



Off Morocco.

BUNNY shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared through the shimmering heat towards the Moroccan coast. Round the yacht Albatross shone the intense blue of the Mediterranean. Overhead, the sky was azure and cloudless. Heat clung to the ship. The deck was hot to the touch, stanchions and bolts almost burning. Southward, hazy in the heat, loomed the mountains of Morocco; nearer at hand, the arid beach, the grim reefs that are the terror of sailormen, the rolling lines of surf.

But the arid desolation of the shore, the burning heat of the sun, did not matter to Bunny. He was seeing Africa for the first time— except for the glimpse he had had when the yacht came through the Straits of Gibraltar. This, Bunny told himself, was real Africa! Behind those sand and dunes, dusty in the distance, lurked fierce Ruffians. Away back in the mountains were savage tribes who disdained to bow their heads to the White man!

He could see no sign of a town, port, or harbour. The Albatross, after running across from Gibraltar, seemed to have picked out the loneliest spot

on a lonely coast. Bunny was not surprised at that, knowing the intentions of Mr. Earle, the owner, and Hall, the chief mate.

What was going to happen on board the Albatross required no witnesses! Bunny had hoped against hope that Mr. Earle would give up his scheme of losing his yacht (or pretending to do so) and claiming the insurance money—that he would shake himself free from the influence of Hall. But it was only too clear that Earle was holding to his purpose, and that lonely spot on the Moroccan coast had been sought to carry out the pretended loss of the yacht.

Bunny ceased to look at Africa at last, and glanced about the deck. The Albatross no longer presented her former spick-and-span appearance. Since leaving Gibraltar there was a great difference.

Seven or eight new men, Spaniards and lascars, lounged lazily about, looking like anything but a yachting crew.

Bunny knew that they had been shipped in place of a number of the hands who had been left behind at Gibraltar. The English yachting crew could not have been drawn into the

desperate scheme hatched between the owner and the mate, and they had been got rid of, these lurching lubbers taking their places.

There were few of the original crew on board now, and those few, Bunny guessed, were all in the secret. Even the cook and the steward had been left behind, and Bunny, who had stowed himself away on the yacht, and accidentally learned Earle's secret, had had to turn to and do their duties, as well as he could.

The look of the yacht now was neglected, even, dirty. There was hardly a piece of brass that did not need polishing. The new hands were the men for desperate enterprise, not for industrious work.

Hall, the mate, was scanning the reefs through a pair of binoculars, Mr. Earle lounged in a deck-chair, smoking a cigar.

Bunny glanced at him, and Earle's eyes met his. Very elegant and handsome the young man looked in his yachting garb. But there were lines of weariness in his face. He smiled faintly, and made Bunny a sign to approach "You're for it now, my boy!" said Mr. Earle.

"You're going on with it, sir?" asked Bunny.

"That is why we are here."

"And when?"

"To-night! I should have left you behind at Gib," continued Mr. Earle. "but you need have no fear, Hare. You will come in the lifeboat with me when the Albatross goes down. When she goes down officially, I mean," he added.

“Hall stays on board?” asked Bunny.

“Yes—with the new crew.”

“Mr. Earle,” said Bunny, with a deep breath, “I know you’re bent on this -- But it’s no good arguing that it’s wrong to swindle the insurance company?”

“No good at all,” said Mr. Earle. “I am a ruined man, Hare, and this is my last chance of getting on my feet again”

“But-but, let me point out that it can’t work !” said Bunny. “I suppose even Hall would give up the idea, if he knew that it was bound to fail?” ,

“No doubt !” Herbert Earle laughed, “Say what you like, Bunny”

“Well, sir, I suppose you can make out that The Albatross has been correct, and draw the insurance money,” said Bunny, “but if the ship remains on the sea she’ll be traced sooner or later. Every ship is a registered.”

“The Albatross will change her name,” said Earle. “She is going to be freshly painted—disguised in every way. She will be re-named the Swan.” ‘

“But, whatever you call her, how are you going to account for her?” said Bunny. “How will the Swan get on the register of ships?”

“She won’t !” answered Mr. Earle. “The Swan will go into the West African trade, with forged papers.”

“Forged papers?” repeated Bunny.

Earle smiled—a bitter and cynical smile.

