eyes and a grim squaring of his jaw. Deep in the wood on the western side of the solitary island, Jim had fancied that he was safe from search and recapture—but he had not felt quite sure! In dealing with a man like Dr. Samuel Sparshott, the headmaster of Grimslade, you never could tell!

"My giddy goloshes!" It was the panting voice of Ginger Rawlinson. "It's thick here, sir!"

"And hot!" came Streaky Bacon's gasping tones.

"Both!" agreed the cool, quiet voice of Sammy Sparshott.

On the hottest day—and it was always hot on Castaway Island—Sammy Sparshott seemed as cool as a cucumber.

"Dainty can't have come this way, sir!" It was Sandy Bean who spoke, and Jim grinned as he heard the words. "That was a monkey we saw a few minutes ago!"

"Rather like Dainty, to look at—but not Dainty!" said Ginger. And there was a breathless laugh.

"Dainty came this way!" answered Dr. Sparshott's cool voice. "I have picked up several traces of him. I fancy we are close on him, too! Keep your eyes open! The young rascal must be caught this time and taken home!"

Jim Dainty rose to his feet. In the silence of the wood, silent save for the chattering of parrots and monkeys, the words came quite clearly to him—the speakers were not six yards away.

Flight was futile; the sound of rustling would have guided the pursuers to him at once. And the rebel of Grimslade was as determined as ever not to

be taken back to the castaways' hut on the eastern side of the island.

Many days had passed since he had fled from the little community of shipwrecked Grimsladers; he was still free, and he was going to remain free.

Jim stepped close to the gnarled, irregular trunk of the huge ceiba and climbed. There was hiding-space for an army almost, in the forest of branches above him. He swarmed swiftly up the massive trunk, and reached a spot ten or twelve feet up, where several mighty branches jutted out in various directions, with a kind of rugged floor in the centre.

It was deeply dusky under the thick foliage. Swiftly Jim Dainty clambered into the centre of the jutting branches—and then, with a sudden gasp, he felt himself falling.

"Oh!"

That sharp gasp left his lips as he fell into utter darkness. It had not occurred to him that the ancient tree was hollow. But it was, and he had clambered over the hollow and pitched headlong in. Before he knew what was happening he was shooting down into the dense, dusky darkness of the interior of the tree-trunk.

Bump!

He landed heavily, sprawling and panting. He had not fallen far—seven or eight feet perhaps—but the sudden shock was almost stunning. It was fortunate for him that he fell on mouldering wood and a thick bed of old leaves that had collected in the hollow.

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Jim, as he struggled to his feet—which sank several inches into the mouldering mass of old leaves that had softened his fall.

But as he pulled himself together and collected his scattered wits he grinned in the darkness of the hollow tree. Inadvertently he had tumbled into a very safe hiding-place.

Keen as Sammy Sparshott's eyes were, they could not penetrate the thick trunk and spot him inside. Hollow as it was, the outer case of the big trunk was probably still two or three feet thick—

it was like a massive wooden wall round him.

Jim listened intently. Through the thick trunk no sound was audible, but the opening at the top let in sound. He heard a rustling and a murmur of voices. Suddenly he became aware of a pair of bright eyes staring down at him in the hollow tree, and gave a violent start.

The next moment he chuckled silently as he saw that it was a monkey staring at him.

Peering down at Jim, the ape chattered with excitement, and the school-boy below watched it hang on by its tail and swing down to investigate.

At any other time the monkey's curiosity would have amused him. But it occurred to him now that the creature's antics might draw the attention of the searchers to the spot.

With that thought in his mind, he was careful to make no movement to startle the ape and send it scuttling away in alarm. He stood quite still, watching the animal as it swung down—and then, with a sudden thought, he took a nut from his pocket.

The monkey, swinging on his tail, blinked at him, and seemed a little alarmed by the sight of him at close quarters. But, perceiving the nut, he grabbed it in a paw and promptly transferred it to his jaws. Having disposed of it, he hung there, watching the junior, apparently in happy expectation of another nut!

Jim grinned, and took a handful from his pocket, which the monkey took one after another, cracking them with cheerful contentment.

"Here, I think!" came a deep voice startlingly close at hand. And Jim started as he realised that only the thickness of the surrounding trunk separated him from Sammy Sparshott.

The deep voice startled the monkey, and he swung upward and scampered into the branches above. There was a yell from Rawlinson below.

"There he goes—in the tree!"

"Fathead!" It was Dick Dawson's

voice. "That's that dashed monkey again!"

"Mein gootness!" came a fat, gasping voice. "I like not tose monkeys! I tink tat perhaps tat peastly prute of a monkey trow down te nuts on mein kopf."

"Nothing in your head to damage, old Boche bloater!" said Ginger.

"Peastly prute—"

"Dainty has been here!" It was Dr. Sparshott's deep voice again. "There are signs of a camp. There are banana-skins here—"

"Ach! Himmel! Yarooooop!" roared Fritz Splitz.

There was the sound of a heavy bump! Evidently Fritz Splitz had found one of the banana-skins—by treading on it!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Within the hollow tree Jim Dainty was grinning. He made no sound.

"You should not be so clumsy, Splitz!" came Lr. Sparshott's deep voice. "Silence, please! Dainty has been here—this is his camp! He cannot be far away! It is nearly noon, and we shall camp here for lunch!"

"Good egg!" gasped Ginger. "I can do with a rest!" All the castaway schoolboys were tired from the struggle through the dense, tropical forest. Jim Dainty drew a deep breath. He had intended to keep doggo in the interior of the ceiba till the hunters passed on. But they were not passing on; they were camping under the mighty branches, and the rebel of Grimslade was a prisoner in the hollow tree.

CHAPTER 2.

Tree'd!

DR. SAMUEL SPARSHOTT, his tattered mortar-board tilted over his eyes, sat leaning against the trunk of the ceiba, frowning.

Ginger and Bacon and Bean and Dick Dawson lay in the thick herbage, resting and dozing. Fritz Splitz, extended on his back, with his eyes shut and his mouth wide open, was snoring.

They had eaten their midday meal, but until the fierce heat of the tropical day had passed, they were not resuming their way.

Sammy's brows were knitted under his mortar-board. He was deeply and intensely angry with the rebel of Grimslade, who was giving him all this trouble; and every day that passed only made him more determined to bring the rebel to book.

Sammy was keen and wary; but it did not occur to him, as he sat there thinking it over, that the rebellious junior was watching him from above.

For a long hour or more, Jim had remained in the interior of the tree, after which, fed up with his imprisonment, he climbed silently up the rugged inner side of the hollow trunk to the open space above. There, hidden by branches, he peered down at the camp under the tree.

He had hoped to find the campers asleep, and to get a chance of stealing softly away. So far as the boys were concerned, he could have done so; but a glance showed him that Sammy was awake, and would spot a retreating movement at once.

Fritz was directly below him, his capacious mouth wide open, and the temptation to drop something into that wide mouth was almost too strong for Jim.

He grinned at the idea. The rucksack was on his back, and he had supplies of food in it, gathered in the forest. Quietly, he drew out a large, fat plantain.

Holding it directly above Fritz' wide-open mouth, he hesitated. But he was fed up with inaction and waiting and watching. Suddenly he let the plantain fall! It dropped fairly into the wide receptacle below!

A horrible gurgle came from Fritz Spltz as he woke suddenly. He started up, gurgling, gasping, and spluttering frantically. Instantly Jim Dainty dropped back into the hollow trunk.

"Urrrrgh! Gurrgh! Wurrgh!" came in gurgles from Friedrich von

Spltz. "Ach! Himmel! I vas joked mit meinsel in mein troat after! I vas joking! Mein gootness! I have no more te breff! Urrgh!"

"My giddy goloshes! What the thump—" Ginger jumped up, and the other fellows sat up and stared. Dr. Sparshott turned a frown on the fat, gurgling German.

"Spltz! What—" he barked.

"Gurrgh! I joke in mein troat!" gurgled Fritz. "Someting trop in mein mout' vile that I sleep mit meinsel after! Grugggh!"

Dr. Sparshott stared at the fat plantain which had fallen from Fritz' mouth as he started up. He stared at it keenly. Sammy did not need telling that plantains did not grow on ceiba-trees! It was no accidental fall of fruit that had happened. He rose to his feet, and stared up grimly into the vast branches overhead. His eyes glinted.

"Ach! Urrgh! I tink tat peastly prute of a monkey trow tat peastly ting at mc!" gasped Fritz Spltz.

"That is a plantain," said Dr. Sparshott, "and there are no plantains growing near here. It has been carried from a distance."

"But it trop in mein mout' pefore—"

"Monkeys," said Dr. Sparshott, "will pelt people with anything near at hand! But I have never heard of a monkey carrying missiles from a distance."

"It couldn't have dropped from the tree, sir!" said Ginger.

"It could have dropped from the hand of a boy in the tree, Rawlinson!"

"Oh, my giddy goloshes!"

"I think," said Dr. Sparshott calmly, "that Dainty is not far away! We have found his camp; and I have no doubt that he was here and heard us coming! Dainty is in that tree!"

Ginger whistled.

Every word came to the junior in the hollow trunk. Jim set his lips, rather repentant of that little jest on the sleeping Rhinelander. He had hardly expected Sammy to jump to it like this!

"Then we've jolly well got the silly young ass!" said Streaky Bacon. "He's given himself away!"

Sammy stood with his head thrown back, staring up into the vast mass of branches and foliage. Ginger & Co. were quite ready to clamber into the tree at a word from Sammy, and search for the rebel there. But the gigantic tree, almost a forest in itself, would need a lot of searching—some of the branches extending as far as eighty feet from the parent trunk. And Dainty, if found, was not likely to come quietly! Sammy had no wish to risk lives and limbs. His voice suddenly barked out:

"Dainty! I know that you are there, and I know that you can hear me! I order you to come down from that tree."

Jim Dainty certainly heard. But he gave no heed. Dr. Sparshott paused, like Brutus, for a reply. Like Brutus, he paused in vain.

"Cheeky young ass!" muttered Ginger.

"Very well, Dainty!" said Dr. Sparshott quietly. "You refuse to obey your headmaster! But this time, I think, you will not be able to elude me. I shall remain here until you descend and give yourself up. My boys, we are going to camp here for the night! Probably that rebellious young rascal will be tired of staying up in the tree before sunset."

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Jim Dainty. It was many, many long hours to sunset, and the prospect of remaining imprisoned in the hollow tree through the long, hot hours of the tropical day was dismaying.

But he was not thinking of surrender. It was a contest now between him and Sammy, and he was not going to be beaten!

He heard Sammy barking out orders to the juniors. A sound of rustling in the underwoods followed. He knew what was happening. The five juniors were being posted round the great ceiba at various spots to watch for him to

make an attempt at escape. If he quitted the refuge of the tree he would be pounced upon at once.

His teeth shut hard. All his resolution, all his obstinacy were roused now. Somehow, he was going to beat them.

A few minutes passed, and then Jim Dainty crawled along a wide-extended branch, peering down through the twigs and leaves as he went. A glimpse of a mortar-board below sent him crawling back to the trunk.

He selected a branch on the opposite side of the tree and crawled out again. On that side he was, at least, secure from Sammy's keen eyes. At a distance of forty feet from the trunk he stopped, as a well-known rumbling sound reached his ears from below.

Friedrich von Splitz, set to watch like the rest, had gone to sleep at his post! There he lay, half-hidden in tree-ferns, fast asleep and snoring.

Jim's eyes gleamed. This was a chance! To drop from the tree without awakening the fat German, and creep away on tiptoe—

He swung himself down the branch on his hands and dropped lightly. He was only a couple of yards from the sleeping Fritz; but the saucer-eyes did not open. Fritz was far away in the land of dreams, revelling in visions of the fat and juicy sausages of his native land!

Breathing hard, the rebel of Grimslade made a step—but he did not make another. A red head showed through the thickets, and there was a yell.

"My giddy goloshes! Got him!" The next instant Ginger Rawlinson had jumped on him.

"Oh, you red-headed rotter!" panted Jim, as he struggled fiercely. He had been trapped—trapped like a rabbit! Ginger was grinning as he grasped him.

"Got you, you tick!" gasped Ginger. "Caught you out, you cheeky worm! I fancied you'd hear that Boche bloater snoring, and think it was a safe way to cut. And I was jolly well watching

—"

Jim had guessed that already. He

struggled desperately to throw off the red-headed junior, as he heard the sound of calling voices, trampling footsteps, and brushing in the thickets. Through the tall tree-ferns a tattered mortar-board showed.

"This way!" Ginger was yelling. "I've got him—I—Urggh! Whoop! Oh, my giddy goloshes!"

A sudden uppercut sent Ginger staggering. Jim Dainty tore free. For an instant he stood panting for breath—then, with a desperate spring, he was clambering into the ceiba again. The grasp of Dr. Sparshott's hand missed his foot by barely an inch, as he went.

"Dainty!" roared Sammy. "You young rascal!"

"Jim, you fool!" panted Dawson.

But Jim Dainty was gone. He had escaped by the skin of his teeth; but he had escaped. Panting for breath, he rolled back into the dusty, dark hollow of the tree-trunk. Ginger, nursing his jaw, mumbled with wrath. Sammy Sparshott set his lips in a tight line.

"I will break a bamboo on that young rascal when I catch him!" he said. "Take your places—and keep watch! He cannot escape!"

CHAPTER 3.

A Wild-Goose Chase!

ARUSTLE in the thick foliage and the glitter of two bright, red-rimmed eyes. From above the junior imprisoned in the trunk of the hollow ceiba, the monkey looked down, grinning amicably.

Jim Dainty, squatting uncomfortably in the hollow tree, grinned faintly up at his visitor. For a moment he had fancied it was one of the Grimsladers clambering into the ceiba, and it was a relief to see again the black, hairy face of the ape to whom he had given the nuts.

Apparently the monkey remembered that gift, and, having got over the alarm caused by the arrival of the Grimslade crowd, had come back for

more. But Jim had no more to give him—for he was at the end of all his supplies.

For long, hot hours he had been a prisoner now. Dr. Sparshott, knowing nothing of the hollow trunk, supposed that he was lodged somewhere in the vast branches. Wherever he was, there was no escape for him—the great tree was watched vigilantly on all sides.

Jim had finished the supply of food in his rucksack long ago; and, worse still, not a drop of water remained in the bottle slung to his belt. And it was hot—terribly hot and terribly stuffy inside the mouldering trunk of the ceiba—and thirst had tormented him for a long time.

There was no help for it—he had to endure it or surrender—and surrender was as far from his thoughts as ever.

At the back of his mind was a desperate scheme of escape—by clambering from the tree to the next, and so on from tree to tree, like a monkey, without descending to the earth at all; but he would be heard and seen and followed. They would not fail to keep track of him. That scheme had to be left till nightfall, when it offered a chance of good luck. In the meantime, hungry, and tormented by thirst; he had to wait.

The big monkey clambered down into the hollow, evidently having no fear of the fellow who had fed him. He even pawed Jim's sleeve and muzzled with his flat, flabby nose. He wanted more nuts; and Jim, searching through his pockets, found one that he had overlooked—which his new friend cracked, and ate with great pleasure.

Jim's eyes were so used by this time to the dusky interior of the tree that he could see about him fairly well; and he watched the grimaces of the ape with a grinning face.

Suddenly the monkey made a snatch at Jim's hat, and placed it on his own head. Jim chuckled. He reached out to take the hat back, but the monkey jumped away, chattering and grimacing.

With Jim's hat on his head, the ape

clambered swiftly up from the hollow trunk, and sat above, out of Jim's reach. There was a sudden shout from below the tree.

"There he is!" It was Sandy Bean's voice.

"Where?" came the deep tones of Dr Sparshott.

"I can see his hat— Oh, he's gone now!"

Startled by the voices, the monkey dropped back into the hollow trunk beside Jim.

"Keep watch!" said the headmaster of Grimslade. "I have no doubt that that young rascal will tire of his rebellious folly before much longer."

Sammy Sparshott was right there; the rebellious young rascal was tired, more than tired, already. It was still long hours to dark, and Jim wondered desperately whether he would be able to stick it out much longer.

He did not want his hat in the hollow tree, and he allowed the monkey to retain it. Suddenly a gleam came into his eyes as a thought flashed into his mind—caused by what he had heard from Sandy Bean. Sandy had seen the hat on the monkey's head among the leaves, and supposed that it was on Jim's.

"My only Aunt Jemima!" murmured Jim breathlessly.

He opened his rucksack. In that he had packed a change of clothes before getting away from the castaways' hut on the other side of the island. He sorted out a pair of cotton shorts and a shirt. Immediately, his companion eyed the new articles with inquisitive interest, and stretched out to paw them.

"Yours, old bean!" murmured Jim.

He made soothing, friendly gestures but they were hardly needed. The monkey grinned with delight at having the shirt slipped on him, and chattered away with great glee. Then Jim slipped the cotton shorts over the hairy legs and secured them.

In the dusk of the hollow tree anyone might have taken the monkey for a human being, clad as he was.

"Now get out, old monkey-nut!" whispered Jim.

He gave the ape a shove and a push without avail, then he bestowed a smack, and the monkey, with a startled and indignant squeal, whipped out of the hollow tree into the branches above.

Jim listened, with beating heart. Was it going to work?

It was!

There was a shout from Ginger Rawlinson:

"There he goes! After him!"

Shout after shout answered. The monkey, in shirt and shorts and hat, scrambling in the foliage, was seen only in glimpses, and not a fellow who glimpsed him had the slightest doubt that it was Jim Dainty, making at last a desperate attempt at escape!

Startled and alarmed by the clamour, the monkey scuttled along a branch, leaped in the next tree, and scuttled through it to another. There was a trampling of feet and a cracking of the underwoods. The deep voice of Sammy Sparshott shouted:

"This way! Follow on!"

Jim Dainty chuckled breathlessly. His trick had succeeded—even the wary Sammy had no doubt that it was the elusive rebel whom he glimpsed from moment to moment clambering high in the branches from tree to tree.

Voices and tramping footsteps grew fainter in the distance. There was silence at last in the forest round the great celba—hunters and hunted were gone!

Jim Dainty clambered up, and dropped from the tree to the earth, glad enough to get into the open air again. With a cheery grin on his face, he started through the forest in a direction opposite from that taken by the monkey and his pursuers. Ten minutes later he was kneeling at the woodland stream, drinking deep.

Meanwhile, the pursuit was going on, through the thick forest, far away from the rebel of Grimslade. The monkey, in a state of wild alarm, was fleeing

fast; but the pursuers kept pace, breaking through thickets and tree-ferns, wrestling through tangled lianas, panting for breath, but never stopping a moment, only Fritz Splitz panting far in the rear.

Sammy Sparshott kept ahead, watchful of the fugitive to drop from a tree, marvelling at the activity with which the supposed junior swung from one high branch to another. His keen ears followed the rustling and brushing in the foliage overhead; his keen eyes caught, from moment to moment, a glimpse of a hat or shirt, or cotton shorts. Not a doubt entered his mind till the chase had gone on for more than half a mile.

Then a more open space in the forest was reached; and the fugitive either had to turn back or to descend—or to take the risk of a long leap from one tree to another, which no human being could have made in safety. And then

Sammy Sparshott staggered in amazement.

For the fugitive, coming out into full view, swung to a branch by a long tail—which Jim Dainty certainly could never have done!

"What—" gurgled the Head of Grimslade, transfixed.

"My giddy goloshes!" howled Ginger, staring.

For a long moment they had sight of the figure in shirt and shorts and hat swinging by its tail! Then, with a long swing, it shot to a distant tree, caught hold, and clambered. There was a stirring and a rustling in the branches as it fled on.

But the Grimsladers no longer pursued. They stood transfixed. The expression on Sammy Sparshott's face was extraordinary.

"A—a—a—a monkey!" stuttered Streaky Bacon. "That—that—that's a monkey! It—it—it's got Dainty's clobber on, but it—it—it's a m-m-monkey!"

"Done!" gasped Ginger.

Sammy Sparshott stared, speechless, after the vanished monkey. Then, with-

out a word, he swung round and started back through the forest at a rapid run. He knew now—and he covered the ground back to the giant ceiba at a pace that left the juniors hopelessly behind.

But he had little hope that Jim Dainty would still be there. Obviously, the Grimslade rebel had played that extraordinary trick on his hunters to get a chance to clear—and when Sammy reached the big ceiba, he had cleared!

Where, Sammy was left guessing.

Deep in a bed of leaves, rolled in a tattered blanket, Jim Dainty slept soundly under the midnight stars, his head resting on his rucksack. He awakened drowsily at a stirring in the leaves beside him. His eyes opened, and his heart jumped.

Something touched him in the darkness and for a moment he fancied that Sammy had run him down. Then, in the deep gloom, he had a glimpse of a grinning black face, of red-rimmed eyes winking under an old hat!

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Jim.

It was the monkey; and, with a squeal of satisfaction, he snuggled down in the bed of leaves beside the junior. Jim gave a sleepy chuckle. Evidently the ape had taken a fancy to him, and had looked for him and found him again. Apparently he was going to stick to his human pal.

"Good old bean!" chuckled Jim. "I'm going to be Robinson Crusoe, and you're going to be my Man Friday. Good-night, Friday."

And when Jim awoke in the morning Friday was still there, sitting up in the bed of leaves, cracking nuts and grinning.

CHAPTER 4.

Friday Takes a Hand!

"CHUCK 'em down!" chuckled Jim Dainty.

Whiz, whiz, whiz!
Jim looked upward, laughing.

Castaway Island lay scorching under the tropical sunshine. Jim Dainty stood under a tall palm on the western side of the lonely island. There were clusters of coconuts on the palm, and coconuts were dropping round the Grimslade junior.

Clinging to the palm by his tail, Friday grinned and chattered gleefully as he tossed down nuts to his master.

"Go it, old bean!" chuckled Jim. "Chuck 'em down! You're not pretty to look at, Friday, but you're jolly useful."

For several days Friday had been Jim's only companion. He was free to go if he liked, but he did not like. He had taken a fancy to the Grimslade junior and stuck to him.

During those days Jim had seen and heard nothing of the other castaways—Dr. Sparshott, his headmaster, Ginger & Co., Dick Dawson, and Fritz Splitz. He was as determined as ever not to go back and submit, and he wondered whether Sammy Sparshott had decided, at long last, to give up searching for him, and leave him to his own devices.

But he was not thinking of Sammy at the present moment. He watched the antics of the monkey in the tall palm, laughing as the falling coconuts plopped round him.

He did not hear a faint rustle at a little distance, and as he did not look round he did not see a tattered mortarboard that showed over a clump of mimosa. And he did not know that the steely-grey eyes of Dr. Samuel Sparshott, headmaster of Grimslade School, were fixed on him.

Sammy smiled grimly.

He had run down the fugitive at last, and caught him napping. For a few moments Dr. Sparshott stood looking at the rebel of Grimslade. Then he strode forward. Jim Dainty spun round with a startled exclamation as a heavy hand dropped on his shoulder.

"Sammy!" gasped Jim.

He gave a wrench to free his shoulder, but he might as well have wrenched

at a steel vice. Sammy's sinewy grip was more than vice-like.

"Exactly!" drawled Dr. Sparshott.

"I'm not coming back!"

"Your mistake!" said Dr. Sparshott.

"I think you are, Dainty!"

Jim panted.

"I'll run away again. You don't want me back. You're all down on me; you don't want me."

"Do you expect anybody to want a headstrong, wilful, disobedient young rascal?" asked Dr. Sparshott calmly.

"You are a trouble and responsibility, Dainty; but on this lonely island, where we are shipwrecked, it is my duty to keep you in my charge. Even at Grimslade"—Sammy smiled whimsically—"we never sack a man, as you remember."

"I won't come!" muttered Jim desperately.

He made a sudden clutch at the slim trunk of the palm. He clasped his arms round it and held on. Sammy gave a jerk, and another jerk, but the rebel of Grimslade held desperately to the palm. He was not going back to the hut on East Bay if he could help it.

Sammy, never relaxing his grip, looked at him thoughtfully. Friday had ceased to throw down coconuts, and was staring curiously at the scene from the top of the palm, aware that something was going on, but not understanding it. Dr. Sparshott gave the monkey no heed. His eyes were fixed grimly on Jim Dainty.

"I am going to give you," he said quietly, "the whopping of your life, Dainty, for your disobedience and rebellion. Apparently you desire me to give it to you before we return to the hut. I shall oblige you."

Dr. Sparshott had a thick, flexible bamboo under one arm. He grasped Dainty's collar with his left hand, and slipped the bamboo down into his right.

"Let go that tree!" he barked.

"I won't!" answered Dainty, between his teeth.

Whack! The crack of the bamboo rang like a pistol-shot through the tropical woods. Jim Dainty gave a yell.

Whack! Whack! There was no doubt that Sammy was deeply, intensely angry, though he was not in the least excited. Sammy never got excited. But he was grimly resolved to deal with the rebel of Grimslade—drastically.

Whack! Whack! Every cut rang loud and hard, and it was going on till the rebel let go the palm and came away. Whack, whack!

There was an excited chattering from the monkey in the palm, unheeded by either the schoolboy or the schoolmaster. Whack, whack, whack! Friday stared and chattered, his red-rimmed eyes gleaming from his black, hairy face. Suddenly he grasped another coconut from the palm.

Whiz! Crash!

"Oh!" gasped Dr. Sparshott.

He relaxed his grasp on Dainty and staggered back as the coconut crashed on his head from above. The impact cracked the nut, and came near cracking Sammy's own "nut." Dazed for the moment, hardly knowing what had hit him, the headmaster of Grimslade staggered back. Jim, panting, tore himself loose.

"What——" panted Sammy dizzily.

Jim Dainty leaped away. Another second and the headmaster of Grimslade was leaping after him. His grasp would have closed on the rebel before he could get clear. But, whiz, came a couple of coconuts from above, crashing on his head, and Sammy pitched forward and fell on his knees.

That was all the chance that Jim wanted. He darted away through the palms like a hunted deer. Dr. Sparshott staggered to his feet, his head spinning.

"Stop!" he roared.

Dainty vanished among the trunks. Sammy made a stride in pursuit, and then stopped, clasping his hands to his aching head. He stared up at the ape, who jabbered and chattered defiance at

him, and hurled coconuts. Then, as Jim had disappeared, Friday swung himself away into another tree, and vanished also. Dr. Sparshott blinked after him.

"My hat!" ejaculated Sammy.

A mile away, deep in the tropical forest, the fleeing rebel stopped at last, and threw himself down to rest, panting, in the shade of a tree. He grinned while he panted.

"What a jolly old surprise for Sammy! He didn't know I had a pal! Good old Man Friday, though I suppose I've lost him now."

There was a rustle in the thickets, and a queer figure in shorts had dropped beside Jim. He had not lost his Man Friday. Friday did not mean to be lost.

CHAPTER 5.

The Men from the Sky!

B UZZZZZ!

It was a sound like a million bees close at hand. Jim Dainty, half asleep in the tropical heat, had heard it for some time without heeding it. But at last he sat up in his hammock and took notice.

The Grimslade rebel was in his camp. A hammock, made of thick lianas plaited together, swung in the branches of a great ceiba-tree. At twenty feet from the ground it was invisible from below, screened by the lower branches, and the rebel hunters might have passed under the tree a dozen times without dreaming that the fugitive schoolboy was camped there.

The gigantic trunk of the ceiba was hollow, and in the interior Jim parked his camping outfit and his provisions and a can of water. It was a safe refuge and hiding-place if the hunt came close.

Like all dwellers near the Equator, the Grimslade castaways found it necessary to take the "siesta," or mid-day rest, in the tropical heat of the day. Jim was dozing in his hammock.

and Friday had cleared off on some business of his own, when that steady drone far above reached his ears, and at last drew his attention.

Sitting up in the hammock, Jim listened, with a perplexed frown on his brow. Above him the thick branches shut out the sky, save for a thin gleam of blue here and there. He could see nothing but foliage as he looked up.

That continuous buzzing came from over the treetops, like millions of bees or billions of mosquitoes. But it could not be either. Familiar as the sound was at home in England, it took Jim some time to realise that it was—what it must be!

"A plane!" he breathed.

It was the purring of an engine—it could be nothing else! Jim Dainty's eyes danced as he realised it.

Castaway Island was far off the map—no vessel ever passed within sight of it. Since the Grimsladers had been shipwrecked only one craft had touched at the solitary island—the schooner of Captain Luz, the treasure-seeker from Martinique, and that was long since.

That schooner had gone down in a hurricane, and the survivors, enemies of the castaways, had not been likely to send them help. The Grimslade Crusoes still hoped to see a sail—but the hope was growing faint.

Probably it had never occurred to any of them to hope for an aeroplane. But it was a plane that was buzzing over the island now, and Jim knew it! If it was possible to signal—

He rolled out of the hammock and clambered down to the earth. For the moment he forgot that he was in rebellion against his headmaster, and on terms of warfare with his old comrades. If it was possible to signal the plane it meant rescue—that was all that he was thinking of now.

From the thick tropical forest he could not see even the sky, let alone the plane, and he tore away through the trees, heading for the open beach. Ereathless, excited, heedless of the heat,

though it made his face stream with perspiration, Jim Dainty ran his hardest.

He came out of the forest at last, in sight of the sea on the western shore, and gazed up. The buzz of the engine was still in his ears. Against the blue of the sky flashed a shape, flying low. It had been circling over the forest, but now it had turned seaward again and was over the water.

Jim ran down the sand towards the sea. He shouted, in his excitement, oblivious of the fact that his voice could not possibly reach the men in the plane. Were they going—believing that they had only sighted an uninhabited island?

He had to draw their attention somehow. It was not likely that the castaways on the other side of the island had seen or heard it, with the high hill in between. All depended on Jim. Almost on the margin of the sea he stopped, waved his hat, and shouted wildly.

The plane zoomed on, circling. It was over the shore again now, flying so low that Jim could make out every detail of the structure and glimpse the two men in the cockpits. It struck him that the airmen were looking for a landing-place—impossible in the wooded interior of the island.

The plane had come from the west—that is from one of the West Indian islands—Jamaica, perhaps, or Martinique or Cuba or Trinidad. Whoever they were, wherever they came from, surely they would be glad to give help to shipwrecked castaways—at least, to take news of them so that a ship might be sent to take them off.

Jim waved and shouted till he was tired; but he could see now that the flying-men were going to land—they were picking out a level stretch of beach for the landing.

"Oh, good!" gasped Jim, as the plane swooped down.

It landed on level sand a quarter of a mile from where he stood, and taxied along the sand as if on the tarmac. Instantly Jim Dainty started running

towards it. If only his friends—they were friends again now, in his thoughts—had been there to see it!

But he would soon carry them the news. Sammy would forgive him when he brought the news of rescue! Panting for breath, Jim raced towards the halted plane.

It had stopped, and the two airmen had got down. They had seen him, and were standing beside the plane, watching him curiously as he came. The island, unknown and remote, was to all appearance uninhabited, and as they had landed on the western side they could have seen nothing of the little settlement on East Bay.

Yet it struck Jim that they were not surprised to see him. They watched him keenly and curiously as he raced towards them over the sand; but nothing in their manner indicated surprise at the sight of an English face on that lonely, deserted West Indian island.

The pilot of the plane, a short, squat man with a face like tanned leather, lighted a cigarette as he watched Jim. The other man, taller and slimmer, after a long and curious stare at the running schoolboy, turned away and stood looking inland towards the forest, so that Jim could not see his face as he came.

Jim noticed that the squat pilot spoke to the taller man, who nodded, and then the pilot, standing squarely with his stocky legs wide apart, watched the schoolboy come up.

There was a faint grin on his hard, tanned face, not wholly pleasant. Jim, gasping for breath, stood unable to speak for a moment or two, and the man who had piloted the aeroplane addressed him.

"I guess you're in some hurry, boy!"

"Yes," gasped Jim, finding his voice. "We're castaways on this island—we've been here for months. Thank goodness you've come! I was afraid you were going on—till I saw you landing."

"I guess you needn't have worried a

lot!" grinned the tanned man. "We was s're looking for this island."

"Looking for it?" panted Jim.

"Sure! I guess I've been here afore, and savvy the lie of the land, too. Though I reckon I got no rum along this trip."

Jim stared at him. Now that he was close at hand he could see that the airman looked a tough customer. He remembered that Dr. Sparshott had said that if Castaway Island was ever visited it would only be by rum-runners—liquor smugglers of the American coast. Jim glanced from him to the taller man; but the latter still had his face turned away.

"Who—who are you?" gasped Jim.

"Jevver hear of Slim Stack?" asked the tanned man.

"Never!" answered Jim.

"Then I guess you're hearing of him now," said the squat man, with a grin that showed a set of teeth discoloured by chewing tobacco. "If you've been a long time on this here island maybe you ain't heard that Old Man Prohibition is dead and buried, and rum-running gettin' to be one of the lost arts! But I guess there may be something on this here island to pay for a trip, if Luz has got it right."

"Luz!"

Jim caught his breath. Was it from Captain Luz, the half-breed treasure-hunter from Martinique, that these men had heard of the island? Captain Luz's schooner had gone down in the hurricane that had driven him and his crew away from Castaway Island. The castaways had seen nothing of him since.

"I guess you know the name some!" grinned Slim Stack. "You're one of the schoolmaster's bunch, I reckon! Where's the schoolmaster?"

"On the other side of the island."

"And the rest?"

"They're with him."

The tanned man gave him a sharp, suspicious stare.

"What'll you be doing on this side all on your lonesome own, then?" he rapped.

"I—I've left my friends—there was a row," faltered Jim. "I—I say, you—you're going to help—" He faltered.

Already it had dawned on his dismayed mind that the castaways could expect no help from these strangers who had come from the sky.

"Sure! I'm going to help myself!" said Slim Stack, grinning. "Some! That's the feller I generally help! You can let the guy see your face, Luz—he's alone here, and I guess he ain't taking the news to the schoolmaster—we've got him."

The taller man turned round—and Jim gave a cry as he recognised the dark, swarthy features and black eyes of Captain Luz. It was the half-breed treasure-seeker himself who had returned to the island by air, in company with the American rum-runner.

Jim Dainty felt the gangster's powerful grip on his shoulder. He realised that he had fallen into a trap—or, rather, that he had run at full speed into one. There was a sour and mocking grin on the face of the man from Martinique.

With that grinding grip on his shoulder, the gangster walked Jim to the nearest tree and slammed him against the trunk. Then Luz drew his knife and cut lengths of the wiry lianas.

Resistance was impossible, and Jim Dainty had to submit while he was bound to the tree trunk. Luz did the binding, and he did it with thoroughness.

Length after length of the wiry liana was bound round the schoolboy and the trunk, till he was unable to stir a finger, let alone a hand or a foot. Slim Stack stood watching the operation, and gave a nod of satisfaction when it was complete.

"I guess that lets you out, boy!" he remarked. "You surely won't get loose in a powerful hurry! Nope! I'll say you'll keep safe till I got your schoolmaster cinched."

With that, he turned and walked

away, followed by Luz. The moment their backs were turned, Jim Dainty began to struggle with his bonds. It took him only a few minutes to realise that struggling was futile. The lianas, strongly knotted, held him like rope, or rather, like strong wire.

He was a helpless prisoner, as the adventurers well knew when they left him. The boy groaned aloud in misery. If only he could have escaped to carry warning to Sammy—but it was hopeless to think of it.

He watched the two adventurers. They walked to the aeroplane and unpacked various things from the rear cockpit. He saw them sit on the shady side of the plane and eat a meal, after which Luz smoked cigarettes and Slim chewed tobacco.

Every now and then the American glanced at the sky, and the sun was low in the west when he rose at last and came up the beach with his companion. They were going towards the wood, and they passed a hundred yards from the spot where Jim stood bound to the tree, hardly glancing at him, before they disappeared into the forest.

Faintly, a rustling came back, and then all was silent. Jim Dainty groaned. They were starting to cross the island—towards the little settlement on the east side. The fact that they had waited so long indicated that they meant to arrive after sunset. Even Sammy Sparshott, wary as he was, would have no inkling of danger. Unsuspecting, probably asleep, the castaways would be taken utterly by surprise.

If only Jim could get loose and warn Sammy—

But he could not! Again and again he tried his strength on his bonds—in vain!—while the sun sank lower and dipped into the western sea. It was almost dark when Jim heard a rustling in the forest behind him, and wondered whether it was one of the ruffians returning. He gave a gasp as a strange, hairy figure in trousers, shirt, and hat skipped into view.

"Friday!" he gasped

It was his monkey pal!

