THE St. FRANK'S EXPLORERS!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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WHEN THE EARTH GOES MAD!

REMEMBER those times when you've wanted to go out of doors, and it's started to pour with rain? Remember how you've grumbled about the rotten weather?

Well, next time that happens, think of what might happen to keep you indoors, and thank your stars it's only rain you've got to put up with. For, in foreign countries, things happen to the weather that make it seem as if the earth's gone mad, and it's death, not just a drenching, to venture out of doors!

Florida, where rich Americans spend their summer holidays, is one of these places. At regular intervals the land is swept by tornadoes that would make our worst gales seem like gentle breezes. Two-miles-a-minute gusts lash the land, uprooting every tree, and even blowing down solid, brick-built ten-story skyscrapers. Motor-cars are whirled off the roads and blown bodily through space. On one occasion, a man caught in the open was carried a mile and half through the air before he was flung lifeless back to earth. Some idea of the force of these tornadoes is shown by the fact that branches of trees, torn off by the wind, have been found driven clean through brick-built walls!

Death From the Sky!

In South Africa, a couple of years ago, there was a hailstorm that killed no less than eleven people. The hailstones were nine inches in diameter, and almost as deadly as cannon-balls. Hundreds of cars left parked in the streets were found with the bodywork shattered and great holes gaping in their steel-plating where the lumps of ice had crashed through!

Africa, too, suffers from the world's worst thunderstorms. On one occasion a storm destroyed a million square miles of forest and scrubland in a single day. The lightning flashes struck the forest trees in a hundred different districts, starting fires which ran through the dry undergrowth like a spark rushing along a fuse. And by the time the great blaze had ended a district roughly one thousand miles square—equal to many times the area of the United Kingdom—lay a blackened, smoking ruin.

Nature at its Wettest!

But it is to Australia that we must turn for the worst rainstorms. Just as some parts of that continent suffer from prolonged droughts, so, when the rain comes at last, the long-awaited water pours down in such torrents that it seems as if Nature is trying to make up for the long, dry spell in a single minute. River-beds which have been dry for months fill with rain in an hour, and the flood-waters tear down towards the sea in a solid wall of water. Time and again, travellers trying to cross the dried beds have suddenly found themselves trapped by a flood travelling faster than an express train, and have been drowned before they could reach the banks.

Russia was the scene of the strangest storm in history some centuries ago. A storm of meteorites descended upon the wastelands of the steppes. The result of that storm was only made known to the rest of Europe during this century, when a party of scientists found a great hole in the middle of the remote district where the meteorites had fallen.

There were several smaller holes, but the main one measured over a mile in diameter, and was hundreds of feet deep. If a meteorite of that size fell on London to-day, not a single building in the capital would be left standing, and probably every person in the Home Counties would be killed by the shock of the concussion.

THE ST. FRANK'S EXPLORERS!

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Off to the wilds of Brazil in search of a lost explorer! NIPPER & Co., the chums of St. Frank's, are booked for a thrilling holiday, and you will enjoy every word of their exciting adventures.

(Told by NIPPPER of the St. Frank's Remove.)

CHAPTER 1.

Choosing the Guests!

"BRAZIL!" said Handforth solemnly.

"Eh?"

"The land where the nuts come from!" went on Handforth, thoughtfully stirring his tea. "By George, it'll be the best holiday we've ever had, my sons! It'll whack everything else into a cocked hat!"

Church and McClure grinned.

"We don't know we're going yet," remarked Church.

"Don't know we're going?" repeated Handforth. "What rot! Why, Lord Dorrimore has got everything fixed! He can leave to-morrow, if he wants to. His yacht's waiting at Tilbury, with steam up, and everything prepared for the voyage. Besides, he's definitely decided to go on the trip."

"Well, Nipper said that it wasn't positively fixed, anyhow," said McClure. "Quite apart from that, though, we haven't been invited. We might not go at all."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I'm going, anyway!"

"It doesn't do to take things for granted," said Church.

"Oh, my hat! You chaps make me feel bad!" roared Handforth. "Didn't we go to Africa last year? It's absolutely certain that Lord Dorrimore will include us in the party—at least, he'll include me. He can't very well do without a chap of my ability. I'm always ready to give good advice!"

Church nearly choked himself with a

mouthful of bread-and-butter, and McClure scalded himself with hot tea—both of them in a valiant endeavour to refrain from laughing. Handforth was not a boaster—he really thought that his advice was good.

"Oh, well, we don't want to be talking about it all day long," said McClure. "Let's hope everything turns out as we want, and leave it at that. But if everybody who wants to go is invited, Lord Dorrimore will have to take the whole giddy school!"

"Lord Dorrimore's yacht is a beauty—one of the finest private ships afloat—but it's not very big," said Church. "There's a limit to its accommodation, you know."

Study D was not the only apartment where Brazil and sea voyages and private yachts were being discussed. Practically every Remove study, in fact, had few other topics to talk about.

The summer holidays were near at hand; in a day or two St. Frank's would break up for the vacation, and a long spell of glorious freedom was near. It was known that Lord Dorrimore—Nelson Lee's famous friend—was contemplating a voyage across the Atlantic, to Brazil, and thence up the mighty Amazon, far into the depths of the primeval forests. It was to be a wonderful cruise.

It was also known that a party of St. Frank's fellows were to be invited, and there was much speculation as to who the lucky juniors would be. A certain number, of course, fully anticipated an invitation.

For example, Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West knew well enough that they would go and Tom Burton was also sure—because his father was in command of Dorrie's yacht. And Sir Montie and Tommy would naturally come along with me, just as I should naturally go with the guv'nor.

But some of the other juniors were not quite sure.

They half-believed that the choice would be left to me, and I was treated with the utmost politeness on every side. Even Fullwood & Co., the cads of the Remove, were amazingly well-behaved. Nothing was too much trouble for them, and their caddish ways dropped from them like a cloak.

The nuts were especially well-behaved when Lord Dorrimore was about, and it was quite likely that he gained the impression that Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell were three of the best juniors in the school.

Of course, there were a good many other juniors who were equally anxious—such as Singleton and Fatty Little and Reginald Pitt. They were very keen upon the trip, but of course, they couldn't go unless they were asked.

And, meanwhile, the time was going on, and within a very short period the end of term would be at hand. Arrangements would have to be fixed up at once.

Tregellis-West and Watson and I were just finishing tea in Study C when Tubbs, the page-boy, put his head into the doorway.

"Sorry to disturb you, Master Nipper!" he said. "You're wanted in Mr. Lee's study immediate."

"Oh!" I said. "Thanks, Tubby!"

I lost no time in going to Nelson Lee's study. I found the guv'nor sitting in his chair, smoking a cigar, Umlosi lolling on the couch, and Lord Dorrimore glowering fiercely at the inkpot. He transferred his gaze to me, and tried to bore holes through me.

"Hallo!" I said in surprise. "Anything upset you, Dorrie?"

"I'm worried!" snapped his lordship. "I'm infernally worried! Why on earth somebody else can't do all this botherin' business positively whacks me! That's why I've called you in!"

"What business?" I asked. "What's wrong, guv'nor?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Lord Dorrimore is hardly a man of business, Nipper," he said dryly. "He hates writing letters, he hates touching a pen, he hates handling correspon-

dence of any kind. It's almost too much trouble for him to write a cheque."

"By gad! So it is!" agreed Dorrie. "I'm havin' a rubber stamp made!"

"Your bank wouldn't accept that!" I grinned.

Dorrie groaned.

"That's just it!" he complained. "Whenever I think of a really brilliant idea to save trouble, some silly ass butts in and says it won't do! I loathe business, as the professor says. So I want your advice."

"What's wrong with the guv'nor's?" I asked.

"Your advice is better than his," said Dorrie—"at least, on this particular subject. I want to know who the thunder to invite on this trip. An' I want you to make out a list of names."

