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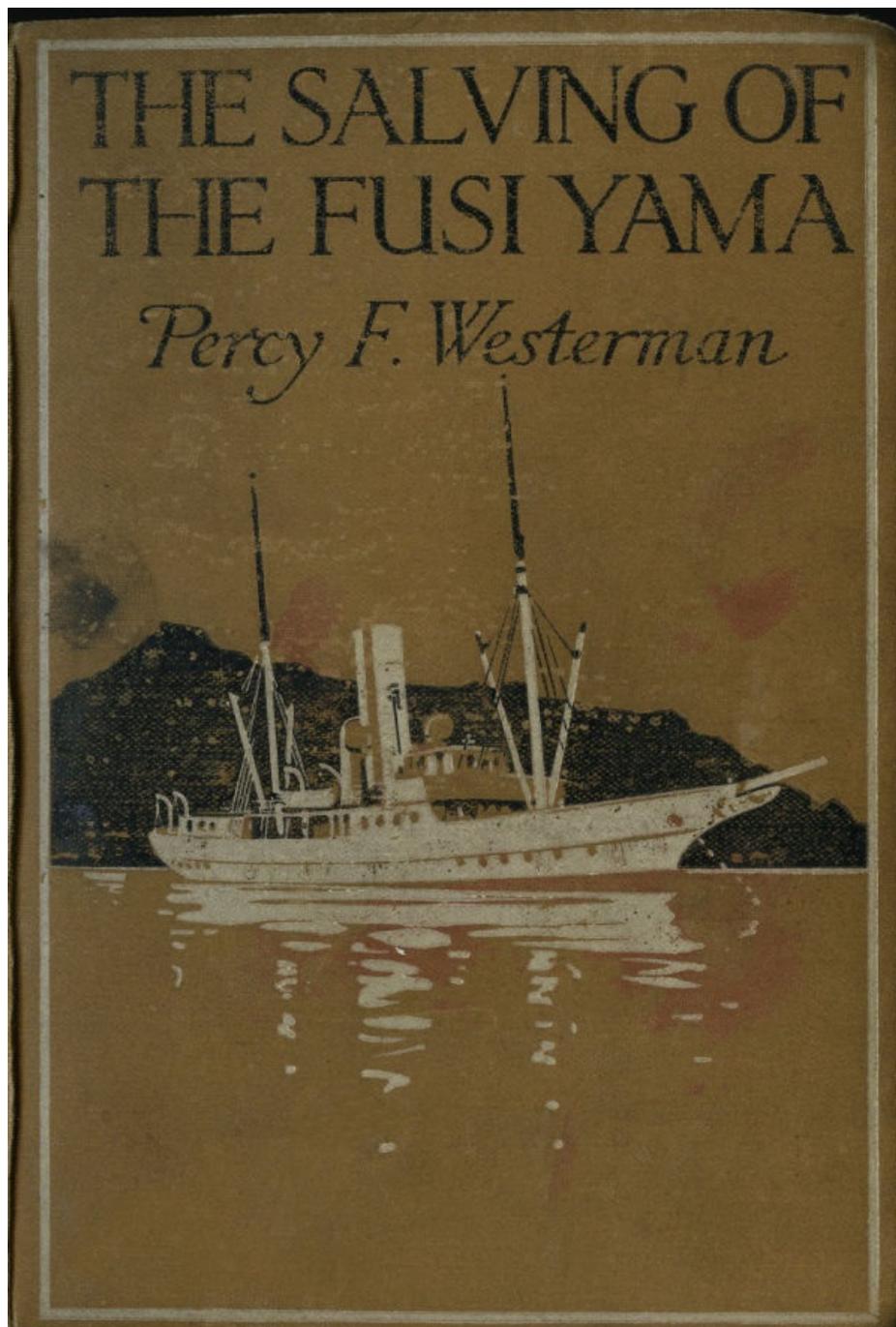
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SALVING OF THE "FUSI YAMA": A POST-WAR STORY OF THE SEA ***



[Illustration: cover art]

THE SALVING OF THE "FUSI YAMA"

BY
PERCY F. WESTERMAN
LIEUT. R.A.F.

"No boy alive will be able to peruse Mr. Westerman's pages without a quickening of his pulses."—**Outlook.**

The Salving of the "Fusi Yama": A Post-War Story of the Sea.

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A Post-War Story of the Sea

BY

PERCY F. WESTERMAN

Illustrated by E. S. Hodgson

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Contents

- CHAP.
- I. [ROCKS AHEAD](#)
 - II. [TO THE RESCUE](#)
 - III. [SIGNING ON](#)
 - IV. [COMRADES ALL](#)
 - V. [THE "FUSI YAMA"](#)
 - VI. [THE YACHT "TITANIA"](#)
 - VII. [SAND-BAGGED](#)
 - VIII. [THE "TITANIA" SAILS](#)
 - IX. ["WHERE AM I?"](#)
 - X. [A CHOICE OF TWO EVILS](#)
 - XI. [VILLIERS' RETURN](#)
 - XII. [PETE AND THE MUTINY](#)

 - XIII. [ADVICE AND BLUFF](#)
 - XIV. [SUNK IN COLLISION](#)
 - XV. [WHAT DID DICK DO?](#)
 - XVI. [THE WRONG ISLAND](#)
 - XVII. [NUA LEHA](#)

- XVIII. [THE FIRST DAY ON THE ISLAND](#)
XIX. [MISSING](#)
XX. [UP AND DOWN](#)
XXI. [A GOOD NIGHT'S WORK](#)
XXII. [VON GIESPERT HEARS NEWS](#)
XXIII. [EUREKA!](#)
XXIV. [THE HURRICANE](#)
XXV. ["KONKED OUT"](#)
XXVI. [HARBOROUGH'S RUSE](#)
XXVII. [A SUBMARINE DUEL](#)
XXVIII. [THE EXPLOSION](#)
XXIX. [A FRUSTRATED ESCAPE](#)
XXX. [VON GIESPERT'S RESOLVE](#)
XXXI. [EXIT THE "ZUG"](#)
XXXII. [SETTLING ACCOUNTS](#)

Illustrations

[A SUBMARINE DUEL](#)
(missing from book)

Frontispiece

[SAND-BAGGED](#)

[UNMASKED HE WAS NO LONGER AN AMIABLE SWEDE](#) (missing from book)

[THE GERMANS WERE DUMFOUNDED](#)

[JACK WAS PINNED PRETTY FIRMLY AGAINST THE CEILING](#)

[CLAVERHOUSE STEERS THE SEAPLANE INTO THE LAGOON](#)

THE SALVING OF THE "FUSI YAMA"

CHAPTER I

Rocks Ahead

"And how do you like being out of harness, old top?" inquired Jack Villiers.

The "old top", otherwise Bobby Beverley, late Sub-Lieutenant of the Motor Boat Reserve,

squared his shoulders and thrust his hands deeply into the pockets of a well-worn salt-stained monkey-jacket.

"Candidly, dear old thing, I don't like it one little bit," he replied. "A fish out of water isn't in it."

"I believe that's an undisputed fact," interrupted the other.

"And I jolly well begin to realize it," continued Beverley with conviction. "There are thousands in the same boat, but that doesn't alter my position. Fact remains, I see rocks ahead."

"Is that so?" inquired Villiers seriously. "What is it? Short of the ready?"

Beverley shook his head.

"Not that," he replied, with the confidence that a Service man will display when discussing financial matters with a brother-officer. "I've been careful, after a fashion, and there's my gratuity, and a bit of prize-money when that comes along. Enough to carry on with for a bit; but, hang it all, what's a fellow to do? I don't like the idea of taking on a job in an office. When you've been in charge of a crew for the last three years, you don't like knuckling under and being bossed; you know what I mean."

"Precisely, old bird," agreed Villiers. "Same here. I'd go off to Rhodesia like a shot, only I don't know a blessed thing about farming. I'd go to sea again, but the Mercantile Marine is chock-a-block with demobbed Royal Naval Reserve men with Board of Trade certificates and deep-sea experience. That's where we're bunkered, old boy. But never mind. Something'll turn up. It's a case of grasping Dame Fortune by the forelock, whatever that is. 'Fraid the only forelock I'm acquainted with is the forelock of an anchor, and that's apt to let you down badly if you don't watch it."

The two chums had encountered each other just outside the docks at Southampton. Both had recently been demobilized from the parent ship *Hermione*, Villiers' "M.L." having been paid off a fortnight before Beverley's craft had gone to lay up indefinitely in the Hamble River.

Jack Villiers was a tall, sparely-built fellow, bronzed, athletic, and moving with a typically nautical roll that one is bound to acquire by three years' acquaintance with the open sea. The only son of a formerly well-to-do Devonshire man, Jack found himself "out of a berth" with precious few prospects of obtaining employment of anything approaching a congenial nature. He had gone straight from a public school into the R.N.V.R and for three years he had risked his life for his country and had had enough experiences of warfare afloat to last a lifetime. He knew how to handle men, to take over responsibility in a tight corner, and generally to steel his nerves and act promptly in emergencies. He had a roof over his head, albeit the enamelled roof of the M.L.'s ward-room; good and ample food, a genial superior officer, and a crew with whom he was undoubtedly popular. His salary was sufficient for his needs, although it compared unfavourably with the wages of the average munition-worker ashore, and generally speaking he had, to quote his own words, "a top-hole time".

But at the end of the three years it was quite another story. The prospect of completing his education at a university had vanished. His second string—a course at an Engineering Training College—had snapped. His father, hard hit by the war, was no longer in a position to render financial aid, and it became apparent that Jack Villiers would have to cut out a line for himself.

The burning question was how? The prospect of a commercial life appalled him. His utter inexperience of the world was against him, and it was doubtful whether, during that period of unrest that almost invariably besets the demobilized man, he could settle to sedentary work. The call of the sea, the craving for spirited and healthy adventure, militated against the prospect of a hum-drum life.

Bobby Beverley was in much the same state—possibly worse. He was additionally hampered by having to provide for his fifteen-year-old brother Dick, who was at present a boarder in a well-known school near Salisbury. Bobby's parents were both dead. Mr. Beverley, taking up a commission in the Army Service Corps, at the age of forty, had been killed in action somewhere in France. His widow survived him by but a few months, while Dick had to be maintained out of a scanty "compassionate allowance", largely augmented by a considerable portion of his elder brother's Sub-Lieutenant's pay. And now Bobby Beverley was faced with two problems: his own future and that of Dick when the latter left school, which would be at no distant date.

"Let's trot along and have lunch," suggested Villiers. "I know of a decent little show in the High Street. Dash it all! I remembered in time," he added, as he replaced his cap after saluting a lady. "Only just beginning to remember I'm in mufti. Passed Barry's missus this morning, and, by Jove! I was going to salute Navy fashion when I recollected I was out of it. Good old times those, George."

"They were," admitted "George" fervently, accepting without demur the name that for some unaccountable reason is indiscriminately bestowed upon members of the Senior Service. "We had our sticky times, of course. Then we grouched like the rest of 'em. But that's a back number. Looking at it retrospectively, it wasn't a bad sort of stunt. And now there's the future."

"There won't be one for you on this old planet if you aren't more careful," interrupted Villiers, as he gripped his chum by the arm and hiked him on to the pavement just in time to escape being run down by a motor-cyclist. "Bless my soul! It's Alec Claverhouse; and on a brand-new 1919 jigger, too."

The recognition was mutual, for the motor-cyclist slowed down and came to a standstill with one foot on the kerb within twenty yards of the spot where he had all but collided with Bobby Beverley.

From what could be seen of him Alec Claverhouse appeared to be a tall, burly fellow. Tall he certainly was, but the burliness was largely deceptive, since he was wearing thick clothing and heavy motor mackintosh overalls. His forehead was concealed by a golf-cap pulled well down, while resting upon the peak were a pair of goggles that were evidently considered by their owner to be necessary adjuncts to the "doggy" appearance of a "speed merchant".

Claverhouse was an ex-lieutenant of the Royal Air Force—or Flying-Officer according to the revised and much criticized style of rank. He had been demobilized for more than five months, and after a long and wearisome search for a job had taken up a not too lucrative post at a motor-engineering works, part of his duty being to risk his neck and those of others of His Majesty's lieges by testing cars and motor-cycles on the King's highway. Up to the present he had been fairly fortunate in having his licence endorsed but twice, although it was a wonder that the fatal third endorsement had not been recorded. Like a good many other air-pilots Claverhouse, used to travelling at 120 miles an hour, found that a paltry twenty over the ground was a mere crawl.

"Cheerio, Beverley, old bird!" he exclaimed boisterously. "Hardly expected to run up against you. Still in it, I see. And, Villiers, you dear old thing! so they've chucked you out."

"Both of us," corrected Beverley. "We were discussing the prospects of hacking our way to fame and prosperity when you nearly settled the problem for us."

"Always ready to be of assistance," rejoined Claverhouse. "By the by, seen any of the old Abermurchan crowd lately?"

"Not since last July," replied Beverley. "Villiers and I came south together when the M.L. base packed up. The Air Station was due to close down almost immediately, I remember. What are you doing here?"

"Trying to find my feet," was the reply. "In other words, pottering about in a glorified garage waiting for a snip. I'm thinking of going abroad."

"That's about as far as we've got," said Villiers.

"But at present we're thinking of having lunch. Come along with us."

"My 'bus," protested Alec.

"Shove it round the back of the show," suggested Villiers. "Get on with it and then you can reserve a table. We'll be there in less than five minutes."

Claverhouse fell in with the suggestion and rode off. Arriving at the restaurant he was fortunate in securing a corner table. Five minutes passed, but there were no signs of Villiers and Beverley. Ten minutes passed.

"Wonder if they're acting the giddy goat with me?" he soliloquized as he carelessly picked up a copy of *The Times* and began to scan the Personal Column.

Why he did so he hardly knew. There was little of interest to him in the long list of appeals for work by demobilized men, though it roused his sympathy. Somehow it didn't seem right that fellows who had fought for the country should have to eat out of the hands of the stay-at-homes who for a dead certainty would have had no home had the Hun been top-dog.

Half-way down the column he came across an advertisement of a length and novelty unusual even to the unique Agony Column of *The Times*. Its audacity held him until he became aware of the arrival of Villiers and Beverley by receiving a vigorous thump on his shoulder.

"Sorry we're late, old son," exclaimed the former apologetically. "Ran across old Hammersley just under the Bargate. You remember him?"

Claverhouse nodded, then put the paper on the table.

"Cast your eye on this, old thing," he said. "A bit tall, eh, what?"

"What, Rio del Oro shares? Thanks, I'm not having any," said Villiers decidedly.

"No, next column," explained Claverhouse. "There, where my thumb is."

"What's the wheeze?" inquired Beverley, craning his neck and looking over Villier's shoulder.

"That's what I want to know," replied Alec. "If there's anything in it, I'm on."

The announcement was as follows:—

"To Demobilized Officers. Those wishing for further excitement and adventure overseas and who are physically and mentally capable of taking care of themselves are invited to communicate with the under-signed. An enterprise involving the risking of two hundred and fifty pounds per head is in contemplation. The capital may be lost; on the other hand, there is a possibility of a gain of one thousand per cent upwards. Applications are especially invited from ex-members of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, and Royal Air Force, but those persons formerly serving in other branches of H.M. Services will be given consideration. Full particulars of the scheme, which will require twelve months' personal service, will be supplied to *bona fide* applicants.—Address, 'Joystick', c/o Messrs. Steady and Strong, Richborough Chambers, Southampton."

"Claptrap!" declared Villiers, taking up the menu-card, which represented something rather more concrete, and consequently rather more digestible, than the newspaper announcement.

"P'raps," admitted Claverhouse, with his characteristic drawl. "'Tany rate the bloke's straightforward enough to tell you that you might be chucking your money away."

"That's so," agreed Beverley. "We can investigate. I suppose there's no obligation to carry on if the thing looks fishy."

"I don't mind going that far," said Villiers. "And if it looks a sound scheme I'll plank down three hundred. After all three hundred is only worth about a hundred and eighty pounds, and if we are kept employed for a twelvemonth and get a bit of excitement chucked in, well—we might just as soon spend our gratuities that way as being rooked and rushed at home."

Beverley made no audible comment. He was of a cautious nature, and his cautiousness was heightened by the fact that he was responsible for the maintenance of a young brother for at least a couple of years.

While the waiter was taking orders the subject was dropped, but as soon as the man had departed Claverhouse returned to the matter.

"Wonder if it's a filibustering stunt?" he hazarded.

"Or piracy," added Villiers. "I heard a yarn floating around only yesterday about a merchant skipper whose crew were killed in cold blood by a U-boat. The old man was taken prisoner, but managed to escape, and now he's vowed to get his own back. How I don't know, unless he turns pirate and goes for every Fritz he falls in with on the high seas."

"Thanks, I'm not having any there," declared Beverley. "I don't want to find myself hanging in the modern equivalent to Execution Dock."

"Nor I," added Villiers. "Apparently this stunt has something to do with the sea, since it's R.N.V.R. fellows who are wanted."

"And Air Force blokes," said Claverhouse gently.

"Nothing like sticking up for your own crush, old bird," remarked Villiers. "Yes, that part puzzles me a bit. Look here, let's take Beverley's advice and make inquiries. If it isn't all jonnick we can pipe down."

"When?" asked Claverhouse. "Now? At once?"

Villiers laughed.

"Hardly," he replied. "Pretty guys we'd look trotting round to Richborough Chambers and asking for 'Joystick'. It's too much like asking for trouble to my mind. No, the best thing we can do without compromising ourselves is to write and ask for an interview. Then we can resolve ourselves into a Committee of Ways and Means."

"Joint letter?" asked Beverley.

"No, individual, briefly stating our qualifications," replied Villiers.

"But, in that case, you or I might be sent for and the others ignored," objected Claverhouse. "I vote we stick together—united we stand sort of touch."

"That's the stuff to give 'em," was Villiers' rejoinder.

CHAPTER II

To the Rescue

It was not until the following Thursday afternoon that Villiers, as head of the informal Mutual Advancement Syndicate, received a reply to the joint letter to "Joystick".

As Villiers had expected, the letter gave no clue to the nature of the proposed undertaking, but consisted of a brief intimation that the advertiser would be pleased to interview Messrs. Villiers, Beverley, and Claverhouse at Richborough Chambers at 3 p.m. that day.

"We're progressing," he observed, as he handed the letter to Bobby. "Now comes the fun. Will 'Joystick' take a rise out of us, or shall we pull his leg? Let's go round and rout out Claverhouse."

"He'll be at his one-horse show garage," said Beverley. "Better look him up at lunch-time."

"Won't give him enough warning," objected Villiers. "We'll tackle him at once and let him know how things stand. 'Raise steam and prepare for immediate action', eh, what?"

They happened across Alec Claverhouse just outside the motor-works. He was about to take a 60-h.p. "Oudouresque" out for a test run.

"Cheerio!" he exclaimed. "Any luck?"

"Read this," replied Villiers. "My festive friend, you'll have to pipe down this afternoon. Thursday's 'Make and mend', you know."

"Not in this rotten show," said Claverhouse. "The civilian equivalent to the Adjutant bird in these works is a regular Cossack for granting time off. I haven't a great grandmother to bury, nor is there a football match on this afternoon, so honours are even on that score. What do you think of this little lad? Guess I'll knock sixty out of her on the road."

"In that case," remarked Beverley, "you'll get run in by the police and sacked by the firm, so before you do find yourself in the cart why don't you apply for leave?"

"I will, sure," replied Claverhouse, throwing off his leather-lined coat and tossing it into the coupé. "Hang on half a tick, and I'll tell you the result of the poll."

He disappeared from view, leaving Jack and Bobby to admire the workmanship and general "get up" of the powerful "Oudouresque".

In less than five minutes he reappeared, beaming and smiling.

"It's all O.K.," he announced. "I cut the rotten red tape and saw the manager. While I was about it—'in for a penny, in for a pound' stunt you know—I asked if he had any objection to you fellows coming with me. Said he hadn't, as long as the firm hadn't to pay your funeral exes; so hop in and let's get a move on."

Nothing loth the two chums boarded the car, Villiers sitting by Claverhouse while Beverley reclined in lordly fashion on the back seat. Almost imperceptibly, in response to a touch of the electric starter, the powerful car glided away.

There was no doubt about it. Claverhouse knew how to handle a high-horse-powered engine, and before the car had traversed the length of the crowded High Street, and had adroitly negotiated the narrow Bargate, both Villiers and Beverley had abandoned the mental visions of finding themselves either in a mortuary or in an infirmary.

Alec kept the car well retarded until he reached the outskirts of Southampton, then opening out slightly he soon covered the somewhat hilly road between the seaport and the cathedral city of Winchester, but never once did the needle of the speedometer point above twenty-five.

"Don't think I was boasting about the sixty," remarked Claverhouse. "There's a fine stretch of open road ahead. Then you watch her rip. Keep your eye on the speedometer. It's the only indication of the rate we're doing."

Presently the chalky highway ascended a long hill that forms part of the North Downs. Ahead as far as the eye could reach was a desolate stretch of unfenced road with a wide expanse of undulating grass-land on either side—straight as a die in the direction but interrupted by a number of gentle gradients.

"Worthy Down," announced Alec. "Four hundred feet up. Now she'll rip."

Rip she did. Swiftly the needle rose from thirty to forty-five.

"All serene?" asked Claverhouse, only this time he did not turn his head. His whole attention was centred upon the road, yet so silent and well protected was the car that he could speak in an ordinary tone and be heard distinctly.

"Quite," replied Villiers.

Fifty, fifty-five, sixty, sixty-five, seventy.

The "Oudouesque" was travelling. The wind whistled past the screens, the chalk road blended into a vague, swiftly-rushing riband of white. Everything within fifty yards was indistinct, like a badly-focused photograph, while for a mile behind the car a dense cloud of dust eddied in the back-draught of the swiftly-moving vehicle.

"Look out, old man," cautioned Villiers. "There's a cyclist ahead."

"Yes, I see him," replied Alec, gently retarding the terrific momentum. "'Fraid he's spoiled my record."

"Motor-cyclist," corrected Jack, as the approaching machine breasted one of the intervening ridges and disappeared in a dip of the road. "Wonder if anything would happen if a bike going at, say, forty, passed a big car doing seventy? If—"

He broke off. Simultaneously Claverhouse throttled down and applied the side-brakes.

Before the car could be brought to a standstill it had surmounted a slight rise and was on the down grade leading to another ascent half a mile or more away. Right in the hollow was a confused group of figures which resolved itself into a motor-cyclist bravely defending himself against four rough-looking men. The cycle lay on the grass a good ten yards from the road and a fifth ruffian was already beginning to ransack the contents of a case strapped to the carrier.

At first sight Villiers thought that there had been an accident, and that the motor-cyclist had collided with a group of pedestrians, but he was speedily undeceived. It was a case of highway robbery.

Unfortunately, from the footpads' point of view, the rascals had not bargained for the approach of a car at seventy miles an hour. Lying in wait for the solitary traveller, they had taken the precaution to see that the straight road was otherwise deserted when the object of their attention approached. Nor were they aware of the presence of the swift, silent car until it appeared to leap from the ground within a hundred yards of them.

"Look out, chums!" shouted the fellow standing over the fallen motor-cycle, and acting upon his own warning he promptly took to his heels.

The others also fled, but not before one of them was held by the attacked motor-cyclist. It looked as if the fellow would be made a prisoner, for the other held on like a leech, until the ruffian drew a knife and struck.

"After them!" yelled Beverley, taking a flying leap from the car. Villiers was a close second, ignoring Claverhouse's suggestion to take the car in pursuit.

As it was the chase was futile. The assailants, young, agile, and strong in wind, scattered in different directions, steadily outdistancing the three new arrivals, hampered as they were with heavy coats.

"Pity we didn't stick to the car," remarked Alec regretfully, as puffed and pouring with perspiration they made their way back to the victim of the attack. "I bet we would have run at least two of them to earth. Fine sport it would have been, and the grass makes good going. Hallo! He's up again."

Claverhouse indicated the unfortunate motor-cyclist, who, holding one arm below the elbow, was ruefully contemplating his steed.

"Hurt, sir?" inquired Villiers.

"Scratch," replied the other with equal laconism.

Then, as if the presence of his rescuers was unnoticed, he fumbled with the fingers of his uninjured arm until he succeeded in opening the leather case on the carrier.

Apparently his investigations were satisfactory, for, closing the lid, he turned towards the three chums.

"Thanks, awfully, for your timely assistance," he exclaimed. "It was very remiss of me not to say so before, but my head feels a trifle dizzy. I'm afraid I haven't quite got the hang of things yet."

"Let me bind your arm," suggested Beverley. "It is bleeding rather badly."

"So it is," admitted the stranger. "I hardly noticed it, but it's tingling a bit now."

Villiers helped him off with his motor-cycling coat and jacket and rolled up his sleeve.

"Clean cut," announced Beverley. "Any first-aid gadgets in the car, Alec?"

"Trust me for that," replied Claverhouse. "I'll fetch the wallet."

"Any suggestion as to the cause of that attack?" asked Villiers.

"Can't say," was the non-committal reply. "I'm sorry they got away—very."

"So am I," agreed Villiers sincerely. "According to the papers, robbery with violence is on the increase. One of the after-results of the war, I suppose. Going far?"

"Southampton," replied the stranger. "I have an engagement at three."

"So have we," added Beverley. "Is your bike all right?"

Examination proved that it was rideable, although the front wheel was slightly buckled and the exhaust-lever cable had snapped.

"You'd better come in the car," suggested Claverhouse, when the bandaging operation was completed. "One of my friends can ride your bike."

"I'd be eternally grateful," replied the motor-cyclist. "I'm not much of a hand at this sort of game, but with this wretched railway strike on, what is a fellow to do?"

"It's no use hanging on to the slack," observed Claverhouse, moving in the direction of the car. "Jump in and let's get along. First stop Winchester, I presume?"

"What for?" asked the stranger. "Not on my account?"

"But surely," said Claverhouse, in astonishment, "you are going to inform the police?"

"A waste of valuable time," objected the other. "No, if you don't mind dropping me in Southampton I'll be doubly obliged. I'll take that attaché case with me, if you please."

"Good enough," agreed Claverhouse. "Beverley, dear old soul, you're riding the bike, I believe?"

"That is so," admitted Bobby.

"And," continued Alec, with a grin, "you think you'll hang on to us? You'll be dropped, old son, for a dead cert. So don't you think it would be just as well to ask this gentleman's address? Where shall we put you down, sir?" he asked, turning to the stranger.

"Richborough Chambers," was the unexpected reply.

"Well, I'm hanged!" exclaimed Villiers. "That's rummy—very. Do you happen to know of a fellow who, for certain reasons, calls himself 'Joystick'?"

A faint smile overspread the man's bull-dog features.

"I am 'Joystick'," he replied.

CHAPTER III

Signing On

For some minutes "Joystick" remained silent, enjoying the obvious astonishment of the trio.

"You need not introduce yourselves," he continued. "You are Robert Beverley; you are Jack Villiers, and you are Alec Claverhouse—I presume you pronounce your name in Scots' fashion."

"You are a veritable Sherlock Holmes," declared Villiers.

The other raised a hand deprecatingly.

"I cannot aspire to that degree of intelligence," he remarked. "So, to remove misunderstandings, I will explain. You said you had an appointment at Southampton at three. I mentioned Richborough Chambers, and then you asked if I knew 'Joystick'. Amongst many applications for an interview I had a joint letter signed by you three fellows. I heard Beverley called by name. That accounted for one of you, and left two—Villiers and Claverhouse. One looked like a naval man, the other did not, but he had an accent that hails from north of the Tweed. Simple, eh? and, by the by, since I know your names, there is no reason why I should screen myself under a nom-de-plume or nom-de-guerre, or whatever you like to call it. I'm called Harborough—Hugh Harborough."

"Late Lieutenant-Commander, R.N.V.R.?" asked Villiers.

"Correct," was the reply.

"And Sir Hugh Harborough," continued Jack.

"I believe I have a handle to my name," replied the baronet, smiling. "However, that's a detail. I didn't ask for it. A fellow cannot be responsible for the deeds: or misdeeds of his great-great-grandfather."

"That excuse cannot apply to your D.S.O.," urged Villiers, following up his attack.

It was Sir Hugh's turn to look astonished.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"Merely because I happened to know a fellow in the Inchlellan Patrol who had been transferred from Poldene. He knew you. Carruthers is his name."

"Good man, Carruthers," exclaimed Sir Hugh. "I'd like to meet him again. But this isn't Southampton. What do you say to an alteration of plan? Come back to 'Thalassa Towers' and have lunch with me. Then, if you don't mind running me into Southampton, I can interview some more fellows at 3.30. It's only a matter of eight and a half miles to my place."

It was Alec Claverhouse who was the first to agree to the revised programme, and since he was in charge of the "Odoresque" Company's car it was only right that he should take the responsibility of delaying its return. Provided the car was returned to the works and reported "passed for road work" by three o'clock there would be no cause for anxiety on the part of the officials of the company.

"Any objection to a speed burst, Sir Hugh?" he asked.

"None whatever," was the reply. "What'll she do?"

For answer Alec let the car all out. She was soon doing seventy-five, while Beverley, on the twin "Mephisto" was almost out of sight far astern. But Beverley was cautious in most things, and on a strange mount he did not feel inclined to give the engine full throttle.

"To the left at the fork roads," cautioned the baronet. "Hadn't you better let Beverley reduce station a bit? No, I don't think the footpads will molest him. It was this they were after, I fancy."

And he tapped the attaché-case at his side.

A quarter of an hour later the "Odoresque" was sweeping along the extensive drive leading to Thalassa Towers, with the "Mephisto" fifty yards behind.

"Make yourselves at home, and please drop all formality," said the baronet. "This isn't a Service stunt, and personally I'm dead set on red tape. Had quite enough of that the last four years. 'Fraid the place is rather in a muddle. You see, I only succeeded to the title in '15, when my elder brother went under at Ypres, and I haven't spent much time at the old show since."

"I like his idea of a muddle," thought Beverley, as a well-served lunch was being quickly provided, although at short notice. There seemed an abundance of servants, and, what was somewhat remarkable, there was a large touring-car and a light run-about in the garage. Why then did Sir Hugh risk his neck on a motor-cycle?

Harborough personally led the way to a bath-room, and then, excusing himself, disappeared for a few minutes to return divested of his mackintosh overalls.

He was of average build, bronzed complexion, with heavy jaw and cheek bones. His eyebrows were thick and bushy, extending in an almost continuous straight line below a forehead of medium height. His iron-grey hair was close-cropped and grew low on his temples. When he smiled, which was rarely, a double row of even white teeth rather toned down an otherwise blunt, determined, and somewhat reckless-looking face.

Instinctively the three chums felt that Sir Hugh was "sizing them up" before broaching the important subject. He put them entirely at their ease, chatting casually on common-place subjects during lunch, but the while there was the feeling that every question he asked, however simple, was with the object of plumbing the minds of his guests.

Villiers tried to "draw him" on the matter of the idle motor-cars, but the baronet avoided the subject adroitly yet without any suspicion of awkwardness, and the conversation drifted through the merits of No. 6 shot for rabbit-shooting and the prospects of next year's yachting to a discussion on heavier versus lighter-than-air machines.

"Suppose we make tracks for the smoking-room?" suggested Sir Hugh, when lunch was finished.

The smoking-room was cosily furnished in old oak, and like the rest of the rooms on the ground floor the windows were heavily barred. There were also steel shutters, opening and folding inwards against the sides of the deep window-recesses. Both bars and shutters were unmistakably recent additions.

The baronet motioned to his guests to seat themselves, and handed cigarettes. Then placing the attaché-case on the table he took up his position on the hearthrug, leaning against the carved mantelpiece.

"Now to business," he began abruptly. "I'm not asking for recruits for a filibustering expedition, piracy, or any of that sort of work. I'm taking on a speculative but above-board deal, which will involve hard work, peril, and perhaps losing the number of your mess. I believe you, Claverhouse, would term the latter contingency 'Going West', but you know what I mean. Briefly, I hope to fish up a million and a half in bullion and specie, the principal part of the cargo of a ship sunk by von Spee's squadron somewhere in the Pacific. I know where that somewhere is; the exact position is recorded in a document lying in that attaché-case. Incidentally, I have good reason to believe that this morning's little affair was promoted by a clever scoundrel who is particularly anxious to obtain the secret and to see me safely out of the way. Those bars and shutters, which I noticed that you were admiring just now, are part of the defensive scheme; so you see, apart from the mere excitement of treasure-hunting, there is a subsidiary stratum of danger to add to the zest of the prospectors."

"That sounds promising, Sir Hugh," observed Villiers.

"And as to terms," continued the baronet. "Each member of the expedition—I propose to bring up the number to fifteen or eighteen—will be required to contribute two hundred and fifty pounds towards the cost. I will find the balance. Meals and quarters will be provided free, but there will be no guarantee that each member's capital will be returned. It won't even be secured. If, as I expect, the venture is a success, half the profit will be divided between my assistants plus their two hundred and fifty pounds, while I have the rest of the proceeds. Now, have you any remarks?"

"Seems quite O.K.," replied Claverhouse. "After all's said, two hundred and fifty pounds isn't much for a twelvemonth's travel with board and lodging thrown in, as we remarked when we saw your advertisement."

"There's more than that," said Sir Hugh. "The stake makes every man take the keenest interest in the work. He realizes that it's up to him to do his level best for his comrades and himself. I could, of course, engage a professional crew, but nowadays one can't depend upon paid labour whether ashore or afloat. This railway strike, for example, although the way the Government's tackling it was a complete surprise."

"We volunteered," remarked Villiers, "either for road or marine transport, but we were three amongst thousands and didn't have a sniff in. Motor jobs all snapped up and only a few fellows required for marine work."

"That's satisfactory from one point," said Harborough. "It shows that a considerable section of the community supposed to be relatively helpless can get a move on. The war has brought them out, as it were; helped them to find their feet. But that's where I was let down when my chauffeur struck suddenly. Driving a car isn't one of my accomplishments."

"We noticed you had a couple of cars," observed Beverley.

"And wondered accordingly, I presume," added Sir Hugh drily. "Let me explain. My chauffeur fellow wanted more pay, although I had raised his wages recently. Thought he had me under his thumb, so to speak, when the railway strike came, but I wasn't going to be bluffed. So he went off at once, presumably to join the taxi-driver crush in town. He'd make a fine brigand. I can drive a four-in-hand with credit. Took on the job of driving a stage-coach in Winnipeg fifteen years ago, and was glad to get four dollars a day for doing it. So you see, I've had my ups and downs in life, and I'm not sorry. Since I couldn't drive the car and there was no one on the spot to drive for me, I sent my gardener boy into Farnham to bring back a motor-bike. The 'Mephisto' was the only one he could get, and a hundred guineas at that, but you see, I'm always particular to keep my appointments. I mustn't forget the one at Southampton at three-thirty," he added, glancing at his watch. "Now, have I made myself sufficiently clear for the present? If you require time to think the proposition over, there is no immediate hurry for a day or so—say Monday morning."

"I'm on it," declared the impulsive Villiers.

"And I," added the hitherto deliberate Claverhouse.

Bobby Beverley hesitated.

"Out with it, man," exclaimed Harborough encouragingly. "Nothing like speaking your mind. What's the difficulty? Anything of a private nature?"

"Not at all, Sir Hugh," replied Beverley, flushing slightly under his tan. "I'd like to come, only —"

The baronet guessed the nature of the impediment. He was right, but he was too keen a judge of human nature to prompt the still hesitating youth.

"It's like this," resumed Bobby, plunging into details. "I can't very well raise that two hundred and fifty pounds without getting credit. I've a young brother to look after."

"How old?" inquired Harborough.

"Fifteen this month."

"H'm, beginning to think what he wants to be," commented the baronet. "What are you doing with him?"

"He's at boarding-school," answered Bobby. "I think he'll go in for motor-engineering. He wanted to have a shot for Sandhurst, but, unless something turns up, I can't run to it."

"Nothing like the Service for a healthy youngster, provided he's keen," commented Sir Hugh. "Wish I'd gone in for Osborne when I was a lad. Instead of that I got out of hand, and my governor packed me off to Canada to find my feet. I did," he added grimly.

The baronet glanced at his watch again, and then addressed Villiers.

"Can you drive a car?" he asked. "You can—good. Will you mind driving me in? Claverhouse can take his, and then I'll have something to get home in. Excuse me a moment while I get my gear."

He went out, taking the attaché-case with him. Villiers turned to his companions.

"Wonder if he's fixed up for the return journey?" he remarked. "Bobby, you thundering old ox, why the blazing Harry did you hedge? I'd have advanced you the ready like a shot."

"I know, old man," replied Beverley. "I'd jump at it, but there's Dick. I'm a non-starter."

"Tell you what——" began Villiers.

He got no further, for at that instant the door opened and Harborough appeared.

"Can you spare me a minute, Beverley?" he asked.

Beverley went out. His chums exchanged glances.

"It's a deal after all, old bean," remarked Claverhouse.

Bobby was absent not one but a good ten minutes. He returned with a radiant face, following the self-possessed Sir Hugh.

"Beverley has signed on," announced the baronet briefly.

CHAPTER IV

Comrades All

"When do we take over, sir?" inquired Villiers.

The reply came sharp and to the point.

"From now," replied Sir Hugh. "In Claverhouse's case, I understand, he will have to give in his resignation. There's one more point. In addition to board and quarters—you'll be regarded as members of the establishment—there will be an amount of two guineas a week to each of the syndicate until we leave England. That will be as soon as possible, but it would hardly be fair to expect you to hang on here without some slight remuneration. Now let's be going."

The four men made their way to the garage, where Claverhouse showed Villiers how to manage the baronet's car, which was of a type that the R.N.V.R. man knew intimately. Then, having "started up", Claverhouse boarded the "Odoresque" with Beverley as his companion, while Sir Hugh and Villiers seated themselves in the other.

The journey to Southampton was performed at strictly moderate speed, and nothing unusual occurred. Villiers led the way, the powerful "Odoresque" following a hundred yards behind at a pace that seemed a painful crawl to the road-hogging Alec.

Just before the Bargate, Claverhouse took a side-road in order to return the car to the Odoresque Co., Ltd., leaving Villiers to take the head of the syndicate to Richborough

Chambers.

It was an intricate piece of work to negotiate the ancient and narrow gateway that spans Southampton's principal street. The road was not only greasy, and had tram lines on it, but there was a slight descent to the Bargate itself. Here stood a policeman regulating the traffic, since it was possible for vehicles to pass only in one direction at a time.

The traffic was passing in the right direction as Villiers approached. Just ahead was a tramcar, while following the motor—he could see that by means of the reflector—was a petrol-driven dray with three or four men sitting on the otherwise empty body.

The tramcar emerged from under the arch, but just as Villiers was immediately under the gate a cyclist, disregarding the policeman's upraised arm, dashed headlong towards the front of Villiers' car.

Not for one moment did the ex-officer lose his nerve. To swerve meant wrecking the car and possibly injuring or killing its occupants.

He applied both brakes, but the metal-shod tyres slithered on the greasy tramlines. The next instant the impact occurred.

It was the cycle that bore the brunt of the collision. Its rider, with considerable dexterity, had dismounted, and leaping into safety had left his machine to meet destruction. The dray, pulling up, filled almost the whole of the archway, with its bonnet within a couple of inches of the tail of the car.