“You do not know yet all the gifts of my gifted mate,” he said. “Dick Hall has already served a term in prison for forgery. Breaking stones did not rob him of his skill. I assure you, Bunny, that the Swan already has a set of papers that would satisfy anyone—out of the regular run of ports, at least. Hall will run her at night through the Straits, take her down the west coast, and sell her to a trader there with whom arrangements are already made.

“She will leave enough wreckage in the Mediterranean to convince the most suspicious underwriter that she has been wrecked. She will leave her survivors in a lifeboat. Then she will vanish into space. Hall and his new crew will take her away. You will be one of the survivors, Hare,”

“Oh crumbs “ said Bunny.

Earle waved his cigar towards the rocky surf-bound coast.

“This coast is famous for its wrecks,” he said. “The Albatross will be one more—that is all. The survivors will all tell the same story— and no one will doubt that the yacht is at the bottom of the Mediterranean. And you, Hare, will tell the same story as the rest.”

“You mean, you’ll tell a lot of lies, and I shall have to do the same, sir?”

Bunny exclaimed.

“Exactly !” Mr. Earle laughed. “It would not do for one survivor to tell a story different from the rest.”

“But I can’t, sir !”

“I’m afraid there’s no choice left for you, Hare !” said the owner of the Albatross. “You’re for it now, as I said. If you tell the truth—”

“I’m bound to, sir !” said Bunny, dismay.

“If you do, you send me to prison.”

“Oh, I couldn’t do that, after you’ve been so kind to me and risked your life to fish me out of the Bay of Biscay !” gasped Bunny.

“I’m sorry for this, my boy,” said Mr. Earle kindly. “If you had known nothing of the plot I could have left you at Gib, and no harm done. You have to pay for your knowledge. I would have taken the risk of leaving you at the Rock, with my secret in your keeping. But you chose to stick to me.”

“I—I hoped you’d give this up, sir;” mumbled Bunny. “Even now, sir, I can’t believe you’re going to do anything so wicked and dishonest. “

“You will have to believe it soon,” said Mr. Earle, speaking lightly, though he winced. “We shall be at anchor in a few minutes, and then the painting will begin. Tonight we leave in the lifeboat—you and me, Antoine and Rawlings, the only survivors. The tale will be that the Albatross ran on a reef in a sudden squall, and went down with nearly all hands. We have to stick to that, Hare.”

“But if you’re not believed, sir?”

“No danger of that. Plenty of wreckage will be left about—a stove-in boat, spars, casks—all sorts of things—to be washed ashore and collected by the natives. The story of a wreck will soon spread along the coast, and enough will be identified to prove that it was the Albatross that went down. That will bear out the story told by the survivors.”

“Oh !” said Bunny dismally.

“You shall not lose by it, my boy. I will see that you touch a fair share of what is going.” And

“I couldn’t touch such money, sir !” exploded Bunny.

“A Roman emperor said once that the smell of all money is sweet !” answered Mr. Earle, with a cynical smile. “Perhaps you will change your mind. Go and get me something to drink.”

Bunny went below with a clouded face and a heavy heart.

The Ruffians.

THE sun went down behind the Riff Mountains. A myriad stars glittered in the dark blue vault over the whispering sea.

The heat was still intense. It felt to Bunny as if a thunderstorm was brewing

The Albatross was at anchor now in a bay half hidden by great rocks.

The shore was a dim blur. Through thickening dusk came the incessant

boom of surf on rocky reefs.

Bunny moved about in the deep dusk—for the Albatross was not burning a single light—with a troubled, anxious face. With all his keen desire to see the world and to live a life of adventure, Jack Hare was wishing now that he was home at Wistaria Villa, at Margate. Margate might be unromantic, lacking in adventure; his relations might regard him as the duffer of the family; but Bunny, just then, would gladly have exchanged Morocco for Margate.

As Mr. Earle had said, he was “for it.” He had not foreseen the details of the plot that had come to his knowledge. It had not occurred to poor Bunny that, as a survivor of the supposed wreck, he would be called on to back up a false story—the alternative being to betray his benefactor, ruin him, and send him to prison. He had clung to the hope that Mr. Earle would change his mind; that when the test came he would shrink from the crime he contemplated. Now the test had come and that hope had failed Bunny. He could not regret that he had stuck to Mr. Earle, and tried his hardest to counteract the influence of Hall. But the prospect before him utterly dismayed Bunny. Even now his life hung on Earle’s protection. Hall would have tossed him overboard to secure his silence, as he had tossed him overboard in the Bay of Biscay. Any of the ruffians who now formed the crew would have stabbed him at a word from his mate.