The monkey gave a squeal of delight as he spotted him. Evidently Man Friday had missed Jim from his camp and had been seeking him since. He danced round the bound schoolboy, chattering and grinning with glee. But he was puzzled by Jim's motionless posture, and he passed a paw over his face, and then over the binding lianas.

A sudden hope beat in Jim Dainty's heart. If the ape could only understand—

"Friday, old man!" gasped Jim. "Get me loose—oh, get me loose, old chap! Oh, if he could only catch on—"

He struggled, wrenching madly at the binding lianas. Friday blinked at him with his red-rimmed eyes, puzzled, perplexed. Then suddenly intelligence flashed into the monkey's eyes. He understood!

He started clawing at the lianas, blinking at Jim's face in the deepening dusk, as if for approval. Jim's face brightened.

"Go it, old bean—go it!" he breathed.

And Friday "went" it—understanding now what was wanted. Knot after knot of the wiry creeper was torn and clawed away, till Jim felt his bonds loosening. He had an arm loose at last, and was able to help Friday in the work. Looser and looser, till at last, panting with relief, the Grimslade junior staggered free.

The sun dipped into the western sea, and all was dark on Castaway Island.

But Jim Dainty was free! Thanks to his monkey pal, he was free—and it might not yet be too late!

He stayed only to take one deep drink from his water-bottle, and then plunged into the tropical forest, with Friday chattering along at his heels—tramping, running, scrambling, pushing on without a pause, to rejoin once more the Grimslade castaways, and—whatever their fate might be—to share it!

CHAPTER 6.

A Surprise Attack!

"STICK 'em up!"

Dr. Samuel Sparshott, headmaster of Grimslade School, fairly jumped. Had Dr. Sparshott been in his study at Grimslade, instead of sitting by a camp fire on the beach of a West Indian island, he could hardly have been more taken by surprise than he was at this moment.

The starry, tropic night was dusky over Castaway Island. The wooded, island hill, the palm groves, and the jungle were lost in shadow. Where the sandy beach sloped up from the bay to the hut the Grimslade Castaways had built, backing against a high rock, a camp fire blazed and flamed, casting lights and shadows.

Round it sat the shipwrecked schoolboys and their headmaster, finishing supper. Fritz Splitz was nodding sleepily over his last morsel; Ginger, Bacon, Bean, and Dick Dawson were talking in low tones; Sammy Sparshott, sitting on a log, with an empty pipe in his mouth, was gazing at the fire and thinking.

Doubtless he was thinking of Jim Dainty, who had cleared off on his own, and defied his headmaster to bring him back. But all thought of the rebel of Grimslade was driven from his mind as that cool, quiet, but menacing voice came out of the velvety shadows of the tropical night.

"Don't start anything, schoolmaster!" came the voice as Dr. Sparshott jumped. "I guess my gun's looking at you! Stick 'em up!"

"My giddy goloshes!" breathed Ginger Rawlinson.

And Fritz von Splitz, wide awake all at once, stared with his saucer-eyes distended.

Dr. Sparshott did not "start" anything! He glanced round over his shoulder, quietly, calmly.

In the circle of the firelight a figure stood—a squat figure, with a hard, tanned face under a peaked cap. A

revolver was levelled at the headmaster of Grimslade, a finger on the trigger, and an eye, steady as steel and cold as ice, glanced along the barrel.

There was a revolver in Sammy's own belt, but he did not attempt to touch it. His life hung on a thread, and Sammy, cool and determined as he was, was not the man to ask for more trouble than he could handle.

He gazed quietly at the gangster. Who he was, where he had sprung from, were mysteries to Sammy. The castaways on the beach of East Bay had seen and heard nothing of the aeroplane that had landed on the western side of the island that afternoon. The sudden appearance of a new enemy on the lonely island had taken them completely by surprise.

"I reckon I said stick 'em up, schoolmaster!" said the squat man, in a dangerous tone. "You asking for it?"

"Not at all, my good man," said Dr. Sparshott calmly, and he put up his hands over his tattered mortar-board. "My boys, sit where you are!" he added.

The juniors were stirring, and Ginger Rawlinson had dropped a hand on a palm-wood cudgel.

The man with the gun grinned and stepped nearer, keeping the headmaster of Grimslade carefully covered. Behind him another figure came out of the shadows—a swarthy French half-breed. The castaways, looking at him, recognised him as their old enemy, Captain Luz.

There was a knife in the half-breed's dusky hand, and the look on his face told that he was keen to use it. The squat man, still keeping his ice-cold eyes on Sammy, spoke to Luz over his broad shoulder:

"Keep that sticker away, bo! I guess I'm running this!"

"Morbieu!" snarled the half-breed. "I tell you, Stack, that that man, that schoolmaster, defeated me and my whole crew! Will you let him live to defeat you also?"

"I guess I'm a bigger man than you and your crew all lumped together, old-timer!" answered the gangster coolly. "I got the schoolmaster where I want him. Quit chewing the rag, and take a rope to him! Put that sticker away, or you won't know what hit you!"

Luz, gritting his teeth, obeyed. The knife was sheathed, and the half-breed unwound a coil of cord from his arm. Dr. Sparshott was cool, but there was a deadly glint in his eyes.

"One moment, my friend!" he said. "May I ask who you are, and what you want here, where you have no business?"

"Yep! I guess you can call me Slim Stack, and I'll say I've had business on this here island when I was a rum-runner," answered the American, with a nod. "Rum-running ain't the lay now, though. I guess we've dropped down from the sky to give you the once-over. I got from Luz that there's treasure on this island, and you've raised it. If there's more'n I can carry away in my 'plane, I'll leave you the leavings, schoolmaster——"

Bang!

The revolver was suddenly deflected towards Ginger Rawlinson, and it roared with startling suddenness, awakening a thousand echoes on the island, the report rolling back like thunder from the wooded hill.

Ginger gave a yell. He had grasped his cudgel, with the intention of hurling it at the gangster's head, and giving Sammy a chance. But, though the icy eyes were watching Dr. Sparshott, Slim evidently saw the action from the corner of his eye. Instantly the smoking revolver was bearing on the headmaster again. Sammy half rose.

"Keep 'em up!" drawled Slim. "The young guy ain't hurt. Jest a lesson to him not to get too fresh!"

Ginger was rubbing his right arm, numbed by the shock. The bullet had crashed on the cudgel, knocking it from his hand. Evidently Slim Stack was "no slouch" with the revolver.

"Oh, my giddy goloshes!" breathed Ginger.

"Kindly sit still, as I have told you, my boys," said Dr. Sparshott sharply. "Leave this to me! Mr. Stack, you have the upper hand, and I am not a man to run my head against a stone wall. But if harm is intended to the boys under my charge, I shall take my chance against your gun!"

"I'll say you're a cool guy, allowing that my gun is lookin' you in the eye!" grinned Slim. "But I guess the boys ain't coming to no harm—unless I do first. I kinder reckon that if that black-jowled half-breed is left cock of the walk, he will feed 'em to the sharks before you could say 'No sugar in mine.' But me, I'm the kindest guy you ever struck."

Dr. Sparshott gave him a hard, searching look. Then he nodded curtly. The half-breed stepped towards him, cord in hand, and the Grimslade headmaster made no resistance. It was sudden death to resist.

Luz bound the headmaster's wrists together, knotting the cord hard and tight. Plainly enough, he would rather have used his knife, but he dared not cross the will of the cool, cold-eyed gangster.

"Now the boys!" rapped Slim.

"Mein gootness!" groaned Fritz Splitz. "Dat is so bad as nefer vas before. I vish tat I vas pack in Chermany!"

Ginger & Co. and Dick Dawson were bound, their hands behind their backs.

"Leave out the Dutchman!" said Slim. "I guess we want somebody to wait on us, and he don't look a lot dangerous."

"Ach! I vas not dangerous vun leetle biece, and I vaits on you mit bleasures!" gasped Fritz Splitz. "I tinks two times before I giffs you any droubles after."

"I figured that from the look of you, Dutchman!" grunted Slim. "You give any trouble, and you won't live long enough to tell any guy about it. Now we got the whole bag, old-timer." He

put the revolver back into his belt. "Say, schoolmaster, I guess I want to know where you've parked the treasure that King Christophe, of Hayti, sent to this here island a hundred years ago."

"You are in error," said Dr. Sparshott quietly. "We have found no treasure on this island."

Captain Luz's black eyes flashed at him.

"It is a lie—you have found the treasure." His hand flew to his knife.

"Let up, you doggoned breed!" snapped Slim. "I guess if they've lifted the treasure, we'll spot where they've parked it! We got the whole bunch now, as safe as that young guy we left tied on the other side of the island. It's our say-so!"

Dr. Sparshott started.

"Dainty! You have seen—" he began.

"Did you figure he might hump along and let you loose?" grinned Slim. "Forget it! We cinched him first, and left him safe. I guess he won't get loose afore I go back to-morrow and call for him."

Dr. Sparshott set his lips. Perhaps a thought had been in his mind that the rebel of Grimslade, free on the island, might learn what had happened and attempt to help.

"They have the treasure," muttered Luz savagely. "I tell you—"

"I guess the schoolmaster will tell us where to pick it up, bo, when I ask him," smiled Slim. "He is sure a cool guy, but there's ways of makin' a guy talk! I reckon he can chew on it till morning. We've sure arrived just in time for supper, and that fat guy is going to hand it round."

"Ach! Ja wohl!" gasped Fritz Splitz.

The fat Rhinelander proceeded to get supper for the two rascals, and wait on them hand and foot, one glance from either being sufficient to strike terror to his podgy heart.

Sammy Sparshott and the other prisoners lay in the sand with bound hands, looking on in grim silence.

CHAPTER 7.

Up to Jim Dainty!

JIM DAINTY halted in the shadow of the palm grove, and looked towards the ruddy glow of firelight in front of the castaways' hut. Friday, the monkey, halted when his master halted, picked up a nut, and cracked it. Friday, in his hat and cotton trousers, made a queer figure. He had followed Jim across the island, hardly noticed by the hurrying, anxious Grimslade junior.

Now, panting, breathless, with a beating heart, Jim watched the camp from behind a palm trunk, and wondered what he should do. Friday had saved him; but whether he could help his friends was another matter.

He was unarmed save for a stick, and he had two armed and desperate men to deal with. If he could but have escaped in time to warn Sammy! But one glance at the camp showed that he was too late for that.

Watching the scene in the firelight, he made out the tall figure of Dr. Sparshott, and the figures of the four juniors, evidently bound prisoners, from their attitudes. Slim Stack and Captain Luz sat on logs by the fire, smoking after their supper. Fritz Splitz, the only one of the castaways left free, moved to and fro, his terrified saucer-eyes turning continually on the two ruffians.

For long, long minutes, Jim Dainty watched, his heart heavy, but his mind made up.

Headstrong, obstinate, wilful, ungrateful, he had rebelled against his headmaster, his friend and protector. He was going to make up for that, if it cost him his life! Somehow, he was going to help Sammy. But how? For the time being he could only watch and wait.

Soon the half-breed was dragging Dr. Sparshott in at the doorway of the hut, and, having pushed him in, he stepped back and drove in the other prisoners.

They were allowed to go to their

bunks, but the suspicious half-breed made a careful examination of their bonds before they were left in peace to sleep, if they could. Fritz Splitz was now bound like the rest.

"I guess, schoolmaster, that I'm cinching that hammock," drawled Slim. "If you can't sleep on the floor, you can sure spend the time thinkin' what will happen to you if you don't cough up the treasure at sun-up. I'm a good-tempered guy, but I'm surely here on business! You get me?"

"We have found no treasure on this island," answered Dr. Sparshott quietly.

"You'll guess again, I reckon, when my partner Luz lights a slow fire under your feet!" grinned Slim.

The headmaster of Grimslade made no answer to that. Slim Stack barred the door of the hut.

The dull red glow of the fire died slowly away. Jim Dainty, in cover under the palms, watched and watched.

All was silent at the hut, and the camp fire was dying out. The hour was late, and he knew the two rascals from the plane had camped in the hut with the prisoners. They were most likely sleeping by that time. But the prisoners were not likely to be sleeping any more than Jim Dainty was.

Sure at last that the ruffians would be asleep, Jim moved out from the palms. If he was going to help his friends, it had to be while he had a chance of taking the enemy off their guard. On the morrow they would learn that he had escaped, and would be on the watch for him.

He crept forward silently, and there was a scuttling sound behind him that made him turn swiftly. Friday, the monkey, was following him. Jim waved him back.

"Stick there, old bean," he whispered, pushing Friday back and patting and stroking him.

The monkey understood, if not the words, the actions, and squatted down again obediently. Jim left him in the

shadow of the palms and crept towards the hut.

Standing close by the window, he listened. The shutters were slatted for ventilation, but he could see nothing within—all was pitchy dark. Slim and Luz, there could be little doubt, were sleeping. There was nothing to keep them wakeful. But the others—surely they could not sleep—especially Sammy!

Jim made up his mind at last to risk a whisper. He put his lips close to one of the slits in the palm-wood shutters.

"Dr. Sparshott! Are you awake?"

It was a scarcely audible whisper. But it reached the keen ears of a bound man slumped against the wall inside. There was the faintest movement. Then came a whisper:

"Is that you, Dainty?"

"Yes, sir."

"My giddy goloshes!" Jim heard a whisper from Ginger. He had been right—the prisoners were not asleep.

"Silence!" breathed Dr. Sparshott.

Softly and silently Sammy shifted his position till his head was close to the window.

"Dainty! It is you! Take care—they are asleep, but may awaken at a sound."

"I understand, sir! Can I help you?" Jim breathed the words through the narrow slit. "Oh, sir, you'll forgive me for having been such a fool—such a rotter! If I can only help you now—"

"Never mind that! Have you a knife?"

"Yes, yes!"

"If you can get a hand through the shutter and get at these cords—my hands are bound behind me!"

"I'll try, sir."

Dr. Sparshott moved again, with the greatest caution. Slim Stack, in the hammock, was asleep; the half-breed, on a pile of blankets, snored. So far, the faint whispering had not disturbed their slumbers.

Jim Dainty, listening with intent

ears, caught the faintest of sounds and knew that Sammy Sparshott was standing by the window-shutter, his bound wrists as close as he could get them to the slit, Jim drew the knife from the sheath in his belt, his heart thumping, but his hand steady, his head cool.

He squeezed his wrist through the slit in the shutter. It was a close fit, but he got it through. His fingers touched the bound wrists of his headmaster and, guided by the touch, Jim slid his knife between them. The cord was thick and strong, and trebly knotted. The keen edge of the knife sawed at it.

The juniors in the hut, silent as death, waited with beating hearts. Fritz snored on. If only the ruffians did not awaken—

There was faint sound as the knife sawed at the knotted cord. No sound passed Sammy's set lips as it scraped his skin. Sammy Sparshott was still and silent as a statue, though his heart beat fast. A minute—a couple of minutes—and once his hands were free— He knew where to lay his hand on a bludgeon, and then—

"Won't be a moment now, sir," breathed Jim Dainty.

There was a creaking as the hammock stirred. The whispering, faint as it was, had reached the wary ears of the human wolf who slept there; Slim Stack was stirring! He was awake!

Sammy felt his heart sink. But he did not stir. There was a chance yet. Was the gangster suspicious? He could see nothing in the dark.

Suspicion was second nature to Slim. Dr. Sparshott heard him heave his weight from the hammock. A match scratched, and in its flicker the gangster looked round the hut. The half-breed's eyes opened, and he stared at him from his bed of blankets. Slim's eyes were fixed on Dr. Sparshott, standing with his back to the window-shutter.

"Say, what the deep pit!" snapped

Slim. He put the match to a candle on the table and stepped towards the headmaster of Grimslade, his hand on his revolver-butt. "Say, you, what—"

Dr. Sparshott smiled.

"Have I disturbed you?" he drawled. "Really, I am sorry, but I have been unable to sleep."

There was nothing in Sammy's attitude as he leaned on the window-shutter to betray the fact that a knife, held by the junior outside, had been sawing at his bonds a second ago. Jim Dainty, as he heard the voices within, ceased to saw and was silent and still. Sammy's manner was cool and careless—there was a smile on his face. Captain Luz gave a yawn.

"Morbleu!" he muttered sleepily.

"What is it, mon ami? They are safe?"

"I guess I'm goin' to be sure of that," grunted Slim.

He laid a rough hand on the headmaster's shoulder and pushed him aside. He stared at the window. Jim's knife had disappeared—the junior outside was still as a mouse.

Slim examined the bars that fastened the shutters, evidently with a suspicion in his mind that the headmaster had been endeavouring to shift them with his bound hands. But the bars were intact in their sockets. The cold, hard eyes turned on Dr. Sparshott again. Slim was suspicious, but he was puzzled.

"Morbleu! Get to sleep!" muttered Luz. "We have work to do to-morrow."

The gangster nodded.

"I guess it's O.K.," he said "But I ain't trusting this schoolmaster guy a whole lot, bo! I guess I'll see he's safe."

Dr. Sparshott shut his teeth hard. He was facing the ruffian, but Slim's sinewy grasp turned him, and the gangster stared at his bonds in the candlelight. A spluttering exclamation of rage broke from him as he discerned the fact, plain enough now, that the cords round Sammy's wrists were cut half-through by a knife.

"Jumping Jehoshaphat!" roared Slim. He hurled Dr. Sparshott head-long away and spun round towards the window.

Sammy made one fierce, desperate effort to wrench apart the cord at his wrist. But it was in vain—the knife had not bitten deep enough for that. He was still a prisoner.

As the gangster, with a face of alarm and fury, dragged at the window-bars with one hand, his revolver in the other, the Head of Grimslade shouted:

"Save yourself, Dainty! Run for your life!"

An oath spluttered from Slim. He dragged open the shutters and leaned out, throwing up his revolver for a shot. Jim Dainty, at his headmaster's word, was running. The gangster had a glimpse of a shadowy figure that flitted in the dim glimmer of the stars.

Bang! roared the revolver, sending thunderous echoes along the silent beach. spurts of sand spattered over Jim Dainty as he ran, desperately. But he was still running, and as the revolver roared again and again he vanished into the darkness of the palms.

CHAPTER 8.

Seeking the Treasure!

"A CH, himmel!" yelled Fritz Spitz.

Fritz was the only one of the castaways who was asleep when morning dawned on the lonely island. And Fritz was suddenly awakened by a kick in his fat ribs. He yelled and sat up.

"Peast and a prute!" howled Fritz. "Vy for you kick me before? I tink —" Fritz broke off as the scowling face of Slim Stack reminded him where he was. "Ach! I pegs you te pardon!" added Fritz, in a great hurry. "Tank you for vaking me up—"

"Turn out, you fat Dutchman!" snarled Slim. "Cut his fins loose, Luz!"

As soon as his hands were loose,

Fritz rubbed his sleepy eyes. Then another kick reminded him that he was expected to make himself useful. The fat slacker of Grimslade developed energy at once. Anyone who had observed Fritz Splitz cooking breakfast for the two invaders of Castaway Island, might have supposed that he was an extremely industrious fellow, and fond of work.

Dr. Samuel Sparshott, Ginger, and Bacon, and Bean, and Dick Dawson, were left tied up. Fritz, exhibiting none of his usual clumsiness and laziness, built a fire outside the hut, cooked the breakfast, and waited hand and foot on his masters—rewarding himself with an occasional snack as he did so.

Slim was in a savage temper that morning.

As he sat on a log by the fire, eating, his eyes turned every now and then on the hut, and glinted at Dr. Sparshott. In the gangster's present frame of mind, Sammy had no tender treatment to expect from him. But Sammy was feeling pleased, all the same! Jim Dainty was still free!

Slim Stack rose from the log at last, jammed a black cheroot into his mouth, lighted it, and signed to Luz. The half-breed led the headmaster of Grimslade out of the hut.

"Now," said Slim. "I reckon you know why we made this here island in the plane, schoolmaster. We're after the treasure. You beat off Luz and his crew when they came in the schooner; but I guess I got you, and I'll say I'm a bigger proposition than a durned 'breed and a whole crew of niggers. You've raised the treasure that the black king of Hayti cached on this island a hundred years ago. You'll tell me where you've put it, and you'll tell me quick."

"I have already told you that we have raised no treasure here," answered Dr. Sparshott. "We should have allowed Captain Luz and his crew to search for it in peace, if they had left us alone. We beat them off to defend our lives."

"Morbleu! A lie!" snarled the half-breed. "I tell you, Stack—"

"Aw! Can it!" snapped the gangster. "I'm running this here show, Luz! I'll give you a chance, schoolmaster! If you ain't raised the treasure, you know where to lay hands on it. You ain't stayed on this here island, knowing it was there, without looking for it, I guess."

"That is true," assented Dr. Sparshott, "and I am prepared to tell you all I know. There is a cavern up the ravine, as Luz knows. Skeletons have been found in it—no doubt those of the men who came here a hundred years ago with the treasure from Hayti."

"I guess I've heard that much from Luz!" grunted Slim.

"We found a walled-up fissure in the cave-wall," went on Dr. Sparshott. "It led to a deep pit, at the bottom of which was water, connected by some subterranean inlet with the sea. My belief is that the treasure was sunk there—but it is only an opinion. I have seen nothing of it."

Slim Stack watched his face with glinting eyes.

"And you ain't been down after it?" he sneered.

"I have—and had a narrow escape of my life!" answered Dr. Sparshott quietly. "There is an octopus—the largest and most fearful sea-devil I have ever seen—in the salt pool at the bottom of the pit. No man can descend there—and live."

Slim Stack grinned, and the half-breed burst into a laugh.

"Morbleu! Are we to be frightened away by a story of an octopus?" he exclaimed. "If it is as you say, guide us to the spot."

"That I am willing to do," answered Dr. Sparshott.

It went sorely against the grain with Sammy to make any terms with the two rascals. But he was thinking of the boys; and for their sakes the headmaster of Grimslade put his pride in his pocket.

For the sake of the boys, he would have been glad to see the two ruffians raise the treasure of King Christophe, stack it in the aeroplane they had left on the western side of the island, and fly away; he would have rejoiced to see the last of them and of the treasure, too.

"Rope them together, Luz!" grunted the gangster. "I guess we're taking the whole bunch, or that kid will be moseying along and letting them loose while our backs are turned."

Luz tapped the knife in his belt.

"There is an easier and quicker way of keeping them safe—" he muttered.

"You doggoned scum of Martinique, can it!" snarled Slim, with a savage glare at his swarthy confederate. "I guess you're too handy with that sticker of yours. Don't I know you'd put it in my back, soon's we've raised the treasure, if you knew how to handle the plane and get off the island? You're here to jump to orders, you scum! Rope 'em up!"

The half-breed gave him a look of hate, and sullenly and silently did as he was bid. The headmaster and the five juniors were roped in a line, Luz knotting the cords savagely. Brute and ruffian as the American gangster was, the castaways could not help feeling glad that they were in his hands and not in the dusky hands of Captain Luz. In the latter case, their lives would have been worth little.

"Now get on with it!" growled Slim, and the party started.

They passed through the palm grove to the stream, and Dr. Sparshott led the way, wading knee-deep in the water, the juniors behind him. Slim and Luz followed them, each with a ten-fathomed coil of rope, taken from the hut, over his arm. Dr. Sparshott stopped when he reached the waterfall.

"We cannot climb this with our hands bound," he said quietly.

Slim grinned.

"I guess you ain't getting your hands loose so easy as all that, schoolmaster!"

he jeered. "I'll guess we'll pull you through somehow."

He uncoiled his rope and knotted an end round the headmaster of Grimslade. Then the two ruffians clambered up through the falling water. On the ledge above they dragged on the rope.

"My giddy goloshes!" gasped Ginger Rawlinson. "Urrrrgh!" He spluttered as he was dragged into the cascade.

"Ach himmel! Ve vas all trowned after!" gurgled Fritz Splitz.

Somehow the Grimsladers scrambled and clambered up the rocks, helped by the drag on the rope above. Half-drowned by the falling water, drenched and dripping, they got through the cascade and sprawled gasping and panting on the rocky ledge above. But they were allowed no time to rest. A savage kick from the half-breed helped Dr. Sparshott to his feet. Sammy's eyes were burning as he scrambled up. But he said nothing.

In a dripping, dragged line, the Grimsladers tramped up the rocky ravine to the cavern.

"My giddy goloshes! Dainty!" breathed Ginger Rawlinson.

He jerked his head towards a tall rock, high up the ravine. On its summit, watching the party, stood Jim Dainty, with a queer hairy figure in trousers and hat by his side. All eyes turned on him, and the half-breed clutched at the knife in his belt, Slim at a revolver.

"Dainty! Take care!" shouted Dr. Sparshott.

Dainty waved his hand. He disappeared behind the rock, with his monkey pal, as Slim's revolver roared. Sammy Sparshott staggered as Luz struck him across the mouth with the back of his dusky hand.

"Silence, you!" snarled Luz.

Sammy's eyes were like fire for a second. But he shut his teeth hard.

"Get on!" snapped Slim Stack.

The headmaster of Grimslade tramped on and led the way into the gloomy opening of the cave.

CHAPTER 9.

The Grip of the Sea-Devil!

THE light of a hurricane-lamp in Slim Stack's hand gleamed and glistened on walls of basaltic rock.

The American gangster stared about him curiously as he advanced into the cavern. More than once, in past days as a rum-runner, he had landed on the solitary island; but he had never penetrated into the ravine above the waterfall, and knew nothing of the cavern in the hill save what he had heard from Captain Luz. But it was not new ground to Luz, who, long weeks ago, had pursued the Grimsladers through that cavern at the head of his black crew.

The half-breed uttered a sudden exclamation as there was a glimmer of white in the lantern-light from the dark floor of the cavern. It was the skeleton for which he had been looking—that of one of the hapless Haytian blacks who had sailed a century ago, from Port-au-Prince, with King Christophe's treasure to hide. It still lay where it had been discovered by the Grimsladers.

"Voilà! The skeleton!" exclaimed Luz.

"I guess that looks like the goods!" said Slim, staring at the grisly bones. "I'll say that this is a likely spot, old-timer."

"The treasure is here—or was here!" snarled Luz. "The schoolmaster has found it, whether he has raised it or not! That I know."

"I guess he's talking turkey!" answered Slim. "He knows where it lies, I reckon, but he ain't got the sand to go after it. Or maybe he's leaving it safe there till he got a chance of getting it off the island. I'll say we're going to save him that trouble."

Dr. Sparshott led the way to the fissure where a wall of rock had been displaced, revealing the opening beyond. The fissure was narrow, and Slim Stack marched ahead with the hurricane lamp, Dr. Sparshott and

the string of prisoners following him, and Luz bringing up the rear. The interior was black as midnight, shadowy and eerie in the gleam of the lamp.

The juniors walked in silence, save for Fritz Splitz, who grunted and groaned at every step. They reached the end of the fissure, where the deep chasm yawned, and the space was wider on the edge. There the prisoners stood in a group.

Luz caught up a stone and dropped it into the gulf. Faintly from below came the sound of a splash.

"Water there, I reckon," said Slim. "I guess there's an inlet from the sea, as the schoolmaster allowed. It'll be sea-level." He looked round at Dr. Sparshott. "What's the depth here, schoolmaster? You allow that you've been down."

"The water is about sixty-six feet below," answered Dr. Sparshott.

"I guess we got to splice ropes for that, Luz."

The half-breed nodded, and started at once to fasten the two long ropes together. Having secured them, he carefully knotted one end round a jutting rock on the edge of the chasm. The other end he dropped into the gulf. There was again a splash as it struck the water far below.

Luz's black eyes were glittering under his dark brows. It was evident that he believed that he was close to the treasure. That, indeed, the Grimsladers fully believed.

But they knew—what the two greedy adventurers refused to believe—that a terrible guardian kept watch and ward over the treasure pool.

More than once, when Slim's eyes were not on the half-breed, they saw Luz's glance glitter at him, and thought they could read what was in his treacherous mind. Ruined by the loss of his schooner, the dusky rascal had told his tale to the rum-runner, and enlisted his aid in searching for the treasure; but, once the gold was lifted, he did not mean to share it if he could help it.

Slim Stack threw himself down, lowered the hurricane-lamp the length of his arm into the pit, and stared below. As if by instinct, the half-breed made a movement towards him, his hand on the haft of his knife.

"My giddy goloshes!" Ginger Rawlinson gasped. "Look out, Mr. Stack—for goodness' sake, look round!"

The gangster, cool as ice, looked round, but without taking the trouble to rise. His ice-cold eyes fixed on the half-breed, and he grinned.

"Wash it out, Luz!" he said. "You couldn't handle the 'plane, bo! Wash it out till we're off the island."

And he resumed staring into the black gulf, regardless of the half-breed. Luz's dusky hand released the knife. He stood staring at the sprawling American with glinting eyes, till Slim rose from his inspection. Little as they had reason to like the man, the Grimsladers were glad to see him out of that perilous position.

They knew, as evidently Slim himself knew, that only the fact that Luz could not pilot the 'plane, saved him from a treacherous knife-thrust.

"I guess we've hit the spot," said Slim coolly. "I guess the schoolmaster spotted the right place." He knitted his brows. "I reckon this job wants a swimmer! I'll sail a rum-running tramp, or pilot a 'plane, with any man between Noo York and Frisco, but I'm sure no swimmer!"

"I will go!" grunted the half-breed. "Morbleu! I swim like a fish."

Slim's icy eyes fixed on him.

"I guess you better tell me the frozen truth when you come up, Luz!" he said. "If the 'plane quits this here island without the treasure, it quits without you, so chew on that!"

Luz gave a sullen nod, and took a grasp on the rope overhanging the pit. Slim fastened the hurricane-lamp to the end of a long cord to lower it after him and light the way down.

Dr. Sparshott made a step forward. Only too well the headmaster of Grimslade remembered his fearfully

narrow escape from the sea-devil of the pit. Savage and pitiless enemy as the half-breed was, Sammy could not see him go into such terrible peril without another word of warning.

"Stop!" barked Sammy. "I have told you—"

Luz released one hand from the rope, and struck him fiercely in the face. Sammy Sparshott staggered back.

"That for your lies!" snarled the half-breed. "Do you fancy you will frighten me away from the treasure with your lying tales?"

He lifted his clenched hand again, but Slim interposed.

"I guess that's the lot, bo!" he snapped. "Get on with it!"

The half-breed swung down the rope. Sammy Sparshott leaned back against the rugged rock, his face white, his lip bleeding from the ruffian's brutal blow. He did not utter another word, and the dusky head of the half-breed disappeared over the rock edge.

Slim, his brawny chest on the edge of the rock, paid out his cord, lowering the lantern as the half-breed descended the rope. Lower and lower went the active, dusky man from Martinique, the lowered hurricane-lamp keeping pace with his descent. Slim watched him keenly, apparently forgetful of the prisoners behind him.

Dr. Sparshott moved forward, dropped on his knees, and then lay down beside Slim staring over the edge as the gangster was doing. But, at a gesture from him, the juniors kept back. Sammy did not want them to see what he feared to see himself.

As the hurricane-lamp went lower and lower, those above were wrapped in darkness—they had no other light. In the thickening blackness the Grimslade juniors stood with beating hearts.

Lower and lower Luz swung himself with a sailor's activity on the rope. His feet touched the surface of the black pool below at last, into which rope dipped. Coolly, he let go the rope and started swimming about the pool. Slim paid out his cord till the hurricane-

lamp was only a few feet above the water, glimmering there like a spot of light in the darkness from above.

The dark head of the man from Martinique was seen moving in the radius of light, but passed beyond it into the blackness of the seapool. It came back into the light again, and the dusky face stared up. Sounding strangely hollow from the deep chasm, the voice of the half-breed boomed.

"C'est ici! It is here! I have dived, and touched a chest under the water! There are others—many others!"

Dr. Sparshott's nerve was of iron, but he felt a shudder run along his spine. The man from Martinique had dived—into the deep den where the sea-devil lay. Was the giant octopus no longer there? Had it gone by the passage to the sea?

Sammy's lip was bleeding from the half-breed's brutal blow; but from the bottom of his heart he hoped that it was so—that the desperado was not to feel the grip of the sea-devil's tentacles as he had felt them. But if the octopus was there the half-breed's diving had probably disturbed it.

Captain Luz's shrill voice came echoing up again.

"Stand by to pull, mon vieux! I shall dive again, and fasten the rope —" His voice broke off suddenly as something touched him in the water, and he stared round.

A wild yell followed, and Luz suddenly disappeared from the radius of the lantern light.

"What's got the guy?" breathed Slim. "What in thunder—"

"The octopus!" breathed Dr. Sparshott.

"Aw! Can it! I guess—"

Slim Stack ceased to speak as something long and sinuous flashed into the lantern light from the water. He stared down, dumb. It was the tentacle of an octopus!

A wild sound of splashing, of hoarse screaming, rolled up from the pool. Suddenly the dusky face of the half-

breed came into the light again. It was drained of colour, distorted with terror, the black eyes almost bulging from their sockets.

Two dusky hands clutched at the hanging rope, and grasped it; head and shoulders of the half-breed came out of the water as he strove madly to climb. Inarticulate shrieks pealed from his colourless lips. For a long moment he hung to the rope, ghastly in the lamplight, straining every nerve to keep his hold.

But a long tentacle was whipped round his waist, thickening as it tightened. Another was round his legs. The pull was one that an elephant could hardly have resisted. Yet for a long, long moment the half-breed clung on desperately, frantically, shrieking. Then he was torn from his grip, and splashed back into the water. Slim, staring down, seemed frozen.

"Release me!" Dr. Sparshott panted in his ear. "Release me, and I will try to help him! Give me a knife, and let me go down the rope! I will try —"

"I guess it's too late!" The gangster's voice was cracked and husky. "I guess nobody can help him now. If a guy had a chance of a shot—"

He had changed the cord to his left hand; his six-shooter was in his right. In the circle of lamplight far down, the water was churned into foam by the throes of a fearful shapeless form with two huge eyes that glimmered like plates; and Slim's revolver roared with a sound like thunder in the narrow space.

The shot told, for Sammy could see that one of the great eyes vanished like a candle that was extinguished.

The water was still more wildly agitated. The shapeless figure disappeared from sight, but several times a thrashing tentacle appeared, and vanished again. But the dusky face of the half-breed was not seen; and his cries had ceased. Dr. Sparshott and the gangster still watched; but the agitation in the sea pool deep below

calmed down, the ruffled water smoothed, and all was still again.

Sick at heart the headmaster of Grimslade moved back from the edge of the pit. Slowly Slim drew up the lantern, and when the light once more gleamed on his face it showed him pale, with drops of sweat on his brow.

He gave the headmaster one look, and then turned away from the pit of death, in silence. The rope by which Luz had descended to his doom was left hanging.

In silence the gangster tramped away by the fissure, and in the shuddering silence the Grimsladers followed him. Not a word was spoken as they went. In the same silence of horror they tramped back through the cave to the ravine.

Even from the hard, ruthless mind of the gangster all thought of the treasure seemed to have been obliterated by the terrible tragedy he had witnessed. And the Grimsladers panted with relief when they emerged at last into the open air, and felt the sunshine on their faces again.

CHAPTER 10.

Up to Sammy!

"GINGER!"

Ginger Rawlinson started violently.

The last thing he expected at that moment was to hear the voice of Jim Dainty.

It was a strange scene in the rocky ravine on Castaway Island. Five Grimslade fellows sat on the rugged rocks by the stream, their hands bound behind them, a knotted rope connecting the five in a string. Dr. Samuel Sparshott, also bound, lay at a little distance from the schoolboy castaways.

Slim Stack, the American gangster, stood with his back to his prisoners, staring into the gloomy opening of the cavern, chewing an unlighted cheroot. His knitted brows showed that he was thinking hard. Slim had a problem

to think out, for he knew now that the treasure he sought on Castaway Island lay at the bottom of the deep pool in the cavern, guarded by the giant octopus.

He was master of Castaway Island; but the treasure was out of his reach.

Ginger & Co. sat in dismal silence on the rocks, waiting. Of all the Grimslade castaways, only Jim Dainty was free; and he had had to flee from the splattering bullets of the gangster's revolver.

How this was going to end they could not guess; but Ginger and Bacon and Bean and Dick Dawson kept a stiff upper lip and were silent. Only Fritz Splitz expressed his feelings in an occasional grunt or groan. But Ginger's heart beat fast as he heard the whispering voice behind the rock on which he sat.

He was about to turn his head, but he remembered himself in time. He sat still, his heart thumping, and whispered back:

"That you, Dainty?"