Within a few seconds a crowd had collected. The traffic was held up while the policeman, notebook in hand, was taking particulars of the accident.

"Take this," whispered the baronet, pushing a small blue-covered case into Villiers' hand. "It's my driving licence."

"Have you a licence, sir?" inquired the policeman

"I have," replied Villiers truthfully. "Here it is."

The guardian of the law was visibly impressed by the name.

"Very good, sir," he said saluting. "Merely a matter of form. I don't think you'll hear anything further about the accident. The cyclist was entirely in the wrong."

"Punctual to the minute," remarked Sir Hugh, as the car drew up in front of Richborough Chambers. "Hallo! Where's that attaché-case?"

It had vanished. Thinking perhaps that the sudden application of the brakes had jerked it under the seat, the baronet made a comprehensive search, but without result.

"Rotten luck," commented Villiers.

"Might have been worse," rejoined Sir Hugh oracularly. "Let's get in and see what's doing. The commissioner will give an eye to the car."

He led the way to a large room on the ground floor. From the adjoining room came the subdued hum of voices.

"Adventure aspirants," remarked Sir Hugh, nodding his head in the direction whence the sounds came. "You'll be my secretary *pro tem.*, Villiers. Cast your eye over these letters and see if you recognize any of the writers."

He handed Villiers a bundle of about thirty envelopes.

"I know three of these names," replied Jack, after scanning the contents of the communications. "Merridew, O'Loghlin, and Fontayne."

"Anything detrimental?"

"To the contrary," replied Villiers.

"Good! We'll see them first. But one moment, I want an advertisement drafted, something to this effect:—'Lost from car, between Winchester and Southampton, attaché-case, containing papers of no value except to owner—no, say owners. Finder will be liberally rewarded on returning same.' That ought to fetch 'em."

"Is the loss a very serious matter," asked Villiers.

"To someone," replied Harborough. "The case wasn't lost, it was stolen!"

"Stolen?" repeated Jack incredulously.

"Precisely," continued the baronet. "But I'll go into the matter with you later. Now let's interview Messrs. Merridew and Co."

The three ex-officers were considerably surprised when Jack Villiers entered the room where they were waiting, and asked them to "come this way".

"Something good on, old man?" inquired O'Loghlin. "Sure it is if you've got a finger in the pie."

Villiers was non-committal. He did not like the responsibility of advising his former comrades on this particular point.

But in less than five minutes the trio had "signed on", and were told to report at Thalassa Towers at eleven on the following morning.

The next applicant was an R.N.R. officer, Swaine by name, whose chief qualification lay in the fact that he had been employed by a salvage company and was an experienced diver.

"I should think there are plenty of openings for you in England," remarked Harborough.

"So there are, sir," replied Swaine, pulling out a bunch of letters from his pocket. "I've half a dozen jobs to go to in the salvage line, but I've seen enough of the North Sea and the English Channel the last four years. Somewhere in the Pacific would suit me, although you didn't say where, sir. S'long as it's not off Vladivostok, the Behring Straits, or south of the Chloe Archipelago, I'm on it."

The selection business proceeded apace. Two men were "turned down" politely, for Harborough knew what he wanted and meant to get it. He was a shrewd judge of human nature. Another applicant "hedged", tried to be funny by asking irrelevant questions, and, remarking that he wasn't jolly well going to pay to work and chuck good quids away, put on his hat and departed.

The last to be interviewed was a short, small-featured youngster with a very mild voice and manner, who blushed hotly when spoken to and showed considerable hesitation in framing his words. He seemed keen, but Villiers, looking on, felt certain that the youth wouldn't come up to the standard.

"What's your Service experience, my lad?" asked Sir Hugh. "You've forgotten to mention that in your letter."

For answer the youth handed in a sheet of paper—his record of service. Amongst other items it was noted that he was a flying-officer, held the M.C. with bar, and had been twice mentioned in dispatches for brilliant reconnaissance work over the enemy lines and for engaging and destroying three hostile machines. His "Protection Certificate" left no doubt as to the identity of the modest aerial warrior.

"Still keen on flying, Mr. Trevear?"

"Rather," replied the ex-airman with a sudden and unexpected burst of enthusiasm. "I wanted to stay in the R.A.F., but it was no go. Then I applied for a post as pilot at a civilian flying-school, but up to now I've heard nothing."

"Do you know the 'Cormorant' sea-plane?"

"Heard of it, sir," was the reply. "My buses were mono-airplanes, but I think I'd cotton on to a seaplane with very little difficulty."

"Good enough," exclaimed Harborough. "A stout heart goes a long way. Willing to sign on, on the terms I mentioned?"

"Rather," replied the now eager youth.

"That's the lot," commented Sir Hugh, when Villiers and the baronet found themselves alone. "Quite a representative crush, eh? I think they'll shape all right. Now we'll pack up, Beverley and Claverhouse, and get back. There's plenty to be done in the next fortnight."

CHAPTER V

The "Fusi Yama"

"At this stage of the proceedings, gentlemen," began Sir Hugh. "I think it time to reveal all I know concerning the *Fusi Yama* and her cargo of sunken gold."

It was the first time that the whole of the members of the Salvage Syndicate had assembled at

Thalassa Towers, and what might be termed a meeting of the Board was in progress.

The scene was the smoking-room, in which a roaring fire was blazing on the hearth, for the autumn morning was decidedly chilly. On the oaken table, and held down by four leaden weights, was an Admiralty Chart of a portion of the Pacific.

"The *Fusi Yama*, a vessel of 4500 tons, was, you may remember," continued the baronet, "sold by a Japanese firm to a British shipping concern at Shanghai. There was rather a fuss made about it at the time, because in shipping circles it was regarded as somewhat significant that Japan had entered into commercial maritime competition to such an extent that she could build and engine vessels and sell them to a nation that hitherto held the palm for ship-construction.

"This was just before the war, and the *Fusi Yama's* first voyage under the British flag was from Chi-fu to Liverpool—but the voyage was never completed in the manner intended. Her cargo consisted of cotton and silk and specie and bullion to the value of a million and a half.

"Strictly speaking, the bullion and specie ought to have been sent by a regular mail-steamer, but rumours were in the air of trouble with Germany, and the consigners decided that a steamer running off the recognized route stood a better chance of getting clear of the Pacific than a liner, for there was then a powerful German cruiser-squadron based at Kiao Chau.

"However, the *Fusi Yama* and her cargo were fully insured, she was classed A1 at Lloyd's, had an experienced and capable skipper, so the underwriters thought they'd struck oil, so to speak.

"On the 2nd August, 1914, the *Fusi Yama* left Chi-fu; on the 9th she was captured by the German cruiser *Nürnberg*, but not before her masts were knocked away by shell-fire. You fellows know perfectly well how frequently the Hun got to know of our movements, so, looking back, it was not surprising to learn that the *Fusi Yama* had been shadowed from the moment she left port. Nor is it when I tell you that I have good reason to believe that the Huns are after that gold too."

A murmur of suppressed excitement ran round the room. Interest in the scheme, already keen, rose to fever-heat. There was a chance, then, of "coming up against Fritz" again, not with steel or bullet but in a contest of wits and skill, and with the almost certainty of a lavish display of low-down trickery on the side of their opponents.

"Then," continued Harborough, "the officers and crew of the captured vessel were transferred to the *Nürnberg*, a prize-crew was placed on board the *Fusi Yama*, and the two vessels steamed eastwards. Three days afterwards they fell in with a three-masted Yankee schooner bound from Singapore to 'Frisco. Arrangements were made with the skipper to take off the *Fusi Yama's* crew. In those days the Huns in the Pacific treated their prisoners well. I'll give them the benefit of the doubt to say that they were fairly straight as Huns go, but it may have been that they knew they were in a tight corner, and until they were out of it they had to behave decently.

"Shortly after that the *Nürnberg* joined the rest of von Spee's squadron, but without the *Fusi Yama*. It was naturally concluded that the Huns had removed her valuable cargo and, finding her slow speed a hindrance, had scuttled her.

"At any rate the million and a half had vanished. The under-writers paid up as cheerfully as they could, and wrote off the *Fusi Yama* as a total constructive loss.

"Now this is where the affair has a personal note. Here let me remark that I bind no one to secrecy over the matter, nor do I make any attempt to do so; but I would like to point out that not only your own but your comrades' interests will be at stake if, even incautiously, you discuss the matter with outside friends or strangers.

"There was on board the *Fusi Yama* a man named Williams, whom I knew when I was down on my luck in Manitoba. There was a bit of a scrap in camp, and he said I'd done him a good turn. Incidentally, his home in England—or birthplace rather—was close to mine.

"Williams was a dare-devil sort of fellow, and when the crew of the *Fusi Yama* were placed on board the *Nürnberg* he had the audacity to disguise himself as a Chinaman, with the result that he was retained by the Huns as a servant. I expect he played up to that, but it was a risky thing to do, although he certainly had features of a Mongolian type. He wore a false pigtail, which might have been fatal to him had Fritz taken it into his head to pull that. They did the next best thing; they cut it off, which saved Williams from further anxiety on that score.

"All the time he was keeping his eye on the bullion, so to speak.

"Then a Jap squadron got on von Spee's track and hustled him along. The *Nürnberg* had taken her prize into an unfrequented lagoon in the Marshall Archipelago, and was preparing to transfer the gold when von Spee heard that not only the Jap squadron but the Australian warships were converging on him.

"So the *Fusi Yama* was hurriedly scuttled in the lagoon in about fifteen fathoms, with the bullion and specie in her strong-room. Williams was the only human being, except the *Nürnberg's* crew, who saw the deed done, and he made good use of his eyes and wits.

"Having found out what he wanted, Williams looked out for an opportunity to part company. It was no easy matter, and not until 14th September, when von Spee's squadron was lying in Talcahuano Harbour, did the supposed Chink succeed in getting ashore.

"On 1st November von Spee's vessels sunk the *Good Hope* and *Monmouth* in action off the Chilian coast, and about six weeks later the German squadron was destroyed off the Falklands, so had the gold been placed on board the *Nürnberg* we should not be sitting in this room to-day. In my opinion Sturdee's action and the Zeebrugge business were the two smartest bits of work the British Navy ever did during the war."

"I saw von Spee's squadron," remarked Merridew. "I was only seventeen then, and our home was at Port Stanley. A fellow couldn't help feeling sorry for von Spee, even though he was a Hun. His ships came up quite unsuspectingly to find the old battle-ship *Canopus* lobbing 12-inch shells at them over the arm of the harbour. Von Spee knew his guns could outrange hers, so he held on. Then he had the shock of his life when he saw tripod masts coming round the corner. He legged it, but it was like a rat trying to get away from a terrier. There were survivors from the *Nürnberg*."

"Yes," agreed the baronet, "there were. We'll hear about some of them, I fancy. But to get back to friend Williams. Apparently he had a sticky time in Chile, for he was eleven months in hospital at Valparaiso. Then he worked his passage in a Yankee barque to 'Frisco, made his way across the States, and arrived in New York just about the time when the Huns started their unrestricted U-boat campaign. Signing on on board a British tramp, Williams found that once more his luck was out, for three hundred and fifty miles west of the Irish coast the tramp was torpedoed, and the survivors spent sixty hours in an open boat in heavy seas before being rescued.

"By a curious coincidence I was patrolling-officer at Falmouth when Williams was brought ashore from a 'P-boat'. I didn't recognize him at first, and no wonder; but he spotted me all right. That was soon after my brother's death, so when Williams was able to be moved I sent him here, but I knew he was done for.

"I saw him again when I was on leave, and it was then that he told me the story of the *Fusi Yama's* gold, and a week later he died. He left me certain papers and a rough chart showing the lagoon and the approaches. These I kept in the attaché-case which was stolen three days ago."

"Will that affect the expedition?" asked Beverley.

"Only to this extent, I believe," replied Sir Hugh. "We'll have to hurry up and get a move on. This brings me to speak of the opposition show. At present I'm rather hazy concerning the head of the rival party, but I have no hesitation in saying that we are up against a tough proposition. To the best of my belief the directing spirit is a fellow called Kristian Borgen."

"A Hun?" asked Claverhouse eagerly.

"Probably," replied Harborough. "Although just now he pretends he's a Swede. From guarded inquiries that I made at the Foreign Office I find that his papers are in order and that he's a native of Stockholm. If he isn't a Hun, he's probably a pro-German. Most Swedes are or were, because their country is practically contiguous to Germany and also because of the Huns' propaganda in Sweden during the war. Fear of her old enemy, Russia, also made her inclined towards Germany. But if Kristian Borgen is a Swede, he's plenty of Hun pals, amongst them some of the survivors of the *Nürnberg*."

"Where is the man?" asked Villiers.

"Here, in England," replied the baronet. "Actually in Southampton and taking steps to fit out a rival expedition. Of course as a Swede he is quite at liberty to do so; it is only if he can be proved to be a Hun that we can take action. Personally I like rivalry. It gives a zest to things, provided it is fair and above board, but there's something in the other organization that isn't, as we say in the Service, jonnick."

"Meaning that scrap on the Downs?" remarked Beverley.

"Yes, and the loss of the attaché-case," replied Harborough. "That alone is sufficient to let us know that Kristian Borgen—if my surmise is correct—means business."

"Sufficient, I think, to justify the case being reported to the police," said Claverhouse.

Sir Hugh shook his head.

"I wouldn't have people say that I brought in the police for the purpose of obtaining a free hand in the *Fusi Yama* treasure-hunt," declared Harborough. "In fact, the least we say about the *Fusi Yama* for the present the better."

"But why does the fellow come to England to fit out an expedition?" inquired Swaine.

"I rather wondered why he did," replied Sir Hugh. "You know that Scandinavia has been buying hundreds of vessels of various tonnage from us, and Borgen is admittedly an agent for their

disposal. He thinks, probably, that he can equip a ship here at less cost and without exciting suspicion. At the same time he can keep an eye on us. Of course I may be totally wrong in my surmise, but this I know: there's dirty work going on, and we'll have to keep our weather eye lifting. So much for that. Now comes another point: the question of a vessel and her equipment."

"Steam or petrol?" asked Fontayne, who in pre-war days had been articled to a marine engineer.

"Neither," replied Harborough. "Coal nowadays is scarce and expensive, especially abroad. Petrol is dangerous: any of you fellows who served on M.L.'s will endorse that statement. No, I'm pinning my faith on heavy oil-engines with hot bulb ignition. They are economical, reliable and fairly simple. I'm also looking for a vessel that has a moderate sail-plan. Now, what do you think of these?"

From a drawer of a pedestal desk the baronet produced a bundle of plans and specifications and placed them on the table.

"Genuine tramp steamers are out of the question," he observed. "The present-day price is much too stiff. Here is a selection of yachts, some returned from Government service, others placed on the sale-list by their owners, who find that the pastime is too expensive for them and must needs leave them to the New Rich. Now, here's the *Titania*, auxiliary schooner, 260 tons registered and 409 tons Thames measurement, two six-cylinder engines giving her an approximate speed of twelve knots."

"That's not much of a speed," said Villiers.

"No, not compared with the type of vessel that you and I have been accustomed to," agreed Harborough. "Still twelve knots is not to be sneezed at. It is an economical speed. For every additional knot you would require horse-power rising by leaps and bounds and consequently more fuel-space than we can afford. And, of course, with high-speed engines the risk of mechanical breakdowns is higher than with slow-running motors, and, after all, the main object is to get to the Pacific with the least delay. Hence reliability is the thing. The vessel, according to the agent's glowing account, has cruised extensively, including voyages to the West Indies and the Mediterranean."

"Have you seen her?" asked O'Loghlin.

"No, but I propose doing so to-morrow," replied Harborough. "She's lying at Southampton in one of the yards on the Itchen. By the by, does any one here understand heavy oil-engines?"

"I do a bit," replied O'Loghlin. "I had a theoretical course, and during the war I put in three months on the kite-balloon barges. That was in the old R.N.A.S. days."

"All right," concluded Harborough. "That's settled. You, Villiers, had better come along too. Three are quite enough for the selection board."

CHAPTER VI

The Yacht "Titania"

"I say, Sir Hugh is a thundering good sort, old man," observed Beverley.

"Only just found that out, my dear old thing," rejoined Villiers. "What's the wheeze now?" The two chums were "turning in". They shared a room in Thalassa Towers, the rest of the members of the expedition being accommodated in twos and threes in the spacious old building. The appropriation of "cabins", as they preferred to call them, showed Harborough's tact, the various members being invited to share their sleeping-quarters with their special chums.

Claverhouse had elected to share a room with little Trevear on the score that both were ex-members of that modern and glorious branch of the service—the Royal Air Force. There they could talk unlimited "shop", and exchange reminiscences without feeling that the a-naval men were being "bored stiff" with matters appertaining to aerial navigation.

"The wheeze," replied Beverley, "concerns my young brother, Dick. Sir Hugh suggested that I brought him along. He'd be handy," he added in extenuation.

"Possibly," replied Villiers. "But if this is going to be a risky business, is it fair on the lad? And, again, won't it cut into his education?"

"We went into those questions," said Bobby. "As regards risk, everything in life is a risk, isn't it? and, given reasonable precautions, there appears to be little reason for anxiety on that score."

After all, we're on a cruise, not fighting Huns and doing a one-step over mine-fields. And, concerning his education, I agreed with Harborough that travel in itself is an education, and there is no reason why Dick shouldn't keep up his studies. As a further inducement Sir Hugh promised that whatever way the results of the expedition went, he'd be responsible for giving Dick a twelvemonth's course for Sandhurst."

"Jolly decent of him," remarked Villiers. "I wonder why he's going to all this trouble. He doesn't know Dick."

"No," replied Beverley, "he doesn't. Dick's not a bad sort," he added, which was the highest tribute Bobby dared pay his brother before other people. Villiers grunted sleepily.

"In?" he inquired laconically, as he groped for the lanyard attached to the electric-light switch—a device whereby he could turn off the light without getting out of his cot. "My word! It's blowing. Glad I'm not on an M.L. in the North Sea to-night."

"Hold on a minute," exclaimed Beverley. "I wanted to ask you something. Is Harborough very worried about that stolen attaché-case?"

"I don't know," replied Villiers. "I expect he is, but he doesn't say much."

"There are the plans and charts relating to the *Fusi Yama* in it, aren't there?"

"Believe so," admitted Villiers. "Makes things a bit complicated. However, I'll back Sir Hugh against Borgen any old time. Good night."

Next morning, according to previous arrangements, Harborough, Villiers, and O'Loghlin motored to Southampton to inspect the *Titania*.

At first sight the yacht did not convey a favourable impression. She had only recently turned from Admiralty service, and looked very dilapidated in her garb of grey, striped with innumerable rust-stains. She was lying in a mud-berth, and, the tide being low, a considerable part of her weed- and barnacle-covered bottom showed above the mud. Her tapering pole-masts, once resplendent in all the glories of varnish, were coated with battle-ship grey paint; her standing rigging was in a deplorable condition. An unsightly deck-house built above the original saloon added to the picture of neglect, for most of the sheet-glass panes were broken. In her present state no man intent upon the joys of yachting would have looked at her twice.

But Harborough was nothing if not practical. Appearance mattered little to him. In that neglected craft he saw seaworthiness and utility. Paint and varnish might make a crank vessel smart, but they would never make her seaworthy, but the *Titania*, despite her woebegone appearance, gave indications of being a good, all-round, hard-weather boat.

"A fairly flat bilge and a clean run aft," commented Sir Hugh. "If it came to a push she'd take hard ground pretty comfortably. Let's get aboard and see what she looks like 'tween decks."

The *Titania* was not a modern vessel by any means. Her schooner bow and rather long counter proclaimed her as a late Victorian. As a matter of fact her papers showed that she had been built at Dumbarton in 1900. The heavy oil-engines were fairly recent additions, or rather a substitute for the triple-expansion engines with which she was supplied immediately following her launch.

She was built of steel with teak decks, and twenty years had had very little effect upon her structure. Apparently she had been used for mine-laying during the war, for a steel trough had been built aft projecting a couple of feet over her counter. Amidships were two motor-driven winches, also added for war purposes, and evidently not considered worth removing before she was handed back from service. Right for'ard, in addition to the hand-operated capstan, was a powerful steam-capstan, the engine and oil-fed boiler of which were placed in the fo'c'sle.

"Rather cuts up the crew-space," commented Sir Hugh. "Fortunately, that doesn't affect us. But these capstans and winches are the very thing. What do you make of them, O'Loghlin?"

The engineering expert plunged into a maze of technical detail. Harborough listened as if he enjoyed it, but whether he did was a debatable point.

"But will they work, do you think?" he inquired at last.

"Give me a week on them and they'll work," replied O'Loghlin confidently.

The original engine-room had been gutted, and had been used as a hold, although, when the yacht had been converted from steam to heavy oil, the engine-space had been made into an additional saloon with store-space below. The present propelling-machinery was well aft, and in spite of their rusty condition the twin-motors were in serviceable order. Not only were the original oil-tanks left, but there were two large tanks, capable of taking a thousand gallons of fuel, installed immediately for'ard of the engine-room.

"She's just the thing for an ocean voyage," declared Harborough. "Don't you think so, Villiers?"

"Economical and easily handled, I should say," replied Jack. "I believe she'd give a good

account of herself in a seaway."

"Let's look at the accommodation aft," said Sir Hugh. "We've to berth twenty without undue crowding, remember."

They made their way to the main saloon, which was lighted solely by skylights during the day. It was in a deplorable state, the teak and mahogany fittings being almost destitute of varnish and showing signs of not only hard but rough usage. Hardly a glass panel remained.

"Someone's been turning the ship into a bear-garden," commented Villiers.

"Fortunately, we're not sybarites," added Harborough. "Comfort's the main thing. I don't suppose the absence of looking-glass panels on the wall will worry us. She seems fairly dry, I think."

"Yes," agreed Jack. "Her decks are well laid, and that's a lot to be thankful for. Haven't spotted a sign of moisture anywhere below."

Opening out of the saloon were eight cabins, four on either side, each lighted by a port, which, when closed, was fitted with a glass scuttle. From the saloon an alley-way ran right aft to a spacious cabin, extending the extreme width of the ship under the poop. Four cabins large enough for double berths opened out of the alley-way.

"She's like a young liner," commented Harborough. "Plenty of room for the whole crowd of us. Well, that's about all. The sails and the rest of the inventory are in the store. Now, candidly, what do you think of her? Of course, she'll want a lot of refitting."

"She's just the thing, I think," declared Villiers.

"Yes," corroborated O'Loughlin. "There's precious little to find fault with the engines, as far as I can see."

"As regards the refitting," continued Villiers, "we can do most of that ourselves. We are all of us handy men. The only difficulty is the docking."

"That will have to be done by professional hands," said the baronet. "If we purchase the *Titania*, docking and coating the bottom with anti-fouling will be the first job. Right-o; let's call on the agent and prepare to haggle over terms."

The yacht's agent received them without emotion. He was so dubious about selling the vessel, even when there was a "boom" in shipping, that he made no attempt to sing the praises of the neglected maiden. He had had dozens of prospective purchasers during the recent period following the yacht's release from Admiralty service, and every one had gone away without attempting to close with the deal.

"Well, Mr. Strangeways," began Sir Hugh, "you've brought us down here to see a most disreputable old tub."

The agent shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"You asked for particulars, sir, and we sent them," he replied. "She's not like the *Asteria* and the *Falala*, both of which are on our books if you wish to inspect. But consider the price asked for the *Titania*—a mere song."

"That's what I am considering," agreed Sir Hugh, grimly. "By the time she's fitted out, taking into consideration present-day prices of labour and material, she'll cost a small fortune. And even then she won't be a modern vessel by any means. No, sorry to trouble you, but I'm afraid there's nothing doing."

"Perhaps, sir," said Mr. Strangeways, metaphorically grasping at the last straw, "you might care to make an offer?"

"My price is fifteen hundred," declared the baronet promptly. "Not a penny more."

"Impossible, my dear sir," protested the agent, raising his hands in mock dismay.

"Sorry, good morning," said Harborough. "Come along, you fellows; we'll be late for lunch if we don't get a move on."

For the next two days Sir Hugh lay low; but he was far from inactive. As for the agent, he was simply bombarded with applications to inspect the dilapidated *Titania*, for during those two days fifteen individuals called in person, and in every case they either declared bluntly that they wouldn't touch the yacht at any price or else offered various sums none of which exceeded thirteen hundred and fifty pounds. Nor did they think fit to enlighten the now thoroughly harassed Mr. Strangeways with the information that they were members of a syndicate of which Sir Hugh Harborough was the head.

And since the reserve price of the *Titania* was £1450, and Mr. Strangeways had a reason for

disposing of her promptly in order to close an account with her present owner, Sir Hugh evinced no untoward surprise when he received a prepaid wire:

"Does offer £1500 for *Titania* still hold good? If so, will accept."

Within three hours of the receipt of the telegram the "Fusi Yama Syndicate" was in possession of sixty-four sixty-fourths shares of the yacht *Titania*.

CHAPTER VII

Sand-bagged

During the next three weeks there was plenty of work for all hands. It was hard work, too; but everyone stuck to it grimly and determinedly in spite of aching muscles, blistered hands, and a variety of small ailments consequent upon unaccustomed handling of white-lead, paint, tar, pitch, and sooji-mooji.

The latter was unanimously voted a tough proposition. Composed principally of caustic soda, it is the shell-back's sheet anchor where old paint has to be removed. The amateur crew of the *Titania* found that it removed other things as well—for it burnt into their fingers, had a decided tendency towards destroying their clothes, and not infrequently spoiled their foot-gear.

There were other minor casualties. Griffiths, an ex-R.E. officer, and one of the two representatives of the British Army amongst the *Titania's* ship's company, found by practical experience that a marline-spike has a sharp point, and that even when dropped from a height of a couple of feet can rightly claim to be best man in an encounter with a human toe. Merridew, too, discovered, to his extreme physical inconvenience, that there are two ways of using an adze—the right and the wrong. Subsequent reflection on the part of the victim resulted in a decision that there was even a better way of dealing with adzes—to leave them severely alone.

Also the amount of brain-work required to equip and provision the ship was not small. Nothing superfluous was to be taken—only the absolute essentials. In the old days, "when there was a war on", procuring stores for M.L.'s was a comparatively simple matter. The officer in charge signed a "demand note" for a quantity in excess of what he actually required, taking this step to safeguard himself against the parsimony of an official known as a Naval Stores Officer, who had a nasty habit of cutting down the demands. In the case of the *Titania's* equipment this would have been a financial disaster. Each man knew in effect it was his own money that he was laying out and acted accordingly.

Within eight days of the purchase the *Titania* was docked, cleaned, and "compoed", undocked and berthed alongside a wharf. This had been done by the yacht-yard hands, but Harborough and his "merry buccaneers", as he generally referred to them, were toiling like galley-slaves.

The grey, rust-stained sides had been scraped and had been given two out of a final three coats of white paint, and white paint at the present time costs money. But it was money well laid out. The health and comfort of the ship's company, as the yacht sweltered in the Tropics, depended largely upon the almost non-absorbing properties of white paint to the terrific glare of the sun.

The grimy decks were scraped and then scrubbed with wet sand; the dull varnish on the teak-work was removed and the bare wood given three coats of copal. The masts were rubbed down and painted a pale-buff colour, and the whole of the standing and running rigging renewed. Fortunately, the sails were in excellent condition.

"What arms are we taking?" asked Villiers.

"Nothing very formidable," replied Harborough, who, at his own request, was no longer addressed as Sir Hugh by his fellow adventurers. "I don't anticipate any scrapping. Bloodthirsty cannibals are back numbers in the part of the Pacific we are making for, and I don't suppose that our rival treasure-hunters will go to the extent of armed aggression."

"Still, we ought to be prepared for emergencies," rejoined Villiers. "There's virtue in the barrel of a Maxim gun."

Harborough shook his head.

"Not always," he replied. "When there's a hot-headed fellow fingering the firing-button, for instance. No, no; we'll dispense with a Maxim or a Lewis. A couple of rifles will be useful, perhaps, and half a dozen automatic pistols. I'll take a dozen 12-bore shot guns. It's remarkable what a deterrent a charge of small shot can be. Verrey Lights and rockets we'll take. You might see to the ship's armoury. Most of the guns, the rifles, and two automatic pistols are already at *Thalassa Towers*. Bring them down next time you have room in the car. Oh, by the by, you might

read this."

He handed Villiers a long blue envelope. Within was a communication from the underwriters of s.s. *Fusi Yama* agreeing to grant Sir Hugh Harborough the sole rights of salvage subject to a 5-per-cent royalty.

"Five per cent," exclaimed Harborough. "Evidently they think we're on a fool's errand. However, now everything is fair and above board. We are the legitimate firm; Borgen & Co. are mere interlopers."

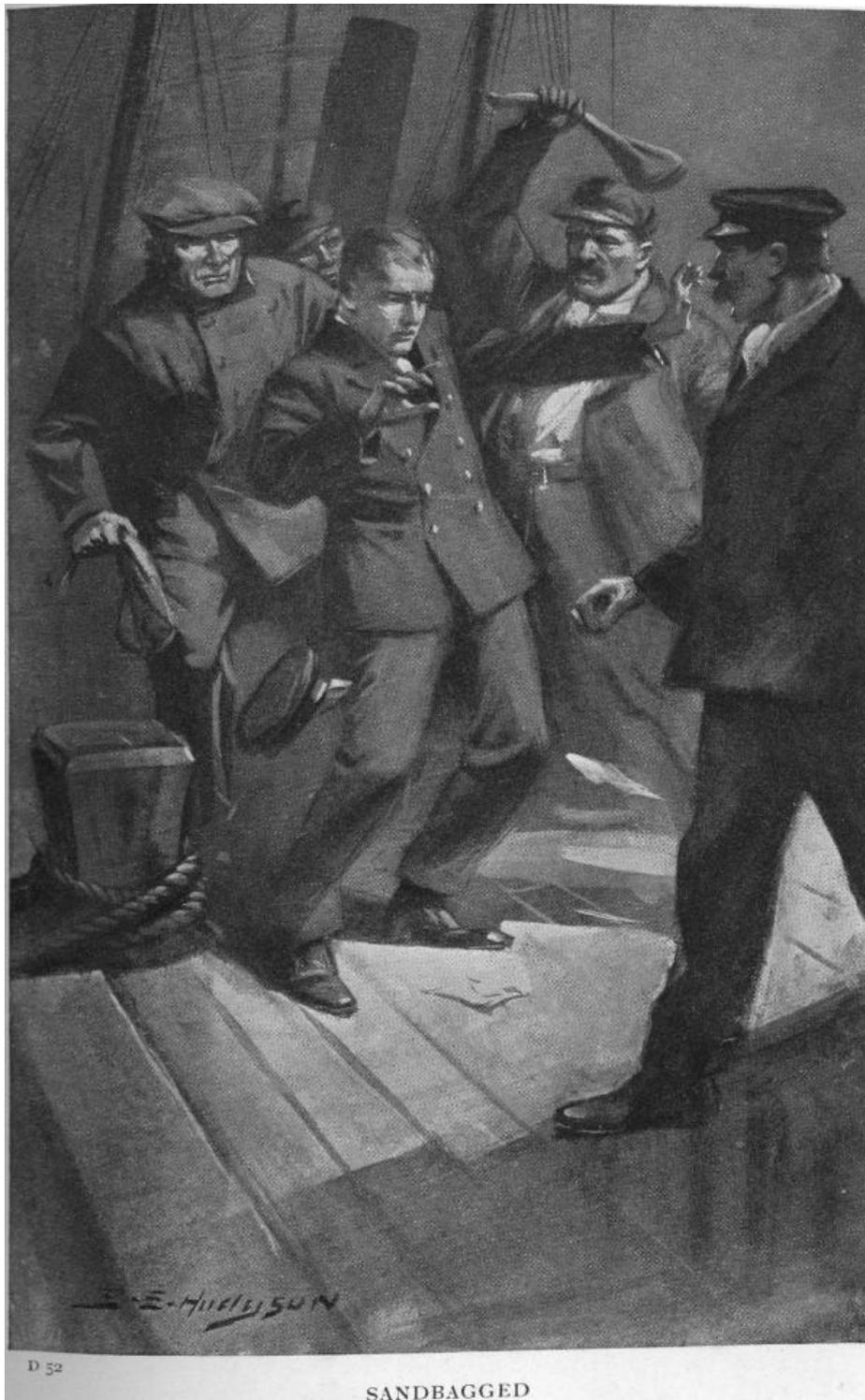
"Talking about Borgen," observed Villiers, "just step aft a minute. See that tramp lying alongside Anstruther's Wharf? The one with the black, yellow, and blue funnel."

"Ay," assented Harborough. "Is she our rival?"

"I don't know—yet," replied Jack. "We haven't our intelligence Department in full working order at present. All I know—on the authority of the Yard Foreman—is that she's the *Geier*, one of Germany's surrendered mercantile fleet, and she's just been sold to a Swedish firm."

"And thence back to Germany," commented Harborough. "Verily the ways of our politicians passeth understanding. However, if Kristian Borgen has a finger in that pie we'll have to watch the *Geier*."

Villiers laughed.



D 52

SANDBAGGED

[Illustration: SANDBAGGED]

"Shouldn't be surprised if the *Geier's* people haven't been watching us pretty carefully for the last few days," he remarked. "Don't you think it would be as well if a couple of us slept on board in future? Several of the cabins are quite habitable."

"There's a night watchman," observed Harborough.

"Yes, for the whole of this yard," added Jack. "He can't be everywhere at once."

"Very good," agreed Harborough. "Pick out two of the crowd and warn 'em for sleeping aboard."

"I'll take the first week," volunteered Villiers. "Beverley will, too. And we may as well have Tommy on board."

Tommy was an Aberdeen terrier belonging to Sir Hugh—a sharp-faced, long-nosed little animal who seemed to be perpetually asleep with one eye open all the time.

"Good enough," agreed Harborough. "Seen O'Loghlin about? I want to speak to him about those

diving-dresses."

Four more days passed—the days in strenuous activity, the nights in utter tranquillity. Villiers and Beverley found the new arrangement quite comfortable. They were afloat once more, even though the *Titania* was berthed alongside a wharf in a sheltered tidal river. During working-hours a "brow" or gangway gave access to the vessel, but when the working-party packed up, the brow was removed, and the only means of direct communication with the shore was a wire "Jacob's Ladder" that led to a long raft moored between the *Titania* and the jetty, whence a wooden ladder, its lower rungs slippery with weed as the tide fell, enabled access to the wharf.

It was Saturday evening. Manual work on board had been set aside to be resumed early on Monday morning. Beverley, who was beginning to feel the strain of long hours and hard toil, had turned in early. Villiers, with the small table of his cabin covered with technical books, was deep in *Norrie's Epitome* and *The Nautical Almanac for 1920*.

"Yacht, ahoy!"

Jack heard the hail but did not stir. Calls of that sort were common, considering that there were half a dozen yachts, with hands living on board, lying in the tier out in the stream.

"*Titania*, ahoy!"

"For goodness sake why didn't you say so before?" exclaimed Villiers to himself. "Where's Tommy? Why didn't he bark, I wonder?"

Getting into his pilot-coat, for the night air blew coldly down the river and contrasted forcibly with the warm cabin, Villiers went on deck.

"Ahoy, there!" he exclaimed.

On the edge of the wharf stood a man with his back to the feeble gleam of a gas-lamp.

"Telegram for Harborough, yacht *Titania*," he announced. "Prepaid wire."

"Come aboard," said Jack.

"Sorry, sir," was the reply. "I'm a stranger to this sort of game. No hand at ladders, I'm not."

Considering the awkward means of gaining the *Titania's* deck, the man's objection was reasonable enough, so Villiers descended the wire-rope ladder, crossed the raft, and ascended the vertical steps. The tide had almost finished on the flood, and there were only a few rungs to scale.

"Prepaid, eh?" remarked Villiers. "All right. I have a pencil. Let's go under the gas-lamp."

The next instant a multitude of dazzling lights flashed before his eyes, and without a cry he pitched head-long on his face.

* * * * *

"Jack, old thing!" shouted Beverley, throwing back his blankets and jumping from his cot. "What's the time? Why, it's eight bells! Who's turn is it to light the stove this morning?"

Receiving no reply from the adjoining cabin, Bobby laid hold of a sponge, dipped it in the water-jug, and made his way softly to Villiers' berth. He opened the door and looked in.

"What's he doing?" he thought in wonderment, for the cot had not been slept in. The lamp was still alight, but on the point of burning itself out. It was an oil-lamp, for the electric-lighting arrangements were not yet in working order. The table was littered with books, two of them open, while a pipe, with a small heap of white ash, lay upon the open page of the *Nautical Almanac*.

"I believe he's been swotting all night, the mouldy old book-worm," thought Beverley. "Now he's gone to the bathroom to shove his heated brow in cold water."

But the bathroom was empty. A hurried search brought no sign of his chum—nor of the dog.

Fearful of his own surmises, Bobby looked over the side. Almost the first thing he noticed was the dead body of Tommy left stranded on the mud by the falling tide, but of Villiers not a trace.

Even as he looked at the unfortunate Aberdeen, a swell threshed sullenly against the evil-smelling mud and lifted the dog's body a couple of feet or so nearer the weed-covered piles. A steamer had just passed—a tramp, outward bound, with the name *Zug*—Malmo, on her stumpy counter.

CHAPTER VIII

The "Titania" Sails

Filled with the deepest apprehensions concerning the fate of his chum, Bobby Beverley was not content to think. He acted.

As it was yet early in the morning, and a Sunday, there were no signs of activity in the yacht-yard. The night watchman, his duties over with the rising of the sun, had taken himself home; the watchkeepers on board the various craft were still sleeping soundly in the knowledge that there was no pressing need for them to turn out.

Slipping over the side, Beverley gained the wharf. There were no signs of a struggle, and the hoar-frost that covered the tarred planking was destitute of human or canine foot-prints. Only a number of triangular marks on the white covering showed that sea-birds had been waddling about the jetty.

Suddenly Beverley caught sight of a crumpled paper that had wedged in a projection of a heap of rusty iron. It was the telegraph-form that Villiers had gone ashore to receive when he was struck down by a cowardly blow. On it were the words:—

"Harborough, yacht *Titania*. Cannot keep appointment Monday. Will Tuesday same time suit?
"Heatherington."

"H'm; no postmark," commented Bobby. "Looks like a plant. Wonder if this has anything to do with Villiers' absence?"

Folding the crumpled paper, Beverley placed it carefully in his pocket-book. Then, making his way across the encumbered yard, he stopped outside the manager's office. As he expected, the door was locked securely, but Beverley was not going to stick at trifles.

With a piece of iron-bar he deliberately smashed a pane of glass. Then inserting his hand through the jagged pane he shot back the window-catch. It was then an easy matter to gain admittance.

He lifted the receiver of the telephone, and in less than a minute and a half he had secured a trunk-call to Thalassa Towers.

"Hallo!" exclaimed a faint and indistinct voice.

"That Harborough?" inquired Bobby. "Beverley speaking."

"No, I'm Claverhouse, old bean," was the reply. "Why this activity on the Sabbath morn? Anything wrong?"