"Great Scott! Is that all?" I asked.

"All! Isn't it enough?" asked Dorrie, glaring.

"I thought it was something important, judging by the way you're yelling," I said. "Why that's an easy matter! I'm the Remove skipper, so perhaps it's just as well for me to suggest the guests."

"Good!" said Dorrie. "As many as you like. I'll invite the bally lot, if you want me to—only we shall have to put some of 'em down in the holds!"

"You mustn't take any notice of Dorrie," smiled Nelson Lee. "He's as irresponsible as a child, and he wants looking after constantly. What you've got to do is to make out a list of names—about a dozen names, exclusive of yourself and your chums. Of course, there will be Stanley Kerrigan, of the Third, and two of his own Form-mates. He has been told he can choose whom he likes."

"Well, that won't take me long," I said.

I sat down and wasted no time in writing down the names. The list, when complete, was like this: C. de Valerie, E. O. Handforth, W. Church, A. McClure, R. Pitt, J. Grey, T. Tucker, Hon. D. Singleton, Duke of Somerton, T. Burton, M. Trotwood, C. Trotwood, J. B. Farman, and J. Little.

"There you are," I said. "How's that, Dorrie?"

"Splendid!" said Lord Dorrimore, without looking at it. "All my worries are gone now. I'm simply going to write an invitation to each of these fellows, and that'll be the finish. Two members of the Sixth are coming, too, an' three members of the Third—to say nothin' of one or two members of the gentle sex. So, altogether, we shall be a pretty lively party."

"That's great!" I said. "I'm glad you've done this, Dorrie. There won't be any more speculation and quarrelling among the fellows. When are you going to let them have the invitations?"

"Now!" said Dorrie. "You can take 'em round!"

He pointed to a heap of sealed envelopes on the table. They were all blank, and Dorrie added that it didn't matter a toss about that. I could deliver the invitations, and that would be good enough.

But they wouldn't do like that so I sat down and addressed each one—so that there could be no mistake. Then I sallied out of the guv'nor's study and went straight to the Common-room.

A good many fellows were there, and I waved the envelopes aloft.

"Invitations!" I said cheerfully.

"Oh, my hat!" roared Armstrong. "Am I invited?"

"I'm afraid not," I said, shaking my head.

Armstrong was not very disappointed, because he had never expected to go. Reginald Pitt was there, and Jack Grey and De Valerie, and most of the others. They were delighted, and they tore open their invitations eagerly.

Each fellow was provided with a letter from Dorrie to forward on to his people. In this letter Dorrie undertook to care for the boys in every possible manner during the voyage and bring them back safely.

This was not really necessary, for Lord Dorrimore was well known, and

his luxurious yacht was a very famous vessel. Anybody lucky enough to take a trip in her was envied by all.

"Souse my scuppers! This is great!" exclaimed Tom Burton. "There won't be any more squabbling after this. It'll all be plain sailing with a fair breeze, and with everything in good trim."

"There was no need for you to worry, Bo'sun, anyhow," I said. "You were certain to come. Considering that your pater is the skipper of the Wanderer, it would be a bit rough if you were left behind."

Handforth & Co. marched into the Common-room shortly afterwards, and they were at once aware of the unusual stir. Fellows were excitedly showing their invitations to other fellows—who were not invited.

"Hallo! What's all this commotion about?" asked Handforth.

"Great pancakes! Don't you know?" asked Fatty Little, his plump face glowing with delight. "I've been invited to go to the Amazon—and lots of other fellows are going, too. It's all settled."

Handforth's face was a study.

"All settled!" he exclaimed. "Aren't we going?"

"Haven't we been invited?" demanded Church huskily.

"Not that I know of," said Fatty.

"Nipper's got the bundle of letters from Dorrie," said Pitt. "You'd better ask him. If he's got three for you fellows, he'll hand them over."

Handforth & Co. rushed at me.

"Are we going?" panted Handforth anxiously.

"Lemme see," I said, looking through the remaining letters. "Tucker, Farman, Somerton, Trotwood—— No; you're not here, Handy. I can't see either Church or McClure."

"Haven't—haven't you got any invitations for us?" roared Handforth.

"No."

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Church. "This is rotten!"

"I thought we were a bit too optimistic," said McClure miserably.

I grinned.

"If you ask Watson, he might find two or three invitations," I chuckled. "I just gave him three to hold, and your names might be on 'em."

Handforth & Co. surrounded Tommy and grabbed the invitations before he could hand them over.

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth. "It's all serene, after all!"

Church and McClure were equally delighted, and before they had got over their excitement, Timothy Tucker wandered aimlessly into the Common-room. I knew that T. T. would not spend a very happy time at home during the holidays, so I had included his name in the list. He was a curious junior, but it would be worth while taking him, if only to be amused. For Tucker was an unconscious humorist. He was funny without knowing, and without intending to be.

"Something for you, T. T." I said genially.

"My dear sir, I am quite delighted to accept this," said Tucker, blinking at the envelope mildly. "I sincerely trust that this is no practical joke. I have great objections to that type of amusement. Admitted. The position is this——"

"Open the letter, you ass!" said Pitt.

"Dear me! Of course—of course!" said Tucker.

He tore open the envelope and extracted a double sheet of notepaper. He gazed at it curiously, and then he flushed, and his eyes gleamed. He looked up at me in a curious kind of way.

"Do I see aright?" he asked, in his high-pitched voice. "Is it possible that this is the actual truth? H'm! I am invited to be a member of Lord Dorrimore's party! Dear me! It—it is most extraordinary! The sight of this letter sends a warm feeling of satisfaction through me."

"Yes, you're invited," I said. "And mind you behave yourself, my son. And there's one thing I've got to warn you against. If you start any of your

spasms on board, we'll take you by the scruff of your neck and pitch you overboard!"

"I sincerely trust not, my dear sir—I sincerely trust not," said T. T. mildly. "It would be a most unpleasant experience to be pitched overboard. Quite so! Really, I am so thrilled that I scarcely know what I am doing."

Tucker wandered out of the Common-room in a state of considerable excitement.

There was a good deal of excitement all round that evening. But in Study A, in the Remove passage, gloom reigned supreme.

Fullwood & Co. sat looking at one another almost balefully. Gulliver got to his feet and gave a short laugh.

"Well, it's no good mopin'!" he said. "We aren't goin'. I knew we didn't stand an earthly, right from the start."

"After we've been puttin' on our best manners, too!" said Fullwood disgustedly, as he lit a cigarette. "I'll bet Nipper put the stopper on us bein' invited—the sneakin' cad! But I haven't given up hope yet."

"Oh, rats!" said Bell. "What can we do?"

"I don't know—until I've thought something out," said Fullwood, puffing slowly at his cigarette. "But I don't feel much like spending the vac at home this summer. My pater's got gout, an' he'll be as crusty as the deuce for weeks."

Gulliver nodded.

"I don't care much about goin' home, either," he said. "My people are frightfully strict. We can manage to enjoy ourselves here—but at home I can't do a bally thing. I'd be half-skinned if I was caught smokin'. Besides, I'm frightfully keen to go on that cruise."

"Well, it's no good bein' keen," said Bell. "It's off!"

"Is it?" said Fullwood grimly. "We shall see about that, my son!"

And there was something in Ralph Leslie Fullwood's tone which made his chums look at him rather curiously. It was quite clear that the leader of Study A was determined to go to Brazil on board the Wanderer.

But would he be able to work the trick?

CHAPTER 2.

The Vision of Aunt Jane!

NELSON LEE and Lord Dorrimore strode briskly out of the Ancient House, and walked towards the massive gates. With them was Kerrigan of the Third.

I happened to spot them just as I was coming from the playing fields. It was the following morning, and lessons were almost due to commence—not that there would be much work done.

"Going out, sir?" I asked, as I came up.