Only Earle’s protection stood between him and death. And how could he turn on his mate who saved him? he could not! But how could he become a party to a false story, with a swindle as its object? That he could not do, either. Poor Bunny was on the horns of a dilemma, from which there seemed no escape. He hung over the rail, staring at the starlit sea. It was very dark, in spite of the glitter of the stars.

There was a smell of fresh paint in the air. Through long, hot hours the work of disguising the yacht had gone on. Already the “wreckage” had been thrown into the sea—many articles bearing the name of the Albatross, to furnish proof that she had gone down on the Riffian reefs. Soon—very soon now—the lifeboat would be picking off with the “survivors,” Jack Hare among them.

Bunny thought it over, and groaned.

There would be perhaps a day in the boat; then they would be picked up. Every survivor would have to make his statement—Bunny among the rest. What was he going to do? What was he going to say?

Hall and Earle were below in the saloon. Three or four of the new crew lolled about the deck, smoking and muttering together. The water washed the hull with a deep murmur, and the Albatross stirred and incessantly at her cable. Through the deep gloom came the boom of breakers on the rocky shore.

In the shadows on the dark sea it seemed to Bunny that he discerned darker shadows stirring.

He took little heed. His thoughts were on the crime that was about to be effected, a crime which seemed inevitable now that he would be forced to become a party. He liked Mr. Earle, and admired him, in spite of the weakness and unscrupulousness in his character. He found all sorts of excuses for him, laying the whole blame on the hardened villain, Hall. But he wished that he was anywhere but on board the

Albatross.

What were those shifting shadows in the darkness? It seemed to Bunny that he heard a sound from the sea—the cautious plunge of a muffled oar. He started and listened. Surely it could not be a boat coming off in the darkness from that arid, inhospitable shore?

Who could be coming off from that desert coast?

Bunny strained his eyes in the darkness. A vague feeling of alarm was in his breast. In the gloom there was a gleam of bare steel. He jumped as he caught that gleam.

“Oh crumbs !” breathed Bunny.

Dimly, half-seen in the gloom, he made out the shadowy shape of a long, low boat, crammed with men—dark faces lost in the night, but gleaming eyes catching here and there the sparkle of the stars.

Bunny’s heart throbbed. A boat crammed with men was approaching the Albatross in the darkness and, the fact that no sound of rowing could be heard showed that the oars were muffled and handled with stealthy caution. A boat crammed with Riffian natives, stealing out to the ship in deadly silence—dark-skinned men with fierce, rolling eyes, armed to the teeth, and not an eye on board the yacht watching, except Bunny’s startled eyes.

In a flash he understood what was coming. On the wild Moroccan coast Nature and was red and raw. No doubt, during the long, hot day, while the yacht had lain at anchor in that solitary bay, greedy eyes had watched her from behind the sand-dunes. To the fierce tribesmen of that desolate beach her coming meant plunder—rich booty for a beggarly crew. And Bunny knew beyond the shadow of doubt that it was a matter of minutes — that if that savage crew set foot on board the yacht, not a man would be left alive to tell what had happened!

He sprang away from the rail. Breathless, a moment later, he was rushing into the saloon, where Earle and Hall sat smoking and drinking brandy-and-soda, while they discussed the last details of their plot— the plot which, all unknown to them, had brought them within the shadow of death!

“Mr. Earle !” panted Bunny.

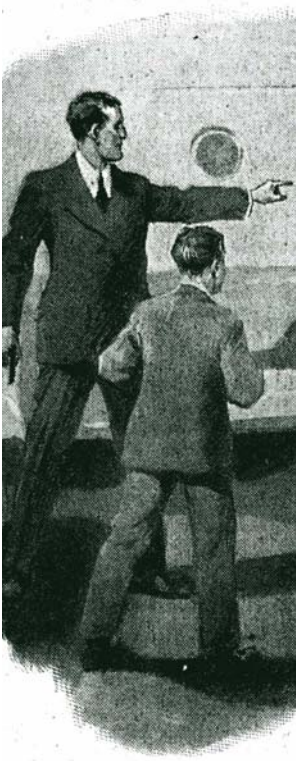
“You swab—get out !” Hall roared, leaping to his feet.

