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Illustration: Frontispiece by R. F. Hilder

THE "GOLDEN VANITY" COMES IN TIME

Page 56
Frontispiece

CHUMS OF THE "GOLDEN VANITY"

BY

PERCY F. WESTERMAN

Author of "The Quest of the *Golden Hope*"
"East in the *Golden Gain*"
"All Hands to the Boats!", &c.

Frontispiece by R. F. Hilder

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CHUMS OF THE "GOLDEN VANITY"



CHAPTER I

The Broken Appointment

"It looks as if it's going to be a complete washout," declared Bernard Woodward, glancing at his watch for at least the twentieth time since noon—and it was now nearly two o'clock. "What's to be done if Mr. Harrison doesn't show up?"

"He will," asserted Geoffrey Ensor confidently. "Perhaps something's happened to his jolly old car. That's the yacht, right enough. There can't be two *Nornas*. It's merely a case of our weary watches keeping."

"Well, there's some slight consolation in that," rejoined his chum. "There's no need to hand them over to 'Uncle' for custody. But I hope to goodness we aren't let down."

The two chums were waiting at Greenbank Steps at Falmouth—waiting to keep an appointment with someone whom they had never seen. The expected meeting was the outcome of an announcement in the *Yachting Press*. The owner of a twelve-ton yawl had advertised for two young and energetic amateur yachtsmen to accompany him on a cruise to the Brittany ports. Bernard and Geoff had replied to a Box Number with the result that arrangements had been made with the owner, a Mr. Harrison, for the crew to join the yawl *Norna* at Greenbank, Falmouth, at noon on Tuesday morning.

They were there to the minute, but the owner of *Norna* was not.

Bernard Woodward was a somewhat heavily-built, broad-shouldered lad of sixteen, dark-featured and looking considerably older than his years. He was Yorkshire born and until he went to Greystones—a public school in the south of England—most of his time had been spent in the neighbourhood of Whitby and Runswick Bay, where he had acquired a useful knowledge of seamanship from the fishermen who earn their livelihood in those quaint but highly seaworthy craft known as cobsles. There was Norse blood in Bernard's veins; almost certainly his ancestors first set foot in England when, centuries ago, the black-sailed galleys from Scandinavia ascended the Humber and Trent to harry and then to settle on Anglo-Saxon soil.

It was Bernard's ambition to take to the sea as a career. He wanted to enter the Royal Navy. His father had vetoed that. Later his inclinations leant towards the Mercantile Marine, but Mr. Woodward turned that idea down also. He wanted Bernard to become a Chartered Accountant, overlooking the fact that his son was quite old enough to form a strong opinion of what his future career ought to be. Curiously enough Mr. Woodward offered no objection to Bernard going on a yachting cruise across Channel with a hitherto unknown individual. Possibly it was because Mr. Woodward, an artist of no slight repute, was taking a holiday sketching class to Brittany and would be in a position to give an eye to his son should occasion arise.

Geoff Ensor was similar in build to his chum, and almost the same age. There the resemblance ended, for Geoff was typically Anglo-Saxon in appearance, with fair complexion and straight, close-cropped flaxen hair. His home was in East Dorset where the high percentage of fair-haired people testifies to the purity of the Anglo-Saxon more than in any other part of England.

Geoff's father was a well-to-do solicitor. There was a sound practice waiting for Geoff when the time came, but, like Bernard, the youth's mind was set upon the sea. He stood rather in awe of his parent and had not as yet expressed in words the thought that was uppermost in his mind. Consequently Mr. Ensor took it for granted that Geoff would automatically become the son of "Ensor & Son" even as he had once been junior partner to his father.

Nor had Mr. Ensor raised any objection to Geoff's proposal to go on a yachting cruise. In fact he rather jumped at the idea, since it left him free to take his wife on an extended motor tour to the Highlands. The arrangement fitted in well. Mr. Ensor was spared the additional and decidedly heavy hotel expenses for his son on tour, while Geoff, who hated to have to sit inactive in a car for hours at a stretch, was glad to have the opportunity to exchange the dusty road for the ozone-laden breezes of the open sea.

Geoff had a fair practical knowledge of boats. Often he had gone afloat in small craft in Poole Harbour. His theoretical knowledge of seamanship was amazing, especially as he had no relatives connected with the sea. Quite possibly his great-great-grandfather had been one of those hardy—one might say lawless—mariners of Poole, who in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had earned a reputation for desperate courage in many a stoutly contested fight with French privateers.

In Bernard Woodward he found a kindred spirit. In their leisure moments at Greystones they talked boats and precious little else. They took in every yachting paper they could find, they pored over charts and sailing directions, devoured dry tomes on seamanship and navigation.

Then, towards the close of the summer term, they answered Mr. Harrison's advertisement, made all arrangements and arrived at the rendezvous at Falmouth well before the stated time—and Mr. Harrison had failed to put in an appearance!

Another hour passed tediously. Yachtsmen and paid hands passed in a steady stream to embark in their dinghies and go aboard their various craft. A flat calm accompanied by a slight summer haze overspread the harbour. Yachts of all rigs and sizes—cutters, yawls, ketches, and several of those characteristically designed, able craft known as quay punts—rode at their moorings. Many had their sails set, the canvas hanging idly from their gaffs, waiting for the expected and long-delayed breeze. Others, possessing auxiliary motors, were chugging noisily seaward to catch the steady sou'westerly wind beyond Pendennis Point.

Anxiously Bernard and Geoff scanned the faces of the yachtsmen as they passed, but, beyond casual, careless glances, none showed any interest in the two waiting youths. Obviously, then, Mr. Harrison was not amongst those fortunate individuals who had but to row a short distance to their respective yachts.

Practically every craft was making ready to get under way. A notable exception was the *Norna*. She lay, with sail covers on, riding gently to the first of the ebb, without a sign of life on board.

"Why not try and find where her dinghy is?" suggested Geoff.

"Good egg!" agreed his chum. "There's bound to be someone looking after the yacht."

They made their way towards the stone quay whence the ferry plies from Greenbank to Flushing, looking at each of the many dinghies lying on the shelving shore.

Presently they noticed one with a club badge painted on each bow and the name *Norna* on the back-board. She had but recently been washed down. Globules of water yet remained on her varnished thwarts and spotlessly clean bottom-boards.

Evidently the person entrusted with the duty of looking after and cleaning Mr. Harrison's dinghy had only recently completed his task. He could not be far away.

A group of blue-jerseyed men were leaning over a low stone wall, lazily contemplating the wind-bound yachts.

"Can you tell me who is in charge of *Norna*?" asked Bernard.

"I be, sure, sir," replied a weather-beaten man, tugging at his tawny forelock.

"Have you seen Mr. Harrison?"

"No sir. 'E wrote tu I tellin' me to 'ave his yot ready tu-day come-rainy, come-fine. Aired canvas I 'ave, an' put fresh watter an' all aboard agen 'is comin'."

"We arranged with him to join the yacht here," announced Geoff. "Did he mention anything about us in his letter?"

"No, sir," replied the man stolidly.

"What time do you expect him?"

"When I sees 'im I sees 'im," was the uncompromising response.

"Can you put us on board?" asked Bernard.

The old boatman shook his head.

"That I can't, certain sure," he replied decidedly. "Ain't got no orders, sir."

"Unobliging blighter," soliloquized Geoff, but the thought had hardly entered his head when he recognized the honesty of the man in whose charge *Norna* had been left. After all, he was responsible, and he was only doing his duty by refusing

to allow two strangers on board.

Just at that moment a car drew up and a tall, elderly man switched off the ignition and alighted stiffly. For some moments he scanned the beach, then, catching sight of the two lads, walked towards them.

"Mr. Harrison?" queried Bernard.

"Fraid not," was the reply. "Do you happen to be Mr. Ensor?"

Bernard hastened to correct the stranger's slight error.

"I've a note for you," continued the motorist, handing Geoff a pencilled missive. "It's from Mr. Harrison."

Eagerly Geoff read the note and handed it to his chum.

"Awfully sorry," it read, "but I have met with an accident and am now in hospital. In the circumstances, I regret that our proposed cruise is off, and the doctor here declares that I shall not be fit for at least six weeks. I hope that my disappointment is greater than yours, and that you will be able to find ample recompense in another direction before very long. Yours sincerely, H. B. Harrison."

CHAPTER II

An Unexpected Offer

"Rough luck!" exclaimed Geoff.

For the present he felt a little bewildered at the sudden and unexpected news. Whether his exclamation referred to the dashing of his hopes or to the accident that had befallen the unlucky Harrison was a matter of speculation. As it happened the bearer of ill-tidings took the latter view.

"It is," he agreed. "These Cornish roads are the limit. I came across your friend lying by the side of the road and his car over on its side. From what I gathered he had collided with a stone wall in attempting to avoid a dog. I managed to get him into my car and take him to a cottage hospital. He was pretty badly knocked about—compound fracture of the left arm, dislocated collar-bone and severe scalp wound. Plucky as they make 'em, though! As soon as the doctor had patched him up he insisted on writing that note and got me to bring it along."

"Jolly decent of you, sir," declared Geoff.

"Not at all! I was on my way down to Penzance, and it isn't far out of my intended route. It will give me a chance to have a look round Falmouth. Well, that's all, I think. I'll be getting along."

With that the stranger returned to his car and was soon lost to sight.

Geoff looked at the note again.

"We didn't ask him where the accident occurred," he remarked. "And there's no address. Goodness knows where the Cottage hospital is. It may be miles away."

"And there's not much object in finding Mr. Harrison," rejoined his chum. "We don't know him and more than likely his people have been telegraphed to. Well, the cruise is off."

"And what's to be done now?"

Bernard gave a longing glance at the harbour. By this time the breeze had materialized and the red and white wings were heeling to the gentle wind.

Without replying he turned to the *Norna's* caretaker, who, having overheard part of the conversation, was hovering around for further information.

"Mr. Harrison's met with an accident," announced Bernard. "He won't be able to sail for at least six weeks. But no doubt he'll write to you and tell you what to do with the yacht. I suppose you don't happen to know of an owner who wants a couple of amateur hands?"

"Amatoor?" repeated the old man dubiously. "Can't say as I knows of any. Very onusual, ut be. Now I knows of a nice lil' sailing-boat wot belongs to a cousin o' we—meaning me an' me brother Carlo, Andrew Penbolla bein' 'is name—wot you can hire prapper-like for——"

"Garge! Whur be tu?" shouted one of the group of men from which the old boatman had recently detached himself.

The summons sounded peremptory. With a muttered, "'Scuse me a while, gents," George Penbolla hurried away.

During the last quarter of an hour the knot of 'longshoremen had been augmented by a swarthy, over-dressed man of about forty. Up to the present the chums, engaged in their own business, had not noticed the individual. Now that Garge had gone up to him and was apparently engaged upon an argument Bernard and Geoff could not help being attracted by the conversation.

"Not fur a 'unnard pound," declared Garge with Cornish vehemence. "'Tain't no use you axin' we; us won't take it on nohow!"

Half a dozen heads nodded in unison in support of the spokesman's declaration. The stranger shrugged his shoulder, and extended his upturned palms—a characteristically foreign gesture.

As he did so he swung round with his face turned towards the chums. He looked a foreigner. His hair was crisp and inclined to curl; also it was badly in need of cutting. His features were sallow and flabby, his lips full. His brown eyes had a pathetic, almost apprehensive look, like those of an ox in a slaughterhouse.

He was dressed in a blue yachting suit with a peaked cap crowned with a white cover. The badge was that of a well known club. Geoff noticed, with feelings of contempt, that the man sported a tie-pin and wore diamond rings on two fingers. If the stones were real, they represented a small fortune, but, in any case, they were far too conspicuous and likely to hamper any attempt at work afloat.

The man made what was an obvious appeal in a low and somewhat musical voice. He continued to talk. At first Garge, as head of the party, shook his head; gradually the negative movement ceased. Then his tawny poll began to nod.

"Now your'm talking sense-like," he observed. "Just so happens as 'ow them two gents wur axin' if I knowed where they could get berths as amatoors. Mebbe they'll do. If so be, I reckons 'arf a sovereign. . . . Right-o, guvnor, this way."

With that he led the over-dressed yachtsman to the spot where the chums stood.

"This gent," he began, without any preliminaries, "this gent 'as a nice lil' yot an' 'e wants 'er sailed up-along to Cowes. You two wants a run in a yot. I leaves it to you tu fix it up."

Having thus unburdened himself, Garge moved away to a discreet distance, leaving the chums confronted by the stranger.

For some seconds there was silence. Both would-be contracting parties looked at each other as if trying to sum up their respective personalities.

Geoff, keen on sailing and only a moderate judge of character, was only too ready to jump at the offer. Bernard, more cautious, waited to hear what was required, and deliberated with himself whether he could "stick that poisonous sweep". As for the "poisonous sweep", his chief anxiety was to get hold of a couple of hands capable of sailing his craft to The Wight. Seeing, as he thought, a pair of hefty youths of nineteen or thereabouts—and they looked it—he decided that they would do.

"My name's Gordon," he announced. "There's my yacht—the *Arran Dhu*."

With a wave of his be-ringed hand, Mr. Gordon indicated a cutter of about twelve tons that lay at moorings a little beyond the buoy to which the *Norna* rode. Outwardly she appeared to be a well-kept-up craft, although her straight stem and long counter proclaimed her to have been in existence for an extremely large number of years. Originally she had a topmast and heavy overhanging boom, but she was now rigged more snugly with a polemast and lighter spars, the boom being plumb with the counter. She was flush-decked, save for two skylights and a small cockpit. Her sides were painted black, with a white boot-top. As she rolled to the swell of a passing steamer her copper gleamed in the sunlight. From a flagstaff aft flew the Blue Ensign.

"I want the *Arran Dhu* sailed round to the Solent," continued Mr. Gordon. "You two—I understand you're amateurs—seem quite the sort of people I want. Think you'd like to take on the job?"

Bernard glanced at Geoff. Geoff glanced at Bernard. The latter's caution had vanished at the sight of the Blue Ensign. To him that emblem was the hall-mark of maritime respectability second only to the White Ensign of the Royal Navy and the Royal Yacht Squadron. What he did not know was that, provided the owner is a British subject and a member of a recognized club entitled to fly the Blue Ensign, and that the yacht is "registered", the Admiralty will grant a warrant entitling the yacht to display the ensign in question. The owner may be the biggest scoundrel unhung, the yacht the rottenest old tub ever held together by paint—provided the Admiralty conditions are complied with, the former virtually becomes a member of the Royal Naval Reserve, and the latter can sport the Blue Ensign in the presence of abler and better-manned craft that have to be content with the humble "Red Duster".

"We're on it, sir!" exclaimed Geoff, and Bernard nodded concurrence.

"That's a deal then!" rejoined Mr. Gordon.

"When do you set sail?" asked Bernard.

Mr. Gordon waved his hand magnificently.

"I'm not sailing," was the surprising reply. "Business affairs demand my presence in London to-morrow. You two can manage quite all right. She handles like a top. It will be a surprisingly cheap holiday for the pair of you. If you had to charter a yacht like *Arran Dhu* twelve guineas a week it would cost you. As it is, all the expense you'll be put to is for provisions. With the wind where it is, you can pick up moorings in Cowes Harbour within twenty-four hours, but I'm in no hurry. You can take a week if you like. Provided *Arran Dhu* is handed over by the 12th, I'll not mind. Well, that's that. Now we'll go into details."

It seemed rather a tall order, but the chums, in spite of their inexperience of open sea work, realized that it was up to them to see the business through. Both were glad in their minds that they were not to be burdened with Mr. Gordon's company. They were on their mettle. Now was the opportunity to see how theoretical knowledge combined with a little practical work would pan out.

"There are charts on board, I hope?" asked Geoff.

"Charts—everything; she's fully found," declared Mr. Gordon airily. "I'll go on board and show you round. One minute while I have a word with the boatman."

Mr. Gordon was absent not one but many minutes. The chums remained by the *Arran Dhu's* dinghy—a beamy craft that had only left the boat-builder's yard a fortnight—until the owner returned.

"We've let ourselves in for it this time, old son," remarked Geoff. "She's a big packet to handle."

"All right with plenty of sea-room once we've learnt the ropes," rejoined his chum. "By the look of her she'll stand anything. We'll get her into Cowes Harbour right enough."

Arran Dhu's owner, treading with cat-like softness, returned to overhear Bernard's remark.

"I hope to goodness you do nothing of the kind, my friend," was his amazing, unspoken wish.

CHAPTER III

Gordon's Little Scheme

The chums' knowledge of what is known as "the world" was decidedly limited. They were practical enough when dealing with situations or tackling problems connected with youthful sport and pastime, but when thrown into contact with strangers they were apt to accept them at their own valuation.

Thus it was that they accepted Mr. Gordon's statement without hesitation: that he was a yachtsman who had been "compelled to go to London and leave his craft at Falmouth". Since Mr. Gordon wanted the *Arran Dhu* taken round to Cowes, the arrangement fitted in admirably. They would be doing the owner a good turn while he would be saved the inconvenience of making a long train journey to bring her eastwards at some future date.

As a matter of fact Mr. Gordon lived in various places between Bournemouth and Hastings, never remaining more than a few weeks in the same hotel. In London he had "chambers" of a more or less permanent character. He described himself as a financier—a high-sounding term to the uninitiated. Some people had no hesitation in describing him as a shark. On more than one occasion he had been called that to his face and he had accepted the insult with a sickly smile.

Thanks to the tolerant and benevolent attitude of the British Government to undesirable foreigners seeking sanctuary within its gates, Mr. Gordon's father had little difficulty in dropping his name—an unpronounceable one ending in "ski"—and assuming a good Scots one. The present Mr. Gordon found the name useful. It inspired confidence in clients who communicated with him by letter only. Mr. Gordon rarely granted personal interviews professionally. He was fully alive to the fact that the assumption of a Scottish name had not and could not eliminate the marked characteristics of his Russo-Polish forbears.

Through one of those sudden inexplicable impulses to which human nature is subject, Gordon decided "to go in for yachting". It seemed easy. All one had to do was to buy a yacht, join a club, engage a crew (even if the crew numbered one only), and, of course, purchase a yachting uniform with peaked cap complete. That was Gordon's view. He set about putting his ideas into execution.

He had no trouble in buying a yachting suit. Joining a "Royal" club presented little difficulty, especially as the club was anxious to increase its membership list, and thereby strengthen its financial position. Mr. Gordon, having been duly proposed and seconded by members who had never set eyes on him and who knew nothing whatever about him, was declared elected.

Then came the snag—the purchase of a yacht. Gordon, who prided himself upon the calculating cunning whereby he had fleeced scores of foolish victims, had yet to discover that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, especially when yachts are concerned.

A carefully worded attractive advertisement resulted in the purchase of the *Arran Dhu*. Knowing nothing about "marine survey", Gordon bought her at Penzance "as she now lies", according to the vendor's announcement. It was true that she was officially registered. Her number was carved deeply in her main deck beam. Her certificate was in order—her pedigree that showed amongst other things that once she had been the property of a belted earl. So, in consideration of a monetary payment, Gordon became the owner of "sixty-four sixty-fourths" of the *Arran Dhu*.

Straight stemmed, lean bodied, and deep draughted, *Arran Dhu* was as "stiff as a church and as slow as a funeral". According to local longshoremen "she'd starve you afore she'd drown you". Her timbers and planking were sound. Her sails were in good condition. Her standing and running gear had recently been renewed. Freshly painted, *Arran Dhu* looked a smart well-cared-for craft; but to the professional eye there was no disguising the fact that she was no chicken.

Having purchased the yacht, Gordon had her insured up to the hilt; but according to the terms of the policy, he had to bear the first fifty pounds of every claim for accident.

Then, having engaged two local men to act as crew, Gordon set sail from Penzance bound up-Channel.

Before the Lizard bore abeam, Gordon had had enough of open sea work. A beat to wind'ard with a strong weather-going tide—conditions under which sailing provides a most exhilarating sensation—proved too much for the financier's internal stability. Not only was he violently sea-sick; the yellow streak, in the form of abject fear, displayed itself conspicuously. From first to last he never was in any danger; but when the *Arran Dhu* entered the sheltered waters of

Falmouth Harbour, Gordon began to abuse his paid hands, alleging that they had deliberately exposed his precious carcass to extreme peril.

The inevitable result was that the two men—honest Cornish yacht hands—refused point blank to remain on board and obtained their discharge forthwith. Gordon's cowardly behaviour became known to the Falmouth yacht hands, and the upshot was that *Arran Dhu's* owner found himself stranded.

Not that he wanted to risk his precious life in the open waters of the English Channel. In the Solent with a harbour under one's lee, no matter the direction of the wind, yachting in his opinion might be tolerable. Once he found someone willing to sail the boat to those sheltered waters, all would be well. If, on the other hand, the yacht were lost, he would more than recoup himself for his initial outlay.

So he hailed with intense satisfaction the chance that threw Bernard and Geoff in his way.

Not that he wanted them to lose their lives. He did not mind them risking *their* hides, however careful he was of his own. But, he consoled himself, if the yacht were lost, the crew could take to the dinghy, and would probably either make their way ashore or else get picked up by a passing vessel.

Like many ill-informed individuals, Gordon regarded "taking to the boat" as a matter of course. He did not stop to think that in nine cases out of ten, when a yacht sinks or is thrown ashore owing to the violence of the elements, her dinghy is already either swamped or stove-in.

Everything considered, Gordon had good reason to congratulate himself on being able to persuade the chums to attempt to sail the yacht round. He had saved the cost of professional labour; if an accident happened, he would not be liable under the Workmen's Compensation Act.

In short, he summed up the case as follows: either *Arran Dhu* would reach the Solent or she would not. If she did it would be a task economically carried out. If she did not, he would draw the insurance. An alternative proposition never occurred to him, and this is where Mr. Gordon, astute financier, made a serious miscalculation.

CHAPTER IV

A Night at Sea

For the rest of the afternoon the chums were busily engaged in preparing for the voyage. Gordon, having taken them on board and explained in glowing terms the sea-worthiness of *Arran Dhu* and the lavishness of her equipment, went ashore and took the first available train to London.

The lads' first task was to overhaul sails and running gear to find out where each rope led, and for what purpose it was intended.

"I reckon she's slow in stays," remarked Geoff. "She'll be a brute to handle if we have to beat out of here, but with plenty of sea-room——"

"Yes, sea-room's the thing!" ejaculated Bernard. "On a wind she'll sail herself. What do you say to getting under way to-night? The wind's sou'westerly. When does the tide serve?"

An inspection of the Nautical Almanac in conjunction with the chart showed that the first of the east-going stream commenced at a little after eight o'clock.

"Just the thing," agreed Geoff. "It will give us an opportunity to provision the ship. We'll listen to the weather forecast; if it's all right, we'll make a start at once."

They rowed ashore, made their way to the nearest provision shop, and bought enough tinned stuff to last them a month!

"Saves the fag of having to cook," explained Geoff. "Now, is there anything more we want?"

Bernard thought not. They retraced their way to where they had left the dinghy. Garge, his broad back propped against the stone wall, smiled benignly.

"Your'm off, I'll allow?" he inquired.

"Yes, this evening," replied Geoff. "Is she easy to handle?"

"Quiet as a lamb," asserted the man. "Wunnerful seaboat she be. I knowed 'er when Mr. Trefuses 'ad 'er. Lie-to? Sartain sure. The only thing wrong with that there 'ooker is 'er owner, an' I don't go much on 'im."

A certain sense of loyalty towards the absent Mr. Gordon who had so generously lent them the yacht restrained the chums from asking for further explanations.

They rowed off to the *Arran Dhu*, had a good meal ("You never know when you'll have the chance to get another," remarked Bernard philosophically), and awaited the hour fixed for their departure.

In plenty of time they stood by for the weather report. The *Arran Dhu's* radio equipment was installed with its aerial running from the starboard chain-plate up to the masthead and down to the corresponding chain-plate on the port side, whence it led to the set fixed to the for'ard bulkhead of the saloon. Thus the aerial could be kept in position while the yacht was under way. The so-called "earth" was merely a copper wire trailing overside into the water.

"Winds sou'westerly, moderate to light. Further outlook: a period of fine sunny weather is likely to continue for some days.' Good enough!" declared Geoff. "Let's get sail on her!"

He gave a comprehensive glance round to reassure himself that all was snug below, and that there was nothing likely to go adrift when the yacht heeled. Then he followed his chum on deck.

Together they commenced to hoist the heavy mainsail.

"May as well reeve the reef-earrings," said Bernard. "They mightn't be wanted, but if they're there they're there! . . . A swig on the peak-halliards, old son! At that! Slack away the topping-lift. My word, that sail sets well! Nothing much to complain about there!"

Staysail and No. 2 jib were then hoisted. Leaving Geoff to tend the headsheets, Bernard went aft to the tiller.

"Head sails a-weather! Let go!" he shouted.

The *Arran Dhu* had been lying at moorings, thus doing away with the necessity of weighing and stowing anchor. Geoff, taking care that the buoy-rope was not foul of the bowsprit shrouds, cast off the mooring-chain. The yacht's head paid off. Her jib and staysail sheets were trimmed a-lee. Slowly she gathered way.

The voyage had begun.

For the next five minutes it was an anxious time for the youthful helmsman. They rapidly gathered an understanding of her "stiffness" and slowness.

In the early days of his youth, Bernard's somewhat didactic father had taken great pains to impress upon his son the paramount importance of doing one thing at a time and doing it well. This advice had been so often reiterated that it had become tedious. Bernard had tried, after a fashion, to live up to the precept, with the result that he was apt to be slow in his movements and painstaking in his methods.

Five minutes in charge of *Arran Dhu* knocked that precept into the limbo of shattered illusions. He had to be here, there, and everywhere. A pull on a sheet here; a leap to clear a kinked line there; then back to the tiller in order to put it hard down to prevent the yacht poking her bowsprithead through the shrouds of an anchored craft. Then the tiller had to be temporarily abandoned in order that the dinghy's painter might be shortened lest that hefty yet important object should foul the buoy of a large ketch.

As it was the *Arran Dhu's* boom-end missed the ketch's bowsprit by inches; and, having given the young helmsman cold shivers, she proceeded to do her best to get in irons, midway between a steam-yacht and a large motor-cruiser.

"Put your hellum down!" yelled a brass-bound man on the steam yacht. "Let 'er come abart!" shouted a Cockney hand on the motor-yacht.

Arran Dhu refused to answer. Absolutely in irons, she drifted on the now strong tideway, grazing past both craft with little more than a fender's breadth to spare.

By this time Geoff had snugged down for'ard and come aft.

"What's up with her?" he inquired.

Bernard shook his head.

"Hanged if I know," he replied. "I have never handled such a brute. Headsheets to wind'ard, old son. Sooner we get way on her the better."

By this time *Arran Dhu* had drifted rather than sailed clear of the anchorage. Sulkiyly she paid off, gathered way, and pointed her bows towards the open sea.

Before Black Rock was abeam, Bernard had "got the hang of things". In other words, he discovered that the old-fashioned craft could not be "pinched"—that is to say, sailed close to the wind. She would not point so high as a short-keeled yacht, or even the centre-board boats to which the chums were accustomed. But, given liberal weather-helm, *Arran Dhu* would be reasonably tractable.

"What's the course, Captain?" asked Geoff, when St. Antony bore a mile to the nor'ard.

"Due east," replied Bernard. "You take the helm, I'll go below and get the kettle on the stove. Yes, she's doing very well now."

Arran Dhu was certainly moving. There was a steady sou'westerly breeze and favourable flood-tide. With eased sheets the cutter was doing a good five knots, while the dinghy, straining at her two-inch Manila painter, was frothing noisily through the grey-blue water.

Already it was close on sunset. In the cabin it was too gloomy to see much, so Bernard lighted the two gimballed lamps before attending to the stove.

What a transformation those lamps made! The mellow light harmonized with the cushions and curtains. There was a pleasing and characteristically yachty smell of varnished teak, and a subtle odour of tarred rope. From without came the

sound of plashing water as the old boat drove sedately through the waves. Through the open skylight wafted the sound of the wind as it hummed in the tautened weather rigging. The while there was a pleasing, rhythmic motion that made the swing table and the gimbaled lamps sway in unison as the *Arran Dhu* kicked her heels to the quartering seas.

"This is absolutely IT!" thought Bernard enthusiastically.

Presently: "Grub's ready!" he sang out. "Are you coming down?"

"No," replied Geoff. "You carry on. I'm all right. When you've finished I'll have my grub."

Bernard ate his meal in silence, ecstatically happy.

"Bring the side-lights when you come up," called out the helmsman.

Reflecting that these should have been lighted and placed in position before, as it was now well past sunset, Bernard brought the lamps from the lamp-room and went on deck.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "what's the wind doing?"

"Falling light," replied his chum, relinquishing the tiller. "No matter; we're afloat. Who cares?"

Left to himself Bernard nursed the almost unresisting tiller. The breeze was dropping steadily. The *Arran Dhu* was hardly making way through the water. Astern the dinghy wallowed sluggishly, the bight of her painter dipping again and again into the oily sea, and throwing a cascade of phosphorescent spray every time the rope took up the towing strain.

Bernard glanced at the compass-card in the electrically lighted binnacle-hood. The yacht's bows were still pointing east. So far the dying breeze had remained true.

Shorewards the lights of the various fishing-hamlets had vanished into a sort of watery haze. Although overhead the stars shone brightly a kind of low-lying mist seemed to be closing down upon the yacht.

At length the wind petered out. *Arran Dhu* rolled sluggishly, her canvas slatting from side to side, the heavy boom bringing up with a jerk as the mainsheet took up the strain. Alternately the flapping foresail was tinged with red and green as the fabric swung into the arc of the sidelights. Through the frosted glass of the skylight the lamps in the saloon gleamed cosily. A clatter of metal announced that Geoff had finished his meal, and was engaged in the prosaic task of washing-up.

Then it was that Bernard realized the impotency of a sailing-craft when deserted by the breeze. There was a sense of utter helplessness in being becalmed in the open seas on a dark night, and without power to move the yacht. A motor, which both chums had scornfully derided, would now have been welcome. True, there were sweeps, but what purpose was there in tugging at the heavy ash oars which at their best would urge the heavy craft along at only a little over a mile an hour?

Bernard began to be conscious of a decided drop in temperature. There was a chilliness in the air that seemed different from the normal change following sunset. It was a damp cold that, in spite of the lad's thick sweater, seemed to strike to the very marrow of his bones.

"Pass up my oileys, Geoff!" he sung out.

"Right-o!" replied his chum. "What do you want them for? Is it raining?"

"No; it's beastly cold," was the laconic response. "Better bring yours, too, while you're about it."

Geoff appeared carrying both semi-rigid, self-adhesive lumps of yellow canvas that claimed to be non-sticking oilskin coats.

"It is dark, isn't it?" remarked Geoff. "How's her head, cap'n?"