"Yes, Nipper, we're going to London," replied Nelson Lee.

"To London?" I echoed in surprise.

"Only a flying visit," explained Dorrie. "We shall be back by the last train, young 'un—you needn't look scared. We're not running away. It's a matter of great importance, an' we can't stop and explain it to you, or we shall lose our train."

They went on their way, leaving me rather puzzled. I wondered why the guv'nor and Dorrie should be taking a trip to London—and I wondered why Stanley Kerrigan should be with them.

But then I remembered that he was really closely connected with the whole undertaking. And he was booked to go on the cruise.

For Stanley's father had died on the Amazon, four or five years earlier. He had gone on an exploration trip, but he had never returned—and there had been a great deal of evidence to show that he had perished of fever.

Stanley had no mother, and his only relative was Miss Janet Kerrigan, his aunt—his father's sister.

She had given full consent, and so the fag was coming with us all, and he was particularly delighted because he

could see the place where his father had last been seen alive.

And Lord Dorrimore was taking Nelson Lee to London for a very definite purpose. He intended, in fact, taking Lee to Miss Janet Kerrigan, because he wanted the famous detective to hear what Aunt Janet had to say.

Dorrimore himself had originally conceived the idea of going to the Amazon after a conversation with the lady. He had been greatly impressed by that conversation, but he was anxious for Nelson Lee to visit her, too.

"You see, old man, I'm not quite sure of myself," admitted Dorrie, as they sat in the train. "Personally, I think that Miss Kerrigan is a wonderful woman, and I honestly believe that she's gifted with powers that ordinary people don't possess. I don't believe in spiritualism—I call it a lot of mischievous twaddle—but, at the same time, there's something in this particular case."

"You say that Miss Kerrigan believes that her brother is alive?" said Nelson Lee.

"Yes, but I'm not going to tell you anything about it," said Dorrie, shaking his head. "You asked for details before; but my plan is to let you hear Miss Kerrigan's story yourself. Then you'll be able to judge it better and tell me whether I'm right or not in taking you to London to hear her story."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I think it is quite possible that you have been a trifle carried away," he said. "But you are a level-headed chap, Dorrie, so I won't say anything more at present. Whether I believe in Miss Janet or not, we shall have to go on this trip to the Amazon. After inviting so many people, you can't back out of it."

"I don't intend to," said Dorrie. "But you don't get my point, old man. If it's a pleasure cruise, pure and simple, we'll just dodge about the civilised part of the Amazon, and see all the pretty sights. But if you think this vision stunt is the real goods—well, we'll penetrate right up the river and do things, regardless of danger. That's what I'm thinking of."

For the remainder of the journey the pair discussed the subject. When they arrived in London, at about tea-time, they at once got a taxi and drove straight to Bayswater.

Here, in a quiet avenue, lived Miss Janet Kerrigan, the sister of the famous explorer, Colonel Kerrigan, D.S.O. Young Stanley was quite excited, and he rushed into the house as soon as the door was open.

Within a few minutes Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were ushered into a comfortable sitting-room, and they did not have to wait long. The door opened, and a tall, somewhat angular lady entered.

She looked very prim and cold. It was hardly to be wondered at that Stanley was not over anxious to spend his summer holidays in the midst of such gloomy surroundings, and with such a stern relative as his sole companion.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Lord Dorrimore," she said gracefully.

"I hope you won't be upset, Miss Kerrigan," said Dorrie. "I've brought Mr. Nelson Lee, and I want you to talk to him of your brother and the visions you have."

Lee soon discovered that Miss Kerrigan was not so prim as she looked. She was a typical old maid—about forty-five years of age, but looking somewhat older, owing to her out-of-date style of dress.

"You wish to know about my brother?" she asked, after they were all three settled down. "I'm afraid I can't tell you very much, Mr. Lee, but I will say at the outset that I am convinced that Stanley is still alive."

"He has been missing for four years, I believe."

"Longer than that," replied Aunt Janet. "It is getting on for five years now. He went out to the Amazon soon after he returned from Africa,

and he was most optimistic of penetrating the unexplored forest in order to see what lay beyond. I strongly advised him not to go, but he would not listen."

"I think we know most of the facts, Miss Kerrigan," said Nelson Lee. "Your brother penetrated right up the Amazon in a small yacht, and he took the fever before he could carry out his plans. Definite information was brought down the river by many people that Colonel Kerrigan had died. There were some who declared that they had actually seen your brother's grave."

Aunt Janet was quite undisturbed.

"I believed them at the time, but I do not believe them now," she said. "Stanley is alive."

She made this statement with an air of finality there was no mistaking. One might have supposed that she had seen her brother alive with her own eyes.

There are some people who love to cherish a belief that those who have passed away in some distant land are still living.

"I only trust that your belief is true, Miss Kerrigan," said Nelson Lee gently. "However, I think you have more to tell me, and I shall be delighted to hear what you have to say. I am greatly interested."

"I will certainly explain to you why I am so certain," said Aunt Janet quietly. "You may disbelieve my story, but I do not mind. I am convinced and it is sufficient for me. Thank heaven I have convinced Lord Dorrimore, and he has promised to make a trip to the Amazon which may prove my dream to the world."

"You may possibly convince me, too," said Nelson Lee.

"Well, to begin with, Stanley is my twin brother. And he and I have always had that peculiar faculty, often noticed between twins, of knowing one another's movements instinctively. When he has been thousands of miles from home I have had the conviction brought to me that he is very ill. or that he has met with some painful accident. I have told people of these convictions, and they have laughed."

"But they have turned out to be true?"

"In every case," replied Miss Kerrigan quietly. "Once, when Stanley was in Borneo, I knew that he was in peril of his life—I knew that he had been captured by some savages, and was on the point of death. That was on the first of March, a good many years ago. Months later a letter arrived from my brother, and in it he informed me that on the first of March he had been in the hands of savages, and had only escaped a terrible death by a hair's-breadth."

"There you are, Lee; what do you think of it?" asked Dorrie.

"It is certainly most convincing," said Nelson Lee. "I have heard of similar cases—particularly between twins."

"You may think that this is merely idle fancy on my part," proceeded Aunt Janet. "But in all these instances, I have spoken to people weeks before it has been possible to get definite information."

"A kind of mental telepathy," said Nelson Lee. "Your case is undoubtedly an unusual one, Miss Kerrigan. You certainly seem to have powers beyond the ordinary."

Miss Kerrigan smiled.

"And yet I am no different to other people," she said. "I do not go crazy over spiritualism, and, in fact, I am totally opposed to the idea that we are capable of communicating with departed spirits. The very thought is abhorrent to me, and I reject it. We are not speaking of the dead. My brother is alive—and I know it. Were he dead, I should know it at once. 'How?' you will ask. I cannot tell you because I do not know myself. I simply know, and that is all I can tell you."

"And you are basing your fixed belief that your brother is alive on the

fact that you have that conviction?" asked Nelson Lee.

"That is one point," replied Aunt Janet. "But I have more to tell you, Mr. Lee. Not once, but a hundred times, I have seen my brother during the last four years. I have had visions of a most extraordinary nature. Sometimes they have come night after night with disturbing persistency.

"Can you tell me the nature of these visions?"

"At first they were somewhat vague. I simply saw my brother alive, and everything about him was hazy and indistinct," replied the old lady. "Mind you, I am not pretending that these visions were anything supernatural or psychical. They came to me in the form of dreams. I may as well tell you that I saw my brother last night—and his attitude was exactly the same."

"His attitude?" repeated Lee curiously.

"Yes," said Aunt Janet. "For months past these visions of mine have always been the same, without the slightest variation. I have seen things with such startling distinctness that I know almost the nature of the ground upon which my brother stands. I am in no way terrified by these strange dreams. They comfort me, and when I awake in the morning I am generally very refreshed."

