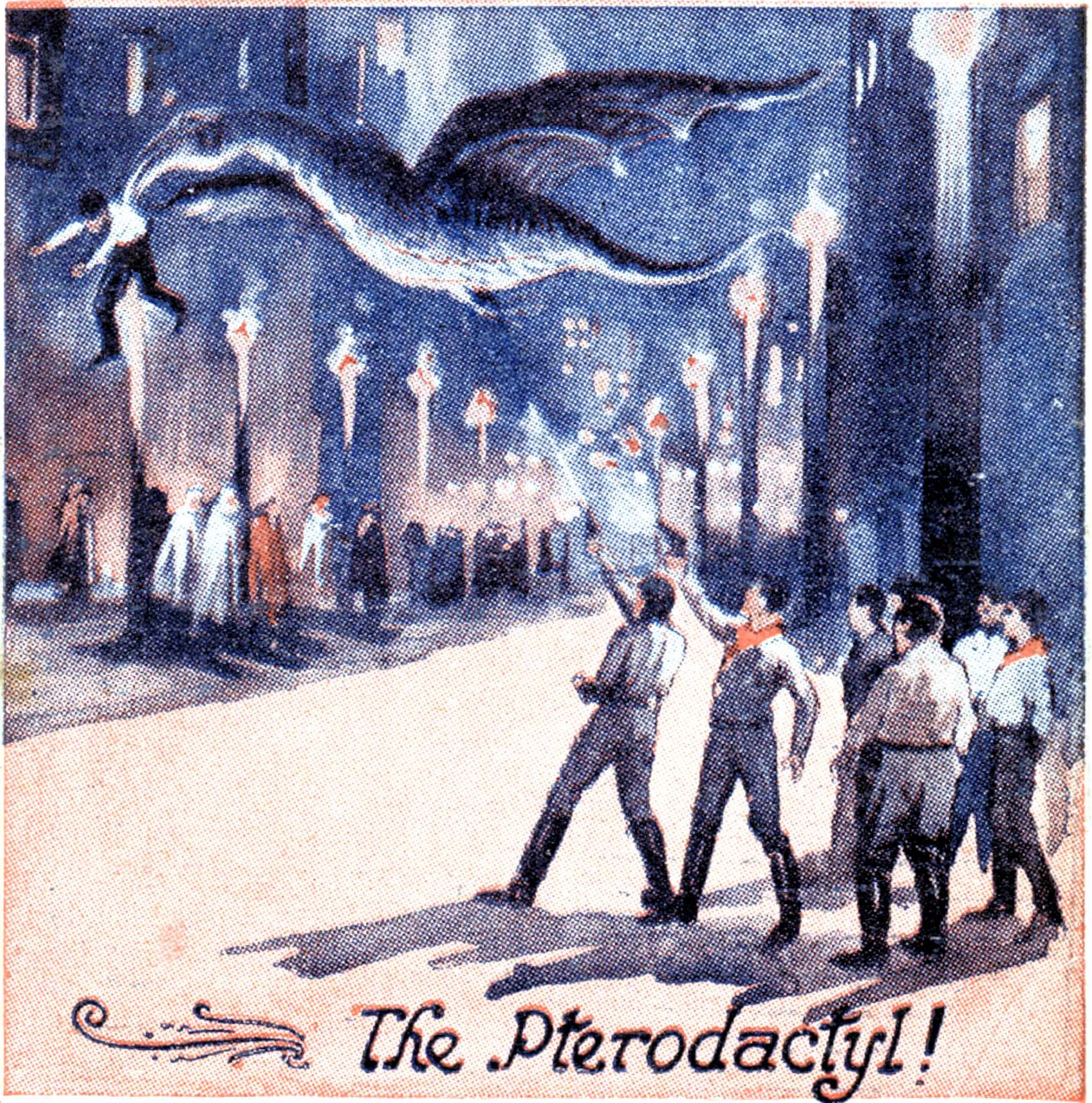


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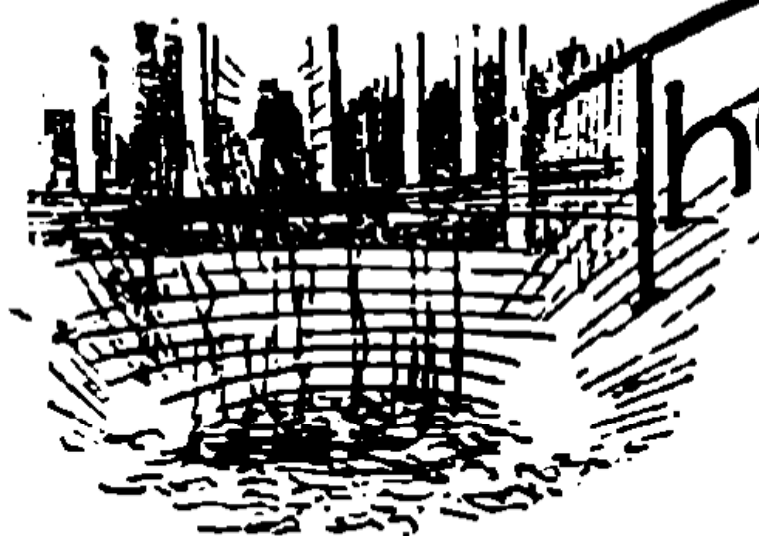
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# The Modern EL Dorado

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**(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)**

## CHAPTER I.

### PRISONERS IN THE CITY OF GIANTS.

**"PRISONERS!"** said Tommy Watson gloomily.

"Hundreds of miles from civilisation!" remarked Church.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez, and looking round with grave concern. "It's shockin', dear old boys—it is, really!"

"It's awful!" muttered McClure, in a low voice.

"I really don't know how we're goin' to get out of this place," went on Sir Montie, shaking his head. "It's an appallin' proposition, an' we can only trust to Mr. Lee to do his best."

"It's all very well to trust to the guv'nor," I said, "but what can Nelson Lee do? There's no way out of this place, Montie. And, supposing we did escape, what chance should we have?"

Tregellis-West scratched his noble head.

"Dear old fellow, that's a frightfully difficult question to answer," he replied. "What chance should we have? Well, I don't suppose we should have much chance at all, begad! We should only find ourselves in the city, an' there are thousands of these giants knockin' about there, an' we could never get completely away."

"But, even supposing that we get completely away," I went on—"what then? We are cut off from civilisation by that terrible swamp—the swamp that stretches for hundreds of miles before the forest is reached. Without Lord Dorrimore's airship, it is impossible for us to think of making our escape. And, as you know, Dorrie's airship is in the hands of the enemy."

"Yes, it's hopeless—absolutely hopeless!" said Tommy Watson glumly.

"And we haven't had anything to eat yet!" exclaimed Fatty Little, holding his waistcoat and looking utterly forlorn. "Not a giddy bite, you know! Great dough-nuts! I don't mind being a prisoner so much, but I reckon they ought to give us some grub! I'm starving!"

Fatty was probably the only one among us who was in that condition. We had not had any food for some little time, but we didn't need it. Our position was so serious that we did not feel like food. We did not want to eat. We could only stand there, talking, and wondering how on earth we should get out of the terrible predicament in which we were in.

For we were prisoners in El Dorado—the modern El Dorado, which we had discovered hundreds and hundreds of miles behind the great Matto Grosso, of Brazil. We had come to this marvellous

city in Lord Dorrimore's airship, and we had been captured by the strange race of white giants who inhabited the country.

Our capture had been a mere matter of misfortune, and owing to no carelessness on anybody's part, and, to our utter surprise, we had found that we were really in the hands of the Comte de Plessigny.

This plausible rogue had been much in evidence at St. Frank's, thousands of miles away, in England. It was, therefore, a great surprise for us to learn that the count was in El Dorado, and that, moreover, he was the King of the Arzacs, as the white giants were called.

There were twelve of us prisoners in the hands of the Arzacs—Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, Handforth and Church and McClure, Fatty Little, Watson, Tregellis-West, and myself, and two mechanics. We had all been on the airship at the time of the capture.

There had been some exciting adventures of late.

We had really come out to the Amazon in the hope of finding some trace of Colonel Kerrigan, the father of young Stanley Kerrigan, of the Third. Lord Dorrimore had been greatly impressed by Miss Janet Kerrigan, the lost colonel's sister. She had had repeated visions of her brother, standing in front of a wonderful city, appealing for help. She and the colonel were twins, and Dorrie had believed that there was something in these visions, that they were not merely figments of an excited brain.

And Dorrie was justified—and Aunt Janet was justified, too; for, although we had not yet seen the colonel, we had learned that he was a prisoner in this same city.

After coming up the Amazon in Lord Dorrimore's magnificent steam yacht, we had entered a small tributary called the Majarra, and there, at a safe anchorage, Dorrie had erected his airship.

A trial trip had been made at once, and this had led to the discovery that a terrible swamp lay beyond the forest land, a swamp which extended for hundreds of miles.

A second trip had been made, and then we had first seen a sight of the wonderful city of gold—the modern El Dorado.

During the flight, we had been at-

tacked by a mysterious red aeroplane, and we had lost a considerable amount of gas, owing to machine-gun fire. But this brush with the enemy had not dealt us any real harm, and we had succeeded in getting back to the yacht, but certain members of the party had been left behind, so Nelson Lee had returned. And it was while landing, in order to take the party on board, that the airship had been captured.

The inhabitants of this wonderful city were gigantic people, many of the men reaching nine feet in height and the women being over six feet. They were attired in long, flowing robes, sandals, and gold ornaments, and they were people of splendid physique. Their skin was almost white, and their features even and quite handsome in a way.

Quite helpless amid the throng of giants who had seized us, we had been marched into the city, and we had almost forgotten our troubles in the astonishing sights which met our gaze.

The city was, indeed, a place of marvels, for it was built of marble and gold, with wide, beautifully kept streets, and with a surrounding wall hundreds of feet in height, and so thick that a railway train could have travelled along the upper edge.

Then we had been taken before the chief, the King of the Arzacs. And we had made the discovery that this individual was none other than the Comte de Plessigny.

The Count had arrived only a short time before us, and he had come by aeroplane. The white giants, astounded by the sight of the roaring aeroplane, had believed the Count to be a strange creature from their own heavens, and they had acclaimed him as their chief. This, of course, suited the Count's book very well, and he had accepted the honour with alacrity.

Thus it came about that we were helpless prisoners in El Dorado. What was happening on board the yacht we did not know, but we could judge the anxiety and worry which our companions were passing through.

There were many other juniors there, a number of girls, Lady Helen Tregellis-West, and others. And we had not returned, although we had been expected long since.

Nelson Lee appeared to be quite calm and cheerful, but inwardly he was very grave and concerned.



"I'm afraid we're in a bad position, Dorrie," he murmured, as he and Lord Dorrimore stood aside with Umlosi. "So far as I can see, there is no way out of this predicament. We are prisoners, and we are likely to remain prisoners. Do not forget what the Count told us."

"I haven't forgotten, old man," said Lord Dorrimore quietly. "But it's a new idea for you to give way to pessimism—what?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I am not pessimistic, Dorrie," he said quietly. "I am simply reviewing the position as it stands, and, for the life of me, I cannot see any ray of hope."

"Wau! Thou art of weak heart, O Umtagati!" rumbled Umlosi, the giant Kutana chief. "Even as N'Kose has just stated, thou art inclined to be of the hopeless thought. Thou art surely wrong, my master. Thou must be of stout heart, for ere long we shall be free from this place, and we shall be able to join our friends in the great forest. I know, O Umtagati, and thou need not be of sorrowful demeanour. I have spoken!"

Dorrie clapped Umlosi on the back.

"That's the way to speak, old son!" he declared. "You're cheerful, I can see."

"It is not necessary to be otherwise, my father," replied Umlosi simply.

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, I like to hear you talking in that strain, Umlosi," he admitted. "Somehow or other you generally seem to look into the future with remarkable accuracy. However, it is wrong to be pessimistic; but, on the other hand, it is just as wrong to be unduly optimistic. We must review this position just as it stands, and take it at its true valuation."

"Exactly!" said Dorrie. "That's what we are doin', old man. The Count has got us here, an' he's pinched the airship. Well, that's pretty bad. Fortunately, these giants don't seem to be very ferocious fellows, so we are not troubled much with them. But the Count does not intend us to escape, and, to make matters worse, it is his genial plan to bring all the rest of the crowd over to this place, where gold is as common as stinging nettles."

"Yes, that's just it, old man," agreed Nelson Lee. "According to the Count's plan, he intends to bring over here Captain Burton, the crew of the yacht, and

every other member of your party. It is the Count's plan to leave us here, to maroon us hundreds of miles from civilisation, so that we shall never return to tell our story."

"But what is the genial Count's idea?" asked Lord Dorrimore.

"My dear fellow, you know that as well as I do," said Nelson Lee. "Some years ago the Count appropriated the fortune which rightfully belongs to Colonel Kerrigan; at least, that is how I read it. The Count turned upon Kerrigan, and left him in the Brazilian forest for dead. But the colonel was not dead, and when de Plessigny learned that we were coming out here on an expedition, he saw that it was up to him to make a drastic move. So, with rare cunning, he came out here in advance, and was already installed when we arrived. The Count has no intention of allowing us to take Colonel Kerrigan back with us, and, in fact, he means to keep us all here."

"A pretty tall order," remarked Dorrie.

"Not at all!" said Lee quickly. "Under the present circumstances, it will be quite easy, I can assure you. The Count has the airship, and with that very valuable vehicle of transportation he can bring every other member of the yacht's party over the swamp. It is merely a matter of organisation, and it can be done. Our only hope lies in the fact that the Count's plan will miscarry, and that those on board the yacht will be astute enough to defeat him."

"Thou art using idle words, my masters," put in Umlosi, in his rumbling voice. "Whatever thou sayest, it will make little difference. We shall escape, and we shall see many wonders. It is not destined that we shall see our friends again just yet; but, in the end, all will come right. I have seen; I know. Thou need not be of faint heart!"