He peered at the compass card. The lubber's line was against NW by W.

"Bit off your course, aren't you?" he remarked.

"Try and get her round, then," said his chum. "We're just drifting, nothing more."

To emphasize his remark, the dinghy ranged up alongside the yacht's port quarter. At the risk of having his fingers jammed, Bernard grasped the dinghy's gunwale and pushed her clear of the sluggishly rolling *Arran Dhu*. The while the boom was charging from side to side, threatening to deal a stunning blow to either or both lads.

This sort of thing continued until nearly midnight. The sky was now completely overcast. Big drops of rain pattered on the deck or splashed as they struck the heaving, crestless waves. The rain increased in density, until, in spite of the darkness, the sea all around the wind-starved yacht was ghostly white with the rebounding drops and the noise of the creaking gear was drowned by the sound of the vertically falling downpour.

Then, its volume increasing until it outvoiced the sound of falling rain, came a long-drawn moan.

Each lad glanced at the other. Bernard sprang to his feet.

"Let go your headsheets," he shouted. "We're in for it! It's a squall!"

CHAPTER V

On her Beam Ends

Even as Geoff cast loose jib and staysail sheets from their cleats, and Bernard paid out the saturated and swollen mainsheet the violent squall swept down upon the *Arran Dhu*.

It took her fairly abeam and in spite of her great stability flung her down until her lee coamings were awash. The canvas flapped and cracked like a whip; the slacked-off sheets flogged wildly. In the darkness it was out of the question to form any definite idea of what was going on. The lads were enveloped in salt-laden spray as they groped for the tiller and mainsheet.

Fortunately the initial blast was of short duration. The yacht, relieved of the terrific pressure, began to forge ahead, gathering way as Geoff hauled in the stubborn mainsheet.

"Get those headsails to wind'ard as sharp as you can," shouted his chum. "We'll heave to and knock down a couple of reefs."

Considering their lack of practical experience the youthful crew were to be congratulated. How exactly they succeeded in taking in those two reefs they hardly knew. It was not until the last of the reef-points was secured, and the breathless lads were once more in the cockpit, that they discovered they were without their oilskins and wet through to the skin. In the excitement of finding their movements impeded they had automatically discarded the cumbersome coats and had bundled them under one of the seats of the cockpit. Ten minutes ago they were feeling chilled to the bone; now they were glowing as the result of their exertions.

By rights the headsails should have been correspondingly reduced; for, when the sheets were trimmed, and the *Arran Dhu* bounded ahead like a plunging dray-horse, she carried a decided amount of lee-helm. But for the enormous leverage of her keel, and the grip afforded by her generous amount of draught, she might have been thrown on her beam-ends. As it was the old "plank-on-edge" type of craft possessed one advantage denied to her more modern and easier handled sister—she could be driven with lee-helm without being either dismasted or capsized.

The way the stiff old packet bored her way through the rapidly rising seas gave returning confidence to the somewhat frightened lads. Each would have freely admitted under self-examination that he "had the wind up badly", but wild horses would not have dragged that admission from his lips. And with restored confidence came an inexplicable sensation of exhilaration.

The squall had given place to a hard wind from the east'ard—one of those summer "blows" which meteorological science may be able to explain, but is rarely able to forecast.

Showers of spray and frequently "green-uns" flew over the weather bow, while the lee-bow wave, frothing and hissing, was a sight to gladden the heart of any deep-sea sailorman. Astern the dinghy, straining at her painter, was tearing madly, her bluff bows high in the air on the crest of a wave that followed but never overtook the plunging counter of the hard-driven *Arran Dhu*.

With feet pressed firmly against the lee side of the cockpit, and with tautened arms grasping the quivering tiller, Bernard steered through the chaotic waves, for with the sudden change of wind the tide was now weather-going, raising a short, steep sea.

A glance at the compass showed him that the course was now sou'sou'-east. At any rate it was a fairly safe course, and not one that might eventually pile the old yacht upon the iron-bound Cornish coast. He knew that more than a hundred miles lay between the *Arran Dhu* and the French coast, and that the deeper the water the more regular the seas were likely to be. He had faith in Worth's dictum: "The sea is kind to little boats", even if they are sailed by raw and rash amateurs.

Bernard, steering by the luff of the mainsail as naturally as if he had been at sea for years—it was the innate instinct that makes seamen that was asserting itself—was fully occupied with what was ahead. Geoff, for the present able to "stand easy" was watching the dinghy. Even in the darkness there was something that told him that all was not well with her. She was yawing badly. No longer riding on the crest of the following wave, she was showing a decided tendency to overrun the yacht. At one moment she would sweep forward until her bows seemed as if they were about to come down

with an appalling crash upon the *Arran Dhu's* counter. At the next she would drop astern until with a savage twang the tautened painter pulled her up with a jerk, to repeat the charging tactics.

One of those sudden jerks proved her undoing. Instead of lifting her sharp bows to the crested wave she plunged into it. A sea filled her. She rolled completely over. The strain on the painter was enormous. Something had to go. The Manila stood the stupendous drag, but the cleat on the *Arran Dhu's* cockpit coaming was wrenched from its fastening. For a few moments Geoff had a fleeting glimpse of the dinghy's keel. Then the derelict was lost to sight in the darkness.

"Dinghy's gone!" shouted Geoff.

His chum merely grunted. He had other things to think about. Ahead was a tremendous crested wave. Viewed from the comparatively low level of the cockpit it seemed as if it would overwhelm the yacht. Down it bore, rapidly, menacingly. The *Arran Dhu* buried her bowsprit into the frothing mass. Green water surged as far aft as the saloon skylight; yet, like a noble mastiff, the old boat shook herself clear, staggered as a fresh blast struck her, and resumed her onward rush.

From that moment the weather began to ease up. The wind piped down considerably. Once more rain began to fall, beating down the crests of the waves, until, as the first streaks of dawn appeared on the distant horizon, the summer storm had blown itself out.

It was a dawn! Away to the east and nor'east the sky was of a vivid crimson hue. To lee'ard ragged wisps of indigo-coloured clouds were scudding in a vain attempt to overtake the shades of receding night. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing to be seen but an expanse of sullen rollers meeting an unbroken horizon. Land was nowhere in sight—not that the chums expected to see it. They would have been considerably astonished had they done so.

"How about shaking out those reefs?" asked Geoff.

"Best not, yet awhile," replied Bernard. "There's more bad weather coming, judging by the sunrise. We'll put her about on the starboard tack, I vote we make Plymouth Sound and stop there till it looks more settled. Take her, Geoff, I'll go below and get some hot grub."

"Heave her to, first," suggested Geoff. "I vote we both go below, and shift into dry gear. Helm's a-lee!"

As if tired after her decidedly speedy performance, the *Arran Dhu* swung slowly into the wind. With headsheets to wind'ard she lay to, pitching gently.

Lashing the tiller and leaving the yacht to her own devices, both lads dived into the cabin, and rummaged in their respective kit-bags for dry clothing.

Considering the hammering she had undergone the yacht was fairly tidy below. The gimballed lamps were still burning feebly in the growing daylight. Some of the cushions had been thrown from the settees, and were lying sodden in a couple of inches of water that surged across the linoleum-covered floor. A few things in the galley had been displaced, but being of enamelled iron had come off lightly.

"She'll go through anything after that," declared Geoff enthusiastically.

His chum, struggling into a dry sweater, mumbled something to the effect that his sentiments were in accord with those of the speaker.

"She's all right with plenty of sea-room," he added. "But she's a pig when it comes to turning into a crowded harbour. . . . Where's the methylated, old son?"

Evidently the tin containing this necessary commodity had gone adrift during the blow. Both lads were engaged in a hunt amidst the somewhat disordered gear in the galley when a peculiar jarring sound, different from those they had previously heard on board, attracted their attention.

"What's that?" asked Bernard.

Before his chum could reply, the whole yacht quivered. She seemed to leap bodily in a vertical direction for at least six inches. It was somewhat akin to the sudden and unexpected starting of a lift. Then, almost before they realized what was happening, the lads were hurled against the fortunately unlighted stove, to the accompaniment of a shower of tinned

goods from the pantry.

The *Arran Dhu* was on her beam ends.

Hastily the lads regained their feet, dazed by their peculiar surroundings. Instinct prompted them to make a bolt for the deck, but it was easier said than done. Between the galley and the saloon there had been a sliding door six feet in height and two in breadth. Now there was an aperture two feet in height and six in breadth, one of the doorposts forming the sill and inclining sixty degrees or more to the perpendicular.

Over the ledge the lads contrived to clamber, finding a footing on the rise of the starboard settee. Followed an indecorous scramble over the swing-table and a combined gymnastic display in order to negotiate the almost horizontal companion ladder.

At length they gained the cockpit, planted their feet on one coaming and rested their backs against the other. In that position they were able to take in their immediate surroundings.

Arran Dhu was lying with her canvas almost flat on the water. In fact her boom-end and the clew of her staysail were submerged. Her mast, thirty-eight feet from heel to truck, was inclined to such an extent that the top was only about seven feet from the surface.

"Are we aground?" asked Geoff.

"Aground—in mid channel," replied his chum. "I don't think. Must have hit some floating object, I fancy."

"Then why doesn't she right herself?"

"Goodness knows," answered Bernard. "Let's get canvas off her and see if that makes any difference."

It was a practical suggestion but difficult to put into execution. It was no easy task to go for'ard, maintaining a precarious foothold on the side of the skylight, and thence to the fife-rail. Working desperately they succeeded in casting off the moisture-swollen jib and staysail halliards and coaxing the headsails into a rough and ready furl. Harder still was it to slack off peak and throat halliards and to claw the heavy canvas. The gaff-jaws jammed; the mast-hoops refused to slide along the almost horizontal mast.

Hauling, teasing, and kneading the heavy flaxen canvas the chums succeeded after a tough struggle in gathering it in and lashing it loosely to the boom. Relieved of this amount of leverage the yacht recovered a little from the excessive list—not much, but sufficiently to bring the mast up till it made an angle of thirty degrees with the surface of the sea. At that inclination there was less immediate danger of the water pouring over the lee side of the cockpit.

"It's my belief she's dropped her keel!" declared Geoff.

Which was a perfectly accurate surmise. *Arran Dhu's* ballast consisted principally of three tons of iron on her keel, the rest being in the form of lead pigs stowed under her bottom-boards. In her recent refit care had been bestowed upon the renewal of her standing and running gear; but one important consideration had been entirely overlooked—the condition of her keel-bolts. Twelve years had elapsed since these had last been renewed and throughout that period unseen corrosive action had been taking place. The action is most rapid at a point where the metal keel and the deadwood touch. In fact it is not unusual on knocking out a keel bolt to find that although the corrosion elsewhere is but slight the bolt at this point may be eaten away to a mere fraction of an inch.

And this is what had happened to *Arran Dhu's* keel bolts. Providentially they had withstood the stress and strain during the storm, but, in the lull that followed, the heavy mass of metal keel had just dropped off and was now resting fathoms deep on the bed of the English Channel. Had the accident occurred during the height of the storm the fate of the yacht and her youthful crew would have been sealed. As it was she had merely taken a heavy list—almost on her beam ends—and had shown no decided tendency to right herself.

Both lads realized the hazardous nature of their position. It was one thing to be afloat in a stiff, weatherly craft; another to be drifting helplessly out of sight of land, clinging precariously to a disabled vessel that might roll completely over and plunge to the bottom at any moment.

So far only the sudden lull in the wind had saved the *Arran Dhu* from turning turtle. No other craft was in sight; the

weather outlook pointed to a renewed and possibly heavier blow; the dinghy had been lost; so altogether things looked decidedly black for the crew.

Yet they came of a stock that is not dismayed when in a tight fix. They were not the sort of lads to sit down and wait for trouble, nor were they ready to throw up the sponge.

"Grub first," decided Bernard. "Now's our chance and goodness only knows when we may get another. I'll go below and fetch up some sort of a meal."

So saying he again scrambled into the saloon, fervently hoping that *Arran Dhu* would not capsize while he was below. The lee side of the cabin floor was more than ankle deep in water. Either the yacht was leaking through the bolt-holes or else she had shipped a quantity of water over the cockpit coaming and through the open scuttles.

Treading warily—it would have been an easy matter to find a foothold on the pictures secured to one side of the saloon—Bernard proceeded to close the scuttles. Through those on the port side he could see nothing but a circular expanse of angry-looking sky; those to starboard embraced a limited view of leaden-coloured water but a few inches from the brass-bound rim of the scuttles.

Groping in the alley-way between the pantry and the galley, Bernard retrieved a couple of tins of meat and a watertight box of biscuits. Bread and other "soft tack" was floating about in a sodden condition. The tap of the fresh-water tank, too, was a couple of inches under the bilge-water, so it was out of the question to make use of the contents of the tank for drinking purposes.

"Jolly good thing we bought those bottles of lime-juice and soda," soliloquized the lad optimistically. "Well, that's enough in the catering department for the present."

Lying upon the shelving deck with their feet against the skylight, the chums had a hurried meal. It could not be described as a pleasant repast. They knew that time was precious and hurried through the "cold tack" accordingly. Nevertheless they felt considerably refreshed and fortified and in this condition life assumed a fairly roseate hue.

"If we can cut away her mast she'll right herself," declared Geoff, mentally measuring the girth of the heavy Oregon pine spar. "We can use it as a sea-anchor and ride to it until a vessel shows up."

"Hard lines on Mr. Gordon's property," remarked his chum.

"If we don't it looks as if he'll lose the yacht," pursued Geoff. "It's my turn to go below. I wonder if there's an axe or a saw on board."

Searching diligently in the lockers in the fo'c'sle, Geoff failed to discover any cutting-tools. There were rusty spanners, a marlin-spike without a point, a serving-mallet, a few files and a hack-saw with a badly-worn blade. With these he returned on deck.

"Dud collection this," he remarked. "Let's see what the hack-saw will do. You might start on the weather rigging-screws with the spanner, old son."

While Bernard set to work to cast off the stout wire shrouds his chum attacked the mast with the hack-saw, starting at a point about a foot above the spider-band. It was hard work, the rusty blade making very slight impression upon the tough wood.

"How are you getting on?" inquired Bernard, as one shroud, cast off by unthreading the rigging screw, swung noisily across the deck, its end disappearing under the surface of the water.

"Rottenly," replied Geoff.

"Then put more beef into it," prompted his chum.

Geoff did so, with the inevitable result. The rusty hack-saw blade parted with a loud twang. It was the only saw blade they possessed.

"Rough luck," commented Bernard. "Never mind; we've our knives. I'll knock off my job and bear a hand. The sooner we

cut away the mast the better. Wind's piping up already."

It was. Gusts were ruffling the heavy surface of the sea, forerunners of worse to come. The yacht's list increased until it seemed as if she would be right down to it. One blast in particular knocked her well on her beam-ends. A cascade of water poured into the cockpit.

For the moment both lads thought that it was all up with the *Arran Dhu*. They grasped the lifebuoys that they had placed ready to hand and waited.

But with the passing of the squall, the yacht recovered herself. In fact the angle of inclination was rather less than before.

"The water we shipped is acting as ballast," declared Bernard. "Once we get the tophamper clear. . . . Stick it, old son."

Both lads tackled their task with renewed zest. They knew that they were working against time. While Geoff held the edge of the blade of his sheath knife against the mast his chum dealt the steel a hefty blow with the serving-mallet, continuing the process until there was quite a respectable gash in the tough pine. Nevertheless it was a tedious business, and at the end of about an hour's feverish labour *Arran Dhu's* massive "stick" still defied their efforts.

They worked turn and turn about. Their wrists were numbed by the jarring of the knife, their hands were blistered by the unaccustomed task of wielding the heavy mallet. The deeper they cut into the wood the slower was the progress made.

Then, to add to the disadvantage under which they laboured, the sheath knife snapped close to the hilt. Geoff's knife was of the clasp variety and quite inadequate to the task. The blade was so narrow that it sank completely into the gash already cut by his chum's sheath knife.

"P'raps if we slack off the remaining shroud the weight of the mast'll finish the trick," suggested Bernard. "Stand by. I'll tackle the rigging-screw."

He found a somewhat precarious footing and faced outboard in order to get to the rigging-screw. As he did so he caught sight of a ship under all plain sail at a distance of about a mile dead to wind'ard.

According to popular notions Bernard ought to have waved his cap and shouted in transports of joy: "A sail! A sail! We're saved!"

But he did nothing of the sort. For quite a quarter of a minute he looked admiringly at the unusual sight of a ship under all plain sail; decided that the *Arran Dhu* lay well in her track and that, more than likely, the look-out in the on-coming vessel had sighted the derelict long before he—Bernard—had seen her.

He glanced down over his shoulder at his chum, who, unwilling to waste a moment, was diligently resharpening his knife with one of the rusty files.

"Knock off that," exclaimed Bernard in ordinary tones. "Knock off and look to wind'ard. There's a sight for you!"

CHAPTER VI

Rescued

Enthusiasm at the decidedly unusual sight of a full-rigged ship under all plain sail made Bernard Woodward forget the plight of his chum and himself. His immediate surroundings seemed to fade away. Clinging to the heaving and steeply listing deck of the *Arran Dhu*, he did nothing but feast his eyes upon the unexpected and inspiring vision.

The on-coming ship was bowling along, sailing free on the starboard tack. Judging by the "bone in her teeth"—the double bow-wave of white foam far-flung from her sharp clipper bows—she possessed a good turn of speed. Her hull was black with a broad white band. Her straining canvas showed a pleasing brownish hue against the slanting rays of the sun. Save for the fluttering of her headsails her spread of canvas set like a board—a tribute to the almost lost art of square-sail making.

On she came unswervingly until the chums could hear the sounds of crisp orders coming down-wind. To them they were unintelligible. There appeared to be no response.

Then, with a sudden but unhesitating motion the ship commenced to circle under full port helm. Canvas slatted, blocks creaked, yards groaned. The ship, a few minutes earlier a swiftly moving mass of symmetry and grace, was now pitching to the seas, devoid of way and practically stationary. She was, in nautical parlance, hove-to, her square sails being trimmed in such a fashion that some acted against the others. A landsman would wonder why under that press of canvas, the vessel would not drift rapidly to lee'ard, lying well down to the freshening breeze. Actually she lay-to as quiet as the proverbial lamb.

Out swung one of the lee'ard quarter boats. An officer and three men jumped into her. She was lowered with a run; the falls were slipped.

Then came another surprise. The chums, watching the manoeuvres, were quite prepared to see the oars shipped and to hear the crisp orders "Give way!" But nothing of the sort! How the crews of the old Blackwallers and China Tin Clippers would have rubbed their eyes at the spectacle! Instead of having to depend upon ash oars the boat was provided with a prosaic lump of metal attached to the transom. In other words an outboard motor.

At the third attempt the engine fired with a rapid succession of "tinny" explosions. The officer raised one arm as if in pleasurable surprise that the motor had succeeded in functioning. The painter was cast off and dropped into the boat's bows. She gathered way, steadied on her course, and bore down upon the derelict *Arran Dhu*, her progress watched by a couple of score of interested spectators manning the ship's side.

As she drew near Bernard noticed that the three men were rigged out in nondescript garments affected by the "hands" of the Mercantile Marine. The officer was in uniform—salt-stained pea-jacket and trousers, the former with tarnished gold buttons. Tilted on his head was a battered peak-cap with a weather-stained badge.

He was a youngish man of about twenty years of age, sturdily built. His features were tanned by exposure to the sun and the salt-laden breezes of four of the five oceans. Beneath heavy, regularly arched eyebrows his greenish-grey eyes looked keen and alert. They gave one the impression of being able to take in a critical situation at a glance, and to decide upon a rapid and intelligent course of action. The hand that grasped the vibrating tiller of the outboard motor was, Bernard noticed, huge, strong, and capable-looking—one that, if occasion arose, could be used with numbing effect in a "scrap".

Calculating the boat's way to a nicety, the young officer switched off the ignition and brought the craft almost alongside to the wind'ard of the beam-ended *Arran Dhu*. Therein he showed that his judgment was not at fault; for although under normal conditions boarding to lee'ard is the usual procedure, the danger of the boat being struck by the heaving motion of the yacht's mast, made it imperative that the wind'ard side should be chosen.

"Stand by and fend off!" he ordered crisply; then, addressing the chums, he expressed his opinion that it was a "proper lash-up".

"It is, sir," agreed Geoff. "Can you lend us an axe? We've been trying to cut away the mast. She'll float on an even keel if we do."

"Sorry, young fellah-me-lad," replied the officer, with a cheerful grin. "We're not tree-cutters and timber fellers. 'Sides,

with the wind piping up she won't keep afloat much longer. Get your gear together. I'll give you five minutes."

"Sounds like a U-boat commander's ultimatum," rejoined Bernard.

"Might," agreed the officer. "Can't say for certain. That was a little before my time. . . . Get a move on! Twenty seconds gone already."

It was an order that, however genially conveyed, left no doubt that it was an order, and, as such, had to be obeyed.

The chums slid down into the slanting cockpit and wriggled into the cabin. They stepped knee-deep in water. Sodden settee-cushions and a medley of other gear, including Geoff's kit-bag, were moving sluggishly in the gurgling, filthy bilge-water. Bernard's "traps" were, fortunately for him, stowed on the lee'ard berth. Naturally of a tidy nature, he had taken the precaution of placing most of his personal belongings in his kitbag. Geoff, on the other hand, had left most of his things lying about. He was now frantically engaged in retrieving them, groping in the water for hairbrush and comb, toothbrush, socks, and shoes, underclothing and portions of his garments he had shed just before the yacht had inconsiderately dropped her keel. All these he grabbed and rammed unceremoniously into his kitbag, adding blankets and oileys to leaven the lump.

"Got everything?" inquired Bernard laconically.

"Hope so," replied his chum.

For the last time they hoisted themselves over the steeply shelving side of the companion, pushing their bulky kitbags in front of them.

Then, kneeling on the slippery deck they heaved their belongings into the waiting boat, and prepared to follow.

"Avast there!" cautioned the officer. "Wait till she lifts on the crest. Now, jump for it!"

They jumped, landing in undignified postures on the bottom boards.

"Shove off!" ordered the officer crisply. Then, under his breath he murmured, "I'll bet the old cow won't gee for toffee."

With this cryptic utterance, he grasped the handle of the flywheel of the outboard motor and pulled vigorously, repeating the process again and again, but all to no purpose, except for raising a large blister on his horny palms.

"Always said this darned box of tricks was a washout!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "Out oars, lads. Give way."

By this time the boat had dropped nearly a hundred yards to lee'ard of the abandoned *Arran Dhu*, and quite thrice that distance from the hove-to ship.

Eager to be of some assistance, Bernard and Geoff each manned an oar.

The officer, watching, said nothing at first, but finding that there was little to complain about their stroke, nodded approval.

"That's the ticket, my lads!" he remarked.

As the boat repassed the *Arran Dhu* Geoff looked regretfully at the derelict floating property of the absent Mr. Gordon.

"Wish we'd cut away that mast," he remarked to his chum. "We might have saved her."

"Mind your stroke there," cautioned No. 3, who had just received a blow in the small of his back from the loom of Geoff's oar.

Geoff took the rebuke with a murmured apology. From that moment he directed all his attention to his task, never even turning his head to look at the ship until the order, "Way 'nough! In bow!" informed him that the boat was close alongside.

All along the lee rail, heads were craned as their various owners stared down upon the new-comers. On the poop a mahogany-featured, uniformed individual, whom Geoff and Bernard rightly took to be the "Old Man", hailed the boat.

"Why didn't you run the motor, Mr. Kelso?" he inquired acidly.

"Konked, sir," was the terse reply of Third Officer Peter Kelso.

CHAPTER VII

An Interview with the Old Man

Feeling rather subdued under the detached gaze of the Old Man, Bernard and Geoff sat still and awaited developments. If the truth be told, they felt decidedly disappointed at their reception. No one raised a cheer at their rescue; no inquiries were shouted concerning them. All the Captain seemed to be interested in was the failure of the outboard motor to perform the task it was supposed to carry out.

One of the boat's crew came aft and secured the after-fall. Another had performed a like service with the for'ard one.

"All secure, sir!" sung out Mr. Kelso.

The next instant, with a sudden and decidedly jerky movement, boat and crew rose vertically from the surface of the water. With thirty odd hands tailing on to the falls, she simply *had* to come; and although a fairly heavy cutter her weight seemed that of a feather.

In a trice she was above the rail. Quickly she was swung in. Everything seemed to be done "at the run", and almost before they realized it the chums found themselves planted on the ship's well-scrubbed deck.

No one spoke to them. Half a dozen youths of various ages between fifteen and eighteen were grouped a few feet away. These youngsters gave them curious glances; that was all. Instead of finding themselves in the position of celebrities who had stuck to their ship until ordered to abandon her, Bernard and Geoff felt that they were being completely ignored, and treated as undesirable intruders. It struck them that, somehow, there was a flaw in the generally accepted idea of the "brotherhood of the sea".

"Ready all!" shouted the Old Man in stentorian tones. "Quartermaster; ease the helm down!"

Followed a scene that, as far as the chums were concerned, looked like a state of orderly confusion. Men were running hither and thither, each with a set purpose.

"Raise tacks and sheets!—Leggo t'gallant bow-lines!—Haul taut the main brace!—Mainsail haul!"

With a succession of groans the main-yards swung round. Canvas threshed in the wind, blocks creaked. Men "tailing on" to seemingly purposeless ropes "walked back", shouting cheerfully as they did so.

Interested, even astonished, Bernard and Geoff watched order being evolved out of what appeared to be utter chaos. The ship was no longer pitching. She was forging ahead, heeling gracefully to the quartering breeze.

"Head braces, there!—Brace up the main-yard!"

More trampling on deck, more heaving and hauling. Then the Old Man "seeing what there was, was good", turned to the Chief Officer.

"Carry on, Mister!" he ordered. Then, "Mr. Kelso?"

"Sir?" rejoined the Third.

The chums, standing but a few paces from the officer who had effected their rescue, figuratively pulled themselves together. Now, they concluded, they were to be objects of attention and discussion. They understood now that during the operation of getting way on the ship there was a good reason why they should have been ignored.

But no! Captain Corbold, Master under Providence of the good ship *Golden Vanity*, had another matter on his mind.

"Why did she?" he demanded.

To anyone unacquainted with Captain Corbold's little eccentricities, the question would seem to have been at least peculiar. But Third Officer Peter Kelso knew his skipper's vagaries pretty well. Captain Corbold had been Chief Officer in the *Golden Vanity* when Kelso first entered the Mercantile Marine on joining the same ship off Southend as a very raw cadet. He knew that all the time the Old Man was giving orders and getting way on the ship, the subject of the outboard motor had been at the back of his mind. Fifteen minutes had elapsed since Kelso had reported that the motor had "konked out"; and now, after that interval, came the question, "Why did she?"

"Can't say, sir," he replied. "She fired at the third pull when we cast off. She hadn't a kick in her when I tried to restart. With your permission, sir, I'll overhaul her in the First Dog."

The Old Man nodded concurrence. He rarely wasted words. His gruff manner and rugged appearance belied his real nature. Actually he was a sympathetic individual, who sought to hide his good deeds under a mask of dour reserve. He was a fine seaman of the old school, who believed in keeping the hands under strict discipline, but never set a subordinate to do a task that he would not tackle himself should necessity arise.

A week or so before the *Golden Vanity* left London River on the present voyage, Captain Corbold had been approached by an enterprising individual who proclaimed himself to be sole distributing agent for an American firm who had just put on the market what they claimed to be a sure fool-proof never-stop-unless-you-want-it-to outboard engine. With glib tongue and honeyed words the agent pointed out the desirability of this type of labour-saving device for use at sea, and offered Captain Corbold a tempting commission on all orders obtained on his recommendation. The Old Man, never reluctant to turn an honest penny, had broached the subject to his owners, Messrs. Whatmough, Duvant & Co., with the result that they purchased one of these outboard motors for use in the *Golden Vanity's* boats, and instructed Captain Corbold to report upon its merits or demerits as the case might be.

So far that engine had lived up to its makers' claims in two respects. When it could be induced to start it certainly went on running; but the difficulty lay in getting it to start at all. Also, it was fool-proof. But it was also expert-proof. Every officer on board, who knew anything at all about the theory or practice—or both—of internal-combustion engines had had a cut at it. Sometimes one succeeded in coaxing the thing to fire. When he did he stood erect to await the plaudits of the rest. But more often than not the outboard stubbornly remained silent and inert.

Peter Kelso was walking aft when the Old Man called him back.

"What do *you* think's wrong, Mr. Kelso?" he asked, with emphasis on the you.

"I can't say off-hand, sir," replied the Third Officer guardedly. "It might be ignition, faulty mixture, wrong timing, carbon brushes in the magneto——"

"How many more things?" demanded Captain Corbold.

"Well, sir," replied his subordinate, with a bright smile, "when I had my first motor-bike I bought a book dealing with possible faults. Each possible fault was numbered. There were nine hundred and forty. Of course, sir, it may be a fairly simple matter to set the thing right. I'll do my best."

In the circumstances the Old Man thought it the best plan to leave the business in the hands of his capable and self-reliant subordinate.

As he turned to go aft he caught sight of Bernard and Geoff. They were standing with their backs to him. Actually they were taking a last look at a dim speck in the sunlit water—the listing hull of the abandoned *Arran Dhu*.

"You, there!" he sang out.

Not knowing whether the summons was intended for them or not, the chums glanced for'ard and aft before realizing that they were the objects of the Old Man's attention.

"You, there!" bawled Captain Corbold again. "When I sing out, look lively. I don't tell a man twice to do a thing as a rule."

The lads faced about; murmured apologies.

The Old Man scanned them from head to foot, trying "to get the hang of 'em by the cut of their jibs". Frankly he was puzzled. What he saw were two bronzed lads of uncertain age who might or might not be professional yachtsmen. Both were wearing blue jerseys—their white sweaters were still lying in a saturated condition together with other articles of apparel in a similar state in their respective kitbags—blue cloth trousers and shoes that at one time were pipe-clayed. Geoff sported a red stocking-cap, while his chum had to be content with a dilapidated yachting-cap. Forty-eight hours previously it was brand new. Since then it had been overboard twice, jumped upon once, pancaked between the cabin floor and the case containing the yacht's library, and lastly had been retrieved from the liquid mess surging over the

floorboards.

"Who and what are you?" asked the Old Man.

Bernard gave their names, adding that they were cruising in the *Arran Dhu* when the yacht shed her keel.

"Hands?" queried Captain Corbold laconically.

"Not exactly, sir," replied Bernard. "We were sailing the yacht round to Cowes for a—er—an acquaintance."

"H'm; rummy sort of acquaintance that to let you put out with rotten keel-bolts. Afraid to risk his precious hide so he shoved you on to the job, eh?"