"But you were saying something about your brother's attitude."

"Yes, I will tell you," said Miss Kerrigan. "He always stands on the top of a high pinnacle, with rocky crags surrounding him. He is attired in peculiar raiment—half-savage, half-civilised. His beard is long, and he looks haggard. And my brother is standing with outstretched arms, appealing for help."

"It is certainly extraordinary," said Nelson Lee.

"I can see forests—gigantic trees and myriads of creepers," said Aunt Janet. "And behind all stands the most marvellous city one could imagine. A vast place of strange buildings. It is a wonder city, and my brother stands before it, with arms outstretched, mutely appealing to be rescued."

"And does this vision never change?"

"Never," replied Aunt Janet. "I have seen it so frequently that it has almost become real to me. I do not suppose for one moment that I am convincing you, Mr. Lee. I can hardly expect you to believe this queer story of mine. It will sound wild and impossible to you, and you will set me down as a fanciful creature."

"On the contrary, Miss Kerrigan, I am greatly impressed by what you have told me," said Nelson Lee. "I do not ridicule your story—I believe it. It is not the only instance which has come to my knowledge. Such things do sometimes occur in the case of twins. I don't pretend to know why, but it is just a fact. This power of mental telepathy appears to be acutely developed in your case."

"I am very glad that you take this view, Mr. Lee," said Aunt Janet warmly. "I have not told my people about my visions. I learnt a lesson two or three years ago—after I had been laughed at and ridiculed to my face. I have been living in hopes—praying that some day my brother would either escape, or would be rescued by an exploration party."

"And you really think he is alive?" asked Nelson Lee.

Miss Kerrigan smiled gently.

"I know it, Mr. Lee, I know it," she replied. "There is not the slightest shadow of doubt. I am as certain of it as I am certain that the sun is shining. Stanley is alive, and he is in need of help."

Lord Dorrimore slapped his thigh.

"That's good enough for me, Miss Kerrigan," he said. "I am taking out that search party straight away—an' if we don't find your brother this trip, I'll go out again, an' search Brazil from corner to corner!"

Aunt Janet's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, it is good of you—wonderfully good of you!" she exclaimed, clasping

her hands. "And you are taking little Stan with you. I am so pleased, because he has always longed to go to the Amazon, and I shall know that he is in safe hands."

"Oh, he'll be all right," said Dorrie. "And just think of his joy if we find his dad for him."

"Please say nothing just yet," said Miss Janet quickly. "I have kept him in ignorance of my convictions. He believes that his father is dead. I do not want to raise false hopes in him. I know that Stanley is alive; but the point which worries me is whether he will ever obtain his freedom. He is held a captive in some marvellous city, and that is all I know."

"Of course, there is no such city known——"

"I quite realise that, Mr. Lee—and I am fully convinced that most people would laugh me to scorn," said Miss Kerrigan. "These fabulous cities only exist in fairy tales and in dreams. But my dream is a true one—that city exists—that city is standing to-day. I know it—I am convinced of it—I am as certain of it as I am alive. No argument will shift me from my conviction."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I admire you for your firmness, Miss Kerrigan," he said. "I entirely endorse Lord Dorrimore's plans, and I shall be most honoured to accompany him in his somewhat unusual quest—a quest for a man who is supposed to be dead, and a quest for a city which is as yet unknown to civilisation. Truly, it sounds more like a fairy tale than real life."

"You have filled me with hope and joy," said Miss Janet gladly. "I would have fitted out an expedition myself a year or two ago. But I have never had the means."

"Well, it's being done now," said Dorrie, rising to his feet. "I don't think we need bother you any longer, Miss Kerrigan. We've brought Stanley up with us, an' he will remain here until we all meet on board the yacht. I suppose he'll have his time well filled, preparing for the trip."

Shortly afterwards Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee took their departure, and as they were driving away, Lee turned to his companion.

"I'm glad you brought me, Dorrie," he said. "I wouldn't miss this trip for anything. We're not going on a pleasure cruise—we're going out into the heart of Brazil to find Colonel Kerrigan, and to make history."

Dorrie gripped the detective's hand.

"By gad, old man," he exclaimed, "I believe you!"

CHAPTER 3.

Fullwood & Co., Too!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD sat in the easy chair in Study A, with his hands stuck deep in his pockets. Gulliver and Bell were there, too, and they looked equally thoughtful. Fullwood was the first to break the silence.

"Everythin's fixed," he said.

"What?" grunted Bell.

"Fixed!" snorted Gulliver. "I like that! Why, we've got no hope of goin' at all—not the faintest chance! What do you mean—fixed?"

"I was talkin' about our people," said Fullwood.

"Oh, that's fixed all right," said Bell. "Rather a dotty idea, I call it. What the dooce was the good of writin' home for permission to go when we haven't been invited?"

"It's better to be prepared," said Fullwood. "We all wrote home, an' we've all got permission from our people that we can go on this trip, an' that everythin' is all serene. We've only got to get Lord Dorrimore to invite us—an' there you are."

"Oh, that's all!" sneered Gulliver. "We've only got to get Lord Dorrimore to invite us! There's nothin' easier! You—you silly ass! We shall never

get those invites if we wait until we're ninety."

Fullwood grinned.

"We'll see, my sons," he said. "It won't be easy, I know; but I'll bet you a level fiver that I do the trip. Lord Dorrimore is a good sort, an' we've been good little boys since he came."

Bell grunted.

"I'm fed up with it," he said. "Every time we've been in his presence we've acted like good little Georgies! We've done all sorts of kind actions so that he could see us, an' it's got on my nerves. I'm fed up to the neck with acting the part—particularly as nothin' will come of it."

"Don't be so darned impatient," said Fullwood. "The school breaks up to-morrow, an' all the fellows will go home. To-night's our last chance—absolutely the final chance. If we don't work the trick to-night we shall never work it."

"What do you propose, anyhow?" asked Gulliver.

"Well, Lord Dorrimore's got a habit of takin' a stroll in the Triangle last thing at night," said Fullwood cunningly. "He generally goes out when the Remove is at supper—I've noticed it."

"I don't see what you're gettin' at," said Bell.

"You will in a minute," said Fullwood calmly. "It's a lovely evenin', an' it's a ten-to-one chance that he will go for his usual stroll. My scheme will work out all right—if you chaps back me up."

"Well, what is the scheme?"

Fullwood told them; but they were not particularly impressed—in fact, when their leader had done, Gulliver shook his head.

"No good at all!" repeated Gulliver. "You can't spoof a chap like Lord Dorrimore. He'll never swallow it, Fullwood."

"Well, we can try the dodge, anyhow."

"Might as well save ourselves the trouble," said Gulliver. "We shall only get into a row over the whole business."

"Hang it! Can't you do anythin' else but grumble! Think of somethin' better, if my wheeze doesn't suit you."

But, although Gulliver objected to Fullwood's plan, he had no better scheme to suggest. And the nuts finally decided to support him.

St. Frank's was in something of a commotion. Lessons were completely over—the next day would be a holiday, and all the fellows would depart for their homes. It would be a day of general rejoicing.

Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee had returned from London on that same day, and the guv'nor had already informed me of the interview with Aunt Janet. And I was filled with wonder and excitement.

By all appearances, this trip was to be something very special.

Stanley Kerrigan, of course, had not returned to St. Frank's. We should meet him later on, when the time came for us to get on board.

And this evening, when everything was bustle and disorder, Fullwood & Co. were intent upon making a big effort to obtain invitations. The success of the whole scheme would depend upon whether Lord Dorrimore took a late stroll or not.

As luck would have it, he did.

Dorrie was out in the Triangle, and he had the place to himself, to all appearances. From the open windows of the Ancient House came many voices and yells of laughter.

Dorrie smiled to himself as he puffed thoughtfully at his cigarette. He was very content. He knew that this trip would be particularly interesting.