I strolled up at that moment, and joined the gov'nor and Dorrie.

"Well, sir, what do you think of it?" I asked. "A pretty mess this is, eh?"

"Yes, Nipper, I'm afraid that we are in a serious position," said Nelson Lee, patting my shoulder. "At the same time, it is not altogether hopeless. Much may happen, and, if Umlosi is to be believed, our troubles will be over very shortly. Umlosi is quite certain that we shall all gain our freedom."

My eyes brightened.



"That's good!" I said keenly. "Um-losi doesn't often make mistakes of that kind. He seems to have a sixth sense, somehow, and he knows these things before anybody else can know them."

"I say, what about some grub?" asked Fatty Little complainingly, as he walked up.

"Grub!" repeated Lord Dorrimore. "Why, you're not hungry, are you?"

"I'm starving, sir!" groaned Fatty. "I—I'm getting as thin as a rail!"

Dorrie grinned.

"You look it, my son!" he commented. "By gad, I should think you could fast for a month, and you'd still be heavy enough to stop a motor-'bus!"

I grinned and looked over at the doorway of the prison. I thought I had heard a slight sound, and I was all attention.

The place where we were imprisoned was a huge stone chamber, as bare as a billiard-table, without a table, without a chair and without a couch. There was one massive door, made of stone, and so closely fitting that it was almost indistinguishable from the wall itself, and, high overhead, a great square in the roof allowed the blue sky to be seen. That square served as a means of ventilation and to illuminate the chamber. Any sort of escape was utterly out of the question. It was a prison of prisons.

The sky was not blue now, but turning a rich purple, for it was getting fairly late in the evening, and darkness would soon be upon us.

There was another sound at the door, and this time I was not mistaken. The heavy stonework swung back, and the big opening was revealed, an opening which led into long, cool passages.

Two of the gigantic Arzacs appeared, and a third member of the strange race stood in the doorway, guarding it.

"Hurrah!" roared Fatty excitedly. "Grub!"

"Somebody seems satisfied, anyway," remarked Lord Dorrimore calmly.

The two giants advanced into the chamber, and they were carrying massive gold trays. Upon each tray four dishes were piled, and there were golden tankards, too.

The two men set the trays down in the centre of the chamber, looked at us, and then retired to the doorway. They said nothing, for they probably knew that we should not understand. But the very sight of the food was sufficient; any words were quite unnecessary.

The three men did not retire, leaving

us to ourselves. They stood in the doorway, looking very picturesque in their flowing robes and gold ornaments. And they talked to one another in their own language, eyeing us with intense curiosity, but with no appearance of hostility.

"What's on the menu?" asked Lord Dorrimore calmly. "Roast chicken or stewed steak? Personally, I rather fancy a fried sole at the moment."

"What—what is it?" demanded Handforth, staring down at the dishes.

"Goodness knows!" said McClure.

"It—it looks horrible stuff," went on Handforth. "I'm blessed if I'm going to eat any of that!"

"It's no good passing judgment before you taste, my sons," said Lord Dorrimore. "I'll admit that the concoction doesn't look extremely appetising, but, at the same time, I dare say it is perfectly wholesome."

I did not blame Handforth for looking rather disgusted. At the mention of food I had become aware of the fact that I was considerably hungry. But now that I looked down at the stuff which had been brought to us, I felt that my hunger was leaving me. Not that it was unclean, or anything of that sort. The gold platters were glistening and gleaming with brilliance, and everything was scrupulously clean.

But the food itself did not look at all appetising to our civilised eyes. On one gold dish there was a heaped-up pile of green material, made into the shape of a pudding. It was soft, and goodness knows what it was made of. The stuff itself was chopped up into fine particles, mixed with a substance which had a strong, peculiar odour of extreme pungency.

On another dish there was some meat, but it was of strange texture, and there were lumps of fat attached to it which made me feel rather bad. All the stuff was cooked, and that, at all events, was one consideration.

On another dish still a pile of sodden-looking articles met our gaze. They were leaden colour in hue, and had apparently been baked, probably by the sun. But what they were composed of was a puzzle. I picked one up and broke it. It crumbled in my fingers, and I smelt it. It was not exactly unpleasant, and when I ventured to taste a portion of it, I found that the stuff was a kind of bread, but badly made and extremely sodden.



There were other dishes, too, all piled on the two trays, and all containing different concoctions, strange to our eyes, and not at all pleasant.

However, we were hungry, and several juniors lost no time in making headway. Fatty Little, indeed, piled into the grub as though it were the finest food from the Trocadero grill-room. It made very little difference to Fatty what sort of grub he demolished. The main thing was that it filled him up. His motto was simply this: grub was grub, and it didn't matter much what it consisted of.

The other fellows, however, ate very gingerly, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were soon satisfied. They made their meal mainly from the little leaden-coloured loaves, and Umlosi was something like Fatty Little. He was not at all particular. As long as the stuff tasted all serene, Umlosi was happy.

He made a good meal, and at the finish he and Fatty were left alone at the gold dishes.

The other fellows had had quite enough.

"My only hat!" said Handforth, with dismay. "I—I'm feeling bad already, you know. If that's the kind of grub we shall get while we're here—well, I'd rather starve!"

"Dear old fellow, this stuff is shock-in'!" said Sir Montie, eyeing the food with an expression of horror.

"It's not so bad as all that!" I grinned. "After all, it's strange to us, and we haven't got accustomed to these sorts of things. If we are compelled to remain here long, we shall get used to it, and we shall probably enjoy the food almost as much as our own. It's mainly a question of use."

"Fatty seems to be enjoying it, anyhow," remarked Tommy Watson.

"Fatty would enjoy anything!" growled Handforth.

The fat junior looked up with his mouth full.

"What's the matter with it?" he mumbled. "There's nothing wrong with this grub. It's filling me up a treat, and if you fellows don't want any more I'll clear the giddy dishes!"

"Great pip!" said Handforth, staring. "Do—do you mean to say that you're going to eat the lot?"

"I'm jolly well not going to let any be taken away!" declared Fatty, with emphasis.

"My only hat!"

And Fatty Little was as good as his word. Since nobody else was keen upon finishing the food, Fatty finished it himself.

I think he rather overdid it, and he knew this himself; but he simply could not allow and grub to be taken away. That would be a sin in Fatty's eyes.

The three guards were still at the door, examining us with intense interest. We appeared to be causing them an endless amount of interest, in fact. They could hardly take their eyes off us, and when we had finished the food they were in no hurry to clear away the dishes and to take their departure.

One of the giants came forward, and he seized Fatty Little in his arms. The Removite was held up as though he had been a mere baby, and he was turned over and over like a little toy. The spectacle was really quite amusing, and it was evident that the giant was not at all rough. He was simply examining Fatty, as one would examine a well-made doll.

"Leggo, you silly, great ass!" gasped Fatty. "I—I've just had my supper, and I'm full up!"

The giant took no notice, and he continued to turn Fatty upside down, and in all manner of attitudes. This was not calculated to make Fatty feel any the more comfortable, just after he had demolished such a liberal meal of unfamiliar food.

"I say, guv'nor!" I exclaimed. "Couldn't we make a dash for liberty now? There are only two guards in the doorway, and we might——"

"Pray do not be so absurd, Nipper!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "These men are enormously strong; they possess the strength of six of us, and we could not possibly hope to force our way out. Not only that, but an alarm would be given at once, and our chances of escape would be extremely remote."

"But what can we do, sir?" I asked. "If we keep waiting like this we shall never do anything at all. The door's open now, and we might be able to work a trick of some sort. Couldn't you think of a ruse?"

"Don't you worry your head, young 'un!" put in Lord Dorrimore. "The professor an' I were just tryin' to get hold of some wheeze, an' you come



buttin' in, an' mess up all our thoughts. I'm pretty sure that Lee was just on the point of gettin' hold of a good idea."

"Good enough!" I said. "I'll keep quiet, then!"

But if I kept quiet, Fatty Little did not.

By this time he had been set on his feet again, and the giant was turning his attention to Tommy Watson, who did not like it at all. However, it was quite useless to dodge or to attempt evasion, so Tommy had to go through it.

Meanwhile Fatty had doubled himself up, and there was an expression on his face which really alarmed me. Fatty was usually very ruddy, but now he had gone a sickly pale colour, and he was holding his stomach with both hands.

"What's the matter, Fatty?" I demanded sharply, going over to him.

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Fatty. "I—I feel awful, you know. I've got terrific pains inside, and—and I feel dizzy."

"You've eaten too much, you fat glutton!" I said severely.

"Great coconuts!" said Fatty unsteadily. "I—I—" Ow! Yaroooooh! Oh, great chutney! Yow-ow-ow!"

Fatty Little simply roared, and he suddenly sat down on the floor and doubled himself up. Nelson Lee came striding over and he examined Fatty keenly. Meanwhile the three giants were looking on with greater interest than ever. They probably wondered what on earth was the matter with the fat junior. They made no attempt to interfere, but simply stood watching.

"I was afraid of this, Little" said Nelson Lee grimly. "You partook of the food too heartily my boy. Where do you feel the pains?"

"In—in my tummy, sir!" groaned Fatty.

"Oh, we'll soon put you right!" said Nelson Lee, with a smile. "I'll give you a little tablet which will bring you ease within ten minutes."

"Oh, thanks, sir!" said Fatty, with difficulty. "Be—be quick, sir, please!"

Nelson Lee extracted from an inner pocket his little medicine-case. It was hardly any bigger than a pocket-book, but it contained a number of tiny tubes, each tube being filled with concentrated

tabloids. When in tropical regions Nelson Lee never travelled without that very handy and very useful medicine-case.

He took out a small tube and gave Fatty one tiny tablet.

"Swallow that, my lad!" he ordered.

"Only—only one, sir?" said Fatty, looking at the tiny tablet, then looking at the tube.

"Yes, Little, only one," said Nelson Lee. "Do you wish to go to sleep for five or six hours? These tablets are a very valuable medicine, but if several of them are taken they induce sleep—eight of them, indeed, are quite sufficient to send a man off into a stupor for many hours. But the one tablet will do you a lot of good."

"Thank you, sir!" said Fatty, swallowing the tablet with alacrity.

Nelson Lee was about to put the little tube back into the case when one of the giants came forward and grasped Nelson Lee's arm. The next second the tube of tablets was in the giant's possession, and he was fingering it about with interest. Then he looked at Fatty Little, and took one of the tablets and swallowed it. He seemed to like the flavour, for he took another tablet and rolled this one about in his mouth. I knew what they were, and I could understand the giant's liking for the medicine. Those tablets were coated with sugar, and they were quite pleasant to take.

The other two giants came up, and they shared the spoils. Between them they emptied the whole bottle within a few minutes, and that bottle had contained fifty tablets!

"My only hat!" I exclaimed, looking at Nelson Lee in rather a startled way.

"Will—will they kill anybody, sir?"

"No, Nipper, but they will induce sleep, as I have just said!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, with a curious note in his voice. "These men have taken at least sixteen tablets each, and, according to all laws of human nature, they should fall down in a drunken sleep within two minutes."

I looked startled.

"Then—then if they drop off now, before they close the door, we might be able to get away?" I asked breathlessly.

"Yes, Nipper, that is exactly what I mean!" exclaimed the guv'nor. "It seems that fate has played into our hands."



## CHAPTER II.

## THE COUNT SHOWS HIS HAND.

**M**EANWHILE certain interesting events were taking place on the River Majarra, where Lord Dorrimore's steam-yacht, the *Wanderer*, was at anchor.

There were many anxious people on board the yacht. Captain Burton had spent a sleepless night, for it was now just after dawn on board the *Wanderer*. Hardly one member of the yacht's company had slept, and this included Miss Violet Watson, Miss Ethel Church, and the other young ladies. Nobody, in fact, had thought of sleep.

The anxiety on board was too great for that.

The airship had been expected home the previous evening, carrying every member of the party who had ventured out. But the airship had not come, and the night had passed and still there was no sign. That night, although fairly short, had seemed to be interminable.

And now at last, when the dawn had come and the early sun was shining gloriously over the great forests, the *Adventurer* had made its appearance. Far away over the trees the airship was to be seen, sailing majestically, and with perfect control.

The joy on board was almost too great to be described. After thinking that the whole party had perished, it was glorious to know that they were returning—that everything was all right.

For there was the airship, and it was sailing straight towards the yacht. How could everything be otherwise than all right? Some of the girls cried, some of them laughed, and the juniors cheered themselves almost hoarse.

Even Fullwood and Co., the cads of the *Remove*, who had somehow managed to be included in the party, were excited and overjoyed. This trip was really doing them a lot of good, and it was knocking some of the snobbishness out of their natures. And after that tense night they were almost as eager as the rest of the fellows.

"Isn't it great?" exclaimed Reginald Pitt, his eyes gleaming. "They're coming back; they're almost here!"

"It seems almost too good to be true," said De Valerio. "After we'd thought they'd gone for good, too. I was absolutely sure that the airship had come

down in the swamp, and that we should never see it again."

"Somehow or other, I had an idea all the time that everything would turn out all right," said the Hon. Douglas Singleton. "Mr. Lee's a wonderful man, and he's not the kind to get himself into trouble, particularly when he has a lot of fellows to look after. You can bet there's been a very excellent reason for not returning sooner than this."

Meanwhile, on the bridge Captain Burton was congratulating Mr. Hudson, the first officer, and Mr. Hudson was congratulating the skipper.

"It's fine, sir!" declared Mr. Hudson. "I'd given them up—I had, indeed! I know what these forests are, and it seemed to me quite impossible that they should ever return. But there's the airship, sailing as serenely as ever. They'll just arrive in time for breakfast."

Captain Burton rubbed his hands.

"Exactly, Mr. Hudson," he agreed. "This is splendid—splendid!"

There was very little conversation after that, for everybody was watching the graceful airship as it circled far overhead, gradually getting lower and lower. The vessel was not extra large, but its lines were really beautiful, and it presented a magnificent spectacle up there in the early morning sunlight.