"Yes! Keep quiet!"

Ginger was at the end of the string of prisoners, a few feet from the others. So faint was Dainty's whisper that it did not reach other ears. Ginger's whispered reply, however, drew their eyes upon the red-headed junior of Grimslade.

"Sit tight, you men!" breathed Ginger. "Don't get that villain looking round! Not a sound."

And the Grimsladers, realising that something was on, sat tight and made no sound. There was a faint splashing in the water of the stream below the rocks. Jim Dainty was there, with the water to his waist, crouching out of sight below the rocky bank. Ginger was the only fellow he could reach without revealing himself, and he had whispered to warn him of what was coming.

"My giddy goloshes!" murmured Ginger Rawlinson, as he felt a knife sawing at the knotted rope on his wrists behind him.

His heart beat almost to suffocation. The knife was sharp and held in a steady hand. Hardly a minute was needed to free him. But if the gangster looked round—if he came across from the cave—

But Slim Stack did not stir. He knew that his prisoners could not free themselves, and he had no suspicion that Jim Dainty had crept up the stream, neck-deep in water, out of sight: His thoughts were concentrated on the treasure of King Christophe of Hayti, sunk a hundred years ago in the sea-pool in the cavern, and the problem of raising it.

Ginger felt a thrill as the cut cords dropped from his wrists and he knew that he was free. Into one of his hands he felt the handle of the knife thrust by the junior crouching behind the rock and his fingers closed on it. His eyes met those of Dick Dawson who was next on the string.

Holding his hands behind him as if they were still bound he shifted his position to get nearer to Dawson. If Slim Slack noted the movement, there was nothing in it to make him suspicious. He stood still, staring into the cavern, buried in thought.

Ginger pressed close beside the next fellow so that he was able to extend an arm behind him unseen—the knife in his hand. Slowly, carefully, with great caution he felt for the knotted cord on Dawson's wrists, and sawed at it with the knife.

Streaky Bacon and Sandy Bean sat tight, their hearts throbbing. Even Fritz Splitz forgot to grunt and groan. Sammy Sparshott, from where he lay at a little distance, could not see what was happening.

If only the gangster remained unobservant for a few minutes more the whole bunch would be free. Then there would be a chance of either tackling Slim by surprise, before he could use his revolver, or of getting Sammy loose to tackle him.

Suddenly the gangster moved. He turned from the cavern-mouth, and in-

stantly the Grimsladers sat motionless. The cold, hard eyes glanced over them, but it was only a cursory glance. Slim Stack stepped towards Dr. Sparshott and stood looking down at him.

Jim Dainty crouched low under the rocky bank of the stream. He was hardly ten feet from the gangster, little as Sam suspected that he was there.

Dr. Sparshott, helpless in his bonds, looked up quietly and steadily into the hard, tanned face looking down on him. He knew that the man who had come to Castaway Island in the 'plane had arrived at some decision now, and wondered what it was.

"I guess I got it, schoolmaster," said Slim in his cold, hard voice. "There ain't nary a doubt that the treasure lies in that pesky pool—Luz dived and touched the sunken chests and called up to me afore the big squid got him. I reckon the gold's there—and according to the story there's a cool five million dollars of it. I ain't leaving this here island without it."

"You are welcome to lift it and carry it off in your 'plane so far as we are concerned," answered Dr. Sparshott quietly. "I have told you that we should not attempt to interfere, and you would be perfectly safe in setting us free. I would give you my word to stand clear and leave you to carry on."

"I guess I ain't a trusting sort of guy," said Slim, with a grin. "With chests of gold bars lyin' around loose I wouldn't bank on you keeping your word, schoolmaster. But I got to let you loose to raise that dust. I guess I ain't no swimmer, or I'd do the job myself—though sure the big squid got Luz, who was as good a swimmer as any guy in the West Indian seas. But you're a better man than Luz ever was, schoolmaster."

"I hope so!" said Dr. Sparshott. "You're going down the rope after the gold," said Slim.

Dr. Sparshott stared at him. "I am going to do nothing of the kind!" he answered curtly. "Do you fancy for one moment that I will face

the fearful fate of your confederate to gratify your greed for gold?"

"Yep! I'm going to set you loose and give you a knife and an axe—I guess a gun wouldn't be no use in the water, nor I sure wouldn't trust you with one, neither. You're going after the gold—or—" The gangster broke off and grinned mockingly.

"Or what?" breathed Sammy.

"Or I'm going to throw the boys down into the pool for the big squid," said Slim. "You can chew on that and take your choice, schoolmaster."

CHAPTER 11.

Ginger for Pluck!

DR. SPARSHOTT lay on his elbow, silent, his face a little pale, staring up at the gangster. He did not speak, for he knew that it was futile. He knew that Slim meant every word he uttered, and that the ruthless rascal was no more to be turned from his purpose than a stream from its course.

The juniors listened in utter horror. Ginger Rawlinson clenched his hands behind him in silent fury. Those hands were free now. To attack the ruffian meant sudden death under his revolver. But Ginger was ready for it before Sammy should face such a fate as that of Captain Luz.

But for the present he made no stir. The ice-cold eyes were on him. He had no chance now, but a chance might come. He slipped the knife into his trousers pocket and wound the cut rope round his wrists to give it an appearance of being still secure if the gangster should look at it.

For a full minute there was silence, then Dr. Sparshott spoke.

"I am in your hands, and my boys are in your hands! Get on with it!"

Slim nodded and grinned.

"I reckoned you'd play up," he assented. "You got to if you don't want the young guys to go where the breed

went." He jerked Sammy to his feet. "Get back into the cave. You guys follow on!"

His icy eyes glittered at the schoolboys, and they rose to their feet.

Not till the whole party had gone into the cavern, and the hurricane lamp carried by Slim winked in the distant darkness like a firefly, did Jim Dainty venture to crawl out of the stream. He shook the water from him like a dog after a swim, and cautiously approached the cave mouth. Once inside in the deep gloom there was little danger of being spotted, and he had only to keep the distant light in sight.

Ginger wondered whether he might be following, but he could see and hear nothing of him. Slim did not give a thought to Dainty. His mind was on the sunken treasure, and he had forgotten the junior who was free. With the hurricane lamp in one hand, his other grasping Dr. Sparshott's arm, the gangster strode up the cavern, the schoolboys stumbling on before him.

They reached the fissure that led to the death-pit, where the great octopus had his den. A gesture from Slim drove the boys ahead by the narrow way, and he followed with Sammy. Where the fissure opened wider, on the edge of the chasm, they came to a halt, and Slim set down the hurricane lamp on a spur of rock.

The rope by which Captain Luz had descended still hung over the edge of the pit. Sixty or seventy feet below was the pool, fed by salt water from the sea, where the octopus lurked. The spot was full of horror to the Grimsladers.

They remembered the terrible fate of the half-breed, and it seemed to them that in the eerie silence they could hear the cries of the doomed wretch dragged down by the octopus. And that was the fearful fate that Sammy was called upon to face to save them.

Sammy was quiet and cool. Slim's knife cut through the rope that fastened his strong wrists, and he stood free. He rubbed his chafed, numbed

wrists, and while he did so, regarded the gangster in the glimmer of the lamp with a cool and calculating eye. Slim, as he read his thoughts, grinned sourly and jerked a six-shooter from his belt.

"Cut it out, schoolmaster!" he said. "You ain't got an earthly. You may as well try your luck with the squid as put it up to me to let daylight through you!"

"Quite," said Sammy calmly.

Slim Stack took the end of the rope that was fastened to the juniors and knotted it to a high point of rock, well back from the chasm. That kept them safe while he was occupied with Sammy's descent into the den of the giant squid.

Sammy, standing as firm as a rock on the edge of the pit, chafed his wrists, stiff from their bonds, and looked below into the blackness, where death in its most terrible shape lurked hidden.

How slim his chance of life was he well knew, but he was cool and calm. The boys were in his charge as their headmaster, and it was up to him to save them, even at the cost of his life. But if coolness and courage could pull him through, they would not be wanting.

The gangster, as he knotted one end of the long rope, did not dream that Ginger at the other end was no longer secured. Ginger kept the rope in position and played up with a cool head.

Leaving the schoolboys a dozen feet back from the edge, the gangster approached Dr. Sparshott. There was a grim approval in his hard face, as if he had some appreciation of the headmaster's quiet courage and resolution. There was, too, perhaps a slight trace of remorse.

"I guess there ain't no other way about it, schoolmaster," said Sam. "And I'll say that if I was a swimmer like that guy Luz I'd try to do the job myself. I reckon he was some bone-head to let the big squid get him that easy. If he'd been wise to it he'd had a better chance. I guess you'll pull it off, schoolmaster."

"I shall try," said Dr. Sparshott quietly.

"Luz allowed that he could fasten the end of the rope to the chests under the water if the squid hadn't got him. You'll have to dive to do it. I guess if we lift one of the chests to-day we'll give the big squid time to settle agin afore we come after the next. I'll say I'm making it as easy for you as I can, schoolmaster."

Dr. Sparshott gave him a glance of contempt.

"You are throwing away a life more valuable than your own from sheer rascally greed!" he said. "But if the boys are saved I am content. But if I perish in that hideous den you will leave the island without the treasure. You cannot carry a crew in your plane, but you can give word on the mainland where the boys are to be found and rescued. That is all I ask of you."

"Sure!" said Slim. "Get on with it!"

Dr. Sparshott grasped the hanging rope to swing himself over the edge.

Ginger's heart thumped. If the headmaster of Grimslade had been always admired and beloved by his boys, he had never been more so than now—now that he was giving his life for them. Ginger at that moment would have risked his life—thrown his life away—to save him. But Slim was standing full in the light of the hurricane lamp, his revolver in his hand. It was death—and without saving Sammy!

Ginger, with an almost bursting heart, watched. It was sixty or seventy feet down, and descent would be slow. His chance would come before the headmaster of Grimslade was within the sweep of the sea-devil's tentacles. So long as Sammy was at hand the gangster was watchful, wary as a wolf, ready for a desperate attempt to turn the table on him. But soon—Ginger knew that there would be a chance soon!

Very slowly, cautiously, Dr. Spar-

shott's head disappeared below the edge of rock, sharp almost as a shelf. Then the gangster thrust the revolver back into his belt, relieved of any danger of an attack from Sammy. He leaned over the edge and handed a knife and an axe to the schoolmaster. Hanging by one hand over the giddy depths, Sammy Sparshott took them and put them in his belt. Then, hand under hand, grasping firmly, he went down the rope, and the gangster, lying at full length on the edge, lowered the lamp on a cord to keep pace with him as he had done when his confederate descended.

As the lamp sank below the edge the gloom above thickened, and Slim, watching Sammy as he went, had no eyes for the juniors. Ginger Rawlinson dropped the cut cord from his wrists and stepped forward. Streaky Bacon, Sandy Bean, Dick Dawson watched him eagerly, and Fritz Splitz' saucer-eyes were wide open and staring like a cod-fish's. Jim's knife was in Ginger's pocket, but there was no time to release his friends—every second was precious now that Sammy was going down to his death.

But as he stepped noiselessly behind the sprawling ruffian, Ginger hesitated. The man lay prone before him—at his mercy, in a sense. But at a touch he would turn like a tiger, and Ginger had no chance whatever in a struggle with him. He would be as helpless as a baby in that muscular grip.

There was only one way, and Ginger knew it. He shuddered at the thought, but pulled himself together with the knowledge that it was to save his headmaster. It was Slim's life or Sammy's, and a Grimslade man was not likely to hesitate long in making his choice. Already the giant octopus might be stirring, the eel-like tentacles winding over the dark waters in quest of prey.

Ginger Rawlinson shut his teeth hard, stooped, and suddenly grasped the gangster by the ankles, and tilted him headlong over the rocky ledge.

Swift as the action was, giving the ruffian no chance, Ginger was barely

successful, for Slim was agile as a cat. He gave a startled gasp as he was pitched over the precipice, but, dropping the lamp-cord, he clutched at the rock to save himself, and somehow grasped hold with one hand.

Precarious as the hold was, he might have climbed back into safety, but Ginger was not likely to give him a chance. He stamped fiercely on the grasping hand, and Slim gave a yell of agony and let go. He shot away into space, and Ginger, white as a sheet with the horror of what he had done, stood gasping for breath, the sweat pouring down his face.

"Mein gootness!" came from Fritz' chattering teeth. "Tat peast and a prute vas a tead man after."

Splash!

The light vanished, and all was blackness as the sound of the gangster's fall in the water floated up from below.

CHAPTER 12.

The Upper Hand!

HALF-WAY down, between the rocky edge and the deep, dark pool below, Sammy Sparshott hung on the knotted rope.

The headmaster of Grimslade had ceased his descent as the falling hurricane lamp shot away, followed by the plunging body from above. What had happened Sammy did not know—but the crashing splash of a heavy body in the water told him that the gangster must have fallen; and he heard, too a faint gurgling cry.

Hanging to the thick knots on the rope, Sammy stared below him, a prayer of deep thankfulness in his heart. The iron-nerved gangster was the last man he would have expected to fall from a precipice—yet it was clear that he had done so, and it meant life to Sammy Sparshott, safety to his schoolboy charges.

Deep below him came the glimmer of the lamp. Above was the blackest dark-

ness; but the cord on which the hurricane lamp was strung was fastened to the rock, and it was a ten-fathom cord. The lamp, falling, brought up with a sharp jerk a few feet above the water, and swung to and fro at the end of its cord, not extinguished by its rapid flight through the air, as an ordinary lamp would have been. Its rays glimmered over the dark, sullen surface of the sea-pool, wildly ruffled by the crash of the falling gangster.

"Sammy!" Ginger's voice came shouting in panting tones from the blackness above. "Sammy!" Ginger, wildly excited as he was, remembered himself the next moment. "Dr. Sparshott! Sir! Hold on, sir, for goodness' sake! That villain's gone, sir!"

"Rawlinson, keep back!"

Sammy's first thought was for the boy's safety on the terrible edge in the darkness.

"I'm all right, sir! I'm lying down—holding on—right as rain! Come up, sir—oh, come up while you can! He's gone!"

He began to get a glimmering of what had happened.

"Yes, sir—Dainty cut me loose before we got into the cavern. He was out of sight—that villain never knew—I pretended I was tied, and then"—Ginger's voice cracked—"I pitched him over—to save you, sir! Thank goodness you hadn't gone all the way down. Come up, sir—come up!"

"I am quite safe, Rawlinson! Keep back from the edge!" Sammy shouted back, and then he fixed his eyes again on the sullen pool below.

He remembered that Slim had said that he was no swimmer. He seemed to have gone down like a plummet as soon as he struck the water; but, swimmer or not, he would rise. If he had risen, he was out of the radius of light.

Dr. Sparshott searched the water with anxious eyes, so far as the hurricane lamp glimmered. It was like Sammy to think of his enemy now that the tables were turned and he had the upper hand. He would not have left a worse enemy

than Slim to the clutches of a giant octopus if he could have helped it.

He gave a cry of relief as a head appeared over the water, and he felt a drag on the knotted rope where the end slithered beneath the surface to the bottom of the pool. It could not have been design—it must have been sheer luck—that Slim had grabbed the rope trailing in the water. But he had grabbed it with the tenacious grip of a drowning man, and he was clutching it as his face emerged into the light, with two eyes wildly staring.

Man of ice and iron, hardly capable of fear, Slim was in the throes of hideous terror now. His plunge had taken him to the bottom of the sea-pool, where he had struck on one of the heavy chests sunk there long ago by the Marquis of Marmalade, at the orders of King Christophe of Hayti—and he had touched, as he struggled, something soft and slimy and flabby, which he did not need telling was the loathsome carcass of the octopus.

The fearful guardian of the black king's treasure was sprawling among the sunken chests, which were embraced by his eel-like tentacles as he lay in repose—but the impact of the gangster had stirred him.

Slim's hard, tanned face was like chalk, his hard, cold eyes staring from it in fixed horror and fear as he desperately grasped the rope and scrambled. The water below was agitated as the monster stirred; already one long, lashing tentacle was in the air, winding, creeping, feeling for its prey. Madly the gangster clambered up the rope, clutching with both hands, his feet against the wall of rock.

The eel-like arm of the giant octopus lashed to and fro below him; but the monster itself was rising now, the shapeless carcass looming in the lamplight. A tentacle reached after Slim and caught him round the waist. He tore madly, but in vain, for release.

Dr. Sparshott set his teeth as he saw. He slithered down the rope.

Ginger, from above, saw him as he

came into the lamplight below. He held his breath. He saw Sammy holding on to the rope by a leg and an arm, his free hand grasping the axe from his belt. The clear, sharp steel gleamed in the light as he struck. It was a swift and forceful blow, and the keen edge cut clear through the gripping tentacle. The hideous thing dropped loose, and for the moment the gangster was free.

"Quick, man!" yelled Sammy.

He clambered up out of the ruffian's way. Slim followed him up the rope. The cut tentacle sank wriggling into the water, where the mass of the monster thrashed and rolled wildly. Two or three long tentacles wound upward, seeking; but before they could get a grip both Dr. Sparshott and the gangster were high beyond their reach.

"My giddy goloshes!" breathed Ginger, wiping the dripping sweat from his brow.

"Is Sammy safe?" came Streaky's husky voice from the darkness behind him.

"Safe as houses!" answered Ginger.

"Good—oh, good!" panted Dick Dawson.

Ginger pulled on the lamp cord, winding it in, to keep the light level with Sammy as he climbed up the rope.

Up the rope came Sammy Sparshott, till he was close to Ginger on the edge. The red-headed junior of Grimslade reached out and grasped him, and Dr. Sparshott joined him on the rock shelf.

Sammy lifted the lamp and hooked it on a point of rock. Then he turned, to face Slim Stack, as the gangster would have followed him up. The headmaster's hand stopped him.

"Not so fast, my friend!" said Sammy Sparshott calmly. "Hang on while I have the pleasure of a little conversation with you. In the meantime, Rawlinson, you may release the other boys."

Ginger, grinning, went back to the others and began to cut them loose with Jim Dainty's knife. Slim, hanging on the rope at the edge of the rock, looked Dr. Sparshott in the eyes. He was far out of danger from the octopus; but he

could not climb out of the pit unless Sammy chose. And Sammy did not choose yet.

"You got me, schoolmaster!" said Slim. "And I'll say I'm powerful obliged to you—the big squid would have had me. You ain't letting a guy drop back to that?"

He shivered.

"Not in the least!" answered Dr. Sparshott. "But, as you have so intelligently realised, I have got you. The tables are turned, Mr. Stack, what?"

"You've said it!" muttered Slim.

"I will trouble you to hand over your gun," said Sammy. "I am taking no chances—hand it to me by the barrel. I advise you strongly not to play tricks—our friend below probably feels hungry."

For a long moment Slim eyed him. Then, releasing one hand from the rope, he drew the revolver from his belt and handed the butt to Dr. Sparshott.

"Now the others," said Sammy cheerfully.

The two revolvers Slim had captured from the castaways were in his pockets, packed there for safety.

In grim silence he groped them out, and handed them up. Then he made a movement to climb; but the headmaster of Grimslade gently thrust him back, with a kind smile.

"I think," remarked Sammy, "that there was a knife! I have not failed to note the details of your arsenal, my friend!"

"I guess you won't never be caught asleep with both eyes shut, schoolmaster!" said Slim. "I'll say a lynx has got nothing on you!"

And the knife was handed over.

Dr. Sparshott stepped back.

"You may now," he said, "climb out, Mr. Stack. Need I say that at the first sign of hostility I shall blow your scoundrelly brains out with your own gun? No, I am sure that I need not point out such obvious things to a man of your intelligence. May I trouble you for your cartridge-case? Thanks!"

Sammy picked up the hurricane lamp

with his left hand, holding a revolver in his right by the barrel, ready—and willing—to crack the gangster's skull with the heavy butt if he gave a hint of trouble. Slim, in the circumstances, was not the man to give trouble. He knew when he was beaten.

Dr. Sparshott glanced round. The juniors were all freed now, and in the light of the lamp their faces glowed with joyful satisfaction. Sammy gave a nod towards the remnants of the cord.

"Rawlinson, will you secure Mr. Stack's hands behind him?"

"Won't I just!" grinned Ginger.

And he did.

"And now," said Sammy, "we will lose no time in getting out of this disagreeable place. I am very anxious to see Dainty, to whom we all owe our safety. Dainty has been a rebellious young rascal—but this, I think, is a time to forget and forgive. Come!"

And with Sammy leading the way, lamp in hand, the Grimsladers gladly turned their backs on that den of horror. They left the fissure, and as the lamplight wrinkled in the great cavern there was a shout, and Jim Dainty came running into the light.

It seemed to Jim that he was dreaming as he saw his friends free and the gangster a sullen, bound prisoner. His eyes danced as he came running up.

"All safe, old bean!" chirruped Ginger. "Thanks to you!"

Jim looked at his headmaster.

Sammy smiled.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Jim.

Sammy was holding out his hand, smiling—and Jim took it, and his headmaster gave him a grip that made him jump.

There was no need for words—with that grip all past offences passed into oblivion.

It was the rebel of Grimslade who had saved the headmaster and his school-fellows—and the Grimslade castaways were once more a happy and united family as they marched out of the cavern into the brilliant tropical sunlight.

"SPLITZ!"

No reply.

"Where is Splitz?"

Still no reply.

Dr. Samuel Sparshott frowned. Jim Dainty & Co. grinned. As there was work to be done, it was not surprising that Fritz von Splitz had disappeared from sight.

It would have been surprising if he hadn't!

It was a hot morning on Castaway Island. The tropical sun blazed down on the white beach and the green, dark jungle. The tide was going out in the bay, and the boat rocked on the water at the end of the painter, tugged at by the receding tide.

From where the Grimslade castaways stood in front of their hut the boat looked empty. It did not occur to them that a fat and podgy figure was crouching in it under the gunwale. Fritz Splitz, safe out of sight of Sammy Sparshott's keen eyes, grinned as he heard his headmaster's voice. He heard it, but he heeded it not.

There was hoeing and weeding to be done that morning in the cultivated patch by the hut. Neither hoeing nor weeding had any appeal for Fritz von Splitz. He disliked work in any shape or form. Fritz von Splitz, like Brer Fox in the tale, "lay low and said 'nuffin'."

"Splitz!" roared Sammy. But only echo answered, and Sammy gave an angry grunt. "Dainty!"

"Yes, sir!" said Jim Dainty cheerfully.

"I shall be absent most of the morning. You will work in the garden till noon. But first find Splitz, and give him six with a bamboo and see that he does his share."

"What-ho—I mean, yes, sir!" answered Jim. And Dainty and Dawson, Ginger and Bacon and Bean spread along the beach looking for the elusive Fritz.

Dr. Sparshott gave a last frowning glance round, and then walked into the hut. A short, squat man, with a hard, tanned face and ice-cold eyes, sat there, his arms bound behind his back.

Slim Stack, the gangster, was a prisoner in the hands of the castaways, but he was taking the turning of the tables with his usual coolness. Chewing tobacco, he was squirting the juice round him on the floor of the hut, while he waited to learn what his fate was to be. He stared up at the tall figure of the headmaster of Grimslade as it darkened the doorway.

"I'll say you've got me, schoolmaster," drawled Slim. "What's it going to be? You ain't the guy to knock me on the head, I guess. Say, I reckon I'm ready to talk turkey. You let me rip, and I'll sure mosey across the island to where I left my 'plane. I'll light out, and you'll see the last of me. That's what you want, ain't it?"

"Not quite, Mr. Stack!" said the headmaster of Grimslade. "In the first place, as you came here after the treasure of the island I've no doubt you would return if I let you go—and bring with you enough rascals of your own stamp to give you the upper hand here."

The gangster grinned.

"I'll say that you won't ever be caught asleep with both eyes shut, schoolmaster!" he said.

"In the second place," went on Dr. Sparshott, "I am fortunately able to pilot a 'plane. I am going to borrow yours, Mr. Stack."

"I guess you won't get all your crowd on that 'plane, schoolmaster."

"Not at all! My intention is to take your 'plane, get away to an inhabited island, and return in a ship for the boys under my charge."

"Leaving me here?"

"Hardly!" Dr. Sparshott pointed from the doorway to the sea, and the gangster, following the direction of the pointing finger, discerned a speck far out on the Atlantic. "On that rock Mr. Stack, I have marooned a scoundrel named Ezra Sarson, who scuttled the

ship we sailed in, and caused us to be cast away here. I've no doubt he will be glad of your company."

Slim shut his teeth hard, and his icy eyes gleamed at the headmaster of Grimslade.

"You figure on marooning me there?" he muttered.

"Exactly! You will be out of harm's way, and will find sufficient food to support life till you can be taken off—with the other rascal. That will be when I return in a vessel to take the boys."

"And the treasure?" muttered Stack.

"And the treasure!" said Dr. Sparshott calmly. "If it is possible to raise it from the pool where the great octopus guards it, I shall certainly take away the treasure also—quite regardless of your wishes and views on the subject. Now kindly get on your feet. We are going out on the tide—the boat is ready."

Slowly the squat ruffian picked himself up. He gave a last squirt of tobacco-juice and set his teeth. His muscles almost cracked as he made a fierce and desperate effort to break the cords that secured his powerful arms behind his back. The sweat stood out on his forehead with the effort. But it was in vain; he was too securely bound. Dr. Sparshott watched him, with a faint smile, his hand near the butt of the revolver in his belt.

Slim relaxed at last, and stood panting. He was a helpless prisoner, and there was no chance of getting loose. Dr. Sparshott signed to him to follow, and strode from the hut. The gangster tramped after him with a black and bitter face. He could hardly have hoped to be allowed to leave the island free in the aeroplane in which he had come—but he had not expected this.

Marooned on the lonely rock far out at sea, he would be helpless, with nothing to do but to wait and watch during the weary days, all hope lost of ever laying hands on the treasure of Castaway Island. A desperate light was in his hard, cold eyes. He was ready to

take the most desperate of chances, even if it cost him his life.

Jim Dainty & Co. were along the beach, hallooing to one another as they hunted for Patty Fritz among the palms and the rocks by the stream. Fritz, in the boat, lay low and grinned as he heard their distant shouting.

So long as they did not think of coming down to the boat and looking into it, Fritz was satisfied. He was not aware that Dr. Sparshott was taking out the boat that morning—or certainly he would not have selected it as a hiding-place. And he started and pricked up his fat ears at the sound of tramping footsteps on the sand, coming down to the sea.

"Mein gootness!" murmured Fritz in dismay. "Is tat tat peast and a prute Sammy! Vy for he gum tis vay, plow him!"

He crouched low in the rocking boat. It rocked at the end of a long rope that was fastened to a peg driven in the sand. Fritz had waded out through shallow water when he got into the boat. Now he heard the voice of Dr. Sparshott.

"Get in!"

Whom he was addressing Fritz did not know for a moment. Then he heard a muttered curse, and there was a splashing as Slim tramped through the shallows. The squat, stocky figure of the gangster appeared beside the boat, and Fritz' saucer eyes blinked up at him in alarm.

Slim was not looking at him, however. He, like Sammy, supposed the boat to be empty. He turned as he reached it, standing knee-deep in the sea, and looked back at Dr. Sparshott. Sammy had stooped, and released the rope from the peg in the sand. Coiling it over his arm, he came towards the boat, which bobbed and tugged under the pull of the tide.

Slim's eyes glittered. A sudden desperate shove at the boat would have torn the rope from Dr. Sparshott; he could have hurled himself into it, and the running tide would have whirled

him away out of reach. Had his hands been free—

But to float out to sea with his hands bound was to condemn himself to a lingering death of hunger and thirst. Desperate as he was, he was not desperate enough for that. He dismissed the thought and turned to the boat to scramble in—and his eyes fell in amazement on the fat German crouching there.

For a single instant the gangster stared. His active brain worked swiftly. Fritz blinked up at him dismally. Discovery was inevitable now, and it meant a whopping from Sammy. Little did the fat Rhinelander guess what was flashing into the ruffian's brain. What followed took not only Fritz, but Dr. Sparshott by surprise.

Suddenly, sharply, Slim hurled his whole heavy weight on the boat, already tugged by the tide. The sudden unexpected jerk tore the rope from Dr. Sparshott's hands and it slithered into the sea. That sudden shove, added to the tug of the tide, sent the boat shooting out—and as it went, Slim, with a desperate spring, threw himself in headlong over the gunwale. He landed with a crash, and rolled over Fritz Splitz, from whom there came a suffocated howl. The impact added to the boat's way, and it fairly shot seaward.

Dr. Sparshott grasped swiftly after the escaping rope. It whisked away far from his reach. The boat, rocking wildly and shipping water, rolled and plunged away on the tide.

"You madman!" roared Sammy. "Will you go to your death?" He stood for a moment or two anxiously watching, half expecting the boat to capsize. Then he plunged into the sea, swimming swiftly after the receding boat.

CHAPTER 14.

Hand to Hand!

"A CH! Mein gootness, I vas vun tead Cherman!" groaned Fritz von Splitz. Fritz hardly knew what was happen-

ing. But he knew that most of the breath had been knocked out of his fat carcass, and that he was crushed in the bottom of the boat by a heavy weight, and that salt water was washing over him. So wildly did the boat roll and pitch, that it threatened every second to plunge gunwale under, and the sea washed in fore and aft.

But the weight was removed from Fritz as the gangster rolled off him and gained his knees. One swift glance Slim gave back at the beach—he saw Dr. Sparshott plunge in and swim—and farther up the beach he saw Jim Dainty & Co. start running down to the water. But he had time to act—to carry out the desperate plan that had flashed into his mind at the sight of the fat German in the boat.

Dr. Sparshott was swimming strongly; but the tide ran hard, and carried the boat fast seaward. It was likely to be minutes, at least, before the swimmer overhauled him. And one minute, Slim reckoned, would be enough for him.

He gained his knees in the rocking boat, gave that one swift glance back, and then fixed his gleaming, icy eyes on the terrified face of Fritz. Before the fat German could even think of stirring, a sinewy knee was planted on his fat equator, pinning him down, gurgling wildly.

"Ach! Gesroff!" gurgled Fritz. "I have no more te breff! Mein gootness! I tink that I tie! Gurrerrgh!"

"Shut that bully-beef trap of yours, you fat guy!" Slim bit off the words. "Get me loose—hear me? You got a knife or something—get me loose! I guess you want to be quick!"

"I tink tat I gannot—yurrghhh!" gasped Fritz, in anguish, as the gangster's knee ground into his stomach. "Urrrh! Wurrgh!"

"I can't use my hands, you fat geck!" hissed Slim. "But I guess I can use my feet, and I'll sure tramp the life out of you if I ain't loose in two shakes of a 'possum's tail! You get me?"

"Urrrh! Mein gootness! Wurrgh!" gurgled the hapless Fritz.

The knee was removed from him, and the gangster stood up, heedless of the wild rocking of the boat. He gave Sammy another glance—coming on hard, but yet at a distance. His boot crashed on Fritz Splitz in a savage kick. There was a gasping howl from Fritz.

"You gettin' me loose?" snarled the gangster.

"Ach! Ja! Ja wohl!" gasped Fritz. "Kick me not after—urrgh!—I will cut you loose so quick as neffer was before! Mein gootness! Urrgh!"

"Quick, you fat guy, unless you want to be kicked over the side!" hissed Slim.

Fatty Fritz groaned, gathered himself up on his fat knees, and groped for his knife. He could not have stood on his feet in the rocking boat, though it gave Slim no trouble. With trembling hands the fat German opened his knife to carry out the gangster's orders. For his fat life he dared not disobey. He was utterly at the ruffian's mercy.

Any other of the Grimsladers would have put up a fight and held the gangster long enough for Sammy to come up. But Fritz would have laid hands on an alligator in the swamps of Castaway Island as soon as upon Slim Stack. The ruffian would have trampled him down without mercy, and Fatty Fritz was not the fellow to face that, or to take the risk of it.

Getting the knife open as quickly as his trembling fingers allowed, Fritz began to saw at the cord that fastened Slim's hands together.

As his hands were secured behind him, Slim had to turn his back for the fat German to free him. That would have given Fritz Splitz a chance, had his nerve been equal to taking advantage of it. But it did not even occur to Fritz to resist; his terror of the desperado was too deep for that.

He cut and sawed at the cord, the shaking of his fat hands causing him to cut the bound wrists also, gashing the hairy skin in two or three places. But the pain seemed nothing to the gangster. His snarling voice breathed savage threats, urging Fritz to hurry.

There was a shout from the juniors

on the beach. They could see Fritz Splitz in the boat now, and though the distance was increasing, they could see how he was occupied. Ginger Rawlinson shook a fist at him, and Jim Dainty yelled:

"Fritz! You rotter! Chuck it!"

Fritz did not even hear. He cut and sawed, and sawed and cut, and the strands of the cord parted under the knife.

Slim panted. His eyes were on the dark head astern of the boat, where Sammy Sparshott was coming on with long, swift strokes. Sammy had seen Fritz, and he knew now why the gangster had taken that desperate chance.

With set teeth and glinting eyes, the headmaster of Grimslade put every ounce of strength into his strokes, to reach the boat before the ruffian had his hands free. Closer and closer he came, sweeping down on the drifting, rocking boat; and Slim knew that it would be touch and go. If he was not free when Sammy came, he would not have another chance.

He wrenched at the cord. It was cut half through, and it cracked and parted under that desperate wrench. The fragments of the cord fell away, and the gangster was free. A backward smack from his hand sent Fritz spinning helplessly. The fat German sprawled there, gasping and groaning, unheeded further by Slim.

The ruffian scrambled for an oar. As he grasped it, Sammy reached the boat and gripped at the gunwale.

Up went the oar in both Slim's sinewy hands, brandished in the air over Dr. Sparshott's head.

"My giddy goloshes!" panted Ginger, watching from the beach. "Sammy!" It seemed to the juniors that their hearts had stopped beating as they watched their headmaster's peril.

Crash!

The oar came down, and for a second both the gangster and the watching juniors fancied that the blow had told. But it was only on the

gunwale that the crash landed—Sammy had slipped deep in the water in time. So heavy was the blow that the impact jerked the oar from the ruffian's hand, and it dropped. He staggered as the boat rocked wildly. The next moment a hand was on the gunwale again, and Dr. Sparshott was scrambling over the side.

Slim spat out an oath and plunged at him. He had no time to catch up the oar again and aim a blow. Sammy was clambering in like a cat, and needed only a second, a split second! He had a leg over the gunwale as the gangster plunged on him and grasped him.

Sammy returned grip for grip, and they struggled fiercely. Sinewy and strong as the gangster was, a mass of muscle and sinew, Sammy was as strong or stronger. But Slim Stack had the advantage of position. Sammy, half over the gunwale, struggled fiercely to get in, but he could make no headway.

The gunwale dipped, and the water rushed in in a flood; and Fritz Splitz gurgled horribly as it washed over him. He scrambled to his feet, holding on, gasping for breath, and spitting out salt water.

"Splitz!" panted Sammy. "Lend a hand here! Splitz!"

"Urrgh! Mein gootness!" gurgled Fritz.

"Back up, Grimslade!" yelled Sammy.

Even Fatty Fritz was not deaf to that appeal. The rocking of the boat tumbled him over on his podgy knees in the flooding water. But he realised that both Slim's hands were busy, holding Sammy, and he blinked round wildly for a weapon. He spotted the boathook, scrambled at it, and grasped it. Then, screwing up his courage to the sticking point, Fatty Fritz plunged at the gangster, lunging with the hook.

There was a fearful yell from Slim as the boathook jabbed in his back. He would have torn himself free from Sammy and turned on Fritz, but Dr. Sparshott's grip was like a vice—he could not get loose.

Fatty Fritz lifted the boathook and brought it down on the back of Slim's head, answered by another fiendish howl from the gangster. Then Slim kicked out suddenly backwards, catching a fat shin, and Fritz von Splitz went sprawling. He crashed on the gunwale, and plunged helplessly overboard.

CHAPTER 15.

Escape!

SAMMY SPARSHOTT gritted his teeth.

He had a footing in the boat now, and in spite of Slim's fierce resistance, he was gaining the upper hand. Fiercely, savagely, desperately, the gangster exerted all his strength, but the headmaster of Grimslade was forcing him back, gaining inch after inch.

If the boat did not capsize, it was fairly certain that Sammy would soon overpower Slim Stack. But to his ears, from the running sea, came the wild shriek of Fritz Splitz, cut off in a drowning gurgle as the tide washed over him.