"By Jove, it'll be a great trip!" muttered Dorrie, strolling near the shady old elms. "Nothin' could be better. It'll be a holiday cruise, everybody will enjoy themselves, an' there's a rare chance of findin' some first-class excitement. Gad! I'm anxious to be off!"

He paused, and went off into a little dream. He pictured the yacht on the

broad bosom of the great Amazon. He saw himself upon the deck in a cool white drill suit. He saw everybody happy and content——

Then his train of thought was interrupted.

A sound, quite distinct and audible, had come to his ears.

He looked up wonderingly, and stared into the gloom beneath the elms. It seemed to him that the sound was a sob—and a very pitiful one at that. It was repeated, and Dorrie moved forward quietly.

"Some poor youngster in trouble!" he murmured sympathetically.

Dorrie had an easy-going and sympathetic nature. He hated to see anybody in pain, and it made him miserable to see anybody else miserable. If it was possible to bring happiness to anybody, Dorrie was always there.

So he moved forward silently to see what was the trouble. He had only moved a few paces when he saw a form leaning against one of the trees. It was the figure of a junior, and his shoulders were heaving as he sobbed in a very distressing manner.

"Hang it all, I must look into this!" Dorrie muttered.

But before he could reach the junior's side, two other Removites came up from behind the trees. Apparently they were unaware of Lord Dorrimore's presence, and he paused to see what would happen.

"I say, Fully, old man, buck up!" came a voice, in gentle entreaty.

"Go away, Gully—I—I don't feel like talking just now," sobbed the voice of Fullwood. "I'm miserable—I'm feelin' absolutely rotten!"

"But somebody might hear you," said another voice. "Don't snivel, old man."

Lord Dorrimore knew that the juniors were Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell, of Study A. He had seen them quite often, and he did not hold a very high opinion of them. At the same time, he was all sympathy now.

Dorrie did not know their characters thoroughly, or he would have been suspicious. He had been told that Fullwood & Co. were cads, but he had never taken much notice of it. Besides, Dorrie was the kind of man who would find good in the worst of people.

He stood quite still, listening to the low conversation. He had no scruples about doing so, because he wanted to find out what the trouble was, in order to make things right if he could.

He certainly did not imagine that the whole affair was a put-up job especially for his benefit.

"I say, Fully, do buck up!" said Bell appealingly. "There's no sense in mopin' about like this. It's the last day of term to-morrow, an' you ought to be happy——"

"Happy!" said Fullwood, with a hollow laugh. "How can I be happy when I shan't enjoy a minute of the holidays? My people will do all they can, I know, but it's nothin' like what I was hopin' for."

"It's the same with us," said Gulliver miserably.

Fullwood sobbed again.

"We've all tried to be decent," he said. "We've done our best to act straight and be true blue. It's fine, too—there's nothin' like goin' straight, an' helpin' other chaps when you can. But nobody will believe in us."

"Not a soul!" said Bell glumly.

"They misunderstand us all the time," added Gulliver. "An' as for askin' Lord Dorrimore what you suggested, Fully—well, it's impossible. We couldn't have the cheek; it would be too much."

"I know it would!" said Fullwood, with a gulp. "That's what makes it so awful. Lord Dorrimore's one of the best men in the world. But I daren't ask him to let us go on that trip—he'd simply refuse, an' we should only make ourselves look silly."

Gulliver nodded.

"And we all want to go so badly!" he said sorrowfully. "Lord Dorrimore will refuse, so we can't ask. It makes us feel miserable, bein' without a decent

holiday to look forward to. Oh, I don't know what to do—it's rotten!"

"Oh, it's no good!" groaned Fullwood. "I'm a fool to give way like this, I suppose; but I couldn't help it. It's—it's so awful to think of that yacht goin' off without us. I—I thought we might have been invited—— "

"Couldn't we ask him to let us go ——"

"No," said Fullwood firmly. "We can't do that, old chap! It wouldn't be the thing—it wouldn't be good form. We haven't been invited, and it would be simply cheek to ask. We must grin and bear it. There's nothin' else to do."

"But if we asked, he might let us go!" said Bell.

"He would let us go, I believe—I'm sure of it!" exclaimed Fullwood. "We've only got to ask, and he'll invite us—he's such a thundering good sort. But we can't ask—a thing like that's impossible."

"It—it means we can't go, then?"

"Yes."

Fullwood sobbed again, and his chums turned away miserably. There was silence—and Lord Dorrimore fell into the trap just as Fullwood had anticipated.

Dorrie was not a suspicious individual—he was just brimful of goodness and cheerfulness. He thought, moreover, that he was listening to a conversation which the juniors thought was private. Dorrie never dreamed that it had all been rehearsed.

"Poor kids!" he muttered. "They don't seem such bad sorts, after all. They seem to be in a pretty bad way, too!"

He remembered what they had been saying—how Fullwood had decided against asking for an invitation, although he felt sure that it would be granted. He was prepared to deny himself because it wouldn't be good form.

That was the right spirit, at all events, and Lord Dorrimore admired it. He admired it so much that he came to a decision on the spot. His impulsive nature asserted itself, and he walked quietly forward.

"What's the trouble, young 'uns?" he asked kindly.

Fullwood turned with a start.

"Oh——" he gasped. "I—I didn't know——"

"It's all right—you needn't be scared," said Dorrie. "I came up rather quietly, didn't I? I think I know what the matter is here. Don't blub like that, my lad—it's not necessary."

"I—I'm sus-sorry, sir!" sobbed Fullwood.

"You needn't be sorry," said his lordship. "Look here, I heard what you said just now—some of it, at all events."

"You—you heard, sir?" panted Fullwood & Co. in one voice.

"Yes, an' I'm feelin' a bit sorry for you," said Dorrie generously. "If you're so dead set upon comin' on this trip, you're quite welcome. You can come along if you like—there's plenty of room."

"Oh!" gasped Fullwood. "You—you'll let us come, sir?"

"Of course!"

"We—we didn't know you were listening to us, sir——"

"Of course you didn't," agreed Dorrie. "It's a good thing I strolled up, or you wouldn't have had the opportunity of getting an invitation. If your parents will agree to it you can regard yourselves as booked for the trip."

The wily nuts gasped with joy.

"Oh, sir, it's—it's too good of you!" exclaimed Fullwood. "I know our people will agree—we've already hinted at it, an' they seem quite all right. We can fix it up easily, sir. Thanks awfully, sir!"

"You're a brick, sir!" said Gulliver and Bell.

Lord Dorrimore laughed.

"Nonsense," he said. "It's all right—nothin' more to be said——"

"Can—can I speak a minute, sir?" asked Fullwood nervously.

"Go ahead!"

"We—we've been trying to be really decent, sir," said Fullwood humbly. "Sometimes we've been rather beastly, I know—and we're awfully sorry. But now that we're doin' the right thing the other fellows won't believe us."

"That's hard luck," said Dorrie. "If you hadn't been naughty young bounders in the past you wouldn't be suspected now. You'll soon get over it."

"Yes, sir, but—but——"

"Well?"

"When the other chaps get to know that we're going on the yacht, they'll kick up a fuss," said Fullwood, with rare cunning. "They'll try to make out all sorts of things, and they'll ask you not to let us go——"

"That's all right," said Dorrie. "I'll deal with 'em!"

"I know, sir—it's splendid of you!" went on Fullwood. "But—but we don't want the others to get up an agitation. It wouldn't be nice. Besides, we want to avoid a row of any sort. I was wonderin' if we could keep it dark—about us comin', I mean."

His lordship grinned.

"Well, I won't say anythin'," he promised. "If you keep it dark, I will. Simply turn up at Tilbury—at the last moment sort of thing. The other fellows can't make a fuss then."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

"It's wonderfully good of you, sir!"

"Rather!"