“Get out, Hare! What do you want, confound you !” exclaimed Mr. Earle irritably. “I’ve heard enough of your talk. Get out !”

Hall made a stride towards the boy, his heavy fist clenched. But Bunny took no heed of him.

“Mr. Earle, there’s a boat coming alongside!” panted Bunny. “A boat crammed with men—armed men !”

Hall stopped dead. He glared at Bunny.



had brought them within the shadow

“What! You young swab, you lie ! There’s not a sound !”

“They’re coming -They’ll be alongside in a minute !” panted Bunny. “Mr. . Earle, I believe they mean to attack us—I’m sure !”

Earle dropped his glass, and the liquor ran over the table.

“We never thought of that, Hall !” he exploded. “This is a dangerous coast—ships have been looted in these waters before !”

“It’s a lie !” snarled Hall. “There’s not a soul on the coast! The boy’s lying!”

Mr. Earle burst into a laugh.

“What an end to our game—to have our throats cut by a mob of Riffians! Ha, ha !”

The reckless, sardonic laugh made Bunny shiver. He caught the yachtsman by the arm.

“Mr. Earle—for goodness’ sake— They’ll be on us in a minute t” he gasped.

Hall, grabbing a revolver from his hip pocket, plunged u the stairs to thç deck. Mr. Earle laughed again.

A good an end as any other,” he said. “If they cut my throat to night, I shall die an honest man! Hark !”

Bang ! It was the roar of a heavy revolver on deck.

“Hall seems to believe you now,

Hare !” said Mr. Earle. “He’s firing on them. Listen !” The shot was followed by a furious out more of yells that woke every echo. It seemed as if a crew of demons had

suddenly given voice. Startled shouts from the men of the Albatross mingled with the yells and there was a pattering of feet on deck.

“Sir!” gasped Bunny. “Get your revolver—for goodness’ sake!”

There was a bump of a boat on the side of the Albatross. Wild yelling rang through the night. Pandemonium had broken loose, where a few moments before all had been so silent.

“You’re right, boy!” said Mr. Earle. With perfect coolness he looked to his revolver.

“Antoine! Antoine!” he shouted.

“Monsieur t” gasped the terrified valet, running into the saloon with a pale face.

“Get hold of something, Antoine, and follow me on deck,” said Mr. Earle. “If you want to save your neck for the hangman, you will have to fight for it now, mon garçon!”

With revolver in hand. Mr. Earle hurried up the steps. Bunny stared round for a weapon and caught up a heavy stick that belonged to Mr. Earle. With the stick gripped in his right hand up to the hilt and Antoine, with a revolver in his left hand, followed more slowly.

The Lifeboat.

Bunny stared round him wildly

The scene on deck was one of the wildest confusion. The attack had come suddenly. Every hand on board had been concentrated on the work in hand—the disguising of the yacht, trickery of voting wreckage, relations for the survivors to leave the vessel at midnight. No man on board had given a thought to what might be hiding behind the dusky sand-dunes on that solitary, savage coast. And now the sand-dunes had revealed their secret! But for Bunny’s warning, the Ruffians would have swarmed over the low freeboard of the yacht and swamped the vessel with their numbers before a shot was fired or a hand raised; The crew would have been cut to pieces almost before they knew they were in danger. Bunny’s warning had prevented that. Hall had rushed on deck, revolver in hand, only half-believing, to see the boat creeping to the yacht’s side, hardly three fathoms away. And the mate, knowing that every life on board hung on a thread, began to shoot instantly, pitching his bullets into the thick of the brown-faced, wild-eyed crew of the pirate boat. And with the first shot pandemonium broke loose! The Ruffians, seeing their stealthy approach discovered, gave up stealth and pulled hard and fast for the Yacht. Hall stood at the rail, pitching bullets into them, yelling to the crew. The startled men of the Albatross, roused from complete security to sudden danger, shouted and scurried in the gloom.

At that moment Hall would have been glad of the British seamen he had left behind at Gibraltar. But only the rough crew of bravoes and lascars were there to back him up and most of them were yelling with panic.