Fritz could swim—at Grimslade all the fellows had to learn to swim. But he was as good at swimming as at anything else, and keeping himself afloat in a swimming-pool was very different from battling for his life in a fast-running tide.

Fritz went under, and went under again, dropping behind the drifting boat where his headmaster was fighting with the gangster. And Sammy knew what he had to do. Fritz Splitz was drowning—and his headmaster could not leave him to drown.

He gritted his teeth. If Slim captured the boat and hoisted mast and sail he could run round the island and reach the western shore, where the aeroplane lay, before the castaways could cross by land.

That was Slim's intention if he got the upper hand—there could be no doubt about that. And Sammy had to

give him the upper hand to save the helpless fat duffer who was shrieking and gurgling in the tide. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but Sammy had to get it down. His grasp on the ruffian in the boat relaxed.

Slim did not know what was in his mind, but he knew that the iron grasp had loosened—that Sammy was no longer forcing him back. He freed a hand, clenched his fist to drive it in the face of the Grimslade headmaster. But the blow, as he gave it, met with no resistance, as Sammy slipped back into the sea and the gangster almost toppled after him.

"Doggone my cats!" he gasped.

Sammy, unheeding the drifting boat, was striking out for Fritz. A fat hand was thrown up from the water—the last sign of Fritz Splitz if help had not been at hand. The gangster stared, understanding now why Sammy had given up the struggle. Even his great strength had been exhausted, and he half-crouched in the boat, panting for breath, watching Dr. Sparshott as he reached the fat German, grasped him, and dragged him up to life.

Fatty Fritz, half-senseless, hung a dead weight on Sammy. His saucer-eyes were closed, and he gurgled faintly. Holding his head above water, Dr. Sparshott stared round grimly at the boat.

Slim grinned at him breathlessly from the boat, scrambled up, and seized the oars. They rattled into the rowlocks. The water washed round his knees as he sat to the oars. The boat had shipped so much that it floated deep. But it floated, and Slim did not lose time in baling. He dipped the oars.

"Good-bye, schoolmaster!" roared the gangster. "Say, if you're going to borrow my plane, you'll sure have to burn the wind!"

The boat glided away. Sammy Sparshott made no reply to the gangster's taunt. He was a good half-mile from the shore, with the tide running strongly out of the bay—and if he was to save Fritz and save himself he had

all his work cut out. With a bitter disappointment that was too deep for words—if he had had the breath to waste uttering them, Dr. Sparshott turned shoreward, leaving the gangster to his own devices.

Not till he was at a distance of two or three cables' length did Slim venture to put in his oars and start baling the waterlogged boat. Then he stepped the mast, ran up the sail, and steered out to sea, to clear the rocks at the mouth of the bay before he tacked to the westward to run round Castaway Island. The sail, glancing in the sun, vanished seaward.

The strong and sinewy headmaster was almost at the end of his tether, when he felt the sand under his feet and dragged himself and his gurgling burden ashore. Utterly exhausted, the headmaster of Grimslade sank down on the sand, and did not stir till he heard the sound of running feet.

Jim Dainty & Co. were running along the curving shore of the bay, to meet him when he landed, but they had a great distance to cover to reach him. Sammy had recovered a little by the time they arrived. He sat up, passed his hand over his eyes, and blinked at them. Fritz Splitz, lying on the soft sand, did not stir. Fritz was hardly sure yet whether he was dead or alive.

"You're all right, sir?" gasped Jim Dainty, the first to arrive, breathlessly. Sammy smiled faintly.

"Quite," he said. He rose, slowly and rather painfully, to his feet. "Stack has taken the boat, owing to that incredibly stupid blockhead, Splitz! He will make for the western shore, to get back to his plane. And I—"

Sammy shut his teeth. He was weary to the bone, and in no state for a desperate race across woods and jungles to the other side of Castaway Island. Jim broke out eagerly:

"Let us go, sir! We've got a chance

Dr. Sparshott considered quietly for a moment or two with knitted brows.

"He's unarmed, sir, and there's five of us if we get there in time," urged Ginger Rawlinson. "We can handle him, tough as he is."

Dr. Sparshott took the revolver from his belt. It was soaked from the sea. Quietly, while he considered, he reloaded it with cartridges from his waterproof case. The juniors watched him eagerly. The Head of Greyfriars nodded at last.

"You may try," he said. "I will follow as fast as I can. I shall trust you with the revolver, Dainty—you can handle it well, I know. Do not hesitate to shoot if you meet with that scoundrel."

"Trust me, sir," said Jim.

He put the revolver in his belt and started at once, the other fellows following. More slowly, breathing hard and deep as he went, Dr. Sparshott followed on. Fritz Splitz sat up on the sand and blinked after them.

Jim Dainty and Ginger Rawlinson were in the lead, racing over the sand, leaping from rock to rock so long as the way lay by the shore, then pressing on without a pause through the thick jungle and the tangled woods. The other fellows were doing their best, but gradually tailing off.

If Slim escaped in the plane it meant the end of the hope of escape for the castaways from the lonely island. And they knew that the gangster would be losing no time—already, perhaps, he had run round the island in the boat while they were toiling through the tropical forest.

Neck and neck, Jim Dainty and Ginger emerged from the forest, on the western side of the island, aching with fatigue, streaming with perspiration. The wide sands and the western sea were spread before their gaze.

And to their ears came a sound that was familiar in far-off England—the humming buzz of an engine! Ginger gave a panting yell.

"My giddy goloshes! Look!"

The aeroplane, which had landed on a level stretch of firm sand, was now in motion. Jim Dainty snapped his teeth at the sight of the plane taxiing along the sands. Farther in the distance he saw the boat bobbing in the shallows, where Slim had left it when he jumped ashore. The gangster had won the race!

As the plane taxied the Grimslade juniors could see the squat figure in the pilot's seat. Jim Dainty burst into a desperate race, and Ginger rushed after him. The revolver was in Jim's hand now.

Crack! Crack! Crack! He pulled the trigger as he ran. He saw the pilot in the plane start and flinch for a second. One bullet had whipped by Slim's head, grazing him as it flew. Another and another tore through the wings.

Crack! Crack! But even as the shots rang along the shore the plane took off, rising gracefully as a swallow. Jim Dainty, halting, threw up the barrel and fired his last shot after the plane as it flew. It seemed to him that he heard a yell through the roar of the engine and the rush of the plane, but he could not be sure. The plane rose and rose, heading seaward.

"Oh, rotten luck!" groaned Ginger.
"Gone!" said Jim Dainty, between his teeth.

Higher and higher rose the plane, gleaming in the sun, streaking away over the sea. Dawson and Streaky and Sandy came panting along as the two juniors stood watching it. It diminished to a mere speck in the fleecy clouds.

"We've got the boat back, anyhow!" said Ginger at last. And the juniors went down the beach to secure the boat. They dragged it up the sand and sat on it, watching the speck that gleamed in the deep blue of the sky, still visible. But they rose as Dr. Sparshott emerged from the forest, and came tramping down the sand.

"Gone, sir!" said Jim Dainty. "Just too late!"

He pointed to the glancing speck in

the blue. Dr. Sparshott fixed his eyes on it, and it vanished as he looked. Slim Stack was gone from Castaway Island!

CHAPTER 16.

Going Fishing!

"BUDGE!" grunted Ginger Rawlinson.

"Posh!" retorted Fritz Splitz. "I will not pudge!"

Fatty Fritz was feeling too comfortable to "budge."

He was sprawling on the sandy beach of Castaway Island, on the shady side of the boat, which was drawn up out of the water. The beached boat sheltered him nicely from the tropical sun that blazed down from a sky of cloudless blue. Fritz' bullet head rested against the timbers. His fat limbs sank luxuriously into the soft sand. In one podgy hand he had a stick of sugar-cane, which he lazily chewed. He blinked indignantly at the red-headed junior of Grimslade.

"Go and eat goke!" said Fritz. "I was derribly dired, and I will not pudge mit meinself pefore."

"You blithering, bloated Boche!" said Jim Dainty. "We're taking the boat out."

It was a busy morning on Castaway Island—for everybody but Fritz von Splitz. Dr. Sammy Sparshott had gone to cut sugar-cane, taking with him Dawson and Bacon and Bean. Jim Dainty and Ginger and Fritz had been left to hoe the garden by the hut, where weeds sprang up with tropical luxuriance. This was how Fritz did his share of the work!

Having put in a couple of hours with the too-luxuriant weeds, Jim and Ginger were going out fishing. For that purpose they wanted the boat. Which was annoying to Fritz von Splitz, who did not want to budge.

Ginger, whose methods with slackers were rather rough-and-ready, settled the point by grasping Fritz by his fat ankles. With a podgy ankle in either

hand, Ginger jerked at the fat German.

"Ach! Peast and a prute!" roared Fritz. "Ach! Mein kopf!" Fritz' head, suddenly leaving its resting-place against the timbers of the boat, rapped on the sand, with an emphatic rap, as Ginger jerked him away.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Led go, you peastly pounder!" roared Fritz.

But Ginger, having got possession of the fat legs, retained possession of them. Handling them as if they were the handles of a barrow, he marched along the beach, dragging Fritz after him. Fritz' fat back scored a deep furrow in the sand, and his fat hands clutched wildly, as he roared at the top of his voice.

"Mein gootness! Vill you led go?" shrieked Fritz. "Vy for you trag me py te legs, peast and a prutal pounder? Mein gootness! I vill peat you till you pellow like a pull! Ach! I have no more te breff! Urrrggh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jim Dainty.

Having dragged the fat Rhinelander about a dozen yards along the sand, Ginger released him, leaving him in a gasping heap. Then he walked back to the boat and helped Dainty shove it down the shelving beach to the water.

A hairy figure in cotton trousers and a ragged hat came skipping up, and joined in shoving at the boat. It was Jim Dainty's monkey friend, Friday. Friday had a way of imitating everything that his master did. Ginger chuckled as the monkey clawed at the boat.

"Your young brother likes to make himself useful, Dainty!" he remarked.

"Fathead!" was Dainty's reply. It was a standing joke among the shipwrecked Grimsladers that Jim had found a long-lost relation on Castaway Island. Ginger & Co. affected to discern a close personal resemblance between them.

The boat ran into the water. Dainty and Ginger jumped in, and Friday jumped in after them.

"Is your minor coming, Dainty?" grinned Ginger.

"I'm taking a red-headed monkey—why not a black-headed one, too?" answered Jim, who was getting tired of the joke sooner than the other fellows.

"Why, you cheeky ass!" exclaimed Ginger.

"Shut up, and shove off!"

Fritz von Splitz had picked himself up. Fritz was wrathful. Fritz was not, as a rule, much of a fighting-man; but Ginger's rough handling had roused the fighting-blood of the Von Splitzes—such as it was! Fritz grabbed up a thick bamboo, and rushed down the beach to the boat for vengeance. The boat was shoving off, and the fat German waddled in the water to his knees, and landed the bamboo on Ginger with a terrific swipe.

"Take tat, peast and a prute!" roared Fritz. "I tink tat you tink two times, before you trag me along py te legs after."

"Yaroooh!" roared Ginger, as he took it. He dropped the oar he was shoving against the sand, staggered, and sat down. The boat rocked wildly and collided with Fatty Fritz, the gunwale catching him just where he had parked a large breakfast.

"Ach!" gasped Fritz, as he collapsed over the gunwale, head and shoulders in the boat, and fat legs in the water.

Jim Dainty, grinning, shoved hard, and the boat shot out into the bay. Fatty Fritz clung on to the gunwale for dear life. In a moment he was in deep water, and he dared not let go.

"Peast!" he gasped. "Go pack—go pack! I shall be trowned pefore, if you go not pack after."

"No loss if you are, old Boche bean!" answered Jim cheerily. "If you're not going to sleep there, Ginger, get up and lend me a hand with the mast."

Ginger scrambled up. His face was as red as his hair with wrath.

"I'll burst that blithering Boche!" he gasped.

"Ach! Go pack mit you!" yelled Fritz.

The boat slid out to sea, with the fat German hanging on to the gunwale. Jim Dainty slipped a pair of oars into the water, and pulled, regardless of Fritz' predicament. Ginger's glare of wrath changed into a grin, and he chuckled.

"Hang on, old Boche barrel!" he said. "You can come, if you like."

"But I vant not to gum!" gasped Fritz. "I vant to go pack. I vas all vet mit meinselb perfore! Go pack to te peach!"

"Likely!" grinned Ginger.

Fritz spluttered with wrath. He blinked back at the beach with his saucer-eyes, but it was already receding to a distance. Fritz was not disposed to swim for it. He clung on, and tried to scramble into the boat. Ginger planted the toe of a boot on a fat pimple of a nose. Fritz gurgled.

"Peastly pounder, if you vill not go pack, help me into te boat!"

"You're all right where you are!" answered Ginger. "Stick on there! I say, Dainty, is that a shark yonder?"

There was a fearful yell from Fritz. Probably there was no shark within a mile or two; but the mere mention of one was enough for Fritz von Splitz.

"Mein gootness! I vas vun tead Cherman!" he yelled. "Help me into te poat, peast and a prute! Mein legs vill be pitten off pefore! Vill you not trag me into tat poat, peastly prute and pounder?"

"Ha, ha, ha! He's just behind you!" roared Ginger. "Good-bye, Fritz—sorry to lose you like this!"

"Ach himmel! Help! I vas tead mit meinselb after!" shrieked Fritz, and as Ginger doubled up with laughter, Fritz made a clutch at his red head, got a grip on his hair, and dragged himself desperately into the boat. Ginger ceased to laugh quite suddenly. He rolled into the bottom of the boat with Fritz, feeling as if his red mop had been pulled out by the roots.

"My giddy goloshes! I'll pulverise him!" gasped Ginger.

"Ach! Mein gootness! Bunch me not pefore!" gurgled Fritz. "I have a bain in mein bread-pasket! Grooo-ooogh!"

Leaving Fritz for dead, as it were, Ginger Rawlinson lent Jim Dainty a hand in stepping the mast and hoisting the sail. With Ginger at the tiller, and Jim handling the sheets, the boat ran out in the wide bay.

CHAPTER 17.

The Fight with the Ray!

BUMP! "Peast!" murmured Fritz Splitz drowsily.

"What the dickens——" said Jim Dainty, staring round.

The boat had run out almost to the mouth of East Bay fronting the wide Atlantic. There the Grimsladers dropped the sail, and glided on the current, with a net tralling in the water. Fish were thick in the waters round the lonely West Indian island. There was already a good catch.

While Jim and Ginger watched the net and managed the boat, Fritz Splitz settled down to the repose which had been interrupted by his unexpected coming out a-fishing. Fritz Splitz could sleep anywhere; and he was soon snoring, with his hat shading his fat face from the sun. Friday, the monkey, climbed to the top of the mast, and clung there, surveying sea and sky contentedly.

A sudden heavy bump under the keel made the boat jump, and rock violently from side to side, rousing Fritz from his nap, and startling the other two fellows.

The sea was calm within the bay, though outside the headlands it was ruffed by the breeze. By Sammy Sparshott's orders, the juniors never went outside the bay, except when their headmaster was with them. They could handle the boat well enough, but there were sudden squalls and currents that made it too dangerous, and the

risk of being carried out into the open ocean was not to be lightly incurred.

In the calm, shining waters, it was difficult to guess what had bumped the boat so suddenly and sharply from below. The juniors were quite certain that they had not run on a hidden rock or reef.

Bump! It came again, rocking the boat so violently that it shipped a sea, and Fritz, startled by a sudden wash of salt water, started up with a howl.

"Peastly pounders! Vy for you vet me mit vatter after?" he roared.

"My giddy goloshes!" gasped Ginger. "Hold on!"

In amazement and alarm, the juniors held on, Jim Dainty to the tiller, Ginger to the mast. Fritz rolled over helplessly in the rocking boat, and might have gone overboard had not Jim freed a hand and grasped him in time. His grasp closed on Fritz' fat ear, the nearest part of Fritz that came to hand, and he dragged him back, to the accompaniment of fiendish howls from Fritz.

"Yaroo! Led go mein ear before!" shrieked Fritz. "Vill you pull tat ear off mein kopf, peastly plockhead?"

"Hold on, you fat idiot!" gasped Jim, and Fritz got hold of a thwart, and clung. "Ginger, what the dooce

"Look!" yelled Ginger, in consternation.

He pointed to a strange shape rising beside the boat. Loose ropes slithered where the net had been—net and fish had been torn away by sharp, snapping jaws. Jim Dainty's eyes almost started from his head, as he stared at the hideous thing that bumped under the boat from below, and was now rising under the gunwale.

At the first glance, it might have been taken for a section of rubber flooring, afloat in the water, or a huge, thick mat. But there was a head to it, and a tail—the former with grasping jaws and savage eyes, the latter with the fatal sting of the sting-ray. He had never seen such a beast before, but he knew what it was—the giant sting-ray of tropical seas.

Jim's heart almost died in his breast at the sight of it. He had time for only one horrified stare, before the head of the great ray crashed on the boat and sent it spinning and shipping water.

"Vat is it?" gasped Fritz Splitz. "Is tat a shark? Ach himmel!"

"Worse!" gasped Ginger, his face white. "Keep where you are, fathead, and hold on for your life! We've got to pull, Dainty."

The schoolboys had lost their catch and their net as well. But they were not thinking of that. The giant ray was attacking the boat, and they had to think of escape—which was not likely to be easy.

Fritz, spluttering with terror, lay in a state of collapse in the bottom of the boat, but the other two were glad to have him out of the way there. Friday was squealing wildly as he now huddled beside Fritz. Jim and Ginger, keeping their balance in the rocking boat somehow, grasped the oars and pulled, only anxious to get away from the next crash, which might capsize the boat.

The ray rushed again, but the swift motion of the boat eluded him. He missed, the boat dancing on his wash as he shot by. So close by was his wash, however, that it whipped away Jim's oar from his hand. And at a little distance, the ray turned to come back.

"The sail!" panted Jim.

That they could not escape by rowing was clear, after the first moment or two. Whether they had a chance of shaking out the sail they could not tell, but they had to try. Luckily, they had left the canvas ready for hoisting. But the ray was coming back with a rush, and Jim Dainty, leaving Ginger to secure the sail, caught up a fish-spear from the thwarts, and faced the terrible enemy. Ginger caught the loose sheet, and held it in his teeth while he handled the halyards. Jim Dainty drove the fish-spear right at the hideous head that charged the boat.

It sank deep into one of the glaring, bulging eyes of the giant ray. The next

Instant it was torn away from his hand, sticking in the ray's head. The wound seemed to check the brute, for he passed under the boat, reappearing at a little distance on the other side. There he thrashed and flurried wildly in a mountain of foam.

"Quick!" panted Jim.

He sprang to help Ginger with the canvas. The ray, for the moment, seemed to be checked, but Jim had no hope that the fight was over. And he knew, from what Dr. Sparshott had told him, that the giant ray could leap aboard, and crash the boat under its weight. That would be the finish for all.

But the sail was up now, and filling with wind. The wind came off the shore, from the west. The schoolboys could have tacked home easily enough, after the trip, but they were not thinking of tacking home now. There was one chance, and one chance only, of escaping the fearful enemy alongside, and that was by running free, and getting every ounce of speed out of the heavy boat. That they were running out to sea could not be helped—as Sammy Sparshott would have agreed.

The sail filled, and the boat shot away, even as the giant ray, mad with pain and rage, came charging again.

As the boat fled seaward before the wind, the ray was directly astern. But it came with almost incredible swiftness, and it seemed to the Grimsladers that they would be overtaken before they could gather speed. Suddenly the shapeless mass shot from the water, leaping clear into the air, right at the fleeing boat.

Jim Dainty dragged over the tiller barely in time, and as the boat glanced away, surging gunwale under, the giant ray landed on the water where the craft had been a few seconds before. The monster came down with the crash of a solid ton's weight, sending up a waterspout. Had that crash landed on the boat it would have been driven down in splinters. The Grimsladers had escaped by hardly two

fathoms' length, and water fell in showers on them from the spout made by the ray as it fell behind.

"My giddy goloshes!" panted Ginger, through his chattering teeth.

"Stand on!" breathed Jim.

"Mein gootness!" moaned Fritz Splitz. "Vat was tat ting in te vatter after? Safe me! Ve was all tead before! Ach, safe me!"

The boat stood on before the wind. She was already outside the bay, and in rougher water. In the bay, sheltered by the thick woods and the island hill, the wind had seemed light, but outside the headlands, it blew a stiff breeze, and the water was strongly ruffled.

Jim, at the tiller, swung the boat a few points from the wind, without lessening her speed. Astern, the giant ray was coming on again with a savage rush.

"Will he get us?" muttered Ginger.

It seemed as if he would, for the speed with which the clumsy-looking monster moved was amazing. But the boat was going faster now—faster and faster. The wind drove her hard, and Castaway Island was sinking in the west, only the wooded hill still visible above the sea. Faster and faster—till Jim Dainty panted at last:

"We're beating him!"

They had beaten him! Dropping behind in the chase, the giant ray plunged and disappeared. They had beaten him in the race for life and death, and they gasped with relief when the sea rolled over him, at long last, and he was lost to sight.

CHAPTER 18.

Blown Out to Sea!

"MY giddy goloshes!" Ginger Rawlinson wiped the sweat from his brow, and breathed hard and deep. "We've done it, Dainty!"

"Looks like it!" gasped Jim.

Fritz Splitz sat up dizzily. Patty Fritz had been so terrified that he hardly knew what had been happening. He

was soaked to the skin with the water that had been shipped, and he sat up in several inches of it. He gasped for breath, and blinked at Jim and Ginger with bulging, saucer-eyes.

"Mein gootness!" gurgled Fritz. "Is tat ting gone? Himmel! I vas all vet all ofer--vet to te skin! Peasts and prutes, vy you make me all vet?" Fritz dragged himself up, and blinked round for the land. He jumped. "Oh, crumbs! Vere vas ve? Vere was te island before?"

He stared over the rolling sea. Jim Dainty pointed to a dark speck far astern of the boat.

"There's the island, fathead!" he answered. "At any rate, there's the hill—the top of it! We're miles out."

"Tat you vas vun peast!" roared Fritz. "Sammy say tat you go not out to sea in te poast! You disobey Sammy, you peast!"

"You bloated, blithering, blethering Boche!" growled Ginger. "If we hadn't run out to sea, that big ray would be chewing you up about this time. Not that that would matter—but he would be chewing us up along with you."

"Which matters a lot!" grinned Jim Dainty.

Jim stood up, shading his eyes with his hand from the glare of the blazing sun. With the wind right off the island, and blowing hard, it was no easy matter to tack home; and it was likely to be many weary hours, at the best, before the schoolboys set foot on the golden sands again. But that was not the worst of it.

Over the speck that marked the hill-top of Castaway Island—the only guide they had homeward—a dark cloud was blotting the blue. Had they been still fishing in the bay the schoolboys would have run in at once at that sign of foul weather. But they were miles out of the bay now. Jim's face set rather hard.

"Looks like a blow!" he said quietly.

"Looks like it!" said Ginger. "We've got to get back, old man! Chance that dashed ray showing up again. This old

hooker won't sail very near the wind, either! But we've got to manage it somehow."

Since the Grimslade castaways had captured Ezra Sarson's boat they had plenty of practice in sailing her, and plenty of instruction from Dr. Sammy Sparshott, who was a skilful yachtsman. It stood them in good stead now.

They brought the heavy craft round into the wind, and in their keenness to reach the island made the natural mistake of trying to sail too close to the wind, which emptied the sail and drifted them to leeward. Letting her fall away, they made progress again, but it was clear that they had to tack wide and large, at the risk of losing sight of the island altogether. It could not be helped, and they carried on, while the dark cloud over the island hill thickened and darkened, and the wind came harder and harder, with a roar.

"Luff!" yelled Ginger suddenly.

A sharp squall came so suddenly that Jim had barely time to put the helm down at Ginger's yell. The boat, thrown suddenly into the wind, trembled and shook like a frightened animal; but she met the squall with her bows, over which the sea broke in a torrent. Had that sea struck her broadside, nothing could have saved her. As it was, she was flooded fore and aft, but her nose surged out of the billows, and she still rode.

Fritz Splitz gurgled wildly as the water washed over him in a flood; and Friday squealed and clambered on the mast again. For a second or two, both Jim and Ginger believed that she was filling under their feet; but she still rode, though deep and wallowing.

"My giddy goloshes!" gasped Ginger. "That was a close shave, old bean! Fritz, you squeaking German sausage, get hold of the baler!"

Through the spattering spray and spindrift Jim stared hard to windward, picking up the clouded hill of Castaway Island—now far away on the port

bow, as the boat was running on the starboard tack. To carry on further was to risk shooting past the island and missing it altogether. Jim put the helm down, while Ginger slacked the fore sheet, and the boat came round into the wind. And as it swung, Jim Dainty jammed down the helm with all his strength.

"Look out, Fritz, you fool!" shrieked Ginger, as the tackle swung over, and Fritz Splitz dodged just in time and sprawled, spluttering.

The canvas filled on the new tack, and the boat shot onward. Once more the island hill loomed more clearly, now to starboard. Jim wondered whether Sammy Sparshott and Dawson and Bacon and Bean had yet returned to the hut, and missed them and the boat. If so, he could imagine how anxiously they were watching the sea for a sign of them.

But all thought of that was dashed from his mind by a rending, shattering howl of rent canvas and cracking ropes. A terrific gust had torn away the sail. For an instant or two it was visible, flying like a bird, before it vanished in the billows, leaving a few rags fluttering from the rigging.

"Oh, my giddy goloshes!" He heard Ginger's breathless shout. "That's dished us, Dainty!"

"Dished and done!" breathed Jim.

The boat lost way immediately. Fritz howled and squealed and baled as the water washed inboard.

"Let her run!" roared Ginger.

There was nothing else to be done. With the sail blown out of the ropes, there was no chance of making the island—not the remotest chance of keeping anywhere near the wind. Ours were useless in such a sea. All that the castaways could do was to run before the wind and hope for the best, and at all events keep the seas from breaking abeam.

"That tears it!" said Ginger Rawlinson; and he sat down and started baling with an empty can. "How much

would you give for our chances now, Dainty?"

"While there's life there's hope," said Jim. "Keep a stiff upper lip, old man! Grimslade never says die!"

CHAPTER 19.

Lost on the Atlantic!

"A CH! I was vun tead Cherman!" groaned Fritz Splitz.

Fatty Fritz lay sprawling in the water that swamped the boat in spite of incessant baling. Every now and then he grunted and groaned and mumbled.

Jim Dainty and Ginger Rawlinson had no time for groaning or mumbling. They baled and baled, wet and weary and worn, but keeping up their courage—still, when all hope seemed to be gone, hoping on.

Friday, the monkey, crouched in the bottom of the boat, drenched with salt water, in a state of terror almost as intense as Fatty Fritz'.

Long since, Castaway Island had vanished from sight. Where they were, whither they were driving, the juniors did not know; but they knew that they had been driven many miles from the island that had been their Crusoe home. They had little leisure to think of it, as they baled at the swamping water, expecting every movement to be overwhelmed by the waves, and tossed to death in the wild Atlantic.

The wind had shifted a few points to the northward, and the boat ran to the south-east. The first fierce force of the gale was spent now, and the wind dropped more and more; but the sea still rolled in hills and valleys of green water. It seemed a miracle that the boat yet lived; but still it floated.

A burst of red sunlight came through the banks of cloud. The sun was setting—far away to the west over Castaway Island. Long before this, they knew, their friends must have missed them, and no doubt given them up for lost.

"My giddy goloshes!" Ginger Rawlinson spoke at last. "Are we going to pull through, Dainty?"

"Looks like a chance!" answered Jim.

Silence again, and baling, baling, baling! Almost dizzy with fatigue, the juniors struggled with the water that swamped them continually. Ginger reached out with his foot at last, and gave Friedrich von Splitz a kick in his fat ribs.

"Tumble up and take your turn, you fat booby!" growled Ginger. "Take this can and bale!"

"Ach, leaf me alone pefore!" groaned Fritz. "Mein gootness, I vish tat I vas pack in Chermamy! Peasts and prutes, vy for you pring me out to sea in tis peastly poat after?"

"Kick him, Dainty!"

"Ach! Whoop!" roared Fritz, forgetting even his terrors for a moment. "Peast and a prute, kick me not on mein trousers after! Yaroooh!"

"Take your turn at baling, you podgy porker," growled Jim.

Fatty Fritz sat up. But as his saucer-eyes blinked at the wild seas rolling round the boat, he gave a squeal of terror, and crouched below the gunwale again. Like an ostrich hiding its head in the sand, Fatty Fritz preferred not to look on the fearful perils that threatened him. He lay shuddering. Ginger tossed the can to him, and it landed on his bullet head with a loud crack. But Fritz did not heed. He simply dared not sit up again.

But there was on unexpected helping hand. Friday, the monkey, grabbed the can and started baling. It was Friday's way to imitate everything that his master did; but his trick of imitation had never come in so useful. Jim and Ginger stared at him, and then, in spite of fatigue and peril, they burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old monk!" chuckled Ginger. "Go it, Friday!"

Splash, splash, splash went Friday with great energy.

"Thank goodness the wind's fallen!" said Jim Dainty. "I believe the sea's going down a bit, Ginger. We're shipping less water now. We shall pull out of this, old bean."

"Ve vas all tead!" moaned Fritz Splitz dismally.

The red sunset faded into night. There was still a wind, more and more from the north; but it was only a breeze now, and the sea was calmer. While Friday baled industriously, Jim and Ginger were able to take a much-needed rest.

There was little doubt now that the boat would live. The gale had blown itself out. But now that they were able to think over their situation, the juniors realised that it was one that might have daunted the stoutest heart.

There was neither food nor water in the boat. They had taken it out to fish in the bay, not intending to be out more than a couple of hours. The attack of the giant ray had forced them to run before the wind, and then the gale had caught them. It was almost a miracle that they had lived through the gale, but what was to happen now.

Darkness enshrouded the sea. As the boat ran more steadily, and ceased at last to ship water, Fritz Splitz sat up once more and blinked dismally round him.

"Mein gootness, it vas tark!" he ejaculated. "Peastly prutes, you geep me away from land after tark! I vas all vet and cold. Also I am ferry hungry. Mein gootness, how I vant mein supper!"

"Ring for the waiter!" suggested Ginger Rawlinson sarcastically. "Mine's turtle soup when you give the order."

"Peastly pounder!" groaned Fritz. Immediate danger being over, Fatty Fritz forgot his terrors in the recollection that he was hungry. There was an aching void inside Fritz von Splitz. "Ach, I vas so hungry as neffer vas pefore! Vat is tere to eat in tis poat?"

"Nothing," replied Ginger briefly;

whereupon Fritz groaned, and groaned again.

Jim and Ginger were also hungry. They had time to think of it now, and they found that they were very hungry indeed. But there was nothing for it but to tighten their belts and endure in silence. There was nothing else for Fritz, either—but he did not endure in silence.

The hot tropical day was followed by a cold night. Soaked to the skin, wet and shivering, the juniors snatched moments of sleep from sheer weariness. Every now and then Fritz' snore rumbled through the boat; but cold and hunger kept even the fat Rhinelander from sound slumber for once, and his snore was frequently changed into moaning and groaning.

Light at last gleamed on the rolling Atlantic. Fritz Splitz, sprawling on a wet boat-cloak, snored. Jim Dainty and Ginger moved their cramped limbs, and stood watching the curling waves in the gleam of the rising sun. In the dawn the sea was almost calm, and the boat drifted with an even keel.

Water, water everywhere, far as the eye could reach. No sign of land—no sign of a sail or a steamer's smoke—the Grimsladers seemed alone in a universe of sky and water.

"Bit warmer, anyhow!" said Ginger. "I hope it won't get too warm!" said Jim. Already there was warmth in the sun's rays; the tropical heat was coming.

"My giddy goloshes, I'm hungry!"
"Same here!"

As if the word had reached him through the mists and shadows of sleep, Fritz von Splitz ceased to snore, and sat up, rubbing his saucer-eyes with podgy knuckles.

"Mein gootness, vere vas I?" he ejaculated. Then, as he blinked round at sea and sky, he remembered. "Ach, I vas hungry! Neffer vas I so derrribly hungry as now I vas!"

"I wonder—" Jim Dainty stooped to the little locker in the stern.

"Nothing there!" said Ginger. "We never brought anything."

But Jim opened the locker and looked inside. There was a remote chance that something might have been left over from Sammy's last trip in the boat. He gave a shout and picked up a coconut.

"Oh, my giddy goloshes, what luck!" exclaimed Ginger, his eyes dancing. A single coconut was not much among three fellows and a monkey. But it was something between them and actual famine.

"Ach, goot!" gasped Fritz Splitz. "Giff me tat gokernut, Tainty!"

"Whacks round!" said Ginger Rawlinson.

"Peast and a prute!" roared Fritz. "You pring me here, and I vas so hungry as neffer vas before, and you vas so greedy tat you giff me not tat gokernut. Mein gootness, I tink tat you vas vun colossal peast, Chinger."

Jim looked at him. Ginger looked at him. Fritz was frantic with excitement, and there was no doubt that he was the hungriest of the three. They exchanged glances, and Ginger nodded his red head.

Quietly Jim handed the coconut to Fritz Splitz. And Fatty Fritz, evidently in dread that they might change their minds, lost no time in cracking it and devouring it to the last morsel.

CHAPTER 20.

On the Sandbank!

"SEE anything?"

"I think so!"

It was nearly noon. The blaze of the sun on shining waters that gleamed like a polished mirror round the drifting boat dazzled the eye. In the burning heat the juniors longed for the chill of night. Thirst was added to hunger, and it was worse than hunger. Fritz Splitz, half asleep, lay sprawled against the bare mast, dry enough now, mumbling and grunting as he dozed.

From time to time Jim or Ginger rose

and scanned the sea—and now, in the haze of noon, Jim Dainty's eyes were fixed on a dark blur. As he answered Ginger's question the red-headed junior of Grimslade scrambled up.

"Where away?" he asked.

Jim pointed.

"My giddy goloshes, it's something!" Ginger's voice was husky but eager. "We're nowhere near our island! But—it's land of some sort—if only a sandbank! Get hold of the oars!"

The current was drifting them down past the blur on the sea; they would have passed it, leaving it to port. But a few strokes of the oars brought them in line with it, and they continued to pull, going with the current.

The dark blur grew darker, more distinct. They made out a creamy line of foam where the sea broke. It was a sandbank—innumerable in West Indian waters. As they drew closer they could see that at its highest part it did not rise more than six or seven feet above the tide. Not a single tree nodded there, but there were thick patches of some brambly bush. Seagulls circled round and over it, their cries reaching the ears of the juniors.

Jim Dainty suppressed a groan. He had hoped for the sight of land when he picked up the blur on the sea. A low sandbank was little better than the drifting boat. But he pulled himself together. It was possible that water might be found in some hollow—that berries of some sort might be picked up on the bushes. At the worst there was some shelter from the sun, and a chance of stretching their legs.

Bump! The water shallowed by the sandbank, and the keel bumped in the shifting sand. The shock startled Fritz Splitz, and he sat up with a groan.

"Vat vas tat?" mumbled Fritz.

Bump, bump! Punting with the oars, Jim and Ginger pulled the boat to the sandbank, and it ran ashore. They jumped out in a foot of water, and waited for Fritz to follow them. Friday scuttled out and skipped away to the bushes in search of food. Fritz sat and

blinked. For a moment he had hoped that it was land, and the sight of the dreary, sunbaked sandbank made him groan.

"Get out, fathead!" hooted Ginger: "We've got to beach the boat—and do you think we can drag your ton of pork along?"

"Peastly prute!" moaned Fritz. "I vas too weak mit hunger to move mit meinself after. I tink—yaroooooh!" A lunge from the boathook convinced Fritz that he could move, and he skipped out of the boat almost as actively as Friday.

The boat was dragged up out of reach of the water. Then, leaving Fritz to groan and mumble, the two juniors set off to explore the bank. Ginger gave a yell of delight at the sight of a hollow among the bushes with a foot of brackish water in it at which Friday was guzzling. The fact that the ape was drinking was sufficient evidence that it was fresh water, left by the rain of the last squall.

"Oh, good egg!" gasped Jim Dainty. Ginger threw himself down and plunged his burning face into the water. Brackish as it was, it tasted to him like nectar. Jim shouted to Fritz von Splitz:

"Fritz, this way"

"Peastly prute!"

"Water, you fathead!" yelled Jim.