So far as the chums were concerned they had not looked upon Mr. Gordon's offer in this light. They kept silent and thought more upon the suggestion.

The Old Man questioned them further, asking who their respective fathers were. The fact that Mr. Woodward was an artist of repute failed to impress him, but when he discovered that Mr. Ensor was a solicitor he formed the conclusion that the two lads were worth his consideration from a financial point of view.

To do him justice Captain Corbold, notwithstanding his gruff manner, would have treated his involuntary guests decently in any case. But in this instance there was yet another chance to add to his monetary perquisites—not because he had been instrumental in saving life, but because it was legitimately open to him to accept a "present" from the chums' parents for their sons' accommodation and keep.

It was "up to him" either to land the youths at the first convenient port at which the *Golden Vanity* touched or to put them on board a homeward-bound vessel. At the present there was little likelihood of either facility being forthcoming. The first port of call was to be Rio de Janeiro; as for speaking a passing vessel and asking her to receive a couple of passengers, the impending gale from the nor' east would put that step out of court. The longer Captain Corbold kept the lads on board the greater would be the cost of their accommodation—which would not go into the owners' pockets but into that of the skipper.

"All right," he concluded, "you'll mess with the cadets until such time as I can send you home. Mr. Kelso, show these young gentlemen their quarters!"

CHAPTER VIII

The Cadets' Mess

The cadets' quarters in the *Golden Vanity* consisted of a steel deck-house abaft the mainmast, lighted by circular scuttles with rims of polished brass, and entered by means of a doorway provided with a fairly high coaming to keep out the water when, as frequently happened, there was wet work in the waist—in other words when green seas poured inboard until it was thigh-deep in the lee scuppers.

The Third Officer pulled open the door. Unlike those of houses ashore it opened outwards—another precaution against the thunderous assaults of stormy waves.

"Mind your shins," he cautioned, setting an example by stepping over the raised coaming.

Bernard and Geoff followed, and found themselves blinking in the relatively dim light of the interior of their future quarters.

Presently their eyes grew accustomed to the subdued light. The deck-house was spacious, airy, and spotlessly clean. Against both transverse bulkheads were double tiers of bunks. Some of these, judging by the irregular mounds of blankets, were occupied by cadets of the off-duty watch. Others showed spotlessly clean and obviously new mattresses upon which blankets were neatly folded and stowed.

At the opposite ends of the lee'ard settee were two cadets sitting with knees drawn up and caps tilted well over their noses. Seated at a swing table were three more "young gentlemen" engaged in a more or less diligent manner in "writing up" their logs, which in due course would have to be submitted to the Chief Officer. Yet another was industriously darning a large hole in the heel of a sock. It was his first voyage and already he had discovered that sea-boots are "rough" on socks. There was no need for Bernard and Geoff to be told that it was Cadet Merrifield's first voyage. The youngster's pale complexion, as yet untanned by the sun and the salt spray, was sufficient evidence. Besides, he had only just recovered from a severe bout of sea-sickness and had gamely turned out for the first time to stand Morning Watch. Merrifield's age, to be correct, was fourteen years and six months.

At Third Officer Kelso's appearance the cadets sprang to their feet.

"Carry on!" exclaimed Kelso. "This is Fairclough, Senior Cadet of the Port Watch. Fairclough, your new messmates—Woodward and Ensor. Now I'll leave you to shake down."

"We have to thank you, sir," said Geoff, as the Third turned to go.

"What for?" asked Kelso.

Geoff hesitated. Somehow it did not strike him that the young officer had virtually saved the lives of the two chums; yet, remembering the parlous state of the *Arran Dhu*, when they left her and the present condition of the weather, he realized that that was precisely what Peter Kelso had done.

"For rescuing us," he replied.

"Nothing much really," declared the Third airily. "We happened to sight you first. That's all."

There was an awkward pause after the Third had left the deck-house. The chums found themselves under the curious gaze of the future messmates. They, in turn, tried to "size up" the cadets of the Port Watch. They felt very much like new boys in a large public school—mightily inferior in the presence of youths who already "knew the ropes". Possibly the glaring defects of their attire made them self-conscious when confronted by the uniformed, budding officers of the British Mercantile Marine.

"You fellows got off just in time, I fancy," remarked the Senior Cadet. "Wind's piping up. They're shortening sail. Where's your kit?"

"Left it on deck," replied Geoff.

"Did you, by Jove! If I were you I'd get hold of it as fast as you can. It might be missing. Right-o; I'll come along."

With Fairclough's assistance the kitbags were recovered from the lee scuppers. In the scurry of working ship and

shortening sail—the t'gallants were being taken in—the chums' scanty possessions had escaped notice; otherwise the kitbags might have been surreptitiously kicked for'ard by the "hands of the watch", and lost to sight for ever as far as their lawful owners were concerned. Even in a well conducted ship such as the *Golden Vanity*, it was not advisable to leave one's gear lying about.

"Your traps seem to have had a bit of Saltash luck," remarked Fairclough, eyeing the sodden articles as the chums removed them from the kitbags. "I'll lend you a blanket. Killigath, you've a spare blanket, haven't you? Grub'll be ready at seven bells. If you take my tip you'll turn in after that. I'll see to your blankets. I'll ask the Chief for permission to dry 'em. What happened to make that old hooker of yours lie over on her beam ends?"

Once more the story of the *Arran Dhu* had to be told.

"Better to be born lucky than rich," remarked the Senior Cadet. "Making the trip with us?"

"I don't know," replied Geoff. "We rather hope so; don't we?"

"Rather," agreed Bernard. "Where is the ship bound for?"

"Ask me another," replied Fairclough. "P'raps round the Horn. At any rate we're making for Rio and we're in a hurry. I guess the Old Man said things when he had to heave-to and pick you fellows up."

"Why?" asked Geoff innocently.

"'Cause we're having a race with the *Blue Bird*," explained the Senior Cadet. "She isn't one of our line. She's a rank outsider, really; but her people think she's a bit of a crack sailer. She licked the *Vanity* last time we raced. Before that we won. This will decide."

"But is that the object of the voyage?" inquired Bernard.

"Rather not," replied Fairclough. "It's a sort of scratch race. The *Blue Bird* dropped her pilot off Dungeness almost at the same time as we did, and our Old Man signalled a challenge. The first to enter Rio Harbour gets twenty quid; only you see the winner doesn't get it although she draws it from the other one——"

"Be explicit, do, Fairclough!" implored Davis, another cadet in mock entreaty.

At this interruption the Senior Cadet leant across the swing table to seize the interrupter. As he did so, Davis adroitly dived underneath the table and grasped Fairclough by his ankles. The latter found himself spread helplessly across the tilted mahogany to the dismay of the cadets who were engaged in writing up their logs. Books, paper, pencils, and other articles slid to the deck, the lowermost edge of the table pinning Davis behind his knees.

It was a complete deadlock. Fairclough, held by his ankles and sprawling head downwards across the table gripped Davis's legs; Davis underneath the table was hanging on to the Senior Cadet's ankles.

The rest of the mess chortled at the sight. It was quite permissible for a junior to try conclusions with the Senior Cadet during the Watch Below. On duty such a proceeding would be out of the question. They yelled advice and encouragement to both with the utmost impartiality.

Davis held on grimly; so did Fairclough. Neither could relinquish his hold without sacrificing a decided advantage, until Davis, a wily Welshman, released one hand and proceeded to tickle the stockinged feet of his opponent.

This had no more effect than stroking a hippopotamus with a feather. The soles of Fairclough's feet were almost as tough as leather. But the idea commended itself to the Senior Cadet for he, too, tried the effect of tickling his opponent's feet. The result decided the issue. The little Welshman writhed under the treatment. It was torture to him.

"Pax!" he gurgled.

Fairclough desisted at once. The two lads sorted themselves out, regained their feet, and helped to replace the capsized books and papers.

"Must let off steam sometimes," he remarked to Geoff. "Hallo! There's brekker. Get everything shipshape, you fellows!"

Ten minutes later Bernard and Geoff were sitting down to their first meal on board the *Golden Vanity*. They were provided with enamelled cups, saucers, and plates, but these were unchipped. Those on the *Arran Dhu* were decidedly the worse for wear. Food there was in plenty—hot rolls straight from the galley, bacon and eggs, jam, and very strong tea from a huge iron teapot, the beverage tasting delicious, condensed milk and moist brown sugar notwithstanding.

"Do you always have grub like this?" asked Bernard of Davis, who sat next to him.

The cadet grinned.

"You wait!" he replied darkly. "If you take my tip you'll stow all you can. Aboard this hooker you never know when you'll get your next meal."

"How's that?"

Davis shook his head.

"You wait!" he reiterated.

Geoff left it at that.

CHAPTER IX

Kelso and the Motor

The chums took Fairclough's advice by turning-in soon after breakfast. They did so for two reasons. One was because the other occupants of the cuddy did so; the second because they were dog-tired.

In many respects they scored heavily over two of the junior cadets—youngsters on their first voyage. Merrifield and Capperly were fresh from school—and a day-school at that. As yet they were not accustomed to "go to bed"—a landsman's expression which already they had bitterly regretted having made use of—in the presence of half a dozen others. They were very self-conscious, and felt the lack of privacy—not that anyone paid much attention to them. Also they had been very sea-sick, and were only just beginning to find their sea-legs.

On the other hand, Bernard and Geoff took naturally to their new surroundings. Compared with the somewhat cramped saloon of the *Arran Dhu*, and the yacht's lively motion, the cadets' cuddy of the *Golden Vanity* was spacious and comfortable. Also they had been used to sleeping in a dormitory.

So, hastily divesting themselves of their scanty clothing, they took to their respective bunks, rolled themselves in their borrowed blankets, and were soon fast asleep.

It was well into the First Dog Watch when they awoke, or rather, were roused by the Senior Cadet.

"You two fellows are 'on' at eight bells," he announced in matter of fact tones.

They left it at that. Evidently they were to be treated exactly the same as the rest of the mess. What their duties were, and when they had to be on watch, were as yet unsolved mysteries. For the present they were ready to congratulate themselves on their good fortune, since nothing had been done to tranship them to a homeward-bound vessel.

"I suppose they'll let our people know," remarked Geoff. "Not that it matters for a day or two. The Governor thinks we're cruising with Harrison on the *Norna*. Instead we're bound foreign, old son."

"Course the captain will let them know," rejoined his chum. "There's wireless. I shouldn't be surprised if he's done so already."

They went on deck. The *Golden Vanity* was bowling along at a tremendous pace with a quartering wind. Not another craft was in sight. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing to be seen but an expanse of grey sky, and leaden-coloured water flecked with curling foam. At least they expected to see the canvas of the *Golden Vanity's* rival, the *Blue Bird*. They owed a debt of gratitude to the *Blue Bird*. But for her Captain Corbold might have taken immediate steps to send the chums home. Therefore it was something of the nature of a disappointment when they failed to catch even a glimpse of the other competitor in the impromptu race to Rio.

On deck most of the hands were "standing easy", which meant that they were not standing, but lying under the lee of the raised coamings of the fore hatch and in other sheltered spots. Some were "snatching forty winks", others were industriously patching and sewing, and yarning with their messmates. It was the First Dog—Jack's so-called spell of leisure during which no unnecessary work is supposed to be performed.

A number of men grouped under the break of the poop attracted Geoff's attention. They were engaged in "knocking up" a contrivance that resembled an obstacle used in horse-jumping. It consisted of a piece of "six-by-two" timber, of about seven feet in length, supported at a height of thirty inches or so above the deck by two X-shaped struts, the whole being rigidly secured by a complication of stays and guys set up by means of tackles.

Curiosity prompted the chums to go closer and inspect the "gadget". As they did so, Third Officer Peter Kelso, who was superintending the setting up of the contrivance, gave them a cheery recognition.

"Feeling fit an' merry an' bright, an' all that sort of thing?" he inquired.

"Quite, sir; thanks," replied Bernard.

"Sorry we haven't been able to report that you're on board," continued the Third. "We haven't seen a homeward bound ship to speak to since you fellows came aboard. The chances are we won't, because our sailing track takes us well out of the steamship routes; so it may mean a cable from Rio."

"When do you think we'll arrive at Rio, sir?" asked Geoff, somewhat anxiously. Keeping his people without news for a few days when they had little reason to expect any was one thing. A complete silence for weeks was quite a different proposition.

"Can't say," replied Mr. Kelso. "Last time the *Vanity* took six weeks, I'm told. I wasn't in her that trip. The worst of it is that we can't send any message."

The chums made no remark concerning this information. Already they had learnt that it is as well not to be too inquisitive on board. Nevertheless, they felt a bit curious concerning Kelso's statement. They had noticed the *Golden Vanity's* twin aerial set up between spreaders at the fore and main trucks.

"Result of strike of wireless operators," continued the Third. "So we're just carrying on without 'em."

There was a contemptuous ring in the Mercantile Marine Officer's voice. Of the reasons for "calling out" the operators he knew little and cared less. But, with the rest of the deck officers of the Merchant Service, he felt nothing but disgust at the action of a body of men who, on the strength of a certificate from the Postmaster-General, had secured posts as operators afloat. These, wearing officers' uniforms and claiming to be recognized as officers, had deserted their posts, regardless of the fact that they were exposing their former shipmates to risks that might otherwise be avoided. Not that Merchantman Jack minded very much. His forefathers "carried on" without wireless. He could do the same.

It was a very shame-faced Sparks who had gone ashore from the *Golden Vanity* just before she left the docks. He went with downcast head amidst the contemptuous silence of the *pukka* officers. No encouraging cheers from the men—members of the Seaman's Union—greeted his departure—only an ironical shout from a slightly inebriated deck-hand: "Women an' children first!"

Quite possibly the crew recalled a certain tragic incident during a former wireless operators' strike. In mid-winter, battered by a furious Atlantic gale, a British tramp steamer was foundering. Thirty luckless wretches were seeking a temporary respite on her bridge. Everything else was awash. A wireless message would have brought aid, but there was no operator. The lights of a passing vessel hove in sight. The desperate men signalled her—or tried to—but the message was misunderstood. Thinking it to be one of good cheer, the steamer signalled back "A Merry Christmas" and passed on, leaving the crew of the sinking vessel to their fate.

"All ready?" inquired Third Officer Kelso, his attention swinging back to the work on hand. "Very good; bring her along and fix her up."

The object referred to in the feminine gender was the outboard motor that according to his promise to Captain Corbold, Peter Kelso had carefully overhauled. He was now about to put his efforts to a practical test.

Under the centre of the massively supported beam was placed a large galvanized iron pail filled with water. To the beam the motor was securely clamped with its propeller and circulating pump immersed.

With the air of a conjurer, Kelso stepped forward and drew on his right hand a thick leather glove. The glove was a necessary precaution, since the palm and two fingers of his right hand were raw as the result of his previous struggle with the refractory motor. Behind him in a semicircle were most of the crew, the Chief and several of the cadets being in the front row of Kelso's appreciative audience.

At that moment Captain Corbold appeared upon the scene.

"Why didn't you inform me you were ready, Mr. Kelso?" he inquired.

"Sorry, sir," replied the Third. "I wanted a sort of dummy run to see that everything was in order before you came on deck."

"H'm! I suppose you did," rejoined the Old Man. "Well, do you think you'll get her going now?"

"Hope so," said Mr. Kelso cheerfully. "I've overhauled everything, filed up the platinum points, and decreased the spark gap to give her a chance of firing readily. She ought to fire with that magneto. It's not one of those idiotic flywheel type."

"Quite so," agreed the Captain of the *Golden Vanity*. "Quite so."

Not that he knew anything whatsoever concerning the theory of the internal combustion engine. The average schoolboy could give him points and leave him at the post in that respect. As a Master Mariner he knew the ins and outs of his profession from A to Z. Had he contented himself with that all would have been well. Unfortunately, he disliked to have to admit that any of his subordinate officers knew more of other subjects than he did. Kelso, for example, might have "pulled his leg" mercilessly over the matter of the outboard motor, and the Old Man would have merely looked wise and grunted assent to all and any suggestions the Third might make.

But Peter Kelso was in deadly earnest. Whatever task he undertook he put heart and soul into it. He looked upon it as a point of honour to "get that dashed box of tricks running somehow".

Giving a final glance at the air-throttle contacts, Peter Kelso grasped the knob of the flywheel and swung the metal disc vigorously. Beyond a fairly loud gurgle, reminiscent of a burly Prussian swallowing soup, the motor remained silent.

Three times the young Officer repeated the operation, each time with waning confidence. Then he removed the sparking plug, shook it, and displaced a minute quantity of petrol.

"Too rich a mixture, sir," he explained.

"Haven't we any cheaper stuff on board?" inquired the Old Man innocently. At this Cadet Merrifield tittered, and immediately tried to switch over to a badly simulated cough. Captain Corbold gave the luckless youngster one glance. Thereafter, for the rest of the performance and after, joy and laughter deserted the unlucky cadet.

Replacing the plug, Kelso tried again and again to coax the unresponsive motor into a state of activity. Beads of perspiration welled from his forehead and trickled in rivulets down his face.

"Are you sure you've turned the petrol on?" asked the Old Man.

Considering that petrol had been dripping from the lavishly "tickled" carburettor during the whole performance the question was an entirely superfluous one. Even the least intelligent of the hands knew that.

"She's getting too much as it is, sir," declared Kelso, regulating the supply. "Everything depends upon the right mixture. I'll see how she likes that."

He swung the flywheel. A sharp explosion in the silencer, followed by a puff of oily vapour, raised his hopes.

"Fired this time, sir," reported the Third breathlessly.

"Quite so," agreed the Old Man. Then, thinking that victory was in sight, and wishing to be an active participator in the resultant glory, he continued. "Spell-ho, Mr. Kelso. It's taken the puff out of you. Let me have a go at the brute."

Planting his legs firmly apart Captain Corbold placed one hairy hand upon the brightly polished knob on the flywheel. Putting every ounce of his massive sinews and whipcord-like muscles into the task, the Old Man pulled the wheel slowly and deliberately over compression.

Then, wonder of wonders!—the motor back-fired. More, it continued to fire in a reverse direction at the same time emitting a rattle of loud reports like that of a machine gun.

Before the Old Man recovered from his pleasurable surprise, he received a shock that was far from welcome. The propeller, running at nearly a thousand revolutions a minute, threw up a tremendous shower of oily water. Most of the objectionable liquid caught the astonished skipper full in the face. The rest hurled itself with strict impartiality over those of the crew who stood in the wake of the propeller.

Staggering backwards the Old Man subsided heavily upon Cadet Davis. The others scattered right and left, those who had escaped a drenching chortling at their comrades' discomfiture.

Recovering his feet, Captain Corbold, nursing a badly jolted thumb, beat an undignified retreat to his cabin.

The engine was still running, and continued to run until Peter Kelso dashed through the cloud of spray and succeeded in turning off the petrol supply.

"Bet you a box of cigars you don't get her going again, Kelso," sung out Strachan, the Second Officer.

"Done!" exclaimed the Third.

He was in a different sense; for in spite of his determined efforts the outboard motor refused to restart.

On that account Peter Kelso felt vastly relieved when a shout of "Sail on the weather bow, sir!" afforded him a genuine excuse to retire from the unequal contest.

CHAPTER X

Speaking the S.S. "Denham"

Geoff and Bernard received the announcement with feelings akin to those of seafaring passengers of a couple of centuries ago—when the sighting of a strange sail might denote the approach of a pirate. In spite of Third Officer Kelso's assurances that the *Golden Vanity* would seize the opportunity to "speak" with the first homeward-bound ship they met and communicate the news that the "crew" of the *Arran Dhu* were safe, they were still dreading the possibility of being transhipped for passage back to England.

Captain Corbold had given them no definite decision on that point. He had not even asked if they were willing to remain on board. As a matter of fact he had decided on his course of action, taking it for granted that the two chums would be only too glad to make the trip in the *Golden Vanity*.

Two considerations influenced him. One, already mentioned, was the probability of some pecuniary token of gratitude from the lads' parents. The other arose out of a new regulation governing the entry of cadets into the service of the owners, Messrs. Whatmough, Duvant & Co.

Under the old conditions a cadet was bound by indentures to serve for a term of years. If, as rarely happened, he found life afloat irksome—in which case he was practically hopeless as an officer of the Mercantile Marine—he had to continue to serve his time unless his parents or guardians forfeited a fairly expensive bond or the cadet took the disastrous step of deserting in a foreign port.

Messrs. Whatmough, Duvant & Co's. main object in taking cadets was to train them to become efficient officers for their own line. They had the sense to realize that many a youth, fired by the prospect of a life afloat, went to sea only to find his ideals rudely shattered within the first week or so. He would soon find out that a cadet's training was not all play, but a hard task often exposing him to dire peril.

Consequently a new system had been introduced. Every youth accepted by the Company as a cadet was obliged to make one voyage on probation. Nominally he appeared on the ship's books as a passenger. Although he wore uniform and received precisely the same instruction and treatment as a "bound" cadet, his parents or guardians were quite at liberty to remove him from the Company's service at the end of the first voyage without further liability. This system had been in operation for nearly two years and it was a significant fact that out of seventeen probationer cadets only one had failed to follow up a sea career.

It was to Captain Corbold's advantage to have a full quota of cadets under instruction. He received a small capitation grant for each one in his charge, together with a bonus should the lads pass the examiner in practical seamanship at the end of the voyage.

The *Golden Vanity* had left London River with two cadets less than her normal complement. On the eve of sailing, two youths had failed to report for duty. One because his vacillating parents changed their minds at the last moment, the other owing to the timely discovery that he was developing measles. It was then too late for other lads on the Company's waiting list to be sent for, so Captain Corbold had two cadets short on the ship's books.

The Old Man realized that in Bernard Woodward and Geoff Ensor there was material for turning out a pair of efficient cadets, and at the same time making good a slight deficiency in his exchequer. By both direct and indirect questions he had gained certain essential information concerning them. That they were keen on the sea he knew; otherwise they would not have been "cruising for pleasure" in a small yacht. He had seen the way in which the chums had each taken an oar when the boat returned from the abandoned *Arran Dhu*.

Of course the whole proceedings were decidedly irregular, but in the circumstances Captain Corbold argued that he was justified in taking the lads as far as Rio—if not farther. At Rio he would cable to his owners for instructions.

At the same time he realized the urgent importance of having news sent home concerning the safety of the rescued lads. Wireless had failed him. Visual signalling—either by flags or semaphore—remained.

Captain Corbold, having changed into dry kit, came on deck. The Third Officer and the bo'sun, the latter carrying the code-book under his arm, went to meet him.

Since signalling by means of flags is a somewhat slow process, it is desirable to make the message in as few "hoists" as

possible.

"Will this do, sir?" asked Kelso. "VYK seems to meet the case."

The Old Man glanced at the now open code-book.

"VYK—Have shipwrecked crew on board; will you let me transfer them to you," he read. "No; won't do at all. I'm not transshipping 'em. Try under 'Hands'. Anything about 'All hands saved', Mr. Kelso?"

"Yes, sir, DXR."

"Then make it so. I don't suppose you'll find the *Arran Dhu*, in the 'Code-list of Ships'. You'll have to spell it out."

The on-coming vessel proved to be a tramp of about 1500 tons—the S.S. *Denham* from Bilbao to London. She was steaming at about eight knots. The *Golden Vanity*, bowling along at seven knots under all plain sail, was moving in practically the opposite direction. Consequently the two craft were about to pass at an aggregate speed of nearly eighteen land miles an hour.

Up went the *Golden Vanity's* "number"—four flags indicating her number. As soon as this was acknowledged, another hoist of four flags proclaimed her port of departure, followed by her destination. Then came a request to report her to her owners.

Followed the most important part of the message, "All hands saved from *Arran Dhu*."

"Spell their names while you're about it," ordered the Old Man, as an afterthought.

Making the name "Ensor" presented little difficulty. "Woodward" was a complicated affair when made out in code, involving three separate hoists of four flags each. So the *Golden Vanity's* bosun hit upon the ingenious idea of making two small hoists:—ZHN for "Wood", and YUF for "Ward". By this time the S.S. *Denham* was well astern.

"Your people will get that message before you're missed," remarked Captain Corbold to the chums. "So that's all right. Nothing to worry about."

"Thanks awfully, sir," replied Geoff. "We were half afraid you'd put us off on that craft."

For a moment the Old Man eyed him quizzically.

"Let's hope that before this voyage is finished, you won't be sorry I didn't," he remarked.

CHAPTER XI

The Peregrinations of Mason

"I wish to see Mr. Gordon."

The office boy at the financier's business premises was rather taken aback by the peremptory ring in the caller's voice. Clients who paid personal visits to Mr. Gordon—these were rare, since the latter preferred doing business through the medium of the facilities afforded by the Postmaster-General—usually made their request for an interview in a subdued, hesitating manner, as if fully conscious of the force of the vulgar saying "Money talks".

"Appointment, sir?"

"Yes," replied the caller briskly.

Mr. Theodore Mason, junior reporter on the staff of *The Yachtsman's Fortnightly*, was perfectly truthful. He had an appointment, but it had not been fixed by Mr. Gordon.

The youthful Cerebus did not allow Mason to pass without further palaver.

"Your name, sir, please; and have you a card?"

Mr. Mason handed the boy a piece of pasteboard. The precocious youngster read it and pursed his lips. His employer, he knew, was very reluctant to give interviews to Press representatives. He had very good cause to remember a grave lapse on his part when on one occasion he allowed a pressman of *The Searchlight* to beard the financier in his den.

Yet the name *The Yachtsman's Fortnightly* did not strike him as unfavourably as *The Searchlight*. His "boss" he recalled, was a yachtsman, for had he not put in an appearance one Saturday morning rigged out in blue reefer coat and trousers, and sporting a white-covered peaked cap, resplendent with a gilt badge, at an absurd tilt on his woolly hair?

Mr. Gordon studied the reporter's card most thoroughly. He loathed publicity except in such cases where he acted as his own Press agent. The sight of a newspaper representative generally gave him a nasty jar. He had never heard of *The Yachtsman's Fortnightly*; it might be a ruse on the part of *The Searchlight* and kindred journals to get in direct touch with the elusive financier.

"Did you say I was in?" he demanded.

"No, sir," replied the boy. "He took it as if he knew you were."

"Then ask him to write down his business," continued Mr. Gordon, flicking the card across his desk.

Presently the boy returned with a pencilled note: "Business concerns *Arran Dhu*."

"By Jove!" thought Gordon hopefully, "I wonder if she's lost. Bring Mr.—er—Mason up, Charles."

He rose, affability personified, to greet his caller.

"I believe you are the owner of *Arran Dhu*," began Mason, coming straight to the point. "The Chief sent me along for certain particulars."

Mr. Gordon held up his hand. He wanted time to think. Mason's opening sentence, "—you *are* the owner," did not suggest a total loss. Had he said "were the owner" Gordon would have been ready to fall on his neck in a figurative sense.

"I'm afraid I'm not in a position to give particulars, Mr. Mason," he remarked. "When last I saw the yacht she was at Falmouth."

"Then you've heard nothing of the disaster?"

"Disaster?"

"Serious mishap, then. Our Penzance representative wired us that *Arran Dhu* was towed into Newlyn by a steam drifter. She was picked up thirty miles S.S.E. of the Lizard afloat, but derelict with a heavy list. The crew of the drifter report

that an attempt had been made to cut away the mast. They had to complete the task with the result that the yacht, half full of water, regained practically an even keel."

"Pity the confounded yacht hadn't sunk in deep water," thought Gordon, realizing that by the terms of his insurance policy he would have to pay fifty pounds sterling towards the cost of making good the damage.

"It's fortunate they brought the yacht in," he remarked. "Things might have been worse."

"They are," rejoined the reporter gravely. "Her dinghy, badly damaged, was washed ashore at Par, a few miles west of Fowey. Our local representative learned that the yacht left Penzance with you and two paid hands. Might I inquire under what circumstances you left the yacht? Until I called at your office I was under the impression that you were on board when the disaster occurred. In fact, I never expected to find you here."

"Yet you asked to see me?"

"As a matter of form," replied the reporter.

"Well, Mr. Mason, I must decline to give any further particulars until I have been in communication with the underwriters. You will readily understand how even a slight case of misrepresentation might cause endless trouble when dealing with insurance matters."

"Not as far as *The Yachtsman's Fortnightly* is concerned, Mr. Gordon," declared the Pressman. "Before my report goes to Press you will be given every opportunity to see the proof-slips."

"All the same I must decline——"

"But it is not a personal matter," interrupted Mason, bristling at Mr. Gordon's manner. "Evidence goes to prove that there has been loss of life. The relatives of the crew should—must be informed. You will not object, I take it, to furnishing me with their names and addresses?"

"I can't tell you," declared Gordon, shifting uneasily under the reporter's steadfast gaze.

"Can't; why not?"

"Because I don't know."

"Don't know? Surely you didn't engage a professional crew without obtaining particulars required by the Board of Trade?"

"They weren't professionals."

"Then who were they?"

Mr. Gordon recovered himself with a determined effort.

"I've already refused to give your paper, or in fact any paper, further details at present, Mr. Mason," he said loftily. "So I must wish you good day."

The financier never made a greater mistake than when he attempted to ride the high horse with Mason of *The Yachtsman's Fortnightly*. He realized the fact almost as soon as the door of his private office was closed. He foresaw trouble, not only on account of the missing amateur crew, but with the underwriters. He drew mental pictures of having to pay out fifty pounds and still have the unlucky *Arran Dhu* on his hands. With her unenviable reputation no one would be likely to purchase her except for breaking up purposes.

Meanwhile Mason made a hurried journey to the office of his paper. To Hammond, the editor, he made a plain, unvarnished report, purposely refraining from offering surmises.

Hammond, quick to seize the opportunity for a scoop, nodded approvingly.

"I don't suppose the lay Press will do much in the matter," he remarked. "Yachting affairs, for some reason, hardly attract their notice. When they do give yachting items they generally make a hash of things. Our Press day's Thursday. That gives

us three clear days. The rival rag's out to-day, so they won't have a chance until Monday next. Off you go to Penzance and Newlyn, Mason. Eye-witness' statements if you can; master of the drifter's yarn, for instance. You didn't get the name of the Insurance Company?"

"No, sir," replied Mason. Then with unusual lack of discretion, he asked: "Do you suspect anything?"

"I suspect nothing," rejoined Hammond drily. "I want facts. Get them!"

That evening Mason found himself in Penzance. He had previously telegraphed to *The Yachtsman's Fortnightly* local representative—a keen youth named Tregenna who was on the station platform to meet him.

Together they taxied to Newlyn. The steam-drifter that had towed the *Arran Dhu* in had put out soon after noon. The luckless yacht lay aground, listing slightly over towards the hard granite wall of the tidal harbour.

"She dropped her keel," explained Tregenna. "If you don't mind walking on mud—it isn't very thick—you can see the damage."

"I'll take your word for it," replied Mason. "The mast, I understand, was cut away before the drifter's men could get her on an even keel?"