"Yes," replied Beverley. "Jack's missing—Jack Villiers. Eh? what's that? No, I didn't say—Oh! Dash it all, they've cut me off."

He replaced the receiver and again rang up the exchange, demanding peremptorily why the interruption had occurred.

"You must have cut yourself off," replied the operator. "Stand by."

Bobby "stood by" for another five minutes—minutes that passed with leaden feet.

"There's no reply," came the matter-of-fact voice of the exchange operator. "This is Andover speaking."

"I say!" exclaimed Beverley in desperation. "Can you send an express messenger to Thalassa Towers?"

"Sorry," was the calm reply. "You must try a post office. It opens at nine on Sundays."

Beverley replaced the receiver with a vicious bang. Then he rang up again, this time obtaining a call to the yard-manager's private house.

That functionary's temper was far from amiable when he found himself called from his bed, in the early hours of a chilly late-autumn morning, to receive a bald announcement from the intruder's own lips that the latter had deliberately broken a window in the office and had temporarily installed himself.

"There's no need to bring a policeman along with you," added Beverley reassuringly, "but come

as soon as possible. No, I've disturbed nothing. There's no cause for alarm as far as you are concerned."

Bobby replaced the instrument and sat down in the padded-leather arm-chair, the while keeping a look-out upon the *Titania*.

In about twenty minutes the manager arrived, unkempt and unshorn. To him Beverley explained the situation, requesting that someone could be sent either in a car or on a motor-cycle to inform Sir Hugh Harborough of the grave news.

"Have you informed the police?" asked the manager, the while covertly glancing round the room to assure himself that nothing had been tampered with.

"I'd rather wait till I've seen Sir Hugh," replied Bobby. "Of course the whole thing may turn out to be a mare's nest; but the dog——"

"Where is the dog?" asked the manager.

"On the mud—dead."

"Wouldn't it be as well to recover the body," suggested the now interested man. "That might afford some information. I'll hang on here."

Beverley fell in with the idea. Procuring a boat-hook from the yacht, he succeeded in recovering the Aberdeen's body and laid it on the raft.

Just as he had completed the task there came the hoot of a car, and a minute later Harborough appeared accompanied by Claverhouse, O'Loghlin, Fontayne, Swaine, and Trevear.

Harborough had received a portion of Bobby's telephonic message, from which he concluded that something was amiss; and without delay the six men drove at record speed to Southampton.

"Something decidedly wrong," declared Harborough, as he descended to the raft and examined the body of his pet. The dog's mouth was inflamed and discoloured. Death had been caused not by drowning but by poison.

Beverley handed his chief the telegram.

"Fake," declared Harborough promptly. "I know no one of the name of Heatherington; still less have I an appointment with him. I'd like to meet the fellow who composed this," he added.

A thorough examination of the *Titania* resulted in nothing of a suspicious nature being discovered. Assuming on the strength of the faked telegram and the poisoned dog that there had been an attempt at murder, kidnapping, or sabotage, there was nothing on board to justify the assumption that an effort had been made to injure the vessel.

"I don't see why Villiers was singled out for rough treatment," observed Harborough. "He had no personal enemies, had he?"

Beverley shook his head.

"Not to my knowledge," he replied. "Jack is one of the best, absolutely."

"Perhaps you were the intended victim," suggested Claverhouse.

"Oh!" ejaculated Harborough. "I won't contradict your supposal; but on what grounds, might I ask, do you make your assumption?"

"The faked message was addressed to you," replied Alec.

"Perhaps you're right," replied Harborough thoughtfully. "But it doesn't say much for the other fellows' intelligence department—mistaking Villiers for me. However, we must inform the police."

"The police?" echoed Beverley, bearing in mind Sir Hugh's reluctance on a previous occasion to communicate with the law.

"Unfortunately, yes," replied the baronet. "It is regrettable from a professional point of view, but we owe it to Jack Villiers. Hallo! The *Geier* has gone."

The Swedish-owned tramp had vanished from her accustomed berth. In her place lay a vessel very similar, even to the funnel-markings.

"Suppose you didn't notice her go down stream, Beverley?" inquired Harborough.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Bobby. "A tramp like her went out this morning—the *Zug* of Malmo."

"Possibly the same old hooker," commented Harborough. "Well, let's make for the police-station."

Three days passed. The mystery of Jack Villiers' disappearance remained unsolved. A police-inspector called upon Kristian Borgen in his office, but the Swede gave a complete explanation of his movements. It was true, he stated, that the *Geier* was bought by his firm and that her name was changed to *Zug*—a fact advertised beforehand in the press according to the requirements of the British Mercantile Shipping Act. The *Zug* had sailed for the Baltic and was due at Stockholm on the 30th inst. Her clearance-papers were quite in order.

The inspector, fully convinced that he had been put on a false trail, shook hands with Borgen, apologizing for having inconvenienced him, to which the amiable Swede replied that it was no inconvenience whatsoever, and that he was only too happy at all times to assist the law of the land that had offered him a temporary home.

Meanwhile there was no cessation of activity in the work of fitting out the *Titania*. Everyone on board realized that Villiers would have wished it so. But there was a feeling of depression that it was impossible to shake off. The uncertainty of Jack Villiers' fate, on the eve of what promised to be a successful enterprise, cast a shadow of gloom upon the proceedings.

The day of the *Titania's* departure having been fixed, Harborough saw no insurmountable reason for postponing it, and the rest of the crew agreed with him.

"If Villiers does turn up," he explained, "he can join us anywhere between here and Singapore; and delay will only mean increasing risks on the score of bad weather, to say nothing of the possibility of our rivals turning up before us."

So at 9 a.m., early in the month of November, the yacht *Titania*, Hugh Harborough, Master, slipped her moorings, and at a modest six knots dropped down Southampton Water on her long voyage to the Pacific. There were two absentees from her full complement, Jack Villiers was one, the other was Dick Beverley. An epidemic of mumps was raging in the school, and a swollen face intervened between Dick and a visit to the enchanting South Seas.

CHAPTER IX

"Where am I?"

Jack Villiers opened his eyes slowly, only to shut them again. During the first moments of returning consciousness he was aware of a dull throbbing pain in the region of the nape of his neck—a pain that became almost excruciating when he made an effort to rise.

It was some moments before he attempted to reopen his eyes. With his brain working slowly, he tried to account for his present state of discomfort. Something was wrong—what? Had he been playing Rugger, and been carried off the field? No; it couldn't be that. He hadn't played footer for months. Strafed by Huns? Wrong again: he realized that he had been "demobbed" and that there was no longer a war on. Yet he was on board ship. He could feel the steady pulsations of the engines and the thud of the propeller-shaft not so very far beneath him. Odours of an unmistakably "shippy" nature assailed his nostrils. Yes, he was at sea. The *Titania* was under way.

Yet that theory puzzled him. She wasn't ready for sea. Beverley and he were sleeping on board, and—

With an effort he raised himself on one elbow and tried to shout his chum's name. But not a sound came from his parched throat. His tongue, feeling as if it had swollen to abnormal dimensions, seemed to press, hot and dry, against the roof of his mouth.

"Dash it all!" he ejaculated mentally. "Haven't I got a fat head? Where am I?"

By degrees he became more rational. He lay still, not daring to move. Even then every roll of the ship sent thrills of acute pain over his body.

At first when he opened his eyes everything appeared to be of a dull-reddish tinge, but presently the lurid mist cleared away and he found himself watching an oval-shaped patch of light that, penetrating a solitary scuttle, danced up and down the opposite bulkhead with every movement of the vessel.

"What cabin is this?" he thought. "It's not mine; proper sort of a dog-box this. Who put me in here?"

It was indeed a sorry sort of place. The walls and ceiling were covered with cork-cement that was dripping with moisture. At one time the composition had been painted white. It was now a sickly yellow streaked with iron-rust. On the floor was a ragged piece of oak linoleum. Underneath the scuttle, which was closed and secured by a tarnished brass butterfly nut, was a bunk on which a piece of old canvas had been placed to form a rough and ready mattress. And on

the bunk, with his head supported by a folded coat—his own, lay Jack Villiers.

Further investigation showed that he was dressed in his own trousers, socks, pants, and vest—and nothing more. His boots, shirt, and waistcoat had gone.

"Good heavens!" he thought, as the full significance of his position came home to him like a flash. "I've been shanghaied. Yes, I remember, a fellow called me about a telegram."

Slowly he raised his arm and, bringing his hand back, very gingerly rubbed his skull. There was a raised bruise that felt as large as a duck's egg.

"Sandbagged!" he decided. "The rival crowd is one up. Well, I suppose I'll be able to find out now who the fellows are. Wonder why they singled me out for their unwelcome attentions."

As a matter of fact it was a case of mistaken identity. On that momentous Saturday night one of the crew of the *Zug*—ex. *Geier*—who was a past master in the art of speaking colloquial English, hailed from the wharf-wall, fully expecting that Sir Hugh Harborough was one of the two persons on board the *Titania*. The pseudo messenger was not alone. Skulking behind a rusty and condemned ship's boiler were three powerful men, one armed with a length of rubber pipe filled with sand, and the others holding ropes and a gag in readiness should the persuasive methods of the loaded india-rubber pipe fail.

Unsuspecting and quite unprepared for foul play, Villiers was struck down from behind. There was no need to gag and bind him. Quickly and silently the four men carried their victim to a slipway, where a boat lay in readiness. It was quite a simple matter and almost devoid of risk. The night was dark, and even had there been any of the crews of the neighbouring vessels about, the statement that it was only a drunken man being taken off to his ship would have allayed suspicion. But, unseen and unchallenged, the emissaries of Kristian Borgen conveyed their senseless victim on board the *Zug*.

Kristian Borgen was waiting to receive them in the tramp's dingy state-room. Save for his own assertion and the fact that he spoke Swedish fluently and possessed credentials (forged, no doubt) from Stockholm, there was nothing Swedish about him. He was a Hun, and a Prussian at that. His real name was Kaspar von Giespert, and he had been an Unter-Leutnant of the German light cruiser *Dresden*. He knew the story of the *Fusi Yama's* sunken gold, having heard it from a brother-officer serving on board the *Nürnberg*, but he was not at all sure of the actual position of the wreck. The *Dresden* escaped the fate that overtook her consorts in the engagement with Sturdee off the Falkland Islands, but afterwards met with an ignominious end by being sunk by her own crew at Juan Fernandez—Alexander Selkirk's famous island. On the approach of a British cruiser, von Giespert was interned by the Peruvian Government until the end of the war, and upon being released promptly returned to Germany with the object of fitting out an expedition to search for the lost gold.

There were serious difficulties in his path. The partial surrender of Germany's mercantile fleet had made it an impossible matter to procure a ship in any German port. As a Hun, von Giespert knew that "his name was mud" in almost every important seaport on the Atlantic and Pacific shores. A nation cannot "run amok" and institute a policy of "sink everything without trace" and then expect to be treated on a pre-war footing by the States whose flags she has wantonly flouted and insulted. So von Giespert, quick to realize that as a German he was "down and out", had no qualms about renouncing, temporarily at all events, his nationality and becoming Kristian Borgen, a Swede. And as such he found little difficulty in taking up his abode in Southampton, whence he could control his latest mercantile enterprise with comparative ease.

He had succeeded in getting a picked crew of twenty-two German seamen—men who in pre-war days had served in the British Mercantile Marine, where frequently 75 per cent of a crew sailing under the Red Ensign were either "Dagoes" or "Dutchies". And these men could all speak English as spoken on shipboard, and most of them, with the Hun's versatility in learning languages, were equally at home with Swedish.

Von Giespert had a firm hold upon his band of desperadoes. For one thing he paid them well and made fair promises of a substantial share of the treasure, if and when it were recovered. Anyone possessing capital could do that, but von Giespert, being a Hun, went further. The men he picked carefully from the crews of certain U-boats whose record of piracy was of the blackest—men who had carried out infamous orders with alacrity when they thought Germany was winning, and who had not hesitated to mutiny and assault their officers when they discovered the long-hidden truth that all was lost.

Von Giespert knew how to trade upon their fears. He told them that they were "wanted" by the British Government for their past crimes, and that the only safe course for them was to take the bull by the horns, become Swedish subjects, and accept employment in the country that was their former enemy, where, by their audacity, they would fling dust into the eyes of the hated English. The *Zug's* crew accepted the statement and acted with corresponding discretion.

For the present he had no intention of sailing on the s.s. *Zug* for the Pacific. He was content to allow the vessel to proceed in the charge of Siegfried Strauss, who had been a quarter-master in the North German Lloyd Line before serving in the Imperial navy. Strauss was under orders to

navigate the *Zug* by a circuitous route round the Cape of Good Hope and pick up his employer at Batavia.

"Donnerwetter! Who is this?" inquired von Giespert angrily, as the unconscious Villiers was unceremoniously dumped at his feet. "This is not Harborough."

The kidnappers cowered before the wrath of their Prussian pay-master.

"This is the man who has been on board for the last four or five nights, Herr Kapitan," replied one.

"He seemed in authority."

"You've blundered," declared von Giespert, "and you cannot undo your mistake. Let us hope that his absence will throw that fellow Harborough's plans out of gear. Herr Strauss, are you all ready to proceed?"

"The pilot will not be on board before six tomorrow," replied Strauss. "Those were your instructions."

"Very good," rejoined von Giespert. "We must have a pilot, of course. Now when you drop him, steer eastwards to a point roughly ten miles beyond the Nab Lightship. Then you know the rest. Keep this fellow well out of sight. If he gives no trouble, carry him on to Las Palmas and land him there. If he kicks, then drop him overboard. In any case hoodwink him and try to find out our rivals' programme."

Forty-eight hours had elapsed since then, and Jack Villiers was recovering his scattered senses. In that respect he was not helped when the door of his cabin was opened and two men entered.

One—Strauss—was rigged out in a blue-serge suit with gilt buttons and a double line of gold braid round his cuffs. The other man was dressed in a pale-blue shirt, open at the neck, and a pair of canvas trousers.

"So you are recovering," observed Strauss in an almost faultless English accent.

Villiers tried to reply, but his parched throat gave no sound.

"Bring some brandy," ordered Strauss, turning to his subordinate.

The strong spirit had the effect of reviving Jack considerably. He found his tongue.

"Where am I?" he demanded.

"On the s.s. *Zug*," was the reply. "We picked you up seven miles south of St. Catherine's."

"Oh!" ejaculated Villiers, taken aback by this astonishing intelligence. "How——"

"Don't talk," protested Strauss, with mock sympathy. "You're very weak. I'll tell you. It was two days ago. We are bound from Malmo to Monte Video, and this is a Swedish ship. Two days ago, I say, we were standing down Channel when we sighted a ship's lifeboat drifting. We altered our course, and on approaching we found you lying unconscious on the stern-gratings. We did not touch at an English port, nor did we sight any vessel bound up-Channel; so it seems as if you must enjoy our hospitality until we reach Las Palmas."

"Haven't you wireless?" inquired Villiers.

The acting skipper of the *Zug* shook his head.

"Otherwise we would be able to oblige you," he added. "But I will see that you are made comfortable. Do you wish for anything to eat?"

Villiers felt far from wanting food. His throat was still painful, and his head ached fearfully.

"I'm thirsty," he replied.

The two men went out, returning in a few minutes with a hair mattress and pillow and a basin of hot soup.

"Take this and go to sleep," said Strauss, when the fresh bedding had been substituted for the canvas sacking. "I will look in again in half an hour or so."

Villiers managed to finish the soup, although every spoonful required an effort to swallow. Then he lay back, wondering and pondering over the brief story that the *Zug's* master had just told him.

"Boats cost money, especially nowadays," he soliloquised. "Wonder why I was cast adrift in a lifeboat when they might have dumped me into the ditch? That would have saved them a lot of expense and would have covered their tracks. Well, here I am, able to sit up and take nourishment, but beyond that—— And Beverley, how's he taking it? I suppose they didn't

sandbag him, too?"

Still puzzling his tired brain over his strange predicament, Villiers dropped into a fitful slumber.

CHAPTER X

A Choice of Two Evils

Siegfried Strauss did his level best to carry out his employer's instructions to hoodwink the abducted Villiers. For the first two days following Jack's return to consciousness the Englishman was treated with every possible consideration. At least that was how it struck Villiers.

Hourly his strength returned and with it his reasoning powers. He was well supplied with food—of the average quality to be found on tramps—and was allowed to sit on deck.

Then one or two things began to strike him as being somewhat peculiar. Strauss evinced a decided tendency to prevent Villiers from strolling for'ard. On the face of it there could be no satisfactory reason why he should not do so; but Jack, always obliging, fell in with the supposed Swedish skipper's wish.

Then he made another discovery. One of the men left a newspaper wedged in the falls of one of the davits. A gust of wind displaced it and carried it across the deck almost to Villier's feet.

Jack's first impulse was to return it to its owner. A Swedish newspaper would be useless to anyone not possessing a knowledge of that language. But somewhat to his surprise he saw that it was English. His astonishment increased when he found that it was a Southampton paper and dated the Saturday on which he had been foully struck down.

Obviously, Villiers reflected, there was a flaw in Captain Strauss' carefully-pitched yarn. If the *Zug* had proceeded down-Channel without putting in anywhere and without holding communication with any other craft, how could that paper have found its way on board?

"I'm up against something here," thought Villiers, and proceeded with his investigations. He acted warily, for he was not sure of his ground.

In quite a casual way he refolded the paper and replaced it in the falls; then he made his way for'ard, carrying his chair, until he reached the engine-room's fidley.

Here he sat down and listened through the open gratings. Before long he overheard the engineer shout something to one of his assistants. The voice was plainly audible above the pulsations of the engines, and the words were unmistakably German; so was the reply.

"We're getting on," decided Villiers. "I wonder if this is the *Zug*. I have my doubts."

He glanced to and fro along the deck. On the fo'c'sle two men were engaged in coiling down a rope. Their backs were turned towards him. Those were the only members of the crew within sight. The helmsman was invisible from the spot where Villiers had taken up his position, owing to the height of the bridge and to the fact that the wheel-house was set well back from the canvas screen running round the bridge stanchion-rails.

Having satisfied himself on this point, Villiers peered through the open fidley into the engine-room. He saw what he expected, for right in the centre of the for'ard engine-room bulkhead was a brass plate setting forth the information that the steamship *Geier* had been engined in 1904 by the firm of Hopper and Heinz of Stettin.

That ought to have been conclusive, but Villiers did not rest there. After a while he made his way right aft and leant over the stumpy counter. There were the words "*Zug—Malmo*" written plain for anyone to read, but the letters were freshly painted, and there were signs that a longer word had been somewhat carelessly obliterated.

"Feeling better, Mr. Villiers?" asked Strauss, who happened to come on deck at that moment. "I wouldn't look down if I were you; it won't do your head any good."

Villiers, caught out, made no reply.

"Come and have tea in my cabin," continued the skipper of the *Zug*, as a preliminary to his ordered task of "pumping" his involuntary guest.

Jack acquiesced.

"What land is that?" he inquired casually, indicating a rugged range of hills about four miles on the port beam.

"Portuguese coast," replied Strauss. "Thinking of swimming there?"

"About a hundred yards is my limit," said Jack. "So I don't think I'll take it on."

Both men descended the companion and entered the cabin, which opened aft out of the saloon, for in her earlier days the s.s. *Geier* had passenger accommodation in addition to carrying cargo.

Siegfried Strauss waited until tea was served, and, ordering the steward to clear out, prepared to subject his guest to a carefully manipulated cross-examination.

But before he could get in his first question he was totally taken aback when Villiers looked him straight in the face and demanded bluntly.

"Isn't your name Kristian Borgen?"

It was wide of the mark, nevertheless Strauss knew now that Villiers had his suspicions.

"No, it is not," he replied. "I am ready to swear to that."

"What's in a name?" quoted Jack. "I suppose you are equally prepared to swear that you are not a German, and that this vessel isn't the *Geier* under an assumed name?"

Strauss was on the point of blustering when he bethought himself that it would be advisable to assume a conciliatory and non-committal attitude.

"You are quite under a misapprehension, my friend," he said smilingly. "I don't know why you have adopted this truculent attitude. I suppose you are still feeling the effect of your rough usage. To allay your unfounded suspicions I will show you the ship's papers."

The skipper got up from the table and went to a locker above one of the settees. This he opened and removed a packet of papers. As he did so Jack caught a glimpse of a yellow-leather case boldly stamped with the initials H. H.

It was the identical attaché-case that Sir Hugh Harborough lost from the car at Southampton. Even Villiers was taken aback by the discovery, but, controlling himself, he decided to ignore the facts for the present.

"H'm," he remarked, after he had examined the "Certificate of Registry" and other documents appertaining to the ownership and nationality of the s.s. *Zug*. "I'll swear those are forgeries. But we'll let that pass. How can you account for the fact that the name *Geier* is in the engine-room. Beastly careless of you, you know."

Villiers had certainly scored.

Although the change in the ship's name had been publicly advertised, Strauss had tried to conceal the fact from his unwilling guest. Now he had to admit it.

"And you left Southampton early on Sunday morning last," continued Villiers. "I know that, and you can deny it if you like—you did before, you remember—but that won't alter the fact. That's a Hun all over. You couldn't enter into a rivalry with Sir Hugh Harborough on this treasure-hunting stunt without descending to low-down tricks such as waylaying him and sand-bagging me. That's enough to land you in the dock, my festive."

Siegfried Strauss realized that the cat was out of the bag. Unmasked, he was no longer an amiable Swede but an unspeakable Hun.

With a sudden rush he bounded out of the cabin and up the companion-ladder. At the head he paused to reassure himself that Villiers was not in pursuit.

"You've done for yourself, you swine!" he shouted. "Since you have made yourself dangerous there is but one thing to be done—get rid of you."

Jack could hear him bawling for the hands to come aft. He was in a tight corner, but he had no intention of quietly giving in to a swarm of Huns.

Strauss had threatened "to do him in". No doubt he, Villiers, had asked for it when he tackled the fellow. Perhaps it would have been better to have pretended to humour him, and then Strauss might have set him ashore at Las Palmas. But it was too late now. There was no averting the crisis.

For a brief instant Villiers considered the possibility of gaining the bridge and holding it against all corners, but the futility of that plan at once became apparent. He was unarmed; the crew of the *Zug* were not. Every man carried a sheath-knife, and possibly several had firearms as well.

Acting upon an inspiration, although he hardly knew why, Villiers dragged the missing attaché-

case from the locker and ran on deck.

Captain Strauss was still shouting to the crew. He hardly expected Jack would dare to come out of the cabin. When he saw him he attempted to close.

With a pleasurable feeling that he was getting his own back for the sand-bagging affair, Villiers saw the burly German measure his length on the deck as the result of a straight left with the Englishman's fist. For the present Siegfried Strauss ceased to count in the unequal contest.

Three or four of the crew ran on with a rush. Villiers didn't stop to meet them. He was cool enough to realize, in the first sense of elation, that there are limits to human powers. Running aft, he paused only to unship a life-belt and hurl it overboard, then, with the leather case still grasped in his right hand, he leapt over the rail into the sea.

He hit the water with tremendous force, for the *Zug* was steaming at a good twelve knots. That and his still weak condition almost deprived him of breath. He swallowed a good half-pint of salt water before he rose spluttering to the surface.

Even while he was still under the surface Villiers found himself debating upon the wisdom of his rash act.

"If I hadn't jumped into the ditch," he soliloquized, "those fellows would have slung me in, and perhaps given me another tap on the head just to make things doubly sure. I told friend Strauss that I was good for a hundred yards. So I am at racing-speed. It is now up to me to see if I can cover four or five miles, hampered by a leather bag and a life-buoy."

Why he hung on to the attaché-case he hardly knew. Whatever there was within it was evidently now no secret to the directing spirits behind the s.s. *Zug*. Even if Harborough's charts and plans were still inside the case, there was every reason to suppose that they had been duly inspected and the information they contained committed to memory. Sir Hugh knew the locality of the wreck, even without the aid of the stolen documents, so, now that the mischief was done, there could be little good served by regaining them.

The attaché-case was well made and the lid fitted closely; consequently it possessed a considerable amount of buoyancy. On coming to the surface Villiers found that he could support himself by the case without much effort, and thus give himself time to take stock of his surroundings.

Fifty yards away floated the life-buoy. Having assured himself of his position, the swimmer devoted his attention to the *Zug*. Already she was a good cable's length away, and holding on without apparently altering course. Five or six of the crew were standing right aft, and Villiers fancied that he caught the dull glint of the barrel of a rifle.

"They'll put about," he thought, "and either run me down or else put a bullet through my head if they spot me. I don't think they do, although I'm right in the glare of the sun. I'll keep clear of that buoy for a time, though."

Which was sound logic. The white-painted buoy, bobbing up and down over the crests of the waves, was a fairly-conspicuous object—as it was intended to be. But Jack, bareheaded and almost motionless, ran very little risk of being spotted by the crew of the rapidly-receding vessel.

But, contrary to his expectations, the *Zug* neither altered course nor did her crew open fire. She held on, leaving Villiers to his fate.

"Now for it," he muttered, and, turning on his back and still grasping the recovered attaché-case, he made toward the buoy.

CHAPTER XI

Villiers' Return

The yacht *Titania* lay at anchor about three hundred yards west of the Old Mole at Gibraltar. The first stage of her long voyage was accomplished, not without difficulties and dangers, for she had encountered bad weather in the Bay, which had continued until she passed Cape St. Vincent. In a way the gale was a blessing in disguise, for it enabled Harborough to put his crew to a severe test in seamanship, and to their credit they came out of the ordeal in quite a praiseworthy manner. The yacht had been able to hold on her course under close-reefed canvas, and had made a fairly-quick passage without having been compelled to use her engines when once clear of the Needles.

Beyond the necessity of having to replenish fresh water, provisions, and consumable stores, the

Titania was fully equipped. Each member of the crew responsible for his particular department had carried out his duties thoroughly. Everything necessary for salvage operations was on board—patent, self-contained diving-dresses which enabled their wearers to work independently of air-tubes and pumps, demolition charges, pneumatic drills, tools of various sorts, and chains, ropes, shackles, and blocks, ample for the work, were methodically stored in the holds. The two dwarf seaplanes, which, when packed for transport, took up very little room, had been stowed away under the charge of Claverhouse and Trevear. Griffiths and Bell, the only ex-army men, were responsible for the provisioning of the ship; O'Loghlin and Vivian for the engines, each man working "watch and watch" with an assistant. The rest of the crew formed the amateur deck-hands, Harborough heading the starboard and Beverley the port watch.

Once at sea all hands followed sea routine. A state of discipline prevailed while on duty, although in the "watch below" every man was Tom, Dick, and Harry to his comrades. The system worked well. Every member of the crew had been in a position of more or less authority during the war, and each realized the absolute necessity of discipline. They knew the value of initiative; but initiative, important though it is, must ever be subservient to discipline if success is to be attained.

Harborough was certainly a "tough nut". On duty he was autocratic. His idea was: "I'm in charge; carry out my orders and I'll do my level best in your interests. If anything goes wrong, then I take all the responsibility." Off duty he was affability personified, and was always ready and even eager to listen to suggestions, and should Beverley be in charge of the deck he would never interfere.

Originally it had been the intention to place Villiers in charge of one watch, while Harborough, except for actual navigation duties, acted as general supervisor; but Villiers' mysterious disappearance had altered that plan, and Harborough did not appoint a substitute. He shared a belief with Beverley that Jack Villiers would put in an appearance before the *Titania* reached Singapore, and so firm was his conviction that he had the missing officer's kit on board instead of placing it ashore when the yacht left Southampton.

"Bit of a change from the good old North Sea," remarked Merridew, gazing at the towering Rock, bathed in the rosy tints of the setting sun. "This time last year we were perambulating bales of wool: three sweaters, a muffler, monkey-jacket, pilot-coat, and two pairs of thick trousers, and none too warm at that. Now, here we are feeling quite warm in flannels."

"And I'm on anchor watch," added Fontayne. "I'm rather looking forward to it, 'cause it's full moon to-night, and the Rock will look splendid in the moonlight. I remember when I was an A.B. in the R.N.V.R. keeping middle watch when we were lying just inside Inchkeith. It was New Year's night, and there was a buzz going round that a Fritz was nosing about just outside the boom. Sleeting, snowing, and blowing like billy-ho. Absolute fact; I had to go below and thaw before I could get my clothes off. Hallo, there's a boat pulling off."

[Illustration: UNMASKED HE WAS NO LONGER AN AMIABLE SWEDE
(missing from book)]

The boat, manned by a couple of "Rock Scorps" ran alongside the gangway, and presently the crew of the *Titania* were bargaining for quantities of luscious fruit at a price that, although affording a handsome profit to the vendors, was so ridiculously cheap that the purchasers could hardly believe it.

Then another boat ran alongside, and others, until the *Titania* looked like a swan surrounded by her cygnets. There were bumboatmen, ship's store-dealers, washermen, butchers, purveyors of insipid rain-water—Spaniards, Genoese, Moors, and representatives of every country bordering on the Mediterranean—all clamouring to do business with the newly-arrived vessel.

"Allow no one to come on board," ordered Harborough.

"No exception?" inquired a hearty voice, and to the surprise of everyone on deck Jack Villiers appeared from behind a pile of fruit-cases in the stern-sheets of a whaler.

For once, at least, Harborough went back on his word. He almost went back and down an open hatchway, for, although he was convinced that Villiers would put in an appearance, that worthy's sudden return took the usually cool and collected Sir Hugh by surprise.

"Good heavens, Villiers, dear old thing!" he exclaimed. "How in the name of all that's wonderful —!"

Running up the accommodation-ladder and saluting the quarter-deck as he came over the side,

Villiers grasped his chief's extended hand.

"Fraid I haven't much of a kit," he remarked apologetically; "but this, I think, sir, is your property."

He held out the attaché-case. Harborough gazed at it with mingled surprise and amusement.

"You've a yarn to spin about that," he observed. "Come below. We're about to have dinner. You'll be able to have a word with Beverley before he goes on watch."

"I won't say that I've nothing to tell," remarked Jack, "because I have."

For the next three quarters of an hour he was hard at it, his audience listening in almost unbroken silence. Following his plunge from the deck of the *Zug*, he was in the water forty minutes before he was picked up by a Portuguese "mulutta"—a fishing-boat whose chief characteristic is the large number of fantastically-shaped sails she carries. It was doubtless the presence of the fishing-boat that deterred the *Zug's* crew from putting about and opening fire upon the swimmer; but Villiers had not observed the presence of his rescuers until the tramp was hull down.

The fishermen treated him very kindly, and eventually landed him at Figuera, a Portuguese harbour about one hundred miles north of Lisbon. A hospitable merchant rendered him every possible assistance and provided him with money sufficient to enable him to reach Algeciras, which he did after a long and circuitous railway journey which, in Villiers' opinion, embraced the greater part of Portugal and Spain. At Algeciras he was fortunate in catching the last ferry-boat for that day across to the Rock, and during the six-mile passage across the Bay of Gibraltar he saw, to his unbounded delight, the *Titania* putting in and dropping anchor off the Old Mole.

"I'm afraid," observed Harborough, when Villiers had finished his narrative, "that you expended a lot of unnecessary zeal over that attaché-case."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jack doubtfully. "Why?"

"Because it was a fake," explained Harborough. "I did not mention it at the time, because it was my secret. I intended doing so immediately we left England. These plans and charts are false. I knew that someone was after the real charts, and I took precautions accordingly. I expected they would be stolen, and they were. In order to make sure that they were stolen and not accidentally lost, you remember, I offered a substantial reward. But they were not returned—hence it was reasonable to assume that they were deliberately stolen by our rivals. You have proved that such was the case. I only hope your late host, Herr Strauss, acts upon them."

"I believe the fellow is identical with Kristian Borgen," said Villiers. "In fact, I chucked it in his teeth."

"And he denied it?"

"He did."

"Then he told the truth," declared Harborough. "He is acting under the fellow Borgen's orders, but Borgen was in Southampton when we left; consequently he couldn't have been on the *Zug* when she sailed. And we've enough evidence now to get the *Zug* detained and her crew put under arrest at the first port she touches."

"Don't do that," said Villiers. "It would spoil a lot of sport. Just fancy those fellows thinking they're doing us, and all the while acting on faked information. Their punishment will be found in their disappointment. Personally, I'd like to have five minutes with the gentleman who sand-bagged me, but I'm quite content to let the rival crush have a run for its money."

"There's something in that," agreed Harborough, who, in common with the rest of the members of the expedition, had a strong partiality for the element of chance and a liking for sport. "They're interlopers, it's true, but rivalry adds a zest to life. But you must be tired with your long journey, Villiers."

"I am," replied Jack, stifling a yawn. "I'll turn in. I suppose there'll be time for me to nip ashore to-morrow and get a new kit."

"Plenty of time to go ashore," replied Harborough, "but I don't think you'll need a fresh rig-out. Your kit's stowed away in the locker under your bunk."

CHAPTER XII

Pete and the Mutiny

The *Titania* remained at Gib. for thirty-six hours, refilling her fuel-tanks, provisioning, and making good slight damage done during the gale.

At six in the morning, having received her clearance papers, the yacht weighed, and was soon bowling along with the strong current that sets perpetually eastward into the almost tideless Mediterranean.

Villiers, now officer in charge of the starboard watch, was pacing the deck with Harborough. For the present there was little to do. The *Titania* lay close hauled on the port tack; she had plenty of sea-room, and there were no hidden shoals to worry about. Fontayne was taking his trick at the wheel, and the rest of the duty watch, having scrubbed decks and "flemished down", were standing easy.

"She shows a clean pair of heels," remarked Villiers, watching the vessel's wake. "I should imagine we're doing a good eight knots."

"Yes," agreed Harborough. "But we won't stand here gazing aft. It's a little antipathy of mine. Why, I don't know. You read in books of people standing aft and watching the phosphorescent swirl of the propellers and all that sort of thing. Sentimental! I prefer to look for'ard and see what's ahead. There's precious little fun in taking life retrospectively. It's anticipation—call it hope if you like—that is the lodestone of life!"

"I wonder if you'll be of the same mind when you near the end of your journey," remarked Villiers.

"That I can't say," replied Harborough. "But, candidly speaking, would you care to go through the last five years again?"

"I had some good times," said Jack reflectively. "Perhaps I was lucky."

"Supposing you'd been a Tommy in the trenches?" prompted Harborough.

"Ah, that's a proposition," rejoined Villiers gravely. "I don't think I'd care for the idea. In fact, I feel certain I wouldn't. And I know dozens of fellows who've been and come back, and they are all of the same opinion—that it was a physical and mental hell. But if they had to start all over again, they'd do it."

"As a matter of patriotic duty," added Harborough. "We're a weird nation—slow to adapt ourselves to changing conditions, blunderers in war and blunderers in peace, and yet, somehow, we come out on top in the end. The Old Country's in a pretty rotten state just now, I admit, but in another twelvemonth or so things will begin to shape themselves. Eh! what's that?"

O'Loghlin, lightly clad, perspiring freely and reeking with oil, had come up from the motor-room and stood before his chief.

"We've a stowaway, sir," he reported.

Harborough knitted his heavy brows.

"Bring him along," he ordered.

The stowaway came quietly. He followed O'Loghlin like a lamb—a tall, powerfully-built negro, on whose ebony features was a smile of beatific contentment, in conjunction with a wide-open mouth that displayed a double row of glistening ivories extending almost from ear to ear.

Harborough looked straight at him and said nothing. O'Loghlin, standing behind the black, afterwards maintained that the skipper was looking through the nigger. In less than fifteen seconds the smile had vanished and the stowaway was on the verge of tears.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the skipper of the *Titania*.

"I jus' come aboard, sah."

"For what reason?"

"Me tink dis packet is bound for 'Merica. I jus' want to go dere," and again a broad smile stole over the nigger's face. "Me British born," he continued proudly. "From Hole Town, Barbadoes, which am in British West Indies; but I specks you know dat bit, sah."

"And so you thrust your unwelcome carcass on board this yacht," rejoined Harborough. "Do you know where we are bound for?"

The nigger shook his head.

"Don't much, sah," he replied. "Me work berry hard to please you."

"You'll jolly well have to," declared Harborough grimly. "There's no room for idlers on this craft. Can you cook?"

"Yes, sah, me berry good cook," assented the black, and immediately he broke into a loud roar of laughter until he had to hold his sides as the tears streamed down his face.

The laugh was distinctly infectious. There was something so boisterously gusty in the merriment that every one of the *Titania's* crew on deck began smiling in varying degrees of intensity.

"What about your cooking?" inquired Harborough, whose face was puckered in a multitude of crinkles.

"Me cook aboard de *Lucy M. Partington*, three-masted schooner from N'Orleans to Naples," explained the black. "Me cook berry well all de time. One day de fellah played a prank, an' put Epsom-salts in the sugar canister. I made Spotted Dick for de Ole Man—pardon, sah, de Captain, I mean—an' dere you are."

Another tornado of laughter followed.

"And what happened then?" prompted Harborough.

"Ole Man kick me out at Gib.," replied the nigger soberly. "Big gum-boots, too," he added, with painful reminiscence.

"Well, carry on in the galley," ordered the skipper of the *Titania*. "None of your Epsom-salt touches here, remember, or you'll find my boot heavier than the *Lucy M. Partington's* Old Man's. What's your name?"

"Pete, sah; Pete Johnson."

Harborough waved dismissal. Pete, pulling his woolly forelock, pattered away towards the fore-hatch.

"They didn't have a nigger on board the *Zug*, I suppose?" inquired Harborough.

"No," replied Villiers. "This fellow seems quite above board."

"He may be a blessing in disguise," commented the baronet. "I don't envy the fellows who volunteered for the galley when we get down the Red Sea, and they'll be jolly glad to get out of it."

An hour later Villiers went below and inspected the galley.

Pete had quickly made himself at home. Arrayed in white-canvas jumper and trousers he presented a decidedly better appearance than he had done in the ragged dungarees. He had not been lacking in energy, for the pots and pans were burnished brighter than they had been since they left the ship-chandler's establishment in far-off Southampton.

He greeted Jack with one of his expansive grins.

"Quite shipshape now, Massa Villers," he exclaimed.

"You're making quite a fine show, Sambo," replied Villiers.

The black's smile vanished and he pouted his lip.

"I would hab you know, Massa Villers," he exclaimed, with studied dignity, "dat my name is Pete, not Sambo. Sambo Yankee niggah; me British born."

"Right-o, Pete, I'll remember," replied Villiers; and the black resumed his customary smile.

"I wonder how he got hold of my name," thought Jack.

It was O'Loghlin who solved that little mystery. O'Loghlin had discovered the stowaway hidden behind the main fuel-tank that was fitted athwartships just abaft the main hold. Pete would not have been surprised had the engineer officer dragged him out by his woolly hair and booted him in addition. That was the sort of thing he was used to aboard the *Lucy M. Partington*, but nothing of the kind happened, and Pete felt grateful. He described in detail how he contrived to get on board without being "spotted" by any of the watch on deck. After he had been rated ship's cook the nigger asked O'Loghlin to tell him the names of every man on board, and, with a retentive memory that many West Indian negroes possess, Pete "had them all off pat".

Throughout the greater part of the day the wind held, but towards the end of the first dog watch it fell a flat calm with considerable haze. Away to the south'ard the African coast, although only five miles distant, was lost to view. Night was approaching, so in order to keep clear of the unlighted coast the *Titania's* course was altered a full point, and the motors were started to give her steege-way.