Somehow it seemed to those on the yacht that the airship was not travelling as fast as it should be. It did not seem to be descending with its usual speed and smoothness. It became somewhat erratic when it was about five hundred feet up, and then descended no more, but circled round and round with the engines going fully.

"Why, hang it all——"

Captain Burton uttered that exclamation. He had got his binoculars to his eyes, and he was staring up at the car of the airship which was swung underneath the great gas envelope. And Captain Burton could see a face looking over the rails, but it was an unfamiliar face.

"What's the matter, sir?" asked Mr. Hudson.

"I don't know, man—I don't know!" said the captain sharply. "Have a look through your binoculars, quick!"

The first officer did so, and there was a rather startled expression in his eyes when he lowered the glasses.

"Well?" rapped out the skipper.



"I can't see Mr. Lee on board, sir," said Mr. Hudson, in a curious voice. "And I don't recognise that man, either—that man who is looking overside."

"Neither do I!" declared the captain grimly. "Mr. Hudson, there is something queer about this. I do not believe any members of Lord Dorrimore's party are on board that airship. You may be sure that the boys would be looking over and waving, and that Lord Dorrimore himself would be waving, too. But there is no sign of them! There is only this one man—this stranger!"

"It's amazing, sir," said Mr. Hudson, taking a deep breath.

The truth was becoming known among the boys and the other guests by this time, and fresh consternation became apparent. The juniors were really alarmed.

"What does it mean?" gasped De Valerie, who had a pair of binoculars. "Mr. Lee isn't there; I can't see anybody! I mean, I can't see any of the chaps, or Lord Dorrimore, or Umlosi!"

"They must be there, you ass!" exclaimed Pitt. "It's all rot to say that they're not there!"

"Look!" shouted Jack Grey. "What's that?"

Something had just dropped from the airship—something which came sailing towards the yacht rapidly, and which fell almost like a stone. It had evidently been aimed at the deck, near the fore-castle, but it actually fell amidships, and several fellows only just got out of the way in time.

Bang!

The object dropped on the deck, rolled a few inches, then came to a standstill. Somerton dashed forward and seized the object at once. It was nothing more alarming than a large piece of canvas, tied up very tightly so that it would make a fairly heavy parcel. And before the juniors could untie it Captain Burton came hurrying along with the first officer.

"What is that, my boys?" asked the skipper sharply.

"We don't know, sir," said Grey. "It just fell down from the airship."

"Let me have it."

The captain took the package and rapidly cut through the strings. He unrolled the piece of canvas, and at length came upon a large sheet of paper. Upon the paper there were some written words, and Captain Burton pressed out the

creases and read the communication with interest.

The others gathered round in a curious crowd, while the airship continued to circle overhead.

Everybody was watching the skipper's face, and it was quite evident that the communication was a strange one, for the skipper's face revealed amazement, incredulity, anger, and other emotions.

Finally he passed the paper to Mr. Hudson, and he spoke in a strange, subdued voice.

"Good heavens!" he muttered. "It—it can't be true, Mr. Hudson!"

The first officer held the paper in front of him and read the words it contained. And as he did so he felt a curious thrill run through him. It was so unexpected, so dramatic, so positively startling, for the words upon the paper were these:

"You are called upon to surrender the yacht at once. Lord Dorrimore, Mr. Nelson Lee, and the other members of the party which left the yacht in order to sail over the swamp in the airship, are captives in my hands. They are quite safe and well, and no harm will come to them if you comply with my instructions without delay. The Wanderer must be surrendered promptly, and without a single weapon being fired. If this order is disobeyed, and if you refuse to submit, I shall have no other alternative but to drop several bombs. You must signal your willingness to agree by hoisting a white flag to the masthead."

That was all, just those words—no more.

But the message contained a tremendous lot. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and all the others were captured, but by whom? And could it possibly be true that unless the yacht surrendered there would be bloodshed? Did this unknown man actually mean that he would bomb the yacht? Captain Burton and Mr. Hudson were staggered.

And the captain found it necessary, almost at once, to read out the message aloud, so that everybody else on the yacht could hear it. There was a general feeling of dismay; there were faces which expressed startled consternation and concern.

"It—it can't be true, sir!" gasped Jack Grey.

"Oh, it's too absurd for words!" said



Pitt. "The idea of the yacht being bombed! I'll bet it's some joke of Lord Dorrimore's!"

"Yes, of course!"

"Rather!"

Captain Burton shook his head.

"You must not get such an idea into your heads, boys," he said sharply. "Lord Dorrimore is not the kind of man to play a practical joke of this description. This is a serious matter—this message is meant in deadly earnest! You can be quite sure of that!"

Lady Helen Tregellis-West clasped her hands.

"Oh, it is dreadful—it is dreadful!" she exclaimed, in great distress. "What can we do? Oh, captain, this is more terrible than ever!"

The skipper's face became grim and set.

"I don't know what it means, and I don't know what has happened to Mr. Lee and Lord Dorrimore!" he exclaimed. "But I do know that I will never surrender the yacht!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors were somewhat hysterical in their excitement.

"We'll never surrender, Mr. Hudson," repeated Captain Burton grimly. "As for that scoundrel up there—whoever he is—I will show him that he is not going to have everything all his own way! Good gracious me! A disaster has occurred, but there is no reason why we should make the disaster all the greater."

The captain hurried away, and mounted a bridge ladder. When he arrived on the bridge itself, he raised his fist, and shook it furiously up at the circling airship.

"That's my answer!" he roared fiercely. "I take no notice of your threats!"

It was really difficult to know what to do. The position was so extraordinary. Nobody on board could understand what it all meant.

They had been expecting the airship to contain Nelson Lee, myself, Lord Dorrimore, and the others. And, instead, it contained a stranger—a man who had possession of the airship, and who declared that the rightful owners were prisoners.

"There—there seems no reason for it, you know!" said Reginald Pitt, in a startled voice. "Why should Mr. Lee

and the others be taken prisoners? There's no war over here; there's no reason why this state of things should go on!"

"It's no good guessing at things," said Somerton, scratching his head. "It beats me, you know. It—it seems too serious to be really true. Where is Mr. Lee, where's Dorrie, where are the others? It says on the paper that they're captives—but where?"

"Goodness knows!"

"It's—it's a mystery!"

"And we're called upon to surrender!" exclaimed Tom Burton. "Souse my scuppers! I can just see the dad surrendering to a slab-sided lubber like that chap overhead! Great marlin-spikes! I thought we were going to have some excitement up here, beyond the Amazon, but I'm blessed if I anticipated anything of this sort!"

"Oh, Grey, it can't be true, can it?" asked Miss Violet, coming along the deck, and appealing to the boys. "I—I'm so worried!"

"We're all worried, Miss Violet," said Jack Grey. "The whole affair is simply staggering. You're anxious about Tommy Watson—naturally, you would be, because he's your brother."

"Yes; I'm sure I don't know what has happened to Tom," said Violet, in great distress. "I haven't had a wink of sleep all night, and when I saw the airship I thought that everything was all right—and I felt so happy! And now it's worse than ever! Oh, isn't it terrible!"

"Hallo! The airship's comin' down lower," put in Gulliver, at this moment.

Everybody looked up, and it was seen that the airship was descending. Her engines were now only running at about quarter-speed, and the beautiful air vessel was gliding along serenely. Then suddenly something was thrown over the airship's rail, and it fell rapidly towards the yacht's deck.

And it was something which left a trail of smoke in its rear!

"Oh!" screamed one of the girls. "A—a bomb!"

"Great Scott!"

"Good heavens!"

"Run—run!"

The juniors scattered like wildfire, and there were many shouts of horror and consternation. The thing which was coming down from the airship was evi-



dently an explosive of some kind, for the smoke was streaming out, in a long line, as the thing fell. Then it struck the deck, and—

Boom!

The object went off, with a deafening report, and it fell just within three yards of Do Valerie and Pitt, who had not succeeded in getting out of the way. The next moment both the juniors were enveloped in a choking mass of white smoke.

"Oh, they've been killed!" screamed Miss Violet, holding her hands over her eyes.

"Souso my decks!" muttered the Bo'sun dully.

But the next moment there was general relief, for both Do Valerie and Pitt appeared out of the smoke, and they came running up the deck vigorously. It was obvious at once that neither of the juniors was hurt. The explosion had not harmed them in the slightest degree.

"It's only a firework!" shouted Pitt. "One of those cannon cracker things, you know. It hasn't even scorched the deck."

"Oh, thank Heaven!"

"A—a firework!"

"And—and we thought——"

Everybody was talking at once, and there was great relief when it was found that the object that had been dropped was of no real danger. But it had been a mean trick of the man in the airship. He had dropped that firework with the deliberate intention of scaring everybody on the yacht.

And then another object fell—and there was a fresh scattering. It was thought that a second firework was descending.

But this was not the case.

The second object was another piece of canvas, tightly tied up, and it contained a brief message, which Captain Burton read at the first opportunity. The message was as follows:

"I took pity on you that time, but you can be quite sure that the next one will be the real thing, and not a harmless firework. I do not wish to be unduly harsh, and so I will give you time to decide. You have exactly six hours from this minute, and you will be well advised to comply—and to surrender. If you fail to give any satisfactory signal, then the attack must commence

forthwith. Be warned in time, and act wisely."

Almost before the message had been read, the airship had mounted higher and higher, and her engines were going at full-speed. Then she sailed off across the forest, and had disappeared from view almost at once, owing to the fact that the high trees concealed the sky.

The Majarra became tranquil once more. The sun shone gloriously, the birds sang, the insects hummed, and everything was peaceful.

But on the yacht there was dismay and deep concern.

There was not a soul on board who had any doubt now. The truth was known—the grim truth. There was no getting away from it. The airship was in the hands of an unknown enemy, and it was to be used as a weapon of warfare unless the yacht surrendered.

And Captain Burton had six hours to decide.

His decision was made within six seconds. He would never surrender Lord Dorrimore's yacht; he would never submit to the intimidations of the scoundrel who had possession of the airship. This state of affairs had come about, and the only thing was to make the best of it. Captain Burton was a fighter, and he was ready to fight now, if necessary.

He knew well enough that the Adventurer could not last for long. She had only sufficient petrol in her tanks to carry her a certain distance, and her supply was surely getting exhausted already. There was no other petrol except on board the Wanderer, therefore the airship would be compelled to descend in order to take in fresh fuel.

The juniors were so excited that they hardly knew what they were doing—they hardly spoke coherently. They were dismayed, staggered, and really scared. Somehow, they felt lost without Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore on board. And they were filled with anxiety, too, concerning all those who had gone across the great swamp.

It was known to everybody on board the yacht that a wonderful city existed beyond the swamp. Nelson Lee had related the story of El Dorado earlier, when he had returned from the first scouting trip. And now it was generally recognised that the party had been left in that strange and wonderful city.

The airship was the only possible method of reaching El Dorado—the



swamp was impassable by any other means. And the airship was in the hands of an enemy. The position was undoubtedly bad.

And all the yacht's company could do was to wait—wait for the airship to put in an appearance again, and then to fight, if things really came to such a pass.

Something like chaos reigned on board during that morning. At least, this can be applied to the juniors and to the girls. Captain Burton himself was busy, and every member of the crew was busy, too.

Two machine-guns were fetched up from below, and they were placed in position. The chief engineer converted one of the guns so that it could be used as an anti-aircraft weapon. Rifles were brought up from below, cleaned, and loaded. Active preparations were made for a grim fight. Captain Burton would certainly not be taken unawares, and he was ready to give battle.

But just now there was a respite. How long would it last? How long would it be before the airship returned and made the promised attack?

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE WONDERFUL CITY.

NELSON LEE watched the three giants closely, and it was apparent almost at once that the gov'nor's words were coming true.

The three Arzacs had swallowed fifty of the drug tablets between them, and, although those tablets were perfectly harmless, they had the effect of inducing sleep at once, provided they were taken in sufficient quantities.

The only thing to be afraid of was that the giants might possibly leave our prison chamber, and close the heavy stone door. In that case, we should be as helpless as ever.

But the giants did not seem to be at all inclined to go. One of them stood in the doorway, and the other remained just within the chamber, watching us with that same curious, childlike stare of wonder. We interested them a great deal.

"I never expected anything like this, old man," said Nelson Lee, addressing Lord Derrimore. "I took out those

tablets with the intention of easing Little's pain, and it was quite a surprise to me when that giant seized the little tube of tablets. If they all become unconscious, it will be entirely their own doing."

"That makes it all the better," said Dorrie. "Luck generally seems to be with us, Professor, and I don't suppose it'll desert us now. The beggars have drugged themselves for our benefit, and I'm not grumblin' one little bit!"

"There you are!" I exclaimed quickly. "Look! One of them is going off already!"

We watched with great interest, and with some anxiety.

As I had said, one of the giants had passed a hand over his brow, and he was swaying slightly. A moment later his knees sagged, and he fell to the floor. He went down with a thud, and his companion, who was standing near by, looked at him in a dull kind of way.

Then the second giant bent down, with the evident intention of helping his companion. But once he was down, he remained down, and did not rise. The third man, in the doorway, simply put his back to the doorway, and slid to the ground.

"My only hat!" muttered Handforth. Nelson Lee had been right! Those tablets had taken effect practically at once, and all three of the guards were now helpless. They were insensible, and the door was open for us to escape, just when we liked.

Outside, the stone passages were empty and silent. They were quite deserted. I immediately saw a wonderful series of golden chances.

If only we could get into the open, we might be able to do wonderful things. It was almost dark by now, and we should be able to get clear of the city, perhaps, without being spotted. And if we could only locate the space where the airship was moored—well, there was no telling.

But I did not like to let my thoughts carry me further. Perhaps I was too hopeful; perhaps I was too optimistic.