"Yes, but someone, probably the yacht's crew, had tried to do so before."

"I suppose you don't know the names of the crew?"

"Of the two men who left here with Gordon? Yes; but that won't be of much use. They left the yacht—had a row with the owner—and came home. The *Arran Dhu* was lying on moorings in Falmouth Harbour when they paid themselves off."

"I'd like to see one of them," said Mason.

"Right-o," agreed Tregenna. "Jim Polberro is the handiest to find. He lives in Carter's Ope. It's not far."

In spite of the lateness of the hour Jim Polberro had not turned in. He had no hesitation concerning his willingness to tell all he knew. Mason listened patiently to the long story of Gordon's incapacity and cowardice and how the two paid hands, having worked the yacht into Falmouth Harbour, had declined to remain with the owner.

Actually Mason had learnt little. He already knew the essential points of what had happened to the *Arran Dhu* between Penzance and Falmouth. He was still in the dark as to the identity of the two individuals who took the yacht out of Falmouth Harbour.

The paid hand's story made good "copy" but something else was required. Mason determined to go to Falmouth.

It was too late that night; but early next morning the obliging Tregenna ran him to Falmouth in the side-car of his motor-bike. Eight o'clock found Mason, faint yet pursuing, at Green Bank.

By a rare slice of luck the first person he addressed was Old Garge who, taking advantage of the ebb tide, was scrubbing a boat on the hard.

"Do I know t'*Arran Doo*? Sartain sure. A lil' black cutter-plank-on-edge sort, she be."

"That's the craft," rejoined Mason. "Do you happen to know the names of her crew? I know the owner's name."

Old Garge glanced keenly at his questioner.

"Be they wrong 'uns?" he asked, suspiciously. "Happen you'm a plain-clothes officer?"

"No, I'm not," protested Mason, slipping half a crown into the man's hand. Clearly Old Garge had not heard of the mishap to the yacht. The reporter realized that the best course to pursue was to be frank with the man. "I am a journalist—a reporter. I represent *The Yachtsman's Fortnightly*. The *Arran Dhu* was found abandoned and towed into Newlyn. No one seems to know what has become of her crew. We are anxious to find out their names."

Old Garge shook his head.

"That I don't know, sir," he said. "Two nice young gen'l'men they wur, sir. Amatoors, but I will say as 'ow they knowed something about 'andling a yot."

"Did you speak to them?"

"Ay, that I did. 'Enery an' Bill an' Amos Polgerrick an' me was a-arguing wi' 'er owner. Says 'e: 'Will aught o' ye sail this 'ere yot round up-along?' Says I, 'Not for fifty pun, but I'll show you a couple o' young gents who happen'll tek it on.' An' I sort o' interdooced 'em tu 'en."

"But how did you know they wanted to take charge of the yacht?" asked Mason.

"'Cause they 'ad told me they wur making a trip in *Norna*. There she be, that lil' white yawl. Seems as 'ow Mr. 'Arrison—'im bein' t'owner, me bein' in charge o' she—'ad arranged to take 'em for a lil' cruise, only 'e 'ad an accident like and broke 'is leg an' whatnot. So I thought, seein' as Mr. 'Arrison wurn't able, these young gen'l'men would tak on *Arran Doo*. Fulish-loike I misremembered tu ax their names."

"Does Mr. Harrison live in the neighbourhood?"

"'E does, an' 'e doesn't in a manner o' speaking, sir," replied Old Garge. "'Ome's up tu Lunnon, but e's in Penycuil Cottage 'Orspital, a matter o' twenty mile out Bodmin way."

"I must run over to Penycuil," decided Mason.

"Right-o," rejoined Tregenna. "Time's my own in a way. I'll take you."

Actually it was eighteen miles of hilly road. Forty minutes from the time of leaving Falmouth Mason, aching in every limb, was deposited on the doorstep of Penycuil Cottage Hospital.

Mr. Harrison, considerably upset by the news, was only too ready to give all the information he could. To Mason's great satisfaction, he gave the name of the two lads—Bernard Woodward and Geoff Ensor.

"I don't know either of them personally," continued *Norna's* owner. "I got into communication with them through the medium of your paper, Mr. Mason. Unfortunately I haven't their letter with me, but if my memory serves me right, they wrote from Greystone College. You know where that is, I presume?"

Mason did. His face fell. Here was an unexpected snag in the stream of hitherto successful investigations. Greystone was a long way off. More than likely the whole of the staff were away during the holidays. In any case a pre-paid telegram would not be likely to obtain the desired information. Time was too precious to spend in writing, on the off-chance of either Woodward's or Ensor's home address being forthcoming.

"Now I come to think of it," continued Mr. Harrison, "Young Ensor mentioned in his letter that his father was in practice in Poole as a solicitor. Why he gave that piece of information I don't know. Possibly to impress me. Why not call in at Poole on your way back to town?"

It did not take Mason long to decide. He was used to rapid and generally sound decisions. Besides being a whale for work, he possessed a qualification that many reporters lack—tact when dealing with painful subjects. In addition to obtaining as full a report as possible concerning the *Arran Dhu* business he had, as far as he was aware, to break the news that Ensor and his chum were presumably lost at sea. He might have telephoned to Mr. Ensor at Poole, but the telephone is at best a crude means of communicating news of this description.

He decided to take train to Poole.

He knew that it would be a long, tedious, and round-about journey, but his energy was unbounded. Although he had had but little sleep he felt perfectly fresh. The hours taken by the railway journey could well be spent in writing off "copy" to date.

His Cornish colleague ran him back in the side-car to Truro, whence he booked through to Salisbury. At the latter place he transferred to another Company's line, and found that he had forty minutes to wait before the Poole train left.

"Evenin' paper, sir?"

Mason bought a copy and commenced to scan the headlines. Presently he caught sight of an item headed: "A MYSTERY OF THE SEA".

It ran as follows:

"The S.S. *Denham*, on arriving at East India Docks, reported having received the following message from the S.S. *Golden Vanity*—'All hands saved from *Arundel*, Ensor Wood washed overboard'. The Master of the *Denham* also added that his position when the message was signalled was approximately 7° 15' W.; 48° 20' N. Asked whether he had the message repeated, Captain Cole replied that owing to the distance between the two vessels such a course was impracticable. According to Lloyds the only *Arundel* flying the British flag was reported as having left Karachi for Rangoon on Monday last."

Quick to discover errors in what his chief had referred to as the "lay Press", Mason noticed that the *Golden Vanity* was wrongly described as a steam ship. It so happened that a year or so previously he had had to write a description of her as one of the few surviving full-rigged sailing ships.

Then the name "Ensor" riveted his attention. It was by no means a common surname. He had never before come across it until Mr. Harrison mentioned it that very day, as that of one of the amateur crew of the *Arran Dhu*.

"*Arran Dhu!* I wonder if the Master of the *Denham* made a mistake in reading the signal. In ordinary circumstances the *Arundel's* name would be received as a 'number'," thought Mason. "Probably the *Arran Dhu* hadn't a number, and her name had to be spelt out. A careless signalman, jumping at conclusions, might well write down *Arundel* for *Arran Dhu*. The message also says 'Ensor Wood washed overboard' but it also stated emphatically 'All hands saved'."

Working on this supposition, Mason wrestled with the problem during the rest of his journey to the Dorset seaport.

Arriving at Poole he did not immediately make for Mr. Ensor's house, but hurried to the Harbour Master's office. Here that obliging official let him see a copy of the *International Code of Signals*.

He commenced by translating "Woodward" into code letters. "Wood" he found to be ZHN; "ward" resolved itself into YUF.

Next he looked up the phrase "Washed overboard". To his intense satisfaction this was represented by the letters YUR.

"It's as simple as daylight," thought Mason. "The *Denham's* signalman mistook F for R. It's true they aren't very like each other, but both are largely made up of red bunting. 'Tany rate I'll take the responsibility of informing Mr. Ensor that his son and young Woodward are safe.'"

From the Harbour Master he obtained directions to find the solicitor's premises—a somewhat old-fashioned house not far from the railway station. But to his disappointment the offices were closed for the day. Mr. Ensor lived at Parkstone, two miles or so away.

Mr. Ensor had just finished dinner when *The Yachtsman's Fortnightly* representative was announced. Mason had a bit of a surprise when the solicitor entered the study. Invariably he pictured men of that profession as short, dark-featured men, with hatchet features and long pointed noses. Geoff's father was quite the opposite—tall, burly, fair-complexioned, and wearing a thick crop of curly flaxen hair.

"Well, Mr. Mason, what do you want to see me about?"

"Do you happen to know where your son Geoffrey is?" asked Mason.

Geoff's father shook his head.

"Haven't an earthly. The young beggar hasn't written. Not that I expected to hear from him. He's away yachting somewhere. Why are you interested?"

Mason told him. Mr. Ensor listened without comment till the narrative came to an end.

"What is the *Golden Vanity*, do you know?" he asked.

"A full rigged ship."

"H'm, then Master Geoff is probably peeling potatoes or washing up in the cook's galley," commented Mr. Ensor feelingly. "Do him worlds of good, and will knock all those ideas of going to sea as a profession out of his head. It looks as if the practice will be run by Ensor & Son after all. I'll write to Mr. Woodward and let him know. Thanks awfully for the trouble you've taken, Mr. Mason."

"Not at all, sir," replied the Pressman.

"May I offer you any refreshment?"

Mason shook his head.

"Thanks no; I must catch the first train back to London."

On the first stroke of midnight, Mason dashed into his chief's sanctum. He had delivered the goods! *The Yachtsman's Fortnightly* had secured the biggest scoop in its career.

CHAPTER XII

Away Aloft

"Away aloft!"

The rousing order stirred Bernard and Geoff to the depths of their being. For the first time since they had set foot on the snowy planks of the good ship *Golden Vanity* they were to take an active part in imparting more speed to this superb specimen of naval architecture.

The hitherto strong breeze had blown itself out. As the *Golden Vanity* gained the lower latitudes the heat of the sun was no longer tempered by speeding clouds. Overhead that orb shone in an unbroken vault of brilliant blue. Deep-blue, too, was the sea, save for the snow-white flecks on the crest of the waves. Now within the influence of the Trades the ship could clap on all sail and carry it for days together without risk of sudden and unexpected changes in the climatic conditions.

The chums were not in entire ignorance of the task demanded of them. With the cadets of the watch they had been given instruction by the Chief on the principles of making, reefing, and stowing canvas. For this purpose a model mast, with yards, sails, and rigging complete, was employed.

Now was the time to put theoretical knowledge to a practical test. It was Bernard and Geoff's equivalent to the soldier's ordeal of "going over the top".

Every man of the Watch had his particular duty. The "hands" were told off to the fore- and main-masts, some to go aloft, others to man sheets and braces. The cadets' part of the manoeuvre was the management of the mizzen-sails. In their case the order was to shake out reefs in upper and lower topsails and set mizzen t'gallant and royal.

The chums had little or no time to think what they were doing. Going aloft was carried out in a wild sort of scramble that reminded them of a school "scrum". They found themselves more or less in the middle of an ascending stream of youthful humanity. The feet of the cadets preceding them seemed only a matter of a few inches from their heads, while the arms of those following enveloped their legs. In this compact mass all sense of dizziness was absent. Even the weather shrouds seemed as rigid as a wooden ladder under the combined weight of the climbers.

Presently the speed of the ascent became slightly retarded. Not only were the ratlines growing smaller in width as the shrouds contracted towards the trestle trees—the futtock-shrouds tended to delay progress. It was no longer a case of three abreast or even two. The ascent had resolved itself into a sort of "follow-my-leader" affair.

Those futtock-shrouds gave Geoff a bit of a shock. For a moment he hesitated. Hitherto he had been climbing a sort of inclined ladder. It was like scaling the side of a steep hill. But now he had to climb on the under side of a short ladder inclined outwards.

"Look alive there!" shouted someone below him.

Others had essayed the feat before him. What they could do he must. Raising his eyes Geoff saw young Merrifield, the junior cadet, just disappearing from sight over the edge of the top. *He* had done the trick. If Merrifield, smaller and weaker than Geoff, had swarmed up those futtock-shrouds the feat was not so hazardous as it looked.

All the same it gave Geoff a bad twenty seconds or so before he too swung himself on to the amazingly wide mizzen-top. Viewed from the deck the platform looked hardly large enough for two men to find a foothold. Actually six cadets were already there and still there was room. Others were making their way still higher; more were pressing up from below, swarming over lee and weather futtock-shrouds.

"Come on, you fellows!" shouted Cadet Davis. "Upper top-sail-yard men!"

With that Davis grasped the jackstay, and finding the foot-ropes, began to edge outwards to the weather yardarm. Geoff followed, stopping at the allotted distance from Davis and waiting until Bernard and the rest of the upper top-sail-yard men had gained their posts.

So far Geoff had been too actively employed to realize matters. Now that he had a brief respite—for the reef-points had to be cast off practically simultaneously—he could form some idea of the height at which he found himself.

Somewhat to his surprise he felt no sense of insecurity. Possibly the bellying canvas immediately beneath him destroyed the suggestion of height. Beyond and below the bulge of the sail he could catch a glimpse of the deck from the base of the mainmast for'ard until it was hidden by the foot of the forecourse. Men, looking no larger than rabbits or even mice, were gathered in the waist, standing by until the Chief's hoarse and seemingly unintelligible orders set the whole human mechanism into action.

"If those fellows manning the braces look as small as that what would they look like from the main-royal yard?" pondered Geoff, glancing up at the spar in question where some of the hands were "laying out" in readiness to make sail.

"Haul taut reef tackles and bunt-lines!" ordered somebody. The voice, clear and distinct, seemed to come from a long way off. "Man weather brace!"

All was now activity. The chums, following the example of their more experienced shipmates, set to work to cast off the becketts.

Suddenly a shriek rent the air, followed by the fall of a heavy furiously-clutching object from the yard above. Horror-stricken, Bernard and Geoff could do nothing but retain their grip and gaze. They felt the footrope give a disconcerting jerk, saw Davis lean inward from the yard-arm and make a frantic grab at the falling object.

For the moment Geoff was under the impression that Cadet Davis had overbalanced and was also hurtling to a swift but horrible death upon the deck beneath. But the next instant the plucky cadet, lying like a limp sack across the yard, had grasped the falling object in a vicelike hold.

At the time Geoff had rather scoffed at the horseplay in the messroom where Davis and the Senior Cadet had come to grips over the swing-table. Now he realized that there was method in their form of madness. It was but a sort of preliminary training against emergencies—much as a boxer goes in for skipping exercises in order to make him nimble on his feet.

It was little Merrifield who had fallen from aloft. Davis had him by the ankle. The junior cadet was hanging head downwards with his body pressed against a hollow in the bulging canvas. Now came the difficult part of the business. Davis, literally balanced over the yard and hampered by Merrifield's weight, was unable to regain his place unaided.

The hazardous nature of the situation goaded Geoff into action. Edging along the foot-rope he threw one arm round Davis's legs. That restored the threatened balance, but the problem still remained as to how Merrifield could be raised into a place of safety.

Then Bernard commenced to edge towards the yard-arm. Slower in action than his chum, he possessed the faculty of being able to take in a comprehensive view of the situation. Geoff, he realized, could do nothing more than hang on to Davis's nether extremities; Davis, on his part, could not lift Merrifield unaided; therefore he, Bernard, must help Davis.

Throwing himself astride of the yard and hanging on with his right hand and right leg, Bernard groped with his left hand—blindly, since he could not trust himself to look down. His fingers touched Davis's wrist. His reach was not enough.

He wriggled still farther on the fore side of the massive spar.

"Be sharp, man!" panted Davis. "Can't hold him much longer."

Thus appealed to, Bernard forgot his own peril. Unhesitatingly he looked down, saw that another six inches of reach would enable him to perform useful service. He stretched and grasped Merrifield by the ankle of his previously free foot.

"Got him!" he gasped.

"Then heave!" responded Davis.

A wave of stark fear swept across Bernard's mind. He realized now that if either he or Davis overbalanced it would mean death to the three of them—Merrifield, Davis, and himself—and possibly to Geoff as well.

All the same he heaved. So did Davis. Their joint efforts resulted in raising Merrifield, still head downwards, until his feet were about level with the upper side of the yard.

Then Geoff, abandoning his rôle as a human counterpoise, shifted his hold to Merrifield's legs.

"All secure!" he exclaimed.

With this assurance Davis, blown and breathless, regained a position of relative security upon the yard. Bernard did likewise. The three then set to work to complete the rescue of the junior cadet, until, frightfully scared and trembling like a leaf, Merrifield was hauled and held athwart the yard.

In the respite that followed, Bernard looked down. He, too, felt dizzy and inclined to be violently sick. Dim realization of the decidedly narrow squeak seemed to paralyse brain and muscle. A white mist danced in front of his eyes. He could hardly feel the rigid grasp of his hands.

"Upper tops'l-yard there!" roared Captain Corbold. "What are you hanging on the slack for?"

The effect was electrical.

"Get a move on, you fellows!" exclaimed Davis, laying out on the yard-arm.

Spacing themselves out on the foot-rope Bernard and Geoff—fear of the skipper banishing all other sensations—resumed their work, while Merrifield, gaining the topmast shrouds, swarmed aloft to his station.

At length the work was completed and the cadets regained the deck. They were last in executing the task. The fore and main topmast men had been "blown down" quite five minutes ago.

"What a brute the Old Man is!" was Geoff's unspoken opinion when he had time to collect his thoughts. Bernard held similar views; nor is there much doubt that they were shared by the other participators in the act that nearly proved to be a tragedy.

But after dinner the Old Man sent word for the four youths to report themselves in his cabin.

"What happened, Merrifield?" he demanded. "Skylarking?"

"No, sir," replied the junior cadet. "The foot of the t'gallant flogged and flung me off. Davis caught me as I fell."

"So I observed," rejoined the Captain airily. "You three, Davis in particular, acted with commendable courage and resource. I suppose you thought I was an inhuman brute to order you to carry on, eh?"

The quartette remained silent. They had not the face to admit the impeachment; they were too honest to deny it.

"I thought so," continued the Old Man, with a quizzical smile. "Now, if I'd ordered you down the four of you would be useless for the rest of your lives as far as going aloft is concerned. You would have lost your nerve and would never regain it. I know: I've had some. By making you carry on you had to forget what had happened, because there was something else to occupy your minds. A landlubber uses his feet practically for one purpose—to walk with. A proper seaman soon finds that they are an extra pair of hands. After all's said and done working aloft is easier and safer than riding a motor-bicycle. A' right, that will do. If any of you care to blow in to my cabin at eight bells there'll be tea with jam an' cake."

"What did the Old Man say?" eagerly inquired a number of the cadets when the four returned to the mess.

"Say?" echoed Davis. "He was so mad because we were behind time with that mizzen t'gallant sail that he's stopping all leave at Rio."

The others took him seriously. There was some talk of sending a deputation to the Captain to ask him to reconsider the matter. But no one volunteered for the task. Captain Corbold usually had a way with deputations. They had seen him deal with one from the hands of the Starboard Watch.

"You go, Davis," suggested Capperley.

The Welshman found a chance to wink at Geoff and Bernard. Merrifield was out of his range of vision. Provided the junior cadet didn't butt in there was a chance for Davis to make capital out of his joke.

"Right-o," he agreed. "At least the four of us—Woodward, Ensor, Merrifield, and myself—will tackle the Old Man. If we get him to change his mind over jamming our leave what then?"

"You'll earn our gratitude, old son," declared Fairclough.

"Not good enough, my festive," objected the wily Welshman. "Look you; gratitude is cheap enough. Supposing—only supposing, mind you—that we pull this business off; are you other fellows game to stand a bust-up at the Babylonia?"

"What's the Babylonia?" inquired Setchell—one of the "first year" cadets.

"Sort of café and music hall in Rio," replied Davis. "They give a top-hole show. Well, is it a deal? You fellows to stand exes for the four of us, provided we make it all right with the Old Man over this leave business."

"What'll it be costing?" asked McKie cautiously.

"Less'n a dollar a head, including grub," was the answer. "Is it a deal?"

The others agreed.

"Hop aft and see him now," suggested Fairclough.

Davis shook his head.

"He's in too much of a paddy, look you," he objected. "Wait till he cools down. We'll push along and beard him in his den at eight bells, won't we?"

Geoff and Bernard nodded assent. They were beginning to "tumble to" the Welshman's ruse. Merrifield, still in the dark, began to expostulate.

"Shut up, you idiot!" exclaimed Davis. "After all, you are the cause of all this rumpus. You ought to tackle the Old Man by yourself. As it is we nobly share your burden, so dry up. That's settled then. At eight bells."

"What's that fellow Davis driving at?" remarked Geoff, when the two chums found themselves alone. "It's rather a rotten joke making out that the Old Man is a bit of a tyrant."

"Blest if I know," replied Bernard. "As a matter of fact I thought the skipper was too until he explained why he kept us going up aloft. He's a tough sort of customer, I admit, but he's white all through."

"All that," agreed his chum heartily.

CHAPTER XIII

The Ship that Passed in the Night

The North-east Trades bore the good ship *Golden Vanity* rapidly southwards. Everything pointed to a quick passage; and, although the *Blue Bird* had not been sighted since off Dungeness, everyone on board the *Vanity* hoped that they had outsailed their rival.

From the Start to Rio is roughly 4950 miles. The distance is the same whether performed under sail or by steam. At first sight this seems rather a superfluous statement, but it must be remembered that under sail the shortest distance is often not the quickest. For example, from Plymouth to The Cape is 5882 miles by the recognized mail-boat route. A sailing-ship, making the same voyage, if she is to make a quick passage, and take advantage of known currents and winds, has to cover 7200 miles.

A few degrees north of the Line the *Golden Vanity's* luck was out. She ran into a belt of calms. For days she floated idly upon the oily, glaring-surfaced water, outwardly motionless, although hourly she was being set east of her true course by the Equatorial current.

By this time the chums were beginning to realize some of the disadvantages of "masts and yards". Hitherto the voyage, with one exception, had been of the nature of a pleasure cruise. For days on end there had been little necessary work to be performed. Hardly a sheet required to be touched or a sail trimmed during several successive periods of twenty-four hours.

But once out of the influence of the Trades, the case was very different. Bernard and Geoff had had experience of calms as yachtsmen in British waters know them—a few hours at most of idle drifting within sight of land, followed by a spanking whole-mainsail breeze.

Day after day of exasperating calms was quite another matter. Within a few minutes after dawn the sun would shoot up in a blaze of glory into an unclouded sky. Then steadily it would climb across the vault of heaven until it was almost directly overhead. Throughout the afternoon it would move slowly until the lengthening shadows heralded the close of another day. Then, still in an unclouded sky, the brilliant orb would turn a dull red, apparently increase in magnitude, and plunge quickly beneath the horizon.

Five minutes later it would be night. Myriads of stars would powder the firmament and make slow procession from east to west. Not the faintest suspicion of a zephyr cooled the heated air or ruffled the mirror-like surface of the star-spangled ocean.

At the end of three days of this sort of thing, the chums realized what deadly monotony was. It was too hot to want to eat. Food—hard tack and tinned stuff by this time—no longer appealed to their jaded appetites. They were in a sort of vapour bath from morn to night. Even the hours of darkness brought scant relief. To attempt to sleep in their bunks, even with scuttles open, was merely a matter of tossing uneasily on the hard mattress until they were roused to stand their "tricks".

The while not a sail appeared in sight to break the tediousness of the situation. By day sea and sky met in an unbroken circle. Overhead the sails hung limply from their yards or drooped forlornly from the stays. The decks were too hot for anyone to tread barefooted. If water were thrown over the sweltering planks, the moisture, rising in clouds of vapour, would evaporate within a few minutes. Refuse dumped overboard floated alongside for hours.

Although watches were kept as strictly as usual, there was little to be done. The helmsman stood by the idle wheel, knowing that it was useless to put the helm either up or down. Drifting helplessly the *Golden Vanity* would frequently turn through all the thirty-two points of the compass half a dozen times a day. It was useless to trim sails. The whole press of canvas that in the Trades had driven the ship at a good twelve knots, would not now move her a foot an hour.

Nevertheless, a sharp look-out had to be kept for the first indication of a breeze ruffling the mirror-like surface. When it came it might come suddenly and with terrible ferocity, and woe betide the luckless ship caught unawares and taken aback!

Captain Corbold was too experienced a "masts and yards" to risk such a disaster—for disaster would inevitably occur. He had seen sailing-ships, neglecting ordinary precautions, dismasted and left sheer hulks all within a few minutes. He

had also vivid recollections of seeing a large barque taken aback and thrown on her beam ends by a dreaded white squall. In that particular instance his ship—he was Second Officer in her at the time—was within two miles of the barque. Although boats were lowered to go to the rescue of the latter's crew not a trace of either barque or hands remained. Capsized, the luckless craft had sunk like a stone.

When at length the long-expected breeze appeared it came softly. The *Golden Vanity's* canvas fluttered irresolutely. She heeled, recovered, heeled again and began to forge ahead, without the necessity for trimming sails.

After days of inactivity the helm once more began to "kick". The bored helmsman, lubricating his hands, prepared to enjoy himself, while the welcome ripple under the ship's cutwater and a steadily lengthening wake announced that for the present the period of inaction was at an end.

By midnight, when Geoff had to "stand his trick" the ship was logging eight knots. Peter Kelso, the officer of the Middle Watch, had just taken over when Geoff reported for duty.

Having received the assurance that the side-lights and stern-lights were burning brightly and that the look-outs were at their posts, the Third Officer stepped aft and demanded of the helmsman the course.

The man gave it without hesitation. Kelso glanced at the compass-bowl. The correct point was dead on with the lubber's line.

"Very good, Richards!" he remarked. "Keep her so."

Noticing Geoff he beckoned the lad to him. Together they paced the port or wind'ard side of the poop.

Presently conversation drifted round to the subject of the Old Man's outboard motor.

"I'd like to get that confounded box of dud tricks running," remarked Kelso. "Not that I'm keen on that type of engine; but somehow the Old Man's quite cut up about it. Dunno why, unless he's got an interest in the firm who make the things."

"Those flywheel magnetos are always unsatisfactory," remarked Geoff. "I know several fellows who had them in Poole. Not one could be relied upon."

"But this one has a separate mag, driven by bevel gear," declared Kelso.

The Third Officer and Geoff were talking freely now. The barrier of restraint had been swept away. Both were on common ground, discussing internal-combustion engines.

"So much the better then," asserted the latter. "Evidently the trouble is owing to their weak spark. You can't swing the flywheel quick enough."

"That's a fact," admitted Kelso, whose hands still bore testimony to his efforts in that direction. "That and high compression. Once she starts she goes."

"Then why not gear the mag?" suggested Geoff. "Gear it two to one, so that there'll be two sparks of the plug to every revolution of the flywheel? She ought to fire at a quarter turn then."

"She might," admitted Kelso. "But what happens to the spark that doesn't fire?"

"Nothing," replied Geoff. "It won't affect the explosion. I've seen a motor-boat engine with a magneto geared. It started like a bird."

"Really?" exclaimed the Third. "Look here; suppose we tackle the job? If it does all right it'll please the Old Man immensely. If we can get the engine to go by the time we reach Rio——"

"Light on the starboard bow, sir!" shouted the look-out for'ard.

Peter Kelso sprang to the lee rail. The *Golden Vanity* was on the port tack. Away on her starboard bow could be discerned a single red light—an indication that there was a sailing-ship on the starboard tack. If she were close hauled it would be the *Golden Vanity's* business to give way to her.

Geoff waited, wondering what the Third Officer would do. It seemed remarkable that two sailing-vessels, having miles of ocean to themselves, should converge in this manner.

Kelso, too, was waiting. On him the safety of the ship and all who sailed in her depended, and possibly that of the strange craft as well. He was waiting to observe the change of angle; an indication which would show whether the other vessel was sailing free or close hauled. Until he was certain on that point he was loath to warn the Watch.

In less than ten minutes the on-coming craft was clearly visible in the starlight when looked at through night-glasses. She was a full-rigged ship carrying all plain sail—which was precisely what the *Golden Vanity* was carrying.

Presently Kelso returned the binoculars to their case.

"She's the *Blue Bird*," he declared.

"The ship we're racing?" asked Geoff.

"Yes," replied the Third. "It's our bad luck. We'll have to give way. Inform Captain Corbold that the *Blue Bird's* two miles on our starboard bow close hauled on the starboard tack."

Geoff scurried down the poop ladder on his way to the Old Man's cabin. As he did so he heard the Third warning the Watch on deck to stand by.

Geoff knocked, and without waiting for permission entered the cabin. On one bulkhead was a bracket carrying a gimballed lamp. To keep off the glare the Old Man had painted green one section of the shade, so that his bunk was in shadow.

Captain Corbold was sleeping. His deep resonant snoring left no doubt on that score. He was lying on his back. His huge pyjama-clad body seemed to fill the entire space between the bunk-board and the bulkhead.

"Please sir!" began Geoff.

The Old Man opened his eyes.

"Mr. Kelso told me to inform you that the *Blue Bird*——"

The Old Man leapt out of his bunk.

"Is two miles off——"

The Old Man was already pulling on his clothes. Methodical in his habits he made a point of laying out every article ready to hand.

"On our starboard bow——"

The Old Man grabbed his rubber boots.

"Close hauled on the starboard tack!"

Geoff had delivered the message, but within ten seconds of its completion, Captain Corbold was making for the deck.

"What are we doing?" he demanded.

"I've put the helm up, sir," reported Kelso. "We couldn't point any higher. Shall we run under her lee and 'bout ship?"

"No," replied the Old Man promptly. "Go to lee'ard of her and then close haul."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the Third, not without a sense of disappointment. His idea, had he had a free hand, would have been to run under the *Blue Bird's* lee, go about smartly on the other tack and then attempt to get to wind'ard of the *Golden Vanity's* rival.

"Meet her! . . . At that!" cautioned Kelso to the helmsman.

In the starlight the sight of the *Blue Bird* tearing along with a great bone in her teeth and with her canvas setting like a

glove was one never to be forgotten. The two ships passed within a cable's length of each other. In the half darkness the distance appeared to be even less. Then the *Blue Bird's* port light vanished from sight—hidden by the screen. As it did so, the *Golden Vanity's* courses and topsails shivered in the back-draught from the craft to wind'ard. Filled again as she drew clear. Then she plunged into the *Blue Bird's* lee-bow wave, taking it green over her shoulder.

Both vessels had drawn clear, but still Kelso did not give the order to up helm and brace up the yards. Geoff wondered why, seeing that the *Vanity* was losing what might prove to her valuable seconds. It was not until he caught sight of a phosphorescent swirl two hundred yards or more astern of the *Blue Bird*, that he realized the reason for the Third's delay in giving the expected orders. That swirl marked the position of the rotator of the *Blue Bird's* log—and it is considered neither good seamanship nor good form to cut another craft's log-line.