The lone, low boat had hooked on. The dark-skinned ruffians swarmed up the side, the low freeboard giving them little trouble. Mr. Earle had joined Hall, and was shooting with a steady hand, and a cynical grin on his face. It might almost have been fancied that Earle was glad that this had happened—that he welcomed the wild fight and the danger. In an hour more he would have been away in the lifeboat—committed to crime! Now he was fighting for his life, the plotting forgotten.

Two or three of the crew backed them up with knives or belaying-pins. The Ruffians were swarming, but for the moment they were held in check. Both Hall and

Earle fired fast, and with deadly aim. Unheeding the fallen, the savage brown men swarmed on, yelling fiercely. Bunny rushed forward to help in the defence, and his stick crashed across the face of a savage ruffian clambering over the rail, hurling him back into the boat.

“Well done, boy!” came Mr. Earle’s voice. “Stick to it !”

“Yes, sir!” Bunny gasped. Rawlings, the engineer, came rushing on the scene, grasping a belaying pin. Antoine joined up with his revolver, though his hand was shaking so that the bullets flew wide and wild.

“ Back up, you swabs!” Hall was roaring to his crew. “You hounds, do you want your throats cut? Fight for your lives, you scum !”

His revolver was empty. He clubbed it, and crashed the butt into a savage face. Three or four Riffians had gained the deck, and the rascally crew of the Albatross, attacked at chose quarters, were fighting. But heavy, sweeping scimitars wielded by desperate hands bent knives and belaying pins the hands of panic stricken men. There were howls of despair, mingled with the ferocious yelling of the Riffians.

Hall was fighting like a madman, his clubbed revolver in his left hand, a belaying-pin in his right. Earle, his own revolver empty, snatched the weapon from Antoine’s shaking hand.

With perfect coolness he pitched his bullets, and not one of them missed. Bunny, wildly excited, was lashing out fiercely with his stick. He saw Antoine back away and scuttle off into the lifeboat. Already provisioned, the lifeboat hung outboard in its davits, all ready for the departure of the survivors if the plot had been carried out. It seemed unlikely now that there would be any survivors to depart. For desperate as the defence was, heavy as was the toll taken of the Riffians, the unequal conflict could only end one way.

Already the dash of oars told that another boat with a piratical crew was coming out from the darkness of the shore to share in the plunder. The odds were heavy, and in a few minutes they would be overwhelming.

Bunny heard Earle laugh—a strange sound in the midst of darkness and confusion and death.

“The game’s up, Hall ! Fight it out!”

Antoine, in the lifeboat, was making a frantic attempt to lower it, bent on escape. But to lower both tackles at once required a cooler head than the panic-stricken valet’s. He cast off the forward tackle, a holding it fast while he jumped to the other davit, seeking to lower both at once. But the rope slipped and flew, and the boat’s nose dropped to the sea, Antoine, with a howl, plunged down into the water, and held on to the boat—which now hung down from a single davit—shrieking.

Hall gave a maddened glare round him. Seven or eight Riffians were on the ship now, and the crew of bravoes and lascars who were to have sailed the stolen ship along the coast with Hall had been cut down or were seeking hiding places below.

The game was up! For a moment the savages held back from the desperate group who defended themselves— Hall, Earle, Rawlings, and Bunny. Savage as they were, they were daunted.

But the respite was only a brief one. Forward and aft the Riffians were clambering up. The second boat had hooked on now. There were sixty or seventy of the villains, and as soon as they gathered for the rush all was over.

Hall made a rush for the lifeboat, hanging by its after tackle. He said no word. The others

could follow him if they liked. Antoine was shrieking from the water as he held on to the nose of the hanging boat.

Rawlings was after the mate in a moment, his face streaming with blood from a deep cut. Bunny caught Mr. Earle's arm.

"Mr. Earle, quick—come—there's a chance to get away! Quick, sir!"

"Save yourself, Bunny!" Earle laughed. He was watching the crowd of brown faces and rolling black eyes, taking advantage of the pause to cram fresh cartridges into his revolver. "Cut for it, kid!"

"Not without you, sir!" said Bunny.

"You young ass—hook it!"

"I'm sticking to you, sir!" said Bunny. "Come, sir!" he panted. "They're getting the boat away! For goodness' sake, sir—"

"I'll come! I'll follow you, kid! They'll rush us if I turn my back, Get away!"