"Now, boys, you must not allow yourselves to get excited," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "By a sheer piece of good fortune, our three guards have been rendered helpless—for several hours, at least. They took the drug of their own accord, and their present posi-



tion in none of our own doing. However, we shall probably benefit by it, for if we can only get clear of this building and out into the open, there is just a chance that we may be even luckier. The airship cannot be far off, and there are plenty of us to get the vessel into the air—that is, if we find an opportunity.”

I could see that the gov'nor's thoughts were running in the same direction as my own, and this was only natural.

“Shall we make a move at once, sir?” asked Handforth eagerly.

“Yes, at once, my boy.”

“Oh, good!”

“Begad!” murmured Sir Montie. “This is surprisin', dear old boys—it is, really!”

Even Fatty Little forgot his pain in this new excitement. Certainly, that little tablet which Nelson Lee had given him had had due effect. It had relieved the fat junior's pain considerably, and this new development had had even better effect.

“Let's go at once!” said Fatty. “We might be able to find some better grub—”

“Oh, my only hat!” said McClure. “You don't mean to say you're thinking of grub again?”

“Why not?” demanded Fatty. “That awful stuff I had a little while ago doesn't agree with me, and I should like some fruit. Bananas, or pineapples, or something. It's miles better than any medicine!”

“We've something more serious to think about now,” said Lord Dorrimore. “All we have to do is to place ourselves entirely in Mr. Lee's care. He'll lead us right, and we've simply got to follow.”

Nelson Lee turned to us.

“Now, boys, we will go in the following order,” he said briskly. “I shall lead the way, with Lord Dorrimore. Nipper will come next, and you other boys can distribute yourselves as you please. Umlosi will bring up the rear, with our friends, the mechanics.”

“That's the idea,” said Dorrie. “But let's get movin', old man. I'm impatient to clear out of this place.”

We did not waste another moment, but stepped over the giant who lay in the doorway, and found ourselves in a high, lofty passage. It was, of course, quite dark, and it was fortunate that both

Nelson Lee and Dorrie carried electric torches. By the aid of these we were able to see quite distinctly, and to traverse the passage with rapid footsteps.

The floor was quite smooth, and progress was not delayed in any way. We believed that we should be able to find our way into the open almost at once, in a minute or two. But in this we were completely mistaken.

After going along the tunnel for a certain distance, we came to a spot where there many tunnels, openings branching out in all directions. It was quite impossible for us to choose any particular one definitely; we were compelled to go at random.

And we went along one passage, down many steps, along other narrower tunnels, and, finally, we were compelled to come to the conclusion that we were lost.

We had seen no sign whatever of any giants. We were completely and utterly to ourselves. The place was as silent as the tomb, and the darkness was intense. We were evidently a good way underground, for the air itself was cold, although quite pure. But there was no sign whatever of any outlet.

To make our way back was quite out of the question. There were so many openings that it would be impossible for us to find the correct route. We should simply have to go on and on until we came to some definite spot—some spot where we could find ourselves quickly into the open.

But it seemed that these catacomb-like tunnels were never-ending.

We had already spent about an hour in these tunnels, and we seemed to be no nearer the open air than we had been at the start—in point of fact, we were much further away. We had escaped from our prison, but we had only succeeded in losing ourselves in this interminable series of lofty tunnels. No matter which way we turned, it was the same. Passage after passage, opening after opening, and every one leading nowhere.

“This seems rather hopeless, old man,” remarked Lord Dorrimore at length, coming to a halt. “We might go on in this way for weeks.”

Nelson Lee was looking anxious.

“Well, Dorrie, we have started now, and the only thing is to go on,” he said



quietly. "I did not bargain for anything of this nature—I might as well confess that at once. I assumed that we should be able to get out quite easily. I can only conclude that we took the wrong tunnel to begin with—and as a result we are now lost."

"Lost?" echoed Handforth, in a queer voice. "Oh, great pip!"

"Lost in these tunnels?" said Fatty Little, with a hollow sound in his voice. "And not a bite of grub anywhere! We shall simply starve to death—that'll be the end of us! And if anybody ever comes to our rescue, they'll only find a heap of bones—a number of skeletons!"

"You're feeling cheerful, ain't you?" asked Handforth tartly.

"Well, this walk has given me a terrific appetite!" grumbled Fatty. "I'm awfully hungry, and I'm wondering —"

"Oh, dry up about your beastly appetite!"

"We're fed up with you, Fatty!"

"A chap can't help his appetite," protested Fatty, in an injured voice. "I'm terrifically worried, you know. These tunnels seem to go on, and there's no outlet at all. Even if we turn back, we shall probably make things worse. Hours have passed since we started, and we're probably miles underground by now!"

"Not so deep as that, Fatty," I said. "There's one thing to be thankful for—we seem to have completely eluded the giants. This may be all for the best, after all."

"How do you mean?" asked Watson.

"Well, we seem to have travelled miles along these tunnels," I explained. "It's just possible that we shall come out on the other side of the city wall—in open country. In that case, our chances of complete escape will be all the better."

"I was thinking the same thing, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "However, we must not make any guesses, and we must not anticipate. The best thing we can do is to press on, and trust to luck."

So we did so. Down tunnel after tunnel we progressed, until our legs were tired, and until we fairly ached with our exertions. Our eyes were getting tired, too, for the strain of looking into the distance in the light of the electric torches was rather tiring.

We came to one tunnel at last which

led rather sharply upwards, and we seemed to be climbing a long hill. The passage led straight up, without turning either to right or left, and at last we came to a spot where there were several other tunnels, leading out into all directions. We came to a halt, feeling rather hopeless.

"What's the good?" I asked. "Here we come to another set. It doesn't matter which one we choose—we shall probably take the wrong one. We've got ourselves into a fine tangle, sir!"

"Yes, Nipper, it seems that——" began Nelson Lee.

"It is well, my master!" interrupted Umlosi, in his rumbling voice. "Thou canst surely smell the fresh air?"

Umlosi's nostrils were twitching like those of a dog, and he was smelling the air keenly. He moved from one tunnel entrance into the other, and finally went back to the dark opening which lay immediately ahead of us.

"Heed my words, O N'Kose!" he rumbled. "We must traverse this dark tunnel, and ere long we will come to the fresh air. Do thou as I say, master, and all will be well."

"That's good enough," said Dorrio briskly. "I know you've got a rippin' nose, Umlosi, so we'll waste no further time."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, we can trust Umlosi," he said briefly.

We were all feeling more hopeful now, and we pressed on up this tunnel with renewed energy. It still sloped upwards, and at length we turned a sharp bend, and felt a decided draught right in our faces. It was a warm draught, a current of air which was very grateful after the chill of the tunnels.

"Oh, good!" said Handforth. "We're coming into the open air!"

"Hurrah!"

"Boys, you must be silent!" said Nelson Lee sharply. "Remember, there may be many of the enemy about—and it will be fatal if we are seen. At all costs, we must prevent ourselves from being recaptured."

"Yes, shut up, you asses!" I said grimly. "There's no sense in making a row."

Exactly four minutes later we emerged into the open air, and our anticipations were not quite realised, for we found ourselves in the city—and not beyond the great wall, as we had half expected.



But the sight which met our gaze was one which caused us to pause there, in the tunnel opening, in sheer fascinated wonder.

We seemed to be on a small, slight hillside, with a great portion of El Dorado before us. It was now intensely dark—night time. And we had expected to find everything pitchy black. It did not strike us for a moment that this strange city would be illuminated by artificial means.

But it was.

The whole great city was blazing with a curious, ruddy light. And it did not take us long to find out the source of this light. Right in front of us, and down the hill, there was one of the wide main streets of the city. We could see the giant inhabitants moving about, and evidently set upon their business. And we could only stand there and marvel.

For the sight upon which we feasted our gaze was one which had seldom been seen by human beings on this earth. Indeed, no civilised people of the world as we know it to-day had ever seen such a spectacle—with the sole exception of the Comte de Plessigny and Colonel Kerrigan.

"Amazin'!" exclaimed Sir Montie, in an awed voice. "Dear old boys, I am absolutely speechless!"

"It—it's staggering!" I declared.

"Rather!"

"My only topper!" said Handforth. "It fairly beats me!"

We looked down at the city, and we were ~~as~~ intensely thrilled, for what we saw was so remarkable that we might have been excused for imagining that we were dreaming.

As I have said, one of the wide main streets of the city was right before us. And it was not dark, as we had expected it to be. On either side of the wide thoroughfare there were giant pillars—massive marble affairs, nothing less than two hundred feet in height. They towered above like great factory chimneys—only, of course, extremely ornamental.

And at the summit of each pillar there danced and shimmered a great ball of fire—a flaming ball of orange-coloured light. This light was so intense that it illuminated the whole district in the immediate vicinity of the pillar. And as there were hundreds and hundreds of these pillars, the result was that the whole city was a blaze of orange fire.

The effect was simply glorious.

And these balls of fire were not merely confined to this one street—the street which lay in front of us. We could see them dotted by the thousand over every quarter of the city; the whole place was aflame with them. London, with its up-to-date lighting, was practically a city of darkness compared to this amazing town of El Dorado.

We were fascinated—we were enthralled. We could only stand there and look at the sight, and feel staggered. How was it that these people—this ancient race of Arzacs—how was it that they could find such wonderful illumination? It was far in advance of anything in the modern world.

"Wau! This is indeed a wondrous place, O N'Kose!" rumbled Umlosi. "Methinks we shall be in difficulties, however."

"What do you mean, old man?" asked Dorrie.

"Hast thou not thought, O, my father?" asked Umlosi gravely.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I'm not able to think clearly at this minute," confessed Lord Dorrimore. "I'm kind of bowled over, you know. I don't exactly know where I am."

"Then thou wilt be wise to set thy wits to work, N'Kose!" said the Kutana chief. "We are bent upon escaping from this city—it is our wish to get into the forests beyond. But wilt thou tell me how it can be done? Wilt thou explain how we are to escape without detection? With this vast amount of light, we shall surely be seen."

"That is exactly what I was thinking, Umlosi," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I am afraid, boys, that we must give up all hope of leaving El Dorado at present. We can scarcely move, in fact, without being seen. Our position, instead of being improved, remains exactly the same. We are prisoners."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"And no grub!" wailed Fatty Little. "I'm starving, you know!"

"Oh, dry up, you fat porpoise!"

"It'll do you good to starve for a bit, Fatty!" said Handforth. "I'm thinking about escaping—I'm thinking about collaring the airship again. But what the dickens can we do with all this illumination about?"

"Well, I don't see any reason why we should remain in hiding," I said. "We might just as well go on, and if we are



recaptured—well, we shall have to make the best of it. We're bound to be recaptured in any case, and we might as well see all we can of this wonderful city while we've got the chance."

"That is one way of looking at it, Nipper, of course," remarked Nelson Lee. "Perhaps you are right, my boy. We will venture; but, at the same time, we will do our utmost to escape observation."

The fact was we were so fascinated by the lights in front of us that we did not carefully consider the perils. We wanted to see more of this place—we wanted to venture into the great streets, and we wanted to examine the buildings, the roads, the golden ornaments.

And so we progressed, moving on down the hillside, towards the very heart of the city.

So far we had not come into close contact with any of our gigantic hosts. We could see them in the distance quite clearly, but we ourselves were in a quiet portion of the town.

And then something of a very startling nature took place. It was something which took us all by surprise, and which left us panting, breathless and really scared.

We were walking along in pairs, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore leading the way, their revolvers held close handy, in case of emergencies. I came close behind, and the other juniors were in the rear of me. Sir Montie, having paused for a moment or two to tie his shoelace, was at the extreme rear of the party.

As I have said, we were not really in the heart of the city, and we were not actually in a main street at all, but apparently in an unfrequented side turning. Although we could see one another distinctly by the light of those orange-coloured balls, the full glare was high above us.

And Nelson Lee suddenly came to a halt, and stood quite still.

"What was that?" he asked sharply.

"What was what?" inquired Dorrie.

"I heard something—it seemed to me like a flapping of wings," said Nelson Lee, gazing upwards. "I am almost certain that— Good heavens!"

"Wau!" exclaimed Umlosi, in a strange voice. "Tagati, my master—tagati!"

"By the Lord Harry!" said Lord Dorrimore, his voice quivering.

We had all halted by this time, and I stared up into the sky. Then I felt my muscles grow rigid—I felt my blood tingling—I seemed to be frozen to the very spot where I stood.

For there, hovering in the air, high above us, was a monster shape—a grotesque, impossible shape. And I could hear the flapping of wings, like leather being waved in the wind. That gigantic black shape was hovering above us in a deadly, sinister manner.

What was it?

I tried to speak, but could not. I was horrified—I was scared almost out of my wits.

As for the other juniors, they could only stand there and stare upwards with bulging eyes, and with hearts that beat heavily against their ribs. This was something which had come unexpectedly—something which had taken us all off our guard.

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth. "It—it's alive!"

There was no doubt that Handforth was right. The object over us was indeed alive. It was impossible for us to see its outline distinctly. It was only a black, shapeless thing which hung there, with flapping wings. And it is not exaggerating when I declare that the terrible monster of the air was every inch of fifty feet from wing tip to wing tip. I could just make out two horrible feet, with claws at the extremities. There was a long neck, with a terrible head at the end. But I could not see the head distinctly, although I am almost certain that the mouth opened, revealing teeth.

Teeth!

Teeth in a thing which flew in the air! What could it be? What in the name of all that was horrible could this object be? Nelson Lee was the first to suggest a possible explanation.

"Dorrie, I am forced to the conclusion that there is only one explanation for this!" said the gov'nor. "This flying thing above our heads is a pterodactyl!"

"A which?" repeated Dorrie.

"A what, sir?"

"A pterodactyl!" repeated Nelson Lee quietly. "Every scientist will tell you that the pterodactyl disappeared from the face of the earth before Adam. It is a monster of the lizard type—indeed, the pterodactyl is nothing more nor less than a gigantic flying lizard. It belongs to the prehistoric era, and



it is practically impossible for such a creature to live to-day. But this city seems to be a land of impossibilities, by what I have seen. I am more amazed than——"

Nelson Lee was interrupted—and he was interrupted in a very startling manner.