"Ach, vas tat vatter? I gum—I gum!" gasped Fritz, and he came.

He came quickly. He might imagine he was dying of hunger; but thirst conquered hunger, and Fritz therefore showed remarkable energy. The German junior galloped through the bushes like a charging elephant.

But Fritz' eagerness led to disaster. The ground round about was studded with treacherous gullies. The foot of Fritz von Splitz found one of those gullies—and Fritz found himself falling forward.

"Ach, safe me! I fall mit meinself

With hands outstretched Fritz sailed through the air groundwards. His right



Captain Lux hung on to the rope, ghastly in the lamplight, straining every nerve to keep his hold. A writhing tentacle was whipped round his waist. For a long, long moment the half-breed clung on desperately, frantically, shrieking!

hand jabbed Ginger astern; his left hand did likewise to Jim.

Both Jim and Ginger were bending down over the pool in the hollow, drinking their fill. But now they drank more than their fill. Pushed from the rear, they both toppled face-first into the water.

"Urrrrrrgh!" spluttered Jim.

"Grooooooooh!" gasped Ginger.

"Oooooooohh!" yelled Fritz, as he

chin made contact with the ground, loosening half his teeth, and he lay there, moaning and groaning.

Jim and Ginger, gasping and spluttering, scrambled to their feet. They glared down at the sprawling Fritz.

"You big, blithering, clumsy, idiot!" howled Jim.

"You clumsy, blithering, big idiot!" roared Ginger.

Fritz still lay there, all the breath knocked out of his body, hovering on the brink of the pool, but too winded to move for the moment.

"I vas tead!" he gasped feebly. "I vas—yarooooop!"

But Ginger soon proved that Fritz was far from dead. A hefty kick in the German junior's pants made Splitz scramble to his feet. Another kick in the same spot sent him tottering forward—and this time it was Fritz who did a nose-dive into the pool.

Fritz von Splitz forgot all his aches and pains then. Thirstily he drank the precious water; and Jim and Ginger, their ruffled tempers quickly subsiding, bent down beside him and again dipped their faces into the pool.

"Urrrrgh! Mein gootness, tat is goot!" gurgled Fritz.

"My giddy goloshes—jolly good!" agreed Ginger, with a cheery grin on his dripping face as he raised it. "Feel better, Fatty?"

"Ach, I vas petter! But now tat I have no more te t'rst, I have te hunger more tan neffer vas before! I tink tat I tie of hunger!" groaned Fritz.

"May find something to eat," said Jim Dainty hopefully. And they

started exploring again—Fritz, revived by the water, joining up.

Friday was scuttling busily among the bushes in the interior of the sandy isle, but the juniors kept on the open shore. They soon had evidence that they were not the first visitors to that lonely sand-bank. Half-sunk in the sand was a ship's topmost with some of the gear still hanging to it, and at a little distance they came on a boat's tiller and several planks from a stove-in boat. Other wreckage lay about the sand—some of it half-buried.

"There's been a wreck here!" said Ginger.

"More than one, I fancy," said Jim Dainty. "Some of this stuff is old—some looks a good deal newer! I'll bet that old mast has been there for dcnkey's years—but look at these bits of a boat—the paint's quite fresh!"

"If any grub got ashore——" said Ginger.

"Too much luck!"

"Mein gootness tat vas possible!" exclaimed Fritz Splitz; and from that moment, Fatty Fritz became the most eager of the searchers.

The three juniors separated, to cover more ground in the search. The bank was about half a mile in length, its width nowhere more than a hundred yards. But its sandy surface was unequal, broken into gullies, most of them overgrown with the wiry bush, a kind of hay-cedar for the most part; and so the three were soon out of each other's sight.

The heat was intense, and a myriad of insects buzzed over the low sand and among the thickets. Here and there, fragments of old wreckage were found, almost in the centre of the isle—showing that in wild weather the sea washed over it. Now, however, all was calm, and the castaways were safe enough from the ocean.

For long and weary hours, Jim and Ginger rooted up and down and round about, but only old shattered timbers rewarded them; and they came back to the boat at last, worn and weary.

"Where's that fathead Fritz?" asked Jim, as he sank down on the shady side of the beached boat to rest.

"Oh, let him rip!" mumbled Ginger. "Gone to sleep in the shade, I suppose—if he's found any!"

"Hallo, here he comes!"

Fatty Fritz emerged from the low thickets. He came quite briskly down to the boat, and without even looking at the two weary juniors leaning on it, he clambered in, and groped in the locker for the axe that was kept there.

Jim Dainty stared round at him.

"What's the game, Fritz," he asked in astonishment.

"Ach! Nottings!" said Fritz hurriedly. "I tink tat I chops up some of te triftwood, Tainty, to make vun fire

"Isn't it warm enough, you ass?"

"I mean, to make vun fire after tark, ven tat it will be so cold as neffer vas!" explained Fritz. "Leaf it to me—tat is all right! You vas dired mit yourselves—leaf it to me."

Shouldering the axe, Fritz Splitz marched off into the bush. Jim and Ginger stared after him. It was so utterly unlike Friedrich von Splitz to take any labour on himself, however necessary it might be, that they were amazed. But apparently the fat German was in earnest, for a little later, they heard the distant blows of the axe, though the thick bush screened the fat Rhinelander from their sight.

But the sounds soon died away. Fritz apparently had tired of his unusual exertions; at all events, he was no longer wielding the axe. But he did not return to the boat.

Friday, the monkey, came scuttling out of the thickets, and Jim stretched out a hand to give him a pat. It was thirty-six hours or more since food had passed the lips of the juniors, and they were growing weak with hunger. Friday grimaced and chattered, and Ginger suddenly sat up and took notice.

"My giddy goloshes! What's the jolly old monk got?" he exclaimed.

"Nuts!" gasped Jim.

The monkey's paw was full of small nuts; of what kind the schoolboys did not know—but it was clear that Friday had found them in the thickets, had eaten some himself, and had brought some for his master. Grimacing and grinning, Friday held them out, and thankfully the juniors grabbed them. They almost hugged the monkey. It was a meal of sorts, and unsatisfying as it was, it made the castaways feel a whole lot better. Ginger rose to his feet.

"It's getting a bit cooler," he said. "Let's make the monk show us where he nosed out the nuts and tell that fat-head Fritz. Come on."

Friday was an intelligent monkey. He understood at once what was required of him, and he grinned and skipped away, guiding the juniors to a thicket in the centre of the sandy isle where the nuts grew. They shouted to Fritz, but received no answer.

Having gathered enough of the nuts to fill their pockets, they started to search for the fat German, wondering uneasily whether he had fallen down in a state of exhaustion. Again and again they called to him, but there was no answer. Suddenly Ginger uttered an exclamation.

"Listen!"

"The fat blighter!" exclaimed Jim, anxiety changing to annoyance. "Fast asleep and snoring!"

The deep snore of Fritz von Splitz rumbled from a shady patch of bush. They came on him at last, stretched on his podgy back in the shade, his eyes shut and his mouth open, sound asleep.

They stared down at him. Fritz had had the coconut in the boat, while the other fellows had nothing; but he had an enormous appetite at the best of times, and it seemed to them amazing that he could sleep so peacefully in such a state of famine. But he slept serenely, as if in the hut on Castaway Island, or in the old dormitory at Grimslade School.

Jim bent over him and shook him. The supply of nuts to be found on the sandy islet was limited, but such as it was they were sharing it out. Fritz's saucer-eyes opened, and he blinked up at them.

"Vat is tat? Vy for you vake me oop?" he grunted. "Is it a ship?"

"No, fathead! We've got some nuts," said Jim. "Friday found them. Here you are, old fat porpoise!" He held out a handful of the little nuts. To his surprise Fritz gave a snort of angry scorn.

"You vake me up for tat, peast and a prute!" grunted the fat German. "Take avay tat ruppish, pother you, and leaf me to slumper. Go and eat goke!"

"You silly ass!" gasped Jim, wondering whether Fritz' fat brain was wandering. "They're good to eat. Better than nothing!"

"Posh! Leaf me alone!" growled Fritz, and he closed his eyes again and recommenced to snore.

"My giddy goloshes!" Ginger stared at him blankly. "Has he gone potty or what? He can't have found anything to eat."

"May have found some nuts for himself," said Jim. "Leave the fat brute alone, anyhow."

And leaving Fritz to snore, the two juniors resumed exploring the sandy islet in the setting sun. They had a faint hope of finding a turtle on the beach, but they found nothing but tiny crabs in the sand.

As the brief twilight deepened to dark they filled their pockets again with nuts and went back to the boat. Already, now that the sun was gone, the wind from the sea was chilly.

Fatty Fritz loomed up in the shadows as they reached the boat. He was there first this time. But, strange to relate, he was not complaining of hunger.

"I tink tat ve petter have vun gamp-fire," he said. "It vill be ferry cold after! If you have some matches mit you—"

"I've got matches!" said Ginger. "Where's the driftwood you chopped?"

"Ach! I vas too dired to chop him before."

"Might have guessed that one!" growled Ginger. "Where's the axe, fat-head? Have you left it in the bush?"

"Ja! Ja wohl! I leaf him behind —"

"That means fetching it, you blithering, bloated Boche. Where did you leave it?" growled Ginger.

It did not even occur to him that the fat and lazy Fritz would be willing to fetch the axe he had left in the bush. But the podgy Rhinelander jumped up in a hurry.

"Tat is all. I fetches him!" he gasped. And he scuttled away before the astonished juniors could speak.

It was ten minutes or more before Fritz came back with the axe. Meanwhile, Jim and Ginger had gathered driftwood. Under the glimmering stars they chopped up wood and built a fire. By that time it was quite cold. They were glad of the warmth and the cheerful blaze of the camp-fire on the sands; and they had a faint, faint hope that the flare might reach watchful eyes on board some ship that passed in the night.

There was brackish water to drink, hard and tasteless nuts to chew for supper. Fritz took his share of the water, but to the renewed surprise of the two juniors he refused to chew the nuts.

Their own hunger was so keen that they could almost have chewed leather, and the nuts discovered by Friday, hard and tasteless as they were, were a god-send to them. They wondered whether Fritz Splitz was losing his senses, and urged him to eat.

"Posh!" grunted Fritz. "Ruppish! Tose peastly nuts vas no goot to me! Leaf me in beace. I vas not vun hungry peast like you fellows! Leaf me to go to sleep mit meinself."

And Fritz, lying alongside the boat in the warmth of the fire, went to sleep. Tired, hungry, and forlorn, Jim and

Ginger and the monkey huddled together by the fire. Too hungry for sound slumber they woke every now and then and put fresh fuel on the blaze.

But Fatty Fritz did not waken. It was amazing—and they almost wondered whether the fat German was getting sustenance from his own fat like a polar bear in his winter sleep. Really, it seemed to be the only possible explanation, for Fatty Fritz certainly was no longer hungry.

Whatever the explanation was—and the castaways were far from guessing the truth—Fatty Fritz slept and snored in happy contentment, while Jim and Ginger, between fitful cat-naps, longed for morning.

CHAPTER 21.
Lost to the World!

JIM DAINTY stood on the low sandbank, with the rising sun behind him, and stared with longing eyes into the west. Ginger Rawlinson sat in the sand, rubbing his drowsy eyes. Friday, the monkey, perched on the bows of the beached boat, solemnly scratched himself. Sprawled on the sand, Fritz von Splitz snored.

Dawn brightened the vast Atlantic, gleaming on the rolling waters, on the low-lying sandbank that jutted from them, on the tangled bush that covered most of its extent, on the fragments of wreckage that lay strewn on the shore. How far away was Castaway Island, where Dr. Samuel Sparshott and the rest of the shipwrecked Grimsladers must have given up the boat's crew as lost?

Many, many a long mile westward, below the sea-line, lay the fertile island which had been their Crusoe home—how many miles, neither Jim nor Ginger could even guess, for they had hardly the faintest idea how far the gale had blown them out into the ocean.

Not a sign of the gale remained. In endless procession the Atlantic rollers passed the sandbank. For long, long

minutes Jim stared into the west, and turned at last to his companion.

"We've got to make it somehow, Ginger!" he said. "Sammy will think we're drowned in the gale. We've got to get back."

"If we had a rag of sail——" grunted Ginger.

"We haven't! We've got the oars."

Ginger Rawlinson rose from the sand, with another grunt.

"Fathead!" he said. "If we knew the distance, and could pull it, we've got no grub."

"Precious little here," said Jim.

"We can dig crabs out of the sand, and there's still some of those beastly nuts that Friday found in the bush. And there's water in the rain-pools. We can keep alive here—we couldn't in the boat. Let's scout for brekker instead of talking rot. Hi, wake up, Fritz!"

Ginger planted the toe of his boot in Fritz Splitz' fat ribs.

"Ach! Vat vas tat?" yelled Fritz. He sat up and rubbed his saucer-eyes. "Peastly prute, vy for you vake me up ven I tream tat I vas pack in Chermany, and tat I eat lofely Cherman sausages?"

"Tumble up, you Boche bloater!" growled Ginger. "If you want any brekker lend a hand hunting for it!"

"Peast and a prute! Leaf me to slumper!" answered Fritz Splitz. "I vas not vun hungry peast like you fellows! Go and eat goke!"

And Fatty Fritz settled down to slumber again. Ginger Rawlinson gave a snort, and tramped away. Jim followed him. They were both desperately hungry and felt as if they could have eaten almost anything. It was amazing that Fritz Splitz, generally the hungriest, was not even more keen on brekker. But it was plain that his un-earthly appetite, for once, was not worrying him, and he had slept soundly all night, while the other fellows had been kept awake most of the time by a gnawing vacancy inside.

An hour was spent digging crabs, and,

then Jim and Ginger, with their hats full, returned to the boat. Fritz Splitz was still snoring. Taking no heed of the fat German, they stirred up the camp-fire, fed it with splinters of driftwood, and filled a can from the rain-pool. As if the scent of cooking had a magical effect, Fritz Splitz awoke, and sat up, yawning. He sniffed.

"Vat vas tat you cook?" he asked. He got up and blinked into the steaming can. "Mein gootness, I like not tat to eat mit meinsel!"

"You jolly well won't have any, either!" growled Ginger. "If you want grub you can root after it like your betters, you fat frog!"

"Posh!" said Fritz. "Ruppish! You can geep all tat—I tink tat I goes and looks for some nuts after mit meinsel."

And Fritz Splitz rolled away along the shore, turned into the thickets in the interior of the islet, and disappeared from sight.

"It's not so jolly bad!" said Ginger, as he tasted the mess in the can. "Better than those dashed nuts, anyhow. What's the matter with that fat freak? I thought he would want to wolf the lot."

"Same here," said Jim, puzzled.

The meal finished, Jim set himself to gathering driftwood for the night's camp-fire, while Ginger fished. For the umpteenth time Jim hunted among the wreckage in the faint hope of finding something in the way of stores that might have been washed ashore from some sunken ship. But he found nothing of that kind; there was plenty of wood, and that was all.

Having piled up a sufficiency of wood for the night, Jim went through the bush to gather some of the small nuts, which were now diminishing in number. The voice of Fritz von Splitz came to his ears—singing! Fritz, it seemed, was in good spirits—which was not only strange but unaccountable, unless the fat German was getting lightheaded.

Jim pushed through the brambly bush and came on him suddenly. Fritz was moving along the edge of a deep gully

which was choked with tangled bush. He seemed to be looking for a place to descend into it; but as he heard the rustle of Jim Dainty coming up, he spun round, with a startled expression on his fat face, his singing stopping of a sudden. Jim looked at him in sheer wonder. If ever there was guilt written in a human countenance it was written in Fatty Fritz'. He looked as he had sometimes looked when caught pilfering the tuck from the study cupboard at Grimsdale School. But why, was a mystery.

"Ach! Vas tat you?" gasped Fritz, his saucer-eyes popping at Jim. "Peast and a prute, vy for you vatch me apout mit yourself after?"

"Who's watching you, you bloated bloater?" growled Jim.

"Ten go away mit yourself!" said Fritz. "I like not your gompany!"

"If you want your cheeky head punched—"

"Peastly prute, you geep off!" exclaimed Fritz, jumping back.

He forgot, in his alarm, that he was standing on the edge of the gully. Missing his footing as he jumped back, he plunged backwards into the gully, and there was a tearing and rending sound as he crashed through the tangled mass of bush.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jim Dainty. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ach! Peast and a prute!" yelled Fritz from the bottom of the gully. "I was scratched mit t'orns pefore—I vas all scratched and torn mit meinsel after! Mein gootness! I have colossal bains! Peastly pounder!"

Jim ran forward and stared down the gully. Fritz' fat carcass had torn a passage through the bush that filled it, and he was sprawling nine or ten feet down, almost hidden by bush. His fat face glared up at Jim.

"Ach! I vas fearfully tamaged!" gasped Fritz. "I vas tamaged all ofer!"

"I'll help you out, fathead!" said Jim Dainty, and he made a movement to clamber down after the fat Rhinelander.

"Ach! Go pack!" roared Fritz. "I want not your help, peast and a prute!"

Jim stared at him.

"You blithering, bloated Boche!" he roared. "Help yourself out, then, and be blowed to you! Go and eat coke!"

And leaving Fatty Fritz wriggling and grunting at the bottom of the gully, Jim Dainty strode away. He returned to the boat, to find Ginger there. The red-headed junior had met with no luck; not one solitary fish had he caught.

So once again crabs figured on the menu of the midday meal. Fritz put in an appearance, but turned up his nose as he saw Jim and Ginger eating the cooked crabs.

"Look here, Fritz, aren't you hungry?" asked Jim quite gently. "You're a lazy slacker, but you can take your whack if you like."

"I gannot eat tat peastly stuff, Tainty!"

"Well, if you like the nuts better——" said Jim, amazed.

"Te nuts?" Fritz grinned for a moment. "Ja! Ja wohl! Tat is it, Tainty—I like te nuts mooch petter!"

And Fritz rolled away into the thickets again and disappeared.

CHAPTER 22.

Fritz' Secret!

FRIDAY, the monkey, came scuttling out of the bush, and grinned and grimaced before his master, with something under his hairy arm.

Jim Dainty did not heed him. He sat on the sand, leaning back against the boat, looking seaward, towards Ginger, who was on the shoal again with his fishing-tackle. There was something like despair in Jim's heart. Sea and sky—sky and sea—met his weary eyes wherever he turned them.

But the persistent monkey drew his attention at last. Jim turned—and then started violently with amazement. He could not believe that it was real—that

the monkey had laid a bag of ship's biscuit on his knees!

He stared at it dazedly for long moments before he stirred. Friday, grinning, jerked a biscuit from the bag, and transferred it to his mouth. He seemed to like it. Jim, still in a sort of trance, did the same. It was ship's biscuit. It seemed to melt in his mouth. He gasped.

"Oh, Friday, old pal! Where did you find that?" gasped Jim Dainty.

He leaped to his feet. His first thought was for Ginger. Taking the bag in his hand, he ran down to the water and waded out, waving the other hand excitedly.

Ginger Rawlinson stared at him, his first impression being that Jim had gone "batty" from the sun. But as Jim clambered on the shoal and held out the bag of ship's biscuit, he jumped.

"My giddy goloshes!" he yelled.

He fairly grabbed at it. Hungry as he was, he had not realised how hungry till he saw good food before him.

"How did you get it?" gasped Ginger at last, his mouth full.

"The jolly old monk picked it up somewhere! We fancied that there might be grub washed ashore with the other stuff, but we never found any. Friday's found it! Must be deep in the bush somewhere—the sea rolls right over this sandbank, you know, in a storm." Jim Dainty chuckled. "Let's go and look for Fritz—that fat bloater will chortle for joy when he sees this!"

"Fritz!" repeated Ginger. He gave a sudden start. "My giddy goloshes! That's it!"

"Eh! What's that?" asked Jim.

Ginger Rawlinson clenched his fists, and punched at the air, as if he saw a fat face there! His face was red with rage.

"I'll smash him!" he gasped.

"What the thump——"

"I'll pulverise him into little pieces! Can't you see?" howled Ginger. "Fritz never wanted any crabs—he never wanted any nuts—he's been living on

air—I don't think! Can't you see, you fathead! Fritz has found this—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"That's why!" panted Ginger.

"That's why he disappears into the bush—that's why he doesn't want any of our prog! I'll bet you the monk has seen him gorging in the bush and got hold of that bag! I'll bet you there's lots of it, and that fat scoundrel spotted it the first day on the sandbank—and he's kept it dark!"

"Come on," said Jim Dainty, between his teeth. "The fat brute's in the bush now. I fancy I know where to look for him, too—I can guess why he didn't want me to go down into that gully to help him out! Come on, old fellow!"

With grim faces the two juniors waded ashore from the shoal. Friday skipped after them as they made for the bush. Jim Dainty led the way directly towards the sandy gully into which Fritz Splitz had tumbled earlier on. He had no doubt that the secret lay there. Possibly the clumsy Fritz had tumbled into it on the first day on the island, and so made the discovery.

"Quiet!" whispered Jim, as they reached the thickets.

Stepping softly, they approached the deep gully in the middle of the islet. There was no sign of Fritz Splitz to be seen. But as they stopped and peered down at the thick masses of bush, a fat chuckle reached them from below.

"Mein gootness! Tat peef is goot! It is ferry goot! It is not so goot as a German sausage, but it is ferry goot!" Chuckle again. "And tat biscuit, he is ferry goot also! Tat peastly prute of a monkey steal vun pag of biscuit, plow him, but bresently I giff him vun goot kick, wen de fellows was not looking!"

The thick bush hid Fatty Fritz from sight in the gully. But there was a break in it where Fritz had gone down, and Jim Dainty jumped into the opening, followed by Ginger. They crashed through cracking bushes, and there was a fearful yell as they landed, one after another, on something fat and soft. It was Fritz Splitz!

"Yaroooh! Mein gootness! Ach!" yelled Fritz wildly, as he sprawled. "I was grushed to a bancake—I have no more to breff—urrrrgh!"

Jim and Ginger picked themselves up. Fritz sprawled and gurgled, all the wind knocked out of his fat carcass. Under the thick bushes was a sort of sheltered hollow, where evidently the fat German had made his camp.

A wooden case, packed full of cans of beef, lay open—they remembered how Fritz had taken the axe into the bush, under pretence of chopping firewood—which he had never chopped! Another case, packed with bags of ship's biscuit, was also open.

There was a crumpled mass of canvas, part of a torn sail, on which Fritz had been sitting, and a tangle of ropes. Probably enough, the bush hid more remnants of the wreck in the recesses of the gully. But the castaways had found enough for the moment.

"What did I tell you?" gasped Ginger.

"The bloated blighter!" panted Jim Dainty. "Collar him!"

How many thumps, and punches, and bangs, and kicks, Fatty Fritz collected during the next hectic ten minutes he never knew. It was a wrecked and battered Fritz who escaped at last scrambling away frantically among thorny thickets, yelling and gasping and gurgling.

Leaving it at that, Jim, Dainty and Ginger loaded themselves with bags of biscuit and cans of beef, and made their way back to camp. For the first time since they had been on the sandbank, they made a wonderful meal—pausing every now and then to pet the monkey, who had rooted out Fritz' secret, and was really to be regarded as the founder of the feast.

"My giddy goloshes!" said Ginger. "This is good! And lots of it, old man—lots and lots and lots! Lots to stack in the boat—and we can try to make that trip now—what?"

"What-ho!" said Jim Dainty. "Hallo, there's Fritz!"

He picked up a chunk of rock.

Fatty Fritz, hovering in the distance, blinked at them. The rocky chunk flew and just missed a fat pimple of a nose. There was a fiendish yell from Fritz Splitz, and he disappeared into the bush again—and the two juniors chuckled and resumed the happy feast.

CHAPTER 25.

Short Commons!

"WHAT ripping luck!" said Ginger Rawlinson.
"Topping!" agreed Jim Dainty.

It was the following morning. Jim and Ginger, having had a hearty supper the previous night, had slept soundly. But not so Fritz. As a punishment for his trickery, he had been denied any grub at all—which, to Fritz, was a punishment indeed.

For a change, it was the German junior who had spent a sleepless night. He had hoped Jim and Ginger would relent when the new day dawned. But they had not relented; and Fritz had not partaken of breakfast!

Now Jim and Ginger were investigating the hoard which had been so unexpectedly revealed.

Fatty Fritz' discovery was more extensive than Fritz had dreamed. Fritz had been satisfied to find the stores; but Dainty and Ginger hunted further, and found many other things.

It was clear that in some terrific storm the Atlantic had swept right over the low sandbank, filling that gully, now dry as tinder, with raging water. Some hapless vessel had come to grief there, shattered and smashed to fragments. Much of the wreck had been washed away in the storm that had caused it; but much remained, embedded in the sand or tangled in the bushes. Everything that remained was deeply hidden by the bush; but the juniors rooted out one thing after another.

There were cases packed with canned beef, and beans, and other things; cases of biscuit-bags; all sorts of utensils,

masses of torn canvas and ropes, an anchor, a shattered boat, all sorts of tackle and broken timbers. Much of it—most of it—was useless to the castaways. But much of it was exactly what they needed.

They had lost the boat's sail in the storm, but here was ample canvas to replace it; it only meant work! And Jim and Ginger were more than ready to put in all the work required. The mere thought of getting back to Castaway Island, to Dr. Sparshott, and Dawson and Streaky and Sandy spurred them on.

It was a busy morning. It was as busy for the hungry Fritz as for the other fellows. They made him work! Trip after trip was made, from the bushy gully to the boat, and at every trip the three juniors were heavy-laden.

Fatty Fritz staggered and groaned and perspired under his loads. The sun was hot—blazing down from a cloudless sky. What Fritz wanted was a big feed, and a snooze in the shade afterwards—while the other fellows did the work!

What he got was painfully unlike what he wanted! Ginger playfully told him that the work would give him an appetite—at which Fritz groaned dismally.

But in the torrid heat of noon, even Jim and Ginger had to stop for a rest. They sat down in what shade they could find, and made a gorgeous meal from their new supplies. Certainly they did not prize grub as Fritz did; but there was no doubt that good food, and plenty of it, made them feel much more hopeful and happy.

Fatty Fritz eyed them wolfishly as they sat down to dinner, and Jim Dainty was disposed to relent. But Ginger was adamant.

"What about letting the fat brute off now, Ginger?" asked Jim, and Fatty Fritz' longing face brightened with hope.

"What about not talking silly rot?" was Ginger's reply, and Fritz' fat face was overcast again. "He kept us with-

out grub for days while he was guzzling! We ought to keep him just as long, to be fair! But we'll let him off lightly. He can pile in at brekker to-morrow—if he works well for the rest of to-day!"

Groan!

"Shut up!" murmured Ginger, sleepily.

"Peast and prute!"

"If I turn out——"

Fritz Splitz suppressed the sounds of woe. He did not want Ginger to turn out and deal with him. Ginger had a heavy hand. Fatty Fritz was silent, and Ginger Rawlinson went to sleep again. Jim Dainty had not awakened. The day's work had tired out the two Grimsladers, and they slept like tops.

But Fritz could not sleep. Fritz without food all day, was too hungry to sleep.

He sat up on the soft sand, and blinked drearily round him. The full, round moon sailed over the Atlantic, and the bushy sandbank; it was almost as light as by day. But it was hours yet to day; and how he was to endure a state of famine till morning, was a mystery to Friedrich von Splitz.

He blinked at the boat. It was at high-water mark, and the painter pegged to the sand. The tide was full now, running past the sandbank, and the boat afloat. It rocked at the rope.

Fritz gazed at it longingly. Stacks of food in the boat and Fritz ravenous! But he dared not raid the provisions! If Ginger heard him and woke——

But under the spur of his unearthly appetite Fritz' fat brain worked at double pressure. Slowly an idea came into that fat brain. He blinked round cautiously at the two sleepers, and rose silently to his feet. Stepping on tip-toe, making no sound on the soft sand, he reached the boat. One tug at the peg, and the painter was free. Knee-deep in water beside the boat, holding on to the gunwale, Fritz blinked round at the sleepers farther up the shore. They were not stirring.

He grinned. He gave the boat a shove and bundled headlong into it, and it rocked away from the shore. There was a sharp, startled squeal. Friday was sleeping in the boat, and the fat German had landed on him. Loud and sharp rang the monkey's squeal, and a hairy paw clawed at Fritz.

"Peast of a monkey!" gasped Fritz. He scrambled up and grasped the oars. A shout came from the shore.

"My giddy goloshes! What——"

"The boat!" yelled Jim Dainty

"Ach himmel!" gasped Fritz Splitz, as the two startled juniors came racing down to the shore. He clattered the oars into the rowlocks and pulled frantically. Jim and Ginger reached the water's edge, but Fatty Fritz was already out of reach. In the bright moonlight the boat rocked a dozen yards from the beach.

"He's got the boat!" gasped Ginger. "Why, you blithering Boche—you potty porpoise—bring that boat back!"

"Peast and a prute!" yelled back Fritz. "I vill gum pack ven I have had mein supper; but pefore tat I vill not gum pack! Yah!"

"My only hat!" gasped Jim Dainty. Grinning at the two exasperated juniors on the sandbank, Fritz pulled hard. It had not occurred to Fritz' fat brain that some whirl of the currents, eddying round the sandbank, might shoot him past the end of the bank and start him on an unintentional voyage across the Atlantic!

"After him!" panted Jim, plunging desperately into the water and swimming.

"My giddy goloshes!" gasped Ginger. He realised, like Jim, that the boat was their only hope. It was packed ready to make sail in the morning; all was ready to make the attempt to get back to Castaway Island. If it was lost——

He plunged in after Jim, and swam for the boat.

"Peasts and prutes!" gasped Fritz Splitz.

He bent to the oars, with the perspiration running down his fat face.

Exerting all his strength, his eyes fixed on the two dark heads dotting the water astern, he pulled and pulled, and did not even notice that the low sandbank was gliding away from him, and that the current was driving the boat past the end of it.

But Jim and Ginger could see. They knew, if Fritz did not, that it was no longer possible for him to make the sandbank again—doubtful if they could make it themselves by swimming!

It was for life itself that they were swimming now, their own lives and Fritz'.

With desperate efforts, the two swimmers reached within a few fathoms of the boat. But they could gain no farther. Fritz kept his distance; and as he saw that they could not overtake him, he grinned, a breathless grin of defiance and derision.

"Go pack!" yelled Fritz. "Go pack mit yourself before, peasts and prutes and pounders! I gum pack after that I have had mein supper, you peastly plighsters!"

"Friday!" yelled Jim Dainty frantically. The monkey was capering in the boat, a queer figure in the moonlight, in his cotton trousers and shirt, in a state of wild excitement. Friday was an intelligent animal, as he had proved more than once. It was clear to Friday that his master wanted to get to the boat, and that Fritz Splitz was preventing him. Jim's desperate yell reached his ears, and Friday sent back an answering squeal.

"We're done!" groaned Ginger.

Fritz Splitz was pulling on, nothing doubting that when he had dropped the pursuit, he could pull in to the shore as soon as he liked! He had forgotten the monkey in the boat. He was reminded of him now.

Friday's intelligent brain grasped the fact that Fritz was keeping his master out of the boat! As soon as Friday quite understood that, Friday began to take a hand in the proceedings. He skipped behind Fritz Splitz, and suddenly clawed hold of his neck from

behind and dragged him over backwards.

"Ach himmel!" squealed Fritz Splitz.

Up went Fritz' fat legs in the air! Head and shoulders banged on the bottom of the boat. The oars, dragged in as he rolled over backwards, clattered from his hands.

"Ach! Peast of a monkey!" howled Fritz.

He struggled frantically up. Friday, squealing and howling, clung to him and clawed. The boat, turning broadside to the current now that Fritz was not pulling, rocked and rolled, and almost plunged gunwale under. Fritz rolled over, wildly mixed up with the monkey. Jim Dainty and Ginger, exerting every ounce of their strength, came cleaving the water. Now that the boat had lost way, they fairly shot down to it and clambered aboard.

Fritz, at last, had succeeded in hurling Friday off, and was on his fat knees when the two drenched and dripping juniors came bundling headlong in. They crashed on him, and flattened him down in the bottom of the boat again.

"Urrrrggh!" gurgled Fritz, as he collapsed.

Ginger scrambled along to the tiller. Broadside on, the boat was in imminent danger. Ginger grasped the tiller and brought it round to the current. The boat steadied at once. Jim Dainty staggered to his feet. He stared across the tumbling water. In the bright moonlight, the sandbank they had left was a mere blur on the sea, fast fading away into the distance. The current whirled them on.

"Urrrrggh!" gurgled Fritz Splitz. "Peasts and prutes! I tell you tat I vill have mein supper, I vas so hungry. Ten I vill go pack—"

Jim Dainty grasped him by a fat ear and forcibly turned his podgy face in the direction of the disappearing sandbank.

"Look, you fat fool!" he hissed. "Look, you blithering idiot! Look, you plefaced, piffing porker! Do you

think you could get back? None of us could get back! If we hadn't got hold of the boat, you'd have gone to sea on your own, and we should have been drowned!"

"Vat!" gasped Fritz. He blinked across the moonlit water. "Mein gootness! Vere is tat sandpank? Ach himmel!"

He blinked at the blur on the water in utter consternation. For the first time it dawned on his fat brain that he had been running out to sea alone in the boat! His teeth chattered.

"Friday's saved our lives—yours as well as ours, you blithering, benighted bloater——"

"Ach, but I neffer tink—I have not tunk——"

"Take the tiller, Dainty!" said Ginger quietly. "I've got something to say to Fritz!"

Jim grinned and took the tiller. Ginger stooped in the boat and fumbled. Fritz Splitz blinked at him. He eyed Ginger hopefully, apparently under the impression that the red-headed junior was sorting out provisions for him. That was quite a mistake on Fritz' part! Ginger was sorting out something else.

"I vill have some peef, Chinger," said the hopeful Fritz. "Also I vill have some peans! And I vill have some biscuit, and——"

"You're going to have beans," said Ginger grimly. "You're not going to have beef, and you're not going to have biscuit; but you're going to have beans—lots of them—lots and lots!"

Ginger rose, with what he had been looking for in his hand. With the rope's-end in his right hand, he grabbed Fritz' fat neck with his left, and twisted him over a thwart. There was a howl of apprehension from Fatty Fritz, as he realised what kind of "beans" he was going to get.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Ach! Leaf off to pang me on mein trousers!" yelled Fritz, struggling wildly. "Mein gootness! I have vun

colossal bain—yaroooh! Feast and a prute, tat you leaf off!"

Whack, whack, whack! rang the rope's-end, and louder still rang the wild yells of Fritz Splitz. Ginger did not leave off till he was tired. By that time, Fritz was more than tired!

For quite a long time Fatty Fritz forgot even his desire for beef and biscuit after that liberal helping of "beans."

CHAPTER 24.

Saved from the Sea!

"A MOI! A moi!"

Jim Dainty wondered whether he was dreaming.

He sat in the stern of the surging boat, his arm flung over the tiller, his hand on the sail. Ginger Rawlinson and Fritz Splitz lay fast asleep, rolled in canvas, amidships; Friday, the monkey, lay beside his master.

Dawn was just breaking, and the darkness of night was lifting as the sun rose slowly over the horizon to herald a new tropical day. A light breeze ruffled the surface of the sea, filling the boat's sail from moment to moment and then leaving it flapping idly.

In the silence and the vast solitude of the Atlantic Jim found himself nodding from time to time. But it was his "watch on deck," and he resolutely kept himself awake. Several times, it had seemed to him, he heard a sound from the sea, and now suddenly it came—a human voice that was calling in the French language.

Quite wide awake now, Jim half rose, staring over the waters. Only the endless surges of the Atlantic, reflecting the rising sun, met his eyes. It seemed to him that he must have nodded and dreamed. How could a voice have called in that solitude of waters?

A day and a night had passed since the three juniors had put out in the boat from the sandbank in the attempt

to get back to Castaway Island. It was a week since they had been blown away to sea, and they knew that Dr. Sparshott and their friends on Castaway Island must have given them up as lost.

But the discovery of the stores in the wreck on the sandbank enabled them to make the attempt, and all day they had watched the western horizon in the hope of seeing the hilltop they knew so well. And it had seemed to Jim that in the last glimmer of the sunset he had sighted a blur on the western sea; but the darkness had shut down, and it was lost again.

If it was Castaway Island it was still many a long mile distant, and the wind had fallen to light puffs, the boat making hardly a knot.