"'Bout ship, sir?" inquired Kelso.

Captain Corbold shook his head.

"Hold on close hauled," he decided. "It's a matter of luck either way. She may get a fair slant or we may not. 'Twill be a close run either way."

CHAPTER XIV

The Sea-serpent

For a full minute Davis kept his night-glasses focused on an object that showed faintly in the starlight at a maximum distance of a couple of cables' lengths.

By the time he had finished his scrutiny that distance had appreciably diminished.

"That's the stuff to give 'em, look you!" he said in a low voice to Setchell, who with the Welshman was cadet of the Morning Watch. "Get Wilson out of it for a bit."

Setchell gave a glance round. The poop was deserted save for the hand standing his trick at the wheel. The Officer of the Watch had left the deck for a few minutes.

"Where's the Second?" asked Setchell.

"Guzzling cocoa, you bet," replied Davis. "Look lively, or we'll miss the thing."

Crossing over to where the helmsman stood, Setchell jiggled him on the arm.

"I'll take her," he said. "Nip off and get a smoke!" Which was a direct breach of discipline, but the two cadets—"two minds with but a single thought"—had already agreed to risk the consequences.

The man, nothing loth, relinquished the wheel and disappeared in the starlight. Davis, too, had vanished, diving down the poop-ladder as soon as he knew that the helmsman had agreed to the other cadet's proposal.

It was a calm night. The *Golden Vanity* was making very little more than a couple of knots—perhaps not that—just sufficient to allow her to answer to the helm.

From beneath the break of the poop came a hoarse whisper:

"Can you see it?"

Setchell, who had put the helm slightly over to starboard, replied that he could not. "It," whatever it was, was masked by the bows of the ship.

"You're dead on it," continued Davis. "Up helm! Keep her at that!"

There was a gentle scuffling noise, then a faint thud followed by the well-known sound of new rope rasping over metal. The rasping continued for nearly five minutes; then silence broken only by the gentle splash of the ship's bow waves.

Presently Davis reappeared on the poop.

"Fixed it," he reported mysteriously. "Better warn Wilson!"

There were distinct aural evidences that the Second Officer had finished his cocoa, so the helmsman was warned that it was about time he "carried on".

When Strachan reappeared the two cadets were performing their watch-keeping duties—which for the present consisted of pacing the weather side of the poop—as unconcernedly as ever.

Dawn broke over the tropical sea. In a few minutes it was broad daylight. The wind, previously light, had died utterly away, leaving the ship rolling sluggishly, with her dew-sodden canvas slatting noisily.

Davis came aft to report "Lights down and all correct!"

The Second Officer received the information without comment, and glanced aloft at the idle canvas, wondering whether he would order t'gallant sails to be set before the watch was changed.

"Think we'll have a breeze soon, sir?" asked Davis, as Mr. Strachan facing for'ard looked down in a preoccupied manner at something near the foot of the poop-ladder.

The Second turned and shot a quick glance at his questioner.

"You seem like a cat on hot bricks this morning," he rejoined. "What's the matter with you? Why this abnormal interest in the weather? Look here, my man, if you want a job to keep you busy, I'll find you one in double quick time."

Davis retired as gracefully as circumstances permitted. Setchell threw him an inquiring look. The Welshman shrugged his shoulders.

Apparently the Second Officer lost interest in the waist, and resumed his steady perambulation of the poop-deck.

Presently, while the sun was only a few degrees above the horizon, a faint breeze shook the sails. The canvas shivered and filled. Once more the *Golden Vanity's* stem threw up a bow wave.

"Beg pardon, sir!" exclaimed Setchell, going up to the Second Officer. "What's that astern?"

Strachan glanced aft, searched the skyline.

"Astern—where?" he asked. "Any sail in sight?"

"No, sir; a cable's length astern," replied the cadet. "Right in the eye of the sun."

"I've got it," declared the Second.

"What is it, sir?" asked the cadet.

Strachan made no immediate answer. He stood gazing at a long sinuous object lazily swimming in the ship's wake, or rather, cutting across it in a series of diagonal lines yet without either definitely gaining or losing distance. Occasionally its head, a fearsome horned affair, would dip beneath the surface. Anon the writhing tail would stand six feet or more above the water, the while its speed was sufficient to throw up a double column of foam. It was difficult to distinguish either its colour or shape owing to the dazzling sunlight; but, whatever it was, it was a marine monster of quite fifty feet in length and totally unlike any creature known to scientists.

"Go and inform Captain Corbold," ordered the Second Officer.

"Do you think it's a sea-serpent, sir?" asked Setchell.

"Go and inform Captain Corbold," ordered Strachan for the second time.

The cadet departed with manifest reluctance. As he passed Davis that worthy made a wry face but discreetly held his peace.

It was not long before the Old Man, attired in pyjamas, uniform cap and canvas shoes, was on the poop.

Nor did he arrive in solitary state. By some means the "buzz" went round the ship that the oft-doubted never-authenticated sea-serpent had done the *Golden Vanity* signal honour by swimming in her wake.

"Go and bring me my camera!" ordered the Old Man, addressing Senior Cadet Fairclough, who with Bernard and Geoff formed part of the crowd of spectators. "'Luff her a bit, quartermaster; let's see if we can get the brute out of the eye of the sun."

"Mainsail haul!" shouted Strachan. "Lee braces, there!" The ship was turned two points closer to the wind—as high as she could possibly sail without shaking. The sea-serpent, with only a slight delay, took a sheer and dived.

"It's off!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

A moment later the thing reappeared, rearing its horned head ten feet or more above the surface.

"Got him, by George!" ejaculated the skipper, snapping the shutter of his camera with unnecessary force. "That'll confirm the entry in the log, Mister! Make a note of the time."

"It's full fifty feet long," declared one of the crew.

"Fifty—more'n a hundred," rejoined the Old Man. "Persistent devil, too. It'll be wanting to come over the side in a brace of shakes. It's gaining on us, Mister."

"I don't think so, sir," replied the Second.

"I tell you it is!" snapped Captain Corbold. "Cunning brute, too! It's dead in the sun's eye again," he added, as the sea-serpent made another sheer on a bearing from the ship's port quarter to the starboard. "Play with him, Mister, while I get my rifle!"

How Second Officer Strachan was expected to hold the sea-serpent in play was a point that the Old Man did not stop to explain.

Hurrying through the throng of cadets and hands who, in their excitement, had invaded the sacrosanct precincts of the poop-deck, Captain Corbold descended to his cabin, fetched a .450 rifle from under his bunk, fixed the detachable stock, grabbed a handful of ball-cartridges and returned aft.

All this took some time.

When he returned the sea-serpent apparently was bobbing in the long swell quite half a mile astern—an indistinct waving line in the sunlit water.

Had the Old Man been observant he might have noticed that Cadet Davis was no longer on the poop-deck. He had unobtrusively followed the skipper down the ladder, but very little farther.

But Second Officer Strachan had noticed the lad as he stole away. Strachan said little then, but thought the more.

"The brute's well away, sir!" he reported.

"Course it would!" rejoined the Old Man. "No matter. I've a photographic record to do unbelievers in the eye. Whack it down in the log, Mister! Give a full description with no trimmings. I'll write a report, too. Don't forget: get three names as witnesses."

"Very good, sir!" replied the Second.

"Lay for'ard then!" shouted the Skipper, suddenly realizing that the poop resembled a bear-garden. "Lay for'ard. Let the hands trim sail, Mister. Yes, upper an' lower tops'ls. Let her romp!"

The Old Man returned to his cabin. The hands of both watches either swarmed aloft or stood by the main sheets and braces. This done, the men were "blown down", and the *Golden Vanity's* decks resumed their normal fair-weather aspect.

It was not until the Morning Watch was relieved at eight bells that Strachan called Cadet Davis to him.

"Why did you want to waste a good coil of inch tarred rope?" he demanded.

The Welshman's face went a vivid scarlet. The game was up.

He had lassoed a huge twisted branch, one that had been brought down by the mighty Amazon and carried miles out into the wide Atlantic, and had let the gaunt timber tow astern at the end of 113 fathoms of new rope.

"So you thought you were pulling my leg," rejoined the Second. "I'll admit it was a very passable spoof. It did look like a sea-serpent, especially in the eye of the sun. You didn't count on my sending for Captain Corbold?"

"No, sir."

"I thought not. That put the wind up you, my lad. No wonder you slipped the rope. I fancy I'd have done the same myself, if I'd been in your place."

"Sorry, sir," said Davis.

"Don't mention it," replied the Second. "You've still got to reckon with the Old Man!"

But Strachan, probably realizing that not so many years had passed since he was a high-spirited cadet, held his peace.

By devious ways the story reached the ears of the Old Man, but the names of the two delinquents were not mentioned.

Captain Corbold thought deeply over the matter, and realized that the less said about it the better. At all costs he didn't want to see an account of the hoax appear in the Press.

The entry in the log was erased.

Soon the Old Man had other matters to occupy his attention.

CHAPTER XV

The Finish of the Race

Variable winds and alternating calms lasted until the mountainous coast of Brazil rose above the horizon.

Eight days had elapsed since the *Golden Vanity* and the *Blue Bird* had passed each other. During that interval no sign of the latter had been seen, although a look-out was stationed on the fore cross-trees during the hours of daylight.

By noon the entrance to the magnificent harbour of Rio, with the famous Sugar Loaf standing out clearly against the background of blue mountains, hove in sight.

Until four in the afternoon the *Golden Vanity* beat up the entrance. Then the wind dropped, leaving the ship wallowing in a long swell.

To the cadets in particular nothing was more exasperating. With port in sight and the prospects of leave ashore, they were doomed to yet another night of strenuous activity before the anchor was let go. For strenuous activity it had to be, since the expected land breeze would mean frequent short tacks.

Presently Geoff, who was standing within a few feet of Second Officer Strachan, noticed that individual level his glasses and keep them focused upon the south side of the harbour. After a while Strachan lowered his binoculars, wiped the lenses and again directed them shorewards.

"Kelso, old son!" he exclaimed in a low voice. "See what you make of that!"

The Third levelled a telescope.

Curiosity prompted Geoff to pick up a pair of binoculars from a spare compartment of the signal locker. He, too, trained them shorewards.

To his surprise he had quite miscalculated the distance. The curve of the ocean still intervened between the base of the cliffs and the ship. The rugged coast was thrown into deep shadow by the rays of the setting sun.

For the best part of a minute Geoff scanned the shore in an endeavour to discover what had aroused the two officers' attention. Suddenly a moving object came into the field of his binoculars. It was the canvas and topsides of a ship under all plain sail bowling along under a strong breeze. The sails appeared to be black and hardly discernible from the background of shadow-enshrouded cliffs.

"The *Blue Bird* for a dead cert," he heard Strachan exclaim. "She's done us, laddie. She's sneaked round from the south'ard. Better pass the word to the Old Man."

Captain Corbold was soon on the scene. As soon as he had picked out his rival he consulted a chart.

"She'll have to stand off to weather those islands," he declared. "Likely as not that'll take her into the patch of calm. We may get to wind'ard of her yet."

It was supreme optimism. The *Golden Vanity*, fifteen miles from the mouth of the harbour, was utterly becalmed. The *Blue Bird*, perhaps five miles from land, was favoured with a spanking breeze. The odds looked pretty hopeless.

Sunset found the *Golden Vanity* still becalmed.

"Up sidelights," ordered the Second Officer.

The ship was then snugged down for the night. Almost everyone on board was convinced that as far as the impromptu race was concerned, the *Golden Vanity* was out of it. Darkness set in—a starless night with an enormous glare in the western sky to mark the position of the as yet unattainable city of Rio de Janeiro.

Dawn brought with it an unexpected sight. The *Blue Bird* lay becalmed at about a mile to the nor'ard of her position when last sighted by the *Golden Vanity*. Apparently the wind had failed her soon after sunset, and she, like her rival, had been drifting all night.

With the rising of the sun all possible shadow of doubt concerning the *Blue Bird* was removed. To the old timers in the

Golden Vanity she was almost as familiar a craft as their own.

The hands were at breakfast when a shout of "A breeze!" brought them pell-mell on deck. Grub or no grub, they were not going to throw away a possible chance of at least decreasing the distance between the two ships. The breeze was dead aft. In a trice the rigging was black with men as they rushed aloft to loose royals and main skysail.

Soon the *Golden Vanity*, with every stitch of canvas set, was logging twelve knots; yet, strange to relate, the breeze appeared to keep but a mile or so ahead of her. Beyond was a belt of flat calm, and as yet the *Blue Bird* had not been overtaken by the wind. She lay "like a painted ship upon a painted ocean", with her creamy canvas mirrored in the placid water.

Her people had noticed the approaching breeze. Nor could they be unaware of the presence of the *Golden Vanity* bearing down upon them under an enormous press of sail. Her crew were swinging the yards and bracing them close up to be ready for the first puff. Three miles to lee'ard of her lay the narrow entrance to the harbour, with Fort São João to port and Fort Santa Cruz to starboard. Between these fortifications was the imaginary line to mark the finishing point of the race. The *Golden Vanity* had five miles to run to her rival's three.

A far-flung gust caught the *Blue Bird* aback, heeled her until her weed-covered underbody showed glistening in the sun, shook her till her canvas flogged. She commenced to gather stern-way.

But the *Blue Bird's* skipper knew his job. Smartly manoeuvring with head and mizzen yards, he soon had his ship under control. She forged ahead, turning under full weather helm until she was on a parallel course to that of the *Golden Vanity*, and with a useful lead of about half a mile.

Both ships were now on a dead run for the harbour's mouth. There were several craft, mostly steam, dodging about. Those under power promptly kept out of the way, according to the Rule of the Road.

A whaler, manned by four oarsmen and three men in the stern sheets, imprudently tried to cut the leading ship off. The *Blue Bird*, by a slight change of helm, missed the boat handsomely. The whaler then attempted to head off the *Golden Vanity*, her crew yelling out in broken English that they were the pilots. The *Vanity* also missed them by a couple of boats' lengths, leaving the whaler rolling and pitching in her wake, with the coffee-coloured Brazilians uttering unintelligible maledictions at the sublimely indifferent Captain Corbold.

Then, as luck would have it, the wind eased and shifted until it bore almost abeam. Both ships promptly trimmed yards and were now going full and bye on the port tack. The *Golden Vanity* slightly to lee'ard, was steadily overhauling her rival.

A huge Royal Mail boat came slowly and majestically into view from behind São João. It was quite within her rights to port helm and keep to her starboard side of the entrance channel. Her captain was a sportsman. Something told him that the two full-rigged ships were "cracking on" in racing fashion. He knew that to pass to wind'ard of them would jeopardise the chances of the *Blue Bird*, so without hesitation he stood across the entrance and slowing down, crept gently to lee'ard. Her passengers and crew, climbing on the side of her tier of decks, cheered the contesting ships to the echo.

Now the *Vanity's* jib-boom was level with the *Blue Bird's* taffrail. Still she gained. Her bows drew level with her rival's counter. Then she commenced to drop back.

Too late Captain Corbold realized his mistake. He was blanketed by the *Blue Bird* to wind'ard. Nor could he luff and run under his rival's stern, thus gaining the weather-gauge. Even had there been room enough the towering heights of the Sugar Loaf rendered the wind fluky. And so, with a little more than half a length to spare, the *Blue Bird* won the race to the accompaniment of a deafening welcome from the syrens of both British and foreign vessels lying off Catete and alongside the wharves.

The crew of the *Golden Vanity*, true to the traditions of their race, promptly gave three cheers for their conquerors; then—"Hands shorten sail!"

CHAPTER XVI

At Rio

Out of the maze of shipping came a squat tug flying the Brazilian ensign aft, and Messrs. Whatmough, Duvant & Co.'s house-flag at the mast head. On board were one of the deputy harbour masters, splendidly arrayed in blue and silver, and the owner's agent.

"You are to bring up at No. 3 Buoy in Botafogo Bay," announced the agent. "Lighters will be alongside to discharge cargo. Send a hawser and we'll give you a pluck in."

Again the hands swarmed aloft to stow and furl sail, and by the time Geoff and Bernard had finished their task, the *Golden Vanity* was ambling sedately in the wake of the small yet powerful tug.

As far as Captain Corbold was concerned this arrangement left him unperturbed. He was quite content to berth or moor the ship where the authorities directed, provided that she was in a safe position. But amongst the crew and especially the cadets different sentiments prevailed. They wanted to see the ship berthed alongside one of the quays. It was handier for getting ashore whether liberty were permitted or not. It meant less boat work, with the attendant inconvenience of having to wait before a boat was available. Also the work of unloading cargo into lighters was rendered more arduous, since the ship's tackle and gear had to be employed to hoist the heavy crates out of the hold. Had the *Golden Vanity* been berthed at the quay electric cranes would have made light work of the task.

At length the *Golden Vanity*, with canvas neatly furled and stowed and with yards squared and trimmed with almost mathematical exactitude, lay at the buoy allotted to her.

Geoff and Bernard, their immediate duties completed, joined with their messmates in looking over the side at the attendant tug. She was lying off at about fifty yards distance, and although the Company's agent was on board carrying a bundle of papers under his arm, and was accompanied by a coffee-coloured man with a couple of bags that presumably contained the ship's letters, the tug made no attempt to run alongside.

"What are they hanging on to the slack for?" inquired Merrifield. "Why can't they sling the mail bag on board?"

These questions were probably asked by most of the cadets. Letters from home were the first consideration.

Geoff and his chum had no longings on that account. No one was likely to write to either of them. As far as they knew their address was unknown to any of their relations or friends. They were experiencing one of the greatest disappointments that seamen receive when making port after a long voyage—an empty mail day.

"You'll have to wait, my lad," replied Senior Cadet Fairclough in answer to Merrifield's question. "Until we obtain *pratique* there's no communication with the shore allowed."

"What's *pratique*?" asked the junior cadet.

"Sort of clean bill of health," replied Fairclough. "Here's the jolly old doctor coming alongside now."

A small motor-launch flying the Brazilian ensign and the flag of the Port Medical Authority was approaching the ship. In the stern-sheets and under an awning sat a short and excessively stout man in white uniform that contrasted forcibly with the dark-brown complexion.

The launch ran alongside. Captain Corbold went to the entry port to greet the Brazilian doctor, while the Chief mustered all hands in the waist.

The medical examination was quite a perfunctory affair. The doctor strutted up and down the line of men, hardly troubling to glance at them, put a few questions to the skipper through the medium of an interpreter, gave the ship a clean clearance and pocketed his fee. Thereafter the crew of the *Golden Vanity* were at liberty to mingle with the citizens of this great South American Republic, the authorities having satisfied themselves that the former would not be likely to communicate any infectious or contagious disease to the inhabitants of Rio. Whether the inhabitants of Rio were likely to infect the *Golden Vanity's* crew with Yellow Jack or kindred tropical diseases was not the Port Authorities' affair. As far as they were concerned, that possibility never troubled them.

Directly the Medical Officer had taken his departure, the tug ranged alongside and the Company's agent, followed by his

factotum, came on board. With due ceremony the Old Man conducted Messrs. Whatmough, Duvant & Co.'s representative to his cabin, while the agent's assistant handed the mail-bags into the care of the Chief Officer.

The remaining officers and men crowded round with eager anticipation written on their faces. The Chief broke the seals of the first sack, untied the lashings and tumbled the contents into a shallow wicker tray. This batch had been sent by the surest method, namely, the writers had addressed their communications to the ship, care of Messrs. Whatmough, Duvant & Co., London. They had then been forwarded by the firm to their Rio agent by British mail-boat, and thus did not pass through the hands of the Brazilian postal authorities.

Letters and parcels nearly filled the tray—messages of affection, greeting, entreaty, recrimination, and abuse of the coarsest kind. Faith, hope, and charity, envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness lurked within the sealed envelopes that were awaiting distribution.

The Chief took up a grimy envelope with a stamp askew in the bottom left-hand corner and addressed in a spidery scrawl.

"Jenkins?"

"'Ere, sir!"

The envelope was flicked into the man's hands. He glanced at the address, shoved the letter into his jumper, and, Oliver Twist-like, waited for more.

A dozen other names followed in quick succession. Then:

"Davidson—Thomas Davidson?"

There was no reply. The Chief Officer repeated the name. His audience remained silent, though chafing at the delay.

"No one of that name in the ship, sir," volunteered the bo'sun.

The Chief laid the unclaimed letter aside, and proceeded with his task. Those for the officers he handed out without a word. The cadets were generally addressed as Mister where their names were concerned.

"Bernard Woodward, Esquire!" sang out the distributor of the mails with marked emphasis upon the "Esquire".

A titter rippled through the crowd. Some of the hands guffawed.

The lad's face flushed scarlet. His surprise at receiving anything at all from the mail-bag was smothered by his astonishment at the amusement of the hands. Rather resentfully he realized that he was not responsible for the *faux pas* of the sender.

He glanced at the handwriting. It was his mother's. Instantly the frown of annoyance vanished.

"Thank you, sir!" he exclaimed firmly and distinctly and placed the envelope in his pocket, though it was a hard task to contain his impatience to retire to a secluded part of the ship and read the correspondence.

Before the general distribution of the contents of the tray ended Bernard had four letters handed to him. Geoff came off even better with half a dozen. Yet, since no one left the crowd of on-lookers, the chums had perforce to follow the example of the others.

Followed the contents of a second mail-bag. These were not so numerous as those of the first and consisted mainly of small parcels, newspapers, and letters addressed to the ship at Rio. Consequently these had passed through the hands of the Brazilian postal officials. Judging by the torn and ragged state of many of the packages the Rio post office people had literally had a finger in them; for in some cases the contents had been extracted either wholly or piecemeal.

"Your own fault, Jeffries," commented the Chief Officer, as he handed an elderly shellback the mutilated wrappings of a purloined parcel. "If you don't know by this time how to have a parcel sent you never will."

"I knows right enough, sir," replied the aggrieved one. "It's they wot sends 'em as don't," and he ruefully examined his "mail", speculating as to the nature of the missing contents.

It did not take long to distribute the contents of the second mail-bag, then by tacit consent officers and men dispersed either to devour their letters and newspapers or else to grouse over the callous neglect of their people at home in not writing at all.

Amongst Geoff's correspondence was a letter from his father—one with a decidedly lawyer-like tone about it, and containing similar sentiments to those which Mr. Ensor had expressed himself to *The Yachtsman's Fortnightly* reporter:

"I have no doubt that by this time"—it ran—"you will have regretted the results of your hare-brained adventure. Unfortunately I see no way to extricate you from your plight. You will have to make the best of things till the ship returns home. Then, I trust, you will recognize the advantage offered by the legal profession and study hard for your Law examinations. If your ambitions coincide with mine—and I trust they do—my hopes for the firm of Ensor & Son will become an accomplished fact."

Geoff read the letter thoughtfully. Then his eyes roamed across the deck to the sight of Rio Harbour bathed in the brilliant tropical sunshine.

"Not if I know it," he soliloquized oracularly.

It was not sheer selfishness or rebellion on the lad's part. Long since, he had been forced to come to the conclusion that the more or less humdrum existence in an office was not for him. He was a lover of the open air—preferably the salt air of the five oceans. Boat-sailing and yachting had strengthened his desire for a life afloat and now, after his experience in the *Golden Vanity*, and an as yet limited acquaintanceship with foreign parts, his resolution to follow the sea as a profession was stronger than ever.

But could he?

Bernard, too, had a letter from his father. While congratulating his son on his narrow escape, Mr. Woodward expressed a hope that Bernard would make full use of his opportunity offered by the sea voyage.

"I know you have no bent for Art in the strictest sense," he continued. "Perhaps it is as well; you will never be plagued by that bugbear, an artistic temperament, which in most cases is but another name for voluntary inertia. So if you like your present job, stick to it."

"What does the pater mean by my present job?" wondered Bernard.

He showed the letter to his chum. Geoff was equally puzzled.

"It seems as if your governor has something up his sleeve, old son," remarked Geoff. "Well, you're lucky. At any rate, your father gives you a free hand. What does he mean by saying you should make full use of the opportunity?"

Bernard shook his head.

"I don't know," he replied. "At any rate, I'm doing it. No time like the present, you know. By Jove! Isn't this top-hole? Wonder when the Old Man'll let us go ashore?"

The period of "stand easy" came to an end. The Chief Officer set the hands to work to whip off the hatches and rig yard-arm tackle for the purpose of unloading the holds. Two large lighters were expected alongside almost immediately.

So far there was no sign of Captain Corbold and the Company's agent. They were still conferring in the Old Man's cabin, the deck being left in charge of the Chief Officer.

The cadets of both Watches under Third Officer Kelso were told off to clear the after-hold and man the gear for working the necessary tackle. In a medley of old clothes and badly worn dungarees, the lads set to work notwithstanding the fact that the temperature was well over a hundred in the shade.

With a dilatoriness characteristic of tropical South American ports, the lighters put in a belated appearance. They were large open boats, save for a short deck fore and aft, and were manned by negroes under the orders of half a dozen mulattos. In each lighter was a Brazilian clerk, whose duty it was to make entries of all cargo received from the ship; while, as far as the *Golden Vanity's* after-hold was concerned, Senior Cadet Fairclough performed a similar office on behalf of the consignors.

"All ready, there?" sang out the Third Officer. "Look smart, my lads! Sooner we've cleared the hold, sooner you'll be given leave! Roundly there! Stand from under! Up with her!"

The tackles creaked. From the cavernous depths of the hold came the first consignment—crates of hardware.

It was hard work. Clouds of dust rose from the now open cavity, mingled with the reek of impure air. Barked knuckles, aching limbs, and lungs strained almost to bursting point, were the lot of Geoff and his fellow workers. But what mattered? Was there not as a reward the promise of liberty ashore?

In the midst of the turmoil the Old Man and the Company's agent came from under the break of the poop.

Bernard, who happened to be guiding a bulky crate clear of an angle of the deck-house, caught sight of the Captain pointing to Geoff.

"That's one of them," remarked the Old Man. "The other is knocking about somewhere."

There was little wonder that Captain Corbold had failed to recognize the youth working close to him. Bernard was literally as black as a tinker.

"All right," replied the agent. "Bring them up to the office at nine to-morrow morning. I'll have the papers ready."

CHAPTER XVII

At the Café Babylonia

It was close on sunset when the work of clearing the after-hold was completed. The cadets had toiled like galley slaves, and it was fortunate for them that the negroes in the lighter were harder workers than those who were stowing the cargo removed from the main-hold. As a matter of fact, the main-hold was but half cleared when daylight failed. In the absence of electric arc-lamps—which would have been available had the *Golden Vanity* berthed alongside the quays—the completion of the task had to be left till the morrow.

"Leave till midnight, you fellows!" announced the Senior Cadet. "Clear and shift as fast as you can. Boat leaves at One Bell (6.30 p.m.)."

The cadet's mess presented an animated scene during the lads' preparations, while drill patrol-suits, most of them showing signs of iron-mould, were extricated from piles of miscellaneous effects in their respective sea-chests. Carefully hoarded cakes of perfumed soap were shared out to mark the importance of the occasion. The down on a dozen different chins was removed for the first time since the *Golden Vanity* left the Thames. Shoes were meticulously pipe-clayed. In short, everything possible was done to make the cadets a sartorial credit to the ship. With them it was a point of honour to be rigged out more smartly than their rivals in the *Blue Bird*.

Geoff and Bernard had long been conscious of the deficiencies of their respective wardrobes, but with the usual open-handedness of their messmates, they had been provided with the loan of white uniforms including caps with the Company's badge.

"You'll have to risk wearing that badge," remarked Fairclough. "Really, it's part of my job to see that you don't sport it. I'd better look the other way! If the Old Man doesn't spot it, it'll be all right. Ready, you fellows? There's One Bell."

A hurried rush on deck followed, the leave-party lining up on the port side of the quarter-deck for inspection. Usually this business was part of the Watch-keeping Officer's duty; but somewhat to the chums' dismay the Old Man was standing at the foot of the poop ladder.

He made the inspection in silence. Geoff felt conscious of the skipper's keen eyes taking in the fact that Bernard and he were wearing uniform caps with the badge of Messrs. Whatmough, Duvant & Co.'s vessels. But greatly to the relief of those concerned the Old Man dismissed the party with the stereotyped injunction to behave themselves like young gentlemen—which might mean anything!

The *Golden Vanity's* motor-launch had been hoisted out and lay alongside the gangway. Unlike the boat fitted with the outboard engine, this craft had the reputation of five years good work behind it. Her motor had never been known to "konk out" at awkward or critical moments. Into her crowded the joyous cadets, while Third Officer Peter Kelso took command.

They landed at a convenient flight of steps at a considerable distance from the ship's berth off Botafogo, but considerably nearer to the centre of the city.

"Be here sharp at midnight," cautioned Kelso. "Well, jolly good luck to you!"

The launch backed away from the steps, turned and shaped a course back to the *Golden Vanity*. Kelso was going to be kept busy that evening. For one thing the launch had to take the Old Man and the Chief Officer ashore to dine with the Company's agent.

To Geoff and his chum was given the unique sensation that falls to the lot of those who set foot in a foreign town for the first time. The marked difference in climate, the characteristic odours of Brazil's capital, the buzz of voices speaking a language other than their own, the prevalence of dark or black features—all combined to convey a first and not unpleasant impression of far-famed Rio. They ambled on, rolling unsteadily after days at sea, and feeling most conscious of the hardness of the pavements to their lightly shod feet.

"I vote we keep together and have a mung round the shops," suggested Setchell.

"But don't forget we're due at the Babylonia at nine," exclaimed Davis. "As one who will not be called upon to pay for the repast and entertainment, I have no hesitation in bringing this fact to your notice."

They wandered about the main streets and plazas after the manner of British seamen ashore. That is to say, they behaved orderly, but did not hesitate to criticize adversely the sights, manners, and customs of a foreign city. Then, just before the hour of nine, Davis led his companions to the magnificently lighted portals of the Babylonia.

The Babylonia was a sort of glorified café consisting of a large open-air space dotted here and there with palms and orange trees. On all four sides were porticoed galleries outlined in coloured electric lamps. Overhead stretched wires carrying more lamps until the whole space was a blaze of riotous colour. Except for narrow gangways, the ground was almost hidden by marble-topped tables set around a raised platform. Already the patrons of the Babylonia had assembled in their hundreds, while to supply their needs in food and drink, scores of waiters, for the most part coloured men, scurried hither and thither.

A gorgeously uniformed official conducted the cadets to a couple of unoccupied tables almost adjoining the platform.

"What are you fellows going to have to drink?" inquired Davis hospitably, knowing that he would not have to foot the bill, since Geoff, Bernard, little Merrifield and he were to be entertained at the cost of the rest. "I'm going to have wine to start with. 'Course there's coffee. Grub? We'll leave that to the waiter-johnnies."