For an awful cry came to our ears—a cry which seemed to freeze my blood in my veins. It was a loud, wailing, harsh sound, which shuddered on the air, and which made me shiver from head to heel.

It was that flying thing in the air which had caused the sound. The next moment we scattered wildly, for, with a creaking of those awful wings, with a fearful fluttering, the pterodactyl swooped down towards us.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West gave a cry—a cry of anguish and terror.

And then we nearly fainted, for I saw that poor Montie had been grasped by the beak of that monster. It had seized his coat at the back, and Montie was captured—he could not possibly get free, struggle as he would. He was carried into the air—carried off his feet, and he flew right over us, in the grip of that ghastly thing.

"Quick!" shouted Nelson Lee hoarsely. "Fire, Dorrie—fire!"

Crack! Crack!

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore pulled their triggers almost at the same second. Two reports rang out, and then Tregellis-West came tumbling into the midst of us. He was about ten feet up at the time, and he came charging down, and practically landed squarely upon Fatty Little. The two juniors went down in a heap, Fatty howling wildly.

I rushed up, badly anxious.

"Montie!" I gasped. "Are you all right, old man?"

"Dear old boy——"

I did not hear what else Montie said, for there was a dreadful noise. The cry which the pterodactyl had uttered only a minute or two earlier was nothing at all compared to the ear-splitting commotion which arose. I turned round, even forgetting Montie—forgetting everything.

And then I saw the cause of the noise.

The great flying lizard had come to the ground—mortally wounded by those two revolver shots. It was now lying about twenty yards from us, flapping its

wings, and scratching its terrible claws on the ground. We could hear its terrific beak opening and shutting with a noise like that of a steel trap.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Handforth. "I—I feel awful, you know!"

"I—I—I——"

McClure could say no more; he was overcome. In fact, he was almost on the point of swooning away from sheer excitement and fright—and nobody could blame him. One of the mechanics was lying on the ground, grovelling in utter terror. An experience like this was something which had never happened to civilised mankind.

"We've finished him, anyway!" said Lord Dorrimore, with satisfaction. "Ye gods and little fishes! Did you ever see anythin' like it, Lee?"

"Never!" said the gov'nor impressively. "And, what is more, Dorrie, I never expected to see anything like it. I don't think the thing is a true pterodactyl, but it is obviously a branch of the same family."

"Well, it's a family I don't want to be acquainted with!" said Lord Dorrimore. "I don't like the bally size of the thing, and I'm jolly certain that I've got a horrid dislike for its appearance. And have you noticed a most diabolical odour knockin' about?"

"I have!" said Nelson Lee. "The odour is, as you say, Dorrie, diabolical!"

But Nelson Lee did not wish to discuss the dreadful smell which the pterodactyl wafted about the air. Nelson Lee came straight over to the spot where Sir Montie and Fatty were getting to their feet. Fatty, of course, was unhurt—nothing could do him any harm. He was all fat and rubber—as Handforth put it—and he merely bounced, without being bruised.

"My dear boy," said Nelson Lee gently, "let me see if you are injured——"

"It's quite all right, dear old boy—I—I mean, Mr. Lee!" said Sir Montie. "I'm not hurt at all—I'm not, really! Begad! It's a frightful wonder that I'm all in one piece, though. The thing got hold of me by the coat, behind, and I'm afraid it's made an appallin' mess of my jacket!"

"Never mind your jacket, Montie," said Nelson Lee. "Are you hurt personally?"

"Not at all, sir, except for one or two bruises when I fell," said Sir Montie.





1. Right beneath us boiled and bubbled the molten gold.
2. "I think you are Colonel Kerrigan," said Nelson Lee quietly.



"I thought it was all up with me, begad! I've never been so frightfully scared in all my life, sir. An' I want to thank you an' Lord Dorrimore for savin' my life."

"Don't be absurd, Montie," smiled Nelson Lee. "I am intensely gratified to learn that you are not injured. It was a very lucky escape—and it has taught us to be cautious. If we see any flying lizards again, we shall fire without asking any questions."

"Rather!" I said. "It's a wonderful thing Montie wasn't killed on the spot. If that terrible beast had had him in its grasp, instead of only his clothing—"

"Please don't, dear old fellow!" said Sir Montie quietly. "I know exactly what would have happened; but there's no need to go into frightful details, you know."

Montie was a brick. He had just passed through a terrifying experience, but he passed it off lightly. He was as brave as a lion, and he made very little of the fact that he was practically calm and composed, as usual.

I turned round, with the intention of going nearer to the fallen monster, which was now lying quietly in death. But then I stared hard and I felt my heart give a jump.

For, all round us, and looking on with curiosity, were at least fifty of the gigantic Arzacs!

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE LAKE OF GOLD.

"WELL, I'm blessed!" I exclaimed. "Didn't you see them before?" asked Handforth.

"We're surrounded, my son. There's no hope of us getting away; but what difference does it make? I'm willing enough to make a fight for it. I'm ready for a scrap at any old time."

"My dear Handforth, it is quite useless to think of fighting," said Nelson Lee. "Possibly, if we use our revolvers, we might be able to scare these people, and to make our escape, but I do not care to take that course. It strikes me that the Arzacs are not hostile; they do not seem to be a warlike race of people. For example, these giants are now surrounding us, but they are standing here in idle curiosity; they

are making no attempt whatever to advance to the attack."

"Yes, I've noticed that, sir," put in Tommy Watson. "What can it mean?"

We were rather puzzled, as a matter of fact. The Arzacs, looking very picturesque in their flowing robes, were standing round in a crowd, and they were silent and curious. I moved a little closer, out of sheer curiosity, on my own account. And then I saw that these giants were looking almost awed. They had an expression in their eyes which told of wonder and amazement. And it did not take me long to arrive at a perfectly natural explanation.

These inhabitants of the city had seen Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee kill the pterodactyl. They had seen him come tumbling down, mortally wounded. And the Arzacs were impressed.

Possibly their own weapons were ineffective against the flying lizards, for it was only natural to assume that this monster was only an isolated specimen. Possibly there were many of these pterodactyls.

At all events, the giants did not attempt to touch us; they did not even come near.

"I'll tell you what it is, old man," said Dorrie. "These people are just peaceful citizens; they are not soldiers. We were captured, by the count's orders, by a party of warriors. It is their duty to recapture us. These people are merely harmless civilians, so to speak."

"That might be, Dorrie, of course," said Nelson Lee. "At all events, now that we have been seen, there is no sense in attempting to conceal ourselves. We might as well walk on and see what happens."

"That's the idea," said Dorrie. "We can be havin' a look round at the sights."

"Oh, good!" said Fatty Little. "We might come upon a shop, or something, where we can buy some fruit, or grub!"

"There he goes again!" groaned Tommy Watson. "Always thinking of grub—always thinking of his tummy!"

"Well, there's nothing better to think about," said Fatty promptly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Somehow or other, we all laughed, but it was a rather hysterical laugh. We were lighthearted, but, at the same time, we were inwardly stirred, and our emotions were on edge, so to speak.

It was a great relief to know that we

had not been attacked, and that there was a possibility of our walking on without receiving any hostile attentions. We were prisoners within El Dorado, but we were free.

As for the pterodactyl, we did not venture near it. There was an excellent reason for this. If we had been provided with gas masks, we might have examined the creature at close quarters. But not even Nelson Lee felt inclined to stand the horrible odour which the terrible lizard gave forth.

In fact, we moved away from the spot as quickly as possible, and very shortly we found ourselves in one of the wide main streets of the city, with the flaring balls of fire overhead. It was as though we were standing in the glare of thousands of arc lamps; but this light was softer, mellow, altogether more charming than the glaring, dazzling brilliance of arc lamps.

"I'd give a thousand quid to know how they get this light" said Lord Dorrimore, gazing upwards, and shading his eyes with his hands. "It's a wonderful illuminant, old man."

"You are right, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "Perhaps, before we leave El Dorado, we may be able to solve the mystery. I am greatly impressed—I am interested in everything. Without a doubt, this is the most remarkable experience I have ever entered upon in all my life."

"Hear, hear, sir!"

"There are so many marvels, guv'nor, that we are getting rather accustomed to them," I remarked. "Just imagine what a terrific sensation will be caused when we get back—when we tell the story of this strange city to the civilised world!"

"You're taking it for granted that we shall get back," put in Handforth cheerfully.

"Oh, we shall get back all right," declared Tommy Watson. "I'm certain."

"Well, it's good to know that we've got an optimist in the party," said Lord Dorrimore. "Good for you, Watson. Shall we get back? Of course we shall! Shall we put salt on the Comte de Plessigny's tail? You bet your sweet life! Are we down-hearted?"

"No!" roared the juniors, in one voice.

"Good!" grinned Dorrie. "That's the style, my sons! Keep a good

heart, and we'll be as right as nine-pence!"

"And the count will get it in the neck before long!" said Handforth grimly. "My hat! I'd just like to give him a punch on the nose!"

"I wasn't aware of the fact that the count's nose was situated in the vicinity of his neck!" remarked Lord Dorrimore calmly. "Well, never mind, let's get on. I'm quite keen to see some more of this place!"

We progressed down the wide streets, and from that moment onwards we were enthralled by all we saw.

Strangely enough, there were only a few of the giants about, and all of them were men. We naturally assumed—and probably correctly—that the majority of the inhabitants were asleep, as all good people should be in the middle of the night.

But why those great flaring lights were burning on an empty city we did not know.

"I can't understand it, sir," I remarked. "What's the idea of having all these lights going now? There's hardly a soul about, and they're simply wasted!"

"My dear Nipper, in just the same way, the majority of the lights of London are wasted between the hours of two a.m. and five a.m.," said Nelson Lee. "How many people do you see about the streets of London in the small hours of the morning? And yet all the street lamps are burning, are they not?"

"Yes, that's quite right, sir" I admitted. "I hadn't thought of that."

"There is another thing," said Nelson Lee. "We have seen that there are many terrible monsters in this land. We have killed an object which closely resembles a pterodactyl, and, outside the city, we encountered a land monster of appalling proportions. It is quite likely that these lights are kept burning in order to keep those flying lizards away. The tremendously high walls are effective enough against the creatures that can only move on land."

"Oh give them a rest!" said Lord Dorrimore. "Just look down this avenue, old man. Did you ever see anythin' so positively beautiful?"

We all paused, and gazed down the long avenue which Lord Dorrimore had indicated. It branched off at right angles, and there were the same great pillars lining the sides of the road.



The place was a gorgeous paradise of tropical growth. Palms, lovely flowering creepers, and other specimens of vegetation which were a sheer delight to the eye.

The air was calm and mild, and overhead the stars were shining with extreme brilliance. It was a night of glory, and we were enchanted.

We decided to pass down this avenue, and we were slow in doing so, for at almost every yard we were compelled to pause, to feast our eyes upon some fresh wonder.

"What's that queer glow, right in front?" asked Watson, after a while. "Haven't you seen it, Nipper?"

"Oh, some more of these exaggerated lamp-posts, I suppose," I said.

"No, I don't see how that can be," said Watson. "This glow is a different colour; it's more reddish. And it flickers about like the light from a blast furnace."

"Yes, I've noticed it," put in Lord Dorrimore. "Well, if we have patience, we shall see. We're goin' directly towards the glow, so it won't be long before we know more."

We walked on, and I was certainly interested in the glow which Tommy Watson had pointed out. It was very ruddy, and the effect on the atmosphere was peculiar. Not only this, but we became aware that the air itself was warmer, and now and again a tremendously hot wave came surging down towards us on the breeze.

"Very curious," remarked Nelson Lee. "I must confess that I am puzzled, boys."

The avenue continued on, and it rose slightly at the other end, and we walked up this rise with feelings of expectation. "But we certainly did not have the slightest idea of the fresh marvel which was to be unfolded before our gaze.

For having reached the summit of that rise, we found ourselves looking down into a deep hollow—a circular pit, as it were, which was brilliantly illuminated. And the air there was overpoweringly hot. We perspired freely.

But we did not think of this. We were astounded by the sight which was in front of us.

Right in the centre of this hollow, there was a boiling, bubbling pool. Not an atom of steam arose, however, and I was at a loss for a moment or two.

The liquid which boiled so furiously shimmered and glistened in the most bewildering fashion, and it was a marvellous sight.

"Upon my soul!" said Nelson Lee.

"It is molten metal!"

"My hat!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Molten metal!"

"But what can it be? What kind of metal?" asked McClure.

Nobody replied. We were examining the place with intense interest. And we saw that all the sides of the hollow were formed into great steps and ornamental tiers. And these very steps and tiers glistened yellow, and they were of gold.

Gold!

There was no getting away from the fact. It was the truth, astounding though it seemed. Those massive steps were made of solid gold. And at the foot of them bubbled and boiled the amazing pool of molten metal. The heat rose up in overpowering waves, startling us, but we did not care. We were all excited—we were all intensely interested. And we did not remain still for long.

Nelson Lee led the way down those great stairs, and as we drew nearer and nearer to the molten pool, the heat almost suffocated us.

Then the lake seemed to writhe itself into fury for a moment. The bubbles were greatly increased, and there was a curious thudding, splashing noise. One splash of the metal came whirling right over, and fell about thirty feet away from us, on one of the steps. Tiny splashes were spluttered out, one of them falling fairly near to us.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "This—this metal, Dorrie, is gold!"

"Gold!"

"By the Lord Harry, so it is!"

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"Great doughnuts!"

We were almost stupified for a moment. That great bubbling pool of metal was pure gold! There must have been hundreds and hundreds of tons there, and it seemed that it was a never ending supply.

I found myself almost dizzy, thinking about it. Obviously, this was a volcanic phenomenon of some kind. And I found a ready explanation for all the gold ornaments and gold pillars with which El Dorado was liberally beauti-

fied. Gold, in this city, was like common soil in England.