"We'll have the canvas stowed," decided Harborough; "one never knows what's behind the mist. The glass is a bit jumpy, I notice."

Accordingly the sails were lowered and stowed, and throughout the night the *Titania* held on under power, riding over the long, sullen ground-swell that was a sign of a gale raging not so many miles off. The sea was highly phosphorescent, and, although from crest to crest the rollers measured a full hundred yards, not a catspaw ruffled the undulating surface.

Morning came and with it no change in the weather. A couple of miles on the port bow was a large three-masted schooner with her canvas slatting violently as she wallowed in the long swell. From her mizen truck was displayed a two-flag signal.

"Stand by with the code-book," cautioned Beverley, who was in charge of the deck.

He levelled his binoculars at the vessel. There was no need for the code-book. Every seaman knows the significance of the letters YF—Mutiny.

"On deck both watches," shouted Beverley. "Close up with the answering pennant."

The order was obeyed in double-quick time, the watch below turning out in a state of attire that could not by any stretch of the imagination be termed uniform. Harborough, stopping only to don oilskin coat and sea-boots over his pyjamas, came on deck.

"Serve out the arms, Mr. Beverley," he said, "and hoist a signal saying we are sending a boat. Mr. Villiers, will you take half a dozen armed men and proceed to yonder vessel?"

Almost as soon as the signal flags GTM—"I am sending a boat"—were toggled and hoisted, the *Titania's* whaler was swung outboard ready for lowering, and under power the yacht rapidly bore down upon the mutinous schooner.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, who, in the midst of preparing breakfast, had answered to the hail for all hands on deck. "Dat's the ole *Lucy M. Partington*."

Before the *Titania* had entirely lost way the whaler's rounded bilges hit the water with a resounding smack. The lower blocks of the falls were disengaged, and the bowman adroitly fended off.

"Give way, lads!" ordered Villiers.

Fifty steady strokes sufficed to lay the boat alongside the schooner's port quarter, from which a rope-ladder had been dropped by her now considerably-relieved skipper.

Leaving one hand in the whaler, Villiers and the rest of the boat's crew swarmed up the side and gained the *Lucy M. Partington's* poop. The mutiny was over. The rebellious hands had been overawed by the sight of the approaching armed boat's crew.

The Old Man, a typical New Englander, with a goatee beard and huge leather sea-boots (Villiers found himself wondering how the skipper could wear heavy foot-gear on a hot day like that), left his strategical position, to wit, a round house abaft the mizen, and was bellowing incoherencies at a knot of sullen seamen clustered under the break of the raised fo'c'sle. With him were the two mates and three apprentices, who looked now as if they were enjoying the scene, and a couple of grizzled, bald-headed seamen.

"What's all this fuss about, skipper?" inquired Villiers genially.

"Tarnation blue snakes take the pizonous reptiles," bellowed the Old Man. "That's the durned skunk I want to get at; that skulking Finn."

He pointed to a gigantic man standing behind, but towering head and shoulders above the cosmopolitan crowd of malcontents.

"We've had just about enuff of your tarnation tricks, Cap'n Abe," shouted one of the mutineers. "Nary a square meal since you hiked our cook over the side."

"Guess I didn't boot the nigger jus' for nuthin'," explained Captain Abe to his rescuers. "The nigger tried to pizen me."

"There ain't as good a cook on board, an' there won't be," vociferated the mutineer. "Pete could cook, and there ain't no sayin' to the contrary, I guess."

So that was the trouble. In putting Pete ashore at Gib. the skipper of the *Lucy M. Partington* had laid up a rod in pickle for himself. No doubt the Old Man honestly thought that the nigger had deliberately put Epsom-salt into his pudding; but he had made a mistake in not taking the trouble to investigate Pete's story. And since the cook was a cook, the crew soon found out to their cost what it means to have badly-prepared meals.

Matters came quickly to a head. One of the men approached the skipper, holding in his hands a saucepan of watery potatoes in which floated hard balls that were supposed to be dumplings, and

asked him whether he considered this sort of food good enough for human beings.

Captain Abe replied by booting the saucepan from the fellow's hands and throwing most of its contents into the grumbler's face. That started what soon developed into a serious affray, and how far matters would have gone remained questionable. The appearance of the *Titania*, which the mutineers mistook for a Government patrol-boat (of which some were yet employed on mine-sweeping work in the Mediterranean), rather took the wind out of their sails.

Villiers called the Yankee skipper aside.

"Look here," he said, "I don't quite know what you want me to do."

"Put the varmints into irons, I guess," suggested Captain Abe.

"Then who'll work the ship?" asked Jack. "There is bad weather coming, judging by the glass and the look of things. Short-handed, you'll be in a jolly tight corner. Those fellows have a grievance, although they were in the wrong to kick up a shindy. I can't lend you any hands, so what are you going to do?"

"Dashed if I know," admitted Captain Abe, in perplexity. "Say, what would you?"

"You've been at sea a jolly sight longer than I have, I should say," continued Villiers. "So it seems like teaching my grandmother to tell you how to handle men. Meet them half-way. If you've a grievance and they have one, there's always the Consular Courts to appeal to. That's better than jumping round the deck with sheath-knives and revolvers."

"Guess you're about right," considered Captain Abe. "Just you sound 'em for me, young man. For my part, I'm willin'."

Villiers went for'ard. In five minutes he had "talked over" the crew. They, too, were willing to carry on as before, on the understanding that a competent cook was shipped at the next port they touched.

Jack, proud of his moral victory, shook hands with the Yankee skipper and the two mates, and returned to the *Titania*.

"It's all right, now, sir," he reported. "They're carrying on."

At that moment the *Titania*, forging slowly ahead, was passing under the stern and within half a cable's length of the becalmed *Lucy M. Partington*.

The latter's skipper caught sight of Pete sitting contentedly on the cat-head. His eyes opened in utter amazement.

"Pete!" he hailed. "Come you back!"

The nigger shook his woolly head.

"You kick me out, Cap'n Abe!" he reminded him.

"Fifty dollars, Pete, if you swim for it," almost implored the Yankee, finding as he thought an easy solution to the present difficulty.

Pete's head shook until his teeth almost rattled in his capacious jaws.

"Dere's no leather sea-boots with nails in 'em on dis vessel," he replied. "Only indy-rubber. 'Specks I know where dis nigger am comf'ble."

Then, using an expression that he had picked up from his new acquaintances on the *Titania*, he added: "Cheerio, you deah, priceless ole thing!"

CHAPTER XIII

Advice and Bluff

"No, no, boy. Not 'la silence' but 'le silence'."

"But, sir," protested the boy, "it's according to rule; it ends in a silent 'e'."

"An exception, Beverley," explained Mr. Jaques. "An exception. One of the peculiarities of the French language. But this might help you to remember. Silence is one of the things that a woman cannot keep, therefore the French place that word in the masculine gender——"

"I say, sir," interrupted Dick Beverley. "Look at that moth. Rather late for this time of year, isn't it?"

"Never mind the moth," said his house-master. "You'll see plenty of varieties of moths during the next few months," he sighed, envious of the high-spirited youth. "Now, say in French: 'Will you kindly tell me the way to the police-station'. Good; 'poste' has two different meanings: 'post-office' and 'police-station', according to gender. Now say the same sentence in Italian. H'm, yes, passable. You have that written slip of directions the Head gave you? And your Italian passport: you're keeping that in a different pocket to your notes? And don't address strangers on Continental railways. If in doubt ask someone in uniform. All railway officials are in uniform on the other side of the Channel, you know."

Dick Beverley nodded. Already the well-meaning Mr. Jaques had dinned the various and somewhat bewildering instructions and injunctions into his excited head at least half a dozen times between Charing Cross and Folkestone. But the boy's brain had closed its doors, temporarily at least, to the advice of his house-master. On the eve of a vast adventure it is often so, although before long a confidant would be welcome.

"Monsieur Deschamps will meet you at the Gare du Nord," continued Mr. Jaques. "The journey across Paris is the most difficult part of the business, but that difficulty will, I trust, be eliminated. I believe there is a *wagon lit* straight through from Paris to Brindisi."

Dick again nodded, but his attention was centred on the animated harbour as viewed from the lounge of the hotel.

"From Brindisi," resumed the master, "you proceed to Taranto. If the *Titania* should not be there, what do you do?"

"Stop at the Hotel d'Annunzio, Strada Miratore," replied Dick promptly. He knew that bit.

"That is so," agreed the pedantic Mr. Jaques; "and above all, be discreet. Remember what I told you about 'silence'. I was given to understand, during a brief interview with your brother, that absolute discretion is necessary—not only for your own welfare but for the people you are about to join. Remember also to keep your French paper money in a different compartment of your pocket-book from your Italian notes, and examine your change carefully. There is a lot of bad money about in those countries, I believe."

"Like a lot of bacon we get in England, sir," added the irrepressible youth.

Mr. Jaques nodded. He could well afford to be sympathetic on that subject.

"You have your keys, I hope," he asked, returning to the lengthy exhortation to a juvenile traveller. "The *douaniers*—custom-house people—will want to examine your luggage, you know."

Dick produced the keys; a large jack-knife, a catapult, and a piece of whip-cord were disclosed during the operation.

"You had better let me have that catapult," observed the house-master. "I cannot conceive why you should want to take a thing like that away with you, especially as the possession of a catapult is an offence against the rules of the school."

Beverley junior surrendered the catapult cheerfully. After all it was one of three that he carried about his person.

Ten minutes later Mr. Jaques and Dick parted company on board the cross-Channel steamer, the former to return with a feeling that he had carried out a duty conscientiously, the latter realizing at last that he was actually on the threshold of a big adventure.

Dick remained on deck. Even the strong desire to go below, to see if he could prevail upon the engineer to allow him to enter the engine-room, was not enough to tear him from the sight of the receding shores of Kent and the constant stream of shipping passing to and fro on one of the main arteries of the world's maritime trade.

He was a high-spirited youth, no better and no worse than the average British schoolboy. He had received his colours at "footer", was a moderate bat, could swim and box, and could ride almost any make of motor-cycle and understand its mechanism as well. True, he hadn't a motor-bike of his own, for the simple reason that funds wouldn't run to it, but his unfailing good nature and ability to undertake repairing jobs were sufficient to give him the run of the majority of motor-cycles belonging to his fellow-boarders.

Normally he was open and inclined to be communicative, but, with Mr. Jaques' warning somewhere in the back of his brain, it was not surprising that he showed a tendency to "choke off" an attempt at conversation on the part of a fellow-passenger on the Folkestone-Boulogne boat.

"Your name's Beverley, isn't it?" inquired the stranger. Dick had noticed him in the foyer of the hotel.

"Yes," he replied shortly. "He can see that by reading the labels on my luggage," he added mentally.

"I know your father," continued the stranger. "My name's Wilson."

"Really," rejoined Dick. "You didn't speak to him in the hotel, did you?"

"No," was the answer, after a moment's hesitation. "I saw you were both talking very earnestly, and naturally one doesn't like to butt in on the eve of parting."

Dick considered. Either the "old buffer" had made a genuine mistake or else he was trying to "pump him". Possibly the latter.

"I'm going as far as Brindisi to meet my daughter from Egypt," continued Mr. Wilson. "You are going farther, I see?"

"Yes, to Taranto," replied Dick. "Cruising in the Mediterranean."

"Then you are one of the *Titania's* party."

"Am I?" rejoined the lad.

The stranger smiled.

"Of course you are," he said. "And you are going farther than the Mediterranean, I believe."

"We were," declared Dick mendaciously, for he considered himself quite justified in bluffing the fellow. "We were, but the long cruise has been abandoned. Don't know why."

"You'll be quite a traveller. Have you journeyed on the Continent before?"

Dick shook his head.

"No? Then I'll have to give an eye to you," continued Mr. Wilson. "Rather a long journey without having anyone to talk to."

"Don't think I'd take it on if I were you, Mr. Wilson," said Dick in a well-simulated, confidential tone. "You see, I'm let out before I ought to be. I only came out of the sanny yesterday."

"The sanny?" queried Mr. Wilson, in perplexity.

"Yes, that is the sanatorium, you know," explained Dick, warming to his part. "Scarlet fever; 'fraid I haven't quite finished peeling yet."

"Er—er—I don't quite understand," murmured the stranger uneasily, moving back a pace.

"Of course with proper precautions it may be all right," continued the fever-stricken youth cheerfully. "I've been cautioned to keep to the lee side of the boat so that the germs—beastly things germs—don't get blown on the people. In the train I've got to keep the window open at night, if other passengers don't object, and sniff carbolic powder. But I'll be free from infection by the time we get to Brindisi, I expect."

Chuckling to himself, Dick watched Mr. Wilson beat a hurried retreat.

"If I'd taken old Jaques' advice about keeping silence I'd have had to have been awfully rude," he soliloquized. "As it is, I've put the wind up him. Wonder who he is? And he said he knows my father, too. That's rich!"

He did not see Mr. Wilson again, save for a glimpse of his back at the Gare du Nord, during the journey to the south of Italy. "Mr. Wilson", or to give him his real name, Herr Kaspar von Giespert, thought fit to alter his proposed route, for instead of proceeding via Brindisi he booked to Marseilles, hoping to catch a Messageries boat to Singapore.

It was a pure coincidence that von Giespert and Dick were fellow-passengers on the Folkestone-Boulogne boat, but Mr. Jaques' over-cautious exhortation had given the Hun a clue. Happening to hear the word *Titania*, von Giespert pricked up his ears. He decided to sound the open-faced British boy; he might have succeeded but for an initial false move in assuming that Jaques was Dick's parent.

Von Giespert was cooling his heels at the southern French seaport days after Dick Beverley joined the yacht *Titania* at Taranto.

Sunk in Collision

It was a dark, windless night. The *Titania*, under power, was gliding through the tranquil waters of the Red Sea. The port watch had just been relieved, and Bobby Beverley, having "handed over" to Jack Villiers, lingered on the deck to have a yarn with his particular chum.

Already the port of Hodeida was left on the port quarter. Ahead lay the reefs surrounding the dangerous Hanish Islands. Two miles astern could be discerned the red, green, and white lights of a vessel that was obviously overhauling the *Titania* hand over fist.

"Mail boat—P. & O. most likely," observed Beverley. "We needn't worry about her—she's the overtaking vessel. Shan't be sorry to get clear of the Red Sea. Too many Arab dhows sculling around without lights to my fancy."

"Enough to give a Board of Trade examiner a puzzler for the 'Rule of the Road' stunt," remarked Villiers. "Do you remember that white-bearded old buffer? I suppose it was the same fellow who examined you. Tried to catch me out with the 'single red light on my starboard bow', but I tumbled to it just in time. Narrow squeak, though."

"I remember him," replied Beverley. "He gave me a regular galaxy of light, and asked what I would do. 'Put my helm hard down and clear out', I told him. 'The best course, too', he agreed."

"After knocking about at sea without lights for three years," said Beverley, "it does seem a bit awkward to find yourself up against 'em. Something like that prisoner in the Bastille who asked to be shut up again after he was released. Question of use, I suppose."

"Light on the port bow, sir," sung out Merridew.

At that distance only a red and a white light were visible, but by the aid of his binoculars Villiers saw the gleam of the starboard light.

"Port helm," he ordered.

The *Titania* and the approaching vessel cleared each other easily, but Villiers had little time to pay further attention to her. Ahead were a number of dhows, strung out in an irregular line, practically motionless in the flat calm.

"Good heavens, what's that!" ejaculated Bobby. "There's an almighty smash."

How it occurred was a mystery, but the fact remained that the overtaking liner and the vessel that had just passed the *Titania* were in collision. It was one of those instances that have taken place and will take place in the future—unaccountable yet none the less disastrous. In clear weather and in a perfectly calm sea two steamers crashed into each other.

Above the noise of grinding steel and the hiss of escaping steam came a clamorous panic-stricken yell from hundreds of throats.

"Not British this time," commented Jack, as he ordered the helm to be put hard over and the boats swung out ready for lowering.

"Get the searchlights running, Bobby," he added, "and inform the Old Man."

But the Old Man was at that moment bounding up the companion-ladder, a conspicuous figure in his white drill uniform.

Directly the two brilliant beams of the searchlights were brought into action Harborough took in the situation at a glance.

One of the colliding vessels was a liner. She was badly damaged for'ard and was deep down by the bows. The other, a chartered Belgian steamer conveying Mussulman pilgrims to Jiddah, the port of the Holy City of Mecca, had already sunk, having been cut completely in two by the impact.

"Have those boats swung inboard again, Mr. Villiers," he ordered. "We'll lay right alongside that fellow. There'll be time before she goes."

Villiers understood. The lessons learnt in the North Sea, where it was an everyday task to place an M.L. alongside a huge lumbering tramp, were not forgotten. To avoid delay in rescuing human lives Harborough had ordered the *Titania* to be manoeuvred alongside the foundering liner.

Even under normal conditions it would have been no easy task, but the difficulties were increased tenfold, for while the colliding vessels remained locked together, nearly a hundred frantic Mussulmans had succeeded in clambering over the liner's shattered bows to find but a temporary refuge on her decks. These, in addition to a very cosmopolitan assortment of passengers, were already out of hand, despite the firm efforts of the liner's officers and crew to maintain discipline. There was a wild stampede for the boats—Arabs and Europeans mingled in a suicidal and homicidal rush, with the result that by the time the *Titania* was within hailing distance one boat only had been successfully lowered. The rest had either capsized or were

hanging vertically from the davits. Those of the passengers who yet remained on board were either made of sterner stuff or else they had been tamed by the sight of the fate that had befallen the frenzied mob. As for the officers and crew of the foundering vessel, they were doing their best to try and preserve order, but the sudden addition of a swarm of pilgrims rendered their task almost superhuman.

Taking the helm, Harborough adroitly manoeuvred the *Titania* until she lost way within ten yards of the sinking vessel. Instantly there was another rush on the part of the utterly demoralized Mussulmans.

"Women and children first!" roared Harborough. "Does anyone on board speak Swahili or Arabic? If so, tell those blacks to keep back. I'll shoot the first man who jumps without permission."

Apparently some of the pilgrims understood English, or else they guessed the purport of Harborough's words. Calm again succeeded the paroxysm of cowardice.

Carefully avoiding the outswung davits of the huge vessel, Harborough brought the *Titania* alongside so neatly and carefully that there was hardly any need to employ fenders to absorb the shock. Even though the ship was foundering she towered high above the yacht, thereby rendering the task of transhipping the survivors a somewhat difficult one. Had there been any sea running the operation would have been hazardous, but *lifting* upon the very gentle swell the vessels, large and small, lay almost motionless, although momentarily the former was settling deeper and deeper by the head.

Half a dozen women and children were the first to be received on board the yacht. Then came thirty or forty passengers, mostly French, but with a sprinkling of Italians and Dutchmen. Then the survivors of the pilgrim-ship were allowed on board, where, thinking themselves safe, they squatted on deck and took no further interest in the proceedings, or, if they did, they concealed it under a cloak of Oriental impassivity. Then followed the crew, most of whom had found time to collect their personal belongings, for nearly every man held a bundle made of a coloured handkerchief filled to its utmost capacity. Last of all came the officers, the dark-featured, white-haired Breton captain bringing up the rear.

He seemed reluctant to leave, and not until Harborough shouted a warning did the little Frenchman leap. It was not a moment too soon, for by this time the liner's bows were awash and water was entering the boiler-rooms.

The *Titania*, her decks resembling a Bank Holiday Margate steamer, and submerged two feet above her water-line, backed slowly away, keeping her searchlight still running in the hope that they might see other survivors from the sunken pilgrim-ship.

"We're lucky," remarked Harborough to Villiers. "Decidedly lucky, otherwise I wouldn't give much for our chances if there had been a sea running. By Jove! What a pack. Makes one think of the good old days when Fritz started running amok with his U-boats."

"What are we doing with this lot, sir?" asked Jack.

"Run 'em into Massowah," replied the skipper of the *Titania*. "Seems to be the easier way out of the difficulty. Massowah's a bit out of our course, but it's an Italian port. They can't detain us to give evidence in a Court of Inquiry. At Aden we might be held up. Hallo! There she goes."

The French liner *Cité d'Arras* was on the point of disappearing. With the *Titania's* searchlights flashed upon the scene, her stricken hull looked as though it were fashioned of silver. Her stern was high out of the water, and, after the *Titania* had pushed off, she had developed a terrific list to starboard.

A hush fell upon the crowd on the *Titania's* deck. All eyes were directed upon the sinking vessel, even the Mussulmans abandoning their hitherto impassive attitude to gaze upon the scene.

Steam was still issuing in dense clouds from her boiler-rooms; jets of water expelled by compressed air leapt high above her listing masts as the eddying, foaming water encroached upon her decks.

Then, with a movement not unlike the convulsive spring of a mortally wounded animal, the stricken craft lifted until her twin-propellers were clear of the water. For perhaps ten seconds she remained thus; then, to the accompaniment of a loud roar as her displaced boilers exploded, she disappeared from sight.

Harborough rang for full speed ahead.

CHAPTER XV

What did Dick Do?

Literally forcing his way along the crowded deck, Bobby Beverley went below to make up arrears of sleep. At the foot of the companion-ladder he encountered Claverhouse, on whom the task of providing accommodation 'tween decks for the women and children rescued from the *Cité d'Arras* had fallen.

"Do you know your young brother's been in the ditch?" inquired Alec.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Bobby. "Is that a fact? Where is he?"

"Fact," confirmed Claverhouse. "At the present time he's shedding his wet gear in your cabin."

Dick Beverley looked a little confused when his brother appeared. As a matter of fact he had changed his saturated garments, and was in the act of attempting to remove all traces of the pools of water from the floor when the cabin door was thrown open and Bobby entered.

"What silly game have you been up to?" inquired Beverley Major sternly.

"Only got a bit wet," replied Beverley Minor. "Nothing much; I'll soon get your cabin straight, Bob."

"How did it happen?" demanded Bobby.

"Sort of slipped in," declared Dick.

"Pushed in?"

"Well, there was a bit of a crush," observed Dick diplomatically.

"You young ass!" ejaculated his brother. "I suppose you know the water's teeming with sharks?"

Dick admitted that he was aware of the unpleasant fact. He had seen them following the yacht soon after she left Suez.

"How did you get on board again?" asked Bobby.

"Trevear hauled me up with a rope," replied Dick simply. "I wasn't in for more than fifteen seconds."

"Time enough for you to have been bitten in two," rejoined Bobby. "All right, carry on and wipe up the mess. I want to turn in."

He went out, leaving Dick to complete his self-appointed task, to seek Trevear and gain further particulars, since his brother was obviously "lying low".

He found the R.A.F. pilot talking French as spoken on the Somme in 1918 to a pair of children whose home was at Oléron in the Department of the Basses-Pyrénées. The result was not altogether a success, although by a wealth of dumb show Trevear contrived to keep the children amused.

"They've shoved me in charge of the crèche, old bird," he observed. "Know it's no use offering you a cigarette; try some of this."

He extended a well-used and bulky tobacco-pouch.

"What's on your chest, old man?" he continued.

"Something my young brother's been doing," rejoined Beverley.

"Eh, what's that?" asked Trevear, raising his eyebrows and simulating an air of complete ignorance.

"I want you to tell me exactly how he got into the ditch," declared Bobby.

"You know that much, then?" rejoined Trevear. "Non, non. Taisez-vous; c'est defendu de puller mon hair (that was an aside addressed to his charges, who, finding themselves ignored, reasserted their presence by tugging vigorously at the ex-airman's closely-cropped hair). All right, then; s'pose I'm no longer bound to secrecy. While we were lying alongside the Frenchman, young Dick spotted someone in the water—one of the Arab crowd. Before I knew what he was up to—I thought he was going to sling the fellow a coil of rope—he took a turn round his waist with the end of a line and jumped overboard. Pete and I hiked him back in double quick time, 'cause the Arab fellow was trying to drag him under. Yes, we got the pair of 'em just as a brute of a shark turned on his back and showed his ugly jaws. Gave me a bit of a turn, and I fancy young Dick had the wind up after it was all over. That youngster's got some pluck, old son."

Trehear would doubtless have held to his compact with Dick Beverley, but it was obvious that the secret would out, as Pete had been a witness of the affair. The negro had already told O'Loughlin and Swaine, and they, in turn, had communicated the news of the exploit to others.

Bobby returned to his cabin. Dick, having completed the tidying-up process, had turned in. His brother went to the side of the bunk.

"Dick," he said softly. "You're a silly young ass, but I'm proud of you."

It was broad daylight when Bobby Beverley awoke to find Pete standing by his bunk with a cup of tea. Already the air was insufferably hot, in spite of the fact that the port-hole was wide open and an electric fan running. Without, the sun beat fiercely down, its hot rays glancing obliquely from the mirror-like surface of the water. On deck the tramp of many feet showed that the survivors of the catastrophe were giving signs of activity.

Looking at the clock, Bobby saw that he had but twenty minutes before going on deck to take over his watch. A plunge into a bath of tepid water, shaving and dressing, occupied half the allotted time; then, making a hurried breakfast, the watch-keeping officer went on deck.

The *Titania* was approaching Massowah, somewhat to the discontent of many of the ex-passengers of the *Cité d'Arras*, who wanted to be landed at the French colony of Obock farther down the coast and just below the Bab el Mandeb. But Harborough had decided otherwise. The objection to calling at Aden applied equally well to putting into Obock, so willy-nilly the survivors had to accept the hospitality of the Italian colony until they found means of resuming their interrupted journeys.

The moment the anchor was dropped and the yacht lost way the *Titania* was surrounded by a fleet of small boats. Into them the rescued people were placed and taken ashore, not before an impromptu meeting had been held on deck and a vote of thanks delivered in broken English by a tall, corpulent Frenchman who was about to take up a Consular appointment in China.

"Do you know what, in my opinion, is the height of embarrassment," asked Harborough, addressing his crew in general after the departure of the cosmopolitan crowd. "No? I'll tell you; being kissed on both cheeks by a demonstrative bearded Frenchman, with the temperature 125 degrees in the shade."

"Jolly funny thing," remarked Dick to his brother. "I met one of the liner's passengers on the Boulogne boat—a Mr. Wilson."

"Really?" remarked Bobby, to whom the announcement conveyed little interest. In his own experience the world was small, and he was used to knocking up against acquaintances, chance or otherwise, at various odd times. "Speak to him?"

"No," replied the lad. "For one thing, I didn't notice him until he had left the *Titania* and was sitting in the boat. For another, I didn't want to."

"Why not?" asked Bobby. When Dick took a dislike to anyone there was usually a sound reason.

The schoolboy told how "Mr. Wilson" had tried to pump him.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Jack Villiers, who was with Bobby at this time. "Pity you hadn't let us know half an hour ago. That's old Borgen for a million. He's on his way to join the *Zug*."

"And what would you have done?" inquired Dick, forming a mental picture of burly Jack Villiers and "Mr. Wilson" fighting *à l'outrance* on the deck of the good ship *Titania*.

"Done?" echoed Villiers. "I owe him one for sand-bagging me—or getting his minions to do so, which comes to practically the same thing. I'd have kept him under the influence of morphia for the next twenty-four hours and taken him to sea with us. Then we'd see how the rival crush got on without a figurehead. We'll have to inform the skipper."

Harborough received the news with his inscrutable smile.

"Tany rate he's boxed up in Massowah for a week or ten days and he's lost all his kit. That's rather put the lid on his activities for a bit. But since he owes us something for saving his life I hope he won't bear us a grudge on that account."

Three hours later, having shipped an additional two hundred gallons of oil and replenished the water-tanks, the *Titania* weighed and resumed her voyage.

It was a long, tedious stretch across the Arabian Sea, for more than 2500 miles lay between the yacht and the port of Colombo. For the most part there was little wind. When there was any it was generally too much ahead to give the vessel a useful slant, for it was the time of the north-east monsoon. Consequently, the heavy oil-engines were kept running almost continuously.

The *Titania* passed to the south'ard of the Island of Socotra, which was the last land sighted for a space of twelve days.

"India's coral strand" was a wash-out as far as Dick was concerned, for the *Titania* passed a good hundred miles to the south'ard of Cape Comorin, but at sunrise on the following morning the lad had a distant view of Adam's Peak, its prominent outlines silhouetted against the rapidly-growing light.

Two days in Colombo Harbour gave the crew a much-needed rest before tackling the almost as long voyage across to Singapore.

Thence, threading her way cautiously between the islands of the Java and Banda Seas, and encountering no adventure in the shape of Malay pirates (somewhat to Dick's disappointment), the *Titania* approached the outward limit of her long voyage.

Towards the latter end of the run Harborough rarely left the deck. He slept in the chart-house, going below for his meals and returning with the utmost haste. His usual coolness was noticeably absent. He was restless and uncommunicative, often pacing the deck for hours with hardly a word to anyone.

At length, shortly after daybreak, he touched Villiers on the shoulder and pointed to a rugged mountain-top just showing above the horizon.

"That's Ni Telang," he announced. "If I've worked our cards properly we ought to find the *Zug* there searching for treasure that does not exist."

CHAPTER XVI

The Wrong Island

"Putting in there, sir?" asked Beverley, finding his chief inclined to become communicative.

"I was debating," replied Harborough. "I want to, and yet I don't want to. Fact is, I can't make up my mind."

Villiers, Beverley, and Claverhouse, who with the skipper formed the party on deck, gazed steadfastly upon the distant peaks of Ni Telang. Each man wanted to study the expressions on his companions' faces, but somehow every one hesitated to do so. The admission of indecision coming from the hitherto somewhat despotic skipper of the *Titania* rather took the wind out of their sails.

"What's your opinion on the matter, Villiers?" inquired Harborough abruptly.

"You wish to satisfy yourself that our rivals are slogging away on the wrong spot?"

"Exactly," replied the baronet. "I suppose it's rather childish, but somehow I want to enjoy the spectacle of seeing the *Zug's* crew figuratively tumble into the pit they suppose they've dug for others. On the other hand, we are anxious to get to work, and on that account perhaps it would be as well to slip past Ni Telang unobserved and carry on to Nua Leha. It will take us some time, I fancy, to locate the wreck."

"I would suggest, sir," remarked Claverhouse, "that we make straight for Nua Leha and get to work. Trevear and I could have a joy-ride over to Ni Telang and see what sort of game the Huns are up to."

"They'd spot the sea-plane," objected Bobby Beverley. "That wouldn't be advisable in the initial stages of the salvage operations."

"Then what is your scheme, Beverley?" asked Harborough, reaching down for a large-scale chart of the islands that lay in a locker under the chart-house table.

"We could make a trip in one of our boats," replied Beverley. "You couldn't, Villiers, old son; they know you already. We could pitch up a yarn that we are on a fishing expedition and have got blown away from our ship. For that purpose we would be Yanks from the U.S. yacht *Narrunga*. No doubt friend Strauss would bluff us, but he daren't refuse to let us land for fresh water."

"Quite a sound scheme, Beverley," agreed Harborough. "I think we'll act upon it when we get to Nua Leha.... A couple of points to the south'ard for the present, quartermaster. East-a-half-south will do."

"East-a-half-south, sir," intoned Merridew in professional style.

Keeping to the new course, the *Titania* passed a good ten miles from the island of Ni Telang. At that distance, although the peaks were plainly visible in the clear atmosphere, the low-lying land

and the surrounding barrier of coral reefs were below the horizon. There was a strong temptation to ascertain whether the *Zug* had already arrived, but, once a decision was arrived at, Harborough put the question firmly from his mind.

Almost before the peaks of Ni Telang dipped below the horizon other land appeared above the skyline, bearing E by N.1/2N.

"We'll broach that case of champagne to-night, all being well," declared Harborough, whose fit of indecision had now passed. He gave another glance at the chart. Almost daily for the last three months he had studied that canvas-backed sea-map of the approaches to Nua Leha; and now the vision of tomorrow had become the reality of to-day.

"Keep her as she is," he continued. "There's plenty of water for a bit. I'm going to turn in. If I'm not awake by one bell in the first dog watch turn me out."

"Very good, sir," replied Villiers.

The *Titania* was bowling along under canvas at a good seven knots. It was one of those rather exceptional days when the breeze held true and the vessel was able to cut through the clear blue water without any necessity on the part of the crew either to increase or reduce canvas, or to touch a sheet. The weather-shrouds were tautened like harp strings as the yacht lay over at an almost constant angle of thirty degrees from the perpendicular. The spray hissed from her cutwater, and burbled pleasantly past her sides, leaving a clean wake astern.

All hands, including Pete, who was now entirely "in the know", were tremendously excited as the distance between the *Titania* and her goal decreased.

Yet the island appeared to rise above the blue horizon with provoking slowness. By noon it was just possible to discern three jagged peaks that rose to a height of two thousand five hundred feet above the sea-level, the intervening valleys being a good thousand feet lower. To the northward the ground sloped gradually until it vanished in the haze of mingled sea and sky.

By four o'clock the white line marking the surf upon the outer reef was visible. By the aid of glasses it could be seen that the lower portion of the island was much-wooded, coco-nut palms predominating. The upper land was well covered with grass, but the higher peaks were bare and rugged, indicating their volcanic origin.

Five minutes later Harborough anticipated himself by coming on deck. He had slept the sleep of mental and bodily exhaustion, and although he still looked tired he had lost the grey, haggard expression that had been his constant companion for the last ten days.

"We'll have to approach from the eastern side," he remarked. "There is a passage on this side, but I don't care to risk it. The lead's precious little use in these parts."

He swept the island with his binoculars, and then turned abruptly upon Bobby Beverley.

"Tell Swaine to go aloft," he ordered. "Conning the ship from the cross-trees is the best means of getting across the bar. Mr. Villiers, see that there's a kedge aft ready to let go. You might as well stow canvas. The wind will be heading us round the corner."

While these orders were being executed O'Loughlin went below to start up his beloved motors. He usually spent the greater part of his waking hours below tinkering with the engines. Even in the Red Sea and in the sweltering heat of the Malacca Straits he kept up the performance, and the hitherto-neglected engines were now a picture of polished and easy-running mechanism.

Keeping within a distance of two miles from the reef, the *Titania* skirted the south-eastern sides of the island. Although a careful watch was maintained there were no signs of human habitation ashore, except a ruined hut that might have been built by the crew of a trading-vessel during their search for *bêche-de-mer*.

"Good thing there are no natives," remarked Harborough "They'd only tend to complicate matters. We wouldn't dare leave any stores on the beach; they'd vanish. Right-o, Swaine; up aloft with you."

Like a cat Swaine swarmed up aloft, hand over hand, by means of the throat-halyards, for the *Titania* was not fitted with ratlines. Barely had he settled himself on the cross-trees when he shouted:

"Vessel at anchor in the lagoon, sir!"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Villiers, and without expressing his thoughts he, too, went aloft.

Beyond a low-lying spur of land fringed with an irregular line of coco-nut palms, he could discern the upper parts of the hull and the mast and funnel of a steamer. She had evidently only recently arrived, for smoke was issuing from her funnel.

"It's the *Zug*, sir," he announced.

The explosion of a 42-centimetre shell could hardly have produced greater surprise. Beating her rival only by a few hours, the *Zug* had dropped anchor not at Ni Telang but at Nua Leha, and almost over the spot where the wreck of the *Fusi Yama* was supposed to be lying. By what freak of fortune had von Giespert's minions chosen that spot, when, had they acted upon instructions given in the false chart, they should have been fifty miles to the west'ard?

"That's a nasty one, sir," remarked Villiers, as he gained the deck.

"It is," agreed Harborough briefly. He was rapidly forming a plan of action rendered necessary by the totally unexpected turn of events.

To enter the lagoon and dispute the right of possession with the rival expedition would almost certainly end in bloodshed, and this Harborough was loth to provoke. Nor was he willing to come to terms with them. On the other hand, he was not going to give up his chances and those of his fellow-adventurers. Something had to be done and that quickly, for in another five minutes the *Titania* would be visible from the *Zug's* decks.

"Make all plain sail," ordered Harborough. "We'll beat back to Ni Telang. It's possible that we may lure 'em out."

Quickly fore and aft canvas was set, and, close-hauled on the port tack, the *Titania* skirted the western side of the island. It was soon evident that her presence was observed, for with true Hunnish effrontery the *Zug* gave a long blast on her syren and hoisted the German colours.

"So much for the Swedish myth," commented Harborough. "Fritz likes to crow when he thinks he's on top. Now we'll see if the fish will bite."

Apparently the *Zug's* crew were puzzled when the approaching British vessel, instead of turning and entering the lagoon, held on a course parallel to the reef. As a matter of fact, owing to a miscalculation on the part of Captain Siegfried Strauss, the steamer had anchored off Nua Leha, under the impression that she was at Ni Telang. The merest fluke prevented this error from leading to the accidental discovery of the sunken treasure of the *Fusi Yama*.

But when the *Titania* held on, Strauss began to puzzle his brains. If this were the island he could not understand why the Englishmen should admit defeat so tamely. Something was wrong somewhere.

He checked his chronometer and sextant readings and revised his figures. Suddenly he gave a howl of angry astonishment. There was an error making a difference of fifty-five minutes of longitude.

With an oath he shouted for the cable to be hove short, at the same time ringing to the engine-room to "stand by", ignoring von Giespert (who had joined the ship at Batavia), and was demanding an explanation.

"I have the speed of that craft," he decided. "I'll beat her yet."

"She's weighing, sir," reported Villiers, who had been keeping the *Zug* under observation by means of powerful binoculars. "They've steam on her winch."

Harborough's rugged features wore a weird smile.

"That's the stuff to give 'em," he exclaimed. "Tell O'Loughlin to give her full throttle. We'll have to keep up the pretence."

With every stitch of canvas set and both engines developing their utmost horse-power, the *Titania* skirted the eastern and north-eastern extremities of Nua Leha. So far the wind helped her, but presently she would be headed by the breeze.

Before an intervening headland cut off a view of the lagoon it was seen that the *Zug* was actually under way. Harborough's bluff looked like succeeding. At all events the rival concern was being lured away from the maritime Tom Tiddler's ground.

"So she hasn't located the wreck," commented Harborough, as pleased as a dog with two tails. "We'll let her beat us on the last lap."

"It will be dark before they arrive," remarked Beverley.

"So much the better," rejoined Harborough. "If they choose to pile her upon the reef that's their affair. I wouldn't risk it."

The excitement of the speed-contest killed all sense of disappointment at having to retrace their course. For once at least Harborough evinced greater interest in what lay astern than in what lay ahead.

"There she is," exclaimed half a dozen voices, as the *Zug's* bows appeared from behind the headland.

A dense column of smoke was pouring from her funnel, and, judging by the size of the "bone in her teeth", she was chugging through the water at a pace that threatened overheated bearings and sundry other troubles in the engine-room.

"I reckon she's doing a good couple of knots more than the old *Titania*," declared Villiers, who, having been busy with the stowing of canvas, had strolled aft to watch the overhauling craft. "It's a wonder that they don't open fire on us through sheer force of habit."

"They'd like to, I don't doubt," rejoined Harborough. "I wouldn't be surprised if she suddenly ports her helm when she's abreast of us. We'll have to watch her."

"She's slowing down," exclaimed Bobby. "That's engine-trouble."