Two or three of the elder cadets ordered wine. They were supplied with about a pint of light red liquid in tall, narrow-necked glasses.

"You'll be three sheets in the wind, Davis," cautioned Fairclough.

"Pooh! Not me," replied the Welshman inelegantly. "The stuff's as weak as water. Don't you see the idea! You've got to make your drink last out or else order more. If you don't they expect you to clear out."

The cadets had hardly settled in their places, when a band appeared behind the central dais. After a few preliminary flourishes, the instruments struck up a lively air.

"Stand up, you fellows!" exclaimed Fairclough, noticing that everyone else was rising. "This apparently is their National Anthem."

At the end of a few bars the audience resumed their seats with a great shuffling of chairs. The band continued to play; the deep murmur of conversation broke out afresh; the coloured electric lamps shed their rays upon a dense cloud of aromatic cigar smoke. Geoff found himself beating time to the lively lilt.

Food was brought. No one amongst the cadets seemed to know of what it consisted. Not that they cared. It smelt and tasted excellent. After days of ship-fare, it was a feast for the gods.

Presently a fat, high-shouldered, greasy-faced man in tawdry garments came on the platform and gave a presumably humorous representation of Tannhäuser.

"I suppose the silly ass is trying to be funny," remarked Bernard. "It seems as if he's trying to raise a laugh at our expense."

As a matter of fact he was. His far from polite references to the *Golden Vanity's* cadets raised yells of laughter from many of the patrons of the Babylonia; but, since the lads were in total ignorance of the language, they were completely in the dark regarding the precise significance of the burlesqued Tannhäuser's sallies.

"Let him get on with it," declared Fairclough nonchalantly. "Perhaps he's trying to give us a pat on the back!"

They left it at that, joining in the applause that greeted the end of the turn. Even the performer seemed surprised at that; so much so that when, according to the custom of the place, he went round cap in hand to receive monetary contributions, he approached with reluctance the tables at which the British lads sat. Each cadet gravely handed him a small coin, whereat his astonishment at the unexpected conduct of these "mad Ingleses" reduced him to a state of exaggerated servility.

Presently a tall, lantern-jawed man, with a decided New England twang, came across to speak to Fairclough.

"Wal, I guess if it was me I'd slug that dago right now," he declared.

"What for?" asked the Senior Cadet.

The Yankee told him.

"That's nothing," declared Fairclough. "We're too jolly thick-skinned to mind that."

The American shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess you are," he rejoined. "You Britishers seem to like taking it lying down."

With that he strolled back to his own table, and folding his arms, glared at the retreating form of the performer.

Several "turns" followed, including a national dance with castanet accompaniment by a troupe of girl dancers. As before, at the termination of the turn, each performer wandered round the place collecting *largesse*.

After a deafening piece by the band, the platform was occupied by a coffee-coloured individual, even more massive and flabby than the man who had first appeared. Unlike the latter he was rigged out in a sort of evening dress with a broad scarlet cummerbund. A sash of the same colour was fastened over his shoulder, but underneath his coat. Rings glittered on his fingers, a brilliant tie-pin threatened to stick into his neck. His hair was long and straight, falling on his collar in well-oiled masses.

Arriving at the edge of the platform the man struck an attitude. The band struck up the opening bars of a dreamy waltz-like air.

"Don't say the blighter's going to sing!" whispered Geoff.

But no; while the principal performer maintained his tragic attitude assistants arrived with wicker crates, followed by a troop of dogs. The animals listlessly took up their position in a line just behind the principal.

Geoff began to take an interest in the business. Always keen on animals, especially dogs, he could not help pitying the dumb performers. They looked and probably were terrified. The usually sharp, alert look in a dog's eyes was noticeably absent. Whatever tricks they were about to perform Geoff realized that they were actuated by fear.

The music sank to a mere whimper. One of the assistants opened a basket and with a magnificent gesture handed the principal a silver-mounted blunderbuss. In full view of the audience the weapon was loaded with powder and buck-shot and capped.

Another assistant groping in a basket brought out a white dove and set it at liberty.

"The swine isn't going to shoot that!" exclaimed Bernard.

"No fear; it's a trick," declared Davis.

The dove fluttered upwards. It had gained a height of about thirty feet when the conjurer let fly with the blunderbuss. The bird simply vanished. No blood-stained feathers fluttered to the ground, no lifeless carcass thudded upon the platform. Instead a billowy piece of green and yellow silk glided within reach of the illusionist's outstretched hands. Holding it by two corners he displayed the Brazilian ensign.

Instantly the six dogs drawn up in line began barking as if in greeting, while most of the audience rose and cheered vociferously.

"Wonder how that was worked," exclaimed Geoff, relieved to find that in some unexplained way the dove had escaped slaughter. In fact while the uproar was in progress the bird fluttered down and hopped into the basket.

Thrice the same trick was repeated, but in other cases the flags of certain other South American Republics were displayed to the carefully rehearsed barking of delight from the canine chorus.

After the fifth shot had been fired at the mysterious and apparently bullet-proof dove the piece of silk that materialized seemingly out of the vanished bird resolved itself into the Stars and Stripes.

The conjurer held the flag aloft. The dogs set up a concerted yelp. Grinning superciliously the fellow disdainfully threw the "star-spangled banner" to the floor. Applause followed. Evidently there was little love for the Greatest Republic on Earth on the part of the Brazilian audience.

The cadets looked eagerly at the American who had previously rallied them upon their lack of patriotic spirit. He was sitting back in his chair, arms folded, legs thrust straight out, and glaring at the conjurer who had insulted his country's flag. But he did nothing—absolutely nothing!

The performance was repeated; this time the Union Jack being displayed and flaunted. For some moments the dogs alone expressed their dislike to Britain's National flag. The audience, knowing that there were several British cadets present, were decidedly reticent.

"Let's boo the blighter!" suggested Davis.

"What's the use," rejoined Fairclough. "He only did it to get our back up. Let's be dignified."

Encouraged by the passivity of the cadets, the conjurer gathered the six flags into a loose bundle and threw them into a basket.

Then he made a speech. The cadets could not understand a single word, but what the man did say was to assert that his dogs possessed such a high degree of brain power that they would unhesitatingly take any named flag from the heap.

"Margarida!" he exclaimed, addressing one of the animals. "Find for me the flag of the greatest and most enlightened country in the world—the Republic of Brazil!"

The animal thus addressed coweringly left her place in the line and commenced nosing into the jumbled heap. The conjurer, with arms folded, now stood facing the audience and with his back to the canine diviner. It was his intention to remain in this posture until a chorus of delighted barks from the rest of the animals proclaimed the successful effort of Margarida.

A crescendo of laughter caused the conjurer to swing round on his heels.

The dog had made her choice. Standing on her hind legs she held the Union Jack in her mouth.

With a snarl of rage the fellow tore the flag from Margarida's jaws, gave the cowering animal a brutal kick that lifted her completely off the ground, and threw the Union Jack upon the floor, stamping upon the flag in a paroxysm of fury.

In half a dozen bounds Geoff gained the platform. Notwithstanding the physical and moral support of his assistant the illusionist did not wait. He made a rush for the back of the stage. He was a fraction of an instant too late. With a magnificent running kick Geoff sent him flying headlong amongst the orchestra.

The place was in an uproar. Opinion was divided. Some of the audience raised cheers for the English youth, others shouted threateningly at the interrupter of the entertainment.

The cadets rising from their tables went to their chum's support, but the conjurer's human assistants made no attempt to avenge their chief. They unostentatiously faded away, taking the dogs and their paraphernalia with them.

Up ran the manager of the Babylonia, trembling and gesticulating.

"What's he gassing about?" asked Fairclough somewhat anxiously, for he knew by experience how quickly a row can develop into an affray. "Where's the Yankee? He'll be able to interpret. Keep together, you fellows!"

The loquacious citizen of the United States was no longer in evidence, but a substitute was forthcoming in the person of a well-dressed Brazilian.

"Ze managair 'e wisha you to go, senhors!" he explained. "You paya ze money for ze food an' ze drinks. An' senhors: et is my advise zet you go kweek bak to ze eschip an' do notta go by ze esmall estreetas. You onnerstanda?"

The cadets with Geoff in the centre, moved towards the entrance.

"Bunch together!" again cautioned Fairclough. "That fellow's given us good advice. Mind the side streets unless you want to look for trouble!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Running the Gauntlet

It was now a few minutes after eleven o'clock. Life in the Brazilian capital was in full swing. The brilliantly illuminated plazas were thronged with people.

"We've nearly an hour to wait for the boat," remarked Davis. "What's the programme, Fairclough?"

"Back to the quay," replied the Senior Cadet promptly. "You know what that chap said?"

"Well, it's not likely that we'll be set upon here, look you," protested the Welshman.

"Dunno about that," rejoined Fairclough. "Look astern of you."

At least fifty of the patrons of the *Babylonia* had followed the cadets into the street. Possibly curiosity was the prime motive, but there was no saying what might take place.

Just before reaching the waterside the cadets had to cross a large square, and thence through a narrow ill-lighted street of about a hundred yards in length. There was another way through the wide Avenida Rio Branco and thence to the Avenida do Caes on the waterfront, but the lads either did not know of its existence or, if they did, preferred to take the route by which they had come.

"Bunch together, lads," cautioned the Senior Cadet, "keep in the middle of the road clear of the sidewalk. Yes, I thought so; we're going to have a bit of excitement."

Less than fifty yards ahead, dark indistinct forms moved in the shadows—men not going to and fro on their lawful pursuits, but gathering in a compact mass across the width of the street.

The crowd that followed the cadets from the *Babylonia* had also increased in numbers. They, too, were pressing into the narrow thoroughfare, thereby cutting off the lads' retreat.

The cadets halted.

"Don't stop," ordered Fairclough. "If those fellows in front give trouble go for them bald-headed. They're the ones we're up against. Those behind us have only rolled up to see the fun."

Angry cries came from the human barrier. Some one shouted to them, and although the cadets could not understand the words, the meaning sounded clear enough. Nor had they now any doubt as to the identity of the leader of the mob. The conjurer, smarting with physical and mental distress, had gathered his pals—mostly mestizos and negroes, to avenge him.

The cadets, although their hearts were thumping wildly, walked as unconcernedly as they could until they were about twenty yards from the foremost of the gang.

A shower of sticks and stones left no doubt as to the nature of the lads' reception. They were entirely unarmed. They had not even a stick amongst them. Most of them were aware that the mob had knives and probably razors lashed to sticks. But it was no use turning back. The only thing to do was to dash right through the crowd of assailants.

"At 'em!" shouted Fairclough.

The cadets broke into a wild rush—a dozen against fifty cowardly wretches, part of the scum of Rio. It was more than the latter expected. Accustomed to waylay foreign seamen, who, after a carouse ashore, were unable to take care of themselves, the concerted attack took them completely aback.

The centre of the line gave way until held up by those behind. It was then that the cadets got to work.

Geoff, on Fairclough's left, found himself confronted by a burly, woolly-haired mulatto armed with a long knife. The fellow raised his arm to strike. Even as he did so, Geoff dealt him a terrific straight right to the point of the chin. The lad had a reputation for being a hard hitter. There was weight and scientific knowledge behind that blow. It would have knocked a white man senseless.

But beyond jolting the mulatto a little the blow had hardly any appreciable effect. The fellow answered by a vicious downward jab with the glittering steel. It missed Geoff's shoulder by a fraction of an inch, ripping the sleeve of his borrowed patrol jacket from the shoulder to the elbow.

At that moment Fairclough sent an assailant spinning by means of a neat hook. The fellow, falling heavily against the mulatto, knocked Geoff's adversary completely off his feet. The lad jumped over the writhing pair and managed to return the Senior Cadet's good turn by dropping a greasy, hook-nosed Brazilian, who was about to deal Fairclough a blow from behind.

A couple of men seized little Merrifield, and although the youngster put up a stiff fight he was in danger of being separated from his chums. Out of the corner of his eye Geoff saw the danger that threatened the lad. Gripping one fellow by the scruff of the neck he banged his head against the second of Merrifield's attackers. Merrifield shook himself free.

"Keep behind me!" bawled Geoff, in order to make himself heard above the din. Then, making a grab at a mulatto who had vainly attempted to evade him, Geoff, using him as a human buckler, pushed him headlong into the press.

For how long the fight lasted, Geoff had not the slightest idea. Before it began the lad would not have hesitated to admit that he had cold feet. In the heat of the contest he found himself enjoying it. He was no longer a law-abiding member of the community, but a hot-blooded fighter conscious of his prowess. Yet the while he never lost sight of the fact that he was one of a party—a member of a team, as it were—ready to fight not solely for himself, but with the definite object of forcing a way through the mob without allowing the weakest member to fall into the clutches of the cowardly *canaille*.

The cadets won through. Heated, breathless, dishevelled, they found themselves at the landing-place on the water-front. Bernard, Davis and Fairclough were bleeding from knife wounds which, fortunately, were but slight. Almost everyone had received contusions from sticks and stones. Geoff's knuckles were raw. He was beginning to be aware of a throbbing pain in his shin. In the *mêlée* he had received a hack that had laid bare his shinbone from knee to ankle.

But the business was far from finished. The mob, augmented by dozens of quayside loafers, were keen to avenge their defeat at the hands of a dozen mere striplings. They closed round in the form of a semicircle at a distance of about ten yards from the knot of well-nigh breathless cadets. For the latter there was no retreat except to take to the water. Even then there seemed scant chance of being picked up.

It was now eleven thirty-five; twenty-five minutes before the *Golden Vanity's* boat was due to take them off to the ship.

In vain the harassed cadets looked for signs of the gorgeously attired civil guards. They had seen plenty during the evening, but no doubt these magnificent gentlemen deemed it best to keep out of harm's way when it came to dealing with an angry mob on the quays.

Urged on by the taunts and encouragements of the spectators the mob advanced slowly to renew the attack. They heralded the hand-to-hand part of the business by discharging a shower of missiles—mostly garbage, since the flagged quays provided few facilities in the way of stones. Against this form of attack the cadets could do nothing but screen their heads with their arms and wait till direct blows would tell. They had to be strictly on the defensive. The breakthrough tactics that had served them so well, were no longer of use. There was no place of refuge for which they could make. To allow themselves to be enveloped by the mob was courting disaster. The question was whether they could hold out until the *Golden Vanity's* boat arrived?

They realized that after the punishment they had inflicted upon their cowardly foes they could expect no mercy—no fair play. Still the crowd hesitated to close. Presently a couple of negroes forced their way to the front of the semicircle. Each carried a bundle of short sticks with the ends wrapped in tow. The tow was saturated with kerosine.

Grinning delightedly the blacks proceeded to set light to the firebrands, distributing the fiercely burning flares to their fellows. It was not for purposes of illumination that the ferocious negroes and half-castes held the flambeaux. They were to be hurled at the still unconquered little band of British lads.

The first of the hissing, flaming torches fell at Fairclough's feet. In a trice the Senior Cadet picked it up and hurled it back. It fell in the midst of the mob, scattering it in all directions. But the diversion was only temporary. Except for two or three who were dancing and yelling with pain, the crowd closed the gap and prepared to open an intensive bombardment.

Suddenly there was a retrograde movement of one horn of the semicircle. Part of the mob was pushed back against the rest. Shouts of alarm mingled with cheers—that did not sound exactly British—told the cadets that some attempt at rescue was on hand.

Panic seized the cowardly throng. They simply fled helter-skelter, urged on by a mere handful of men armed with stout cudgels. In a couple of minutes the cadets were alone save for half a dozen wretches left writhing on the pavement. Their rescuers, whoever they might be, were not content with dispersing the mob. They were following the panic-stricken half-castes, dealing hard knocks on the rearmost of the coffee-coloured throng.

At length the pursuit was called off. The dungaree-clad men who had arrived at such an opportune moment, came towards the knot of cadets.

"Wal," drawled the foremost, "I guess we just cleared up that lot."

Geoff could not conceal his astonishment. The speaker was the lean-featured American who had addressed the cadets in the Babylonia.

"You have," he replied gratefully.

"I reckon that greaser will feel a bit sick with himself," continued the man. "He's a Mexican sure, though I didn't expect to find him here in Rio. There's a time to sit tight and a time to vamoose, sonny. I reckoned there'd be a set-to, so I just slipped out to round up the boys. I guess you felt that sore when he started monkeying about with that flag of yours so you just went for the greaser."

Geoff shook his head.

"It wasn't that," he replied. "Of course I wanted to boot the blighter—we all did—but when he hacked at that dog with his hoof I simply couldn't help going for him."

"I guess I didn't see that part," said the Yankee. "I'd slipped out to get the boys together. Seems we were right there. . . . Much damage? No, sir, the U.S. Ambassador here won't stand for that sort of thing. To-morrow there'll be trouble for some folk. What's your ship?"

Fairclough supplied that information.

"That hyer clipper a-lying off Botafogo?" inquired the man. "Wal, I reckon you'd best come aboard us—the S.S. *Hetty Q. Wilson*—until your boat shows up."

"She's to be here at midnight," said the Senior Cadet. "It's nearly that now."

"It sure is," agreed the man, who turned out to be the Second Officer of the *Hetty Q. Wilson*. "We'll stay here right now till your boat takes you off. 'Tain't exactly healthy for you guys, I guess."

The cadets were very glad for their American friends to remain, especially as there were indications that some of the less timorous of the mob were hanging about waiting for another opportunity for revenge.

As a matter of fact it was nearly one in the morning before the *Golden Vanity's* boat arrived at the landing-place. Directly she ran alongside the steps the Americans bade the cadets good night and walked back to their ship.

"Hallo, you fellows!" exclaimed Third Officer Kelso, as he caught sight of the tattered and battered cadets. "Been ratted?"

"No, sir," replied Fairclough, with a grim laugh. "We've been ratted. After this I can feel sympathy for a hunted rat!"

CHAPTER XIX

Countermanded Orders

Peter Kelso asked for no further explanation. If necessary that would be forthcoming should the Old Man get to know of the fracas. Judging by the appearance of the leave-party, Captain Corbold certainly would.

It was not until the boat was on her way back to the ship that Geoff realized that he was not in the motor-launch but in the boat fitted with the outboard engine. Taking into consideration the reaction through which he was now passing, it was not altogether to be wondered at that he failed to give significance to the fact.

"Come and take her," said the Third, relinquishing the short, vibrating tiller. "Yes, she started up quite easily. Jolly good thing she did."

"I'm glad," rejoined Geoff.

"So am I," agreed Kelso. "We had a pretty kettle of fish, I give you my word. Strachan went ashore to fetch the Old Man at six bells. He took the launch. Now that launch has been running like a clock for months; but dashed if she didn't break down when she was on her way back to the ship. It was blowing a bit at the time, and the boat's crew couldn't make headway with only two oars. The result was that the launch was well on her way across Rio Harbour before we found out what was wrong. Fortunately there was a signal lamp in the launch, and the Old Man called us up. I could have sent a boat away under sail, but she couldn't beat back with the launch in tow. It would have taken a couple of hours to tow her under oars; so I thought I'd try this packet. The motor fired first pull. We were alongside the launch in ten minutes, and back alongside the *Vanity* half an hour later. Gearing up that magneto did the trick, Ensor. The Old Man forgot all about the launch breaking down when he found the outboard motor had done so well. I told him it was your idea about the mag."

"You needn't have done that," protested Geoff.

"Well, I did, so that's that," continued the Third Officer. "He was like a kid with a new toy. Before he went up the side he stopped the engine and restarted it three times. I shouldn't be surprised if he's waiting to see her come back."

"Hope he's not, sir," remarked Fairclough, ruefully glancing at his grimy uniform.

The Senior Cadet's forebodings were ill-founded. The Old Man had turned in before the boat ran alongside. Silently the cadets made their way to their quarters, where for the next half-hour they were busily engaged in washing themselves and applying arnica and adhesive plaster. There were many anxious consultations concerning the fate of certain white drill uniforms—whether they would pass muster after passing through the hands of the laundry men or whether their condition condemned them to be summarily dumped overboard. On top of it all was the dismal prospect that the Old Man would take a serious view of the row and restrict their leave for the rest of the voyage.

"The morning after the night before" feeling was in the air when the cadets turned out. Bruises that had escaped notice during and immediately after the scrap were now painfully in evidence. Almost everyone complained of stiffness. One or two had black eyes.

"We might have been licked," remarked Davis, the sublime optimist. "As it was we knocked seven bells out of the blighters."

"Yes, but if those Yanks hadn't turned up——" objected another.

"Yes, it was rather a pity," continued the Welshman. "If only we could have scored off our own bat!"

Fortunately the lads were not to wear uniforms that morning. Word had been passed that they were to wash down the after-hold before taking in a cargo of coffee, so dungarees were the order of the day. And as Captain Corbold did not appear at inspection, that duty was performed by the Chief, who, remembering his cadet days, did not ask the reason for the battered condition of some of the lads.

Geoff and Bernard were hard at it working with squeegees while Fairclough, handling the hose, treated the working party to a shower-bath, when word was passed that the two chums were to "shift"—in other words wash and change into other clothes—and report at the Captain's cabin.

Without any preliminaries the Old Man explained matters.

"I've heard from the owners," he said. "They've come to an arrangement with your respective parents concerning your passages. It's rather an unusual step, but they are prepared to accept you as probationary cadets for the voyage. Any objection to the arrangement?"

"Not at all, sir," replied both lads heartily.

"A' right," continued the Captain. "I'll take you ashore and get the agent to fix up your papers. Tell Mr. Kelso from me to have the boat alongside—the outboard motor one. By the bye, Ensor, Mr. Kelso tells me that it was your idea about that magneto. Very smart of you. Your zeal is most commendable."

That was all the reward Geoff expected and received. He did not know that by getting the hitherto stubborn engine into a state of efficient docility he was putting nearly £50 into the Old Man's pocket. Provided the engine gave no further trouble Captain Corbold could report favourably on the make, and the owners would give an order for one motor to be supplied to each vessel of their fleet. And the Old Man would pocket a commission from the manufacturers.

To do him justice Captain Corbold would not have reported favourably on the motor had he not been fully convinced of its efficiency. Now, thanks chiefly to Geoff and in a lesser degree to Peter Kelso he could conscientiously state that the outboard engine performed its duties efficiently.

The formal business of entering the probationary cadets at the agent's office took less than a quarter of an hour. There they were supplied with cap-badges, and given an advance in order to purchase uniform from a British outfitter in the Avenida Jaures. Then they stayed to lunch with the agent, returning on board just as work was being resumed at 3 p.m., when the midday siesta came to an end.

Speculation was rife, in the cadets' mess, concerning the next port of call, and, as usual, the various guesses were subsequently found to be wide of the mark.

"The Old Man didn't let out to you, did he?" inquired Fairclough of Geoff, while the latter was shedding his shore-going rags in favour of the business-like dungarees.

"Not a word," replied Geoff. "I wish he had."

"We aren't bound for a tropical port, that's a dead cert," observed Davis. "Coffee, look you, would not be sent from here to any place where it grows. I shouldn't be surprised if we're under orders for Cape Town."

"Or Sydney," suggested Setchell. "If so, that means round the Horn. Ugh!"

"It'll be a twelvemonth's voyage in any case," declared the Senior Cadet.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Bernard.

"Dry up!" rejoined Fairclough. "Wait till you've been barging about round the Horn or in the Roaring Forties, and then see if you're of the same mind. You don't know what hard work is yet, old son."

He spoke feelingly. Recollections of a twenty-one days' battle in an attempt to round the Horn, where the crew, frozen with stinging spray and with fingers raw through contact with the fiercely thrashing canvas, when for days on end they existed miserably under battened hatches, often finding that they had lost ground during the twenty-four hours—all these incidents were yet fresh in the Senior Cadet's mind. Rounding the dreaded Cape was an achievement; but he was not anxious to repeat it.

Just then Third Officer Kelso looked in.

"Get a move on, you fellows!" he exclaimed. "Lighter's coming alongside. We're under orders for Southampton!"

This announcement was greeted with shouts of delight by most of the cadets. The "first voyagers" did not seem so enthusiastic over the news. Of course it was splendid to be homeward bound, but the short duration of the voyage was rather disappointing.

Especially so to Geoff and Bernard. It meant that their probation period would be over before they had hardly seen

foreign parts. Would the opportunity occur again? Their people might "kick"; the Company might decline to re-engage them after the probationary period. In fact a dozen things might crop up to prevent them following up the sea as a profession.

"Well, we aren't at Southampton yet," thought Geoff philosophically. "Lots of things may happen before we arrive there."

Geoff went to the side. A lighter deeply laden with hundreds of dark-coloured sacks containing the cargo was just making fast. From her came about twenty native stevedores on whom fell the task of stowing cargo under the supervision of the ship's officers.

Before the work had been in progress for an hour the lad registered a vow never to drink Brazilian coffee—he had seen the stuff handled and that was enough!

At last the hatches were placed over the holds, tarpaulined and secured by means of wedges. There was a fair breeze blowing right out of the harbour. Captain Corbold decided that the opportunity was too good to be wasted. The expense of tug-hire would be saved.

"Hands aloft! Loose and make all plain sail!"

In a few minutes the hitherto bare yards were displaying their sheeted-home canvas to the accompanying deep bass voices of the hands on the braces. Heeling slightly to the following breeze, the *Golden Vanity* cast off, cleared the buoy and headed to the open sea.

Suddenly Second Officer Strachan hailed the Old Man.

"Our shore signal station speaking, sir!"

Above the flat roof of the Company's agent's offices, a two-flag signal fluttered in the breeze.

"TH, sir!" read Strachan. "Your original orders are cancelled; I am directed to inform you to proceed to——"

The Old Man nodded. Promptly the affirmative pennant was hoisted at the *Golden Vanity's* peak. All on deck were agog with curiosity. What would the next hoist—indirectly the name of the new destination—be?

Geoff was amongst the first to read the four flags AXJM. So did most of the cadets, but until the letters were decoded they were none the wiser.

A few moments of suspense followed. The Second Officer fumbled with the leaves of the Code Book. The page he wanted had apparently become stuck.

"Well, what is it, Mister?" sung out the Old Man, impatiently.

Strachan did most things deliberately. Giving another glance shoreward to satisfy himself that he had read the flags correctly he ran his thumb down the alphabetically arranged geographical signals till he found what he wanted.

"It's Nassau, sir!" he reported.

"A' right," growled Captain Corbold, none too pleased with the information. "Pennant close up there!"

Then, falling in step with Kelso, he began to pace the poop deck.

"Where's Nassau, any old way?" inquired Davis of the knot of cadets who, leaning over the side, were taking farewell glimpses of Rio.

Merrifield, fresh from school, had some hazy idea that the Prince of Orange had something to do with it, and suggested Nassau was in Holland.

"You're wrong, me lad!" declared Setchell. "It's in Germany. I know 'cause my brother was a prisoner of war there. But it's miles from the sea."

"P'raps it's in the United States," hazarded Elkins. "If so——"

"As a matter of fact it's in the Bahamas—in the West Indies," declared Geoff confidently. "Haven't you seen all the fuss in the papers about the Nassau rum-runners?"

"Well, what are we bound there for?" asked Davis. "Surely the old *Vanity* isn't going to start rum-running?"

"You wait and see, my lad," said Fairclough. "Meanwhile those hoops want greasing; get busy!"

CHAPTER XX

The Hurricane

Fair winds soon enabled the *Golden Vanity* to weather Cape San Roque. Followed a period of calms and light seas until the ship picked up the North-east Trades. Finally, cutting between St. Vincent and St. Lucia she gained the Caribbean and shaped a course for the Mona Passage.

It was a voyage after Geoff's own heart. Even in his very early days he had longed to sail the seas where once the buccaneers held almost undisputed sway, and the realization of his day-dreams was not disappointing. Under perfect weather conditions the Windward Islands looked at their best. As far as work on board went there was practically nothing to be done aloft. The ship carried whole canvas for days at a stretch. Rarely had the braces or sheets to be touched save to give them the necessary ease when night fell, bringing with it exceptionally heavy dews. The *Golden Vanity* might be on a pleasure cruise judging by the easy time experienced by both officers and men.

Nevertheless Captain Corbold did not look upon the run to Nassau in the same light. For one thing he was unacquainted with West Indian waters. With nearly thirty-five years' sea-service to his credit he had been on every known trade-route with that exception. And he knew only too well that October was one of the worst of the hurricane months, from July until about the middle of November.

The *Golden Vanity* made a quick run through the Mona Passage, between Haiti and Puerto Rico, and was approaching the nearest of the Bahama Group when her good luck in the matter of favouring winds deserted her.

An hour after sunset it was a pitch dark night with not a breath of wind, yet, ominously a nasty, confused cross-sea sprang up. The glass, that for days past had been steady save for the usual regular diurnal oscillations that in settled weather occur four times in the twenty-four hours, began to fall jerkily and rapidly.

By midnight, when Geoff turned out to stand Middle Watch, the mercury had fallen nine-tenths of an inch. Somewhat to his surprise Geoff found that the ship was under close-reefed topsails, although the canvas was only slatting in the windless air under the erratic motion of the seas. But what was more remarkable was the fact that a flickering pale blue light danced at every yard-arm and from the mastheads as well.

"Corpse candles," explained the bo'sun as he passed the cadet on his way for'ard. "We're in for summat; just you see!"

With this mysterious warning the bo'sun lurched off along the heaving waist to superintend the lashing down and securing of certain gear for'ard.

Ascending the poop ladder Geoff discovered that not only Kelso, the officer of the Watch, was there but the Old Man as well. Something very unusual was in the air for the Captain to be on deck during Middle Watch.

And no wonder. An invariable rule in the northern hemisphere is that, when the course of the approaching hurricane is discovered, the master of a ship in the vicinity ascertains whether his craft is to the right or left of the curved line representing its path. Woe betide him if he finds that he is anywhere near the vortex where the greatest danger lies. But if the ship is on the right hand of the storm track, the best course to pursue, if under canvas, is to heave-to, on the starboard tack. If on the left hand the reverse holds good—the ship is hove-to on the port tack. This procedure is based upon the knowledge that in hurricanes in the northern hemisphere the rotary wind always gyrates anti-clockwise. In the southern hemisphere the direction is reversed.

Captain Corbold had just made the disconcerting discovery that the *Golden Vanity* was on the left of the approaching hurricane. By heaving-to on the port-tack he would find himself perilously close to a lee-shore—the island of Haiti. If, on the other hand, he attempted to cross in front of the storm and thus gain the right-hand side of the track, he might find himself in the centre of the hurricane before his object was achieved. Even if the latter course were decided upon it would be impossible to put it into effect until the wind sprang up.

Captain Corbold had to make up his mind quickly and decidedly. On him rested the responsibility for the safety of the ship and all who sailed in her; and on that account he would not offer to consult with his officers upon the gravity of the situation. If he did and subsequent events proved that their advice was partly responsible for disaster, they would share the blame if they survived to appear before the Board of Trade inquiry. But the Old Man was not of that sort. The vast responsibility was thrown on his shoulders and he meant to do his utmost to see it through.