Lord Dorrimore nodded, and turned away.

"I'll keep the awful secret," he said cheerfully. "Mind you, I shall want your people's permission, an' all that. But we can fix that afterwards. You'd better cut indoors now."

"Yes, sir!" chorused Fullwood & Co. "Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night, boys!"

Dorrie strolled away feeling contented.

"Not such bad sorts, after all," he told himself. "These other kids exaggerate a lot. There's nothin' much wrong with these three."

Which only proved how completely the nuts had hoodwinked Dorrie. He was quite innocent of the fact that his leg had been pulled.

They watched him as he went into the Ancient House. Then they gazed at one another.

"It worked!" muttered Bell.

"It actually worked!" murmured Gulliver.

"Of course it worked," said Fullwood calmly. "When I plan a thing, I plan it properly. We've got our invitations, and we're booked for the trip. Everythin' in the garden is lovely!"

"It—it seems too good to be true!" said Bell.

"Oh, it's true enough!" exclaimed Fullwood, with a grin. "We've got the invites, and Dorrie won't say a word. The other fellows can't put a stopper on the game, because they won't know anythin' about it. How did I do the sobbin' stunt? Did it go down all right?"

"Great!" grinned Gulliver. "In fact, I thought you were really overcome for a minute or two."

"Rats!" said Fullwood. "It was only spoof. You chaps did it well, too."

Bell nodded.

"I reckon we deserve to go, after all the trouble we've taken," he said. "We shall need to be a bit careful on board, too——"

"Rot! Once we've left England, we can do as we please," said Fullwood. "It'll be too late to send us back then. We're booked, an' that's all that matters. By gad! What a soft fool the chap is!"

Fullwood laughed sneeringly, but Gulliver shook his head.

"Hang it all, that's not quite square!" he said. "After we've spoofed the chap like this, I don't call it right to insult him. Lord Dorrimore isn't

a fool, an' he's not soft. He's easy goin' and——"

"Oh, dry up!" said Fullwood. "Dorrie's all right, an' we've dished Nipper an' his confounded lot. They'll have a fit when we come on board!"

And the nuts of the Ancient House strolled indoors, supremely contented and at peace with the world.

Their wheeze had worked!

CHAPTER 4.
The Warning!

HUSTLE, disorder, excitement!

It was the last day of term, and St. Frank's was quite upside down with commotion. Everybody was running about, packing things up, seeing that boxes and trunks were labelled correctly, and a hundred and one other matters.

Juniors and seniors were all alike—they all had the holiday fever. Lessons were over for many a long day, and the best weeks of summer lay ahead. Fortunately the day was glorious, and the long journeys which many fellows had to go upon, in order to get home, were undertaken with keen enjoyment.

Naturally, the most excited fellows of all were those who were booked to go with Lord Dorrimore to the Amazon. The party was not starting at once. There were all sorts of preparations to be made and it was only right that the juniors should have a chance of going home.

Still, it was a long trip, and the sooner the yacht left British shores the better. It was not as though time was unlimited and the return could be made just when Dorrie pleased. It would be necessary to get back in time for the beginning of the autumn term. Therefore, an early start was necessary.

The juniors were going home for exactly a week. St. Frank's "broke up" on a Thursday, and on the following Thursday the Wanderer was due to up-anchor at Tilbury and slip down the Thames.

All the members of the party were to be on board, at the latest, by Wednesday evening.

Every train that left Bellton that day was filled with shouting, joyous fellows. Even the seniors forgot to be stately and dignified; they kicked up practically as much noise as the juniors.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West, being an orphan, did not think it necessary to go home to Tregellis Castle. His aunt, Lady Helen Tregellis-West, was naturally coming on the trip, for she would have all the girl guests under her wing. She would come up to London some time the next week, and would go down to Tilbury with the rest of the party on Wednesday. So Montie was coming to Gray's Inn Road, with Nelson Lee and me.

Tommy Watson would have to go home, for he had lots of things to do, and he would bring his sister Violet to London later.

Naturally, Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi were coming with the guv'nor and me. Dorrie had a splendid country seat somewhere, but he only visited it about once every five years, and he much preferred to stay with Nelson Lee. In fact, he had no objection whatever to accepting a shake-down on the couch, if such an expedient were necessary.

Umlosi was rather partial to sleeping on the floor. Civilised beds were not quite to his liking. He preferred something bare. On several occasions when he had been given a luxurious bed he had been found sleeping underneath it in the morning!

The other fellows—Handforth & Co. and Pitt and all the rest of them—were off home as soon as possible. A good many of us went up to London together, and parted at Victoria Station.

Of course, there had been many fond good-byes at St. Frank's. Everybody had wished us luck, and many envious juniors had wistfully expressed a desire

to come, too. But it was impossible to take the whole crowd.

Lord Dorrimore was in a cheerful mood, and, as we sat down to a hearty meal which Mrs. Jones had prepared to perfection, his lordship looked round with an air of complete contentment.

"I've got a feelin' that we're goin' to have a record trip," he said genially. "There'll be heaps of excitement, and all sorts of adventures, an' a nice little spice of danger. It's goin' to be first-class!"

"Are you becoming a prophet?" I grinned.

"Not exactly a prophet, my son!" said Dorrie. "But I've got a feelin' in my bones that everythin' will be great. This adventure will be somethin' in the startlin' line—not merely a wishy-washy holiday trip. There'll be troubles and dangers, but there's more than a chance that Colonel Kerrigan is alive, an' we've got to find him. But where is he? Ah! That's just where it comes in!"

"Dramatic music, please!" I said solemnly.

"If you start any of your rot, my son, you'll find yourself under the table in a jiff," said Dorrie, wagging his finger at me. "What was I sayin'? About the colonel—that's it. Where is he? We don't know, an' we've got to find out. We may strike lucky, or we might have an infernal task before us. In any case, he must be miles beyond civilisation—somewhere out through the forests. Then there's that wonderful city—that magnificent place ——"

"But that's only a vision," I interrupted.

"Very likely—but I've got faith in it," said Dorrie. "It's queer for me to believe in a thing of that sort, but I do. I don't know why, but there you are. Visions aren't in my line, but Aunt Janet was so thunderin' businesslike and sensible that I'm convinced that there's somethin' in her yarn."

"I'm inclined to agree with you, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "Who wants some more ham? Speak up before Nipper devours the last slice. Yes, old man, Aunt Janet impressed me greatly. If she had been of a nervous temperament, and addicted to hallucinations, I should not have given her story one second's consideration. But she is a level-headed woman, straightforward and alert. I certainly believe her. And you must remember that the colonel is her twin brother."

"That's everythin'," said Lord Dorrimore. "I've often read that there's a kind of mental telepathy between twins, an' now I know it. But, as I was sayin', it's a sure thing we're on a good egg this time. It's goin' to be a trip packed full of excitement. Ask Umlosi. He knows."

"Umlosi knows?" I repeated. "How?"

Lord Dorrimore shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear chap, it's no good askin' me that," he said. "Umlosi does know things. It's just a little habit of his. His snake tells him, or somethin' equally funny. He sees red mists, an' all that sort of thing. Every time he sees a red mist it means fightin', excitement by the yard, an' gore."

"How cheerful!" I remarked.

"Thou art inclined to be jestful, N'Kose," said Umlosi, from the other side of the table. "Methinks it is not well to jest over serious matters. Thou art pleased to be humorous, but mayhap there will not be many humours later on."

"We'll takes it all as it comes," said Dorrie.

"I have had wondrous dreams, indeed," went on Umlosi. "I have seen great perils and untold difficulties. It will not be easy all the way. Wau! I am of good heart, since I know that there will be many battles."

"It's rather early to talk of battles, old friend," said Nelson Lee. "Personally, I don't anticipate anything. I prefer to wait until the trouble comes before dealing with it."