"I think not," said Harborough. "She's easing down because she knows she has the heels of us. She's letting us pilot her, but I'll bet when she sights land she'll go all out again. Right-o, Fritz, go your own gait, I don't mind, s'long as you keep clear of Nua Leha."

An hour later the look-out reported land ahead. The three peaks of Ni Telang were showing above the horizon, standing out clearly against the late afternoon sun.

Viewed from the east'ard, there was a strong similarity between the two islands, so that, apart from the Hun navigator's error in determining his position, the mistake was to a certain extent explicable.

For the next hour the *Zug* hung resolutely at the heels of her rival; then, apparently satisfied as to the precise locality of the goal, she increased speed, and in a blatant bullying fashion overhauled and passed the smaller and slower *Titania*.

The Hun bulwarks were lined with stolid-looking men whose faces looked like masks concealing a vulgar triumph. The *Titania's* people simply ignored them. The common courtesies of the high seas were dispensed with; there were no dipping of ensigns and exchange of signals. For all the outward notice she attracted, the *Zug* might have been non-existent.

There was no lowering of screens revealing a battery of quick-firers; no foaming track of a torpedo; no attempt on the part of the Hun to put his helm hard over and ram his rival. No doubt the desire to do so was present, but the fear of detection and consequent punishment was too great.

It was soon obvious to von Giespert and his henchman Strauss that the race was by no means a decided event. There was little doubt but that the German-owned vessel would arrive off the island first, but in the race against darkness the latter would win easily.

With the suddenness common to tropical climes, the short twilight gave place to intense darkness. There was no moon and the stars were obscured. The *Titania* displayed her navigation light, but the *Zug* apparently did not. She might have shown her port and starboard lights, but even by the aid of night-glasses no red and green blurr was visible from the *Titania*; nor did the leading vessel hoist a stern light. All that indicated her presence was a phosphorescent swirl in the water under her stumpy counter, and an occasional display of sparks from her funnel.

Harborough could well afford to hold on, although the low-lying reefs of Ni Telang were not so many miles away. Following in the wake of the *Zug*, he knew that the Hun vessel would give him fair warning of the partly-submerged danger, because if the Hun tramp piled herself upon the coral there would be sufficient time for the *Titania* to port her helm hard over and avoid the danger.

But presently the *Zug* ported her helm. She had now displayed her navigation lights, and the white and green showed two points on the *Titania's* starboard bow.

"She's fuked it, by Jove!" ejaculated Villiers.

"And I don't blame her," added Harborough, straining his ears to catch the sound of the roar of the surf above the steady pulsations of the engines. "Now we'll have to watch her. It's like a game of musical chairs with two players for a solitary vacant seat. We'll have to keep our end up till dawn, and then we'll let them slip in."

It was an eerie night. Except those whose duties required them to be below, the *Titania's* crew remained on deck. Up and down on a four-mile beat parallel to the eastern side of Ni Telang the two vessels cruised, passing and repassing each other like two dogs "ready to wound and yet afraid to strike". Occasionally the *Titania* played her searchlights upon the island in order to verify her position, although Harborough took good care not to let the beams bear upon the rival ship.

Shortly after midnight the *Zug* attempted the passage through the reef. By the aid of an Aldis lamp in her bows she cautiously approached the gap in the line of foam that showed ghastly-white in the tropical darkness. But almost at the moment of success Strauss's nerve failed him, and, reversing engines, the German vessel backed away.

At length Harborough consulted the luminous dial of his wristlet watch.

"It'll be dawn in another ten minutes," he announced. "We'll carry on a little longer than usual on this course, and let them think we've been caught napping."

His surmise was correct. The *Titania* was three miles off the N.E. extremity of the island, when the lofty peaks were lighted up with the blush of a new-born day. The *Zug*, marking time off the entrance to the lagoon, promptly took the narrow channel through the reef, rolling heavily as she passed the jagged fringe of surf-swept coral. Then, with a rush and a roar, her cable tore through the hawse-pipe and she came to a standstill, head to wind, off the Island of Ni Telang. Harborough smiled grimly.

"You've hit the wrong island this time, old son," he exclaimed contentedly. "But it was a narrow squeak for us."

CHAPTER XVII

Nua Leha

Twenty minutes later, conned by Swaine from the fore cross-trees, the *Titania* followed her duped rival into the lagoon. It was as yet too early to pretend to abandon the enterprise. The deception had to be maintained until von Giespert was fully convinced that he was on the right track.

A cast of the lead gave fifteen fathoms.

"Let go!" ordered Harborough. "Fifteen fathoms will give those fellows plenty to do to search for an imaginary wreck. Give her fifty fathoms of cable, Mr. Villiers; then we'll pipe all hands to breakfast."

Meals on board the *Titania* were always plenteous repasts, for Harborough realized that a well-fed crew meant efficiency and capacity for work; but upon this occasion the breakfast was a sumptuous one. There was no hurry; the primary object of the night's vigil had been accomplished, and the *Zug* had been enticed a full fifty miles away from the golden cargo of the sunken *Fusi Yama*. So all hands breakfasted in style, after which the watch below turned in and the duty watch began the customary routine.

Harborough was enjoying a cigar in the after-cabin when he heard a hail from on deck, "Boat ahoy!"

"Thought the blighter couldn't resist the temptation to try and pull my leg," he soliloquized, as he glanced into a mirror to assure himself that his appearance was fitting as captain of a British yacht.

"Boat from the *Zug*, sir," reported Merridew.

Harborough went on deck to receive his uninvited guests.

The *Zug's* gig was already alongside, manned by four hands in white-canvas suits. In the stern sheets sat von Giespert and Captain Strauss.

Von Giespert raised his cap as he came over the side. Harborough punctiliously returned the salute, but feigned to overlook the proffered hand.

"Sir Hugh Harborough, I presume," said the German.

"Mr. Borgen," rejoined Harborough.

The Hun shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps it would be better if I introduced myself as Herr Kaspar von Giespert," he said.

Harborough showed no surprise at the announcement.

"That is not really necessary, Herr von Giespert," he remarked. "But I thought that perhaps you preferred to continue to sail under your false colours."

Von Giespert waved a podgy hand deprecatingly.

"I think we understand one another," he declared, with mock humility. "The war is over, and peace is an established fact. You Englishmen were ever generous to a beaten foe, and I feel certain that you will be willing to shake hands and forget the regrettable happenings of the past

four and a half years."

"Speaking for my fellow-countrymen," replied Harborough, "and I think I'm voicing their opinions, I am in accord with what you say up to a certain point. Generosity to the vanquished has always been a Briton's strong point, but, unfortunately for Germany, her utterly-vile conduct during the war, until she knew the game was up, is sufficient to put her outside the pale for the next generation. However, I don't suppose you came here to be lectured upon the conduct of your compatriots. Suppose you get straight to the point and state your business."

"We are both here on the same quest," said von Giespert suavely. "In England there is a proverb: 'First come, first served'."

"Quite so," agreed Harborough gravely. "There is also another: 'A fair field and no favour'. However, you haven't made yourself clear. Pray continue."

"Being first upon the scene," continued the German, "I claim a right to conduct uninterrupted operations. My vessel lies almost over the wreck, therefore I object to your working within a couple of cables of her. That, I think, is a fair and reasonable request."

"Have you always been fair and reasonable in your transactions, Herr von Giespert?" inquired Harborough.

"Certainly," replied von Giespert in a tone of virtuous indignation.

"You would not, for instance," continued the baronet in firm, even tones, "you would not lower yourself to the extent of kidnapping one of my officers (possibly under the mistaken impression that it was I), hoping to throw my plans out of gear?"

"Your insinuation surprises me," exclaimed von Giespert. "I cannot understand why you should voice it."

"Supposing I am in a position to prove that you would do such a thing," resumed Harborough, "would you be willing to abandon your claim to the treasure?"

"I would," answered the German hastily, somewhat to Harborough's surprise.

"Villiers!" he called out. "Come here a minute."

Both von Giespert and Strauss turned a sickly yellow hue when Jack Villiers, cool and unperturbed, stepped briskly out of the chart-house. The Huns had up to that moment imagined that he had been drowned after he took his flying leap from the deck of the *Zug*.

"You've lost, Herr Giespert," said Harborough. "A charge of attempted murder would land you in a very tight corner. That, however, is Mr. Villiers' affair."

"No harm done," declared Villiers. "We'll call it a case of mistaken identity when you sand-bagged me, Herr Strauss. It was an episode—an experience that will come in useful if ever I take to literature. I might call it an asset, so we'll wipe off that account."

The Germans were dumbfounded. They failed utterly to grasp the young Englishman's attitude. Von Giespert, desperate, even when losing, tried to bargain.

"Suppose, Sir Hugh," he resumed, "suppose we work in partnership—on equal shares? Surely, after all the expense to which we have been put, you will not deprive us of a chance of recovering our losses?"

Harborough was on the point of declaring bluntly that he wanted no truck with a Hun, when he remembered the main thread of his scheme.

"I'm dead off partnerships," he replied. "You've lost, and you must accept my terms. I think if it came to a question of force I'd still hold the whip-hand. However, that issue rests with you. You claim priority. I'll admit that. You can just carry on in your own sweet way for a month. It's up to you to slog in like blue blazes and get the stuff before the expiration of the time-limit. Got that? Good enough; good morning."

The still-bewildered Huns backed away to the gangway and descended to their boat. On the face of it they could hardly credit their good fortune. Their rivals had unaccountably retired from the contest, leaving them in uninterrupted possession of the lagoon for a whole month. With reasonable luck the wreck ought to be located and the gold transferred to the *Zug* in a fortnight.

Half an hour later in the stateroom of each ship an almost identical performance was in progress. On board the *Titania* Harborough was receiving the congratulations of his fellow-adventurers on his successful strategy; on the *Zug* von Giespert and Strauss were shaking hands with each other and drinking with the rest of the ship's officers to the success of the next month's labours.

At noon the *Titania* weighed. It was a calm day with not enough air to give the yacht steerage-way. Under power she slipped through the entrance to the broad lagoon, and shaped a course

that was certainly not in the direction of Nua Leha.

"She's dipping, sir!" announced Merridew, indicating the German vessel.

The *Zug* dipped her red, white, and black ensign thrice, a hollow compliment that the *Titania* duly returned. Both crews, being firmly under the impression that they had scored heavily, could well afford these courtesies.

Upon passing beyond the ten-fathom line—which, owing to the fact that the reef was steep-to, was but a couple of hundred yards beyond the foam-lashed barrier—the *Titania's* helm was ported and she shaped a southerly course. This she held until the high peaks of Ni Telang were almost hidden by the skyline, then altering course she made for her goal.

There was now a steady following breeze which, although not so favourable as one broad on the beam, enabled her to keep up a fair speed without having recourse to the motors, and at one bell in the first dog watch she crossed the bar of Nua Leha. It was exactly at dead-low water, yet there were at least five feet under the yacht's keel. That meant that, unless there were a nasty breaking sea on a bar, the entrance was available at any state of the tide, which even at spring never ranged more than four feet six inches.



D 52

THE GERMANS WERE DUMFOUNDED

[Illustration: THE GERMANS WERE DUMFOUNDED]

The *Titania* moored in nine fathoms, with her main anchor laid out in the direction of the reef, at about two hundred and fifty yards from the sandy shore of a small bay. At its northern extremity the bold headland of the bay almost touched the reef, there being a passage of about fifty yards leading to the next section of the lagoon.

"A south-easter is the only wind likely to trouble us," observed Villiers. "The reef will keep a lot of the sea down, but it's so low that there's bound to be a fairly-heavy tumble."

"What sort of bottom have we?" asked Harborough.

"Mud and pieces of coral rock," replied Villiers. "If the wreck's anywhere about we'll find the water pretty muddy. But it's good holding ground. The sandy part of the lagoon is clear enough, but I wouldn't care to trust the fluke of an anchor in it."

"Let's hope the wreck is on a sandy bottom," rejoined Harborough. "However, that remains to be proved. We'll breach that case of champagne now, lads; after that it's general leave ashore. There'll be time for a stretch before sunset."

This programme was duly carried out. The boats were lowered and armed merely on the principle that it was wise to take precautions—and with the exception of Merridew, who volunteered as ship-keeper, all hands landed on the sandy beach.

"Look at that young brother of yours!" remarked Trevear, drawing Bobby's attention to Dick's rolling gait. "The champagne's got into his upper story."

"He didn't have any," declared Bobby; then, overtaking his erratically-moving relative, he asked:

"What's the matter, Dick?"

"Matter?" echoed the lad. "Wish I knew, Bobby. The ground's coming up to meet me every step I take."

"Merely the effect of being so long on board," explained Villiers. "I've felt the same sort of thing myself. Now, Dick, I'll race you to that tree. A coco-nut for the winner, and the loser's got to find it. Ready? Go!"

Dick won by a yard, and breathlessly he watched the agile Villiers swarm up a young palm until he reached the cluster of broad-leaved foliage at the top.

"Stand away from under," he cautioned.

Down came a green nut. Dick seized upon it with avidity and proceeded to crack it with a lump of coral.

The result rather surprised him, for all the milk had been spilt and nothing remained but the husk.

"Why, it's empty!" he exclaimed.

"Naturally," replied Villiers, laughing, for he had now descended from his lofty perch and was contemplating young Beverley's face with great amusement.

"Why naturally?" demanded Dick, with the air of a fellow who has been "had".

"What did you expect to find?" asked Jack.

"Coco-nut," replied Dick promptly.

"Then you won't find what you're looking for in a growing nut," replied Villiers. "It's full of liquid, nothing more. The white substance forms with keeping. Now, you fellows, who's for rounders?"

The crew of the *Titania* acted just like a pack of schoolboys on a holiday. They played rounders, using a soft coco-nut for a ball, indulged in leap-frog, leaping and jumping with all the abandon natural to a crowd of healthy young fellows landing on an island after weeks afloat.

Apparently Nua Leha was uninhabited. Although the roysterers made enough noise to be heard from one end of the island to the other, their presence was apparently unnoticed. True, wild pigs charged frantically through the undergrowth, stolid penguins broke up their military formation and ambled awkwardly to less noisy haunts, but no human native gave sight or sound of his presence, nor, during their brief visit, did the *Titania's* people find trace of human habitation.

"We'll start by establishing a shore-station tomorrow," decided Harborough, as they rowed back to the yacht. "It will give us more room on board, and save the old boat from a lot of

knocking about. You might look round to-morrow, Mr. Claverhouse, and fix up a secure berth for the sea-planes. There ought to be a sheltered spot on the other side of the headland."

"Very good, sir," replied Claverhouse, with a joyous look on his face at the near prospect of "going up" once more.

"We'll have all the petrol taken ashore," continued the skipper. "You had better see to that, Mr. Trevear. Dick!"

"Sir?"

"Any good with a rifle?"

"First-class marksman in the Cadet Corps, sir."

"Then act up to it," said Harborough, with his whimsical smile. "You'll be on ration fatigue, which means that whenever Pete wishes to give us pork for dinner, you've got to shoot a pig. No indiscriminate slaughter, mind. That I most strongly object to. We want enough for our needs and no more."

It was quite a long time before Dick got to sleep that night. He imagined himself a mighty hunter, on whom his fellow-adventurers depended for the filling of the flesh-pot. The one fly in the ointment was the size of the game. Pity there weren't lions, tigers, and orang-outangs on Nua Leha. But he was jolly lucky, he decided. It was not the lot of most lads to have the run of a real coral island.

CHAPTER XVIII

The First Day on the Island

The shrill pipe of the bos'n's whistle, adroitly manipulated by big Merridew, brought the working-party out of their bunks with the utmost alacrity. During the stay of the *Titania* at Nua Leha the system of routine was to be drastically altered. The port and starboard watches, responsible for the care and maintenance of the ship, were reduced to three men each. The remainder were amalgamated into a working-party whose hours—voluntary, and not subjected to the dictates of a Trades Union—were from sunrise to sunset, with intervals for meals and recreation. Thursday afternoons were "make and mend", as in the Royal Navy, while, except on urgent matters to safeguard the vessel, no work was permitted on Sundays. From eleven in the morning till two in the afternoon was "stand easy", since the heat was too great to allow Europeans to work without grave risk.

For the first time since the *Titania* left Southampton the twenty-eight-foot cutter, stowed amidships, was hoisted out. Her gunwales were protected with rope fenders; she was made fast alongside, and the work of sending stores and gear to the beach proceeded immediately after breakfast.

By the time "stand easy" arrived the two sea-planes had been hoisted out and were in advanced stages of reassembly, under the supervision of Trevear.

Claverhouse had, in accordance with instructions, gone ashore early to fix upon a likely site for a sea-plane station. With him went Dick Beverley, proudly grasping a .303 rifle, and with his pockets bulging with an assortment of treasures, including sandwiches and half a dozen ball cartridges.

The ex-R.A.F. officer and his young companion made their way along the glistening coral beach, on which the limpid water lapped gently under the influence of a light on-shore wind.

A walk of a quarter of a mile brought them to the bold headland on the northern side of the little bay in which the *Titania* lay at anchor. Here the dark, volcanic rocks ended in a ledge that projected about fifty yards from the general shore-line. At the extremity of the natural breakwater the bed of the lagoon dropped abruptly to a depth of five fathoms, although the bottom could be clearly discerned.

"Topping place for a bathe," suggested Dick.

"Quite," agreed Claverhouse, "that is, if it's all right. You'd better hang on till you know there's no danger."

"There are no sharks about," declared the lad.

"Take your word for it, old man," replied Claverhouse. "All the same, I wouldn't dangle my feet

in the water if I were you. There may be ground sharks, and I believe they don't hesitate to snap at a pair of paddling trilbies."

"What's a fellow to do if he can't have a swim?" inquired Dick. "If——"

His words ended in a shout of horrified surprise as a long tapering tentacle shot out from under a projecting rock and securely fastened itself to the lad's bare ankle. Then another and yet another dark, slimy tentacle obtained a grip upon his leg.

Vainly young Beverley strove to free himself from the horrible embraces of a healthy young octopus. The creature's protruding eyes and parrot-like beak were plainly visible. Although its body was only about the size of a soup plate, the eight tentacles averaged a yard in length. Each of the legs that had obtained a grip were bringing into play the dozens of suckers with which they were provided, and the net result was that Dick was a prisoner. So precarious was his position, and so strong the tractive powers of the cuttle-fish, that he had to hold on with both hands to prevent himself being drawn off the slippery rock into the sea.

Claverhouse's first instinct was to grasp Dick's rifle and fire at the head of the hideous creature; but, thinking that he might possibly put a bullet through the lad's foot—which, owing to the refractive qualities of the water, was quite feasible—he whipped out his knife.

Leaning over the edge, he struck hard and deep. The keen steel sunk to the hilt with hardly any perceptible resistance, fairly between the vicious-looking eyes. Then, even as Claverhouse was in the act of withdrawing the blade, two tentacles attached themselves firmly to his hand, at the same time binding it to the foot of the now thoroughly-scared Dick.

The unexpected jerk wellnigh capsized Claverhouse. Resisting the impulse to hack blindly, he withdrew the knife with his left hand and prepared to sever the tentacles one by one. It was no easy matter. Not only was there a danger that the sharp steel might cut either his hand or Dick's foot, but the octopus, upon receiving the stab, had liberated a quantity of black fluid that, quickly spreading, made it almost impossible to locate the slimy quivering arms.

But the octopus had already received more than it bargained for. The discharge of the inky fluid—nature's counterpart to a smoke-screen—was a preliminary move to making a strategic retreat. Almost as suddenly as the attack developed, the suckers relaxed their grip, and the cuttle-fish withdrew to render first aid to a deep but by no means vital injury to its anatomy.

The two victims to the tremendous suction exercised by the octopus's tentacles regained their feet, somewhat ruefully contemplating the livid marks left by their late antagonist.

"Thanks, awfully, Claverhouse," exclaimed Dick. "I owe you one for that."

"Enter it in the book, then," rejoined the ex-R.A.F. officer, with grim jocularly. "Hope the occasion won't arise for you to call quits."

He quizzically regarded his youthful companion, gauging his physical inconveniences by his own.

"S'pect you've had enough of the beach to-day," he continued. "If I were you, I'd go on board and get something for that ankle of yours. A real Futurist picture, I call it."

Dick decided otherwise.

"I'm not going to spoil a day's sport for the sake of a smarting ankle," he protested. "It's roast pork for to-morrow's dinner, and pork I mean to get. I'm all right; I am really."

Claverhouse did not press the point, and the two comrades pursued their way.

In the bay beyond, Claverhouse found exactly what he wanted. The ground shelved gradually to the water's edge. The beach was sandy and free from jagged lumps of coral. There was a good depth of water close to the shore, while the reef was not only within two hundred yards of the island, but was in several places a good six feet above high-water mark.

"I thought coral insects always died when they'd worked their way to the surface," remarked Dick. "How is it that this part of the reef sticks up so?"

"I think if we landed there we'd find volcanic rocks," replied Claverhouse. "Small islands each with a ring of coral round them; subsiding reefs, as it were. 'Tany rate, this is an ideal sea-plane base. I'll get some hands to work as soon as possible, so I'll get back to the landing place. You'll carry on?"

Dick slapped the "small" of his rifle.

"I've got to work for my living," he rejoined facetiously, "so I'll get a move on. See you later."

Claverhouse made his way to the beach opposite the *Titania's* berth, where already a light pier was in course of construction, and crates and boxes were piled high awaiting a place for storage.

"You're handy fellows with an axe," he exclaimed, addressing Griffiths and Bell.

"Never handled an axe in my life," declared Griffiths.

"And when I did I cut a slice out of my boot," Bell hastened to assure the director of the day's destiny.

"Call yourselves ex-Royal Engineers?" remarked Claverhouse, with assumed scorn. "You've seen Tommies wielding axes, so come and do likewise."

He mustered his party, including Vivian and Fontayne in the number, and the five repaired to the site Claverhouse had selected.

It was grand work plying those glittering axes in the yet cool air of the early morning, and bringing the tall palms crashing to the ground; but when it came to "grubbing up" the roots, that was quite a different story.

"Thought we were diving for treasure, not digging for it," remarked Vivian, pausing to wipe the perspiration from his brow. "By Jove, I haven't done so much digging since I was in the Naval Brigade at Lierre. Say, Claverhouse, do crabs climb trees out here?"

He pointed to a felled palm. Out of the crushed foliage a large crab ambled awkwardly.

"Looks like it," replied Claverhouse. "Wonder what a fellow would do if one of those beauties climbed into the fuselage of a bus and began nibbling the bloke's toes. He'd wonder what was wrong with the rudder-bar."

"There's another, making off with a coco-nut," said Griffiths. "And I volunteered to sleep ashore," he added, with the air of a man who had made a bad bargain.

"Nemesis, my son," exclaimed Vivian, "you didn't half chuck your weight about when yours was the only cabin that wasn't infested by those flying cockroaches in the Red Sea. I'd advise you to surround your tent with barbed-wire entanglements, and keep a Lewis gun under your pillow. Come on. This won't get the work done, and we've an hour to 'stand easy'."

The five set to work with redoubled efforts, and when the time for the midday rest came round the ground was cleared and levelled sufficiently to commence the erection of hangars.

"Dick's busy," observed Claverhouse, as the faint report of a rifle-shot rang out. "That's the fifth. Suppose it means pork for the rest of the week."

"Or possibly none at all," added Bell. "I was chipping him last night, and said he wouldn't fire a single shot."

"He's fired five, anyway," said Fontayne. "If you'd anything on you've lost, my festive. You said 'fire', didn't you?"

Upon returning to the landing-place, Claverhouse found Villiers and Beverley resting after their labours, which consisted principally of digging a deep hole and sinking three large barrels in it. These were connected by a pipe, and a small stream of pure water was diverted into them. Trevear and O'Loghlin had practically completed the reassembly of the two dwarf sea-planes, while the rest of the landing-party, under Harborough's supervision, had made great strides with the shore base. Tents were already erected, and a large storehouse, fashioned after the manner of a Canadian lumberman's hut, had grown to a height of five feet.

"What have you done to your hand, Claverhouse?" asked Harborough, when the party sat down to an alfresco lunch.

"Octopus took a fancy to it," replied the ex-R.A.F. officer. "We'll have to be careful bathing off the rocks. No, it's nothing much, thanks."

"We saw a couple of sharks as we rowed ashore," announced Merridew. "They followed the boat into quite shallow water."

"We'll have to take precautions when we bathe," remarked Harborough. "No isolated swimming. Keep together, and have a boat ready. Pete, what's the bill of fare?"

"All propah, sah," replied the cook, with a terrific smile. "Same as in ole Bahamas."

There were roast fowl, taro bread, omelets with bananas and slices of melon—the whole feast provided out of the natural resources of the island. Everyone agreed that it was a fortunate chance that brought Pete on board the *Titania*, for he alone of all the ship's company was well versed in the vegetable products of the tropics.

Upon the resumption of work, after a long and enjoyable spell in which pipes and yarns held full sway, strong moorings were laid in the narrow part of the lagoon for the two sea-planes. There seemed every indication of the glorious weather holding, otherwise Claverhouse would not have run the risk of leaving his precious charges afloat. Nevertheless, he was determined to push

on with the construction of the hangars, which were to be made so strongly that they would successfully resist the tropical gales.

Before nightfall the big store was ready for the roof of palm-leaf thatch. The shore-party made themselves at home, and the men told off to sleep on board prepared to return.

"Where's your young brother?" asked Villiers.

"With Claverhouse, I think," replied Beverley.

"Well, he isn't," corrected Jack. "Alec's just gone down to the boat."

Bobby ran down to the beach and hailed the airman.

"Not a sign of him," replied Claverhouse. "I thought he'd return straight to the camp. We'll have to send out a search-party. The island isn't so very big, but he may have lost his way."

There was no lack of volunteers. Every man ashore, from Harborough to Pete, expressed his willingness to look for the missing Dick.

The fall of night hampered their task, and at the end of a couple of hours' strenuous search the party reassembled on the beach with their aim unattained.

"The moon will be up in another twenty minutes," announced Harborough, who felt himself responsible for having dispatched the young huntsman on his shooting expedition. "Who'll have another shot?"

"We'll carry on till we find him, sir," was the unanimous response.

CHAPTER XIX

Missing

"Hanged if I can wait about for the moon to rise, Jack. It will be two mortal hours before it's much use to us," declared Bobby Beverley. "Game to carry on at once?"

"Right-o," assented Villiers; "but I'm afraid we won't do much. Can't see your hand in front of your face, so to speak. Wish we had a good dog here."

"We'll try with the Aldis," rejoined Beverley.

"Right-o," agreed his chum for the second time. "Let's get a move on."

From the store they procured an Aldis lamp and battery. The lamp, primarily intended for flashing signals (it was powerful enough to enable a message to be sent over a distance of five miles in broad daylight), could be used as a miniature and portable searchlight, although the weight of the case containing the cells was considerable.

"Perhaps," suggested Villiers, as the two men plunged into the coco-palm groves, "perhaps the young blighter's taken it into his head to scale one of the peaks and can't find his way down."

"Hope not," replied Beverley. "Dashed if I fancy climbing a thousand feet or so of lava rock. 'Sides, he must have heard us shouting all over the show."

"Possibly," admitted Villiers. "But he might not be able to let us know."

"Had a rifle."

"And a handful of cartridges. And a handful wouldn't last a whole day with a boy on his own for the first time with a real rifle."

For nearly twenty minutes they proceeded in silence, following a track recently made through the dense undergrowth.

"Trouble is," remarked Beverley, "we've been acting like bulls in a china-shop on the previous stunt. If Dick left a trail we've obliterated it."

"We have," admitted Villiers. "S'pose we weren't born trackers, any of us. It's like collaring a skilled woodcraft man and sending him afloat. He would be all at sea in a double sense."

He stopped and swung the rays of the lamp upon a clump of palms.

"I remember this spot," he continued. "Do you notice how curiously these trunks shoot up? A sort of kink in them. Merridew and his party took that path; we, if you recollect, bore away to the right, and Trevear and Claverhouse carried straight on. If we bear away to the left I fancy we'll be striking a fresh trail."

There was a path of sorts. Whether any of the *Titania's* crew other than Dick Beverley had traversed it remained for the present a matter for speculation. The ground was covered with the decaying vegetation of years and showed no trace of footprints, although the undergrowth on both sides gave indications of being forced aside.

"Pigs, no doubt," commented Villiers, when Bobby called his attention to the trampled saplings. "Hallo! though; what's this?"

The brilliant rays of the Aldis lamp lighted up a small glittering object. It was a cartridge-case.

"Lee-Enfield, .303," declared Beverley, picking up and sniffing at the brass cylinder. "Fired recently; I can smell burnt cordite distinctly. We're on the trail."

Twenty yards farther on the shelving ground was stained by a quantity of blood, the dark-red stain continuing at regular intervals.

"Good enough," remarked Villiers. "Young Dick shot a pig and wounded it pretty badly. The brute got away and he followed it."

"Hope to goodness it isn't Dick's blood," said Bobby anxiously. "The youngster might have put a bullet through his leg or arm by accident."

"If so, he would have turned back," reasoned Jack; "no, it's a wounded pig's trail."

Two hundred yards farther on they stumbled over the body of the victim of Dick's rifle.

The animal was stone dead. On examination the two men discovered two bullet-wounds. One, a fairly-deep one in the pig's flank, had accounted for its comparatively long flight before collapsing through loss of blood. The other, obviously fired at close range, had passed completely through the pig's head.

"So Master Dick, instead of administering the *coup de grâce* in the orthodox manner, wasted another cartridge on the animal," commented Villiers. "The pig's been dead for at least three or four hours. Now, what's the next move?"

The narrow path, evidently the "runway" of a porcine herd, terminated abruptly at what appeared to be a cul-de-sac.

"He retraced his steps," declared Beverley.

"No jolly fear," protested his companion. "He wouldn't have left his trophy lying here unless he went on, intending to get it again on the return journey. Bring that light a bit lower, old thing; that's right. Yes, I thought so."

Close to the ground was a narrow, tunnel-like gap in the undergrowth. This the two men negotiated on their hands and knees, to find themselves in a wide, sloping expanse of open country devoid of trees and dotted by a few stunted bushes.

"Which way now?" inquired Bobby, as the two chums regained their feet.

Villiers did not reply.

"Switch off that light for half a tick," he said.

Beverley did so. For some seconds they stood blinking in the sudden transition from dazzling light to intense darkness.

"What's the move?" asked Beverley.

"I thought—might have been mistaken, though. Ah! there you are; what's that?"

At a considerable distance away—how far it was impossible to gauge with any degree of accuracy—a feeble ray of light stabbed the darkness—three short, three long, and then three short flashes.

"S.O.S.," exclaimed Villiers and Beverley simultaneously.

"Switch on again," continued the former. "Keep behind me. I've got a pocket compass."

Taking a rough bearing of the direction of the distress signal, Villiers began to walk rapidly towards its source of emission, Beverley following a good ten paces behind, and throwing the beam of the Aldis lamp ahead in order to enable Villiers to make his way over the rather rough ground, much of which consisted of "rotten" lava and boulders of various sizes.

Above the moan of the off-shore breeze they could hear the roar of the surf. They had almost gained the other side of the island.

Suddenly Villiers came to a halt. A precipice yawned at his feet. How deep it was he was unable to see until his companion came up with the light.

"Be careful," he cautioned. "The edge is pretty soft. Hand me the lamp and hang on to my feet."

Possessing himself of the Aldis lamp, Villiers lay prone upon the bare ground, while Bobby, hardly able to control his feelings, gripped his companion's ankles.

They were on the edge of a terraced cliff that rose a good eighty feet above a shelving beach. Twenty yards from the base was Dick Beverley.

"You all right, Dick?" shouted his brother.

"All right so far," was the reply. "Ankle's a bit sprained."

"We'll soon be with you," rejoined Bobby reassuringly.

It was easier said than done, for although there were five or six natural terraces, the cliff looked formidable enough in the deflected rays of the lamp.

"Better wait till the moon rises, old bird," counselled Villiers. "It won't be long now."

"That won't help us much," objected Bobby. "We're on the west side of the island, remember. How did you climb down, Dick?" he inquired, raising his voice.

"I didn't climb—I was pushed," answered Dick resentfully.

Villiers swept the edge of the cliff with the powerful light. Away to the right the land terminated in a low promontory certainly not more than twenty feet in height and a good three hundred yards distant. To the left the cliff rose still higher, terminating in a projecting crag a full two hundred feet above the sea.

"We'll be with you in half an hour," he shouted.

"Right-o; no immediate hurry," replied Dick cheerfully, for knowing that help was at hand his spirits rose accordingly.

"What a ghastly spot," declared Beverley, as the men cautiously made their way round in the direction of the shelving promontory. "Looks as if there had been a volcanic eruption here not so very long ago."

"Centuries ago, perhaps," replied Villiers. "Lack of vegetation doesn't help us much to fix a date. I'd like to explore this show in broad daylight."

"We may have to," added Bobby. "How we are going to get that kid back to the ship in the dark puzzles me. We'd possibly find ourselves bushed."

"It's a sad heart that never rejoices," quoted Jack. "Main thing is we've found your brother. Sprained ankle's nothing. Wonder what he meant when he said he was pushed? Look out—that's a nasty one."

He pulled up just in time to avoid a deep and narrow fissure that ran practically at right angles to the general trend of the cliffs.

"We can scramble down that," decided Bobby, "and save a long detour."

"And perhaps find ourselves stranded on the next terrace. I'm not having any, old thing. If you want to indulge in a sprained ankle just to show sympathy to your brother, then that's your funeral."

Beverley saw the force of the argument.

"Right-o," he replied simply; but it occurred to him that for once at least the two chums were exchanging characteristics. He was usually cautious, while Villiers was of a boisterous, go-ahead nature. Now Villiers displayed caution, while he, Beverley, was decidedly impulsive.

"I'd do it like a shot," continued Jack, "if there were any pressing necessity for it, but there isn't. Dick is in no immediate danger. If we slipped then Harborough would have three useless people on his hands. Stand by with that lamp."

Guided by the beam of light Jack jumped the intervening gap, adroitly caught the bulky apparatus, and waited until Bobby had safely crossed the crevice.

Beyond that point progress was comparatively simple, and presently they found themselves on the sandy shore of the lagoon.

"Let's see the extent of the damage, Dick," said his brother, when the rescuers arrived at the shelving ground where the injured lad lay.

"Nothing much," declared Dick. "Ankle twisted. It's quite all right when I don't move; when I do it gives me what-oh!"

Bobby was busy wrapping handkerchiefs soaked in salt water round the swollen limb.

"Tell us what happened," he invited.

"Not much to tell," replied Dick. "I got one pig all right, then I thought I'd done enough in that line for the time being, so I started to explore a bit. I was standing on the cliff up there when I heard a terrific lot of grunting, and a big brute with a large pair of tusks came charging this way. That spoilt the contract. Although I promised not to shoot more than one pig I wasn't going to be charged by a pocket edition of a rhinoceros."

"It was a boar, perhaps," suggested Jack.

"Might have been; it bore me over the top of the cliff, anyhow," rejoined Dick, laughing at his own joke—a laugh that ended in a wry face as a twitch of pain shot through the ankle. "I let rip at the brute at ten paces, but I must have missed it. The next thing I remember was being bowled over, rolling and bumping until I came to a stop about here. Seen anything of my rifle, Bob?"

"I'll look for it," said Villiers, again switching on the lamp.

It was but a few paces to the foot of the lowermost cliff terrace. Within a yard of the base, and lying in a slight depression of soft ground, was the porker that was responsible for young Beverley's present condition. It was stone dead. The .303 bullet had entered its head just below the base of the skull and had emerged out of the animal's hind-quarters.

Close by was the rifle, apparently undamaged by its fall except that the muzzle was choked with earth.

Villiers returned and reported what he had found.

"We ought to be making tracks," he observed. "The moon's up, although she's still behind the palm trees. Harborough and the rest of the crush ought to be on the war-path by this time. I'll try the signal for recall, but I don't think it'll be of much use."

He flashed the Aldis obliquely skywards, and Morsed a message to the effect that everything was O.K.

"Now for home!" he added. "Good four miles round by the shore, isn't it?"

"Better than risking a short cut inland," said Bobby. "We'll leave the lamp here and fetch it later on. I'll carry Dick on my back."

Lifting the patient on his brother's back was no easy task. It was decidedly painful as far as Dick was concerned, but the lad kept a stiff upper lip.

Fortunately the hard sand afforded good going, but at the end of twenty minutes Bobby was unfeignedly glad to transfer his burden to Jack's broad shoulders.

Upon rounding the north-eastern extremity of the island their path was flooded with brilliant moonlight, for hitherto they had been in the deep shadows cast by the beetling cliffs. On their right lay the dense palm groves, the broad leaves waving in the light breeze; on their left the placid waters of the lagoon, backed by the undulating line of creamy foam that marked the ceaseless battle between the sea and the coral reef.

Bobby halted and raised one hand.

"Hark!" he exclaimed.

Above the dull roar of the surf and the gentle hush of the foliage could be distinguished men's voices. Harborough and his party were still searching.

"Ahoy!" roared Jack. "That's done it," he added; "they've heard us."

Five minutes later half a dozen of the *Titania's* crew, headed by Harborough and with Pete bringing up the rear, arrived upon the scene. The rest of the crew were roaming over the other side of the island.

"There's one thing," remarked Harborough in a low voice to Villiers, "we shan't have our rest disturbed tomorrow night prowling around for the youngster. I was afraid he had shot himself. What did he shoot, by the by?"

"Two pigs," replied Jack.

"Hurrah, massa!" shouted Pete, who happened to overhear the conversation. "Roast pork to-

morrow!"

"Right-o, Pete!" rejoined Villiers. "You can jolly well help to bring in the meat."

CHAPTER XX

Up and Down

"All ready? Stand clear."

With a deafening clatter the powerful little motor of the *Cormorant* sea-plane fired, and the aluminium propeller revolved until it merged into a dazzling circle of light.

Slowly, but with increasing momentum, the compact air-craft began to skim along the placid surface of the lagoon, leaving a long and ever-widening wake.

It was the *Cormorant's* first ascent since the trial flight at the works. The sea-plane's tanks were but half full in order that the single seater might accommodate a passenger.

Claverhouse, leather-helmeted and goggled, was at the joy-stick. Behind him on a somewhat precarious perch strapped to one of the struts was Trevear, armed with a camera.

Originally it had been Harborough's intention to equip the two sea-planes with a wireless-telephone outfit, but, further consideration ended in the proposal's rejection on the grounds that the practical results would not justify the initial outlay. The application of aerial photography would be of great service in locating the sunken *Fusi Yama*, and the view thus obtained would be of a more or less permanent value. Reporting by wireless telephone would have been satisfactory up to a certain point. There would not have been the delay entailed in the use of photography with its processes of developing and printing, but on the principle that the camera cannot lie Harborough hoped for definite and important results.

There had been keen competition on the part of the *Titania's* crew to "go up", but Harborough reminded the applicants that they were not joy-riding at a couple of guineas a flight, and proceeded to whittle down the aspirants for the part of aerial photographer, until Trevear, the reserve pilot, was alone left in the running.

Every available boat carried by the *Titania* was pressed into service to act in conjunction with the seaplane. Fitted with mark-buoys and sinkers, the boats paddled across the lagoon ready to buoy the wreck if luck enabled the airmen to spot it.