Hall was sawing at the tackle desperately with a knife. It parted, and the boat slid down into the water.

It was touch and go, for it was as likely as not that the banging life boat would plunge bows under as it went. Fortunately, though it shipped a sea, the boat floated. The next second Hall leaped down into it, Rawlings at his heels. The mate landed in the boat. The engineer missed it, and plunged into the water, vanishing from sight. Hall did not give him a look or a thought. He grasped an oar and fended off.

"Mr. Earle!" yelled Bunny. He fairly dragged the yachtsman to the side. Earle stopped to pitch one more shot into the Riffians, now crowded on the deck of the yacht, held at bay like wolves

"It's too late!" gasped Bunny. "They've got the boat away!"

"Earle!" came Hall's voice from the dark sea. "Jump!"

"Jump, boy!" said Earle.

"You first, sir!"

"Fool—jump! They're on us! Jump while I keep them off. I'll follow! Jump, you fool!" roared Earle.

And Bunny obediently jumped, while Earle turned on the Riffians again with blazing revolver.

Bunny landed in the boat, and sprawled headlong there. Hall, apparently taking him for Earle in the darkness, fended it off with his oar.

Bunny scrambled in and yelled. "Stop for Mr. Earle! Stop!"

"You, is it?" Hall ejaculated. In his rage he struck at Bunny with the oar, and the boy narrowly dodged the fierce blow. "You—always you!"

"You beast!" yelled Bunny. "Stop for Mr. Earle!"

"It's too late!" The mate drove the oar against the hull of the yacht. Bunny leaped at him, grabbed his arm, and tore down the oar.

"You shall stop, you beast!" panted Bunny. A shadowy figure flitted in the gloom.

Herbert Earle leaped down. Bunny heard a splash in the sea.

"Mr. Earle!" he shouted. The boat was surging away from the yacht and Earle had dropped in the water between. But his hand grasped the gunwale the next moment.

"Here!" he said coolly. Bunny panted with relief as he grasped him and help him into the boat. Antoine had already dragged himself in. Of Rawlings nothing was to be seen—the engineer had gone down like a stone. Hall fended off, while the rail above was lined with

savage faces, and a dash of oars told that a Riffian boat was groping along to cut off the escape.

“Get hold of an oar, Bunny.”

“Yes, sir—I’ve got one !” said Bunny. He ran the oar into the water. Hall, from the other side, did the same. They pulled hard, and the lifeboat shot away from the doomed Albatross.

Mr. Earle took the lines. Antoine was crouching and shivering in the bows. From the deck of the yacht came a hoarse yelling of the Riffians. But the dash of oars in pursuit, which they had dreaded to hear, was not to be heard. The escape of a few survivors muttered less to the Riffians than a share in the plunder. The ruffians were swarming over the yacht, and the lifeboat pulled away to sea unheeded.

Dawn came, red and rosy, on the blue Mediterranean. All through the night the four survivors of the Albatross had pulled in turn by pairs, seeking to place a greater distance between the lifeboat and the Riffian shore. When dawn flushed over the sea they rested.

As the light strengthened, Bunny looked back. But only the blue expanse of sea met his gaze. Far off, now, a dim blur on the sky marked the mountains of Morocco. But the shore was out of sight; and on the sea there was no sail.

Hall sat schooling, but Bunny saw a smile on the face of Mr. Earle.

Antoine sorted out food from a locker for breakfast. Bunny rubbed his tired eyes.

“Safe now, boy !” said Mr. Earle, smiling.

“Yes sir !” said Bunny. “I wonder what they’ve done to the Albatross?”

“I doubt whether two of her planks are holding together by this time,” answered Mr.

Earle. “The Riffians are old hands at this game. They won’t leave anything for a gunboat to pick up. What they cannot carry off they will sink.”

“Then..... the yacht’s gone?”

“Quite”

“You don’t seem to mind, sir !” said Bunny, in wonder.

“Why should I mind?” said Mr. Earle coolly. “The Albatross was fully insured.”

“Insured?” repeated Bunny.

“But—”

“The insurance covers loss at sea, even in such an unusual way,” said the yachtman, smiling.

“Oh’ gasped Bunny.

“And your tender conscience, so carefully trained by your estimable uncle at Margate, may be perfectly at rest now” added Mr. Earle ironically. “The Albatross has been lost — really and truly lost—and I am entitled to draw the insurance money.”