Jim had been thinking, as he sat half nodding at the tiller, whether he would see the green, wooded hill and the shore of golden sands when the sun came up. But that strange cry from the sea drove the thought even of the island from his mind.

He listened intently as he stared over the curling waters. Only the wash of the waves came to him—and, closer at hand, the creak of the sail and the snore of Fritz Splitz. Surely he had been dreaming!

He sat down again, and Friday, waking up, blinked at him with his glimmering back eyes. The boat surged on. Then suddenly again came the cry, fainter than before:

"A moi! A moi!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated the Grimslade junior. He was wide enough awake now, and the cry was unmistakable.

Someone from the surging bosom of the sea was calling for help—in French! There was no boat—he would have seen a boat had one been within hail. It must be a swimmer—in that lonely waste of waters—who had sighted the Grimslade craft.

A shipwrecked man, swimming, and crying for help! Shipwrecked him-

self, Jim Dainty was not likely to pass such a cry unheeded.

He stretched out his foot and awakened Ginger Rawlinson with a kick in the ribs. There was a howl from the red-headed junior of Grimslade.

"Ow! My giddy goloshes! What—"

"Wake up, old man!" exclaimed Jim breathlessly.

Ginger sat up and glared at him.

"You howling ass! Too jolly lazy to take your watch, what? Let a fellow sleep!"

"Fathead! There's a shipwrecked man calling for help—"

"What!"

Ginger was on his feet in a moment. One of his feet, as he scrambled up, landed on the fat figure at his side, and there was a wild gurgle from Friedrich von Splitz.

"Ach! Mein gootness! Vat was tat?" howled Fritz. "Tere vas something tat pang me in te pread-pasket! Urrrrh! I have no more te breff! Wurrgrgh! You prute, Chinger, tat you gerroff mein dummy! Vy for you tread on mein dummy before?"

"Br-r-r-r!" growled Ginger. He stepped off Fritz Splitz, leaving that podgy youth gurgling. Holding on to the mast, Ginger stared across the water. "What do you mean, Dainty? Where's your jolly old shipwrecked man?"

"I haven't seen him—he called—"

Ginger scanned the sea searchingly. The sun was climbing in the sky, and the full light of day burst over the Atlantic.

"I can't see anybody," said Ginger, his gaze roaming the vast expanse of water which stretched on all sides of the boat as far as the eye could see. "Look here, you've been dreaming, fathead—"

"A moi! A moi!"

Ginger jumped as he heard that cry—faint, as though coming from a distance.

"My giddy goloshes!" he gasped.

"That's French—it's some Froggy calling for help! How the giddy dickens —"

Once again Ginger's gaze swept the sea, and now, in the distance, he could see a dark object bobbing in the water.

"There he is!" he cried. "Somebody swimming— My hat!" Ginger put his hands to his mouth, made a trumpet, and roared: "All right! Coming, old bean! Stick it out!"

Jim gave the tiller a twist, and the boat ran down towards the distant man. Faintly from the gleaming waters a wild, white, haggard face showed—the face of a man in the last stage of exhaustion.

But as the boat approached, a cry—or, rather, a husky scream—burst from the swimmer. That cry was echoed by Jim and Ginger, for now they saw something else in the water—something that moved swiftly in the direction of the exhausted man. A fin—the fin of a shark!

Swift as the boat ran before the light breeze, the shark moved faster. Would the castaways be in time to rescue the helpless swimmer from a ghastly fate?

Now the boat was bearing down upon the exhausted man. He was attempting to swim towards the craft, terror written in his eyes. The shark was but a few yards away from him, rising to the surface to grab at its victim.

"Fritz!" yelled Jim. "That tin of beef—throw it at the shark!"

For once Fritz' wits worked with reasonable quickness. He grabbed up a can of tinned beef from the stores in the boat and hurled it overboard—right in the open mouth of the shark with its rows of glittering teeth.

Meanwhile, Ginger leaned over the gunwale, grasped at the swimmer as the boat ran alongside him, grasped at the man, and gripped the tangled, wet hair.

"Got him!" panted Ginger.

He changed his grip to the man's shoulders and heaved him on board,

Jim throwing his weight on the other side. Drenched, dripping, gasping feebly, the half-drowned Frenchman lay in a pool of salt water in the bottom of the boat. Fritz Splitz, his saucer-eyes wide open, stared at the shark as it vanished beneath the surface, the tin of beef still in its jaws.

The rescued man lay breathing feebly, his eyes half closed. It was plain that he had been at the end of his tether when he sighted the boat and cried feebly for help.

Full of compassion as they were, Jim and Ginger could not help noticing that he did not look a pleasant customer. His brows were low and heavy over little piggy eyes set close together—his jaw sharp and jutting under the tangled, unkempt beard. He was dressed in a tattered uniform which somehow seemed familiar to the juniors, but which they could not quite place. Unless he had fallen overboard from a ship, they could not imagine how he had come there at all—yet all through the previous day and since nightfall there had been no sign of a ship.

He panted and panted as he lay in the pool that dripped from him. Jim Dainty sorted out a tin can and filled it with water from a keg and held it to the man's lips. He drank greedily to the last drop. Evidently he had suffered severely from thirst.

"Poor chap!" murmured Ginger. He did not like the rescued man's looks, but he pitied him from the bottom of his heart. "Ask him if he's hungry—put it in French!"

"Avez vous faim?" asked Jim. And the man nodded eagerly.

Almost in a moment Ginger had a tin platter with canned beef, beans, and biscuit before the rescued man. He sat up, leaning on a thwart, and ate greedily, tearing the food like a wild animal.

"De l'eau!" he muttered, and Jim filled the tin can again with fresh water.

The rescued man ate and drank alternately with a desperate greed that showed that it was long since either food or drink had passed his lips.

"Tat is all ferry well," grunted Fritz Splitz, "but subbose tat we find not te island, and tat te food run short—"

"Kick him, Ginger!"

"Feast and a prute!" roared Fritz.

Having satisfied at last both hunger and thirst, the rescued man leaned back, breathing heavily. His eyes, black and sharp, watched the school-boys keenly.

"Vous etes Francais?" he asked suddenly.

"No fear!" answered Ginger. "We sommes Anglais—I mean, nous sommes English—"

A faint grin came over the haggard face for a moment. Ginger's French seemed to have an enlivening effect on the Frenchman. Then he leaned back heavily and closed his eyes. The juniors had an impression that he was glad, or relieved, to learn that they were not French. Why, they could not imagine.

But they could see that he was exhausted, and they arranged the roll of canvas to make him as comfortable a bed as possible. Fritz Splitz eyed that proceeding with disapproving wrath.

"Vat ped is tere for me?" he demanded. A lunge from Ginger's boot was the only answer to that question, and Fatty Fritz had to make up his mind to manage without his bed. Fortunately, Fritz could sleep anywhere and anyhow, and he was soon snoring again, curled up in the bows.

Fritz slept soundly enough. But the rescued man muttered and mumbled wildly in his sleep. Such words as "soif" and "faim" continually recurred, telling how he had suffered from thirst and hunger. Once, half-awakened, he screamed out: "Les soldats! Voyez! Les soldats!"

Jim and Ginger exchanged startled looks as they heard it. Who were the

"soldiers" of whom the man saved from the sea had been in fear? More and more, they wondered who and what he was.

CHAPTER 25.

A Peculiar Passenger!

JIM DAINTY stood up in the bows, and stared into the western horizon. The sun was rising higher over the ocean, gilding the wide, rolling waters. Sea and sky—sky and sea—encircled the boat.

Jim's eyes searched for a trace of the blur in the west that they had picked up the previous day. Was it a cloud that blurred the horizon, far away on the sealine, or was it the summit of the hill on Castaway Island, where their friends mourned them as lost?

It lay west by north, which, so far as the juniors could calculate, was the direction of the island which had been their Crusoe home. Whether it was Castaway Island or not, it was, he was almost certain, land of some sort, and the boat headed for it.

"Ten to one it's our jolly old island!" said Ginger confidently. Ginger always hoped for the best. "If it is, we shall make it before sundown, even in this wind. My giddy goloshes, shan't I be glad to see Streaky and Sandy again—and jolly old Sammy! What?"

"And Dick?" said Jim Dainty. "They must have given us up for lost. Some surprise for them when we come sailing merrily home, Ginger."

The Frenchman was still sleeping. The juniors ate their breakfast—with the usual grumble from Fritz. Plenty of provisions had been packed in the boat from the wreck on the sandbank; but the three were on rations, for it was impossible to tell how long the voyage might last. Rations did not agree with Fritz von Splitz. There was now another mouth to be fed, and that made it still more urgent not to

exceed the regular rations. Which added to Fatty Fritz' indignation.

"You gif good piscuits to tat peastly monkey, and goot peef to tat peast tat you bick up out of te water," he grunted, "and I have vun colossal hunger—I feel as if tere vas nothing in mein preadpasket! I tink tat you vas two prutes and two pounders."

What Fatty Fritz thought, however, did not worry the Grimsladers. Fritz could grouse as much as he liked, but when he reached out for a surreptitious helping, Ginger Rawlinson introduced the boathook into the argument, and Fritz Splitz fled into the bows, yelling.

"Qu'est-ce que cela?" Fritz' howl awakened the sleeping Frenchman, and he sat up and stared dimly round him. He stared at the juniors, and his hand flew to his belt, as if for a weapon. A sheathed knife was buckled to his belt, and his fingers closed over the handle, and half-drew the blade.

"Hold on, old bean!" gasped Ginger. "Keep your wool on! We're friends here, old tulp, you won't want your toothpick."

The man stared, or, rather, glared at him. But he seemed to remember, and thrust back the knife into its sheath. His haggard, bearded, swarthy face looked less prepossessing than ever. For the first time it occurred to the juniors that they might have to be on their guard against the man they had saved from death in the sea.

"Do you speak English?" asked Jim Dainty quietly. He rather wished now that he had removed the man's knife while he slept; but that thought, naturally, had not occurred to him.

"Mais oui, un peu!" muttered the Frenchman. "Yes. Who are you? How comes it that you, who are boys, are in this boat?"

"We were blown out to sea from an island where we had been shipwrecked," answered Jim Dainty. "We're trying to get back now." He pointed to the west, where the dark

blur was now unmistakably land of some sort. "We think that's the island. Our friends are there. But who are you?"

Without replying to the question the Frenchman rose to his feet. It seemed that food and sleep had restored his strength, for he moved nimbly and actively enough. Holding on to the mast, he stared at the western blur. Then his sharp, rat-like eyes scanned the sea in all directions. Finally, he came back to the juniors, and sat down to eat.

His hunger had revived, that was clear, for he ate almost like a wolf. Fritz Splitz groaned aloud as he saw the provisions going. But neither Jim nor Ginger was disposed to say nay to the famished man. He would have to go on rations, like the schoolboys; but they were willing to let him make up leeway first.

At the same time his manner was dominating, in a way that was far from pleasing, as if he fancied that he could do as he chose in a boat manned by schoolboys. He ate, and ate, in a way that Fatty Fritz himself could hardly have beaten. Then he rapped out sharply:

"Donnez-moi—give me to drink!"

Quietly Jim Dainty handed him a tin can of water. He drank it, and tossed aside the can.

"We've picked up a nice polite passenger!" murmured Ginger.

Jim shrugged his shoulders. The man's manners did not matter very much, but if he fancied that he was cock of the walk in the Grimslade boat, he was going to learn that that was a mistake.

"Will you tell me your name, monsieur?" asked Jim.

The sharp, black eyes flashed round at him.

"Mon nom?" He paused a second. "Lebon—Gaston Lebon!" Both the juniors knew that the answer was false. They did not care two straws whether his name was Lebon or not, but they were growing very uneasy. It was

fairly clear that the man was neither a seaman nor a passenger from a ship. Who and what was he?

"Les autres—you have seen the others?" he asked sharply.

"There were others with you?" asked Jim.

"Mais oui—yes, yes! Un bateau—a boat—cinq hommes—five men in a boat. You have seen?"

"No! We saw nobody but you when we picked you up," answered Jim. "Did you fall overboard from a boat, then?"

Instead of answering, Lebon began to ask questions quickly and eagerly. He was anxious to learn whether the English boys had seen anything of a boat with five men in it, and whether they had seen a ship—a gunboat.

Satisfied at last that they had seen nothing, he asked about themselves, and they told him of the wreck of the Spindrift, and of their life on Castaway Island. He listened with the keenest attention, and at last, making them a sign to be silent, he sat plunged in deep thought. Jim and Ginger exchanged rather grim looks.

The wind was freshening a little as the morning advanced, and coming more from the south. They noticed that it was towards the south that Lebon's restless eyes constantly turned, and it was already growing into a suspicion in their minds that he was in fear of pursuit, and from that direction. His looks, his manners, everything about him, hinted that it was some breaker of the law who had so strangely come to them from the sea.

They were more anxious than ever to make Castaway Island, and it was a great comfort to them to see the dark blur in the west taking form and substance. It was a hill rising from the sea in the far distance, and its outline grew more and more familiar. Fortune had favoured them, and they were almost certain now that they were in sight of Castaway Island.

The Frenchman came suddenly aft, where Jim Dainty was steering, and took the tiller from him. The boat swung away from her course, coming full before the wind.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Jim, in angry astonishment.

"Taisez-vous!" snapped Lebon.

"You cheeky ass!" roared Ginger Rawlinson. "Who told you to steer? Can't you see you're steering away from the island?"

Jim Dainty laid his hand on the tiller again. The man from the sea gripped it hard, and his black eyes glittered at the Grimslade junior.

"Ecoutez!" he said, between his teeth. "Listen, you! I go not to an island—it is useless to me! Je cherche Amerique—the mainland—it is a chance, and I take it."

The juniors stared at him blankly. The insolence of the man in thus coolly taking possession of their boat almost took their breath away. And his idea of making for the continent of America, in an open boat over hundreds of miles of sea, was wild and desperate. Certainly the juniors had no idea of making any such desperate attempt. Castaway Island was their destination, if they could reach it.

"You must be mad!" gasped Jim, at last. "Why, the food in the boat would not last us half the distance, even if there was a chance—"

"So much the worse for you, alors," said Lebon, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Why, you dashed rascal!" roared Ginger. "Let go that tiller!"

The man laughed. But he ceased to laugh the next moment as Ginger Rawlinson hurled himself at him, grasped him with both hands, and dragged him away from the helm. There was a bump and a crash as they rolled over in the bottom of the boat together.

"Mein gootness!" gasped Fritz Splitz, his saucer-eyes almost popping out of his fat face; and there was a startled

squeal from Friday, the monkey. The boat rocked wildly.

"Look out, Ginger!" shrieked Jim Dainty, as there was a flash of steel in the sunshine. Leaving the helm to take care of itself, Jim flung himself on the Frenchman, grasped his arm in time, and dragged it back as he struck with the knife.

CHAPTER 26.

The Fight in the Boat!

"MY giddy goloshes!" panted Ginger.
"YOU scoundrel!" roared Jim Dainty.

He dragged back the arm till the bone almost cracked. There was a howl of pain and rage from Lebon.

Amazing, almost unbelievable as it was to the Grimslade juniors, the desperate rascal was striving to use his knife. Only a few hours since they had saved him from death in the deep sea. And this was his gratitude!

But it was clear to them already that the man they had saved was some lawless ruffian, and that it was fear of pursuit and recapture that put into his desperate mind the wild scheme of attempting to reach the mainland of America by seizing the schoolboys' boat.

Jim Dainty twisted over the sinewy arm, striving to make the ruffian drop the knife. But though he howled with pain, the man from the sea kept his sinewy fingers laced round the handle of the weapon and would not let it go. With his left hand he clawed savagely at Ginger.

"Lend a hand, Fritz!" yelled Jim Dainty. But Fatty Fritz, stammering with terror, squatted in the bows, watching the wild scene with popping eyes, unable to move.

With a desperate wrench, the Frenchman tore himself away and leaped aft, free of the juniors. The knife was still in his hand. It flashed in the sun as they leaped after him, and they

jumped back. There was a squeal from Friday as the panting man trampled on him, and Friday jumped back and lodged himself on the rudder. With the tiller swinging loose, the boat yawed wildly, and a sea washed over the gunwale.

Standing facing the two gasping juniors, the knife upraised, the ruffian panted and panted for breath. Ginger grabbed up the boathook, and Jim Dainty an oar. There was no help from Fatty Fritz; he crouched in the bows, gabbling with terror. But Jim and Ginger were made of sterner stuff. They faced the desperado with flashing eyes.

"Ecoutez!" Lebon panted out his words. "I am master here! Pensez-vous—think you that to save your lives I will go back to the Ile du Diable?"

"Oh, my giddy goloshes!" gasped Ginger. "Is that it? An escaped convict—my only hat!"

"A convict from Devil's Island!" muttered Jim Dainty.

They understood now! They had heard of the Ile du Diable—the Devil's Island—the French penal settlement off the coast of Guiana, where the convicts, the scum of the French criminal classes, were guarded night and day by armed men. They knew now why their passenger was wearing that tattered uniform; why, in his sleep, he had muttered "Les soldats."

There had been an escape from Devil's Island—a gang of desperate men had got away and seized a boat and put to sea. Hundreds of miles lay between them and the coast of Guiana, in South America. The wretched convicts must have been days, more likely weeks, at sea, before they came into West Indian waters; where Lebon had fallen overboard, or more probably had been pitched overboard by his savage companions.

No wonder he had been famished with hunger, parched with thirst. No wonder, perhaps, that he had resolved to seize the boat that had saved him

and carry on with his desperate attempt at escape!

The two Grimslade juniors stared at him almost open-mouthed. A savage grin came over the bearded, swarthy face as Lebon noted the effect of his words upon them. He made a threatening gesture with the knife.

"Vous comprenez!" he snarled. "You understand, yes? Ile du Diable—what you call the Devil's Island! Do you think to trifle with a man from the Devil's Island? Ecoutez! I will spare your lives so long as there is food for all. You shall sail the boat under my orders! But to reach Amerique the voyage will be long and hard. Food shall not be wasted, and the fat one goes overboard toute de suite!"

There was a squeal of horror from Fatty Fritz. His fate, at least, was sealed if the man from Devil's Island had the upper hand.

"Ach! Himmel! Safe me!" squealed Fritz. "I will not go overboard mit meinself before! Chinger—Chim—safe me!"

"You vile, dastardly rascal!" said Jim Dainty between his teeth. "Put down that knife, you villain!"

"Sharp's the word!" rapped Ginger.

The ruffian stared at them, as if not understanding. As it dawned on him that the schoolboys did not intend to give in, but were, in fact, ready to attack him, he burst into a harsh, savage laugh. With the knife gripped in his hand, and his eyes glittering like those of a wild beast, he made a crouching step towards them.

"Back up, Ginger!" breathed Jim Dainty, his heart thumping hard. Two crouching steps the ruffian made, then he came on with a sudden tiger-like spring. But the Grimsladers were watching and ready. Jim Dainty drove the oar at him, catching him on the chest, and he staggered; Ginger lashed out with the boathook, landing a fierce blow on the tangled head. Lebon went sprawling over in the rocking boat, and they jumped at him to secure him.

But the convict was as nimble as a cat. He was up again in the twinkling of an eye, and a desperate leap carried him back to the after end of the boat. There he turned, and his arm shot up, the knife in his hand. His black eyes blazed with ferocity.

"Look out!" yelled Ginger.

The convict was about to hurl the knife; in another second it would have shot through the air, and either Jim or Ginger would have fallen, transfixed by the flashing steel. But even as the lifted arm was shooting forward for the throw, it was grasped from behind.

"Friday!" yelled Jim.

The convict had not heeded the monkey clinging to the stern. He gave a yell of blank amazement and rage as his arm was dragged back in the monkey's clawing paws. Squealing with wild excitement, Friday clawed and tore at him, and the convict, taken utterly by surprise by that unexpected attack from behind, stumbled over the tiller and fell.

The next moment he was up and aiming a furious slash of the knife at Friday. But the two Grimsladers were on him, and Jim Dainty's oar drove into his ribs, rolling him over, and the boathook in Ginger's hand came down on his tousled head with a stunning crash. As he sprawled helplessly, Ginger leaped on him.

"His knife—quick!" panted Ginger. But Jim Dainty already had the convict's arm in his grasp, and was twisting it savagely, till the knife dropped. He seized it and flung it into the sea. Panting, snarling, spitting oaths, the ruffian struggled furiously in the grasp of the two juniors.

But he was down, and they kept him down! Ginger's clenched fist rained crashing blows into the brutal face. Jim yelled to Fritz.

"Fritz! You fool! A rope—quick!"

"Ach! I gum, I gum!" gasped Fritz. He grabbed up a rope and lurched along the rocking boat. Lebon was still struggling with desperate fury, and the two juniors had hard work to hold him

down. But they held him, and Jim dragged his wrists together, and the shivering Fritz passed a loop of the rope round them and knotted it fast. Then Jim and Ginger staggered up, breathless and panting. The convict was safe now.

"My giddy goloshes!" gasped Ginger. "We've got him, Dainty!"

Jim Dainty, gasping, sat to the tiller again. With the man from the Devil's Island lying bound in the bottom of the boat, the Grimsladers headed once more for Castaway Island, now rising nearer and clearer from the sea.

CHAPTER 27.

Land in Sight!

"IT'S Castaway Island!" said Jim Dainty with a deep breath.

"Rather, what-ho!" said Ginger Rawlinson.

"Mein gootness, but tat is goot!" grunted Fritz Splitz. "I vish tat I vas packed in Chermany, but tat peastly island is petter tan tis poat!"

Under the burning tropic sun, the boat surged on slowly, making barely a knot in the light, uncertain breeze. Hardly a cloud was in the sky of deepest azure, hardly a ripple on the indigo sea. It was hot, aching hot, in the boat, exposed to the full power of the sun, on the wide Atlantic. The iron rowlocks were scorching to the touch, the timbers blistered, the tar sticky in the seams. Half the time the sail flapped idly, the wind almost dying away.

But steadily, if slowly, the Grimsladers were drawing nearer to the green hilltop that lifted above the sea—near enough now to be familiar to their eyes. Soon, they hoped, they would see the jungle and the beach, and the hut on the shore where they had lived their Crusoe life. And Jim and Ginger felt their hearts beat faster at the certainty now of treading once more the beach of Castaway Island, and seeing Sammy Sparshott and their other friends again.

It seemed ages and ages to them since the day when the gale had blown them out to sea.

Friday, the monkey, clinging to the mast, blinked at the distant island with his red-rimmed eyes. Perhaps Friday knew his home again, as the schoolboy Crusoes did. In the bottom of the boat lay the low-browed, bearded, swarthy convict from Devil's Island, with his hands bound behind his back. His black scintillating eyes watched the juniors, gleaming with venomous animosity. But they did not heed him.

"My giddy goloshes!" said Ginger Rawlinson. "We ought to make the island to-night, Dainty, if even this-bit of wind lasts! What about pulling?"

Jim shook his head. Eager as he was to step on Castaway Island again, it was not much use to think of rowing the heavy boat over miles and miles of sea under the burning heat of the sun.

"We'll try if the wind deserts us, Ginger!" he said. "But we're making way—slow and steady does it!"

There came a growl from the bound ruffian sprawling in the boat.

"De l'eau! Give me drink!"

Jim glanced round at him, filled a tin can from a keg, and placed it to the convict's lips. The man hunched himself up against the gunwale to drink. Cramped in his bonds, the man from Guiana felt the scorching heat more than the others. The sweat ran down his harsh face in streams.

"Alors, mon garçon, release me!" he muttered. "Pardieu! It is torture to lie here! Will you release me?"

"Not likely!" answered Jim Dainty contemptuously. "You rascal, we picked you up from the sea and saved your life—and you tried to seize our boat, and would have stabbed us and pitched us into the sea! You'll stay safe as you are till we get to Castaway Island."

"And then?" muttered the convict from Devil's Island.

"Then our headmaster, Dr. Sparshott, will decide what to do with you. If we ever get picked up by a ship, you'll go

back where you belong—the best place for you!”

Lebon's black eyes blazed at him.

“Ma foi!” he muttered. “Better to go to the sharks in the sea than back to Devil's Island. But perhaps your schoolmaster will not decide when we reach the island! Perhaps my comrades are already there!” He gritted his discoloured teeth. “Five of them with their knives—they will make short work of your schoolmaster, hein? Nous verrons—we shall see!”

Jim turned from him in disgust, and there was a cloud on his brow. He stood up and scanned the sea. Nothing was in sight on the vast stretch of the Atlantic, save that green hilltop far away standing out dark against the blazing blue of the sky. There was no sign of a boat.

Yet somewhere in the waters that washed round Castaway Island must be the boat in which the gang of convicts had escaped from Devil's Island far away on the coast of French Guiana. Lebon, as he called himself, had fallen overboard, in some fierce brawl with his savage companions, probably a famished dispute for some fragment of food. He had been exhausted, on the point of sinking to death, when the juniors picked him up. Where was the boat with the other five desperadoes in it?

Had it reached Castaway Island—had that fierce and desperate crew landed there? That was a startling and troubling thought to the Grimslade juniors.

Lebon, muttering curses in his own language, crouched in what little shade he could find. Fritz Splitz fanned himself with the lid of a bully beef tin, dabbed his perspiring fat face with a grubby handkerchief, and groaned and groused over the heat. Friday, in his cotton trousers and shirt, sat contentedly scratching himself. Slowly the heavy old boat surged on, the distant green hilltop seeming to mock the longing eyes of the schoolboys.

“It's going!” grunted Ginger Rawlin-

son. He mopped a face that was as red as his hair. “It's gone, Dainty!” A last puff of the dying wind flapped the sail, and then it hung against the mast.

Jim Dainty stared towards the island. He could make out the lower slopes of the hill now, dark with verdure. But the shore was still below the sea-line. The sun was sloping down to the burning west, the heat still like that of an oven. The juniors had been fortunate in finding Castaway Island again, after being blown away into the vast Atlantic. But now that they had found it, it mocked them like a mirage.

“We've got to pull!” said Ginger.

Jim Dainty nodded.

“Out with the oars!” he said. “Down with the mast and sail.”

It was hard work, killing work, in the tropic heat. But the two juniors put out the oars, and pulled. Once more the boat was under way, surging on towards the distant island. For a long hour they pulled hard and steady.

“Fritz!” snapped Ginger at last. “Come and take your turn, you fat slacker! Are you setting up to be a parlour ornament, you bloated image?”

“Mein gootness! I vas too dired, in tis colossal heat, to row mit oars!” exclaimed Fritz, in alarm. “Tat gan I not do, Chinger.”

“I fancy you can, if I begin on you with the boathook!” growled Ginger.

“Peast and a prute!” roared Fritz. “Geep away mit you, mit tat poathook! Vy for tat gonvict peast not row te poat?”

Ginger exchanged a glance with Jim. The convict was a powerful and muscular man. He was worth the two juniors together, with Fritz thrown in, when it came to pulling. Both of them had already thought of it, but they thought also of the danger of letting him loose, after their experience of his treachery and ferocity. But an hour of deadly exertion in the terrible heat made them inclined to think less of the risk than of their aching muscles.

“After all, why not?” said Jim. “We can watch the brute! No need to stand

on ceremony with him. If he gives trouble, knock him on the head!"

"I'll watch that!" growled Ginger. "I'm not slogging with this oar while that brute does nothing! I'll crack his nut for him fast enough if he gives any trouble. Here, Froggy, up with you, and row."

The convict's black eyes blazed.

"Volontiers!" he exclaimed. "As you will!"

It was easy to read the treacherous thought in his savage mind, it showed plainly enough in his face. All he wanted was freedom, and another chance of turning on the schoolboys who had saved him, and seizing their boat.

Jim Dainty hesitated a moment. As if to warn him, a black triangular fin showed over the blue water for a moment, hardly three fathoms from the gunwale. Under the glimmering surface lurked a shark, visible for a fleeting glimpse. For hours the shark had been following the boat, as if in expectation.

But as Jim paused, Ginger laid in his oar, bent over the convict, and began to untie the rope that secured him. Jim Dainty picked up the boathook, and stood on guard. After all, the man was now unarmed, and they were two to one. And without his aid with the oars, it was clearly impossible to reach the island before dark.

As the ropes fell away from his limbs, Lebon rose limply to his feet, and chafed his cramped arms. His black eyes, glittering like a snake's, watched the Grimsladers. Jim gave him a steady look.

"Take the oars and pull, Lebon!" he said quietly. "Mind, I shall be watching you, and I'll knock you senseless at the first sign of trickery!"

"Same here!" said Ginger. He took a hatchet from a locker. "Look out for your cokernut, old French bean, if you try any tricks!"

With a shrug of the shoulders, the man from Devil's Island sat to the oars and pulled.

CHAPTER 28.

Hand to Hand!

"LOOK!" yelled Ginger suddenly. It was nearly an hour later, and the boat, under the steady pull of Lebon's rowing, was slowly but surely drawing nearer to the green hill that stood out against the blue.

Again and again the convict's black, venomous eyes had sought the two juniors, but found them watchful, on their guard. They were only too well aware that he was watching for a chance to get the upper hand, and they were ready to knock him senseless at the first attempt.

Jim was steering, and he gave the tiller a turn, to keep clear of a low sandbank that lay ahead. Then Ginger suddenly started to his feet, pointing to the sandbank with a startled yell.

Jim Dainty stared. On the bank of sand that rose hardly three or four feet over the sea a human figure appeared. It was that of a bearded, haggard, tattered man, who stood shading his eyes with his hand from the sun-glare and staring at the boat. Not a trace of vegetation grew there, and it was startling and amazing to see a human figure on that burning stretch of sand.

Lebon stared for a second, and then twisted his head round to see what they were looking at. At the sight of the tattered figure on the sandbank his eyes blazed.

"Mes camarades!" he ejaculated. And he bent to the oars with redoubled vigour.

The juniors hardly needed Lebon's exclamation to enlighten them. They guessed that the man on the sandbank was one of the ruffian's comrades who had escaped from Devil's Island with him. There was no sign of their boat to be seen, and they wondered whether it was hidden on the other side of the bank.

That that was the case they soon had proof; for the man, after a long stare at them, ran down the bank and disappeared on the farther side. A few

moments later a boat emerged into view from behind the bank.

"My hat!" breathed Jim Dainty.

There were five men in the boat—tattered, worn, haggard, desperate—evidently the crew of escaped convicts of which Lebon had been one. And they were hardly a furlong distant; the sandbank had hidden them and their boat from sight till now. Lebon, heedless of heat and fatigue, was rowing madly to reach them. Jim Dainty jammed over the tiller, and swung away.

"We've got to keep clear of that lot!" panted Ginger.

The convicts' boat was already pulling for them—four men at the oars, one steering. Even had they known nothing of that wild crew, their looks would have warned the juniors to keep clear.

In other circumstances, they would gladly have shared what they had with shipwrecked and starving men. But from their experience with Lebon, they knew what to expect from his comrades. That the convicts were in utter and desperate need was clear. With the island hill in sight on the horizon, they had stopped at the sandbank, and it could only have been in the hope of finding there shellfish to satisfy the cravings of hunger, or a pool of water to quench their burning thirst.

"Steer clear!" breathed Ginger.

"You bet! Lebon, you scoundrel, pull!" roared Jim fiercely. As he steered away from the approaching boat, Lebon ceased to row, and laid in the oars. He grinned at them savagely.

"My comrades come, garçon—you may count your lives in minutes now!"

He started to his feet, grasping one of the bars. Jim and Ginger were on their feet at once.

The case was desperate now. If the convicts' boat reached them, they were lost. That hungry, desperate, savage crew were not likely to spare provisions for prisoners. The shadow of death hung over the Grimslade boat. Life and death were in the balance, and Lebon evidently intended to prevent their flight if he could. It was no time

to stand on ceremony, and the two juniors hurled themselves at the ruffian as he swung up the oar.

The boat rocked wildly. There was a wild howl from Fritz Splitz, a shrill squeal from Friday.

The oar in Lebon's desperate hands missed Jim Dainty by a foot as he drove the boathook at the convict. With a yell of pain, as the sharp end jammed on his chest, Lebon went over backwards, crashing down.

Ginger was on him the next second, with a smashing blow from the hatchet. Had the ruffian been on his feet, Ginger would have used the edge without compunction. But Lebon was sprawling in the bottom of the boat, and the red-headed junior of Grimslade used the back of the axe. But it was enough—the crash came down on the convict's touselled head with stunning force, and Lebon gave one faint groan and lay senseless.

There was no time to secure him further—he was, at all events, safe for the moment. Hatchet and boathook were flung down; the juniors seized the oars and jammed them back into the rowlocks. They bent with desperate energy to the pull.

"Mein gootness!" stuttered Fritz Splitz. He left off mopping his fat face, and stared at the convict boat, his saucer-like eyes bulging from his head. "Ve vas all tead mit ourselves pefore! Ach! How I vish tat I vas pack in Chermany!"

A yell floated over the sea from the convicts' boat astern. It was in fierce pursuit.

With set teeth the two juniors pulled. As the first glance it seemed as if they had no chance—two boys pulling against four men in the other boat. But Jim and Ginger were strong and sturdy, and they had had a rest. And the convicts, though of strong and muscular physique, were in no condition for a race. They were worn down with hunger and thirst and exposure, and obviously almost at the end of their tether.

Savagely as they pulled, their failing muscles got little speed out of the boat. The race was not so unequal as it looked. Even as the convicts' boat came surging in desperate pursuit, one of the rowers sagged over in his seat from exhaustion.

"My giddy goloshes! We'll beat them!" breathed Ginger.

"Pull!" breathed Jim.

"Mein gootness! Now ve was going pack away from tat island!" moaned Fritz. Spltz. "I tink tat ve neffer, neffer reach tat peastly island after."

There was no choice in the matter for the Grimsladers. The sandbank that had hidden the convicts from sight lay in their course, and the enemy were directly between them and Castaway Island. There was nothing for it but to turn tail on their longed-for destination and pull out to sea. Later, if they escaped, they could make the island again, but escape from merciless death at the hands of the gang from Devil's Island was the first consideration.

Amid the bubbles that fled astern from the sweeping oars a black fin glanced. The shark was still there, haunting the boat, hungry for prey. The glimmer of that fin from the sea spurred on the schoolboys to desperate efforts. If the pursuing boat overhauled them, the shark would not have to wait long for its prey!

With the sweat rolling down, panting for breath, they put all their beef into that fierce pull. They were holding their own, at least. Behind them came the savage crew of convicts. They had neared while the juniors handled Lebon, but they had not gained since then; an interval of thirty fathoms separated their bows from the stern of the Grimslade boat, and it had not lessened by a foot.

And hard as the work was to the schoolboys, it was harder to the famished, parched crew in the pursuing boat. They pulled twice as many oars, but they had not the beef to put into the pulling. The sun, sinking in the west, flooded the sea with crimson, but

the heat was not yet abated. It ^{meant} to the two juniors that they must faint at the oars if they kept on. But they kept on. It was death to give in.

Bump—bump! The Grimslade boat rocked and jarred on some sandy shoal hidden by the blue waters. The keel scraped over the sunken sand, and the boat lost way. Luckily, the water was deep enough over the shoal to prevent them from going aground. But they lost way, and as they desperately pushed off into deeper water, the convicts' boat came up with a sweeping rush.

The bows crashed on the starboard gunwale of the Grimslade boat, with a shock that made Jim and Ginger reel, and sent Fritz Spltz rolling over like a barrel on the insensible Lebon.

A hairy, bony hand clawed at the gunwale and held on. The two boats rocked together, and the wild crew came scrambling to the attack. Jim Dainty was on his feet, an oar in his hands. Madly he swung it round, and one of the convicts went staggering back, falling among his comrades.

Ginger shoved with his oar at the same moment catching a desperate rascal under the chin and hurling him backwards. That same shove sent the two boats rocking apart, and another convict, in the act of leaping, was too late to check himself and plunged into the sea.

There was a swirl in the water between the boats, the glancing of a black fin. The swimming convict clutched at the boat he had fallen from, and one of his comrades dragged him in just as the jaws snapped behind him. The shark had barely missed.

"My giddy goloshes!" panted Ginger. He drove his oar at the convicts' boat as it surged on, but again a hairy hand clawed and held. Jim Dainty brought down the boathook with terrific force and the convict tore away his hand with a shriek of agony. Again the boats rocked apart.

A yell of fury, fiercer and more blood-curdling than the yell of savages, came

from the Devil's Island crew. That there were food and water in the Grimslade boat they had no doubt; they could see that the schoolboys were not famished and parched, like themselves. And for a fragment of food, a drop of water, they were ready to fight like wolves—to add murder to the crimes for which they had been sent to Devil's Island.