The Arzacs, indeed, could take as much of this gold as they chose, and the pool never grew smaller. As they took the gold, so it filled up again, and thus provided a never-ending supply.

I was reminded of the famous lake of molten pitch. I forget the name of it at the moment, but such a lake actually exists. No matter how much pitch is removed, the lake remains at the same level.

"It's staggering, sir," I said, in an awed voice. "Why, if we can only get away from this place and return to civilisation, we shall all be millionaires!"

"My dear boy, gold is not a light metal, and it cannot be transported easily," said Nelson Lee. "At the same time, there are riches here which exist in no other spot on earth. It is the most wonderful place in creation!"

"It's a pity we can't take a few shiploads of it to England," said Lord Dorrimore regretfully. "I'm fed up with currency notes, by gad! If we could only supply the British Government with a lot of this stuff, we should get the good old sovereigns back again."

"I'm afraid gold would be valueless, practically, if there was an endless supply," smiled Nelson Lee. "But just look at that!"

The gov'nor pointed upwards, and we all saw what had attracted his attention. Stretched right across the pool, from one summit of the hollow to the other, was a swaying bridge. It was composed of many glistening wires, and it seemed to have a floor to it. It was not very wide, but in the centre it expanded itself, so to speak, providing a fair-sized platform.

Standing in the very centre of this platform was one of the giant Arzacs, and he appeared to be wearing a glittering coat of mail—a kind of armour—and he was casting little golden discs into the pool steadily and without ceasing.

The little discs went fluttering down, and they disappeared into the boiling mass, and the whole proceeding was kept up continuously in a dreamy kind of manner. We watched with great interest, wondering what it could mean.

"There is no doubt, boys, that this is some religious ceremony," remarked Nelson Lee, after a short while. "Just in the same manner that some religions demand the burning of incense, so the

religion of the Arzacs must demand that these golden discs shall be thrown down into the molten pool. It is all very impressive, and all very interesting."

"An' somehow I don't think that we are very safe here," remarked Lord Dorrimore. "If you ask me, Lee, the best thing we can do is to retire as gracefully as possible."

"Thou art surely wise in thy words, O N'Kose," rumbled Umlosi. "For me-thinks there is danger near by."

I looked round, and saw that Lord Dorrimore had not spoken without reason. We were standing about half way down the series of great golden steps, and when I looked up I saw that a number of giants were above us, and, moreover, they were coming down slowly and deliberately. Each man was attired in the same glittering gold armour as the man on the bridge. It was quite obvious that they were hostile.

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Handforth. "We'd better bunk."

But it was impossible to bunk, as we very soon found out. The giants swooped down upon us abruptly, and, although we attempted to flee, we were too late.

After a sharp scrap, we were recaptured. Umlosi, perhaps, fought more vigorously than anybody else, but, giant of strength though he was, he was quite helpless in the grasp of two of these Arzacs. We were all prisoners within a minute.

And Nelson Lee realised the truth.

This lake was sacred. It was the god of the Arzacs.

And we had sinned against the sacred law by venturing near the place. Nelson Lee had not looked on the matter in this light at first, but now he saw that there was no other explanation.

"I am sorry, boys, to have brought you here," said the gov'nor quietly. "However, it will probably make very little difference."

"Of course not, sir," said Fatty Little. "I expect we shall be taken back to that prison now, and it's quite likely that they'll give us some grub to get on with."

This cheerful prospect, however, did not materialise, for something of a far more dramatic nature took place.

We were led up the tiers of gold, and then taken round until we came to an end of the swaying bridge. Then, one by one, we were forced to walk along. Our thoughts were rather chaotic as we passed along that perilous bridge. Right



beneath us boiled and bubbled the molten gold. A false step would have meant instant death—a terrible death, indeed!

And Nelson Lee had a dreadful thought.

The gold worshippers had been offended, and their plan was to cast us down from the platform into the molten mass below!

When we arrived at the central platform, we were halted, and stood in a group. The Arzacs talked together in low, gruff tones. They were planning something.

What was to be our fate?

## CHAPTER V.

### THE COUNT MAKES PREPARATIONS.

**T**HE Peladas, although a tributary of the Amazon, was a much smaller river than the Majarra. It entered the Amazon about sixteen miles lower down than the Majarra, and its course was almost concealed by tropical growth. Any steamer passing up and down the Amazon would hardly notice the Peladas. It was practically a hidden river.

But, at the same time, it was large enough for a small steam launch to negotiate. And a vessel of this type, with the name Sunbeam painted on its bows, was anchored near the left-hand shore, about twenty miles up from the Amazon.

It was dawn, or just after, and several men were lounging about the deck, smoking, chatting, and quite idle. Two of them, in white drill suits and peaked caps, were apparently British, but they did not look to be very choice examples of British manhood.

All the other men were swarthy-looking ruffians, and they were natives of South America, one or two Spanish-speaking, and the others half-breed Indians.

And while they were lounging about on the deck of the launch, a curious throbbing hum sounded, and very shortly afterwards a graceful shape appeared in the sky.

It was the Adventurer, Lord Dorriamore's airship.

But on board was the Comte de Plessigny. Only a short while before he had left the Majarra. He had departed from the Wanderer, after giving Captain Burton six hours' grace.

The airship descended gracefully and gently, and at length came to earth on a bare patch of ground not far from the shore. By the time it touched the grass practically every member of the Sunbeam's crew was ashore, waiting to lend a hand.

It did not take long to have the airship secured, so that it was safe, and then the Count de Plessigny stepped out and shook the hand of one of the men in white drill.

"Rather surprised to see me, Captain Snagg, eh?" exclaimed the Count in his smooth, charming voice. "You hardly expected me to come in this way?"

"Well, sir, as a matter of fact I didn't!" said Captain Snagg. "What's the idea? What's the meaning of it, sir?"

"I will explain everything when we get on board," said the Comte de Plessigny. "There is much to talk about, captain, and we have not much time to lose. You have been idle for some time, but now there will be plenty of work—for you and for every other member of the crew. My plans have been progressing with wonderful smoothness."

"I'm glad to hear that, sir," said Captain Snagg. "But this airship! Well, it fairly beats me! You went away in an aeroplane——"

"Yes, it undoubtedly seems very strange to you," smiled the Count. "However, there is a perfectly natural explanation, and I shall give it to you as soon as ever we get on board the launch."

Before very long the skipper had taken the Comte de Plessigny over the short stretch of water to the launch. And then they went down into the captain's cabin, and the other man in white drill accompanied them. The three sat down at the table, and refreshed themselves with some whisky.

"Some work on hand, sir?" said the third man. "What kind of work?"

"You will understand soon enough, Cradley," replied the Comte de Plessigny calmly. "When I engaged you, I did so on the distinct understanding that you were to have extremely high wages, and that you were to ask no questions. You may find it necessary to undergo certain risks, but, at the same time, I will pay you extra money. If this affair goes through as I want it to go through, you will both be rich for the remainder of your lives."

"What do you call rich, sir?" asked Captain Snagg.

"I mean that you will be millionaires."

"By thunder!"

"Millionaires, sir?" asked Cradley incredulously.

"That is what I said," replied the Count. "And I mean it—every word! But listen, and I will explain. I have a great deal to tell you."

It was characteristic of the Count to treat this whole affair in such a matter-of-fact manner. One might have supposed that he was merely discussing a little expedition in order to get some orchid or to capture some very choice specimen of the butterfly group. The Count was quite cool, and he spoke evenly and in a well-modulated voice.

Without undue haste, he told his two underlings the main facts concerning the position. They were soon in possession of the truth.

At least, they knew everything that the Comte de Plessigny wanted to know.

For example, he told them that he had transplanted Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and many others across the swamp, and had left them there. He had captured the airship, and he was using it for his own purposes. The Count did not mention that a wonderful city existed beyond the swamp. It was not necessary for him to go into such details as those.

Captain Snagg and his crew were quite unaware of the real truth in that respect. They did not know a word about that wonderful city of gold, otherwise the Count might not have dealt with them so easily. He told them as much as was necessary, and no more.

"At the moment, I have captured the chief members of the party," declared the Count. "Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee and two of the expert mechanics are quite helpless. But that is not sufficient, Captain Snagg! I intend to make a clean sweep."

"A clean sweep, sir?"

"Exactly!"

"I don't quite understand."

"You will understand very soon," interrupted the Count. "As I have told you, the Wanderer is lying some distance up the Majarra, and there is a considerable crew on board, with Captain Burton at their head. There are a good many other boys, too, to say nothing of quite a number of ladies. The party, taken altogether, is a large one."

"And they have all got to be captured?"

"Yea."

"It's easier said than done, sir," declared Snagg, shaking his head.

"Nonsense!" said Plessigny. "You do not understand what my plan is. I have informed Captain Burton that he has six hours' grace, but that was merely bluff on my part. I shall make no attack until dawn to-morrow morning. And then it will be such an attack that success is bound to reward us."

"I hope so, sir," said Captain Snagg.

"There will be nothing easier than to carry out my scheme," proceeded the Comte de Plessigny. "At dawn to-morrow morning we will make a concerted attack upon the yacht. It will be an attack in force, and you must thoroughly understand that every member of the party is to be taken prisoner without exception. At the same time, nobody must be injured, and nobody must be killed. I wish to impress upon you most solemnly that I will have no bloodshed."

"I don't see how we can do the trick otherwise, sir," said the captain.

"Don't you?" smiled the Count. "Well, perhaps you are rather in the dark at the present, my friend. I have a very particular reason for wanting every member of Lord Dorrimore's party in my power. I intend to transplant every man, woman, and child across the swamp I have already referred to. They will get left there, perfectly safe and perfectly healthy. But, at the same time, they will be unable to get away—until it pleases me to release them."

"Well, it's none of my business, sir," said Captain Snagg. "You're paying me well to keep my mouth shut, and I don't want to interfere. I've had a hard enough time the most of my life, and now that I've got a chance of making a comfortable fortune—well, I'm after it with both hands. I'm at your service to do what you require, but I don't want no killin'."

"Neither do I," said the count. "So we are both agreed upon that point. Your work will consist of capturing the entire yacht's company. When that is completed, you will have further instructions. It is not necessary for me to give them now. Let the capture be made first."

"But how can we do it, sir?" asked the captain. "There are only ten of us here—Cradley and myself, three others—"



throats from Manaos, and five half-breed Indians. We're only a handful, all said and done. I don't see how we can——"

"Tut, tut!" interrupted the Count impatiently. "It does not matter to me whether you see or whether you do not see, Snagg. Please remember that I am giving instructions, and that it is your duty to carry them out!"

"Very well, sir," said the captain gruffly.

"To begin with, you must send your half-breed Indians out into the forest without delay," went on the Count. "They are to visit every Indian village in the surrounding districts. They will take all manner of cheap jewellery with them, and their task will be to obtain an army of savage Indians—the more the better. I have reasoned it all out, and I am quite certain that we can raise an army of at least five hundred before dawn."

The captain scratched his head.

"Yes, there's that way, sir," he admitted. "I hadn't thought of that. But it's just as likely that these darned Indians will turn on us!"

"Ridiculous!" said Plessigny. "You will be able to handle them quite well, captain. Well, when you have obtained this army, the attack will commence. Meanwhile, of course, the Sunbeam will be taken round to the Majarra. The journey will not take so very long. The Indians will go straight across the forest to the spot where the Wanderer is anchored. There will be many other Indians in canoes, and the launch will be there. Taking everything into consideration, the battle cannot last for long. Those on board the yacht will be simply overwhelmed. The numbers against it will be so superior that it will be impossible for us to fail."

"But I expect they've got guns on board, sir," said the skipper.

"Undoubtedly," agreed the Comte de Plessigny. "At the same time, it doesn't matter a toss whether a number of our Indians are killed. One big rush—in which the Indians will take part—will be sufficient. Once they are on board, and the yacht is in their possession—well, we can move up at our leisure. I tell you candidly, Snagg, there will be no risk for yourself."

"Well, that's one good thing, sir," said the skipper. "I'm not particularly hankering after an early death. But this attack will have to be planned out carefully."

"It is going to be planned out carefully," said the count. "With such numbers, we are bound to succeed. I shall be in the airship, and I shall want Cradley with me, because he is quite a clever engineer. And I shall direct operations from the air. If necessary, I will drop some bombs and assist you."

"Well, it seems like a certainty, sir," remarked Cradley. "I'm game for anything you like."

The count commenced to go into details, and the three men sat down there in the cabin, talking over the whole plan, and making it thorough.

The count did not explain to his underlings that he intended taking all the prisoners over to El Dorado. They would be transported, in batches, by the airship.

And, once there, in that wonderful city, they would be cut off from civilisation. The terrible swamp lay between El Dorado and the outside world. It was a swamp which completely surrounded that strange land, and escape was out of the question.

The count would take good care to completely destroy his aeroplane, and to sail away in Lord Dorrimore's airship. The whole yachting party would then be marooned, and not a soul on earth would know of their predicament. They would vanish completely and utterly from the face of the world.

This was the Comte de Plessigny's pleasant little scheme.

But, as I have said, he did not explain it fully to Captain Snagg and Cradley, the engineer.

Their task was to attack the yacht, and to make prisoners of everybody on board.

An hour later there were many signs of activity on the River Peladas. The half-breed Indians were setting off on their mission, with the intention of getting up an army of savages.

The airship's tanks had just been filled with petrol, for, of course, the launch contained large supplies, having been brought by the count for use in the aeroplane.

This was a point which had been overlooked by Captain Burton. The captain, of course, had no idea that the count had headquarters near by.

And so, while the Wanderer was preparing for battle within six hours, the Comte de Plessigny was preparing to

attack the yacht at dawn the following morning.

And, by all appearances, it would be such an attack that failure would be almost impossible.

In any case, there was some grim excitement in store!

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE DISCOVERY OF COL. KERRIGAN, D.S.O.