"That's the idea," said Dorrie. "An' I was just thinkin' that it would be a good—— By gad! What the——"

Crash!

"What on earth——"

"Why, I——"

We all jumped to our feet, uttering startled exclamations. For a somewhat surprising thing had occurred.

It was a warm, sultry evening, and the window was therefore wide open. It was a rear window, overlooking an upsightly series of backyards and ugly buildings.

The thing which had startled us so abruptly was a long stick which came shooting through the window. It crashed into a picture on the front side wall, smashed the glass, and fell to the floor. Nelson Lee was on his feet, looking considerably incensed.

"The confounded impudence!" he exclaimed. Some boys, I suppose, playing about in one of those yards!"

"Wau!" interrupted Umlosi. "This is indeed strange, my masters. Look thou upon the floor! An arrow, or mine eyes are growing useless."

"An arrow!" I echoed.

"Look thou, Manzie!"

Umlosi pointed, and as he was doing so Nelson Lee picked up the thin object which I had taken to be a stick. And we could all see at once that it was really a perfectly shaped arrow.

It differed in one respect, however. The point was not sharp, but was covered with a stumpy pad of felt.

"Well, I'm hanged!" I exclaimed.

"There's nothing very remarkable about it," said Dorrie. "Some kids playin' about, as the professor just said. I suppose they thought it was a good joke to shoot one of those things into this window. What they require is a number one sized tannin'. It would do 'em good."

Nelson Lee was examining the arrow with interest.

"One moment, Dorrie," he said. "I don't think this is the work of a party of boys. It seems to be something rather more significant."

"Why, there's a piece of paper wrapped round it!" I exclaimed.

"Exactly," said the guv'nor. "As you can see, it is carefully rolled round the thin stem of the arrow, and secured by means of three elastic bands. I am beginning to suspect that it was deliberately propelled into this room—and not by boys. There is another point, you will observe."

"Yes, it's rather blunt," said Dorrie.

Nelson Lee was pointing to the felt pad on the arrow.

"Yes, it is certainly blunt, Dorrie," he agreed. "This was done, no doubt, in order to prevent the thing causing an injury if it happened to strike anybody. Our mysterious friend is quite thoughtful."

"Well, what has it got on the paper?" I asked impatiently.

Nelson Lee was unrolling it, and for a moment or two he stared at the paper, and then he smiled.

"Quite novel," he remarked calmly.

Dorrie and I stared at the paper together, and what we saw on it was certainly unusual. The paper contained only a few words. They were typewritten, and perfectly legible:

"Do not go on the trip to the Amazon. If you value your life, stay in England. Heed this warning.

"A FRIEND."

Lord Dorrimore whistled.

"By gad!" he said. "This reminds me of one of those thrillin' cinema dramas. There'll be somebody comin' along soon with a hooded face, or somethin'. The plot thickens, old man! Who, in the name of all that's insane, could have sent this?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I haven't the faintest idea," he said. "The unknown has gone to considerable trouble to deliver this message in a dramatic fashion. The arrow was apparently sent on its journey from one

of those windows opposite. I'm afraid it won't be any good making inquiries, for it might have come from one of fifty windows, and I think the majority of those houses are filled with lodgers."

"It might be a joke, sir," I remarked.

"I don't think so, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Somebody seems to have an idea that there'll be danger on this trip, and the whole undertaking becomes far more significant, to my mind."

"How do you mean?" asked Dorrie.

"Well, my dear fellow, it is fairly obvious that somebody unknown is anxious to prevent me going to the Amazon. He would not do that without a reason. And the reason, although obscure, is capable of being deduced."

"I can't dedooce anythin'," said Dorrie.

"I would hardly expect you to, old man," smiled Nelson Lee. "It would seem that somebody is very anxious to prevent us going on this search for Colonel Kerrigan. Why? Obviously because the same somebody does not want Colonel Kerrigan found—he does not want any information at all to be brought back to England. I'm beginning to suspect a plot of some kind."

"My hat!" I said. "This alters the whole aspect of the case, guv'nor. Do you think it possible that Colonel Kerrigan is being kept in Brazil by some enemies, and they don't want any inquiries to be made——"

"Steady, Nipper, you mustn't imagine things," said Nelson Lee. "I shall merely take this warning for what it is worth. Needless to say, I shall ignore it completely, but at the same time there is no reason why we should not keep our eyes open."

"Oh, we'll do that all right," said Dorrie.

"But who could this friend be, sir?" I asked.

"I don't know any more than you do, Nipper," replied the guv'nor. "But I certainly suspect that he is an enemy rather than a friend. We have had warning messages of this kind on other occasions. Sometimes they have been foolish jokes, and at other times they have been deadly serious. But I never heed what they say. All we can do is to be on our guard."

"Wise words, O Umtagati," rumbled Umlosi. "Thou art speaking with rare wisdom. It is well to keep on thy guard, for one never knows when one is in danger. There will be great doings, methinks, and my heart will be glad when we reach the great forests where the sun shines with warmth—and not with a chilliness which freezes one."

"Phew!" I whistled, fanning myself with a plate. "And I've just been thinking how terrifically hot the sun is."

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"Wait until you get on the Amazon—in the tropical zone," he said cheerfully. "You'll get heat there that'll melt you into a grease spot. Well, we've had a bit of excitement already. It's a good beginning."

Nelson Lee was rather thoughtful that evening. He was beginning to realise that other forces were at work. Who was the mysterious person—or persons—who was anxious to prevent Nelson Lee leaving British shores? It seemed clear to me that the unknown feared the guv'nor's activity.

There was no sense in guesswork, however, and it was idle to surmise with nothing to go upon. All we could do was to wait, and see if anything further occurred. Any action on our part was quite impossible.

That week soon passed. It passed amazingly quickly, in fact, and almost before we knew where we were it was Wednesday. Full arrangements had been made, and the whole yachting party gathered at a famous West End restaurant, for luncheon. After that we were to take the train from Fenchurch Street to Tilbury.

Everybody turned up at the restaurant. Tommy Watson brought his

sister—a very charming young lady of about sixteen. Church brought his sister, too, and there were one or two other girls.

The luncheon was a huge success, and in addition to the members of the party there was a good sprinkling of parents or brothers—who were coming along to see us off. Aunt Janet arrived with young Stanley, and she expressed her intention of coming down to Tilbury, too.

It's not necessary for me to go into any details regarding the journey down. It was a joyous kind of trip, and everybody was happy and gay. We half-filled the train, and when we arrived at Tilbury we found everything ready. Lord Dorrimore had given full instructions to his employees.

The afternoon was sunny and hot, and the Wanderer, lying out in mid-stream, looked very spick and span. It was a fine yacht, and she had been repainted and decorated. Her brass-work glittered like gold, and she seemed fit for a king to sail in.

"By jingo, doesn't she look fine!" exclaimed Handforth. "Good old Wanderer! She'll take us right across the Atlantic, and up the Amazon."

We were taken across to the yacht in little parties, the ladies and gentlemen going first, of course. The juniors had to wait until last.

When we arrived on board the Wanderer, all was bustle and excitement. Some of the party were eagerly looking over the magnificent steam yacht. Others were unpacking their bags in their cabins, and shaking down to their new quarters.

The St. Frank's fellows were berthed three to a cabin, and, naturally, Sir Montie, Tommy, and I were in one cabin, and the same with Handforth & Co.

After a farewell tea, the parents and relatives who had accompanied us to Tilbury said their last good-byes and then departed.

For the rest of the evening we were busy with a hundred and one things, and were tired out when bed-time came.

CHAPTER 5.
Bound for Brazil!

IN the morning, Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West, and I were awakened by loud blowing on the vessel's siren, and we lost no time in turning out.

The morning was brilliant, the sun shining gloriously. The whole Thames was looking at its best, and the weather could not have been more perfect for our departure. When we came up on deck, five or ten minutes later, we found that a good many others were up, too.