"Mr. Kelso," he rang out, "keep a sharp watch for a puff of wind—we'll get it before the blow strikes us—and heave-to at once on the port tack. Call me at once, mind."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the Third.

At two bells the conditions were unchanged. Geoff was dispatched to the officers' galley to fetch some lime-juice and soda. He returned, staggering with a tin cup in each hand.

Peter Kelso drank his share gratefully. So did Geoff. The anxious "stand-by" had parched their throats. The sultry air was so oppressive that the perspiration trickled down their faces.

By the time Geoff had returned his empty cups the phosphorescent lights at the yard-arms had vanished. The sky was as black as ink. Not a star was to be seen. Aft the stern-light scintillated on the wet planks and threw the shadow of the mizzenmast dancing across the slatting main-topsails. Gripping the useless wheel, that was kicking violently under the action of the tumultuous seas against the rudder, stood the helmsman, his bronzed features faintly illuminated in the rays of the binnacle lamp. The while, the yards creaked and groaned as they strained at the chain slings; blocks rattled, canvas flapped. Fore and aft, both to port and starboard, vicious waves slapped the sides as if giving the ship playful warning of worse to come. Still there was no wind.

Just as Geoff gained the poop a vivid flash of blue light overhead threw the plunging masts and spars into strong relief and bathed the deck and surrounding waste of sea in a flood of steel-coloured glare.

For a moment or so as he stood swaying and hanging to the mizzen fife-rail, Geoff was under the impression that a rocket had been fired. But he was mistaken. The glowing mass miles aloft, was moving swiftly in a nor'-westerly direction until, fully twenty seconds later it seemed to swoop downwards and disappear in the sea.

"That's a big one!" commented Peter Kelso. "I've seen a few but never such a bright one as that."

"What is it, sir?" asked Geoff.

"Aerolite or meteor," replied the Third. "Probably it wasn't more than twenty miles overhead."

"Good job it didn't fall on us," remarked the cadet.

"Don't suppose you'd have had time to dodge it," rejoined Kelso grimly. "Make a note of the time, Ensor; time and direction. It'll have to go down in the log."

"Where do you think it has fallen, sir?" persisted Geoff.

"P'raps a hundred miles away; p'raps nowhere except as dust," replied Kelso. "If it had anywhere within twenty miles we would have heard the crash. Hallo! Here comes the breeze. Warn the skipper, Ensor. Hands! ready all."

The *Golden Vanity* began to gather way. The Third shouted for another hand to assist the helmsman. Out of the darkness loomed the figure of the extra hand. He sprang to assist his shipmate at the wheel. Only just in time! With a vicious kick the helm flew over. It took the united efforts of the pair to bring it amidships.

Hoarse orders rang through the darkness. In the waist the hands, oil-skinned and sou'westered, manned the weather main-brace. Slowly the main-yards swung until the reefed topsails were aback.

The old ship lay well over to it. Seas swept completely over her amidships, filling the lee'ard side of the waist with foaming, hissing water.

Geoff, hanging desperately to the mizzen fife-rail—for the ship was heeling at least forty-four degrees—saw the hands in the waist disappear from sight a moment or so before the deck was in darkness. With the seas pouring inboard, a peculiar phosphorescent light played upon the scene. He waited and watched, saw dark heads and shoulders emerge from the turmoil as the men sought to extricate themselves from the torrent that was pouring through the scuppers; watched them as, their task for the present accomplished, they scurried like ants to the slight shelter afforded by the deck-house and weather rail.

It was the first of many vicious assaults. Again and again tremendous seas flung themselves with thunderous roar against

the stout craft. The noise was deafening. The wind shrieked through the tautened weather shrouds. No one could stand up to it. To release one's hold meant being swept bodily to lee'ard with almost the certainty of either having a limb smashed against the lee rail or, worse, being swept overboard to certain death.

A terrific crash, outvoicing the roar of the elements, caused Geoff to look to wind'ard. Although partly sheltered by the mizzenmast the force of the wind lifted his sou'wester so violently that a jerk upon the chin-stay hit him like a jolt delivered by a boxer. Then the chin-stay parted. His sou'wester was whisked off like a feather, leaving him bareheaded, with his hair feeling as if it were being violently combed.

He was not prepared for the sight that met his gaze. The port quarter-boat, hanging in davits and secured inboard by means of stout lashings, had burst her gripes. Lifted clear of the chocks, she swung to the full force of the wind. Then something—either the falls or the block itself—carried away for'ard. The doomed boat swung stern on to the hurricane, and commenced to batter herself to splinters against the deck—eighteen feet of ribs and planking weighing nearly eight hundredweight, streaming like a pennant in the wind.

To attempt to secure the boat would be sheer madness. Nor could she be left threshing the poop-deck like a gigantic flail.

Someone, hanging on to a life-line, slid across the deck to the mizzen five-rail. It was Kelso.

"Got your knife?" he shouted, but his voice was only just audible above the turmoil. "Good; now listen. Bear a hand and cut away the other fall; but look out for yourself and stand clear. Understand?"

The pair fought their way along the life-line to the weather side of the poop. Then they edged aft past the empty davit to the one from which the boat still hung. Then Geoff understood why it was a two-man job. Kelso, heavier and more powerful than he, had to hold him on while he severed the three-inch rope.

Right under the stern of the boat Geoff, the breath literally squeezed from his lungs by the pressure of the wind, set to work. Vaguely he wondered what would happen when the flogging mass of woodwork was released. If it failed to be blown clear it would crush him like a fly under a brickbat.

But the job had to be done. Fortunately, the cadet was very careful about the state of his sheath-knife. Its edge was almost as keen as that of a razor.

With a swift back-handed cut he severed the single part of the falls. The boat was hurled to lee'ard, narrowly missing the spanker-boom, and all but crashing into the starboard quarter-boat.

It took some seconds for him to return the knife to its sheath. As he did so, he recalled a "wiggling" he had had from the Chief Officer. It was only a day or two ago. He had been caught cutting a piece of marline with the blade turned towards him, and had been "ticked off" for using his knife in such a lubberly way. Now he understood why such importance had been attached to what seemed a very trivial matter—but was not.

Together Kelso and he fought their way back to the lee of the mizzenmast.

"Will she weather it?" asked Geoff anxiously.

The Third answered reassuringly.

"Course she will," he replied. "'Fraid you'll have to stick it. There's no chance of the watch being relieved while this is on. Hallo! What's that?"

Rising above the roar of the elements came a succession of whip-like cracks somewhere from for'ard. Then a vivid flash of lightning lighted up the scene. The foretopmast-staysail had carried away, possibly through the clew-crinkle bursting. Already the stiff canvas was flogging itself into ribbons.

So much Geoff saw in the sustained flash. Then the glare vanished, leaving him temporarily blinded.

When the next flash occurred Third Officer Kelso was no longer with him. For a brief instant Geoff was afraid that his officer had been swept overboard. Then he saw Kelso working his way for'ard and urging some of the hands to the task of securing the remnant of the sail and setting another in its place.

Again an interval of intense blackness. By degrees the flogging of the remnant of the foretopmast-staysail ceased. Kelso and his men were tackling their task with the customary grit and determination of British seamen, literally hanging on tooth and nail over the plunging bows of the ship, their work rendered doubly difficult by reason of the jibboom having been run in during the process of "snugging-down".

A burly figure slid across the deck and brought up by the mainmast.

"That you, Ensor?" inquired the Old Man.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Then nip for'ard; see how things are shaping and report. Hang on like billy-ho!"

There was no need for that warning. Geoff knew what would happen if he didn't hang on. Taking advantage of a roll to wind'ard he hauled himself to the weather rail and thence to the head of the poop ladder. As he did so he noticed that the two helmsmen were lashed to the wheel, the wheel itself being secured by stout ropes since, being hove-to, the ship had no longer to be steered.

Flattening himself against the ladder, Geoff made the descent. Then he worked his way for'ard, often waist-deep in water. Often he had wondered why that part of the ship was called the "waist". Now he knew; it was because it was apt to be that depth in water.

As he passed the cadets' quarters he wondered what his chums and Bernard in particular were doing. Obviously sleep under existing conditions was out of the question. They could only wait behind the bolted steel door hazarding as to what was going on outside. The din within must have been appalling. The cuddy must be in darkness. No friendly gleam shone through the scuttles. Then it dawned upon Geoff that the dead-lights had been fixed in position—another tribute to the terrific force of the hurricane.

Under the break of the fo'c'sle Geoff encountered a number of men dragging what appeared to be a gigantic sausage. It was the spare staysail they were hauling for'ard.

To the Third Officer Geoff delivered his message.

"We're about to bend the staysail," replied Kelso, bawling into Geoff's ear. "Timpson's smashed his arm. We've managed to get him below. If you can get hold of Strachan ask him to bring the first-aid box along. That's all. How's the glass?"

Geoff had to reply that he did not know.

Kelso turned away to superintend the setting of the reefed staysail. The cadet battled his way back to the poop and reported the state of affairs for'ard.

Slowly the hours sped. It was a continual hammering, a grim battle with the elements. Again and again the Old Man glanced at the compass. The ship's head, in about three hours, had swung through eight points. Her bows were now dead on for the lee-shore, possibly twenty miles away—less if the drift exceeded the skipper's calculations.

At length Kelso returned aft and the weary hands of the watch were able to snatch an uncomfortable "stand-easy".

"She's lying-to nicely, I fancy," he remarked to the Old Man.

The words were hardly uttered when a tremendous jar shook the ship. To Geoff it felt as if she had hit a rock. Her head began to pay off. In spite of the backed main-topsail she commenced to forge ahead.

"Up helm!" ordered Captain Corbold.

The two men at the wheel cast off the securing ropes. To their surprise the wheel turned easily. There was little resistance.

Dumbly they turned towards the Old Man and pointed to the useless steering gear.

The *Golden Vanity*, her rudder carried away, lay helpless in the grip of the hurricane.

CHAPTER XXI

And After

It was a dreadful predicament. To take in all sail and let the ship scud under bare poles was out of the question. For one thing, it was utterly impossible for men to go aloft. They might be sent aloft, but they would never succeed in battling their way up the hurricane-swept shrouds. For another, without means of steering the ship could not be kept before the wind. Until the seas moderated there was no chance of rigging up a jury-rudder.

The ship was now yawing frightfully, alternately coming up almost into the eye of the wind, and then paying off until the backed upper and lower topsail threatened to fill, the while huge seas swept inboard, breaking with wellnigh irresistible force against the steel deck-house and sending showers of spray far to lee'ard. It seemed a miracle that the deck-house and the cadets sheltering within it were not carried bodily overboard.

Fortunately for him Geoff had taken a turn round his waist, and had lashed himself to the mizzenmast. His senses were dazed by the terrific pressure of the wind. He was just conscious of the creaking, groaning mast, and wondering whether it would be carried away. He was breathing with difficulty, for not only did the securing lashings cut into his body, but the air was so dense with salt moisture that he could but gasp like a stranded fish.

Another series of terrific cracks rose above the tumult. The mizzen-topsails had both split and were rapidly being flogged into fragments. A few minutes later—or was it hours later? Geoff had no idea of time—the upper and lower main-topsails flew into ribbons. The ship, under reefed foresail and forestaysails, but otherwise under bare poles, drove headlong before the wind.

She no longer heeled excessively; but, out of control, she was scudding towards the danger zone—the centre of the storm path.

Again and again she was pooped by mountainous seas pouring completely over her stern and rushing like raging torrents to flood the waist. The glass of the skylight in the poop-deck was shattered but, fortunately, the stout canvas screens lashed over the frames held, otherwise the whole of the officers' quarters would have been flooded, and the buoyancy of the ship endangered.

Save for the captain and Geoff the poop deck was deserted, for the after-guard had been ordered to take what shelter they could under the break of the poop. The cadet was virtually trapped. Without certain risk of being swept either overboard or headlong on the quarter-deck he dare not cast off the lashings that held him to the mizzenmast. As it was, his feet were again and again swept from under him by the rush of water.

How long this terrible state of affairs continued was beyond Geoff's powers of computation. Gradually he realized that day had broken. If anything, the horrors of the situation increased. Darkness had hidden much from his sight; now the scene was revealed in all its grim details.

When the *Golden Vanity* had rescued Bernard and him from the *Arran Dhu* the ship looked enormous. Now she appeared small and puny amidst the mountainous, vicious-crested seas. In the trough between crests forty or fifty feet in height, the straining ship was almost becalmed, then, as the following wave overtook her and tossed her like a cork, the spray-laden wind swept past him with a velocity greater than that of an express train.

Overhead the yards—bare save for fragments of canvas adhering to the bolt-ropes—swayed and thudded against main and mizzenmasts. On the foremast the close-reefed canvas was still holding its own. Amidships on the port side a gap of twenty feet in the bulwarks bore testimony to the furious onslaught of the terrific seas. Again and again the whole of the waist was flooded with foaming, frothing water, that discharged itself through the scuppers, but chiefly through the gap in the bulwarks only just in time before another "coamer" thundered inboard.

But the worst was now over. The hurricane was ahead of the sorely pressed ship. By seven bells in the Morning Watch the wind had eased considerably, though the seas were still running high.

The weary watch were relieved by men almost as tired and haggard as themselves, for battened down, without being able to sleep or to eat anything but "dry tack", they had had to endure the discomforts and the anxiety of not knowing what had been happening.

Dog-tired, steeped in brine, and with his face and hands almost raw with exposure to the stinging wind, Geoff stumbled

to the cuddy. Even Bernard's spiritless greeting remained unanswered. Kicking off his water-logged sea-boots and painfully divesting himself of his oilskin—for neck and wrists were badly chafed by the friction of the stiff coat—Geoff threw himself otherwise fully dressed upon his bunk, jammed his back against the bulkhead and gripped the bunk board. In this posture—a safeguard against being shot out—the exhausted lad fell asleep.

Without knowing it he could have slept the clock round. He had earned extra watch below by reason of having stood double trick. But afloat more than anywhere else what one earns and what one gets are two very different things. There was work and plenty of it for all hands to get things as ship-shape as circumstances permitted.

"Show a leg there!" shouted Fairclough, shaking Geoff by the shoulder. "Show a leg there! Sun's over the foreyard. Hot grub, you lazy hog!"

Thus admonished Geoff swung his feet out of the bunk and on to the deck. How stiff he felt, how tired! His clothes—which a so-called storm-proof oilskin had failed to protect—were damp and clammy in spite of the tropical heat. Although he was ravenously hungry he would have gladly foregone a meal for the sake of another hour or two of undisturbed sleep. But no! Duty, sometimes a hard taskmaster, made demands that must not be refused.

There was a distinctly subdued air amongst the Mess during the meal. The lads without exception were hungry. They were eating against time and under the disadvantage of having to hold on to their plates with one hand while they harpooned their grub by means of a fork held in the other. The rest of the things on the table, not being held, careered madly from side to side, bringing up against the "fiddles" with each roll of the ship.

During the height of the hurricane one of the dead-lights had been stove-in with the result that before a temporary lid could be fixed over the broken scuttle—and the task required a tremendous amount of brute strength to accomplish—a considerable quantity of water had found its way into the cadets' quarters.

The main topic of the limited conversation concerned the cadets' clothing. Three of them, owing to their gear being shot on to the deck, were without a dry stitch.

"You're lucky to want a kit at all," declared Fairclough irritably. Even the nerves of the usually genial Senior Cadet were a bit on edge after the ordeal. "Wait till you start slogging in again. You'll soon get dry enough."

He had hardly expressed himself thus when he regretted having spoken. In the Tropics the wearing of damp undergarments was apt to result in far worse consequences than in temperate climes. The cadets had been strictly warned against this before leaving England, although Geoff and Bernard had not heard of the restriction. Had they been told so, Geoff would not have run the grave risk of "turning-in all standing".

"You'd better scrounge some other fellow's gear," he continued. "I'll lend you a vest and things, Davis. They'll only fit you where they touch but it'll be better than nothing."

Fairclough went to his chest and unlocked it. Lifting out the tray he drew out one of the articles. Then he gave an exclamation of amazement. It was little more than a network of fray-edged holes.

So was the next article, and the next. While the Senior Cadet was in the act of pulling out a pair of socks a huge rat leapt from the chest, darted between Geoff's legs and diving into the stove promptly disappeared up the pipe. As it did so a shower of soot came down, settling over everything.

Promptly Fairclough closed the flue.

"The brute can't get away now," he declared ominously. "I'll attend to him later."

The rest of his gear was dumped on the deck. Then he carefully examined the chest. It was in perfectly sound condition.

"If I find out who put that rat in my chest there'll be squalls!" he announced.

"Who could?" asked Davis. "You keep the jolly old gadget locked, don't you?"

Fairclough had to admit that such was his invariable practice. It was a patent lock. Even if any other member of the mess had a key that would fit—which was unlikely—the act of unlocking and opening another fellow's sea-chest was not to be thought of. No decent, self-respecting youth would do such a thing. It was like rifling an offertory box.

The lads, their interest roused, were still discussing the matter when Third Officer Kelso appeared in the doorway. With an expressive movement of his hand he indicated that the lads had been hanging on to the slack long enough.

In less than thirty seconds the mess was cleared.

The cadets' task consisted in getting spare mizzen-topsails from the sail-room, sending them aloft and bending them to the yards. Hands were similarly employed in replacing the storm-rent canvas on the main-topsailyards.

It was owing to the fact that the *Golden Vanity* was wearing her old suit of canvas—the stronger and newer sails were being kept in reserve to be bent should the ship have to battle her way round the Horn—that she had survived the terrific ordeal. Had not the canvas carried away when the rudder went the ship would have been blown over on her beam-ends. As it was she had scudded before the wind, though fortunately the storm centre had passed in front of her.

The sea was now moderating rapidly so that it was possible to set to work to rig up a jury-rudder. This was constructed from a spare spar to which was lashed a couple of casks with a piece of sheet-iron to give the necessary resistance to the water.

It was not until the afternoon that the improvised steering-gear was in position and the new sails bent. Meanwhile temporary repairs had been effected to the bulwarks, fresh halliards and braces rove where necessary, and various renewals made where required.

By this time it was discovered that the ship had drifted nearly eighty miles north-west of her course, so that she was well away from the Haitian coast.

The work accomplished, Captain Corbold "turned over" to the Chief Officer. For nearly twenty-four hours the Old Man had not left the deck, for even when the weather moderated he insisted on having his meals brought to him.

In view of the disabled state of the ship the Chief suggested making for the nearest port to effect repairs to the rudder.

"Mister," replied the Old Man. "My orders are to make Nassau, and Nassau I'll make."

CHAPTER XXII

Fire on Board

No more was heard of the affair of Fairclough's sea-chest. The Senior Cadet never mentioned the matter, and his chums wisely refrained from asking him. As a matter of fact, Fairclough had to admit to himself that it was his fault entirely. He remembered being interrupted whilst he was searching for something in his chest, and going on deck. He had left the lid open and the tray out. Although he was away less than five minutes the rat had evidently found ample opportunity of investigating. That was three days ago. The rodent, trapped in the sea-chest, had tried to satisfy its hunger by gnawing the Senior Cadet's clothes.

One result of the hurricane was a perfect pest of cockroaches. Driven from the holds by the swishing bilgewater, they had swarmed into the officers' cabins, the cadets' quarters and the fo'c'sle. They were found in bedding, in clothes, and not infrequently in the food.

At first the older hands were inclined to treat the invasion lightly.

"You'll get used to the brutes in time," declared Davis, when Geoff expressed his disgust.

But "in time", whatever that might mean, the cockroaches increased and multiplied to such an extent that conditions became unbearable. Orders were given to fumigate the ship by means of sulphur candles.

The cadets thought this to be rather good fun—something out of the ordinary routine. The act of fumigating their quarters developed into a sort of competition to see who could remain longest in the sulphurous atmosphere; until, the last man out, the cuddy door was shut, and the place hermetically sealed.

Simultaneously the fo'c'sle and cabins underneath the poop were similarly treated, all hands being obliged to remain on deck for the necessary three hours.

But before that period had elapsed the bo'sun reported to the Old Man that he fancied he smelt burning wood.

"I can smell something besides sulphur fumes," remarked Captain Corbold. "You took every precaution against the candles being capsized?"

"Sure, sir," replied the bo'sun. "Every one was set up tight in a pannikin with plenty of water in it."

"In that case there's nothing to worry about," rejoined the skipper.

The bo'sun, far from being satisfied, expressed his belief to Second Officer Strachan. At the risk of nullifying all the good effect of the fumigatory method, Strachan removed the awning over the poop skylight, and pulled out the caulking that had been "paid" to keep the skylight airtight.

As he did so a thin column of smoke rose in the air.

"It's fire on board right enough," declared the Second Officer. "Get the hoses rigged and the fire-buckets filled. Don't alarm the hands. We'll soon get it under."

The Old Man received Strachan's report very differently from that of the bo'sun.

"All our trouble's aft this voyage," he exclaimed. "You've ordered up the fire-hoses, Strachan? Good. Hands to the pumps! Hands to furl fore and main-course and cro'jack!"

While the latter order was being carried out—its object being that in the event of flames bursting out the lower sails would not be ignited—a consultation was held by the officers as to the best way of locating the seat of the outbreak.

To open the door of the main cabin under the poop, out of which were the officers' cabins, was a dubious procedure, as the rush of air would fan the flames. On the other hand, the still burning sulphur candles were a source of danger, for until they were extinguished, and the sulphurous fumes dissipated, no one, unless wearing a smoke-helmet, could get a hose to play in the confined space.

There was one smoke-helmet on board. Kelso volunteered to don it and make the initial attempt.

The door was opened. A waft of suffocating fumes burst out, but very little smoke. It was reasonable to conclude that there was a fire on board, but it had not yet attained serious dimensions.

Wearing leather sea-boots and a heavy pilot coat, and protected by the smoke-helmet, the Third Officer made his way under the poop, dragging a hose after him. Before he was in the place half a minute the truth dawned upon him. The helmet was defective. The sulphur fumes brought tears to his eyes and gripped him by the throat.

Dropping the nozzle of the hose, Kelso rushed into the first cabin—his own—opened the scuttle, and hurled the sulphur candle overboard. For a few moments he held his face to the opening to recover his breath; then, discarding the useless smoke-helmet, he pursued his round. Not until he had disposed of the candles in the four sleeping-cabins did he return, half suffocated, to the quarter-deck.

"No fire to be seen, sir," he reported chokingly. "I've ditched the sulphur in every cabin but yours and that's locked."

"There's fire somewhere," persisted the Old Man.

"Yes, sir," replied Kelso. "In the steerage flat, I think. The deck's hot and there's smoke from under the hatch cover."

If the Third's report were correct, the situation was serious indeed. Apparently the sulphur candles had not been the cause of the outbreak which had occurred in the triangular space formed by the transverse bulkhead of the after-hold and the "run aft"—a sort of store place for ship's gear to which access was gained by means of a small hatch just for'ard of the rudder trunk.

The fire might well have been smouldering for days, and steadily eating its way into the timbers and planking. At any moment, the deck-beams might collapse and allow the air to get to the steerage flat. If that occurred the inevitable result would be a mass of flames that would speedily obtain a firm hold on the whole of the after part of the ship.

Meanwhile the task of furling lower sails had been carried out. At the same time the cadets' and hands' quarters had been opened and the fumigating materials removed and ditched.

The situation was a grave one. The ship was miles from land. No sail was in sight. Notwithstanding the recent hurricane the woodwork on board was bone dry in the terrific heat of the tropical sun. One of the quarter-boats had been carried away. The starboard one and the motor-launch lying in chocks on the main-hatch were insufficient to take all hands should it become necessary to abandon ship.

With the clearing away of the sulphur fumes it was now possible to enter the poop cabins. Men at the pumps forced copious quantities of water through the hoses on the deck above the seat of the fire. Others armed with buckets sluiced the poop deck.

"Ought we to flood the steerage flat, sir?" asked Strachan.

"No," decided the Old Man. "Our best plan is to smother it out. If we had steam available it would be a different matter; but we haven't. Once we lift the hatch the flames will be beyond our control."

For the present no more could be done in that direction beyond keeping the deck flooded. The cadets were told off to clear the poop cabins and transfer the officers' effects to their own cuddy.

"Who says we don't see life?" remarked Bernard, as he staggered for'ard under the weight of a tin bath loaded with a medley of gear from Strachan's cabin.

"A little too much," rejoined Geoff, burdened with a pile of bedding. "Where's the lot going? Are the officers going to turn us out of our bunks?"

"You'll be jolly lucky, my lad, to have a bunk to be turned out of," interrupted Fairclough grimly.

"Is the fire gaining, then?" asked Bernard.

"Goodness knows," replied the Senior Cadet. "I heard the Chief tell the Old Man that he wouldn't be surprised to see the mizzenmast go over the side at any moment."

Having deposited their loads, the chums made their way aft for more. As they did so, they looked anxiously at the mast in

question. There appeared to be nothing amiss with it. Shrouds, stays, and back-stays were intact. All the running rigging was as it should be.

"Guess Fairclough's pulling our legs," suggested Geoff.

They made their way into the steamy atmosphere under the poop-deck, treading over canvas hose-pipes that were discharging copious quantities of water upon the unpleasantly warm deck. Men were placing planks over the saturated canvas and laying gratings on top of the planks.

This was ominous. Underneath the deck a consuming fire smouldered. At any moment the beams might collapse, hurling the fire-fighters into the source of the conflagration; hence the precaution of providing a platform for the men playing the hoses upon the deck.

Hour after hour sped. Still the fire showed no sign of breaking through. It might eat its way through the ship's quarters; it might break through the deck. Or it might demolish the transverse bulk-head of the after-hold and attack the cargo there. But until it did Captain Corbold decided to make no attempt to admit air into the steerage flat.

Meanwhile the *Golden Vanity*, kept on her course by the cumbersome jury-rudder, reeled off the miles that lay between her and her appointed port of call. At half-hourly intervals the men at the pumps were relieved by others. Even the cadets took turns at the arduous task. It served to break the monotony and suspense. Everyone, more or less, was on tenterhooks, for although everything was done that could be done to safeguard the ship there was the constant fear of the inferno breaking its as yet unconquered barriers.

Senior Cadet Fairclough's forebodings concerning the mizzenmast were by no means ill-founded. The state of that "stick" was worrying the Old Man considerably. For all he knew the fire might be eating away the base of the mast. Once that became an accomplished fact neither shrouds nor stays would support it. The mizzenmast would go crashing over the side, ripping up the deck as if it were a titanic lever and thus leave a huge gap to release the pent-up fire.

Fire on board a steel-built steamship was bad enough. Many a skipper had brought his vessel into port with the metal deck almost red-hot. But in the case of the *Golden Vanity* the combustible nature of her construction rendered it practically impossible for the ship to be saved once the flames obtained a firm hold. Once the *Golden Vanity* made Nassau, tugs with fire-fighting plant would quickly and effectively deal with the business.

So the Old Man held on for Nassau.

There was one factor in his favour. The wind was fair. With the quartering breeze the task of steering the crippled vessel by means of her jury-rudder was fairly easy. Should the wind "head her" she stood as much chance of making Nassau as a mediocre swimmer has of swimming the Channel.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Universal Fire Quencher

"Sail on the port bow!"

Day had just broken. The *Golden Vanity* was now seventy miles from Nassau. She had not sighted a solitary craft since two days preceding the hurricane.

About three miles ahead was a vessel lying athwart the *Golden Vanity's* track or nearly so. She had only just been sighted and then only when it grew light. She had shown no navigation lights during the hours of darkness.

Every available glass was brought to bear upon the stranger. In the minds of some of the crew there grew a hope that perhaps the Old Man would accept a "pluck" into port; but when the other vessel was brought within range of binoculars and telescopes that idea faded almost at once.

The stranger was not making way. She was either a steam or a motor vessel with her engines stopped. She lay with a slight list to starboard—a craft of about a hundred and fifty feet in length with a schooner-bow and short, rounded counter. Her bridge and deck-houses had disappeared; likewise her funnel, if she ever possessed one. Her foremast had been carried away close to the deck while her mainmast had parted at the hounds. Half-way up the broken mainmast fluttered a signal that required no reference to the Code Book to decipher. Every seaman knows its grim significance "NC—want immediate assistance".

"It's a case of the blind helping the blind," remarked Second Officer Strachan.

"Yes, Mister," agreed the Old Man. "We'll have to; but how? What d'ye make of her?"

"A Yankee pleasure cruiser, sir," replied Strachan. "I've seen plenty of her type down the Florida coast. What beats me is why Yankee millionaires risk their hides in top-heavy, jim-crack-built craft."

"She's weathered the hurricane anyway," said Kelso. "And she isn't on fire."

Already the Old Man had made up his mind as to what course to pursue. It was a daring plan. Obviously, with insufficient boats to take off his own crew should necessity unfortunately arise, he could not receive the crew of the distressed vessel, since in the event of the fire gaining the mastery the risk of loss of life would be infinitely greater. But he could take the disabled yacht in tow. With the wind as it was, the *Golden Vanity's* speed would not be very greatly reduced. In the event of the *Golden Vanity* having to be abandoned, a temporary refuge for her crew could doubtless be found in the yacht.

Orders were then given for the ship's main yards to be swung round and the main-topsails set aback. In spite of this disadvantage—of being without her rudder—the old ship was hove-to and remained so, hardly forging ahead.

The remaining cutter was then ordered away under Third Officer Kelso, to whom instructions were given to explain the state of the *Golden Vanity* and the inadvisability of transshipping the crew of the distressed yacht.

The boat, with the outboard motor attached, was lowered, Geoff being one of the members of the cutter's crew—a position he had gained by his knowledge of the now tractable engine.

It did not take the cutter long to cover the distance of a little less than a mile that separated the two vessels. As she rounded the disabled yacht's stern Geoff read the name *Lorelei*—New York Yacht Club. Although she was fitted with davits for carrying four boats no sign of the latter was to be seen. In fact, except for the broken mainmast her deck had been swept clear fore and aft.

There were less than a dozen people on deck. Three men, in what were once white yachting suits, two men in dungarees—engineers evidently—three others who looked like sailors, and four women. A goodly stack of "grips" indicated pretty clearly that they fully expected to be taken off to the *Golden Vanity*.

One of the *Lorelei's* hands took the cutter's painter and made fast. There was hardly any sea on, and the boat rode easily alongside.

The Third Officer followed by Geoff boarded the disabled craft.

"You seem to have had trouble, sir," began Kelso, addressing one of the yachtsmen who appeared to be the owner.

"Sure thing," agreed the man. "We fair struck the tail of that hurricane and I guess there was some kick in that tail. My captain, chief officer, and six hands lost, all boats carried away, dynamos flooded, and both propellers busted. I guess I've had trouble enough this side of the Pearly Gates. So I guess we'll trouble your captain to give us a passage."