**T**HE heat was positively appalling.

It rose up from that mass of molten gold in stifling, suffocating waves. Yet the Arzacs themselves did not seem to be inconvenienced in the slightest degree.

It was almost impossible for us to breathe.

We took in the air with gulping gasps, and the perspiration was literally pouring from us in streams. Our mouths and throats were terribly dry, and there was an acrid flavour in our mouths.

"What on earth are they going to do to us?" asked Handforth, in a scared voice. "I—I'm feeling a bit queer, you know!"

"Boys, you must be brave!" said Nelson Lee quietly. "It seems that we are in a terrible position, and resistance is useless. A fight on this strained platform could only end in death for us all. For, once this bridge commenced oscillating, we should all be jerked off, and——"

"Don't, sir!" exclaimed Sir Montie, with a gulp.

"How these chaps can stand the heat is beyond me!" I remarked, panting hard. "I don't think I shall be able to stand this for long!"

"You see, Nipper, these giants are evidently the keepers of the sacred lake," said Nelson Lee. "They have accustomed themselves to this heat, and they can live in it without feeling any undue effect. It is very different with us. We have not been used to living in such a terrible atmosphere as this."

Lord Dorrimore seized the gov'nor's fist.

"In case, old man!" he murmured. "One never knows!"

I did not miss that significant handshake, and it did not make me feel particularly cheerful. I glanced round, and saw that the gold-robed giants had

finished their confab, and they were now turning to us.

"Now for it!" I muttered. "Oh, I can't believe——"

"We ain't going to be chucked down!" shouted Church hoarsely. "Oh, it's too—too awful! To be thrown down into the molten metal——"

"Hush, my lad—hush!" said Nelson Lee.

One of the Arzac priests—as I judged them to be—pointed straight down to the surface of the boiling lake. Then he said something quickly in his own tongue. It sounded a mere gabble to us, but the man kept on, and his voice rose and fell as he spoke. It seemed that he was angry at times, but neither he nor his companions laid a finger upon us.

And, finally, to our amazement, we were seized. But we were not thrown over into that terrible cauldron. We were led along the bridge, and into safety once more. We were so relieved, so enormously glad, that we hardly had a word to say. It was as though we had been rescued from certain death.

We had been quite wrong in our assumption that we were to be thrown into the lake of molten gold. And it was rather difficult to understand why we had been taken to the platform at all.

The most obvious solution seemed to be that the gold worshippers had desired to point out to us that if we ever committed such a crime again, we should be thrown down. It was a kind of warning—just to scare us.

In any case, we were tremendously thankful to be out of the ghastly thing.

The cool of the night air seemed to be almost chilly after the terrible heat in the vicinity of the boiling lake of gold. But we were soon warm again, for we were not allowed to rest.

Four of the gold priests had appeared, and we were completely surrounded. We were marched down the big streets, with a complete bodyguard of these giants. They set the pace, and it was almost necessary for us to go at the double, in order to keep up. And we were compelled to keep up, for there were more giants in the rear.

As I have said, we were surrounded.

Through deserted street after street we were taken, and then, at last, we found ourselves in front of a huge building.



It was not the same place that we had entered before. This building was much larger, and the gold ornamentations were not quite so plentiful. The place, in fact, looked very grim and forbidding.

There seemed to be no doorway, but, after waiting for a moment or two, this was supplied. A huge portion of the marble rolled back, revealing a tremendously wide aperture. And through this we were marched, finding ourselves in total darkness.

Within the building, however, we soon found that there was light, and, again, it was supplied by the curious, orange-coloured balls of fire. We were left in a big apartment by ourselves for some time.

"Well, we move about a bit, that's one thing," remarked Lord Dorrimore. "We've had a brush with a pterodactyl, we've wandered through the city, we've seen the lake of gold—an' we nearly dropped into it—an' now we've come to a different prison altogether. Upon my soul, Lee, this is what I call seein' life!"

"We're in an awful mess, Dorrie," I remarked.

"No worse than it was before," said his lordship. "When I get back to England, an' when I settle down to a quiet country life, I shall make it my business to write a terrific book about this place."

"Yes, I can see you doing it!" I said, with a grin. "You couldn't write a book to save your skin, Dorrie. You'd get to about ten lines, and then you'd dry up—and remain dried up!"

"Somehow, I've got an idea that you're right," said Lord Dorrimore. "By the way, how on earth do these merchants get this queer light of theirs? Look at it, Lee! It's burnin' as steadily as a rock, an' there's nothin' there! It's simply a ball of fire on the top of a rock pillar!"

"I imagine that the light is supplied by a kind of gas," remarked Nelson Lee. "That can be the only explanation, Dorrie. Either that, or each of these pillars contains a reservoir of some liquid which burns. We cannot tell, of course, until we make a close examination by daylight."

"And there doesn't seem much chance of being able to do that, sir," remarked Handforth.

Fatty Little looked about anxiously.

"There doesn't seem to be any sign of anything to eat," he remarked gloomily. "It's hours and hours since we fed, and I'm as hungry as a hunter. I don't care what the stuff's like—anything's all serene when a fellow's half-starved!"

Just then the door was reopened, and the gold-attired Arzacs once more appeared. We were surrounded again, and we were taken out of the chamber, along several passages, and then up a great circular staircase.

Up and up we went, higher and higher, until we knew that we were getting near the top.

The steps were rather difficult to negotiate, because they had been made to fit the legs of the Arzacs. By the time we had finished the climb, we were utterly fagged out. Fatty Little, indeed, had to be helped up the remaining fifty feet.

And now we found ourselves right on the roof of the building. It was perfectly flat, with great parapets, and we could see the whole city of El Dorado stretched out all around us—a truly marvellous sight.

We had come up to the roof through a tremendous hole, but as soon as ever we were there, a great slab of stone was placed in position—a slab which not twenty men could lift. It went down gradually, and finally slammed to with a thud.

"Another respite," remarked Dorrie. "Well, I think I shall get some sleep as soon as possible. We're on the roof now, an' we're just as well off as we were before. The only way down from this place is by jumpin' over the parapet."

Lord Dorrimore was quite correct.

The roof was perfectly square, absolutely bare, and there was now no sign whatever of the opening through which we had come. This prison was quite as secure as the one we had left earlier in the evening.

But I am wrong. The roof was not absolutely bare, as I have just said. Over on the far side there seemed to be a kind of shed; a place which was built on the roof itself. This, also, was of stone, and we could see a door in it.

"I wonder what that place can be, sir?" I asked, nodding towards the little building.

"I'm sure I do not know, Nipper,"

said Nelson Lee. "But you may be quite certain that there is no way to escape in that direction. I think that Dorrie's idea is a good one. We shall all be well advised to get some sleep while we can. As for escaping, that is out of the question. We must simply trust to luck."

"That's the way to look at it, old man," said Dorrie. "It's no good sittin' around an' mopin. I was just thinkin' — By gad!"

His lordship paused, and he uttered that exclamation in real surprise.

For just at that moment a figure had appeared. It had emerged from the little building on the other side of the roof. And the strange point about the figure was that he was small—he was, in fact, no larger than ourselves. And he was a white man.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "He's not a giant at all!"

"Apparently not," said Nelson Lee, moving forward a few paces. "I am just wondering if——"

"By jingo!" murmured Tommy Watson. "He must be the count!"

"My hat!"

"If he is the count, my sons," said Lord Dorrimore grimly, "we'll get hold of him, an' we'll pitch him over these battlements down into the street below!"

"I was not thinking of the count," said Nelson Lee. "Does it not strike you, Dorrie, that this white man might possibly be——"

"Colonel Kerrigan!" roared Lord Dorrimore.

As his lordship uttered the words, we saw that the figure on the other side of the roof had come to an abrupt halt. He stood still for at least a second. Then he flung his arms into the air, and came running over the flat roof towards us.

"You are English—you are English!" he shouted, in a high-pitched voice, filled with excitement and amazement.

"It is the colonel!" I exclaimed. "Well, I'm dashed!"

A moment later the man was with us. And he came to a halt, and looked from Nelson Lee to Lord Dorrimore, and then he gazed upon the juniors. Finally, he turned back to Dorrie, and made a helpless gesture.

"I—I don't understand!" he said. "You—you are English! I can see it! "What does it mean? What are you doing here—in this place, thousands of

miles from civilisation? I—I must be dreaming!"

"I think you are Colonel Kerrigan?" said Nelson Lee quietly.

"Yes—yes," replied the other. "That is my name!"

"Then I am delighted to meet you, Colonel Kerrigan!" said Nelson Lee warmly. "It may interest you to know that this gentleman on my left is Lord Dorrimore, and it was he who organised an expedition to search the Amazon region for any sign of you. I am most happy to find that we have been successful!"

"I cannot believe it!" gasped Colonel Kerrigan. "It—it seems altogether too absurd—too wonderful! My dear, dear friends! What can I say! How can I ever thank you?"

"My dear colonel, you'd better not start thankin' us yet," said Lord Dorrimore, as he took the colonel's hand. "We're in the same wood as you are—we're prisoners. An', unless a mighty stroke of luck comes our way—well, we shall all end our days in this city!"

"And—and you have risked your lives you have risked your liberty—in order to search for me!" exclaimed Colonel Kerrigan, with a break in his voice. "It is so good—so wonderfully fine of you! My dear friends, I cannot find words to express what is in my heart! I only hope that you will be able to understand, that you will be able to realise that I am overwhelmed with gratitude, and that——"

"It's all right, old man!" interrupted Dorrie. "There's no need to make a song about it, you know. We're all enjoyin' the experience. We think it's a first-class trip—what do you say, boys?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" declared Handforth promptly.

"It would be all right if we could only get something to eat, sir!" said Fatty Little. "I'm nearly starving, you know! Yaroooooh! You—you silly ass, Handforth! What the dickens did you want to clump on my foot for?"

"If you mention grub again, you greedy porpoise, I'll punch your nose!" said Handforth darkly. "We're fed up with grub!"

"I'm not," groaned Fatty, "I only wish I was fed up!"

We all looked at Colonel Kerrigan with great interest. There was a good deal of light on the roof there, reflected



from the thousands of fire-balls, which still blazed out all over the city.

And we could see that the colonel was not an elderly man, as we had pictured him. His age was certainly no more than forty-five, although there were streaks of grey over his temples. He did not look nearly so old as his sister—although she was his twin.

But I could see a very striking resemblance. He was an exact replica of Aunt Janet—except that his features were more firm—more determined, and of course, bigger. And he had a large moustache, and a neatly trimmed beard.

"My dear friends, you must tell me how it is that you came to search for me?" he exclaimed. "This is the very last thing I expected—although I have witnessed many things recently which caused me to believe that certain wonderful events were taking place. But only during this week or two. Until then I was hopeless—a prisoner without a single chance of obtaining his freedom."

"I suppose you received hope when you first caught sight of the aeroplane?" asked Lord Dorrimore.

"Yes—yes!" said the colonel. "But I soon discovered to my cost, that the occupant of the aeroplane was an enemy, and not a friend, as I had at first assumed. And then the airship came over—and I was filled with wonder. I could not imagine who the occupants of the airship were, and how it had arrived here."

Nelson Lee did most of the talking, and he soon put Col. Kerrigan in possession of the facts. He explained how Aunt Janet had had the wonderful visions which had caused Lord Dorrimore to seriously consider an expedition.

Then Nelson Lee went on to relate how the yacht had been fitted out, how she had been brought up the Majarra, and how the first trial trip in the airship had led to the discovery of the swamp, and the strange country that lay beyond.

The colonel was enthralled by all that we told him. And he was deeply concerned when he learned that the Comte de Plessigny had gained possession of the airship, and that we were also prisoners in El Dorado. Nelson Lee described what we had seen—how we had wandered about the city, marvelling at all the wonderful sights.

"It is only to be expected that you would wonder," declared Col. Kerrigan.

"This is a city of marvels, my dear friends. I have been here three or four years, and I have seen everything. I know a very great deal about this city, and a very great deal about its people. I am able to speak the Arzac language fluently, and, until the count arrived, I was an honoured man."

"Then you have not been kept prisoner all the time, sir?" I asked.

"Good gracious, no!" said the colonel. "I have been treated as one of the priests of the golden lake would have been treated. I have had everything of the best, I have been respected, honoured, and liked by all. These Arzacs are a peaceful race—except when their blood is up, and then—take heed! For, as peaceful as they are usually, they can be just as fierce, and just as warlike as the Huns themselves. I am referring to the Huns of old—not the modern variety. It is a wonder that I can speak English so well, after having lived among these Arzacs for so many years. But I have taken good care to use my own language every day, so that I should not forget."

"And how did you first reach El Dorado, sir?" asked Tommy Watson.

"I arrived by means of an invention of my own," smiled the colonel. "Really, I cannot blame anybody for the predicament I found myself in. I was keen on exploring—I was intent upon finding out what lay beyond the mighty Matto Grosso—that impenetrable barrier which almost bars exploration. In short, I constructed a huge box kite, and it was fully capable of lifting at least four men in the air. So I knew that it would be capable of carrying my own weight. Perhaps you will say that it was a very foolhardy undertaking?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I am afraid, colonel, that I can only say that your scheme was, indeed, foolhardy," said the gov'nor. "I judge that you had a certain reason?"

"I had!" said the colonel. "For some time I had been down with the fever, and I was tended by a party of Indians while my partner went down the Amazon in our launch in order to obtain medical supplies. These Indians only tended to me very carelessly—they did not seem to care whether I lived or died."

"And you were helpless?"

"Quite!" said Colonel Kerrigan. "The Indians cared for me so little, in

fact, that they departed on a hunting trip without notice, leaving me utterly alone. Then, by great good fortune, another small party of Indians arrived on the scene, and they were more considerate—they were kind hearted. One of their own number met with an accident, that day, I remember, and was killed. They buried him quite close to the spot where I was lying, and they took me in their canoes, and we moved up the river."

"Ah, that accounts for it!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore shrewdly. "Don't you see, Lee?"