Ascending in wide spirals, the *Cormorant* rose to a height of two thousand feet. At that altitude the *Titania* was dwarfed to the size of a dingy, while the boats looked no bigger than pea-pods. The greater part of the lagoon showed clearly through the water—a pale-green unbroken expanse of sand fifteen to twenty fathoms beneath the surface. Here and there were opaque ill-defined patches that required careful investigation.

For twenty minutes the flight continued, Claverhouse swinging the bus to and fro in a succession of short turns, working methodically from the entrance of the lagoon to the part where it almost joined the island itself, while Trevear, with binoculars glued to his eyes, carefully examined the floor of the broad sheet of tranquil water.

Suddenly the observer ejaculated an exclamation of satisfaction and jogged the pilot on the shoulder.

"Got it!" he yelled, and grasped his camera.

"Good enough for a record," he soliloquised, and, drawing a Verey pistol from a rack, he proceeded to fire a green light.

That was the signal for the boats to close. The motor-boat towing the whaler and the gig approached the spot, the crews keeping a sharp look-out for the signal that was to indicate that they were over their unseen objective.

It was a long task. With feelings of exasperation, Trevear watched the boats pass wide of the mark over and over again, only to be recalled and started on a fresh course by means of pre-arranged signals from the Verey pistol.

"There must be a current running round that point," thought Trevear. "Every time they appear to be swept away. Ah! That's better; they've discovered the same thing."

He raised a pistol and waited while the boats approached the dark, ill-defined patch on the

edge of which lay something of fairly-symmetrical shape.

"Good enough!" exclaimed the observer, letting fly with three red lights. "Bring her down, Alec!" he shouted.

Claverhouse did so, vol-planing seawards in a steep, exhilarating dive that proved that the master-hand of the ex-R.A.F. bomber had not lost its cunning. Striking the surface with a double bump, the *Cormorant* taxied in the direction of the boats, from which the mark-buoys had already been dropped. They were now bobbing sedately in an exaggerated curve over the site of the wreck.

"Fifteen fathoms!" announced Harborough, as the sea-plane was taken in tow. "We're in luck, if that is the wreck. I bargained for twenty to twenty-five."

"She's in a big patch of weeds," said Trevear, "and lying well over on her bilge."

"Weeds generally mean mud," remarked Harborough. "Awkward stuff to work in. However, we're lucky to locate the wreck so quickly. By the old-fashioned method of creeping and grappling we might have taken weeks. Stand easy. We'll start diving-operations this afternoon."

Accordingly, when the heat of the day showed signs of abating, the diving-party proceeded to the spot. Swaine, clad in his diving-dress, sat in the stern sheets nursing his copper helmet. As the outfit was self-contained there was no necessity for the cumbersome air-pump and pipe. A wire-rope ladder and a shot-line and distance-rope comprised all the gear necessary for lowering from the boat.

During the week that had elapsed since Dick's adventure, Jack Villiers had been undergoing a diving-course. Already he had made good progress under the experienced Swaine's supervision, and although he had not yet reached a depth of fifteen fathoms he was ready, if need were, to descend to his comrade's assistance should anything go wrong.

"You'll have to watch the current," observed Harborough, as the boat swung to her anchor. "Better to work against it than with it on a job like this."

"Right-o, sir!" replied Swaine, as his assistant prepared to complete the hermetically-sealing process by placing the copper helmet on his head and screwing down the front and side plates.

Encumbered with leaden-soled shoes, slabs of the same metal fixed to his chest and back, and wearing his chemically-created air-reservoir and a diver's electric lamp, Swaine was helped over the gunwale. Awkwardly he descended the rope-ladder, till the water reached the level of his shoulders. Then, raising his bare hand in a gesture of farewell, he disappeared beneath the surface, leaving a trail of air-bubbles to mark his descent.

Swaine had declined to take the portable telephone with him on the preliminary descent, objecting on the grounds that it would hamper his movements. On the other hand, Harborough had strictly enjoined him not to attempt to enter the hull of the wreck, but to content himself with an examination of the hull and report upon its position and condition.

The moment the diver reached the bed of the lagoon all communication with him was cut off. All he could do was to advance as near as possible in a straight line, paying out his distance-rope as he plodded through the ooze until he reached the wreck.

The watchers in the boats could note the trail of air-bubbles as Swaine walked away from the shot-rope. The bubbles were the only indications of his presence and of the fact that the life-sustaining apparatus was still working.

"He's progressing against the current," observed Bobby Beverley.

"Perhaps it's only a surface-current," rejoined Harborough. "If so, so much the better. Sharks? No, I don't fancy they'll dare attack a diver. They'd be more frightened than the man. An octopus is another proposition. They are apt to be found in weed; but they don't grow to any very large size in these parts."

"If that's the wreck, sir," said Claverhouse, who, having seen the *Cormorant* safely moored, had rejoined the boats, "it would be better to get to her from the land, I think. She's within a hundred yards of the beach, and, although the water deepens pretty quickly, a diver ought to make his way up and down with very little trouble."

"Good scheme, Claverhouse," replied Harborough approvingly. "We might even rig up a semi-permanent guide-rope, and later on an endless line for getting the stuff ashore."

"He's returning, sir," announced Villiers, pointing to the line of bubbles.

"That's splendid," exclaimed Harborough.

He could hardly conceal his impatience, for there were moments when the generally-inscrutable features of the baronet did betray the state of his mind, and this was one of them.

The quivering of the rope-ladder under the influence of the current gave place to a series of violent jerks. Swaine was ascending.

"Trim the boat!" ordered Harborough, as the crew leant over the gunwale from which the rope-ladder hung.

It was a necessary caution, for in their eagerness to witness the return of their comrade the men had put the gunwale dangerously low down.

At length the great copper helmet, showing green in the clear water, came into view. Another twenty rungs and it appeared above the surface.

Waist deep, Swaine waited until the glass observation-discs in his helmet were unscrewed. He was breathing heavily, and his red woollen cap was damp with perspiration.

"Well?" inquired Harborough. "Found it?"

Swaine shook his head.

"Found something," he replied, "but not the *Fusi Yama*."

His gaze fell upon Claverhouse.

"Say, Alec, dear old thing," he continued. "Weren't you the guy who bombed a P-boat, in mistake for a Fritz submarine?"

"Yes," admitted Claverhouse; "but I missed her, thank Heaven."

"Next time you go up you'd better take me to spot for you," resumed Swaine. "I guess I might be able to distinguish between the *Fusi Yama* and a wooden two-decker. Fact, sir," he declared, replying to Harborough's unspoken question. "It's the wreck of a frigate or something of the sort. Couple of centuries old, I should imagine. She's lying hard over on her starboard side. Amidships she's practically broken in two. Her foremast is still standing, but the main- and mizen-masts are half buried in the mud; water-logged and held down by the weight of the metal-work, I suppose."

"Didn't go on board?" asked Beverley.

"Not much," replied Swaine emphatically. "Looked too jolly rotten to my liking. I'd tackle it if I had a chum down with me."

"However," broke in Harborough briskly, "since we are looking for the *Fusi Yama*, investigations on the wooden vessel can wait. When will you feel equal to another ascent, Claverhouse: to-morrow morning?"

Alec looked up and noted the position of the sun. Oblique rays were of little use, but for the next hour operations might be possible.

"I'll go up at once, sir," he replied.

CHAPTER XXI

A Good Night's Work

The *Cormorant* sea-plane flew for the best part of an hour, covering practically every square yard of the lagoon, and it was not until the sandy bottom began to grow dim in the increasingly-slanting rays of the sun that Claverhouse and Trevear came down.

"Not a sign, sir," replied Trevear. "We could see the wreck of the frigate plainly enough. There are a couple of foul patches, one a little to the south-west of the entrance to the lagoon, and another off the south-eastern point of the island. The *Fusi Yama* might be lying on the weeds on one of them."

"I don't think so," replied Harborough. "In his yarn Williams mentioned that the German cruiser towed her prize into the lagoon and ported helm when she got inside. So I take it that the object of our search lies northward of a line drawn between the entrance and our shore-station."

"We'll tackle it again to-morrow morning," said Claverhouse. "A little after eleven o'clock is the best time."

"Very good," agreed Harborough. "We'll rig awnings on the boats, and that will give us a chance during the heat of the day."

Dick Beverley was tremendously excited over the news of the discovery of the frigate. It appealed to him almost as much as if the *Fusi Yama* had been located.

"Think my ankle will be well enough for me to go afloat, Bob?" he asked that evening, just as Bobby was "turning in".

"That's for you to say," replied his brother. "It's your ankle, not mine."

"I felt fit to get about yesterday," declared Dick, "only the skipper wouldn't let me get out of my bunk. Do you think Swaine will let me have a diving-dress and go down? It must be frightfully exciting."

"You'd better ask him," replied Bobby diplomatically.

"What was she like?" asked Dick. "The frigate, I mean."

"Smothered in seaweed, and as rotten as a ripe pear."

"And yet Trevear saw her lying on the mud and weed," said Dick thoughtfully. "I suppose the two vessels weren't lying close together?"

"By Jove, Dick!" exclaimed his brother. "That looks like business. Well, good-night. I'll speak to Harbourough to-morrow, and see if he'll let you go in one of the boats."

Bobby altered his plans. Instead of "turning in"—he had been sleeping on board the *Titania* since his brother's accident—he went on deck and dropped into the skiff dinghy, which was lying at the lower boom. Then, taking to the oars, he rowed silently towards the shore.

It was a calm, moonless night. Overhead the stars blazed like points of fire, their reflections scintillating on the smooth surface of the lagoon.

He landed on the coral beach, dug the fluke of the boat's anchor firmly into the ground, and made his way toward the encampment. A hurricane-lamp was still burning in the tent shared by Claverhouse, Trevear, and Swaine.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the former in some surprise. "What brings you ashore this time o' night?"

"Shop, old bird," replied Bobby.

"Let rip, then," rejoined Alec, in mock tones of resignation. "Thought, perhaps, you came to borrow my safety-razor."

"You two fellows both saw the wreck, I suppose," said Beverley, addressing the airmen. "What shape did it appear like?"

"Where's a pencil?" inquired Trevear, fumbling in the breast-pocket of his white drill tunic. "Right-o. Paper's scarce in this part of the world, so I'll sketch it on the table. There you are."

"Yes; that's like it," agreed Alec.

"You've drawn the plan of a boat," continued Bobby. "Swaine swears she's lying on her beam ends."

"So she is," declared the diving-expert.

"You didn't go round her, did you?" asked Beverley.

"Not much use," he answered. "I could see she wasn't the *Fusi Yama*, and there was a pretty stiff current setting round the bows and stern. I was glad to use her as a sort of breakwater."

"Pity you hadn't carried on round," resumed Bobby; "lying on her beam ends with a broken back, she wouldn't present such a profile as Trevear has drawn. I believe—and Dick put me on to the wheeze—that the *Fusi Yama* is lying fairly close alongside and nearer inshore."

"By Jove, Beverley!" exclaimed the three men in chorus.

"Hope you're right," added Trevear, anxious to restore his lost prestige as an aerial observer.

"Game to have another shot at it to-night?" inquired Swaine, beginning to pull on his rubber boots.

"Surely you're not going to dive again to-night?" asked Claverhouse.

"If it comes to that," said Swaine, "it makes very little difference whether it's night or day at that depth and in muddy water. But what I propose doing is putting off in a boat and taking soundings. Is there a lead-line in the dinghy, old thing?"

"What are you fellows doing kicking up such a deuce of a row at this time of night?" inquired a gruff voice. "Go to bed, and get your beauty sleep, you noisy blighters."

Griffiths, blinking in the light, had shoved his head and shoulders through the tent-flap.

"Just the man we want, soldier!" exclaimed Beverley. "A little practice at rowing a dinghy, you know."

"Not in these trousers," protested the ex-Engineer officer, displaying a leg clad in pyjamas of variegated hues. "What's the move? Are you fellows trying to camouflage a nocturnal bridge-party?"

"At him, lads!" exclaimed Swaine, and the four hurled themselves upon the interloper. In spite of his desperate resistance Griffiths was dragged into the tent, and while Beverley sat on his chest the others rammed a pair of rubber boots on his feet and a sou'-wester on his head.

"Kamerad!" exclaimed Griffiths. "Chuck it! I'll fall in with your rotten scheme, whatever it is."

By this time the commotion had aroused the remainder of the shore-party, and to them the nature of the proposed expedition was explained.

"Right-o!" said Vivian. "We'll launch the cutter and have a moonlight trip, only there isn't any moon."

Eleven men put off from the beach, four in the skiff-dinghy, the rest in the cutter. Expectations ran high, and everyone was in good spirits.

"Not so much noise there," cautioned Beverley, "or you'll wake the Old Man."

"We'll wake him right enough, if we find the ship," rejoined Swaine. "Port helm a bit, Bobby; I can see the mark-buoys."

The first cast of the lead gave fifteen and a half fathoms. Working shorewards, they found, contrary to their expectations, that the lagoon grew deeper, the soundings increasing to seventeen. Then, without warning, the depth decreased to eight.

"Lower a small grapnel," suggested Swaine. "Bend a stout line to it, and we may drag up something."

This they did, and very soon the barbed point of the grapnel engaged.

"Something pretty tough," declared Bobby, as the transom of the dinghy was drawn almost level with the water under the efforts of her crew of four, "We've lost that grapnel."

"In a good cause," added Claverhouse.

"We'll get the cutter to bear a hand at hauling it up," continued Bobby.

For some minutes it seemed as if the united strength of eleven strong men was of no avail. The cutter, in spite of her relatively greater buoyancy, was well down aft under the terrific strain.

"Belay and go for'ard," ordered Beverley.

The eleven men were crowded uncomfortably in the fore part of the cutter when suddenly the strain on the grapnel relaxed. The boats' bows dipped. Volumes of water poured in over her bows and under she went, leaving her crew struggling to clear each other.

Almost before the men in the dinghy could grasp the situation properly, there was a terrific swirl in the water and a large greenish-white object shot up to the surface.

It was a ship's boat, green with weed. Its copper air-tanks still retained their buoyancy, and the additional strain imparted by the grapnel had wrenched the boat from the lashings that secured it to the chocks. Fortunately, in its violent ascent to the surface the boat missed the evicted crew of the cutter.

The water was warm and there were no sharks about, or if there were the unusual splashing had scared them off. The cutter, being provided with air-compartments, floated with her gunwale a couple of inches above the surface, so that with the aid of a brace of buckets and a baler the water was soon thrown out and the men regained their craft.

This done the dinghy and the cutter started in pursuit of the unknown boat, which, in the grip of the current, was drifting towards the entrance to the lagoon.

Holding on to the "horse" of the recovered boat, Beverley scraped the slimy deposit of weed from a portion of the transom. Underneath, in faded letters that were still legible, was painted the name *Fusi Yama*.

"Good enough!" declared Bobby triumphantly. "Let her go. I don't think she'll drift out of the lagoon. If she does, it is of little consequence. Now, you blighters, pull for the *Titania*."

The rest of the proceedings savoured of a "glorious rag", for on making fast alongside the yacht the crews began shouting, firing Verey lights, beating suspended brass crutches, banging tin

balers with stretchers, and raising pandemonium generally.

In the midst of the hubbub Harborough and Villiers came on deck, just as Swaine, forestalling his comrades, was sounding a terrific tocsin on the *Titania's* bell.

"What the——" began Harborough.

"We've come off to splice the main-brace, sir," shouted Beverley.

"Have you?" rejoined the baronet. "For what reason?"

The answer, issuing simultaneously from a dozen lusty throats, was unanimous and emphatic:

"We've found the *Fusi Yama!*"

CHAPTER XXII

Von Giespert hears News

"Gott in Himmel!" exclaimed Kaspar von Giespert. "Don't say that you've had no luck."

"Ach, Herr Kapitan," replied Strauss, in the tone of a man repeating a venerable formula, "no luck at all."

For fifteen evenings almost the same exchange of words had taken place. For fifteen days, without respite, even when the sun was directly overhead, the crew of the *Zug* had laboured, at first with a remarkable display of energy, in their efforts to locate the wreck of the *Fusi Yama* in the lagoon of Ni Telang. Almost every square yard of the enclosed sheet of water had been swept by means of drags, grapnels, and bighted ropes. Divers had gone down whenever any obstruction had given rise to the hope that the object of the quest had been found, only to ascend with the disconcerting report that the grapnel had fouled a lump of coral rock.

Von Giespert took very little active part in the operations. He was content to leave the "donkey work" to Strauss, and spent most of the day living in a hammock-chair under double awnings.

He had counted upon finding the wreck with the minimum of trouble. As the days passed and Harborough's time-limit grew nearer, von Giespert began to feel anxious, and anxiety soon began to give place to feelings of desperation.

Up to a certain point the rough chart, which Harborough had purposely allowed his rivals to filch, had proved accurate. To a certain extent it would have served equally well for Ni Telang or Nua Leha, for in either case there was a strong geographical resemblance between the two lagoons, their entrances, and the islands themselves, even to the triple peaks. The latitude and longitude of the former island as stated on the chart agreed to a second with the results of von Giespert's readings of the sextant and chronometer. The only flaw—a very important one—was the fact that the wreck obstinately refused to allow itself to be found.

Von Giespert often wondered what the "schweinhund Englisher" was doing. Self-complacently he pictured his rival going south and putting into Brisbane or some other Australian port to kill time until, according to the mutual agreement, Harborough would return and claim the right to search the lagoon of Ni Telang. It was only in the earlier stages of the operations that the German was self-satisfied. He firmly believed that by the time the *Titania* put in an appearance the gold would be safe in the strong-room of the *Zug*. Now he was not feeling so optimistic about it. On the contrary, he was the victim of jumpiness, which did not improve his temper.

The men, too, were showing signs of unrest. Strauss was a hard taskmaster. He drove but he could not lead; his education as a ruler of men missed one important fact: to get men to work properly it is essential that they should be well fed. On board the *Zug* the provisioning arrangements were far from good. Had von Giespert given one tenth of the time he had lavished upon the mechanical and scientific appliances on board the *Zug* to the personal comfort of the crew, much of the trouble that subsequently occurred might have been avoided.

"What report have you to make?" asked von Giespert, in continuance of his previous question.

"We worked northward of a line east of point G for a distance of seven hundred metres," replied Strauss. "That practically covers the whole of the lagoon where there is a depth of five metres or more."

"Then the lagoon has been twice examined?"

"Twice—carefully," said Strauss with conviction. "Schrang made three descents; Woeber, two.

In every case it was rock."

"But the wreck must be somewhere here," exclaimed von Giespert petulantly, embracing the greater part of the lagoon with a swirl of his jewelled fingers. "The men must have been careless. To-morrow let them start it again."

It was an easy thing to say, but even Strauss foresaw difficulties in carrying out the order.

"There is another matter, Herr Kapitan," he said. "We are getting short of water. The only spring we have found on the island has failed. It was but a small one. I put two hands on the task of sinking a well, but they found no water at four metres. The conden—"

"Yes, I know all about the condensers," interrupted von Giespert irritably, and since it was his fault that the work of repairing them had not been undertaken at Batavia—the last port they touched where work of that kind could be performed—his subordinate's reference to the faulty apparatus was unwelcome.

"I would suggest," continued Strauss, finding boldness in the fact that he, too, was experiencing inconvenience from the shortage of drinking-water, "that four of the hands take the whaler and run across to the island where we lay when the English vessel discovered us. There is water in abundance. We could get three small tanks into the boat, and the men could fill them by means of barricoes."

"Very well," agreed von Giespert. "Pick four men who can best be spared. How is the glass?"

"Steady, Herr Kapitan."

"I suppose there is a possibility of the numskulls missing the island entirely? If so, we shall lose a valuable boat."

"I can give them the compass course. It is usually a favourable wind both ways," said Strauss reassuringly. "All being well, they ought to be back in a couple of days."

"Send them," rejoined von Giespert curtly; then in an undertone he added: "It was a happy thought when I laid in that stock of Pilsener at Batavia, Herr Strauss. Shall we split a bottle now?"

At daybreak the whaler set off on its voyage to Nua Leha. Barely were the boat's sails out of sight when one of the Huns who had been employed ashore came off with the news that he had discovered an ample supply of water.

Von Giespert showed no signs of thankfulness at the intelligence. Instead, he cursed the man for not finding the spring earlier, and upbraided Strauss for sending away the whaler on an unnecessary errand.

For the greater part of the day the sweeping-operations were resumed, the men working sullenly and taking advantage of every opportunity to skulk. About three in the afternoon one of the grapnels fouled something, and a diver descended to examine and report upon the nature of the obstruction.

He came to the surface with the information that the grapnel had caught in the fluke of a large stockless anchor to which was shackled a heavy studded chain. He had traced the latter for a distance of ten metres, at which point it had sunk deeply into the ooze.

This was the one promising incident of the fortnight's operations. Von Giespert, shaking off his lethargy, showed tremendous interest in the find.

"They would, of course, have anchored the prize before they scuttled her, Strauss," he observed, "or she might have drifted into very shoal water. Tell that fool of a diver to go down again. What's the use of half doing a job? If he takes a crowbar with him he can trace the whole length of the cable, even if it is under mud."

While the diver was engaged upon his task von Giespert departed from his usual routine by getting out of his hammock-chair and going to the rail, from whence he could watch the operations.

When, after an interval of forty minutes, the man reappeared, von Giespert hailed a boat to fetch him off. Into this he jumped, not waiting until it was alongside the accommodation-ladder, and ordered the rowers to pull their hardest.

The report was a most disappointing one. The diver had succeeded in finding the free end of the cable. There were only four links buried in the mud. In order to confirm his statement he had bent a rope to the last link and had brought the line up with him.

That evening von Giespert was a prey to alternate hopes and fears. He upbraided Strauss when the latter suggested that the anchor might have belonged to a vessel that had put into the lagoon and had either parted or had been compelled to slip her cable; and he raved incoherently when Strauss hinted that the British or the Australian Government might have already recovered the

treasure and blown up the wreck.

Ten hours after the time of her expected arrival the whaler returned from Nua Leha, deeply laden with water obtained at considerable risk and by dint of hard work.

"We have found the English ship, *Titania*, Herr Kapitan," reported the man in charge of the watering-party.

"Where?" demanded von Giespert.

"At the island where we were sent to get water, Herr Kapitan."

"What is she doing there?" demanded von Giespert.

"She was lying at anchor in the lagoon, Herr Kapitan. All her boats were out, and they had buoys placed round a certain spot."

Von Giespert uttered a round oath.

"Did they see you?" he asked.

"No, Herr Kapitan," replied the man. "We thought it best to be prudent, so directly we sighted the vessel we rowed away and landed on the opposite side of the island. There was water there —"

"Never mind about the water," interrupted the owner of the *Zug*. "Is that all you saw?"

"We made our way round the island and climbed a hill overlooking the lagoon. Max had his glasses with him. They were diving for something. On the beach were tents and huts, and a pile of boxes. Early next morning we went there again, but the Englishmen were ashore playing cricket. So we did not stop, but filled up with water and set sail. The breeze fell light on our way back——"

Von Giespert asked several more questions, then curtly dismissed the man.

"Come to my cabin, Strauss," he said abruptly.

Behind locked doors the two Huns discussed the disconcerting news.

"Huts, tents, and diving in the lagoon," quoted von Giespert. "It's quite certain that Harborough is not killing time there. He's tricked us—tricked us, Strauss."

"It looks like it, Herr Kapitan," remarked his second in command. "He must have known when he lured us here."

For once von Giespert accepted his subordinate's suggestion without either flatly contradicting or scoffing at him.

"That cursed Englishman has been grossly deceiving me," he exclaimed. "It is a breach of good faith, but I'll be quits with him yet."

It was a typically German and consequently one-sided view to take. Not for one moment did von Giespert consider that he had not hesitated to employ underhand methods beside which Harborough's ruse was simple in the extreme. The Hun had commenced operations by stealing what he took to be the genuine charts and plans; he had not hesitated to employ physical force in his attempts to cripple the British expedition, and now, like a boomerang, his villainy had come back upon himself. His mind was filled with feelings of rage at the fact that his rival had scored heavily.

"What do you propose to do, Herr Kapitan?" asked Strauss, after the climax of his employer's temper had been passed.

"Do?" exclaimed von Giespert. "Something desperate. I will stick at nothing. Listen; how will this do?"

His subordinate's eyes gleamed as he listened to the hastily-outlined scheme.

"It is indeed colossal, Herr von Giespert," declared Strauss, his sense of proportion swept away by the magnitude of his employer's powers of imagination. "Carried out in its entirety it will be simply perfection."

"It will be," agreed von Giespert grimly. "We must see to that."

CHAPTER XXIII

Eureka!

"That young brother of yours has his head screwed on the right way, Beverley," observed Harborough in his blunt way, when he heard of the conversation that led to the nocturnal discovery of the treasure-ship. "Jolly good thing we brought him along. We might have been groping for the wreck for weeks."

"I suppose it is the *Fusi Yama*," said Bobby.

"Of course," declared Harborough emphatically. "The boat we fished up proves that." He glanced at his watch. "In another hour and a half we'll put a half-Nelson on the last remaining doubts."

It was just before the breakfast-hour on the morning following the eventful night. The crew of the *Titania*, in spite of a somewhat boisterous demonstration that lasted till the small hours of the morning, were up and ready to resume operations.

For the preliminary diving-work it was arranged that a descent should be made from one of the boats as before; then, the shoal water surrounding the wreck having been surveyed, a guide-rope could be paid out between the *Fusi Yama* and the beach, in accordance with Claverhouse's suggestion.

At seven and a half fathoms Swaine found himself on the poop of the submerged vessel. There was enough natural light at that depth to enable him to dispense with his electric lamp. Objects on her deck, which was fairly well preserved in spite of a lapse of five years, were readily discernable, but over the sides of the ship the water, thick with sand and mud, was as black as ink.

He made his way forward with the utmost caution, lest a rotten patch in the deck should let him down into the cavernous depths below. Everything of a portable nature had vanished from the deck, even the bridge and charthouse, badly damaged by shell-fire from the German cruiser, had gone, save for a few twisted steel girders. The jagged stumps of the masts and the base of the funnel remained, while held in a grotesque inverted position from the davits were three boats similar to the one that the grapnel had brought to the surface. The hatches of the two cargo-holds had been removed, but whether by the prize-crew or by the action of the water Swaine could not determine. As he placed one leaden-shod foot upon the steel coaming and peered into the opaque depths of one of the holds, Swaine felt himself wondering what secrets that abyss held, and whether he would be successful in his efforts to prise the treasure from the keeping of the sea.

Although he had carefully studied the plans of the scuttled ship, and knew the details of her internal arrangements by heart, Swaine made no attempt to go below. For the present his object was to examine and report upon the position and condition of the vessel, and the best means of getting at the valuable contents of the strong-room which, according to the plans, was on the main deck just abaft the after bulkhead of the engine-room.

As he neared the fore part of the ship Swaine felt his progress sensibly retarded. A part of the current that he knew from previous experience set past the two wrecks had been diverted and was sweeping diagonally across the fore-castle of the *Fusi Yama*, with a velocity of from one to two miles an hour. Right aft the current was hardly perceptible as far as the deck was concerned, but over the side the steady ripple of running water, although inaudible, was apparent by the drifting pieces of weed and kelp.

Leaving one end of a rope made fast to a bollard, Swaine came to the surface and made his report. One of the boats then pulled to the beach, paying out the line as it went. By eleven o'clock in the morning a "distance-rope" was in position between the *Fusi Yama* and the shore.

In the afternoon Swaine paid another visit to the wreck, this time entering the water from the beach and following the tautened rope. For half the distance his progress was fairly rapid, judging from the diver's point of view, but towards the latter end of his submarine walk he experienced considerable difficulty from the cross-current, having, in fact, to hold on tightly to prevent himself being swept away.

Close alongside the wreck, which he noticed had already sunk to her bilge-keels in the sand and mud, the current was hardly apparent, being deflected by the flare of the vessel's bows.

Examination by the aid of the portable electric lamp revealed no signs of the hull having been damaged by internal explosion. Evidently the Huns effected the scuttling by opening the sea-cocks.

Clambering on board—a fairly-easy task owing to the buoyancy of the diving-dress, which, notwithstanding leaden weights, was only a few pounds heavier than the water it displaced—Swaine made his way down the main companion-ladder.

'Tween decks a weird sight presented itself. Within the limits of the rays of the lamp he could

see wooden articles of various descriptions pinned up against the ceilings. Other objects, heavier than water, lay about the deck, all covered with a slimy marine growth.

Progressing, he made his way to the strong-room. The massive door was partly open. There were indications that the complicated locks had been blown open by powerful explosives, but a temporary fastening, consisting of a steel bar secured by a large brass padlock, prevented the diver from ascertaining the nature of the contents of the room.

He returned to the shore by the same way, to find his comrades anxiously awaiting him.

"I've found the strong-room," were his first words.

"Empty?" inquired half a dozen voices eagerly.

"Couldn't say," replied Swaine. "I think not, otherwise the Huns wouldn't have troubled to padlock it."

"Let's hope you're right," said Harborough. "They went off in a hurry, I understand, and the gold was stated to have been left on board."

"At any rate, sir, they had time to open the sea-cocks, and not blow her bilges out," continued Swaine.

"Teutonic thoroughness," explained the baronet; "they were in a hurry, with Australian and Jap. cruisers at their heels, but there was time to scuttle her methodically. They evidently hoped to raise her after the war."

"Pity we couldn't," observed Villiers. "It would save a lot of trouble in the long run."

"Unfortunately, that is an experienced Salvage Company's work," rejoined Harborough. "It would mean either filling her with air-cylinders or else building a coffer-dam round her and pumping the water out. We know our capabilities, and we won't begin cutting into other fellow's jobs, so we'll just carry on."

During the next day an electric submarine-lamp was lowered into the hull of the wreck, the current being supplied by a dynamo worked off the shaft of the motor-launch; while electrically-operated drills were sent below ready to commence the task of opening the door of the strong-room.

The work continued in almost perfect weather, the extreme heat of the day being tempered by a soft breeze. Lassitude, one of the drawbacks of the tropics, was unknown, so bracing were the sea-breezes. Even after a day's toil the men felt so full of energy that they indulged in games of cricket, making rough and ready bats from pieces of plank, and balls fashioned of rope-yarn and junk bound with seaming-twine.

"Think I'm up to scratch now, old thing?" inquired Villiers, after half an hour's diving-practice.

"Not much doubt about it," replied Swaine. "You've put in five hours altogether. You can have a shot at the wreck to-morrow."

Jack Villiers had indeed made good progress as a diver. Constitutionally fitted, and possessing a steady nerve, he soon mastered the relatively-simple "gadgets" that made the self-contained diving-dress admittedly superior to that of the older type, in which the diver is hampered by life-line and air-tube. In a case of emergency the diver could blow himself to the surface by liberating a quantity of compressed air from a strong metal cylinder strapped immediately beneath the air-reservoir. The compressed air would then distend the outer fabric of the diving-suit without interfering with the wearer's breathing, with the result that the man would rise to the surface, his leaden sinkers notwithstanding.

Accordingly, upon the next descent to the wreck Swaine did not go alone. Close on his heels followed Villiers, keeping a firm hold on the rope that led from the shore to the hull of the *Fusi Yama*.

With little difficulty the two divers found themselves outside the strong-room door. The space between decks, lighted by the electric submarine-lamp, was shorn of most of its uncanniness by the powerful rays, but a number of fish, attracted by the glare, were swimming to and fro, sometimes butting blindly against the glass fronts of the men's helmets.

Villiers was thankful that none of the fish was of a dangerous variety. They looked hideous enough, magnified by the water. There were some with formidable-looking spines, others resembling skate with ferocious, underhung jaws, some that looked like conger-eels, and one with a razor-backed body, who persisted in rubbing against Villier's bare hands until Jack drew a knife and settled it with the awkward customer. But, he was thankful to observe, sharks, sword-fish, and cuttle-fish were not in evidence.

Both men set to work first to clear away the imprisoned and floating debris. Broken deck-chairs, life-belts with rotten canvas coverings, wooden buckets, and other articles that still retained their buoyancy were dragged to the companion-hatchway and liberated. This done, the

doors were drawn together and lashed, leaving room for the electric-light cable leads to pass through the aperture. By so doing the divers had rendered themselves secure from roaming tigers of the deep.

The steel bar on the door of the strong-room was a formidable affair. Even by the aid of the electric drills, the metal was only cut through to the depth of an inch when Swaine gave the signal to knock off and return to the beach.

One hour and twenty minutes had elapsed, and another forty minutes represented the total period during which a man could remain submerged before his air-supply became impure.

"Slow progress," reported Swaine, on their return. "With luck we ought to cut through that jolly old bar in a couple of hours. How did you like the job, Jack?"

"Not so dusty," replied Villiers guardedly.

"That is an obvious statement," rejoined his fellow-worker. "We certainly weren't working in a dust-laden atmosphere. By Jove, I am hungry! What's going, Pete?"

"Taro and pork-pie, sah," replied the cook, whereupon all the others laughed, for that sort of pie had become part of the daily routine.

"Keen on carrying on, Jack?" inquired Swaine, when, having partaken of a substantial meal, all hands were resting and enjoying a smoke.

"Rather," replied Villiers emphatically. "I'm anxious to see the other side of that strong-room door."

"Come on, then," continued Swaine, knocking out his pipe on the heel of his boot. "Now, then, fall in, the divers' attendants. There's no need to stand there hanging on to the slack. Slap it about."

With increased confidence Villiers plunged into the water, following his chum. At a pre-arranged signal the electric submarine-lamp was switched on and the companion-doors closed.

Alternately holding the electric drill, the two divers resumed their attack upon the steel bar, until Swaine gave the signal to desist. Then pointing to a heavy sledge hammer, he motioned to Villiers to give the *coup de grâce*.

It looked a simple task to break the almost severed bar. The hammer, weighing fourteen pounds in air, seemed ridiculously light, but when Villiers tried to swing it, the result surprised him. He had not calculated the resistance of the water.

At the third attempt Jack laid the hammer down in disgust, then picking up a crow-bar he applied the wedge-shaped end to the bar and bore down with all his weight, planting one leaden-soled boot against the door to give greater leverage.

The steel bar gave. Villiers found himself deposited gently on his back. Agreeably surprised that he hadn't fallen violently, he realized that the resistance of the water that had rendered the hammer-blows almost useless had also let him down softly.

It took him some moments to regain a vertical position. He could see his companion grinning at him through the plate-glass front of his helmet. Then almost the next instant he became aware that he could not keep contact with the floor but was rising through the water. Inadvertently, in his struggles he had opened the release-valve to the compressed-air reservoir, and but for the intervening roof he would have been well on his way to the surface.

It had taken place so quickly that Swaine had no chance to come to the luckless diver's assistance, while most of the compressed air had found its way into Villier's diving-dress. By the time Swaine succeeded in closing the valve Jack was pinned pretty firmly against the ceiling.

Vainly he strove, by pushing against the roof, to force himself down. A mild panic seized him. He struggled so violently that he rasped the skin from the knuckles of his bare hands.

Raising one arm and securing a grip on Villier's gorget, Swaine pulled himself up until the metal of his helmet was in contact with that of his companion's. By this means he could shout and be understood.

"Don't struggle," urged Swaine. "I'll get you out if you don't. Quite simple."

Making his way to the companion-ladder, Swaine opened the double doors, then, by dint of an acrobatic feat that would have been impossible to perform in air, he dragged the buoyant, distended form of his companion to the opening.

Given a final push to speed him on his way, Villiers shot like an arrow to the surface. The sudden change of pressure wellnigh deprived him of his senses, but he was just conscious of floating face uppermost on the surface within a few feet of the motor-boat that supplied the electric current to the interior of the wreck.

Great was Beverley's consternation when he saw one of the divers blown to the surface. Bobby had been having an easy task of standing by attending at intervals to the motor, when the inflated diving-dress, and its unrecognizable occupant, suddenly emerged alongside.

By the aid of a boat-hook Villiers was brought within hand's reach, but the task of getting him on board had yet to be tackled.

Assisted by O'Loghlin, Griffiths, and Bell, Beverley passed a couple of ropes round the distended diving-dress and carefully, yet unceremoniously, parbuckled Jack into safety, although the boat dipped until her waterways were awash.

"All right, Villiers, old thing?" inquired Beverley anxiously, when the first of the glass plates of the helmet was unscrewed.

"Yes—I think so," replied Jack in a voice he hardly recognized as his own. "I'll explain later."

"And Swaine?"

"Quite O.K.," declared Villiers emphatically.

Willing hands divested him of his cumbersome diving-dress, and, a boat having put off from the shore, Jack was transhipped and taken to the camp.

"Nothing to worry about," reported Beverley, in answer to eager inquiries. "Let him alone, and don't worry him with questions. Hallo! here's Swaine." Swaine, having come ashore by the usual way of following the rope, had arrived in shoal water unwelcomed by anyone. Finding that there was no one to assist him, he trudged above high-water mark and sat down, looking a hideously-grotesque figure.

Harborough and two or three others hurried to him.

"Villiers all right?" were his first words.

"Yes," replied Sir Hugh. "What happened?"

"Happened?" repeated Swaine, with a chuckle. "He wrenched open the door, and the result so astonished him that he went up, leaving me to find the gold. It's there, right enough."

CHAPTER XXIV

The Hurricane

"Hanged if I like the look of things," commented Beverley. "The glass has fallen six-tenths in the last two hours, and the sunset looks like a blurr of pea-soup. We're in for something before morning."

It was the evening of Villier's unpleasant experience and the discovery of the *Fusi Yama* gold. Work on the wreck had been suspended for the rest of the day, although Jack pluckily volunteered to make another descent with Swaine, and to begin the actual salvage of the treasure. This proposal Harborough had negatived. He believed in moderation.

"No use putting in one and a half working days in one if it takes two days to get over it," he remarked. "I don't believe in making spurts until I'm on the last lap."

Merridew, who was officer of the watch on shore, agreed with Beverley's observations about the sunset.

"I think we'll have the tents struck," he added. "We can sleep in the store-house. That ought to stick it out. How will your buses get on, Alec?"

"Badly, if we don't do something," replied Claverhouse. "Come along, Trevear, old son; we've a job in front of-us before we go to roost."

"I'll bear a hand," volunteered Bell, and Griffiths, who was rarely separated from his particular chum, also offered his assistance.

Directly the four had gone to prepare the sea-planes for the expected blow, Merridew levelled his telescope on the *Titania*.

"The Old Man knows his job," he remarked to Beverley. "They're furling awnings and veering out additional cable. But I'm hanged if I like the look of things."

Just as the sun sank, leaving behind it an ill-defined blurr of indigo-coloured clouds tinged with vivid copper-coloured streaks, the rain began to fall heavily. Not a breath of wind stirred the broad-leaved branches of the palm trees, although the big drops thudded upon the foliage with a noise like the roll of a hundred drums. In less than thirty seconds the *Titania* was lost to sight in the terrific downpour that obliterated everything beyond a distance of fifty yards from the spot where Beverley stood.

Clad in oilskins and sou'wester, Bobby revelled in the warm rain. He waited until the short twilight had passed into intense darkness, then he rejoined the others in the hut.