"Is the yacht making any water?" asked Kelso.

The owner glanced keenly at him. His jaw shot out aggressively.

"Say, if it's salvage you're after, young man——" he began.

"Don't waste time arguing, Abe," protested one of the ladies shrilly. "Let's get outa here. If it's a case of dollars——"

"Madam," protested Kelso, addressing the obviously ill-bred wife of a self-made millionaire. "It would give me great pleasure to put a few dollars into my modest banking account. But that is neither here nor there so far as present conditions go. Captain Corbold would, I know, be only too willing to receive you all; but, unfortunately, circumstances prevent. He proposes to take you in tow, so if you will give your men orders to get a hawser ready, we'll endeavour to establish communication and get you into Nassau Harbour."

"I reckon it's salvage," persisted the owner, which remark received a concurrent "You bet" from his spouse.

"Not at all," declared Kelso. "Briefly the facts are these. We've a fire on board. It may break through at any moment. So far——"

"Fire!" exclaimed the owner. "Gee whizz! We carry a thousand gallons of gasoline on board this vessel, and I don't fear fire no more'n a duck fears water. See here, I'm the sole manufacturer of Sylvester's Universal Fire Quencher, with works at Noo York, Sheecago an' Detroit. A complete outfit F.O.B. Noo York costs a matter of three hundred an' fifty dollars, and I guess any fire on board a ship when there's Sylvester's Universal Fire Quencher handy stands a worse chance than snow in a stove! O'Meara, get that No. 3 size up right now! Mr. Fearon, here's copy for your paper; put it in with double leaded headlines: 'BRITISH SHIP SAVED FROM FIRE AT SEA BY SYLVESTER'S UNIVERSAL FIRE QUENCHER'. Look slick, O'Meara. This is where Abraham G. Sylvester's out to beat the band!"

The American's interest in pyrotechnics aroused, he seemed to have entirely forgotten the plight of the *Lorelei*. He was only a "live" demonstrator of his own patent fire-extincteur. A moment or so ago he was a more or less passive owner of a disabled yacht, anxious to "quit" at any price. Now he was a forceful business man, quick to seize an opportunity of "boosting" his goods.

"It's jolly decent of you, sir," declared Kelso. "My skipper will be most grateful for your assistance. But I've had my orders and I must carry them out. Will you please give instructions for the hawser to be made ready?"

The American made a gesture as if to imply that any such step was beneath consideration.

"Do, poppa," exclaimed one of the ladies—rather a slim and good-looking girl. "I don't want to lose the *Lorelei*. She can sure be fixed up if we get into harbour."

By this time O'Meara, one of the yacht's mechanics, had come on deck with the apparatus. Mr. Sylvester ordered the surviving members of the crew to prepare the hawser; then, having conceded this point, he had the Fire Quencher lowered into the *Golden Vanity's* boat, and, calling to Fearon—who was the chief reporter of a New York daily, and now on vacation—to look slick, leapt in after it.

Third Officer Kelso and Geoff had no option but to follow. The motor was restarted, and the cutter returned to her parent ship.

The way Mr. Sylvester took charge of matters on the deck of the *Golden Vanity* was no less surprising. The Old Man, unwilling to look a gift horse in the mouth, was simply clay in the hands of the forceful American.

The apparatus, consisting chiefly of two cylinders containing certain chemicals, was carried under the poop-deck. Here, with typical Yankee verbosity, the inventor explained the action of the machine and gave long details of various fires at which it had proved its merits.

"Now, Captain," he continued, "I guess we'll have that hatch open right now."

"If you do the flames will shoot up through the skylight as high as our mizzentruck," protested Captain Corbold apprehensively.

"If the flames were enough to bile Niagara I guess Sylvester's Universal Fire Quencher would put 'em out," asserted the inventor grandiloquently.

The Old Man could make no further protest. He gave the order. The hatch-cover was removed. Instantly a column of dark-red flame leapt upwards, mushrooming itself against the under side of the poop deck. The heat was so intense that the interested spectators precipitately stepped back.

But not so Abraham Y. Sylvester. He was a sort of human salamander. With a deft movement he depressed a lever of the apparatus with one hand while he guided the nozzle of a flexible pipe with the other.

The pillar of flame wavered; then, like a cowed beast, sunk back into the recess from whence it came. Dense suffocating fumes poured from the steerage flat driving everyone back, including the redoubtable demonstrator.

It was the oxygen-destroying fumes that had cleared the confined space—not the acrid smoke from the fire. Victory had been won.

Sylvester turned to Captain Corbold.

"I guess I've come out on top, Cap'n," he remarked. "That there fire is as dead as a rattler with his head under the wheel of an automobile."

"Is that all to be done?" gasped the astonished Old Man.

"Sure," was the confident reply. "But say: I reckon you've had a tooth drawn. Didn't the operator fellow offer you a glass of water to rinse your mouth out? Wal; just you wash that caboose out and you can just sleep easy. I bet it'll be the first good night's rest you'll have had for the last week."

He gave a triumphant glance at the officers and men standing by. That look convinced him that his boast was not an idle one. The tired eyes, drawn features, and generally dishevelled appearance of the *Golden Vanity's* crew bore silent testimony to their grim resolution and devotion to duty.

Spontaneously they raised a cheer for the gaunt citizen of the Greatest Republic on Earth.

Abraham Y. Sylvester raised a hand to enjoin silence.

"No need to bust yourselves, you guys!" he remarked pleasantly. "But just bear this in mind: don't ever go to sea in a ship that ain't properly equipped with the Sylvester Universal Fire Quencher. Just to make sure you've got the name fixed I'll repeat it: the Sylvester Universal Fire Quencher—three hundred an' fifty dollars free on board at Noo York. An' now, Captain, if you'll get your men to play water on the fire what ain't, I guess we'll talk of other matters right now."

CHAPTER XXIV

The Two Cripples

"Certainly, sir," agreed Captain Corbold. "Will you mind stepping aft to my cabin. 'Fraid it's not exactly shipshape, considering——"

But the American brushed the suggestion aside.

"I guess I don't want to say anything that these gentlemen needn't hear," he declared, indicating the Chief, Kelso, and half a dozen cadets. "What's the value of your ship an' cargo, Captain?"

The Old Man told him. Evidently Abraham Y. Sylvester meant business.

"Wal, I calculate you'd get sixty thousand dollars salvage for towin' the *Lorelei* into Nassau; so on the face of things my claim for services rendered will mean 15,000 dollars to the good. Now, don't cut in with high-falutin' talk, Captain. Just you keep mum, till I've had my say. Supposin' you do get the yacht into Nassau; what do you say to 40,000 dollars for your owners an' ten thousand to be shared out by you and your crew? Is that a deal?"

Captain Corbold hesitated. He feared that, in the vernacular, "there was a lemon on it". The American had bargained for a tow and he, as master of the ship offering assistance, was within his legal rights to close without having to wait to obtain confirmation from his employers. That was all very well in its way, but where did the counter-claim come in?

"I understand, Mr. Sylvester, that you are lodging a claim for professional assistance in putting out the fire?"

To the Old Man's surprise and to that of everyone within earshot, the American shook his head.

"Nope," he declared, "I'm not asking for a cent. But that ain't saying I'm not out for my pound of flesh! See here; you'll boost Sylvester's Universal Fire Quencher on the other side of the Herring Pond for all you know how. Also you'll let my friend here—Silas P. Fearon of the *Noo York Mail*—have a free hand at writin' up one of the greatest sensations of the year: how Sylvester's Universal Fire Quencher saved a British ship after being battered by a tarnation hurricane and then blazin' like a Fourth of July celebration. Got me?"

"There's no need to make a song about it," protested Captain Corbold. "We just carried on."

"I reckon you'd a' carried on to Davy Jones in a matter of a few hours," remarked Abraham Y. Sylvester. "That's you Britishers all over. You never like the chance of a good boost when it's shoved under your noses. Say, can we fix up the deal right now?"

Captain Corbold still considered the matter. After all it was primarily a case of making good terms on the part of the owners. The American had been extremely generous.

"Right, sir," he agreed. "Only don't pile it on too thick in the papers."

The *Lorelei's* owner grinned.

"I guess Silas P. Fearon'll see to that," he replied. "Wall, I reckon we'll be just as comfortable on the yacht as on board here, Captain, seeing that your accommodation aft ain't quite as slap-up as I thought. What's that, Fearon? Oh yes, if you wish. Captain What's-his-name——?"

"Corbold—John Corbold," announced the owner of the name.

"Yep," continued the American crisply. "Captain Corbold'll give you a shake-down. That will get your copy fixed up sure. Now, Captain, I'll go back to the yacht right now."

As Third Officer Kelso prepared to follow the American into the waiting boat, the Old Man called to him.

"See that a grass-warp is bent to the yacht's hawser, Mr. Kelso," he cautioned. "Warn them to give us plenty of slack to play with. I'll work up to wind'ard of her, so pass the hawser roundly."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the Third, then dropping into the boat he ordered Geoff to "start her up".

The *Lorelei's* owner, having been returned on board his own craft, the *Golden Vanity's* cutter forged ahead and took in

about fifty fathoms of light grass-warp, the other end of which was bent to the yacht's hawser.

Then the cutter waited.

Warned by the Third to stand by to restart the outboard motor smartly, Geoff was now at liberty to watch an unusual and decidedly smart bit of manoeuvring. The *Golden Vanity*, hampered by having a jury-rudder, was about to take the disabled yacht in tow.

Round swung the sailing-ship's main and main-topsail yards. The hitherto flattened canvas filled; she commenced to forge ahead. It was a stirring sight. Once before Geoff had seen the *Golden Vanity* under sail, other than from her deck. That was in the grey dawn of a cloudy day in the English Channel. Now, bearing few visible outward signs of the double ordeal through which she had passed, she stood out against the blue, cloudless sky as she slowly made her way through the turquoise-coloured water.

Four long tacks she made, sailing with the wind only one point for'ard of the beam. Under jury-rudder the Old Man would not risk pointing her any higher.

"She'll do it next board!" declared Kelso. "Start up, Ensor. Dead slow astern."

Slowly yet surely the cutter gathered sternway, one of the boat's crew paying out part of the grass rope as she did so. It was wet work, for, although the sea was comparatively calm, the boat's stern plunged heavily, throwing spray completely over the motor and the cadet who attended to it.

"At that!" ordered Kelso, then "Easy ahead!"

Geoff had all his work cut out. Failure of the engine at this juncture meant a tedious repetition of the manoeuvre. Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of the jibboom of the *Golden Vanity* projecting high over his left shoulder. Above the pop-pop of the motor he could discern the hiss of the ship's bow wave.

"Ease her down!" shouted the Third.

Geoff shook his head. The engine was throttled down as much as he dared. To decrease the tiny flow of petrol into the combustion chamber would inevitably result in the sudden stoppage of the engine.

"Go astern, then!" shouted Kelso.

The cutter trembled under the sudden reverse action. The hand for'ard, making ready to hurl one end of the grass rope on board the ship, almost lost his balance. But the object was achieved. The *Golden Vanity*, romping parallel to and about ten yards from her cutter, had now overhauled the latter.

"Ahead!" ordered the Third, then, "make a cast, there!"

The bowman hurled the coils by means of a powerful underhand swing of his right arm. Like a gigantic spring uncoiling itself the rope fell athwart the *Golden Vanity's* starboard quarter.

Then, to a stentorian roar of "Roundly, there, roundly!" from Captain Corbold, a dozen men began hauling in the slack as hard as they could.

"Go astern!" shouted Kelso again. Then, the cutter's part of the manoeuvre accomplished, she backed clear of the tautening rope.

Now came the climax of the business. The *Golden Vanity* was making about two knots through the water and was about to overstep the motionless, disabled yacht. By the time the former's stern drew level with the *Lorelei's* bows not only had the grass-warp to be brought on board, but the end of the towing hawser as well.

Not only that. The towing hawser had to be bent to a chain-pendant, that was passed round the mizzenmast and "bitted" to bollards on either quarter. The end of the pendant and the hawser had then to be hove overboard by the time the strain of the tow was taken up by the vessel towing.

The ship's taffrail hid this part of the operation from the boat's crew. Geoff could picture the scene; the hands sweating at the stubborn cable, working against time to bring it to the shackle of the pendant. Then—

"All fast, sir!"

"Stand clear there! Together: surge away!"

With a loud splash the end of the pendant with the hawser bent to it fell overboard, fortunately clear of the jury-rudder. It was not a second too soon. Already the bight of the heavy tarred rope was rising from the water. Would it part, or would the towing bitts carry away?

"*Lorelei* ahoy!" hailed Captain Corbold. "Ease off handsomely there!"

The hawser jerked, sagged, and jerked again. The yacht forged ahead and settled sedately in the wake of the ship—cripples limping for home.

CHAPTER XXV

In the Ditch

"Whack her up again, Ensor!" ordered Third Officer Kelso.

The boat's work accomplished, it remained for her to overtake the *Golden Vanity*, hook on, and be hoisted out—a simple operation, since the speed of the ship with the *Lorelei* in tow was about three knots, or approximately a walking pace.

The cutter was undermanned, since there had been no necessity to use the oars. The now reliable state of the outboard motor no longer rendered necessary a large crew. There were three hands in her, including Geoff, under the Third Officer.

"Stop!" ordered Kelso.

Geoff switched off the ignition. The boat ranged alongside. The boat-rope was heaved and secured, and the cutter brought under the falls. Deftly the engaging gear of the lower blocks was secured.

Standing with one foot on the bulwarks twenty feet above the waterline, and steadying himself by the mizzen-shrouds, was the Chief Officer, waiting to give the order to the hands to hoist.

"All ready, sir!" sang out Kelso.

"Up with her, lads!" exclaimed the Chief crisply.

The boat rose, swaying with the ship as she hung suspended far below the davit-heads. The hands in her fended off with stretchers—a strenuous task for two men.

"She'll have her gunwale stove in next roll!" thought Kelso, and, quick to act, seized hold of a spare stretcher.

Even as he thrust with all his might the stretcher snapped. Thrown completely off his balance his rubber-shod sea-boots slipping on the wet boards, Peter Kelso crashed heavily against the ship's side. Stunned by the concussion, he could do nothing to save himself, and before anyone could go to his assistance, the boat swung outwards.

The young officer fell between the cutter and the ship's side, striking the water with considerable violence. The next instant he was drifting helplessly past the quarter of the steadily moving ship.

In the circumstances the best thing to be done would be for the boat to be lowered and slipped. Geoff would then restart the motor, the hands in the boat could recover their officer from "the ditch", and the cutter could easily overtake the ship.

And Geoff was virtually now in charge of the boat.

But Geoff did nothing of the kind. Even as the first shout of "Man overboard!" rang out, he took a clean header over the side and struck out strongly in Kelso's direction.

Twenty strokes or so brought him within reach of the insensible man. Turning on his back Geoff caught Kelso under the arms and commenced treading water, confident that soon the pair of them would be picked up.

He looked towards the slowly receding stern of the *Golden Vanity*. As he did so a huge bent object overhead attracted his attention. It was the towing hawser.

The sight of this warned him of a danger he had hitherto overlooked. Kelso and he were almost if not quite in line with the bow of the *Lorelei*. Unless he looked pretty sharp both might be overrun by the plunging yacht, and smashed like eggshells under her forefoot.

Realizing the peril Geoff kicked out, swimming on his back and towing the passive Kelso.

Someone on board the *Lorelei* hurled a line as the pair drifted past. It fell short. Even if Geoff had been able to catch hold it would have been torn from his grasp before he could secure it. Two minutes later the two were bobbing in the wake of the yacht.

The *Golden Vanity* still held on her course. Hampered as she was by her tow, even had she not been steered by a jury-rudder, she could not do otherwise short of taking in all canvas. That would have required several minutes, and even

then she would go on drifting farther and farther away before the wind.

"I ought to have stopped in the boat," thought Geoff. "We would have picked Kelso up before this. I wonder how long they'll be getting to us?"

By now the stern of the *Lorelei* was about three hundred yards away. Geoff noticed a number of people gathered aft, but he was unaware that they had dropped overboard the only lifebuoy they possessed that had survived the hurricane.

Since the bulwarks and taffrail of the yacht had been swept clear Geoff could see the people aft distinctly. Even as he watched from the crest of a wave he noticed one man detach himself from the rest and run for'ard.

When the swimmer rose to the crest of the next wave something of a very different nature attracted his attention. It was the black triangular dorsal fin of a shark.

For an uncertain interval—to Geoff it seemed minutes—the lad's mind seemed incapable of reasoning. With the level of his eyes only an inch or so above the surface he could only peer dimly at the apparently slow-moving, sinister object, as the shark proceeded to circle around its intended prey.

"Splash, you idiot, splash!"

It seemed as if someone were shouting into his ears. Sheer imagination, for with the exception of the unconscious Kelso, whose head he was more or less mechanically keeping above water, there was no human being within three hundred yards.

The spasm of stark fear passed. Geoff once more realized that he had not only himself to look after, but to do his very utmost to save his senseless shipmate. Hampered as he was it was no easy matter to knock up a splash. It was out of the question to do so with his feet while swimming on his back with Kelso in front of him. Releasing one hand he beat the water with that. The effect was almost ludicrous.

Turning the Third Officer's body until it was about at right angles to his own, Geoff used his legs with good effect, churning up a column of spray. The effort sent his head under. He came up spluttering, yet his grip on his companion did not relax.

The salt water made his eyes smart. He could see nothing except the dazzling glare of sunshine. Closing his eyelids tightly he succeeded in expelling the irritating moisture. Then he looked around.

The shark had ceased moving, and was taking stock of the unusual activity on the part of one of his proposed victims.

"The brute isn't frightened, worse luck!" thought Geoff resentfully. "One good thing, he's no nearer!"

Then, even as he looked, a feather of white foam leapt from the surface of the water within twenty yards of the shark's head. There was a distinct thud, accompanied by the distant sharp crack of a rifle. A tremendous agitation of the water followed. When it subsided, the shark was nowhere to be seen, though an ever-spreading patch of oil and blood showed that the formidable tiger of the deep had received more than he had bargained for.

Between four hundred and five hundred yards away Abraham Y. Sylvester lowered a pair of binoculars and turned to one of his guests who had just ejected a smoking shell from the breech of a Winchester Express rifle.

"Ricochet," he drawled. "Guess the bet's off!"

Sylvester's guest rubbed his chin with his disengaged hand.

"Reckon I drew a bead on that shark's eye at three hundred," he replied. "Mebbe a yard's a darned sight more at sea than it is Arizona way. Riccyshay or nary riccyshay, I guess that shark won't want dinner agen. I'll trouble you for that fifty dollars, Abe! See here; there's the boat!"

It was not until the shout of "Man Overboard!" that Bernard Woodward realized that anything had gone wrong.

Rushing to the side he was just in time to see his chum dive overboard to swim to Kelso's aid.

"Nip in, a couple of you!" shouted the Chief Officer. "Who knows how to work that motor?"

There was sound reason for this question. Although the cutter under oars only might be able to effect the rescue of the two men in the ditch, she would have a long tussle to overtake the *Golden Vanity* and her tow. In fact, should the wind freshen, the ship would outdistance the boat until sail were substantially reduced, since under a makeshift rudder and hampered by the drag of the *Lorelei* astern, she could not haul to the wind.

Unless the outboard engine could be set in motion the drag of the worse than useless propeller would seriously impede the boat's way. Nor was the rudder—a part of the contrivance—of much use unless the motor were running. To unship the contrivance would take up valuable time.

"I'll work it, sir!" exclaimed Bernard, and receiving an approving "Good lad!" from the Chief, he swarmed down the after falls into the boat.

One turn of the starting handle set the motor working.

"Lower away!" ordered the cadet. "Slip!"

The cutter, freed from the falls, gathered way. Putting the helm hard-a-port, Bernard turned her through sixteen points, and steadied her on her course. She was doing about five knots, the *Golden Vanity* and her tow three in an opposite direction.

"There they are, sir!" shouted the bowman. "A point on your port bow!"

That was not to be wondered at. Bernard had to avoid the *Lorelei*. As the cutter swept past a shot rang out from the yacht's stern.

"Wot's up wiv 'er?" inquired one of the cutter's crew. "Thinks she's firin' a salute, she is."

Then, tossed by the wind, came the nasal voice of Abraham Y. Sylvester.

"Look slick, you guys! There are sharks nosing around!"

Bernard could do no more. He was getting every ounce out of the motor. To order the men to "out oars" would do no good. The cutter was travelling faster than they could row.

Again and again as the boat rose on the crests of successive waves, Bernard caught a momentary glimpse of his chum and the man for whom he had risked his life. Nearer and nearer drew the rescuers, but how slowly the cutter seemed to take to cover a little over a quarter of a mile!

At length Bernard judged it time to switch off the ignition. An error in either direction might mean failure, for he could see that his chum was well-nigh exhausted. To carry too much way would probably result in the men in the ditch being torn from the grip of those who sought to save them. Too little, and the cutter would stop dead and short of her objective. More precious time would be lost in getting way on her and making a second attempt.

The bowman picked up his boathook. The cutter still carried way. Bernard, standing up in the stern-sheets, could no longer see his chum. The bows of the boat were in the line of vision. All he could do was to watch the gentle movements of the bowman's hand as he indicated the direction, then—

"Got 'em, sir!" yelled one of the crew, leaning over the gunwale.

"I'm all right!" spluttered Geoff. "Get him aboard first."

Kelso, still unconscious, was hauled over the side. Then his rescuer was pulled out of the water. Summoning his remaining energies Geoff threw both legs over the gunwale with astonishing alacrity. At this stage of the proceedings he had a decided objection to present his lower extremities as a meal for another shark! Then, safe at last, he flopped helplessly on the gratings by the side of the equally helpless Third.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Best of It

Twenty hours later the *Golden Vanity* picked up her pilot off Nassau.

The pilot, a cheerful-looking negro, grinned when he gained the deck.

"Specks, Massa, you hab trubble," he remarked.

"We have," agreed Captain Corbold, "and don't make it worse by putting us aground."

"What you draw?" inquired the pilot.

Told that the ship was then drawing eighteen feet aft he looked as grave as he was ever known to be. There was until recently only fifteen feet on the bar, but this had been increased to eighteen. Allowing for a rise of tide of four feet there was very little margin for safety.

"Specks you'se better hab a tug," suggested the pilot.

The wind was fair and light. The Old Man shook his head.

"We've done without one since we cleared Rio, and I'm dashed if I'll have one now," he declared. "Carry on, Snowball! Hands, there! Stand by to shorten sail!"

The bar was crossed and for the first time since leaving home the anchor was let go. A tug, scenting business, ran alongside the *Lorelei* and bore her off to the patent slipway to undergo extensive repairs.

A little later Captain Corbold, accompanied by the American journalist Fearon, went ashore to arrange for the supply and fitting of a new rudder. With the Old Man went Geoff and Bernard, the former being little the worse for his adventure in the ditch.

"You could not have arrived at a worse time," declared the harbour-master indicating with a comprehensive sweep of his arm the tremendous damage done by the hurricane. Houses had been levelled, trees uprooted, several of the well-known Bahama schooners had been wrecked, and the cotton fields and fruit plantations devastated. "Yes, there was a cargo for you, I understand, but the store and its contents are strewn all across the island. Still, repairs to your ship will take some time and by then there might be something in the nature of a cargo."

The hurricane had dealt cruelly with the island, for in addition to the actual damage, many wealthy people who were in the habit of wintering there were deterred from so doing. Consequently another important source of income was stopped. Yet the negroes who formed the bulk of the population did not seem at all perturbed by disaster. Only a week had elapsed since the furious storm had swept Nassau; and the "coloured ladies and gentlemen" were going about with broad smiles as if life were well worth living.

That same day Abraham Y. Sylvester and party took steamer for the States. Before going the American was as good as his word, paying Captain Corbold the sum agreed upon.

"And just you watch the *Noo York Mail*," he added on parting. "You want a boost badly, Captain, and I guess it won't be Fearon's fault if you don't get it!"

Next morning a ship-surveyor came off to inspect the damage done to the vessel. Fitting a new rudder, it was explained, would take at least three weeks, since the rudder itself had to be made and then set in position by divers. Owing to lack of docking facilities and also to the slight range of tide—barely four feet at springs—it was out of the question to deal with the work except as an under-water job.

Then came the examination of the damage done by the fire. This was extensive, for several of the timbers had been badly charred and the planking below the water-line considerably burnt. The deck-beams were so eaten away that it was rather a wonder that the deck had not collapsed. Nor were the Old Man's fears concerning the mizzenmast ill-founded, for from the heel to the place where it passed through the poop-deck, the fire had damaged it considerably.

"The timbers and planking will have to wait till you get home and go into dry dock," reported the official. "We'll give them a temporary casing of cement. As for that stick"—indicating the mizzenmast—"you're lucky you didn't have it

carried over the side. I'll have it fished. If you don't carry too much sail or subject it to very great strains it ought to see you home. Yes, about three weeks. Everything should be ship-shape by then."

As a matter of fact it took twenty-seven working days to get the necessary repairs effected. Long before then, Geoff and more or less everyone on board was thoroughly "fed up" with things in general and Nassau Harbour in particular, which merely went to prove again the truth of the old saying that "men and ships rot in port". The cadets soon exhausted the possibilities of the place. Leave ashore quickly palled. Owing to the boats being in constant attendance upon the ship, they were unable to go away for sailing-picnics—one of the joys of harbour. Few of them had any money, for it was still some time from the end of the month and the Old Man wisely refrained from advancing any. Nor did he apportion the sum given by the owner of the *Lorelei*, experience teaching him the mutual advantage of leaving such transactions until the end of the voyage.

During working hours the cadets were kept hard at it with the hands. The Old Man and the Chief spared none. If there was no necessary work to be done they made some, putting the cadets to scraping and varnishing woodwork till they loathed the sight of scrapers and varnish brushes. They were put on to black down the standing-rigging, a messy, thankless job; they were told off to "interior decorations", namely to paint out the cabins under the poop-deck, until even Fairclough remarked, "I almost wish I'd had my skull cracked like Kelso."

All circumstances considered, perhaps the Third Officer was to be envied. For three days he had been delirious with concussion of the brain, during which time those in attendance upon him knew almost the complete history of the Third's career in the Mercantile Marine! But Kelso had been taken ashore and was making a good recovery with the additional benefit of enjoying the unbounded hospitality of a prominent Government official on the strength of the Third once having met his host's son in Hong Kong.

At length the long-drawn out repairs were effected, a small amount of cotton cargo received on board and a full clearance and a clean bill of health obtained from the Port Authorities.

Then, joy of joys! Blue Peter fluttered from the fore. Scorning to employ the motor capstan, willing hands manned the capstan bars and to the lilt of a fiddle the rusty cable began to come home inch by inch.

Late that afternoon, the *Golden Vanity* was bowling along under all plain sail and with the foam frothing at her cutwater. Aft a clean wake trailed away in the direction of the setting sun, the red rays of which tinted the bellying canvas with rosy hues.

Geoff and Bernard were pacing the poop-deck. Gone were the discomforts of port. Their spirits were as buoyant as the good ship under their feet.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Bernard.

His chum stopped in his walk, braced his shoulders and gazed at the towering spread of canvas.

"A man's job," he replied. "Who could wish for anything better than this?"

A month later the *Golden Vanity*, her sails furled for the last time that voyage, was ascending London River in the wake of a powerful tug. Somewhat to Geoff's disappointment the orders to unload at Southampton had been countermanded—by no means an unusual occurrence as far as the Mercantile Marine is concerned—but what mattered? The ship was nearly Home, with a capital H.

Her progress up to St. Katherine's Dock savoured of a triumph. Outbound steamers greeted her with blasts upon their syrens. The training ships off Greenhithe and Purfleet gave her rousing cheers. Fearon of the *New York Mail* had not let the grass grow under his feet, and his account as published afterwards caused blushes to suffuse the tanned features of Captain Corbold.

The voyage was ended, but Geoff had learnt by this time that not only is patience a virtue but a necessity. A week elapsed before the cargo was unstowed and the good old *Golden Vanity* dismantled ready to be handed over to the ship-repairers for extensive overhaul.

Then and only then were the cadets allowed to go on leave, and in due course Geoff was received with enthusiastic welcome by his parents, brothers, and sisters.

Although the *Golden Vanity's* fight with hurricane and fire was already known through the medium of the Press, Geoff had still plenty to relate. In fact he was kept hard at it for the rest of the evening answering questions and describing his adventures.

"You're a hero, Geoff," declared his youngest sister.

"Not at all," he replied. "I've learnt to pull my weight, that's all. Sort of team work really."

Mr. Ensor said little but thought the more. Geoff was not the same Geoff who had gone off for a yachting cruise so light-heartedly, but four months ago—there was a sort of quiet confidence that certainly wasn't noticeable when last he saw him.

And since Geoff had gained confidence his father realized that he had lost some of his, when, after the others had gone to bed, he tentatively broached the subject on his mind.

"I suppose, Geoff, now you've roughed it, you'll be glad to settle down, eh?" he began.

"Settle down, Pater?" echoed his son. "Well, I've a week's leave. The owners have offered me a permanent cadetship—so they have Bernard, and his father's let him take it up—and I hope you don't mind."

"But the firm of Ensor & Son, Geoff? My cherished wish?"

Geoff stood up and placed one hand on his father's shoulder, realized that somehow his parent had appeared to have visibly shrunk in height and frame.

"Sorry, Pater," he said earnestly. "It wouldn't work. Round peg in a square hole an' all that sort of thing. There's Dick. He's rather keen on Law, I believe."

Yes, there was Dick. His young brother could fill the gap and carry on with Ensor & Son. That was some consolation.

"You're still keen on the sea?" asked Mr. Ensor, on the point of capitulation.

Visions of lively Rio Harbour, of the *Vanity* threshing to windward or running free before the favouring Trades flashed across Geoff's mind. They were live, unforgettable pictures. The "sticky times" hardly entered into the composition of the view at all.

"Rather," he declared. "And I suppose I'm fairly good at it or the owners wouldn't be keen to sign me on."

"I suppose there's no more to be said, Geoff. You ought to know your own mind by this time. Probably you do. We must make the best of it."

"That's what I intend to do, Pater," replied his eldest son cheerfully.

Transcriber's Notes:

hyphenation, spelling and grammar have been preserved as in the original

Page 18, 'Can't say as I knows ==> "Can't say as I knows

Page 46, added. 'But she's a pig ==> added. "But she's a pig

Page 119, 'Hop aft and see him ==> "Hop aft and see him

Page 127, She's the Blue Bird ==> "She's the Blue Bird

Page 137, 'Very good, sir ==> "Very good, sir

Page 179, 'I'd slipped out ==> "I'd slipped out

Page 190, said Fairclough ==> said Fairclough.

[The end of *Chums of the "Golden Vanity"* by Percy Francis Westerman]