Wild beasts would not have been so dangerous as that fearful crew, had they succeeded in boarding the Grimslade boat. It was well for the juniors that the wild crew were worn down with hunger and thirst.

Yelling with rage, the convicts strove to lay aboard the Grimslade boat again; but again the oars drove them off, and a desperate shove at their gunwale sent the two boats shooting away from one another.

It was but a moment's respite, but Jim and Ginger acted swiftly. They jammed their oars into the rowlocks and pulled. There was a splashing of oars as the convicts followed. But two of them had been too hard hit to pull, and only three oars were in the water now. The Grimslade boat drew away.

CHAPTER 29.

The Prey of the Sharks!

"My giddy goloshes!" Ginger Rawlinson wiped the streaming perspiration from his brow. "Oh, scissors! A miss is as good as a mile!"

"We've done it!" breathed Jim.

The convicts' boat was disappearing. They had given up the hopeless pursuit and turned, to pull wearily for the distant island.

The hilltop of Castaway Island was very far away now, a blur on the sea. Jim and Ginger ceased to pull as soon as they saw the enemy's stern turned towards them. They were utterly spent, aching with heat and fatigue, and felt as if they could hardly stir a limb.

Half-dazed, they sat in the drifting

boat, but their eyes were on the motionless figure of Lebon. If he had stirred they would have found energy enough to move.

"We're a good way off the island now, old thing," said Ginger, "and when we try for it again we'd better go a good way round. My giddy goloshes, I don't want to run into that gang again in a hurry!"

"We may get the wind again at sunset," said Jim. "We'll run southward a bit, and make the island on the south side. Oh, look!"

He pointed, and shuddered. A hideous snout showed from the water, hardly a couple of fathoms from the boat. The patient shark was still haunting them.

Jim Dainty rose at last.

"Better make sure of that scoundrel," he said, with a nod towards Lebon.

Jim picked up a length of rope and stepped towards the hunched figure in the bows, Ginger following him. To all appearance, Lebon was still unconscious, and the juniors intended to secure him before he recovered his senses. Jim Dainty bent over him, rope in hand, and as he did so the apparently unconscious man came suddenly to life. A sinewy arm was thrown round Jim's neck, throwing him over.

Taken by surprise, the Grimslade junior went over helplessly, and his head crashed on the timbers with a stunning shock. In a split second the convict was on his feet, springing at Ginger, and the red-headed junior had hardly time to grapple with him as he was grasped and borne backwards.

"My giddy goloshes!" panted Ginger. "Oh, you villain! You rotter! Oh!"

He stumbled backwards over a thwart and went down, with the man from Devil's Island over him.

Lebon's eyes blazed with ferocity. In his sinewy clutches the red-headed junior was dragged to the gunwale.

"Help!" yelled Ginger frantically. "Jim! Fritz! Back up! Oh, help!"

Jim Dainty, with spinning brain, strove to rise. He crawled to his knees, pressing his hand to his spinning head. There was a splash beside the boat as Ginger went into the water; but he was clinging and clutching desperately to the convict, one hand wound in his tousled hair, the other gripping his arm. Lebon, snarling with ferocity, struck at him with a savage, clenched fist, fiercely anxious to get rid of him before Jim Dainty could rally and come to his aid.

But Ginger was not so easily got rid of. He clung to the ruffian desperately, heedless of the blows that rained on him. Ginger, with his legs in the water, felt, rather than thought of the haunting shark, and shrieked wildly to Jim.

Jim Dainty was coming. Dazed and dizzy as he was, he staggered towards the convict and grasped at him.

With a snarl Lebon turned on him. For the moment he had to turn from Ginger, and, with the horror of the shark in his mind, one moment was enough for the red-headed junior. A frantic scramble, and he was in the boat again. And hardly a second later there was a dull thud as a snout struck against the timbers.

Jim Dainty was down in the bottom of the boat, the convict on him. Ginger grabbed the iron rowlock from its place and brought it down with a crash on the back of the convict's head.

A fearful yell rang from the man from Devil's Island. He leaped to his feet, staggering in the lurching boat. Before he could recover his balance the lurch of the boat sent him backwards over the gunwale, and he splashed on his back in the water. Head first, he shot into the depths.

Ginger and Jim Dainty, panting for breath, hung on to the boat, which was rocking so wildly that it threatened to capsize. Fritz and the monkey were rolling in the bottom, both of them squealing.

The convict's dark head appeared

beside the boat a few moments later. His hand clutched at the gunwale. But it was only for a moment. The next, the fiendish ferocity in his savage face vanished, to be replaced by a look of horror and despair that long haunted the Grimslade juniors.

For the moment they did not understand. Then they caught a gleam of white in the water—the white belly of the shark, turning over to bite. One long and terrible scream rang in their ears, and then the man from Devil's Island vanished from their sight, never to be seen again.

With the fall of night, as Jim Dainty had hoped, came the breeze. Under sail the Grimslade boat ran out to the west, tacking wide to the southward to avoid a possible meeting with the convict crew. It was in the gleaming light of a bright moon that they sighted the island hill again, and in the moonlight they brought the boat round to the southern shore and landed, at long last, on Castaway Island.

CHAPTER 30.

The Men from the Sea!

"THE boat!" yelled Streaky Bacon. On the summit of the cliff behind the hut on the beach of Castaway Island, Streaky tore off his hat, waved it round his head, yelled and danced like a maniac.

Sandy Bean and Dick Dawson stared up at the excited Streaky from the beach.

It was hot afternoon on the lonely West Indian island. Long, long days had passed since Jim Dainty and Ginger, Fritz Splitz and Friday, the monkey, had been blown away to sea in the gale.

With every day the castaways' hopes of seeing them again lessened and lessened. But every morning, in the sunrise, every afternoon when the heat of the tropic day had passed, one or

other of the juniors climbed the high cliff to scan the sea with a faint, lingering hope of seeing the boat coming back with their lost comrades.

It was Streaky's turn this blazing afternoon, and he clambered to the summit and stared seaward over the rolling Atlantic, stretching as far as the eye could reach round Castaway Island. Eastward, only the endless sea and the heat haze met his eyes to the far horizon. But as he turned his gaze to the southward he gave a sudden jump at the sight of a dark shape on the water that appeared in sight beyond the rocky headland at the end of the bay.

It was a boat—too far off to be picked up clearly, but a boat; Streaky knew that it was a boat, and he waved his hat and yelled, and fairly danced.

"They're coming back!" roared Streaky. He pointed. "Look! The boat—they're coming back!"

Sandy Bean and Dick Dawson stared round. From the beach down below they could not see what Streaky saw from the cliff-top. But their faces were bright, their eyes shining. If Streaky had seen a boat coming in from the sea, what could it mean but that their friends had been spared and were returning? What other craft was likely to be seen in the solitary waters round Castaway Island, where they had watched so long in vain for the sight of a sail or a steamer's smoke.

"Hurrah!" roared Sandy, and Dick Dawson echoed his shout. Streaky Bacon came clambering down from the cliff in hot haste—such hot haste that half-way down he missed his footing and came rolling to the bottom. He landed, bumping on the sand, rolled over, sat up, and spluttered.

"Oooooogh!"

"Sure it's the boat, Streaky?" exclaimed Dawson.

"It's a boat!" Streaky picked himself up, gasping. "Not likely to be any other boat, I fancy! It's coming round South Point—must be Jim and Ginger

—who else could it be? Oh, why isn't Sammy here?"

Dr. Samuel Sparshott, the headmaster of Grimslade, was away across the island that afternoon. The juniors expected him back by dark, and already the sun was setting, level rays glowing crimson across the sea. They looked round, but there was no sign of Sammy yet. Then they ran down to the edge of the sea and strained their eyes across the wide blue bay for a sight of the boat. Sandy pointed.

"There it is! Oh, good luck! It must be Ginger——"

"It must be Jim!" exclaimed Dawson.

"And Fatty Fritz!" grinned Streaky. "Jolly glad to see even old frowsy Fritz again, what? And the jolly old monkey!"

"What-ho!" chuckled Sandy Bean.

Far off on the sea at the southern end of the bay the shape of the boat could be discerned. There was no sail to be seen, but there was hardly a breath of wind that burning afternoon, and they did not expect to see the canvas up. The boat was coming in under oars—they could catch the ripple and the flash. But the delight died off their faces, replaced by puzzled doubt, as the boat came nearer.

They could pick up figures in the boat now—and they made out five. In the Grimslade boat there should have been four—Jim Dainty, Ginger Rawlinson, Fritz Splitz, and Friday, the monkey. Here there were five; and not one of them was a monkey. Four were pulling, and one was steering.

"I—I say," stammered Streaky at last, "that—that's not our boat! They—they're men in that!"

It was a crushing blow to their high hopes. In that solitary spot, lost in the wide wastes of the Atlantic, it had seemed certain, to them, that the coming craft must be the Grimslade boat returning. They were glad enough, certainly, to see any craft, and human faces. But they had hoped to see Jim

and Ginger, Fatty Fritz and Friday. And it was plain now that it was not their lost friends that came.

The boat seemed to crawl. Even with four men pulling, it made little way. As it drew slowly nearer to the view, the juniors could guess the cause. The five men in the boat were bearded, shaggy, wild-looking, haggard. Hunger and thirst had told bitterly upon them. Wild, fierce eyes gleamed from lean, sun-bitten, haggard faces, and eager as they were to reach the land, they pulled feebly at the oars with falling muscles.

"Shipwrecked men—starving!" said Dick Dawson in a low voice. "They look like skeletons—or spectres! They seem hardly able to get the boat along. If we could help them——" It was a bitter blow not to see his chum, after the raising of his hopes. But he was thinking of the sufferings of that haggard, famished crew. "Look here, let's get food and water for them—that's what Sammy would say if he were here."

"Let's!" said Streaky briefly.

They could see that the oarsmen were making efforts, but they could see, too, that every now and then one or another of them sagged over in his seat as if barely able to keep going. It was clear that the boat's crew were at the end of their tether, hardly able to reach the land, near as it now was.

Leaving the beach, the Grimslade Castaways hurried up to the hut to find stores for the famished crew. Dawson opened a can of bully beef; Streaky filled a bag with bananas and plantains and coconuts; Sandy fetched a large can of water from the rippling stream by the palm grove. They carried the supplies down to the margin of the sea and waved their hands to the men in the approaching boat.

The steersman was watching them now, and the rowers twisted every now and then to stare round at them. The boat's crew seemed surprised to see human beings, and whites, on the lonely island; and it seemed to the

juniors that there was something like alarm and suspicion in their looks, as if they were not sure of a friendly reception. But if they had any fear of that kind, it was overcome by the torture of hunger and thirst. And now they could see that the castaways had food and drink ready for them, the instant they made their landing, and that sight seemed to give their weary, enfeebled arms new vigour, and they pulled harder and faster.

With compassionate eyes the three juniors watched them as they came. Now that they were close, it could be seen that they were not English; but whatever they were, the castaways were ready to welcome them and give them what they so sorely needed. Lower and lower sank the setting sun, and far in the east came a silvery gleam of the rising moon.

The creak of the oars in the rusty rowlocks came to the juniors' ears now as the dingy, leaky old boat came surging in. Desperately the exhausted crew pulled, and the boat thudded on the sand at last. The five men leaped from her into the shallow water and scrambled on the beach, leaping like wild beasts to the spot where the three juniors stood.

"Here you are!" Dick Dawson held out a wooden platter on which he had sliced the bully beef, Streaky held up the big can of water, and Sandy a bunch of tin mugs for drinking.

The first to reach the spot, a lithe, supple fellow with black beard and hair, tore the can from Streaky so savagely and violently that the junior stumbled over and fell. Putting the can to his lips, he drank savagely, greedily, desperately. But the next of the crew snatched fiercely at it and tore it from him before he had taken more than two or three gulps. The black-haired man, with a howl of rage, snatched a knife from his belt and sprang at him.

Sandy Bean put out a foot just in time, and the man with the knife

stumbled over it and fell, or there would have been murder done on the beach in another moment. The man leaped up again, with a furious yell, and turned on Sandy like a tiger, striking with the knife. A swift backward leap saved Sandy from the savage clash.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped. "Look out, you fellows!"

The man with the can of water was drinking, heedless of the danger from his associate. But the other three were on the spot now, and they snatched at the can together and tore it from him. The three juniors backed away, but the gang did not heed them. They struggled savagely for the water, and the can crashed on the sand, spilling its contents.

Knives were flashing on all sides, but one of the ruffians sighted the gleam of the rippling stream at a little distance and started for it at a desperate run, and the rest followed him as fast as they could go. Dawson and Sandy and Streaky stood in a dismayed group staring after them.

"My hat!" breathed Streaky. "What sort of a crew—"

The juniors realised that it was no crew of shipwrecked sailormen who had reached Castaway Island. Famished and parched as they evidently were, that did not account for their wild-beast-like ferocity. They reached the stream and threw themselves headlong into the rippling water, drinking, drinking, drinking, as if their torturing thirst could never be quenched.

"Get into the hut!" muttered Sandy. "Goodness knows who they are and what they are, but they're not safe! My hat, I wish Sammy was back!"

"Quick!" muttered Dawson.

The three juniors ran for the hut, while the boat's crew were still wallowing in the stream. They hurried inside, closed the door and the window shutter, and jammed in the bars. A sound of scuffling, running feet came to

their ears. The crew had quenched at last their savage thirst, and were running back to the beach for the food.

From a slit in the door of the hut the juniors watched them breathlessly, wondering what was going to happen after this. They saw the gang snatch at the food and throw themselves on the sand, tearing at it like wild animals. The bully beef, the bananas, and plantains vanished as if by magic, ample as the supply had been.

Satisfied at last, the ruffians sprawled on the sand, but one of the gang—the lithe, black-haired fellow who had handled the knife, stared round him curiously, spotted the hut, and came tramping up the path to it.

Streaky and Sandy and Dick exchanged glances, and their hearts beat. They were glad that a strong, thick door and massive bars were between them and the desperado. The black-haired man groped over the door and found it fast; then he called out:

"Ouvrez—open!"

"No jolly fear!" said Streaky. "You're not coming in here!"

A laugh from the black-haired man was the answer—a low laugh, blood-curdling in its ferocity and mockery. But he said no more. Turning away from the hut, he walked back to his companions on the beach. Evidently he had no doubt that the boys were at the mercy of the gang as soon as they chose to break into the hut.

"Who—what are they?" muttered Dick.

"They're French," said Sandy Bean. "Goodness knows what else! By gum, I wish Sammy was back!" He set his lips. "We can't let Sammy run into that gang; they look as if they'd knife him as soon as look at him. Lucky old Sammy fixed up a signal!"

Sandy Bean stooped over the sea chest in the hut and sorted out a revolver. He placed the muzzle to the slit in the door and fired twice into the sand. The juniors saw the five men on the beach start and raise their

heads and stare round at the sound of the shots. They did not know that the double shot was a signal—but Dr. Samuel Sparshott, tramping homeward through the jungle paths, knew.

CHAPTER 31.

Sammy Takes Control

SAMMY SPARSHOTT started faintly from afar, but ringing clearly to his ears, came the sound of the signal shots.

The headmaster of Grimslade, as he tramped homeward under the sunset, was not looking his accustomed cheery self. He was thinking of Jim Dainty and Ginger and Fritz, blown away to sea in the boat, lost on the boundless Atlantic. The lost juniors were seldom out of his thoughts. He hoped and tried to believe that somehow they had escaped with their lives, but the hope was faint and growing fainter.

But as he heard the warning shots from the hut Sammy dismissed other matters from his mind and was instantly on the alert. That signal meant danger. Cartridges were too valuable on the lonely island for the firearms to be used for any other reason. For a moment or two Sammy stopped and listened, then he resumed his way at a rapid run. As he emerged from the jungle paths and came through the palm-grove, his eyes were keenly about him.

The sun was deep down in the west over Castaway Island; in the east the moon was rising over the Atlantic. The light was dimming, but Sammy's keen eyes picked up the scene at once. The dingy, leaky old boat beached on the sand; four tattered figures sprawling near it, and a fifth—that of a lithe, supple fellow with black hair and beard—lounging up the sandy path towards the hut. And at that first glimpse of the rough crew Sammy's hand went to the revolver in his belt.

That the five Frenchmen who had

landed on Castaway Island were a crew of escaped convicts from the French penal settlement on the coast of Guiana, Sammy could not know. The "Ile du Diable," or Devil's Island, was too far away for that thought to come into his mind at the moment.

But a glance told him that he had to deal with a ruffianly and desperate gang, whoever and whatever they were. And he was glad that he never neglected the precaution of going armed ever since the visit of Slim Stack in his aeroplane. Lonely and deserted as the island was, danger might come at any moment, and Sammy was always ready for it. The revolver was in his hand, his finger on the trigger, as he strode on towards the hut.

The black-haired man reached the door and struck on it with a clenched fist; the other four, still sprawling in the sand, were watching him. Inside the hut Streaky and Sandy and Dick Dawson were on the alert when they saw the black-haired man returning.

"Open!" came the sharp voice of the black-haired man, reaching Sammy's ears as well as those in the hut.

"Go and eat coke!" came Streaky's answer from within.

"You will open one door!" said the black-haired man. "You understand me, mes enfants? Who you are I know not and care not, but give us the hut, and you shall be allowed to run free. Diable! Keep me to wait, and I will slit your necks like pigs—on the word of Louis Lautrec!"

The juniors in the hut exchanged glances. Evidently the gang had consulted together and determined to take possession of the hut for the night. But Streaky & Co. had not the slightest intention of handing it over.

"Alors! Open the door!" exclaimed Lautrec impatiently. "You hear me to speak—is it not?"

"Buzz off!" answered Streaky. "I've got a popgun here, and if you touch the door again I shall pull trigger."

For answer the black-haired ruffian

picked up a heavy boulder, stepped to the door, and crashed the rock on the timber. The rest of the gang rose from the sand at the crash and came towards him. Their knives were in their hands now.

Bang!

Streaky was as good as his word. From the slit in the door came the stream of smoke from the revolver within, and the bullet grazed the arm of the black-haired rascal. Lautrec gave a startled yell and sprang away.

There was a rapid patter of footsteps. The gang swung round at the sound and stared at the tall figure of Dr. Samuel Sparshott coming up at a run, revolver in hand. There was a shout in the hut:

"Here comes Sammy!"

"Diable!" Lautrec, taken by surprise by Dr. Sparshott's sudden appearance, gripped his knife. Like wild animals the gang from Devil's Island eyed the headmaster; like wild animals they would have leaped at him, but the levelled revolver, with Sammy's cool, clear eyes gleaming over it, held them back.

"Drop those knives!" Sammy's voice came clear and sharp. The revolver in his hand seemed to single out each of the scowling, savage desperadoes in turn. There was a second of hesitation, and then the knives clanged on the ground, Lautrec's last. The black-haired man seemed to be the leader of the gang, and it was easy to read in his dark, desperate face that he was eager to lead a fierce rush at the schoolmaster. But the revolver held him in check, and the knife followed the rest.

"Who are you?" rapped Sammy.

"A shipwrecked crew, monsieur," answered Lautrec, with a mocking glitter in his black eyes. "We are French; I alone speak English. And you?"

Sammy Sparshott scanned them. That the savage crew had been through bitter hardships he could see easily enough, though food and drink

had revived them now. Bearded, shaggy, dirty, ferocious, they looked like a crew of human wolves—as, indeed, they were. And his keen eye detected on the leg of more than one of them a circle of rusty iron and a fragment of a chair that had been filed through. That gave him a clue.

"Convicts!" said Dr. Sparshott tersely.

"Vrai!" assented Lautrec with cool impudence. "You guess we are from the *Ile du Diable*, monsieur? There were more of us when we got away from Devil's Island, but the others——" He shrugged his shoulders expressively. "By chance, monsieur, we have reached your island, and here we stay. Ciel! We have had enough of to starve and to thirst in the boat."

The others listened with knitted brows and glinting, savage eyes to the talk they did not understand, as if trying to understand the strange language.

The door of the hut opened. Streaky and Sandy and Dick stepped out—the two former with revolvers in their grasp, Dawson with an axe. The juniors were ready to back up their headmaster if it came to a tussle. The black-haired man glanced round at them with glittering eyes. Dr. Sparshott's eyes rested grimly and thoughtfully on the Devil's Island gang.

It was sheer ill-luck for the Grimslade castaways that chance had led the escaping crew of convicts to their island. To keep five desperate ruffians prisoners was impossible; to shoot them down was hardly to be thought of—and the only other resource was to get rid of them without delay. Sammy was the man for rapid decisions.

"Get back to your boat!" he rapped. "You do not offer us the hospitality of your hut, monsieur?" said Lautrec, in his tone of mocking impudence.

"I would as soon trust a pack of wolves!" said Dr. Sparshott tersely. "Listen to me! Your escape from Devil's Island is no business of mine. But you cannot remain on this island.

You shall be provided with food and water—as much as your boat can carry. Then you will go your way."

"You send us back to the sea, monsieur?"

"Exactly. And if you approach this island again, I shall fire on you," said Dr. Sparshott icily. "I warn you of that, and I warn you also that I never miss. Go back to your boat."

The convicts drew together, muttering in French. Their fierce eyes lingered on the knives. Sammy Sparshott watched them like a cat. Only too well he knew that his life and the lives of the boys hung on a thread.

"Allons!" said Lautrec at last, and he started down the path to the beach, followed by his comrades. At a sign from Sammy, Dick gathered up the knives and carried them into the hut. The desperate gang were not to be allowed to go armed. Slowly, unwillingly, with fierce looks, they went; and under Sammy's eye and Sammy's revolver they pushed off the crazy old boat and clambered into it.

Dr. Sparshott stood on the edge of the sand, still covering them with the revolver, while, at his orders, the juniors brought down supplies from the hut. The headmaster of Grimslade was only too willing to supply their necessities from motives of humanity and with the hope that in a well-provisioned boat they would seek some other refuge.

"Now go," he said at last, "and a good voyage to you! I warn you once more that if you set foot on this island again I shall shoot! Go!"

The Devil's Island gang exchanged fierce looks. Lautrec's eyes were burning. He grasped an oar, bent as if to drop it into the rowlock, and then, with a sudden movement, thrust it at the tall figure on the water's edge. Sammy Sparshott leaped aside from the thrust, and his revolver cracked at the same moment. There was a fearful yell from the black-haired man, and he staggered in the boat, his hand going

to his ear. There was a spurt of red on his dark fingers.

"Is that warning enough?" asked Sammy coolly. "The next bullet will go through your head."

The bullet had clipped the convict's ear. It was warning enough, and, with a face convulsed with fury, Lautrec snarled to his comrades to push off. Sammy Sparshott and the three juniors stood and watched them go. The sun had disappeared behind the island hill; in the silvery moonlight the boat pulled out of East Bay and vanished into the dusk of the sea.

"Gone!" said Streaky, with a deep breath.

"For good?" said Sandy Bean.

But that question could not be answered yet.

CHAPTER 32.

Fallen Among Foes!

"HOME again!" said Jim Dainty. "My giddy goloshes!" said Ginger Rawlinson. "It's good to be back!"

"Ach! I vas ferry sleepy mit myself!" mumbled Fritz Splitz. "Vy for ve not sleep in te boat, and walk back in te morning after?"

"Stick in the boat if you like!" grinned Ginger. "We're going."

"Peast and prute! I sticks not here mit myself alone!" grunted Fatty Fritz.

"Come on, Friday!" called Jim Dainty, and the monkey hopped out of the boat.

It was midnight on Castaway Island. High over the wooded hill hung the white, round moon, shedding silvery light on wood and jungle, glistening beach and rugged rock.

On the south side of the island, where the tide gurgled and splashed in the channels among the reefs, Jim Dainty and Ginger Rawlinson had made their landing. After the fight with the convict boat's crew, far out on the Atlantic, they had waited for the wind,

which came with sunset, and made a wide sweep to the southward, to avoid another possible meeting with the Devil's Island gang.

Now, at long last, they had reached Castaway Island once more, run the boat into a well-known channel among the reefs, and landed on the island that was home to them.

While Ginger secured the painter, Jim Dainty climbed to the top of a tall rock and scanned the shore in the glistening moonlight. He believed that the convicts' boat had headed for Castaway Island, and, if so, it was likely that it had pulled into the bay many hours since. If there had been trouble between the convicts and the castaways, it had already happened.

But there was no sign of life on the moonlit shore.

"Can't see anything of that gang, Ginger!" said Jim.

"They'd land in the bay, if they came at all," answered Ginger. "Thank goodness we kept clear of them getting here. Keep your eyes open, old bean, and let's get going."

Tramping over rock and reef, leaving the boat at its moorings in the channel, the juniors reached the shore and turned along it to the east. Jim and Ginger walked briskly, Friday scuttling along gaily, evidently merry and bright at getting on dry land again, Fatty Fritz rolling along in the rear, grunting.

Once past the big, rocky headland which the castaways had named South Point, they had a view of the wide bay on the east side of the island.

"My giddy goloshes!" ejaculated Ginger Rawlinson suddenly. He halted, caught Jim by the arm with one hand, and with the other pointed to a dark object that lay among the rocks of the headland.

"A boat!" breathed Jim.

It was a boat—beached above reach of the sea. That it was the convicts' boat they could hardly doubt; but it was empty—there was no sign of the tattered crew. Jim and Ginger were,

of course, unaware that the Devil's Island gang had landed in the bay and been driven off under Sammy's revolver. But from the fact that the boat had been beached among the rocks of the headland, they could guess that the crew had some reason for not landing on the open beach in sight of the hut.

Lautrec and his crew had put out to sea at Sammy's order, backed up by his gun, but they had returned by stealth. Of that Jim and Ginger knew nothing, but they knew now that the Devil's Island gang must be on shore.

"If they're between us and the hut —" muttered Ginger.

There was a sudden startled squeal from Friday, who had gone scuttling ahead and disappeared under a cluster of palms near the shore. The monkey came leaping and scrambling back.

Then there was an outbreak of voices, a rush of shadowy forms under the palms, and five tattered figures came leaping into the moonlight.

Savage hands grasped the juniors. Jim and Ginger resisted desperately. But for the fact that Sammy Sparshott had disarmed the convicts, their lives would have been worth little at that moment. But Lautrec was shouting to his comrades to take them, and the capture was easy enough, in spite of their resistance.

Friday, squealing, disappeared into the trees, unheeded by the convicts; but Jim and Ginger and Fatty Fritz were grasped and held—panting in the midst of a circle of fierce, bearded, desperate faces. It was evident that the convicts knew them again, and the Grimsladers expected instant death.

"In the boat at sea you beat us off—ma's oui!" The black-haired man grinned at Jim Dainty. "Here it is another tale, n'est-ce-pas? You walk into our hands. You belong—yes—you belong here—you are some of the rest, yes? The tall man—he with the gun—you know him, isn't it? Yes!"

Jim and Ginger knew that he must be referring to Sammy Sparshott.

"Yes," gasped Jim. "Dr. Sparshott

will shoot every scoundrel of you if you harm us."

The black-haired man laughed softly. "With your lives in our hands, the tall one, he will not shoot—non! I think not!"

He snapped an order to the crew. One of the ruffians scrambled over the rocks to the boat, and brought back a rope. A minute more, and Jim Dainty and Ginger and Fatty Fritz were bound together in a helpless bunch. Their faces were white in the gleam of the moon.

The storm and the ocean had spared them; they had found their way back to Castaway Island—for this!

CHAPTER 33.

The Dumb Messenger!

SCRATCH, scratch, scratch! Dr. Samuel Sparshott heard the faint sound in the silence of the tropic night on Castaway Island. And as he heard it, he raised himself on his elbow and listened, his hand stretching out to the revolver that lay conveniently close beside his hammock.

In the adjoining room in the hut, three Grimslade juniors were sleeping soundly, Streaky Bacon, Sandy Bean, and Dick Dawson. But "Sammy" Sparshott was sleeping very lightly that moonlight night—in fact, he seemed to sleep like a weasel, with one eye open—and his quick ears caught that sound of scratching and shuffling at the barred door of the hut.

But he relinquished the butt of the revolver, and settled back in the hammock. His instant thought had been of danger that the convict crew whom he had driven off the island at the muzzle of his gun had returned. But it was not that—whatever measures the Devil's Island gang might have taken, certainly none of them would have been scratching at the door, like a lost cat seeking admittance. The headmaster of Grimslade School settled down to sleep again.

Scratch, scratch, scratch! It was some animal scratching and-clawing at the barred door. And that was strange enough, for there were few animals on Castaway Island—chiefly monkeys. Whatever animal it was, it was persistent. Sammy Sparshott sat up again.

Scratch, scratch! Scuffle, scuffle! A body was brushing and bumping on the door, as if to attract attention from within. What it could mean, was a mystery. Dr. Sparshott resolved to discover what it meant, anyhow.

He slipped from the hammock, hastily drew on a few clothes, grasped his revolver, and stepped into the outer and larger room of the hut. The three juniors were fast asleep, and he moved quietly, so as not to awaken them, as he stepped to the door. There, with the revolver gripped in his hand, he stood listening to the incessant scratching and scuffling outside. In the door was a slit, used as a spy-hole, covered by a little shutter that fitted into sockets. Dr. Sparshott softly slid the shutter aside, and looked through.

Outside, the moonlight lay in a sheet of silver on the beach, sloping down to the broad bay that fronted the Atlantic. In front of the hut was a strange, startling figure, the sight of which made Dr. Samuel Sparshott start, and catch his breath. It was the figure of a hairy monkey, oddly clad in cotton shirt and trousers and a tattered hat!

For a long moment, Sammy Sparshott stared at that strange figure, his heart beating like a hammer. For he knew that queer figure—he knew Friday, the monkey, who had gone with Jim Dainty and Ginger Rawlinson and Fritz Splitz, when they had been blown out to sea in the gale. Friday, the monkey—back on Castaway Island—there was no mistake about that!

Sammy Sparshott almost wondered whether he was dreaming this. If Friday had survived, then the juniors in the lost boat had survived, and the dread that had lain like lead on his

heart, that they had gone to their death in the storm at sea, was lifted.

The bars clattered down from the door in Sammy's eager hands. He flung the door wide open, and, with a squeal of delight, the monkey hopped into the doorway. Dick Dawson and Streaky and Sandy started up in their bunks at the sudden noise. They gave a yell at the sight of Friday, and bounded out of their bunks.

"They've come back!" yelled Streaky. "Where's Ginger?"

"Jim!" exclaimed Dick breathlessly. Sammy started out of the hut. He stared about him in the moonlight. There was no living soul to be seen on the shelving beach; no sign of a boat on the shore or in the bay. Friday was there, but of Jim Dainty and Ginger and Fatty Fritz there was nothing to be seen.

"It's Friday, sir!" gasped Sandy Bean. "It's the jolly old monkey that went in the boat with them! They've come back!"

"It is the monkey, my boys," said Dr. Sparshott. "But he has come alone. I cannot understand it."

"He couldn't have come back unless the boat came back!" exclaimed Streaky. "The fellows must have returned, but—" He ran out of the hut, with the other two juniors, and stopped short in sheer astonishment.

The monkey was there, but how he had come there was a complete mystery. Seldom had Dr. Sparshott been so utterly puzzled and perplexed. But his face was bright—brighter than it had been for many days—ever since the castaways' boat had been blown out to sea.

"What does it mean?" gasped Dick Dawson blankly.

"It means this much, my boys—that they are living!" said Dr. Sparshott. "For some reason they have not landed in the bay—but they must have returned to the island, or the monkey could not be here. Their lives have been spared!"

"If old Friday could only talk!" said Streaky.

Friday was doing his best! He was chattering, jabbering, and squealing, hopping with excitement. Dr. Sparshott thought hard. Jim Dainty and his companions, as they returned, might have sighted the convicts' boat, and changed their course to avoid it. That would account for their having made their landfall at a distance, out of sight of the hut on the bay. But it did not account for the monkey coming alone. What reason was there why the boys should not have come with him? If Friday could but have spoken—

But Sammy realised very quickly that if Friday's human companions had not come back with him, it must be because they could not—something had happened to prevent them, since they had landed once more on Castaway Island. And the thought of the Devil's Island gang haunted him. He had driven them off the island—but had they returned in the night?

Friday was clawing at him, hopping and capering and jabbering, and Dick Dawson gave a sudden shout:

"He wants you to go with him, sir!"

Sammy stared at the excited monkey. Friday was grabbing at him, clawing at him, trying to drag him down the path from the hut. Dick was the first to guess what was in the intelligent animal's mind. But the moment he had spoken, it was clear to the others.

"You are right, Dawson!" said Dr. Sparshott quietly. "Something has happened to the boys. It is clear that they have succeeded in getting back, but something has happened since they landed. Friday knows where they are! He cannot tell me—but he can guide me."

"And us!" exclaimed Streaky.

Sammy shook his head.

"You will remain to guard the hut," he said. "This may mean that the convicts have returned. Keep the door barred when I have gone—and fire if

you are attacked. I trust you to keep watch."

A very few minutes later, Friday, jabbering with satisfaction, was hopping down the path with Sammy Sparshott. The door of the hut was barred, the juniors within keeping watch and ward.

Friday, loping on ahead, looked back every now and then with his twinkling red-rimmed eyes to make sure that Sammy Sparshott was following. He was soon satisfied that the headmaster of Grimslade understood what was wanted—and scuttled on faster, Sammy breaking into a trot to keep pace with him.

The monkey plunged into the jungle, following a trampled path, made by the castaways, that led to the southern shore of the island. With his revolver gripped in his hand, Dr. Sparshott followed, sure that the intelligent ape was leading him to the lost schoolboys, and little doubting that he was being led also to the Devil's Island gang. For what else could have prevented the boys from coming back with Friday?

Had they, landing at last on Castaway Island, landed only to fall into those desperate hands? What had been their fate? Sammy's face was grim, and his eyes glinting, as he tramped on after his monkey guide.

CHAPTER 34.

In the Shadow of Death!

"MY giddy goloshes!" murmured Ginger Rawlinson. "What a sell!"

Jim Dainty gritted his teeth.

Fritz von Splitz groaned.

The three juniors were tied together in a bunch, Jim's left arm to Ginger's right, his right to Fritz' left, and another rope was knotted round the three of them.

On the shores of Castaway Island, which they had reached after so many perilous adventures on the wide Atlantic, this was what had awaited them! The storm and the ocean had spared

them, but now they had fallen into the desperate hands of the convicts after they had landed. Hardly a mile away, round the circling shore of the bay, was the hut where their friends were—the friends who would have flown to their aid had they known. And they were helpless prisoners, their lives hanging on a thread.

As they stood bunched together, the five French convicts stood in a tattered group near them, muttering together in their own language. In the glimmer of the moon they looked a fearful crew—tattered, bearded, shaggy, haggard from their hardships in the boat in which they had escaped from Devil's Island, far away on the coast of Guiana.

As they muttered they cast evil looks at the bound schoolboys, and it was easy to see that four of the gang would have disposed of them swiftly enough; but the black-haired man, Lautrec, held them in check. It was not from motives of mercy, for he was as savage and desperate as any of the crew, though he seemed a more intelligent and educated man than the others. The prisoners were pawns in his game to obtain the mastery of Castaway Island.

"Mein gootness!" moaned Fritz Splitz, quivering with terror under the dark, threatening looks of the convicts. "Ve vas all tead!"

"Keep a stiff upper lip, fatty!" grunted Ginger. "My giddy goloshes! If Sammy only knew we were here, and how we were fixed—"

"Sammy will save us," muttered Jim, "if—if they let us live!"

The talk among the convicts was growing angry and excited. The juniors caught words here and there, in the rapid French, as the ruffians gabbled together. The word "tuer" came to their ears more than once, and they knew that "tuer" meant "kill." "La mort" (death) was snarled again and again by one or another of the savage gang.

Evidently the ruffians had not forgotten the fight out at sea, when they

had striven to seize the Grimslade boat and had been driven off. Some of them showed marks that they had received in that struggle.

The black-haired man was gesticulating angrily, his eyes flashing, his voice rising shrilly. He was the leader of the gang, but he had a mutinous set of followers. But his influence and his arguments seemed to convince the ruffians at last, and there were sullen grunts and growls of assent, though savage eyes, under beetling brows, still gleaned menace at the prisoners. Lautrec, leaving the others in a growling group, stepped towards the juniors.