"What, not turning in to-night, you fellows?" he inquired. "Perhaps it's as well. Wonder how the old *Titania* will stand it?"

"Wonder how the old hut'll stick it, you mean," said Fontayne. "A sand-bagged dug-out on the side of the hill would be more the mark, I fancy. By Jove, I don't envy Claverhouse and his breakdown gang."

"Any sign of a leak?" asked Bobby, casting anxious glances at the palm-leaf thatch, on the outside of which the rain was falling down with a noise like that made by a number of peas when violently shaken in a tin can.

"All right, so far," replied Fontayne, "but it looks as if the floor will be flooded. Pity we hadn't dug a trench round outside."

"The ground slopes a bit," observed Swaine, "so the water won't lodge. Hallo! I'm not so sure about it. Look here!"

A steady rivulet was finding its way in at the landward side of the hut. All hands hurriedly set to work to dig a runway to divert and keep under control what promised to be a healthy little mountain torrent.

In the midst of this operation Alec and his three companions arrived, drenched to the skin but nevertheless cheerful.

"Don't care if it rains ink," observed Claverhouse blithely. "We've secured the buses and removed the wings. Hope it doesn't blow too hard."

Even as he spoke there came a weird moaning noise from without, followed by a blow that shook the hut to its foundations. It was the preliminary announcement of a tropical hurricane. For full five minutes it lasted, creating a pandemonium of noises as the supple trees bent and groaned under the furious blasts.



D 52

JACK WAS PINNED PRETTY FIRMLY AGAINST THE CEILING

[Illustration: JACK WAS PINNED PRETTY FIRMLY AGAINST THE CEILING]

"Lucky the trees keep off most of the wind," said Bobby, raising his voice to make himself heard above the din. "Suppose we shift some of those heavy cases and pile 'em against the windward side."

All hands, with the exception of the recently-arrived working-party, who were in various stages of deshabille, set to work with a will, until a fairly-solid barricade was constructed on either side of the door up to the level with the eaves.

As suddenly as it had started the wind dropped to a flat calm. The rain, too, was lighter.

"Guess it's all over," remarked Griffiths. "It will be starlight outside."

"No such luck," replied Bobby. "That's only a preliminary canter. While we're about it we may as well rig up a couple of preventer-shrouds to that hurricane-lamp. I didn't like the way it swayed about just now."

The second phase of the storm burst. This time the wind roared. There was no sinister whine in the furious rush of air, but there was no mistaking the strength of the blast. A palm tree,

uprooted, came crashing to earth, its leafed crest brushing against the side of the hut before it came to rest a good fifty feet away. Again and again the side of the hut bulged ominously, while eddying gusts found their way into the building, as if seeking a weak spot in the flimsy but stoutly-woven material.

The men stood silently alert. The noise of the elements crushed all desire to talk. Momentarily they expected to see the hut torn from its foundations and flung, like a discarded toy from the hand of a fractious child, into the storm-swept night.

This outburst lasted a good ten minutes. Then followed a period of calm unaccompanied by rain. The eerie silence that succeeded the deafening roar was almost as awe-inspiring as the hurricane.

"How's the old ship sticking it?" remarked Merridew. "I'll go out and have a look round."

He could see nothing save a line of white as the rollers, forced over the reef by the gale, lashed the beach.

Beyond all was in darkness. Whether the *Titania's* anchors held or whether she had been driven ashore there was no means of telling.

A long-drawn shrill whine warned him that it was high time to beat a retreat. He was not a moment too soon. He regained the hut, but it took the united efforts of four men to close and secure the door.

No one spoke a word, but everyone realized that the third outburst would be the worst, and perhaps the last. It came, accompanied by vivid flashes of lightning and ear-splitting peals of thunder that even made the heavy cases reverberate. Mingled with the loud roar of the wind was that shrill, almost unearthly whine that means mischief.

Suddenly the interior of the hut was brightly illuminated by a flash of lightning. The roof, lifted by a particularly vicious squall, had vanished, leaving a trail of violently eddying leaves and bamboo rafters. Then, while the men were still blinded by the dazzling glare, the wind backed a full four points, struck the roofless hut on its weakest side, and the next moment the building was levelled.

Buried beneath a mat-like mass of thatch, Beverley found himself prostrate on the flooded ground. Someone's rubber-shod foot was beating a tattoo on his face as its wearer endeavoured to extricate himself from an unenviable position.

As Bobby was regaining his feet another brilliant flash gave him a brief but vivid glimpse of his immediate surroundings. His comrades were struggling through the debris, looking much like a litter of healthy puppies forcing their way through a covering of hay. The barricade of boxes had been overthrown, some of the cases lodging against the trunks of the palm trees, nearly fifty feet away.

Many of the trees were bending until the tops nearly touched the ground; others, uprooted, were hurled like straws against those still standing, and formed a gigantic lattice-work. A dozen yards away the kerosene-lamp, with its glass completely shattered, lay blazing fiercely, the heavy downpour of rain tending to spread the flames.

Guided by the blaze, Beverley made his way to the blazing pool of oil. Close by he saw a large box with cryptic markings in red paint. It contained a couple of hundred pounds of high explosives—safe to handle since the stuff had to be detonated by means of a primer, but not proof against the attack of fire. Already the flames were licking the box, and only the fact that the woodwork was damp owing to the torrential rain had prevented a disastrous explosion.

Acting almost mechanically, yet conscious to a certain degree of the risk he ran, Beverley literally ploughed his way through the chaos of bamboo and thatch and seized the rope-handle of the explosive-case. Desperation lent him the strength of a giant. With a mighty heave he shifted the heavy case a full yard to windward of the burning oil; then, walking backwards with his body inclined at an acute angle to the slope of the ground, he dragged the deadly explosive well out of harm's way.

Only when he desisted did he notice that the legs of his oilskin trousers were charred and smouldering still.

Aided by the frequent flashes of lightning and the now dying glare of the kerosene, the rest of the late occupants of the store-house extricated themselves and each other from their awkward and dangerous predicament, and in the blinding rain they made for the shelter of the palm groves, never halting till they had placed a full hundred yards between them and the outpost of trees that held out against the hurricane.

Even now the position of the shore-party was far from enviable. Every man was soaked to the skin; most bore cuts or bruises, while Bell and Merridew were both badly knocked about by one of the packing-cases as the barricade gave way before the blast.

"Think the *Titania* stood it?" asked Merridew.

There was no reply. Every man had his doubts. Bobby was regretting the fact that he had refused to let Dick come ashore the previous afternoon.

For another hour the men sheltered in the palm grove. Here it was comparatively calm, although the trunks were trembling with the effect of the gale upon their verdant tops. To attempt to leave their place of refuge and go down to the beach meant striving to attain the impossible. No one could face the full force of the blast in the open.

At half-past two in the morning the wind died away as suddenly as it had started; the stars shone in an unclouded sky, and only the debris scattered in the glades and the unusually loud roar of the surf remained.

"It's all over," declared Beverley. "Let's make for the beach."

They arrived to find that the breakers were already being subdued by the reef, on which the mountainous rollers were hurling themselves in sullen fury. Pitching heavily as she rode with open hawse to the waves was the *Titania*, standing out clearly against the starlit sky.

"I don't think she's dragged a yard," declared Bobby. "Jolly lucky——"

"What's that?" interrupted Griffiths, pointing to something rolling in the undertow of the surface at a distance of a hundred yards from the beach.

The men rushed to the spot to find that the *Titania's* cutter had been torn from the davits and had been dashed ashore.

Watching his opportunity, Claverhouse waded waist-deep into the water and secured the painter. All hands succeeded in hauling the boat beyond the rush of the waves, but the mischief was already done. Her keel, kelson, and garboards smashed, the boat was beyond repair.

"I'm off to have a look at the sea-planes," decided Alec. "Nothing like keeping on the move when you're soaked to the buff. Come along, Trevear, old son."

The airmen departed. The others, unable to communicate with the ship, thought that activity was the best antidote to saturated clothing, and proceeded to set things in order.

It was a big task. Their first objects of attention were the three boats that were kept ashore at night. Fortunately they had been hauled up well above high-water mark and secured by their painters to some stout trees, while a line and grapnel had been laid out from the stern of each. Even then it had been touch and go. Only the heavy downpour preceding the hurricane had prevented the boats from being hurled away, the weight of the water in the bilges being barely sufficient to counterbalance the lifting-force of the wind.

They found the three boats nearly filled to the thwarts with water, sand, and lumps of coral.

Having pulled out the plugs and allowed the water to drain from the boats, the men proceeded to the site of the store-house, and set to work to collect the scattered cases.

"Look!" exclaimed Swaine, pointing to the box of explosives. "We've had a narrow squeak, lads. The wood's charred."

"So it is," agreed Merridew. "How? It's yards from the blaze caused by the lamp. Lightning, perhaps. Don't you think so, Beverley?"

"P'r'aps," replied Bobby. "Anyone got any dry tobacco? Mine's a wash-out."

CHAPTER XXV

"Konked Out"

Daybreak found the members of the expedition tired, hungry, and undaunted. The gale had wrought havoc with their resources. In less than a minute the work of days had been scattered to the winds, and until the remains could be collected and examined not even a rough idea of the state of their provisions and equipment could be obtained.

Long before the waters of the lagoon returned to their usual state of tranquillity, Harborough, Villiers, and Dick Beverley came ashore. They, too, bore traces of the night's ordeal, for every man on board had momentarily expected the *Titania* to part her cables and come up on the beach.

"It might have been worse," remarked Harborough philosophically, as he surveyed the devastated site of the store-house. "We've had a very sticky time. The motor-boat's gone—torn clean away from her chocks."

"And the cutter," added Beverley. "The remains are lying just beyond that ledge."

"How did the sea-planes get on?" inquired Villiers.

"Can't say," replied Bobby. "Alec and young Trevear have gone off to see what's happened."

"There's one thing," remarked Harborough. "We have no further use for them, and it's merely a question of financial loss. We've to be thankful that we came out with comparatively whole skins. Wonder how the other fellows fared?"

"What other fellows?" inquired Villiers.

"Our friends the Huns," explained the baronet. "The *Zug*, with her high freeboard and being fairly light in ballast, must have felt it even more than the *Titania*. Directly we get things a bit ship-shape I'll run across and see if they are all right. Hanged if I like the idea of their being cut off on Ni Telang, even though they didn't act all above board. Well, how about some breakfast, Pete?"

Harborough was not a man to question the workings of Providence, and to moan and grouse because Nature had done her best to wreck his plans. Adversity only spurred him to greater efforts. Like a punching-ball, he rebounded promptly from the effects of what would have been to the toughest prize-fighter a knock-out blow.

Pete, too, rose to the occasion. Although the kitchen had shared the fate of the store-house, and the remains of the provisions took some finding, the hungry men were presently sitting down to a hot and appetising repast in which, greatly to Villiers' relief, cold pork did not figure. But there was a new item on the menu: turtle steak. Pete, wandering along the shore while the others were salvaging the remains of the cutter, had discovered a fine specimen of a turtle, capsized and lying far above high-water mark.

Breakfast had only just started when Claverhouse and his party returned.

"One's gone, sir," he reported, in answer to Harborough's inquiry concerning the sea-planes. "Turned completely over, and the motor's crashed through the fuselage. The other is all right. On our way back we found the motor-boat perched on top of a patch of undergrowth."

"Damaged?"

"Not as far as I could make out," replied Alec. "She is lying with her bows well up, and the after part is full of water."

The meal over, Harborough outlined a plan of action. Until the damage had been made good, as far as their resources permitted, further operations on the wreck were to be suspended. Another store-house, more solidly constructed, and erected on an enclosed clearing farther from the beach, was put in hand. Griffiths and Bell, assisted by Pete, were told off to examine the debris and set aside everything likely to be of value. The two Beverleys, Merridew, Vivian, and Fontayne were to launch the undamaged boats and to extricate the motor-boat from its unaccustomed berth.

"By the by, Claverhouse," said Harborough. "You will be tuning up our remaining *Cormorant*, I presume? If she's absolutely in running-order, I wish you'd make a trip across to Ni Telang and see how the *Zug* stood the gale. Provided she's still afloat, you needn't have any communication with our friend von Giespert. In fact, if you can contrive to escape observation so much the better. I don't want them to know we are anywhere in the vicinity."

"I understand, sir," replied Claverhouse. "If they're down and out, we'll give them a leg up; if they aren't, we'll simply let 'em carry on in their own sweet way."

"Precisely," agreed Harborough.

Alec hurried off to carry out his instructions. It was a task after his own heart, a fairly-long out and home flight, which in his opinion was infinitely preferable to doing "stunts" over the lagoon. Assisted by Trevear, he had the planes reassembled and the engine tuned up in less than an hour and a half. Then, with additional help, the *Cormorant* was launched and given a preliminary flight.

"Good enough, Trevear, old thing!" shouted Alec. "Sorry you aren't in this stunt. Cheerio!"

The propeller began to revolve; the sea-plane taxied through the water, turned head on to the light breeze, and "took off" in faultless style.

Claverhouse "turned her nose at it", and rose steadily to a height of two thousand feet. Then, following a compass course and allowing for the slight side-drift, he held on for twenty minutes, at the end of which time he could discern the triple peaks of Ni Telang.

The time of day was favourable for a reconnaissance without running much risk of being spotted, for the sun was now almost overhead and blazing down fiercely. Provided he kept at a sufficient height and slowed down his engine until it "revved" just sufficient to give the sea-plane enough lift to counteract the force of gravity, the trick was easy.

Passing over the lagoon at an immense height, Alec got his glasses to bear upon the scene beneath. The *Zug* lay, apparently undamaged, at the spot where she had dropped anchor at the conclusion of the race to the the wrong island. Two or three boats lay alongside, but there were no signs of activity.

"Looks as if they've packed up ready to go home," soliloquized Claverhouse. "Wonder if they've realized that they've been done in the eye?"

The answer to that question was, in Parliamentary language, "in the affirmative", but Alec did not know that. Von Giespert was on the eve of his desperate venture. He had sworn to gain possession of the gold from the *Fusi Yama* at all costs. If he failed, then he would make doubly certain that Harborough would never get the precious metal to England.

Harborough's generous action in sending Claverhouse to ascertain that the *Zug* was safe or otherwise was unnecessary from a life-saving standpoint. The path of the hurricane had missed Ni Telang altogether, the outer edge of the comparatively narrow, curved track passing not nearer than twenty miles of the *Zug's* anchorage.

Having completed his observations, Claverhouse turned, and, making a long vol-plane, was well out of hearing-distance when he "opened out".

As he did so his trained ear detected an unaccustomed sound. The rythmic roar of the motor was giving place to a decidedly jerky splutter. Greatly retarding the spark, he attempted to coax the engine to pick up; juggling with the throttle produced no satisfactory result. The "revs" grew slower and more erratic, until Alec realized that there was nothing for it but to come down.

The floats struck the water with considerable force. The struts whipped and groaned, but withstood the severe strain. The *Cormorant* had alighted safely, but was beginning to drift steadily before the breeze.

"At this rate she'll put me ashore at Ni Telang," thought Alec, as he took off his gloves, pushed back his goggles, and prepared for a determined attempt to trace the fault.

He located it quickly enough, but the knowledge disconcerted him. The magneto had shorted. Possibly the damage had been caused during the gale, but, by one of those extraordinary pranks that magnetos will play, it had functioned perfectly for several hours before "going West".

Claverhouse clambered down to one of the floats and lit a cigarette.

"There's one blessing," he observed to the empty expanse of sea: "Ni Telang in 1920 isn't Ostend in 1917. But I'll have to pitch a yarn to von Giespert, or he'll smell a rat. Wonder what'll happen, though, if I miss the island altogether?"

At the end of two hours drift he was able to reassure himself on that score. Unless there were a decided shift of wind the *Cormorant* would hit Ni Telang or the reef surrounding it. He did not fancy the latter locality. Even viewed from a great height the surf did not appear inviting.

"If I could only steer the old bus, I'd make the entrance to the lagoon," he decided.

Juggling with the ailerons seemed a likely solution, but the only result was to cause the machine to dip and have a tendency to turn broadside on. The hydro rudder, by which the *Cormorant* could be turned when taxi-ing on the surface, was inadequate while drifting at slow speed.

"The old bus is done for in any case," he soliloquized, and, armed with a knife, wire-cutters, and pliers he made his way out on one of the planes and removed the starboard aileron. This he lashed to a dismantled strut, and on taking the improvised paddle to the after float he found that he could keep the sea-plane fairly under control with the clumsy steering-oar.

It was not until the derelict was actually within the lagoon that one of the *Zug's* crew spotted the unexpected arrival. A boat was manned and rowed off to the *Cormorant*.

"I suppose I ought to sink the old bus," thought Alec. "If I did, it would look fishy. After all, I don't suppose they'll be able to make use of her."

"Where do you hail from?" inquired the coxswain of the boat. He spoke in English, knowing from grim experience of recent history that English is the master-language of the Pacific, and that German is at a discount.

Claverhouse, with a comprehensive sweep of his arm, indicated a good 180 degrees of the horizon.

The German grunted.

"Get on board," he said gruffly.

Nothing more was said until the boat ran alongside the *Zug's* accommodation-ladder. There were plenty of men looking over the bulwarks, but they certainly did not appear to be overburdened with work.

Von Giespert's greeting of his uninvited guest left no doubt in Alec's mind about his idea of bluff.

"How's Harborough getting on at Nua Leha?" asked the German bluntly.

"Quite well, when I last saw him," replied Claverhouse. "As a matter of fact, he sent me to see how you were getting on."

"Spying, eh?"

"Not at all," corrected Alec. "He thought your vessel might have been driven ashore in the hurricane last night, and was rather anxious concerning your safety."

"He'll have quite enough to do to think about his own safety before I've done with him," rejoined von Giespert insolently. "Meanwhile, you'll consider yourself a prisoner, Mr. Whatever your name is. If you give trouble, then we'll pitch you to the sharks."

"Right-o," replied Alec. "You might do me one favour, though."

"What's that?" inquired von Giespert.

"Let Harborough know I'm safe."

The Hun laughed boisterously. He felt that as far as his prisoner was concerned he could afford to ride the high horse.

"If Harborough is anxious, he can come here for you," he replied. "I'll be more than ready for him."



D 52

CLAVERHOUSE STEERS THE SEAPLANE INTO THE LAGOON

[Illustration: CLAVERHOUSE STEERS THE SEAPLANE INTO THE LAGOON]

CHAPTER XXVI

Harborough's Ruse

It was not until sunset that Villiers was forced to admit the probability that misfortune had overtaken Alec Claverhouse. The majority of the other fellows had already taken pessimistic views upon the subject of the airman's failure to return. Even Harborough, although he said little, was far from hopeful. He realized that the responsibility of the flight rested upon him, and he reproached himself for sending Alec on the trip, when, with very little trouble, the *Titania* might have proceeded to investigate the state of the rival expedition.

"Alec knows his job thoroughly," declared Trevear; "if he's been forced to come down the old bus will float."

"Unfortunately, Nua Leha's dead to windward," remarked Merridew.

"And Ni Telang's dead to leeward," added Beverley. "Of course he might have found that things were in a bad way with the *Zug*, and in that case he would have landed to offer assistance."

"It's no use kagging and hanging on to the slack," said Harborough briskly. "We'll take the *Titania* and search for him. Not at once, though. On a night like this it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. If we start an hour before dawn, it will be daylight when we reach the farthest easterly position he's likely to be, after making due allowance for the drift of the sea-plane. Tell off a couple of hands to remain here, Mr. Villiers. The rest will go on board; they may be more than useful."

With this cryptic utterance Harborough led the way to the boats. Fortunately, there were plenty of tinned and preserved provisions on board the *Titania*, and she was practically ready for sea at half an hour's notice. Before midnight the remaining boats were hoisted in, the cable hove short, and the sail covers taken off; while, in case Claverhouse should make for the island during the hours of darkness, the searchlight was run in a vertical direction to serve as an aerial signpost.

All hands with the exception of the look-out then turned in to make up much needed arrears of sleep, for neither ashore nor afloat had they had a wink of sleep during the previous night, and had been working at high pressure during the succeeding day.

At 4 a.m. the duty watch was called, and twenty minutes later the *Titania* passed through the gap in the reef under power alone. Directly she rounded the north-eastern extremity of the reef all plain sail was made and the heavy oil engines shut down. For the present, speed was neither necessary nor desirable.

The first streaks of dawn found the yacht ten miles from Nua Leha, doing about five knots before a steady following breeze. A merchantman entering the danger-zone during the height of the unrestricted U-boat campaign could not have kept a sharper look-out than did the crew of the *Titania* for any sign of the overdue *Cormorant*.

It was noon before the peaks of Ni Telang showed above the blue horizon. Only once had the *Titania* altered her course, and that was to run two miles to the nor'ard to investigate a floating object that turned out to be a large open crate, possibly washed from the deck of a tramp during the hurricane.

"We'll pay friend von Giespert a visit," said Harborough. "Probably he'll wonder what we want, probably he won't. Time will prove."

The *Titania* was from two to three miles from the reef when Swaine, who had betaken himself to the cross-trees and was making good use of his powerful binoculars, hailed the deck.

"There's the sea-plane, sir," he announced. "Close to the beach, about a hundred yards to the right of that dark bluff."

Harborough, closely followed by Villiers and Bobby Beverley, swarmed up the rigging. There was little doubt about it. They could distinguish what looked like the sea-plane, floating head to wind, at about a quarter of a mile from the *Zug's* berth. Even as they looked a wreath of haze drifted down and hid a considerable portion of the island from view.

"Wonder if von Giespert's spotted us?" said Harborough, as the three men regained the deck, leaving Swaine to perform the task of conning the yacht through the passage between the reefs. "They've got the *Cormorant* right enough, unless our eyesight's very much at fault. Let's only hope that Claverhouse is safe."

Villiers went for'ard to see that the anchor was ready for letting go, and the anchor-buoy ready for streaming. He had not been there more than a couple of minutes before Swaine hailed again.

"Haze's cleared," he reported; "but I can't see the sea-plane."

The anchorage was now clearly visible from the deck, and, as the mast-head man had stated, there was not a sign of the *Cormorant*.

"Either she's been spirited away," thought Villiers, "or else we've been victims of an hallucination."

It was a tricky passage into the lagoon, for a fairly heavy ground-swell, hardly perceptible off the island, made the *Titania* evince a tendency to yaw just at the critical moment. Scraping a ledge of coral by a none-too-wide margin, she gained the sheltered lagoon, rounded-to, and dropped anchor.

Before the canvas was lowered and stowed a boat was observed putting off from the *Zug*, but Claverhouse was not one of its occupants. Seated in the stern-sheets in a white drill uniform was von Giespert.

"Good-day, Sir Hugh," hailed the German, when the boat was within twenty yards of the yacht.

"Your visit surprises me. I hope you are aware that the time-limit you imposed is not yet half expired?"

"I am perfectly aware of that, Herr von Giespert," replied Harborough. "We are here on a very different business. I understand that one of my sea-planes is here."

"Sea-planes?" repeated von Giespert, with well simulated astonishment. "I do not understand."

"Let me enlighten you," said Harborough, and proceeded to outline his version of what had taken place.

"You are obviously mistaken," persisted the owner of the *Zug*. "Look where you will there is no seaplane of any description here. Perhaps you are misled by taking that tent for the missing machine. And as regards your aviator, you may accept my assurance that it would be a pleasure to me to be able to restore him to you. Unfortunately, since he is not here, that is impossible."

Harborough's brows contracted.

"I have the right to search the island," he declared bluntly. "Are you prepared to give me permission to search your ship?"

Von Giespert assumed an air of injured dignity. Up to the present he had played his part well, for, the moment the approaching *Titania* had been sighted, he had sent a boat ashore and had quickly scuttled the *Cormorant* by the simple expedient of smashing the floats.

"Your request is an insult, sir," he replied. "As such I can only refuse it. To accede would be throwing away my dignity. Remember, that ship flies the German flag, and England is now at peace with Germany. Virtually, the *Zug* is German territory, and should you persist——"

"You would resist by force of arms, eh?" added Harborough.

Von Giespert hesitated. To admit that would also be acknowledging that he feared the result of the search.

"No, no," he replied; "but I would at once make for the nearest port where there is a German Consular Agent and enter a complaint of the outrage to the German flag."

"Then there is no more to be said," rejoined Harborough, and, ignoring the Hun, he turned and went below.

"We are certainly in a bit of a fix," he admitted, conferring with Villiers and Beverley. "There's something fishy about this business. I'm rather inclined to arm a boat and board the *Zug*, but if Claverhouse isn't on board then we'll let ourselves in for damages. I couldn't swear positively that I saw the sea-plane, neither could you. We saw something which we took to be the *Cormorant*, and, taking it for granted, we allowed an illusion to get the better of us."

Both Villiers and Beverley admitted that they might have been mistaken. The powers of suggestion which had, as they now thought, conjured up the sea-plane, had now destroyed the belief.

"We're wasting time," continued Harborough. "Claverhouse may be drifting farther and farther away every moment. We'll weigh and run a hundred miles to leeward, if necessary. I won't throw away a single chance of getting him back."

He went on deck and gave orders for the cable to be hove in. Under the action of the powerful capstan twenty fathoms came on board easily and rapidly; then came a decided check.

"Foul bottom," declared Villiers, as he leant over the cathead and peered into the clear water. "The fluke's caught in a rock, I'm afraid. We'll try tripping the hook."

Accordingly, the nun-buoy was fished on board, and the slack of the stout hempen rope that led between it and the crown of the anchor was hauled in until the yacht's bows were right over the anchor.

Every available man tailed on to the rope, but even with the aid of a tackle the anchor stubbornly refused to leave the bed of the lagoon.

"And we haven't a diving-dress on board," lamented Swaine.

"I'm not going to borrow one from the *Zug*, in any case," said Harborough resolutely. "Avast heaving and slack away. I'll get power on the ship and see what that will do. Something's bound to go."

Something did. With both engines running at full speed, the yacht forged ahead until the cable snubbed and her bows dipped a good two feet below the water-line. Then with a heavy lurch the *Titania* held on, the fluke of her anchor grinding on the coral bottom.

Getting way off the ship Harborough ordered the cable to be hove-in. This time the links came

in steadily but slowly. There was more than the weight of the anchor at the end of the massive chain.

Suddenly Villiers gave a shout of astonishment.

"At that!" he ordered, and at the same time motioning to the hand at the capstan to stop heaving. "Evidence!" he shouted. "We've fished up the remains of the *Cormorant*."

This time there was no doubt about it. One of the flukes was embedded in the sea-plane's motor, and with it was a large portion of one of the wings, a part of the wreckage of the fuselage, and a float bearing unmistakable signs of being stove in by means of an axe.

"That's conclusive," said Harborough sternly. "Since von Giespert won't listen to reason, I'll have to teach him a lesson. Get that piece of wing aboard for evidence, although I guess he's tumbled to it already. He's been watching us all the time, the blackguardly sweep. We'll bluff him. If that fails, then we'll use force, but only as a last resource. He's asking for it all the time."

Kaspar von Giespert took more than an interested view of the developments of the next hour. He was considerably perturbed when, through a telescope that decorously protruded through a gap in a storm-dodger, he watched the impromptu salvage operations of the scuttled sea-plane.

He took a more cheerful view of life when the *Titania* got under way and proceeded seawards, but at the same time that evolution considerably mystified him. He could not understand why the Englishman should retire so tamely from the argument when he had undisputable evidence to support his case.

Von Giespert was on the point of shaking hands with himself and abusing some of his crew—an indication that he was regaining his normal state of mind—when Strauss announced that the *Titania* had turned sixteen points to starboard and was again making for the island.

"We'll fight her," declared von Giespert vehemently, for he realized that the game was a desperate one. "Serve out the arms, Herr Strauss. Himmel! What would I give now for a submerged torpedo-tube? Would that she piled herself upon the reef. She nearly did it last time."

"Harborough is more cautious this time," observed Strauss. "He's coming in under power."

"He is, curse him," growled the other.

The two Germans watched in silence as the *Titania*, with her exhaust chortling noisily, passed through the narrow gap and starboarded helm, steering for the opposite part of the lagoon to that where the *Zug* lay at anchor. That was another puzzler to the already bewildered von Giespert.

Presently the yacht reversed engines and lost way broadside on to and at about a mile from her rival. Then, to the consternation of the crew of the *Zug*, a large gun, of a calibre certainly not less than 4.7 inches, was ominously visible betwixt fore- and main-masts. Simultaneously, and without any preparatory signal, a hoist of the letters VOX—"I am going to semaphore to you"—fluttered from the *Titania's* main truck.

Slowly, reluctantly, the answering pennant was displayed from the *Zug*.

"I thought you informed me that yonder yacht was unarmed," exclaimed von Giespert, turning furiously upon his henchman, Strauss.

"She was when we left Southampton, Herr Kapitan," replied Strauss. "That I can swear to, because we had her under observation all the time. Of course, she might have——"

"They're semaphoring," interrupted von Giespert. He himself could not follow the quick movements of the red and yellow hand-flags, but most of the *Zug's* crew could. More than that, they could read the peremptory message although it was sent in English.

"Hand over my airman, Claverhouse, instantly," it read, "or I will blow your bridge and charthouse to blazes."

Von Giespert chose the first alternative.

Three quarters of an hour later the *Titania*, with Alec Claverhouse once more on board, was bowling along at a steady nine knots for Nua Leha.

Then it was that Harborough, with a playful movement of one hand, toppled the formidable 4.7 inch gun through the hatch into the fore-hold. The mounting followed with a distinctly "tinny" sound. The feat was an easy one, since the "gun" consisted of a twelve-foot length of stove-pipe, and the mounting a piece of sheet iron and an empty oil-drum.

"So friend von Giespert is breathing out threatenings and slaughter, eh?" he laughed. "From what I know of him, his bark is worse than his bite, but we'll have to watch him pretty carefully in the future."

CHAPTER XXVII

A Submarine Duel

It was not until the morning of the fifth day after the storm that operations upon the wreck of the *Fusi Yama* were resumed.

Since it was found upon a second examination that the hull of the motor-boat was somewhat strained and required intricate repairs before it could be rendered seaworthy, the motor was taken out and installed on a strong platform supported by the gig and the whaler. It meant devoting two boats to a duty formerly performed by one, but the motor was necessary, since it worked the dynamo that in turn provided light for the divers to work by.

Villiers and Swaine gained the wreck by following the guide-rope from the beach. They found the rope buried deeply in the sand at places, while another result of the gale was the almost entire removal of the bed of mud on which the ship lay, its place being taken by a deposit of sand and lumps of coral that had been detached from the reef under the terrific force of the breakers.

More than once it required the united efforts of both men to lift the rope clear of the sand that covered it, while in one spot an accumulation of seaweed took a quarter of an hour's hard work before the tenacious tendrils could be cut and the rope exposed.

Upon gaining the deck Villiers could see that the damage done by the hurricane was considerable. Most of the deck-houses and the promenade deck, which had stood the effect of four years' submergence without much sign of deterioration, had been swept away, while a vast quantity of sand had found its way below. This was sufficient evidence to prove that the hurricane had been the worst ever experienced at Nua Leha since the time when the *Fusi Yama* had been scuttled.

Outside the strong-room things were not so bad. There were tons of sand, but most of it had shifted owing to the list of the wreck, and lay five or six feet high against the interior side of the ship.

Adjusting the powerful lamp, so that its rays showed directly into the strong-room, Swaine beckoned to his companion to enter.

If Villiers expected to walk into a treasure-chamber glittering with gold, he was mistaken. The place was piled with wooden boxes, some of which had been wrenched open, displaying their rather dull but heavy contents, but on the shelves, and secured from the motion of the ship by steel grids, were canvas sacks. A few of these, rotted by the action of the salt water or else hurriedly ripped open when the Huns made a hasty examination of their booty, had shed a shower of gold coins upon the boxes and on the floor. There were British and Australian sovereigns, Japanese five-yen pieces, Chinese gold taels, and five-dollar pieces, representing almost every American republic on the Pacific coast, and mixed haphazardly.

With little delay the work of clearing the strong-room commenced. New canvas sacks, weighted with pieces of iron, were lowered from the boats above. Into these were poured the contents of the rotten sacks, then at a prearranged signal the men on the raft hoisted the precious specie to the surface.

It was a slow, laborious but at the same time pleasureable task. Movements that could be quickly executed in air were greatly retarded by the pressure of water, and by the time that the divers' air-supply was showing signs of exhaustion only a quarter of the coin had been salvaged.

For the next week the operations continued uninterruptedly. Villiers and Swaine each making two descents a day.

Compared with the task of recovering the bullion, the preliminary work of clearing the specie was simple. The bullion, packed tightly in iron-bound boxes, had to be extricated bar by bar, for as originally packed each case was too heavy, even under water, to be manhandled.

There were delays, too, in transporting the recovered treasure to the *Titania*, owing to the lack of sufficient boats, so that, according to Villiers' estimate, three weeks would elapse before the precious metal would be stowed in the yacht's hold.

Dick Beverley was enjoying himself immensely. He worked quite as hard as anybody, and his one regret was that he had not been allowed to don a diving-dress and make a descent. This Harborough bluntly refused to allow.

"This is a salvage company, not a nursery for amateur divers," he remarked, although his refusal was based upon his compact with Bobby Beverley not to expose Dick to any unnecessary

risk.

By common consent a substantial share of the treasure was to be given to Pete. The man had earned it fairly. As a cook he was painstaking and conscientious, and when not engaged in his duties in the galley he was always ready and willing to bear a hand at other work.

"What are you going to do with your little lot when we pay off, Pete?" asked Villiers.

Pete's features were almost hidden by a mouth that stretched practically from ear to ear as he gave a prodigious grin.

"Do, sah? Be coloured gen'lman at Barbadoes, Massa Villiers. Buy top-hole swagger hotel an' get dollars from Yankee visitors. P'r'aps I buy a sail-boat and take people round de islands. If any of you gen'lmen come to Barbadoes, be sure to look up Massa Pete Johnson. He put you up free, gratis, and for nothin'."

"Then you're not sorry that Captain Abe booted you out of the *Lucy M. Partington*?" asked Bobby.

"No, sah." Pete evidently did not wish to reopen an unpleasant incident, for he turned somewhat abruptly to O'Loghlin. "Say, Massa," he asked anxiously, "you understan' motors. Will I be able to run a swagger car? One that licks creation for goin' tarnation quick?"

"If you handle the steering-wheel of a car as well as you do a frying-pan, you'll be a rattling good driver, Pete," replied O'Loghlin, pushing aside his empty plate with a satisfied sigh.

The salvage operation continued without a hitch in glorious weather and under ideal conditions. The divers' dread of sharks seemed to have been a needless one, for the noise of the motors and the activity of all hands had no doubt scared the tigers of the deep.

One day Villiers was at work below, when he noticed a gaudily-coloured fish dart out from behind a box, and graze his hand. The fish was but a small one, less than six inches in length, but its dorsal fins resembled trailing tendrils and its tail ended in two tapering points.

Hardly paying any attention to the creature, for fishes were continually swimming around the divers, Villiers began prising open the metal-bound box. Before he had completed his task his arm was throbbing frightfully, and his hand seemed to lose the power of gripping things.

He "stuck it" for another ten minutes, then signed to Swaine that he was finishing work. Before he reached dry ground he felt on the point of collapse, and when he did gain the beach he toppled inertly upon the sand, to the astonishment and alarm of Vivian and Merridew, who were standing by to assist the diving-party.

They divested him of his diving-suit. By this time his arm had swollen tremendously, and the flesh was turning a dull-grey colour.

Harborough, hastily summoned ashore, diagnosed the symptoms as being similar to those of snake-bite. There were a couple of minute punctures on the back of Jack's hand, through which the poison had been transmitted to his veins.

For the next twelve hours it was touch and go with Jack Villiers. His comrades plied him with enough raw whisky to make a man in ordinary health helplessly intoxicated. They walked him up and down without giving him the slightest chance of rest. The treatment was drastic, but it was successful, and, although the arm remained swollen and painful, the danger was past.

Much to his disgust, Villiers had to "stand down", and Swaine carried on alone. That meant more delay, but it was unavoidable, and things might have been worse. Further difficulties were met with through the temporary breakdown of the submarine lighting arrangements, and until that was rectified Swaine was perforce obliged to relinquish his visits to the wreck.

"Look here, old man," said Jack, one morning as Swaine was preparing for a descent. "I'm fit again. There is no reason why I shouldn't go with you."

"Better wait till you've seen Harborough," objected Swaine. "You might jolly well think you're all right, but I shouldn't like the responsibility of passing you fit for duty."

"Right-o," agreed Jack, who saw the force of his fellow-diver's argument. "Don't wait. I'll push off afloat and see what Harborough has to say."

Swaine proceeded on the submarine work alone. Although glad of Villier's company, he realized that the latter was far from being fit for the strenuous toil demanded of a diver. He, Swaine, could do sufficient work below to keep the surface-party busy, and the task of recovering the treasure was now within measureable distance of conclusion.

It was yet early. The morning mists had not entirely dispersed when Swaine waded into the water, awkwardly at first, but with more freedom as the leaden-weighted suit dipped beneath the surface.

Swaine wasted no time in getting on board the wreck and setting to work. He had now a fair amount of elbow-room, since most of the metal-lined boxes had been removed, and a thousand pounds worth of gold was being sent up every five minutes.

He felt in fine fettle and, to use his own expression, "full of beans". So intent was he upon his task that the time slipped by rapidly, until a slight buzzing noise in his ears warned him that the self-contained air-reservoir was not far off a state of exhaustion. In fifteen minutes the supply would be "dud", and it usually took him twenty minutes to reach the shore.

He "knocked off" in a hurry; at the same time, he realized that if things came to a pitch he could blow himself to the surface. This he was loth to do, as the sudden ascent generally incapacitated a diver for several hours.

Slipping over the side of the wreck and grasping the guide-rope, Swaine began to make his way ashore as rapidly as the resistance of the water permitted.

"Current's frightfully strong to-day," he soliloquized, as the rush of water almost swept his feet from under him. As it was, he had to hang on like grim death to the rope and haul himself along hand over hand until he had crossed the track of the submarine stream.

Here the lagoon shoaled considerably. There was sufficient depth to allow a pale-green light to penetrate to five or six fathoms of water, while visibility increased a distance of ten or twelve feet.

Happening to turn his head within the immobile helmet and to glance through the side plate-glass window, Swaine came to a sudden halt and gave a gasp of surprise. Within three yards of him, and floundering along on a slightly converging course, was a man in a self-contained diver's suit.

"So Villiers has got into harness after all," he thought. "Wonder how he came to lose touch with the direction-rope?"

He raised one hand in greeting, at the same time holding up the rope that served as a guide between the wreck and the shore.

Then to his utter astonishment he discovered that it was not Jack Villiers, nor indeed any of the *Titania's* men, indulging in a little submarine expedition. The diving-dress was different in certain details.

Swaine was not left long in doubt as to the stranger's intentions. Apparently the other diver was as surprised as he was, for he halted, swaying slightly in the comparatively feeble current. Then, slowly fumbling, he drew out a knife that showed a pale, dull-greenish glint in the subdued light.