“Of course you are, sir, as she’s really lost by accident,” said Bunny. “I hadn’t thought of that !”

“No need to tell any lies about it,” said Mr. Earle. “A plain statement of the facts is enough.”

“Oh, good !” said Bunny..

“I lose nothing. Only Dick Hall here loses on the deal,” said Mr. Earle. “It’s a real loss of the yacht, instead of a pretended one. The ten thousand pounds Insurance money will be paid and but the five thousand that the yacht was to be sold for is gone for good.” He turned mockingly to Hall. “The deal’s off, Hall. You lose your profit and keep your

conscience, man !

“The company mayn’t be in a hurry to pay up f they learn why we were hanging about the Moroccan coast at night!” Hall snarled.

‘My dear fellow, the yacht’s lost, and the company have to pay. We. lose the extra five thousand we were going to make by a swindle. But don’t look so glum,” added Mr. Earle scornfully. “I lose as well as you. We’ve lost the game, and had a lot of trouble and expense for nothing. And—I’m glad of it !”

“You were always half-hearted !” snarled Hall. He stared back savagely towards the vanished coast of Morocco and gritted his teeth .

“To be beaten like that at the very finish -- at the very finish ! And by such a chance ! Who’ d have thought that— ‘

“We’re lucky not to have lost our lives as well as our game ! But for the boy warning us—“

“Hang the boy !”

Mr_Earle laughed.

Bunny was smiling now. The loss of the Albatross, tragic as it had been, had put an end to the plot. Chance had intervened at the last moment !

“If we’d chosen some other spot—“ muttered Hall.

”We chose the safest place – we never bargained for the Riffians” said Mr. Earle. It’s no use crying over spilt milk, Hall. The Albatross is gone and the five thousand she would have sold for is gone too —I lose as much as you – except that the insurance money may be a little beyond her value” he added, with a grin. “Cheer up, man ! I’ll see that you get a couple of hundred out of it !”

Hall grunted.

“ How long do you think we will be in this boat, sir? asked Bunny “Not long, I hope.”— “We shall be picked up before night ‘ answered Mr. Earle. “ We’re in the track of plenty of steamers‘

The sun rose higher blazing down on the floating boat. Four pairs of eyes watched the sea anxiously. It was towards noon that the smoke of a steamer was sighted. Mr Earle watched it through a pair of binoculars.

“It’s a steamer coming east—likely from Gibraltar to Algeria or Tunis,” he said ‘ They’re bound to see us‘

Hall made no movement. He seemed plunged into deep gloom by the failure of the plot. But Bunny was glad to see that failure had come rather as a relief to Mr. Earle. Certainly his handsome face looked more free from care than Bunny had seen it for many a long day. Antoine wildly waved a signal to the distant steamer and she was seen to alter her course and bear down on the boat. Half an hour later the lifeboat was picked up, and the survivors of the albatross were treading the deck of the steamer, bound for Tunis.

Bunny was feeling happy and elated. But a thought came into his mind that rather dashed is satisfaction

“You’ ll be going back to England, now, sir, I suppose” he asked Mr Earle.

“By the first steamer for Marseilles when we get to Tunis,” answered Mr Earle

“And will you get another yacht, sir?”

“It won’t run to yachting again for me , Bunny! Mr. Earle laughed.

“and when I touch the insurance money on the Albatross I shall either pay my debts— which will wipe out most of it—or—“

‘ Or what, sir?’

“Or try my luck at Monte Carlo!” said Mr Earle. And the well remembered glitter came into his eyes which Bunny had seen in the casino at Boulogne.

‘Oh sir’ said Bunny ‘I hope you’ll decide to pay your debts’

“I hope so !” said Mr Earle laughing.

“But you won’t want a steward’s boy any more, sir,” said Bunny.

“Do you want to stick to me, you young ass?”

“Yes sir if—”

“I’ll take you back to England with me at all events and see you safe home” said Mr. Earle.

Bunny shook his head

“Perhaps I can get a job at Tunis” he said. “My uncle at Margate says you can always find a job if you look for it.”

And though he was sorry at the prospect of parting with Mr Earle, Bunny looked forward with considerable anticipation as the steamer ran down to the one time pirate-city of the Mediterranean.