"Yes, I do!" agreed Nelson Lee. "It was reported, colonel, that you had died, and that many natives had seen your grave. I am now beginning to understand how the story got about. Those Indians must have returned from their hunting trip, and they found the grave of the man who met with an accident. Being on the same spot where you were lying ill, it was only natural for them to suppose that the grave was yours—and that you had died."

"Yes, no doubt that is correct," said Colonel Kerrigan. "Well, my dear friends, I was taken far up the Majarra, and I recovered my health and strength in the native village of the hospitable Indians. And it was one of their number who told me of a terrible swamp which lay beyond the forest. It was a swamp such as I had never heard of—and I was intensely curious to see it. I was even told that solid ground lay beyond—but it was all rather indistinct. To cut the story short, I built this kite, and one day, when the wind was blowing strong, I allowed myself to be carried up. I was carried over the forest, high in the air, and I went completely over the dreadful swamp you have already referred to. Finally, I was driven to earth in this strange country of the Arzacs."

"That is what I imagined," said Nelson Lee.

"I came to ground very heavily," said the colonel. "In doing so, I broke a leg, a rib, and was severely battered and bruised. For a long time I lay helpless—then a party of these giant Arzacs came across me, and they tenderly carried me into the city—where I was cared for, and restored to health. The Arzacs treated me kindly, and they refused to let me leave their land, because I had proved myself to be

very useful in dealing with certain medical cases. I happened to have a small wallet of drugs on me, and I was regarded as a kind of magician, and the Arzacs had no intention of losing me."

"And so you remained here, making your home among these people?"

"What else could I do?" asked Kerrigan. "I must say that I was fairly happy, although I had a terrible longing to return to civilisation. I saw my dear sister appear in dreams. I thought of her constantly—always. And I thought of my darling son, Stanley. Is he well, do you know?"

"He is on board the yacht at this moment," said Nelson Lee. "And young Stanley, colonel, is in the pink of condition, and tremendously eager to find some sign of his father."

The colonel's eyes were rather moist.

"The dear, dear lad!" he exclaimed softly. "He must be getting quite a young man now! What a joyful day it will be when I see— But I must not speak with too much certainty. I was telling you about myself. Yes, I remember. One day came this base scoundrel in his aeroplane."

The colonel's eyes glittered, and his teeth were clenched.

"The infernal brute!" he went on fiercely. "He caused me to be put into captivity at once. He told these simple giants that I was a wizard—that I was a man of wickedness. And he gave orders that I should be imprisoned. As he had come by aeroplane, the Arzacs were greatly impressed. They regarded the man as a god—they thought he was something more than human—and they made him their king on the spot. And that is the position you now find. My friends, I am doubtful—I am sorely troubled. I fear that we shall not be able to escape from this prison."

"I wouldn't mind so much about escaping, sir," remarked Fatty Little, in a hollow voice. "But I do wish we could have some grub!"

"Oh, ye gods!" groaned Dorrie. "He's at it again!"

"Well, sir, I'm hungry!" complained Fatty. "I haven't had any food for hours and hours and hours! A fellow can't exist on thin air, you know. I'm bigger than most chaps, and I want more grub to keep me alive! Unless something



comes before an hour has passed, I shall faint away!"

Colonel Kerrigan laughed.

"If that is your trouble, my lad, I think I can come to the rescue," he said.

"Eh?" gasped Fatty. "Have—have you got any grub, sir?"

"Yes——"

"Hurrah!" roared Fatty. "Oh, great coconuts! Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think Fatty would ask for grub if he'd committed a murder, had been sentenced to death, and was on the giddy scaffold!" remarked Handforth.

"I've never seen such a glutton!"

"Where's the grub, sir?" asked Fatty eagerly.

"It is in my little prison," replied the colonel. "If you will come, I will soon——"

But Fatty was rushing across the roof already, and we grinned as we followed him.

The colonel's prison, we soon found, was quite a bare place. The stone shed, which had been built on the top of the other roof, was a substantial little place, but it was bare and comfortless. There was a good deal of food there—of a variety. The colonel assured us that it was perfectly good and wholesome—and after we had grown accustomed to it we should enjoy it very much.

Fatty seemed to be enjoying it already—without getting accustomed to it at all!

And while we were in El Dorado, exchanging yarns with Colonel Kerrigan, what was happening on the far distant Majarra?

What was happening to The Wanderer?

The skipper had not been idle—and he was taking advantage of every minute. He knew well enough that an attack was coming, and he had sense enough to realise that it would be an attack in force. Not only from the air, but from the river itself. Captain Burton guessed—and guessed correctly—that the enemy would obtain the savages of the Indian tribes which lurked in the dense recesses of the forest.

The St. Frank's fellows, of course, were anxious to lend a hand—they wanted to do something to distinguish themselves. But Captain Burton would not hear of it. At least, not at first. Finally, however, he gave way to a certain extent, and the juniors were given their instructions.

Machine guns, rifles and revolvers were ready, and when nightfall fell over the Majarra, practically everything was ready.

But, so far, there had been no sign.

When darkness came, Captain Burton was on the bridge, and Dr. Brett was with him. Dr. Brett had come out for a holiday, and he felt himself rather lucky to be in all this excitement.

"You really think we shall have some trouble, captain?" he asked.

"There's not the slightest doubt about it, Brett," said the skipper, shaking his head. "There'll be trouble before long—big trouble. We haven't got time to worry about Mr. Lee and the others. We've got our own affairs to look after at the moment. When we have dealt with them—when we have resisted the attack—then we can think about other matters."

Captain Burton was undoubtedly correct.

The attack did come—but not quite so soon as was expected. And when it came, there was terrible strife, and for a long time the issue was in doubt.

But, of course, the Comte de Plessigny did not get his own way—he did not cause the yacht's party to surrender, as he fondly imagined he could do.

At the same time, luck favoured the count to a great extent, and certain events took place which ultimately led to the party on the yacht being conveyed to El Dorado. And then——

But, for the present, I must close this episode. The next episode—as everybody will probably guess—was far more exciting, far more adventurous, and far more wonderful.

Our sojourn in El Dorado had only just commenced!

THE END.

**NEXT WEEK** More Thrilling Adventures, including a spectacular fight on the Majarra, will be told in:

**ABANDONED AMONG THE ARZACS!**



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***A Tale of Life and Adventure in the North-West.***

### INTRODUCTION.

*Two brothers, Jack and Teddy Royce, with their chum, Gerald Telford, are trying their luck in the wilds of North-West Canada. A plan of a gold mine is stolen from them by ruffians. After several adventures the lads eventually capture the villains and hand them over to Tall Wolf, chief of a band of Red Indians. But the ruffians escape, and the three lads realise that no time must be lost in getting to the gold mine at Dead Breed Lake. (Now read on.)*

### How Ted Bagged a Buck Elk.

**T**HE canoe looked like sinking any moment, and it contained, beside the two younger adventurers, all their kit, two of their rifles and ammunition, and a goodly portion of their food supply. Without food, kit, or rifles, they would be in a hopeless plight now, and Gerald and Teddy realised that.

They raised a yell to warn Jack that all was not going on well behind him, then Gerald took command of the situation.

It was wonderful how this pampered youngster had improved in the few short months he had led the rough life of the wilds. At one time, perhaps, he had been short of initiative, inclined to lean on others, to follow rather than to lead. But now he saw clearly what was required of him and Teddy, and the orders he gave the younger Royce were curt and concise.

"Over you go, old chap!" he said. "We'll have to swim. That'll lighten the canoe a lot. Now!"

They rolled overboard and struck the cool waters of the Little Slave with a splash. When they came to the surface again they were swimming one on each side of the canoe, now certainly riding considerably lighter than previously, by reason of the two hundred-odd pounds less weight it had to bear, but still badly waterlogged.

"Get your shoulder under the thing," Gerald panted, doing himself what he told Teddy to do. "We'll have to support the beastly thing, and it's goin' to take some

supporting, too! Now, take it easy, old man!"

It was fortunate they were both good swimmers, for as the canoe settled lower it seemed to bear more heavily on the shoulders of the two boys, who not only strove to support it but tried to coax it nearer the bank, which was a good quarter-mile away from them.

Fortunately the current was not very swift here, and by degrees they managed to succeed. But they were both pretty well winded when at length Gerald ceased swimming with his one free hand, reached up, and grasped an overhanging willow.

Teddy did the same, and for some minutes they hung on, getting their breath back. Then again Gerald spoke.

"Phew!" he said. "That was nip and tuck! I'm afraid everything is wet through! Look at the canoe! It's full. It would have sunk ages ago, old chap, if we hadn't done this. And we aren't safe yet. It'll sink the moment we let it go. I say! Can you reach that spare rope inside?"

Teddy managed to reach over the gunnel and find the loose rope they had there. Again Gerald used his initiative in a manner than would have fetched forth much gracious praise from Jack Royce had he been on the spot to see him. He passed the rope about the canoe, knotted it, and then threw the loose end ashore. A moment later he was out of the water himself, had taken the free end of the rope, and had passed it round the bole of a small tree growing conveniently near. Then he bore back on the rope with all his weight.

"Come ashore now, old sport!" he panted to Teddy. And as Teddy's shoulder freed itself of the weight of the canoe, the youngster saw exactly what Gerald's latest wheeze had meant. The canoe would have sunk right at the water's edge but for that supporting rope.

Teddy came ashore, dripping like a Newfoundland dog, but glowing with excitement. It is to be feared that Teddy flourished on things like this. Anything in the way of a well-ordered, tame life bored him exceedingly. He had been a poor clerk not so



long ago, but then he had been very much like a fish out of water. Now, when he knew he could expect anything to happen, he felt far more at home.

He laughed as he saw their position. Then he gave Gerald a hand with the rope, which was knotted round the tree.

"Now unload the blessed canoe!" ordered Gerald.

Ten minutes later all their effects were spread out on the ground to dry in the sunshine, and the canoe itself had been lifted out of the water and set on the ground, bottom upwards.

By this time, too, Jack Royce had missed his companions, and had reversed his canoe. He paddled slowly upstream, but when he saw Gerald and Teddy on the bank, he quickened his stroke.

"What's up?" he asked, somewhat sharply, for Jack was a fellow who, once he had started on a job, hated to be delayed in its accomplishment.

"Nearly lost the whole giddy outfit," Teddy informed him. "The old tub's got a hole in her big enough to walk through. Jolly lucky for you we managed to save what we did!"

Jack came ashore, and surveyed the mishap silently. He scratched his head for a long while. Then slowly a flush came to his good-looking face, for he realised that all this had come about through sheer neglect on his part.

"Well," he said grimly, at length, "this means a day or two's rest for us—a rest from paddling, anyhow, though we've got some work to do to find suitable birchbark and gum to patch that old jigger up! You did well, you two!"

"Thanks!" said Gerald drily. "Now we'd better see about making a camp here for a day or two. Do you know the right sort of bark to get, and where to look for it?"

"I think so," said Jack. "I'll leave you two here to look after things, while I go and hunt for some. Better get the other canoe ashore, too. I expect that wants overhauling just about as badly. Cheerio, boys, and don't get into mischief!"

"Well, I like that!" Teddy growled, watching his brother's broad back as it disappeared into the woods that fringed the river's bank. "He'll always think we're kids."

"We'll get his canoe ashore, anyhow," Gerald grinned. "And then, I think, while he's away looking for bark and gum, you and I, old sport, might as well go and look for something fresh to eat. I think I'm getting rather sick of bully beef and biscuits and bacon."

Teddy responded to this idea with enthusiasm. Simpson, the surveyor, had been very generous towards this little prospecting party of three in the matter of food, but everything he had given them had been of a "hard" nature, as they say in the Army. The prospect of fresh deermeat, or partridges appealed to the boys.

When they had hauled Jack's canoe ashore, they picked up their rifles, stuffed their

pockets with cartridges, and set off into the woods. They were by this time skilled to some extent in the art—for it surely is an art—of finding their way about in these wild places. They did not forget to take their bearings ere leaving the river-side.

This region, as has been said, was a wilderness, where scarcely ever the foot even of a red man—let alone a white—had trod. This meant, of course, that game was plentiful enough and not too timid for amateur hunters to approach.

Indeed, they had not walked into the bush very far ere Teddy's keen young eyes saw something moving between the trees, less than a hundred yards ahead of him. He took a second glance at this, to assure himself that it was no human shape, then he raised his rifle to his shoulder, and fired.

At once a big buck elk leapt into the air, and came charging towards the plucky little Britisher, who went down on one knee and raised his rifle again.

The buck was plainly badly wounded, but had been maddened by the pain caused by the bullet. This was not the first deer he had had the fierce joy of shooting, and he felt no nervousness about it as he saw this great beast—as big as most horses, with flashing eyes and slashing, razor-like hoofs, come charging full at him, head down, its breath coming from its distended nostrils in thick snorts.

He took aim full at the brute's breast, and fired again. His shot was faultless. It must have killed the buck instantly, for the beautiful creature gave one more convulsive bound forward, then crashed on its side in the undergrowth, not twenty feet from where Teddy knelt, a little breathless, but glowing with triumph.

"Bravo!" Gerald yelled, smiting his little chum on the shoulder. "Old Jack couldn't have done better!"

"We'll show Jack we are big enough to be trusted alone," Teddy grinned, "and that we're quite capable of looking after ourselves—what? He'll be no end pleased over all this fresh grub!"

He was to be forgiven that he felt elation, for his huntcraft had been next door to perfect. Perhaps he wished the conditions would allow him to sever his prize's head from its body and take it home to be stuffed. For this brute's antlers bore eight points each, and would have made a trophy fit to grace any hall.

But the practical side of his kill had to come before the other. He and Gerald set about the somewhat gruesome task of bleeding the carcass and skinning it, after doing which they cut off several prime morsels, and thus loaded, they set off on their return journey to the place where they had left their canoe and their kit.

Their hunt and what had followed had taken up a considerable length of time. They had been absent from the canoes a good two hours ere they reached them again.

(To be continued.)



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