Courageous though he was, Swaine felt his heart beating violently. He was still undecided as to whether the stranger intended sticking the point of the steel into him or whether he meant to cut the guide-rope. In any case, Swaine realized that he would have to act on the defensive.

Drawing his own knife, Swaine, holding on to the rope with his left hand, planted his feet firmly and threw his weight slightly forward. Then he awaited developments. He was handicapped by the fact that his air-supply was now noticeably weak. He might, with discretion, attempt to elude his antagonist, but he realized the disadvantage of showing his back to a man who might possess a greater degree of mobility. Nor did he fancy a knife-thrust as he was in the act of blowing himself to the surface.

No, the issue had to be decided there and then.

Holding his knife dagger-wise across his chest, the unknown assailant advanced. Swaine stood on the defensive. He was in an awkward predicament, for the current that was helping his opponent was against him.

The other feinted. It was a comparatively slow movement compared with the lightning-like thrust of a practised fencer. The pressure of the water was too great for rapidity of action.

Swaine was not prepared for what followed. His antagonist arrested the blow and at the same time hacked ponderously with his leaden-shod boot. The metal rasped on Swaine's bare knuckles grasping the rope, as he stepped backwards to avoid the full force of the blow. The next instant a cut with the keen blade of the other's knife severed the guide-rope.

The sudden release of the tautened rope sent Swaine staggering a good three yards. He found himself sprawling on the sandy bottom, his efforts to regain his feet disturbing the sand to such an extent that it was almost impossible to see anything beyond arm's length.

Not daring to transfer his knife from his right hand to his left, Swaine fumbled for the release-valve of the buoyancy-flask. His fingers, numbed with the glancing blow they had received, were almost useless, and his head was swimming with the effect of the now impure air. Before he could attain his immediate aim he saw the distorted figure of his antagonist through the now

clearing water.

Still struggling to regain his feet, the while guarding himself with his knife, Swaine realized that the odds were very much against him. He found himself vaguely wondering what the effect of a thrust would be through the thick rubber and canvas fabric of his diving-suit. All the same, he meant to stick it, and, if needs be, "die game".

The other approached warily, but there was a suggestion of triumph in his movements. He began circling round his prostrate opponent, seeking a favourable opportunity of closing. He hesitated, possibly because he feared a ruse on the part of the Englishman, who, with knife uplifted, kept turning so that he was always face to face with his assailant. Obviously these wearing-out tactics were telling upon Swaine. The longer the other delayed, the worse became his state owing to the poor quality of his air-supply.

At length the unknown diver raised his arm to deal a stroke. He did it dramatically, pausing with the blade held high above his head.

With senses dulled, Swaine steeled himself to meet the deadly stroke, but the stroke never came.

A rush, a swirl of water, and a blurred vision of the other diver sinking slowly on his face told Swaine that deliverance had come from a totally unexpected quarter.

A huge shark, attracted by the glitter of the knife, had bitten off the fellow's hand just above the wrist, at the same time tearing the india-rubber cuff of his diving-dress and allowing a considerable amount of air to escape.

The shark, finding its palate unpleasantly tickled by the sharp steel, and not laying claim to be a sword-swallower, decided that one mouthful was enough and made off for pastures new, leaving the interrupted principals of the submarine duel to settle matters as best they could.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Explosion

The instinct of self-preservation, coupled with the fact that he yet had a faint chance of escape, rallied the semi-torpid Swaine sufficiently to enable him to take action.

He dropped the knife and groped for the release-valve of the compressed-air reservoir. Half a turn, and he felt the buoyant air rushing into the double folds of his diving-suit. Even as he realized that he was parting company with the bottom of the lagoon he found himself looking at his late antagonist, who was writhing in agony, with a ruddy stream mixed with air-bubbles rising from the clean-cut stump of his severed arm.

Not knowing why he did so, whether it was the irresponsible act of a light-headed man, the sudden impulse of an overstrung brain, or generous pity for a beaten foe, Swaine gripped the fellow by the arm, at the same time turning the release-valve of his buoyancy-flask full on.

Up he shot to the full extent of arm's length and no farther. The lifting powers of the inflated diving-dress were sufficient only for one. Weighed down by his former antagonist, Swaine saw no chance of bringing the latter to the surface, until an inspiration seized him. Having once set his hand to the plough, he was loth to turn back until his task was completed.

The unknown's knife was at that moment seriously incommoding a shark; his own had dropped, but he remembered it was attached by a lanyard to his belt. He recovered it; then, still retaining his hold of the other diver, he pulled himself down until he was able to slash the lashings that secured the leaden weights to the fellow's chest and shoulders.

Then, and then only, did both men rise to the surface, Swaine horizontally, the other vertically owing to the fact that his feet were still weighted with lumps of lead.

For the next hour, as far as Swaine was concerned, everything was a blank.

He recovered consciousness to find himself lying on a mattress on the deck of the *Titania*.

"How's the other bloke?" were his first words.

"The other bloke," replied Villiers, "is progressing favourably in the circumstances."

As a matter of fact, although the fellow's identity was revealed directly his helmet was removed, none of the others knew that a life-and-death duel was in progress when the shark

butted in so opportunely. They were greatly surprised to find Swaine bob up unconscious from the bottom, still grasping the apparently lifeless form of his late antagonist—Siegfried Strauss.

While Villiers and Beverley set to work to restore their comrade to consciousness, Harborough, O'Loghlin, and Trevear did a like office for the German. They were puzzled as to the cause of the loss of the man's hand, for the amputation had been performed as cleanly as if by a knife, while the pressure of his rubber wrist-band had checked what would have been a dangerous haemorrhage. Applying a tourniquet before cutting away the diving-dress, the three amateur surgeons felt that they had succeeded in saving the German's life unless he sank under the effect of shock to the system.

Although curious to hear Swaine's version of the business, his comrades wisely forbore to question him until he had completely recovered from his narrow escape. Meanwhile they were putting forward numerous conjectures as to the reason for Strauss' submarine jaunt.

"Where could he have come from?" asked Beverley. "The *Zug* isn't anywhere in sight."

"Unless she's off the other side of the island," added Villiers. "Even then he must have started from a much nearer base. We'll have to investigate."

"Why did he?" persisted Beverley. "That's what I want to know."

He received his answer in no uncertain way.

A tremendous roar rent the sky, followed by a rush of air and the noise of cascades of water falling into the sea. Over the spot where lay the wreck of the *Fusi Yama* the usually placid surface of the lagoon was lashed into a wide cauldron of leaping, hissing foam.

"Fritz again—the dirty dog!" exclaimed Harborough, when the reverberations of the detonation had subsided. "It might have been worse if we had been working on the boat."

Where the two boats, joined by a platform, had been, was a patch of discoloured water, on which shattered fragments of timber were bobbing in the strong sunlight. Had the working-party not ceased work to convey the rival divers to the yacht, no one would have escaped the force of the explosion.

"This is not the work of one man," declared Villiers. "Let's get ashore."

The suggestion was promptly acted upon, and on gaining the beach Harborough and his companions were greeted by the spectacle of Dick Beverley and Pete, armed with rifles, driving before them a couple of the *Zug's* crew, who marched with arms upheld in the good old-fashioned way they were taught in the Great War.

"Pete and I had been after pigs," explained Dick. "We were on our way back when we saw two strange men lying face downwards on the cliff, apparently watching the *Titania*. Of course, we couldn't do anything then, except watch them, because the land isn't our private property, but when that explosion went off and they began laughing and shaking hands we thought it time to have a say in the matter. We did," he added grimly, "and they came quietly."

The prisoners, finding that they were not beaten, kicked, or otherwise misused by their captors after the custom of certain German officers in charge of prison-camps during the war, became fairly communicative.

Four men, under the command of Siegfried Strauss, had left Ni Telang in one of the *Zug's* boats, and landed on Nua Leha close to the spot where Dick had met with a mishap during his first pig-hunting expedition.

Leaving one man in charge of the boat, Strauss and the other three, carrying explosives, an electric automatic time-fuse, and two divers' suits, crossed the island, keeping under the shelter of the palm groves until they reached the cove where the two sea-planes had been berthed.

While two of the men kept watch, Siegfried and a companion donned their diving-dresses and walked into the sea.

What happened could only be left to conjecture, unless Strauss at a later date thought fit to explain his movements. Apparently they found the wreck and placed their explosive charges in position. Upon the return journey they became separated. His course deflected by the current, Strauss found himself confronted by Swaine, the former's astonishment being almost as great as the latter's. Of the fate of the other Hun diver nothing was ever known. He might have been eaten by a shark, or he might have lost direction and been killed by the shock of the explosion, or else, which was more likely, he was asphyxiated owing to the failure of his air-supply.

That afternoon Merridew, O'Loghlin, Griffiths, and Bell, all armed, proceeded to the place where the *Zug's* boat lay. They made an easy capture of the last member of the submarine raiding-party, and, what was a welcome prize, the boat as well—a stoutly-built 25-foot cutter.

They returned to the camp in the boat, following the shore inside the reef, and the three prisoners were placed under lock and key in one of the *Titania's* cabins, the crew taking turns to

keep watch outside the door to prevent any attempt to escape.

Next morning Villiers volunteered to descend to the wreck and ascertain the state of the hull after the explosion. Since the guide-rope had been severed, the captured boat was pressed into service and moored as close as possible, going by cross-bearings, to the spot where the lighting-plant had been stationed. Since the latter had been destroyed, Villiers had to rely upon his portable electric lamp.

The depth to which he descended before his feet touched the bottom surprised him. It was greater than he had previously worked in, and no natural light penetrated the dark waters. At first he fancied he was in a submarine forest. Gaunt ribs, distorted in the rays of the lamp, reared themselves on either hand. Closer examination showed that they were not metal but timber, badly eaten by worms, and thickly encrusted with barnacles.

His foot catching in some obstacle caused him to throw the light of the lamp upon the ground.

He was standing on a bed of coral on which lay dark shapes in hundreds, like a cart load of bricks dumped on the ground.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed to himself. "I've come to the wrong shop. This must be the wooden hulk Swaine spoke about. She must have had lead pigs for ballast. Even that lot's worth a fortune at the present-day price for lead."

Hardly knowing why he did so, Villiers lashed one of the pigs of ballast to his shot-rope, then, paying out his distance-line as he went, he made for his real objective—the wreck of the *Fusi Yama*.

When that vessel's bilge loomed through the water, Villiers found that he was close to the starboard bow. Much of the steelwork had been stripped of its thick covering of weed and barnacles by the force of the explosion, but of actual damage done to the hull there was none.

By a rare slice of good luck, as far as Harborough and his companions were concerned, Strauss had miscalculated the distance and direction of the wreck of the *Fusi Yama* from shore, and had deposited the explosive charges against the side of the old wooden wreck in the belief that it was the other. The remainder of the gold was still intact. Von Giespert had shot his last bolt, and the missile had gone wide of the mark.

CHAPTER XXIX

A Frustrated Escape

Having made this satisfying discovery, Villiers returned to the surface and reported the good news.

There was, however, much work to be done before the rest of the gold could be removed. The wreck of the *Fusi Yama* had to be buoyed once more, for, amongst other damage, the former mark-buoys had been destroyed by the explosion. Another guide-rope had to be established between the wreck and the shore, while, owing to the loss of the electric submarine lamp and the generating plant, the remainder of the work under water had to be carried out by the relatively feeble light afforded by the divers' electric lamps.

By the time these various preliminary tasks were completed Swaine had recovered from the effects of his perilous adventure. Siegfried Strauss, too, was out of danger and gave but little trouble. His arm was healing slowly, and he seemed grateful to his rivals for their kind and generous treatment.

Swaine bore him no ill will on account of the submarine fight. He willingly accepted Strauss' explanation that he thought Swaine was about to attack him and that he was obliged to take action. Strauss was the loser, and had paid the price for it. The matter was over and done with: that was Swaine's summing up of the case.

On the other hand, every member of the *Titania's* crew felt that they had an account to settle with Kaspar von Giespert. The fellow hadn't played the game from the very beginning, and his treachery in dispatching a boat's crew to blow up the wreck, and, as he hoped, most of the members of Harborough's party as well, put him beyond the bounds of decency.

Strauss freely admitted that his employer had acted treacherously, and that von Giespert was filled with a mad rage for revenge at being baulked of his chance of getting the treasure. He also volunteered the information that von Giespert intended to take the *Zug* back to European waters directly the boat's crew returned. And, since they weren't in a position to return, it was safe to assume that von Giespert would not risk searching for them, but, after giving up all hope of their

safety, would carry out his original programme of leaving Ni Telang and making for home.

The two Germans captured by Dick Beverley did not take kindly to their detention. Not from any sense of devotion to von Giespert did they attempt to escape, but because they were under the erroneous impression that their employer was on the right track after all and was about to gain possession of the gold. They had heard von Giespert say that he meant to sink the *Titania* and gain possession of the booty by force of arms, and, since they did not like the prospect of being under lock and key on the yacht when she was attacked, they took steps to regain their freedom.

It was a bright moonlight night when they put their crudely-formed plan into execution. Although Griffiths was on guard outside the door of their cabin-cell, he heard no suspicious noises. Working desperately and silently, the Huns removed a portion of the inch match-board that separated their cabin from the one adjoining, which happened to be three cabins knocked into one and utilized as a store for hydroplanes. Since the two *Cormorants* were no longer in existence, the fairly-expansive compartment was empty save for a few tools, coils of rope, and kegs of paint and varnish.

One of the doors leading to the alley-way was unlocked—unlocked doors being the rule rather than the exception on board.

They waited until they heard the sentry go for'ard, for Griffiths was pacing up and down the whole length of the alley-way, then they silently crept to the accommodation-ladder and gained the deck.

Merridew and Fontayne, the watch on deck, were at that moment pacing the port side, conversing in low tones in order not to disturb their sleeping mess-mates. Knowing that Griffiths was on duty below, they never troubled about the prisoners—it was not their "pigeon". Their particular duty was to see that the *Zug* didn't pay a nocturnal visit with sinister intent to the lagoon at Nua Leha.

In the midst of Fontayne's elaborate description of his "castle in the air", Merridew laid one hand firmly upon his companion's shoulder.

"Go on talking—anything," he whispered. "These two Fritzes are trying to do a bunk. Let 'em have a run for their money; we'll see some fun."

Merridew and his companion waited until they saw the dark shadows of the Germans flat along the deck; then, each taking up a rifle, the watchers followed, keeping under cover afforded by the chart-house.

Right aft crept the two Germans until they halted and peered over the taffrail as if measuring the distance between them and the shore. Then, with a few coils of main-sheet, they took a turn round a belaying-pin and silently lowered the free end of the stout manilla rope into the water.

Slowly one of the Huns wriggled on his stomach upon the slightly-rounded top of the taffrail, then, grasping the rope, he began to make his way down hand over hand, his companion watching his progress.

Merridew distinctly heard a splash in the water. It was not the noise of a man swimming.

"Sharks!" he whispered, and opened the cut-off to the magazine of his rifle.

The German dangling at the rope's end heard it too, for he uttered a guttural "Achtung!"

The other fell, just below the rail, tried to regain the deck, but the task of swinging himself round and over the projecting taffrail was beyond his powers. As he hung desperately to the rope he prevented his companion's efforts to climb back. Both started to shout for help.

Bawling for the rest of the duty watch to turn out, Merridew and Fontayne ran aft. A strange sight met their eyes as they leapt over the taffrail.

The Germans, gripping the rope with the tenacity of terror, were swaying to and fro in their efforts to put as great a distance as possible between them and the swirling water, while clearly visible in the bright moonlight—as they darted in and out of the dark shadows cast by the *Titania's* projecting counter—were two enormous sharks, their white bellies glistening in the silvery light as they turned to snap at the tempting bait just above their reach.

Levelling his rifle, Merridew waited his opportunity. It was not long in coming. One of the sharks was on the point of turning over on its back to attempt a ferocious snap with its tremendous jaws when the rifle cracked. At close range the nickel bullet inflicted a large and mortal wound, and the monster, still writhing, sank out of sight.

Fontayne hit the other, but whether the shot was fatal or not remained an unsettled question to all concerned except the shark. But the main point was that it swam off as hard as it could go.

Meanwhile the rest of the duty-watch had come on deck. Curiosity prompted them to have a glimpse of the two thoroughly-scared Huns, then they proceeded to lower and man the gig—the

only available boat.

"There's no hurry," remarked Beverley. "Let 'em feel the breeze a bit longer. It will teach them a lesson."

The sharks having been eliminated from the proposition, all danger to life was at an end. But before the boat came under the *Titania's* counter the uppermost Hun released his hold. In his fall he tore his companion's grasp from the rope, and the twain hit the water with tremendous force.

Winded and spluttering they rose to the surface, frantically grabbing at each other until they were unceremoniously hauled into the stern-sheets of the gig.

Next morning Harborough had the two Germans brought before him. The men were thoroughly cowed, for that narrow escape from being seized and devoured by sharks had knocked all the stuffing out of them.

Their punishment was solitary confinement, and they were also ordered to make good the damage done to the woodwork of the cabin.

"Strange," remarked the baronet, when the culprits had been removed. "Up to the present we haven't seen a shark in the lagoon but that it has done us a good turn. Now, then, fall in all hands. Another couple of days' work will see the job finished, and then, yo ho, for Old England!"

CHAPTER XXX

Von Giespert's Resolve

Kapitan Karl von Giespert, ex-Unter-Leutnant of the now defunct Imperial German Navy, was in a very bad temper, which was saying a good deal, since he was rarely in a good one.

He was beginning to realize that his latest bit of dirty work—one of many pet schemes—had been a wash-out. The boat containing Strauss and three of the crew had not returned. He didn't mind losing the men overmuch, but he regretted his decision to send Siegfried Strauss in command of the submarine mining expedition; not that he had any affection for Strauss, but because Strauss was a capable navigator and he was not. And it was a long, long voyage back to the Fatherland.

After taking several turns up and down the deck, von Giespert went for'ard, descended the steep ladder to the fo'c'sle, and thence to the store-room, where for quite a considerable time he stood pensively contemplating the for'ard water-tight bulkhead of No. 1 hold.

Then he bawled to one of the men to pass the word for the carpenter. That individual arrived at the double, rather breathless and perspiring freely not solely on account of the heat, but in anticipation of a scene with his employer.

"I want you," ordered von Giespert, "to shore up this bulkhead from the other side. Use every available baulk of timber. If you want more, send a party ashore to fell some trees. I want the job done quickly and properly."

Had von Giespert told the carpenter to construct a ladder long enough to reach the moon, or given him similar impossible instructions, the latter's surprise would hardly have been greater. The bulkhead of No. 1 hold was of massive construction, and its condition was as good as the day when the ship was launched.

"It will take a day and a half, Herr Kapitan," replied the carpenter, in reply to his employer's question as to the length of the task involved.

"Then have it done," snapped von Giespert, and hied him to interview the chief engineer in his cabin.

"I want steam raised the day after to-morrow," he said. "We're sailing at noon. What's the working-pressure of the boilers?"

The engineer told him.

"No more?" asked von Giespert.

"I might raise another two atmospheres, Herr Kapitan," replied the chief dubiously. "The boilers wouldn't stand that for long."

"They'll have to stand it for an hour," declared von Giespert. "An hour will be enough for my

purpose. I will give you ample warning when I require the additional pressure."

His latest project was to sail for Nua Leha, arriving at dawn. If, as he expected, the *Zug* were sighted by the look-out of the *Titania*, he would hoist urgent signals—the international NV, signifying "short of provisions". He would then make out that the *Zug* intended to anchor within a cable's length of her rival, and, suddenly increasing speed and putting her helm hard-a-port, ram the *Titania* full on her beam. And, since he still required the *Zug* to get him home, the reason for the shoring up of the for'ard watertight bulkhead was apparent. But at all costs there must be no survivors from the *Titania*.

It was a desperate scheme that gave fair promises of success. The one fly in the ointment was the knowledge that the *Titania* mounted a 4.7-inch quickfirer. Von Giespert did not, of course, know that the "quick-firer" was at that moment performing its ordained task of carrying off the smoke of the galley-fire in its humble, yet important, capacity of a chimney.

As a counter-measure, if the *Titania's* gun should be manned and trained, von Giespert could hoist a "not under control" signal and trust that the excuse would pass, but he was beginning to have a wholesome respect for Harborough. Not once but many times that fool of an Englishman had got to windward of him. It behoved him to act warily.

Von Giespert was a firm believer in the German equivalent for the proverb "Desperate diseases need desperate remedies". To him the *Titania* and her crew represented the disease; the *Zug* was to apply the remedy. At the same time he realized that it was the last straw, the final desperate plunge of the despairing gamester, staking his all upon the cast of the die.

For the greater part of the day the carpenter and his crew toiled in the burning rays of the sun, hauling and setting in position huge baulks of timber, supplemented by lengths of stout bamboo, felled and towed alongside and thence whipped up and placed in the for'ard hold by means of the vessel's derricks. Before sunset the carpenter reported complete, but von Giespert was not satisfied.

He ordered the men to fill sacks with sand and pile them up against the timber shores. He meant to make certain of that bulkhead. The *Zug's* bows might be torn like paper in the projected ramming evolution, but the bulkhead must hold at all costs.

The crew obeyed reluctantly. They were of a type that could be driven and did not take kindly to being led; but in the matter of being driven there could be "too much of a good thing". And von Giespert failed to realize the presence of the danger-signal.

Headed by one of the quartermasters, the deck hands came aft in a body and demanded of the now astounded but still mule-headed von Giespert the reason for this excessive amount of work. They could not see why the bulkhead should be strengthened, considering it was strong enough already, unless some desperate scheme were afloat.

Von Giespert told them. He had to admit failure in the quest of the gold and that his British rivals had both hoodwinked him and secured the real prize.

"That is all very well, Herr Kapitan," observed the spokesman of the deputation. "We don't mind taking desperate measures if there's anything to be got out of it. If we sink the English yacht, how do we stand as far as the gold is concerned? And suppose we fail, how do we stand then? It will mean penal servitude in an English prison."

"Not at all," protested von Giespert. "If we fail, the responsibility is mine. You are acting under my orders. If we succeed in sinking the yacht, as I believe we shall, then it's merely a question of diving and recovering the gold. We would know its position to a certainty this time."

He stopped to make a rapid calculation.

"How do we stand in, Herr Kapitan?" asked one of the men.

Von Giespert, who was on the point of offering twenty per cent of the proceeds, came down to ten. Inwardly he vowed that these swinish fellows of his would pay for their temerity in trying to beard him in his den.

"Very well, Herr Kapitan," agreed the spokesman. "One tenth of the proceeds in addition to our wages, and you'll please to sign a paper absolving us from all blame in the matter of the collision."

Muttering angry oaths, von Giespert drew up and signed a document to that effect and handed it to the leader of the deputation. The men withdrew, and for the present at least the trouble had blown itself out.

At eleven on the following morning smoke began to issue from the *Zug's* funnel. Half an hour later steam was raised, and by noon the safety-valves were lifting under the internal pressure. The chief engineer reported that all was ready; but no answering clang of the bridge-telegraph was transmitted to the engine-room.

Von Giespert, on the bridge, was hesitating.

"What is the glass doing?" he inquired.

"It has risen a point since six this morning, Herr Kapitan," reported the quartermaster.

Von Giespert shrugged his shoulders. He had not even the excuse of approaching bad weather to delay him.

With feelings akin to those of a man about to plunge into icy-cold water he leant over the bridge stanchion-rail. The bos'un in the fo'c'sle had already shortened cable and was awaiting the command to weigh.

The kapitan nodded. At the signal the steam capstan began to clink.

"Up and down, sir," announced one of the men, and a few moments later the rusty stockless anchor came into view.

"Easy ahead."

The *Zug* began to forge through the placid water, increasing speed as she passed through the gap in the reef.

Von Giespert turned to the quartermaster.

"Ost zu sud," he ordered.

That course, east by south, was the course for Nua Leha.

CHAPTER XXXI

Exit the "Zug"

"What's that made fast to the shot-line, old man?" inquired Beverley, as Villiers, divested of his helmet and diving-dress, sat in the stern-sheets of the boat that von Giespert had unwittingly given over to the *Titania's* people.

"That?" replied Villiers. "I dunno. Ballast, I expect. There are tons of it down there. Wonder if it's lead?"

"If so, it's a fortune for anyone who can get it back to England," observed Harborough, unclasping his knife and digging the point into the block of metal.

"Tough for lead," he commented, "and yet too soft for iron, unless the stuff's badly corroded. By Jove! Villiers! I believe—yes, I'm sure—it's silver."

"Regular Tom Tiddler's ground then," remarked Jack. "When we left England silver was soaring. Wonder what it's worth now?"

"At any rate, we won't fly in the face of Providence," declared Harborough. "A few days more won't matter very much. When we've finished with the *Fusi Yama*, we'll lift some of this stuff."

"There's enough to sink the *Titania*," declared Villiers. "The hold of that ship must have been chock-full of silver. Rum sort of ballast."

"Probably a Spanish treasure-ship or a buccaneering craft that sunk with her booty," suggested Claverhouse. "They did that sort of thing once, I believe."

"Then that's settled," declared Harborough briskly. "Finish with the *Fusi Yama*, and then carry on with the silver that friend von Giespert, by the hand of pal Strauss, kindly discovered for us. How's the glass, by the by? I forgot to look this morning."

"It rose a point and a half after eight," reported Villiers, "and now it is dropping rather too rapidly."

"H'm!" exclaimed Harborough. "That's bad. It may interfere with our work, and we can't afford to lose much more plant. We'll work double shifts, and keep our weather-eye lifting."

By sunset the task of clearing the *Fusi Yama's* strong-room was accomplished, and an hour later the last of the gold was safely on board the *Titania*—an event that was signaled by three hearty cheers and splicing the "mainbrace" with discreet tots of champagne.

The while the glass was falling rapidly, although not so low as on the occasion of the devastating hurricane. Nevertheless, every possible precaution was taken. The boats were hoisted in and lashed down, awnings and side-curtains stowed, and additional cable veered out. The engine-room stood by ready to start the heavy oil-engines, and thus ease the strain on the anchor-chains should occasion arise. All hands were on board, preferring to face the storm in a staunch craft anchored in a fairly-sheltered lagoon to risking a wet and uncomfortable, if not dangerous, night ashore.

At midnight it was blowing a gale, but, in contrast to the preceding storm, there was no preliminary rain—simply a terrific blast of wind that heralded an almost uninterrupted blow.

It started from the nor'-nor'-east, or obliquely to the coast-line off which the *Titania* lay at anchor. Although the noise of the breakers on the reef was like that of a continual roar of thunder, the lagoon itself was only slightly agitated.

But when, at about 3 a.m., the wind veered four points to the east'ard, the beach became a dead lee shore. Huge billows, crashing madly upon the coral reef, swept in masses of white foam across the lagoon and churned themselves upon the beach, until in the pale moonlight the palm groves appeared to be growing from an undulating field of white water.

Pounding and thudding, quivering under the terrific pressure of the wind, the *Titania* held grimly to her cables. At one moment full fifty feet of chain, stretched taut and obliquely like an iron bar, would be visible; the next the yacht would lurch forward as a giant roller passed her by, and would threaten to overrun her anchors, until she "snubbed" with a sickening jerk that almost tore the stout mooring bits from the deck.

"It won't last long," declared Villiers, as a hissing shower of rain mingled with the driving spindrift. "Wind before rain, you know. It'll ease down by dawn."

He was right. By sunrise, although the wind was still high, its force had moderated considerably, and the sun rose in a grey sky, betokening fine weather before many hours had passed.

"Vessel making for the island, sir," suddenly announced Merridew, pointing dead to windward.

"By Jove! It's the *Zug*!" exclaimed Harborough.

"No doubt about it, sir," agreed Villiers, after a lengthy survey through his binoculars. "Wonder what she's doing here?"

The *Zug* was steering due south, and, therefore, on a slightly diverging course from the eastern side of the island; but when immediately abeam of the entrance to the lagoon, she ported helm as if to approach the narrow gap in the coral reef.

"Either von Giespert's mad or he doesn't know the risk he's running," said Harborough. "Make him a signal, Villiers. Say 'bar unsafe'."

"He's flying some sort of signal, sir," reported Jack. "Can't make out the flags; they're dead to windward."

"If we can't see his, he can't see ours," observed Harborough. "But we'll risk it, and give him a chance."

"I've got it, sir," declared Beverley. "It signifies short of provisions'."

Harborough shrugged his shoulders.

"What's wrong with the pigs and the bread-fruit trees at Ni Telang?" he remarked pointedly. "If I were von Giespert, I would tighten my belt a notch before I'd tackle the entrance to the lagoon. There's one thing, the wind's moderating, but look at the broken water on the bar."

"It doesn't look so bad from seaward," said Merridew. "He'll feel sorry for himself when he's in the thick of it, I fancy."

With a following wind, the *Zug* was rolling heavily and frequently obscured from view by the thick cloud of smoke from her funnel. When quite a mile from the reef, she suddenly fell off her course, vast quantities of steam issuing from her engine-room. She lost way, and was now rolling excessively in the trough of the seas.

"Looks like a boiler-explosion," exclaimed Harborough, glancing over the side at the still tumultuous water within the reef. "We'll have to get the boats ready for lowering, Mr. Villiers. They'll be wanted pretty badly, I expect."

The *Zug* was doomed. Von Giespert had again overreached himself, although the crew of the *Titania* had no suspicion of his desperate move. Von Giespert's orders to his chief engineer had been carried out only too well. The main steam-pipe, unable to withstand the abnormal internal pressure, had burst, the explosion killing everyone in the boiler-room, while the escaping steam had severely injured the chief engineer and his assistants.

Helpless in the trough of the seas, the *Zug* was now drifting rapidly on to the reef. Von Giespert, after bellowing incoherencies, ordered a storm trysail to be set in the hope that the vessel's head would pay off. But the moment the canvas was hoisted it blew to atoms.

As a last resource both anchors were let go. Owing to the depth of water outside the reef, it was a long time before they obtained a grip. When they did, the *Zug* was within two hundred yards of the coral barrier.

Momentarily she swung to her cables, then with a vicious snub both chains parted simultaneously. Seven minutes later, with a crash that was audible above the roar of the breakers, the *Zug* ended her career upon the outer reef of Nua Leha.

CHAPTER XXXII

Settling Accounts

Harborough had not waited for the doomed vessel to strike. Already the *Titania's* two boats—the only serviceable ones—had been lowered, and were pulling towards the leeward side of the reef.

Villiers was in charge of the cutter that had formerly belonged to the *Zug*. Beverley was in command of the gig. Both crews were wearing life-belts.

It was as well they did, for barely had the gig gone fifty yards from the *Titania* when she shipped a heavy sea and filled completely. Luckily all hands managed to gain the yacht by means of ropes thrown them from the *Titania's* bows.

Satisfying himself that his comrades late of the gig were safe, Villiers held on, encouraging the crew by word and gesture, and skilfully handling the boat to meet every dangerously-crested wave.

It was grim, desperate work. Sometimes the boat would lose ground in spite of the efforts of the rowers, who, with cracking sinews and aching backs, stuck gamely to their task. More than once the stroke had to boat his oar and bale out the water, for, in spite of her weatherly qualities, the cutter was shipping dangerous quantities of spray.

As they approached the lee side of the reef, which afforded very little shelter as the breakers were thundering right over it, Villiers could hardly see the wreck owing to the volume of spindrift.

The *Zug* was breaking up fast. Already her after-part, unable to withstand the terrific hammering, had broken off and had disappeared in deep water. On her bows, that were momentarily in danger of being smashed to pieces, were five or six of her crew, swept by the waves, and hanging on tenaciously to the heavier fittings. The rest of her crew had disappeared, having been swept overboard on the impact.

For the present Villiers could do nothing but keep the boat's head on to the seas and wait. A hundred feet of coral reef, showing in the trough of every breaker that swept over it, lay between him and the wreck. To attempt to get alongside the *Zug* would be hopeless. Had there been a ghost of a chance, he would have taken it in his efforts to save life, but there was none. All he could do was to stand by and wait, trusting that some of the luckless Germans might be swept over the reef into the smoother water inside the lagoon. At length one of the *Zug's* crew took a desperate step and plunged into the sea. Caught by a crested breaker, he was hurled for a full fifty yards before he disappeared from view.

"Watch for him!" shouted Villiers. "He's over the reef."

A few seconds later the man reappeared, feebly striking out. He was in danger of being swept past the cutter before he was seen. To attempt to turn meant the boat being caught broadside on and swamped.

"Back all," ordered Villiers, gripping the tiller to prevent the rudder broaching to as the boat gathered sternway.

The cutter backed almost half-way across the lagoon before Villiers gave the order to "give way". Then, gradually edging towards the swimmer, the boat, ably handled, came within an oar's length of the exhausted man.

A few seconds of breathless suspense, then:

"Got him!" yelled Swaine the bowman.

At a cost of enough water to fill the cutter to the thwarts, the German was hauled into at least temporary safety, and while two men kept the boat head to wind and sea the others baled desperately, using canvas bucket and baler until most of the water was ejected.

Once more the cutter approached the reef, the rowers straining desperately at their oars to recover the lost distance.

"There's another of 'em off," shouted Jack, bawling to make himself heard above the roar of the breakers and the rush of the wind.

A stout German, wearing a pair of canvas trousers only, cast off the ropes that secured him to the deck and leapt into the foaming water. In vain the cutter's crew looked for his reappearance. He was never seen again.

The remaining four, deterred by the fate of their luckless comrade, held on. The *Titania's* men, rowing frantically the while to keep the boat from being driven to leeward, watched them over their shoulders. Villiers realized that his crew were now almost played out. It looked as if it were a case of the triumph of matter over mind. The men were grimly determined to "stick it", but the ceaseless labour for the last hour at the oars was wearing them out. It was not straightforward rowing, but a constant tussle in confused breaking water and against a furious wind.

The while the bow portion of the *Zug* was breaking up fast. Alive to the latest danger, the four men, abandoning their position, took to the water. Three of these were picked up, the last not before the cutter had been backed to within half a cable's length of the beach.

Then, with rescued and rescuers almost in the last stage of physical exhaustion, Villiers succeeded in running under the *Titania's* quarter.

"Only four saved, sir," reported Jack.

"More than I expected," replied Harborough. "Get them below. Dry clothes and hot drinks are what they want. Right-o, Villiers, you turn in; you're in need of a rest, I'm sure."

Jack was. Although he had not had the actual manual labour at the oars, he had been badly knocked about by the buffeting of the boat. One side was black and blue, owing to the tiller thumping his ribs, while his left hand, which was still unhealed of its injuries received during the submarine encounter with the poisonous fish, was now raw and smarting horribly owing to the action of the salt water.

Later in the day it was discovered that five others of the *Zug's* crew had succeeded in escaping with their lives. By some strange freak on the part of a wave, they had been swept through the entrance to the lagoon, and unobserved by anyone on board the *Titania*, were washed up on Nua Leha.

When the wind moderated and a landing was possible, they were brought off to the *Titania*, almost dead by reason of their terrible struggle to gain the beach. Amongst them was the *Zug's* carpenter, but Kaspar von Giespert did not figure in the list of survivors.

Jack Villiers, protesting that his injuries did not much matter, was on deck at the second dog watch. After dinner Harborough called him aside.

"I think we'll cut the silver stunt, Villiers," he said. Then he paused to watch the effect of the announcement.

"Very well, sir," replied Jack.

"We've wrestled with Fortune and won, where other men have failed," continued the baronet. "I'm sorry that lives have been lost over the business; but we've this to be thankful for: we've come through it, if not with whole skins, without a single D.D. on the muster-book. I propose making for Sydney, transferring the gold to a liner, and taking passage home in her."

"Quite a good scheme," agreed Jack.

"We can sell the old *Titania* at a good figure," resumed Harborough, "and no doubt get a round sum for the secret of the silver. Let some other fellows have a run for their money; personally, I don't believe in playing Dame Fortune too hard. This gale is blowing itself out, so to-morrow we'll fill up the water-tanks, lay in such provisions as the island supplies, and say good-bye to Nua Leha."

On the following day all available hands, including the two Germans who had been under arrest, but were now released from their cells, went ashore to complete the preparations for the voyage, and by nightfall the *Titania* was revictualled and had water-tanks replenished.

At daybreak she sailed, her crew watching, with a certain amount of regret, the triple peaks of the island sinking lower and lower behind the horizon. Not only had the arduous work been successful, but the varied experiences had cemented a band of life-long comradeship between the members of the expedition.

After an uneventful run the *Titania* arrived at Sydney, where Harborough put his plans into execution.

To him came Swaine.

"If you've no objection, sir," he began, "I'd like to make an offer for the *Titania* and the right to exploit the silver stunt."

"What!" exclaimed Harborough. "You're a sticker, Swaine. You haven't had enough treasure-hunting, eh?"

"Must do something to keep me out of mischief," replied Swaine. "Even with pots of money a fellow is at a loose end when he's got nothing to occupy his mind. I reckon I've more than enough of my share of the *Fusi Yama* gold to pay for the yacht and float a company here for the recovery of the silver."

"I'm quite agreeable," assented Harborough. "But I'll have to arrange with the others concerning the value of the yacht and the other matter."

When the idea was put before the now-dissolving syndicate, not only did they agree to let Swaine have the *Titania* at a reasonable sum, but O'Loghlin and Fontayne offered to join in the new venture.

Claverhouse and Trevear expressed their intention of remaining at Sydney, prior to taking up farming in New Zealand. To them Harborough advanced a sum sufficient to carry them on, pending the realization of the gold in London. Griffiths and Bell, inseparable chums, decided to try their luck at fruit-growing in Tasmania.

Pete, with a pocketful of notes that represented to him a small fortune, departed for the West Indies via Panama. He went with genuine regret, followed by the good wishes of the erstwhile crew of the *Titania*, who regarded him as a cheerful hard-working cook who looked after their inward needs with the utmost fidelity.

The rest of the *Titania's* party accompanied Harborough to England. Villiers and Bobby Beverley, acting upon Swaine's principle, formed a coastal shipping company, which not only kept them busy but gave a good return for their outlay. Within six months of his return home Dick Beverley gained tenth place in the entrance examination to Sandhurst.

Sir Hugh Harborough, rich and contented both in mind and body, was able to run *Thalassa Towers* in a manner that bid fair to make it one of the choicest country seats in Hampshire. He entertained lavishly, but of his numerous guests none were more welcome than his former comrades of the good ship *Titania*.

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Transcriber's Notes:

This book contains a number of misprints.
The following misprints have been corrected:

[\["It's like this," resumed Billy\] -->](#)

[\["It's like this," resumed Bobby\]](#)

There is no Billy in this book. This should be Bobby.

[\[messenger to Thalassa Towers\] -->](#)

[\[messenger to Thalassa Towers\]](#)

[\[Straus had tried\] -->](#)

[\[Strauss had tried\]](#)

[\[the compact air-craft begin to\] -->](#)

[\[the compact air-craft began to\]](#)

[\[the still tumultuous water\] -->](#)

[\[the still tumultuous water\]](#)

Two illustrations were missing in the paper version used for producing this digitised text. These are: 'A SUBMARINE DUEL' and 'UNMASKED HE WAS NO LONGER AN AMIABLE SWEDE'. They are marked with "(missing from book)" in the Illustrations-list and at the place where the image would have been.

A few cases of punctuation errors were corrected, but are not mentioned here.

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