Fritz Splitz almost collapsed with terror as he approached. Jim and Ginger stood steady, though their hearts were beating painfully.

"Allons! You live!" said Lautrec, with a mocking grin. "Mes camarades, they would kill, but I make them to believe that you are useful to live. Comprenez?"

He laughed.

"This tall one—that Sparshott—he has taken from us our knives, or, ma foi, you are cut to pieces when we seize you!" he went on. "For you it is bonne chance that the tall one take our knives! But couper la gorge—that is not the only way to die, mes enfants! If you do not serve my purpose, you die—terribly! You—your name?"

"Dainty!"

"Bon! Vous venez le bateau avec nous—you come in the boat with us—les autres—the others remain! We go to the hut where your schoolmaster, he sleep. You knock at a door—comprenez? That tall one, he open at your voice. He shall not see us till we seize him, and all is done!"

Jim Dainty's eyes flashed.

"You shall kill me first!" he said, baring his teeth.

Lautrec laughed again—a low, ferocious laugh that was blood-curdling to hear.

"Nous verrons—we shall see! There are the other boys, who remain here; and if a single shot is fired at the hut,

the man I leave with them, he kill! I leave with them le petit Goujon, who go to the Devil's Island because, in Paris, he strangle one gendarme!"

Jim Dainty was untied from the other two, his arms remaining bound. Two of the convicts came to him, and, taking his arms, dragged him roughly down the shore to the crazy old boat in which the gang had come. Lautrec followed with another. The man he called Goujon—a thick-set ruffian, with the face of a wolf—remained with Ginger and Fritz.

The boat was dragged from the rocks of the headland into the water, and Jim thrown roughly into it. Lautrec and his comrades followed him in and pushed off.

Ginger Rawlinson, his face white as chalk, stared after the boat as it disappeared in the moonlight across the gleaming bay. The moon was sinking now, the light not so clear, and the boat was soon lost to sight, and the rattle of the oars in the rusty rowlocks died away.

Ginger's heart was like lead in his breast. He could have no doubt that he had looked on Jim Dainty for the last time in life; for he was certain that Jim would never lend himself to the treacherous plan the black-haired scoundrel had formed.

Ginger gave a groan. Jim Dainty had gone to his death—and it was death for those who remained behind! The convict who remained to guard them had his orders if a shot was fired at the hut—orders that he was only too keen to carry out. His evil, threatening face told that only too plainly.

Fritz Splitz, overcome by fear, leaned back feebly against a shadowy trunk, his fat legs hardly supporting him.

"Mein gootness!" he groaned. "Tat Sammy vill shoot ven tey are at te hut—and ve vas tead—ve vas bofe tead! Mein gootness!"

Ginger made no answer. As the long, long minutes passed he listened with feverishly strained ears. Goujon, standing a few yards from him, was

listening, too. If a shot was fired

What was going to happen at the hut? Ginger's feverish thoughts followed the boat as the long, long minutes crawled by. They must have got across the bay by this time, landed on the beach, gone up to the hut. What would happen then? The minutes seemed like hours. Suddenly there came a sound through the silence.

Faintly, but clearly, from far across the bay, came the ring of a pistol-shot. The shot had been fired at the hut.

There was a mutter from Goujon. He turned on the two prisoners. His savage eyes were blazing under his shaggy brows. His comrades had been fired on, and Lautrec had told him what to do. With the spring of a tiger, the convict leaped at the prisoners.

Crack!

The fingers were already at Ginger's throat when a shot rang out close at hand. The grasp of the convict fell from Ginger as Goujon staggered, groaned, and crashed over, and lay on the sand with a bullet in his heart. And Ginger Rawlinson, staring round with wild eyes, saw a monkey in tattered trousers skipping in the moonlight, and after him came the tall figure of Sammy Sparshott, with a smoking revolver in his hand.

CHAPTER 35.

Jim Dainty's Ordeal!

DICK DAWSON caught his breath. "They're coming now!" he breathed.

His eye was to the spy-hole in the door of the hut. One or another of the schoolboys had been watching there ever since Sammy had gone. They were not likely to close their eyes again that night. An hour had passed—more than an hour—and the three Grimsladers in the hut watched and listened, eager for news of the lost juniors.

Faintly through the silence there came a sound of a boat thudding on the

shore, and dark figures came up the path from the beach—wild, tattered figures, casting long, black shadows in the moonlight.

"The convicts!" muttered Dick. "They're coming!"

They knew now that the Devil's Island gang had returned. As they peered through the slit they recognised the wild figures, led by the black-haired desperado, Lautrec. There were five figures in the bunch; but, as they neared the hut, the amazed juniors discerned that only four of them were convicts. The fifth was a boy, and his arms were bound, and a gleam of moonlight on his face revealed familiar features.

"Jim!" breathed Dick Dawson. It was his chum.

"Jim Dainty!" muttered Streaky Bacon. "And—those brutes have got him! Where's Ginger?"

"Get your gun ready!" whispered Sandy Bear.

The bunch of figures came without a sound, creeping up the path. They halted a few yards from the hut. Evidently they believed that the occupants were sleeping—as, indeed, they would have been had not Friday given Sammy Sparshott the alarm. The three within heard a whisper from Lautrec:

"On dorme! Mais pas un mot!"

Streaky & Co. caught that whisper, in the deep silence: "They sleep, but not a word!" What treachery was the black-haired villain planning? He must believe that Dr. Sparshott was there. He could know nothing of the monkey's intervention.

The juniors in the hut waited breathlessly. Streaky and Sandy grasped revolvers. Dick Dawson had an axe. His heart thumped at the sight of his chum, bound, in the midst of the Devil's Island gang. Why the convicts had brought their prisoner there he could not, for the moment, guess; but he was going to rescue his chum, if he could.

"Listen!" breathed Streaky.

Lautrec was speaking, in a low whisper, to his prisoner, the other convicts standing silent. The juniors strained their ears to catch the words.

"You, Dainty! Comprenez? You go to a door—you tap. Yes. We keep out of sight till a door is open. You make the schoolmaster to open a door at the sound of your voice, thinking that you come alone—yes?"

Jim Dainty did not reply. His face was white as chalk. Like the convicts, he supposed that Dr. Sparshott was in the hut, sleeping. There was no sound to hint that wakeful eyes were watching there. He had been brought there to trick Sammy into opening the door—to betray his friends into the hands of his enemies. He knew only too well what would happen once Sammy had opened the door. A rush by the convicts, and then the occupants of the hut, taken by surprise, would be quickly overpowered.

Lautrec's grasp was on Jim, his black eyes gleamed murderous menace. He made a gesture to his associates, and they slunk into the cover of the walls of the hut, to keep out of sight when the door was opened.

"Vous comprenez?" Lautrec's voice was a faint whisper, like the hiss of a serpent. "Your life, the lives of your friends, if you fail me. Comprenez, mon cher? I leave with them Goujon. And if he hear a shot he has his orders—you know what!"

Jim stood silent.

Better a hundred deaths than to betray his friends to the Devil's Island gang. But he was thinking not only of himself, but of Ginger and Fritz—bound, helpless, watched by the ruthless ruffian, Goujon, to be murdered without mercy if a shot was fired from the hut. And if he gave the alarm there was no doubt that shots would be fired.

With a face like chalk, wet with perspiration, Jim stood silent, in anguish. Lautrec's grip tightened on his arm. He whispered again.

"Allons donc! You obey, or——"

"Never!" breathed Jim. "Villain—rascal—rotter—never! You shall kill me first!"

But his voice was subdued. He dreaded to give the alarm, to risk causing the shot that would be the signal for Ginger's death. Lautrec read his thoughts easily in his tortured face. His grip on the boy's shoulder tightened till Jim gasped with pain. The other three convicts, crouching by the wall, suppressed their breathing, watching Lautrec and the boy with eyes that gleamed in the moonlight like the eyes of wild beasts.

"Your life, and the lives of the others!" hissed Lautrec. "You tap at the door with your foot; you call—take care what you call, mon cher! One shot, and your friends yonder—Goujon twist them the neck! Venez!"

He dragged Jim Dainty closer to the door.

Within the hut the three juniors had strained their ears, to hear the low whispering without. A word or two reached them. Enough, added to Lautrec's action, to make them understand why Jim Dainty had been brought there.

Leaving him standing in front of the door, Lautrec crouched to one side, to keep out of sight, with his comrades, when the door was opened, ready for an instant rush. Jim stood motionless, silent, the perspiration streaming down his face. For Ginger's sake he dared not give the alarm, but not to save his own life and Ginger's would he have obeyed the orders of the convict. Lautrec's black eyes glittered at him.

Within the hut, Streaky whispered to his comrades.

There was a sudden sound in the hut as the bars of the door clattered down. Even as that sound warned Jim and the convicts that the occupants of the hut were not asleep, but wakeful and watching, the door flew open and Dick Dawson grasped Jim and dragged him headlong inside. With a howl of surprise and rage Lautrec leaped up.

Bang!

Streaky fired point-blank at the leaping figure in the doorway. Lautrec bounded back, not quite escaping the bullet that gashed along his swarthy cheek and drew a spurt of blood. The next instant the door was slammed and Sandy Bean jammed a bar into the sockets. Outside, the four convicts howled with fury, like wolves.

"Jim!" panted Dick.

Streaky lighted a candle. Dick caught up a knife and cut his chum free. Jim Dainty staggered against the table, white as death.

"Ginger!" he groaned.

"What about Ginger?" panted Streaky. "Have they got him?"

"They left Ginger and Fritz with one of the gang, to kill them if a shot was fired!"

"Oh, heavens!"

Lautrec's savage voice came in a scream from without.

"Name of a name! Nom d'un nom! Les autres—the others—you have given them to death!"

The yelling voice broke off as there came, ringing across the silent bay, the sound of a pistol-shot from the distance.

"Oh, my giddy goloshes! It's Sammy!" yelled Ginger, mad with delight. "Good old Sammy!"

Friday, chattering and squealing, capered round the two prisoners. Dr. Sparshott came up, with his long strides. He did not waste a glance on the figure of Goujon, sprawling motionless in the sand. He snatched a knife from his belt and cut Ginger Rawlinson and Patty Fritz free of their bonds. Friday hopped and skipped, squealing loudly. He had missed his master.

"Where is Dainty?" rapped Sammy.

"They've got him!" panted Ginger.

"They've gone in the boat, taking Jim with them, sir!"

He panted it all out in a few words.

Sammy Sparshott's face set hard as he stared across the moonlit bay. He

had heard the shot from the hut, which was followed by his own, aimed at Goujon. One of the desperate gang had gone to his account, but the other four were at the hut—with Jim Dainty in their hands. Friday had led them to the rescue, and he had saved the two prisoners. But what had been Jim Dainty's fate?

"Follow me!" rapped Sammy. "We must make for the hut!"

The dawn was breaking over Castaway Island, a faint, rosy flush creeping over the sea, the foliage of the wooded hill gleaming in the early rays. Breathing in gulps, streaming with perspiration, Sammy Sparshott came out on the beach at last, before the hut. In the glimmering dawn he saw the dingy old boat on the water's edge, and four tattered, savage figures gathered before the hut. But of Jim Dainty he saw nothing.

Crack! Crack! rang his revolver, pitching bullets at the bunch of convicts as he ran. And there was a startled yell from the Devil's Island gang.

They spun round at Sammy—running towards them like a deer, his revolver spitting fire as he came. He was between them and their boat. Their escape to the sea was cut off. One look at him was enough for the gang. They scattered like rabbits, racing away into the palms, disappearing from sight almost in a moment. Sammy, panting, ran on to the hut. The door was flung open and the juniors ran out.

"Dainty!" roared Sammy.

He could hardly believe his eyes as he saw Jim with Streaky and Sandy and Dick.

"Dainty's here, sir!" panted Streaky. "But Ginger—"

"Ginger!" groaned Jim Dainty. "They left him— Why what— Oh, my hat! Look! Ginger!"

Ginger Rawlinson, his red head gleaming in the rising sunshine, came panting breathlessly into view.

"Ginger!" yelled Streaky.

"Ginger and Fritz are safe!" said Sammy Sparshott. "Friday guided me to them. But thank Heaven I find you safe also, Dainty!"

Ginger came panting up. Streaky and Sandy rushed at him and hugged him in their delight.

"Grimslade wins!" panted Ginger.

"Hurrah!"

Sammy Sparshott's face was bright. The headmaster of Grimslade fairly grinned as he looked over his flock, happily reunited once more.

Sammy Sparshott had no doubt whatever that with three revolvers in their possession, the Grimslade party would have little difficulty in rounding up the four unarmed men, who had lost even their boat. And so it proved.

The next morning, making a drive across the island, the Grimsladers came upon the four convicts sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, and secured them, under the menace of Sammy's revolvers, without a struggle.

"Now let's rope them up to the trees while we have a dip before grub," said Ginger Rawlinson. "Lend a hand here, my hearties!"

Ginger Rawlinson, Jim Dainty, and Dick Dawson roped the convicts to the trunks of the palms, and then joined Sandy Bean and Streaky Bacon, who were waiting for them by the water's edge.

The schoolboy Crusoes enjoyed that dip after their labours of the morning. The broad Atlantic was calm and placid beneath the heat haze, and the water was delightfully warm.

"Race you out to the point, Streaky!" sang out Jim Dainty.

"Come on, then!" replied Streaky Bacon, and began to strike out with tremendous energy.

Jim Dainty went after him with a rush, what time Dawson & Co. took things easy and were content to watch the keen struggle between Jim and Streaky. Both were first-class swim-

mers, and as the point of the island came within a dozen yards of them Jim and Streaky put in a final spurt. Their arms flashed in and out of the blue water with the precision of machinery, and Streaky reckoned he would beat his chum by a yard, and nothing more. What happened next Streaky hardly knew. His head was almost lost to sight in the water, when something struck him between the eyes. It was not a severe blow, but it made Streaky howl.

"Yaroooh!"

"What's wrong, Streaky?" panted Jim Dainty, reaching his chum.

"I biffed my face on something," spluttered Streaky, "and I've swallowed about a pint of sea water!"

He trod water and gazed about him. Jim did likewise. And almost in the same moment they saw what it was that Streaky had encountered. A large wine bottle bobbed up and down a few yards away, and it was that, obviously, which Streaky had fouled.

"It's a bottle!" said Jim Dainty. "Corked, too!"

Both juniors swam towards the bottle, and Jim Dainty was the first to reach it.

"Eureka! It's a message from someone! Look, Streaky!"

Streaky Bacon whooped his excitement. Through the glass of the bottle he could plainly see a rolled-up sheet of paper, with writing on it.

"Let's take it back to Sammy," said Jim Dainty, and, turning, he started back for the beach.

"Boys," said Dr. Sparshott when Jim Dainty had handed over the bottle, "this may prove a lucky find indeed. If what is passing in my mind is at all possible of accomplishment, we shall owe a vote of thanks to Bacon and Dainty."

"What's the message say, sir?" asked Jim Dainty. "It's in French, isn't it, sir?"

"It is," smiled Dr. Sparshott; "so I will translate it for you. Listen!"

In English the strange message read as follows:

"My companion and I are stranded on an island"—here Dr. Sparshott broke off to explain that a compass bearing of the island's position followed—"upon which we crashed. Both of us are badly injured, and our seaplane is damaged. We have supplies for twenty days. When those twenty days have passed we shall starve or die of thirst. In Heaven's name, the finder of this message please save us from such a fate."

Dr. Sparshott broke off, a thoughtful expression on his bronzed features.

"That's about the gist of it, my boys," he said. "We must try to get to these unfortunate men."

"Who are they, sir?" asked Jim Dainty.

"According to this message, they are two French airmen who were sent out to locate the convicts who escaped from Devil's Island," explained Sammy. "And, what is more important, my boys, they are within a few hours' sail of this island. After we have eaten, Dainty, you and I will take out the boat in an effort to locate these injured airmen and their plane. Come!"

He stowed the message inside his shirt and strode back to the hut. After a hasty meal, Dr. Sparshott loaded the castaways' boat with a supply of stores, and drew Ginger Rawlinson on one side.

"Rawlinson, I'm going to leave you in charge of the party."

"Yes, sir."

"You will stand no nonsense from the prisoners, you understand," added Dr. Sparshott. "If they should give any trouble, stop their rations. If they should break free, don't hesitate to shoot. They are dangerous men."

"Leave it to me, sir," replied Ginger.

Dr. Sparshott handed him the two revolvers.

"I am taking Dainty with me on this trip to sea, and I don't suppose we shall be back until to-morrow. I can depend upon you, Rawlinson?"

"Absolutely, sir! Then you think you'll find this island the airmen speak of?"

"If their compass bearing is a correct one, I cannot miss it, my boy. In any case, it is our duty to try to succour these unfortunate men. Come, Dainty!"

Jim Dainty took a grip of the gunwale of the boat and began to run it down the beach into the water. Watched by his envious chums, he stepped the mast and hoisted the sail. Dr. Sparshott took the tiller. The boat began to glide out of the bay as the slight breeze filled the sail, and soon the Grimslade juniors were but specks in the distance.

Ginger Rawlinson & Co, waved their farewells until the boat was lost to sight, whilst Dr. Sparshott, setting a compass course, headed the boat across the rolling expanse of the vast Atlantic and hoped for the best.

CHAPTER 36.

The Stranded Airmen!

THE hours went by. Jim Dainty scanned the illimitable blue of the sea and sky, straining his eyes for a sight of land.

Worried thoughts were passing through his mind now. Supposing they lost their way? Supposing their supply of food ran out, or worse still, their water? Supposing a tropical storm overtook them?

Dr. Sparshott noticed the unusual gravity on Jim Dainty's face, and smiled reassuringly.

"Don't worry, my boy," he said cheerfully. "Grimslade will win through. At the rate we are progressing, I reckon we should strike this island within the next hour."

It seemed an interminable hour to Jim Dainty, but his heart leapt high when, through the mist blanketing the distant view of the rolling Atlantic, he caught sight of land.

"Land-ho, sir!" he exclaimed, stand-

ing upright in the boat, and pointing to starboard. "It's an island, sir!"

Dr. Sparshott shaded his eyes from the glare of the sun and looked intently.

"You're right, Dainty. I'll shift our course a point."

Jim Dainty was all excitement now. Nearer and nearer to the view came the island, rising out of the sea like a ghost, but no sign of life greeted the boat as it forged on. Not even when Jim reckoned he was within hailing distance did the stranded airmen make their presence known. But it was the island, sure enough. To the right, on a long, sandy stretch of beach, Jim made out the shape of a seaplane, high and dry.

"Look, sir!" he exclaimed. "There's the seaplane!"

Dr. Sparshott looked.

"Somewhat badly damaged, too," he observed. "But where are the two French airmen?"

Jim Dainty shook his head. Like Sammy, he was wondering whether the two men had succumbed to their injuries.

The boat ran into a tiny cove and Jim jumped out, painter in hand. Dr. Sammy Sparshott helped him to run the boat up on to the beach, clear of the water, saw that the painter was made secure, and then strode up the shelving beach, hands cupped to his mouth.

"Hallo, there!" he bellowed. "Hallo, there!"

Still came no answering shout. With Jim Dainty at his heels, the Grimslade headmaster entered the cluster of palms which lay beyond the beach and gazed about him keenly. Jim's sharp eyes detected the natural cave which probably served as a shelter for the two stranded airmen, and excitedly he pointed it out.

"That looks likely, my boy!" conceded Dr. Sparshott.

He stood at the mouth of the cave, noting with a certain amount of satisfaction the trampled-down creepers.

"Hallo, there!" His voice awoke the echoes of the cave and rolled back at

him mockingly. When the echoes died away, a faint moan filtered out of the cave.

"Come on, my boy!" said Dr. Sparshott. "They are in there, and they must be in a bad way, or else they would have come out to meet us."

He entered the cave with Jim at his heels, carrying a first-aid emergency outfit. And when their eyes were accustomed to the dimness of the cave, both Jim and Sammy saw the men for whom they had searched.

"Heaven be praised!" A bearded, wan-faced man about Sammy's age raised himself on his elbow and croaked the words. "Our prayers have been answered. Water—water, monsieur!"

Dr. Sparshott sank on one knee and allowed the injured man to drink sparingly from his water-bottle. His companion lay dreadfully still—so motionless that Jim Dainty, peering at him, thought that he no longer lived. But the boy saw the stricken man's eye-

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lids flicker for a moment, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

"He's alive, sir!"

Dr. Sparshott crossed over to the second airman and forced the neck of the water-bottle between his tightly-clenched jaws. The precious fluid began to revive him almost immediately.

Another hour went by before the stricken airmen made any attempt to answer questions or ask any. Then Dr. Sparshott and Jim Dainty learned that the two Frenchmen had been stranded on the tropical island for nineteen days, as far as they could gauge it, and that their supplies of food and water had given out.

"Well, messieurs," said Dr. Sparshott, "we at least have plenty of stores on our own island, and the best thing for us to do is to get you there as quickly as possible. Dainty, help me carry them out. Careful, they appear to be badly crocked."

In the full light of day Dr. Sparshott was able to make a better examination of the injured men. Both had broken legs and head wounds, whilst one—the pilot of the seaplane, so it transpired—had fractured a rib and broken an arm. With rough-and-ready splints Dr. Sparshott bound up their wounds, after having bathed and treated them with an antiseptic. Then he drew Dainty on one side.

"I'm going to look at that seaplane," he said. "Just wait here, my boy."

Dr. Sparshott was gone about half an hour, and when he returned his face was alight with excitement.

"The plane as a plane is useless," he told Dainty, "for the wings are badly damaged, and the propeller looks none too reliable. But the floats of the machine are sound, and, what is more important to us, there is ample petrol in the tanks. Dainty, I have an idea that this plane will prove our salvation."

"You mean we shall be able to leave Castaway Island, sir?"

Dr. Sparshott grinned.

"A sporting chance, anyway, my boy.

Now we'll make these poor fellows comfortable for the night, and at dawn to-morrow we will set off for Castaway Island."

Promptly at dawn the injured men were carried, one by one, to the boat. That done, Dr. Sparshott left Jim Dainty to make them as comfortable as possible whilst he ran across to where the seaplane had crashed on the soft sands. The floats of the plane were a trifle buckled, but they were still seaworthy, and Dr. Sparshott's one concern now was to shift the plane down to the water's edge. The water lapped the beach ten yards away, but those ten yards, even with Jim Dainty to help him drag the seaplane across the sands, drew the perspiration in great beads from Dr. Sparshott's brow. But at last the floats of the plane touched the water, and the damaged machine drifted out on the tide.

Dr. Sparshott climbed into the cockpit.

"You've got your instructions, Dainty. When you've picked up the rope and fixed it, take charge of the tiller of the boat." He glanced anxiously at the sky. "I'm going to try to make Castaway Island at once. Later the weather might change."

Jim Dainty's reply was drowned in the roar of the seaplane's engine as Dr. Sparshott handled the self-starter. Previously he had "primed" the cylinders so that the engine fired first time. As he opened the throttle of the engine the plane began to move forward, a long rope trailing through the water behind it.

Jim Dainty raced back to the boat, pushed it out into the water, and sat down at the oars. He pulled out into the bay, what time Dr. Sparshott turned the plane to lessen the distance, and soon the rope attached to the seaplane was trailing within Jim Dainty's grasp. He seized hold of the rope, fastened it to the prow of the boat, and shipped his oars.

Dr. Sparshott throttled back the engine so that his voice could be heard. "All ready, my boy? Reckon we'll make Castaway Island within the hour."

He waved a hand to the smiling youngster, then settled himself at the controls. The engine roared into life again, the plane began to skim the surface of the sea. And in its frothy wake, towed as if by a tug, came the boat with Jim Dainty and the two Frenchmen.

It was a novel experience to Jim. The taxi-plane—as he had nicknamed it—ate up the miles ten times quicker than a sailing vessel could have done.

Castaway Island lay bathed in the splendour of a tropic morn when its familiar outline hove into sight, and Jim, waving frantically, wondered why the noise of the seaplane's engine, let alone the sight of the taxiing craft and its tow, did not bring the Grimslade juniors rushing to the beach.

But a strange silence settled on Castaway Island. Something was amiss—both Sammy and Jim Dainty were aware of that when the former instinctively let the engine fade into silence. Like Jim, Dr. Sparshott looked hard towards the palms where the four prisoners should have been. But there were only three of them. Lautrec, the swarthy savage leader, was missing!

CHAPTER 37.

Good-bye to Castaway Island!

"I TELL you it will work!" Ginger Rawlinson gazed proudly at his handiwork, whilst Streaky & Co. and Fritz Splitz eyed it dubiously.

On the table in the hut was a bully beef tin—at least, it had been a bully beef tin once. Now it contained a very peculiar mixture of revolver bullets, three or four dozen nails, broken glass and sharp pieces of rock.

"And you call that a depth charge?" asked Dick Dawson rather sarcastically. "Just that!" admitted Ginger

proudly. "It's strong enough to put paid to the octopus of the treasure pit, anyway, Dicky. You see, secured on the inner side of the lid of this tin I have grouped about a dozen live cartridges. All I've got to do is to lower this tin into the treasure pit on the end of a rope, wait for the octopus to show up, and then fire a shot into the tin where the live cartridges are placed. The convicts will be safe enough for a bit, roped up like that. Come on!"

He picked up his home-made depth charge, which had been carefully sealed and made watertight by spreading clay over the seams of the tin, and, with a coil of rope over his arm, led the way to the ravine. In a breathless, excited group the castaways entered the gloomy cavern, Dawson holding aloft a hurricane lamp, which shed an eerie glow over the basaltic rock.

The juniors advanced, and, familiar now as was the sight of the grisly skeleton which marked the route to the treasure pit, they could scarcely repress a shudder as they passed the whitened bones and the grinning skull. Dick Dawson led the way to the fissure where a wall of rock had been displaced, revealing the opening beyond. In single file the castaways went along to the end of the fissure, halting on the narrow ledge and staring down into the deep, gloomy chasm.

"Now let's get busy!" said Ginger excitedly. "Fasten one of the lanterns to the rope, Dick. Good man! Now!"

Lowering the depth charge on the end of the rope, Streaky heard the faint splash as it met the water below. Then, with staring eyes, the juniors waited for the monster of the pit to emerge from his subterranean hiding-place.

It seemed ages before the waters stirred. Something long and sinuous flashed into the rays of the lantern bobbing on the rope just clear of the water—the tentacle of an octopus.

Ginger drew his revolver, and, leaning over the rocky ledge, took careful aim at the bully beef tin. He had

marked in a rough circle where the live cartridges had been placed, detonators uppermost, and he knew that one shot, striking the detonator caps fairly, would be sufficient to loose off the full charge.

The Grimsladers could hardly control themselves. Then—

Bang!

The crack of the revolver as Ginger pulled the trigger at once magnified a thousand times into an earsplitting roar as the depth charge was fired off. Echo after echo boomed forth from the bottom of the pit, followed by the furious thrashing of the tentacles of the monster, then an unearthly silence.

The lantern which had been fastened to the rope had been blown to smithereens, and the juniors on the ledge could not see the ring of water. But Dawson was quick to lower his lantern on another rope, and as it reached the water's edge a cheer went up from the castaways, for Ginger Rawlinson's depth charge had done the trick.

The giant octopus was dead, floating motionless on the surface of the pool.

"I'm going down!" exclaimed Ginger. "We know where the treasure chests are. I'm going to rope one of them. When I yell, stand by to pull it up."

Before his chums could dissuade him, Ginger began to shin down the rope. They watched him disappear and heard the soft splash of his body striking the water. Next they heard his voice, muffled but triumphant.

"The octopus has taken the count. I'm going to dive!"

Ginger surface dived, and his widely staring eyes beheld several ironbound chests below the surface. With trembling hands he secured the rope to one of them, and then broke surface again.

"Pull, my hearties!" he roared. "Here's the giddy treasure!"

The juniors pulled with a will. Up came a heavy chest, festooned with weeds and barnacles. Accompanying it came the triumphant Ginger.

Panting, he clambered on the ledge.

"There are several chests down there," he exclaimed. "But let's get this one out into the light and have a squint at it."

The castaways dragged the chest through the cavern and out into the daylight. Sandy Bean, who had thoughtfully brought along a crowbar, began to force the lid. The juniors clustered round him. But not one of them even in his wildest fit of imagination had reckoned to see such a collection of glittering gems as was revealed when the heavy, iron-bound lid was thrown back. Diamonds lay haphazard side by side with blood-red rubies. Pearls, gleaming dully, nestled against the deep glow of emeralds and topaz. It was a sight the Grimsladers would never forget.

"A king's ransom!" breathed Ginger. "My giddy goloshes! My giddy—" He broke off, and his jaw dropped, for surveying them with a gloating, triumphant expression on his black, swarthy face was Lautrec!

"Look out!" Even as Ginger yelled the warning and dived for his revolver Lautrec sprang.

He saw at a glance that, with the exception of Ginger, the party was unarmed. With the spring of a tiger Lautrec landed on Ginger, sending him crashing back. His fingers sought for and found the two revolvers, and in a second they were in his grasp.

Then, snarling like a wild animal, Lautrec got to his feet, the revolvers levelled at the astonished party.

"It is my turn now, my clever children!" he rasped. "You did not think that Lautrec would escape from your ropes. Ciel, if only I had the schoolmaster here now!"

"The schoolmaster is here!"

Lautrec and the Grimsladers wheeled sharply as that familiar voice awoke the echoes. Something sprang at the swarthy Frenchman from the shadows. Something smote him full on the chin. Like a poleaxed ox, the Frenchman

went down, the revolvers clattering to the rocky floor.

Over the prostrate convict stood Dr. Sparshott. Just behind Sammy was Jim Dainty.

"My boys, I was just in time," said Sammy simply. "Thank Heaven! That ruffian would have killed the lot of you! Secure him!"

Long before Lautrec's dazed senses returned he was securely trussed up. Then, in a procession, the castaways filed out of the ravine, carrying between them the precious treasure chest and their cursing prisoner.

It was the following day. In the ship's boat, loaded with provisions and water for a long journey, sat the Grimslade castaways. The treasure chests—for three of them had been recovered from the treasure pit—were snugly stowed away aft. In the well of the boat lay the two injured airmen, now showing signs of recovery.

A little distance out in the bay, floating on the placid waters, lay the seaplane, with Sammy at the controls. The engine was running smoothly, and after a consultation with the French airmen Sammy decided to take a chance. There was sufficient petrol, they reckoned, to enable the plane to taxi across the Atlantic, pulling its human load in the ship's boat, a distance of something like five hundred miles. Providing no bad weather was encountered, there was a sporting chance that the seaplane would strike the regular shipping routes.

Dr. Sparshott, after much consideration, had decided to take the chance. Up on the beach, struggling frantically with their bonds, were the four convicts from Devil's Island. But Sammy had purposely fixed their bonds to keep them busy only until the castaways were well clear of the island.

"All'ready?" sang out Sammy. "Then take your farewell of Castaway Island, my boys!"

Suddenly there was an excited chatter from the palm grove. Scampering down from a tree and racing across the sands came Friday, the monk, still clad in his cotton shorts.

"Friday!" gasped Dainty. "Come on, old bean! Room for you!"

The monkey scrambled into the boat, perched itself next to Jim Dainty, and chattered excitedly. Then the seaplane's engines broke into full song. The floats began to move across the waters of the bay, the rope towing the ship's boat tautened, and the journey started to the accompaniment of a combined cheer from Jim Dainty & Co.

For five hours the seaplane nosed out across the Atlantic, Dr. Sparshott keeping to a course the injured airmen had advised, and the hour of noon was fast approaching when the Grimslade juniors caught sight of a steamer's smokestack on the horizon. In half an hour's time the seaplane was taxiing across the bows of the steamer. In an hour the castaways and their precious cargo had been pulled up and were safely aboard.

The steamer resumed her course, the Grimslade Crusoes clustered at the rail and gazed across the vast Atlantic. Somewhere astern lay Castaway Island, which they had never expected to leave. And on Castaway Island were four baffled convicts, fully aware that in time a French warship would come to pick them up and return them to Devil's Island.

The steamer ploughed on. The sun went down, and the soft mantle of night spread over the vasty deep. But Jim Dainty & Co. and Sammy Sparshott did not seek the shelter of the cabins which had been placed at their disposal. They lined the rail, too excited even to sleep.

They were homeward bound—and that meant Grimslade. Sleep in the circumstances was next to impossible.

REAL LIFE ROBINSON CRUSOES

YOU don't have to go to the South Seas to live a Robinson Crusoe's life—the lonely islands off the north-west coast of Scotland, only a hundred miles or so from quite thickly populated farming districts on the mainland, have been the lonely homes of more than one castaway forced to live in solitude by a turn of the wheel of Fate.

The Island Castaway.

Seven years ago a bird-snarer who put in at one of these desolate islands—the haunt of sea-birds and a few rabbits which manage to scratch a living from the sparse grass—was astonished to hear a wild cry. A man, clad in rags and speaking some language he could not understand, came rushing down the rocks to meet the incoming boat, and the simple Scots peasant thought for a moment that he had encountered some weird genie of the islands.

But, by means of sign-language, the castaway managed to explain that he had been shipwrecked on the island, and the former took him back to the mainland, where it was found that the man was a German, sole survivor from a U-boat wrecked off the Scottish coast during the Great War days. For ten years the German sailor had been existing on birds' eggs, dead fish found stranded on the beach, and rainwater gathered from rock pools. His long spell of solitude had turned him mad—the poor victim of the sea now spends his time in an asylum swimming, ever swimming, in imaginary seas.

There are some, however, who, despite the tales of privation told by castaways who have returned to civilisation have gone voluntarily into

exile—and enjoyed the life! Alexander Selkirk, the original of Daniel Defoe's great novel, "Robinson Crusoe," was one of these. More recently an Austrian nobleman and his wife chartered a little vessel to take them to a lonely South Seas island, where they lived together for many years, until a British warship, visiting their island in the course of its official "policing" duties, found their rotting bones twelve years later.

Peopled by Castaways.

There is one island which is to this day peopled by a flourishing community who have all descended from a castaway party. This is Pitcairn Island, where settled the mutineers of the good ship *Bounty* over a hundred years ago. You will be seeing their story shortly in a film which is now being made, "The Mutiny of the *Bounty*." The mutineers commandeered the British warship on which they were serving and landed at Pitcairn Island, where they set up their homes and started a new colony.

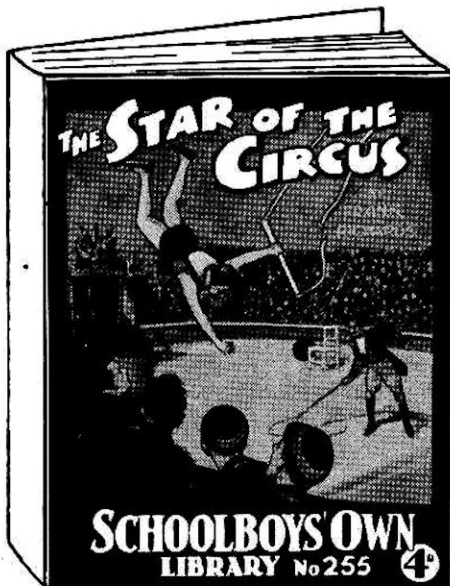
Another island, once uninhabited but now peopled by castaways, is Tristan da Cunha, at the southernmost tip of South America. Even nowadays only one ship a year calls at this, the world's loneliest inhabited island, and, as you can imagine, that day is the most notable of any in the islanders' year. A special mission has been formed to send out useful stores to them; but such is the rocky nature of the coast and the frequency of the storms that often the goods have to be floated ashore, since no small boats can put out to greet the supply-ship. Then the islanders have to wait till another year for their only means of real contact with the outside world.

Yet they are happy enough in their way. They have no need for money or a government—they merely farm the land and exchange produce—and listen to the squabbles of the world they never see by means of their wireless sets!

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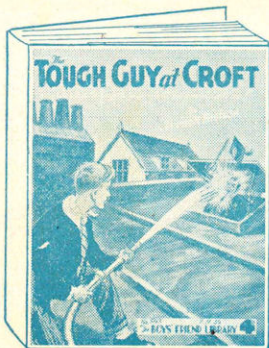
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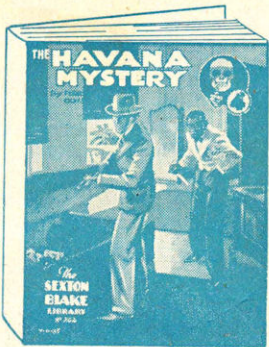
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