"Off to blazing Brazil, my bonny boys!" exclaimed Handforth, as we appeared on deck. "By George, this is going to be the best holiday we've ever had!"

"I hope so!" I said. "In any case, we shall have some excitement—there's no doubt about that. Brazil isn't the kind of country one can go to and stagnate. Besides, we've got a definite object in view. But we ought to be getting down the stream before long ——"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed McClure suddenly. "Look—look over there!"

"Look where!" said Handforth, staring.

"Over to the shore!" said Church. "My goodness! Don't you see who it is?"

"Those—those chaps in the boat!"

We walked to the rail, and stared at a small boat which was coming across the water from the quay. And we all stared very hard. For there was no doubting who the occupants of that boat were. One of them was an ordinary waterman, and the other three were juniors. And at the very first glance we recognised them.

"Fullwood & Co.!" yelled Tommy Watson.

"Begad!" said Montie.

"What—what the thunder does this mean?" roared Handforth. "Fullwood and those other cads!"

There was a note of dismay in the many exclamations.

"Do the silly asses think they'll be allowed to come with us?" I said. "Of all the nerve! Fancy the rotters coming to the yacht like this—just as we're about to depart!"

"I expect they've got an idea that Dorrie will have pity on them and allow them to come along!" said Tommy Watson. "If so, they'll have a disappointment. I'll bet Dorrie won't have them on board at any price!"

"Rather not, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie.

"We'll soon see, anyhow," I said. "There's no need to get excited, my sons. Fullwood & Co. aren't coming with us!"

Handforth grinned.

The boat containing Fullwood & Co. drew nearer, and at length it came alongside the little ladder at the bottom of the accommodation ladder. The nuts came on board, all of them looking extremely cheerful and full of confidence. To my considerable surprise, I observed that there were three large cabin trunks in the boat also. These were now being hoisted up to the deck by the waterman and two of the crew.

"Luggage and all!" I exclaimed. "Well, that takes the giddy bun!"

"It's simply a try-on," said Watson. "The rotters are attempting to throw themselves upon the party by coming along at the last moment. But Dorrie won't be such an ass! He'll soon give them the order of the boot!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood lounged towards us. He was attired in a beautiful grey flannel suit, and he looked spick and span from toe to crown. There was no doubt that Fullwood could look very smart when he liked. Gulliver and Bell were also immaculate to a degree.

Fullwood nodded to us.

"Good-morning, you chaps!" he said calmly. "Lovely morning for sailing, what?"

Handforth sneered.

"You—you rotter!" he exclaimed grimly. "If you think you're jolly well going to stay on board, you're mistaken! If Lord Dorrimore doesn't pitch you off, I'll do it myself—I'll take hold of you, one after the other, and throw you over into the water!"

Fullwood grinned.

"No, you won't!" he said. "We are guests of Lord Dorrimore!"

"Guests!" yelled Church. "Why, you haven't been invited!"

"Oh, haven't we?" said Gulliver. "That's all you know, my son!"

I faced the nuts with a determined expression on my face.

"Look here, Fullwood," I said quietly, "this game won't do. You seem to think that you'll be able to come on this trip by appearing at the last moment. But I don't see——"

"My dear chap," said Fullwood, with a yawn, "there's no need for you to say anythin' at all. And it may interest you to know that we are guests of Lord Dorrimore himself. We've been expressly invited. We've got our parents' permission, and we've come!"

"Lord Dorrimore invited you?" I repeated sharply.

"Yes, he did!"

"When?"

"Oh, before the holidays!" said Fullwood. "Before we left St. Frank's, you know. Dorrie found us in the Triangle one night, and he invited us to come. But we knew what a lot of cads you were, so we planned things."

"What do you mean?" demanded Watson hotly.

"Well, I was pretty certain that you would kick up a fuss if you knew that we were coming," said Fullwood. "So Dorrie advised us to wait until the last

moment, and to come on board just before the yacht sailed.

"You whopping bounder!" roared Handforth. "I don't believe a word of it! It's all swank—it's all spoof! You've never been invited, and you're hoping that Lord Dorrimore will——"

"Here comes his lordship himself!" interrupted Fullwood calmly.

Dorrie came strolling along the deck, and he grinned as he observed the three newcomers.

"Got here, then?" he said cheerfully. "I thought you were going to miss the boat, you young beggars!"

"We timed it just right, sir," said Fullwood.

All the rest of us stared hard.

"Do—do you mean to say, Dorrie, that you invited these rotters to come along with us?" I asked.

"There's no need to get excited, youngster," said Dorrie. "Of course I invited them. You don't think they'd come on board without being asked, do you? They seemed frightfully upset at being left behind, and all that, so I told them they could come if they wanted to. Their parents wrote to me, and said that everything was O.K., so what is there to worry about?"

"Oh, my goodness!" said Handforth blankly.

"The more the merrier," went on Lord Dorrimore. "We've got heaps of room aboard, and these three fellows were so cut up that I simply had to invite them."

Fullwood & Co. glanced at us with expressions of triumph.

"Well?" said Fullwood sneeringly. "What about it?"

"What about it!" yelled Handforth. "If Lord Dorrimore is content to have you on board, I'm not! I'm going to pitch you overside—and I'm going to do it now, you gloating rotters!"

Fullwood turned quickly.

"Look here, sir, do you allow this?" he asked. "Handforth is threatening to throw us——"

"Handforth is a reckless young ass!" interrupted Dorrie calmly. "He doesn't know what he's talking about half the time. It's all right. When he isn't quite so excited, he'll be more reasonable."

"But—but——"

Handforth looked flabbergasted, especially when Lord Dorrimore walked away.

"It's no good, Handy," I said. "It's too late to kick up a fuss now. We shall be slipping down the Thames within half an hour. We've got to resign ourselves to the fact that Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell are coming with us."

The nuts grinned at us, and strolled down the deck.

"Dear old boys, this is simply shockin'—it is, really!" said Sir Montie gravely. "It is more than I bargained for, you know. To have Fullwood an' those cads on board all the time will be appallin'!"

"The only thing we can do is to grin and bear it," I said. "It's quite plain that Fullwood worked on Dorrie's feelings—you know what a soft chap Dorrie is. Those cads evidently spoofed him right up to the neck. Well, they're on board now, and it's no good making a fuss."

But Handforth was very much inclined to make a fuss, and it needed all our combined efforts to prevent him from hurling himself at Fullwood on the spot. Since the nuts were especially invited, we could do absolutely nothing.

The yacht was Lord Dorrimore's, and the cads of Study A were Dorrie's guests. It was not for us to say whether they should come or not.

At the same time, it was distinctly upsetting, and the fellows didn't like it at all. Pitt and Somerton and the others were indignant and angry, and, if the circumstances had been different, Fullwood & Co. would have fared badly.

Fullwood & Co. had been invited, and Fullwood & Co. would have to come. It would spoil our holiday a bit,

but, on the other hand, the nuts' presence would possibly have another effect. We should be able to punch at least three noses when we were feeling ratty over something or other!

We slipped down the Thames from Tilbury in the early morning, and before long were out in the wide mouth of the Thames, passing Southend and Whitstable and Margate. Then we went out into the open Channel, and the actual voyage to blazing Brazil had commenced.

CHAPTER 6.

The Stowaway!

"HOW goes it, Umlosi, old son?" I asked cheerfully. "Feeling all serene?"

All the holiday party were on deck to get their last view of England for some little time, as the Wanderer ploughed her way down the English Channel. But Umlosi didn't seem to be interested in the receding shores of the old country. He was lolling back in a deck-chair.

"Wau! It is indeed a wondrous pleasure to be here, O Manzie!" rumbled Umlosi in his deep voice. "I am indeed all serene."

"That's good, then," I grinned. "I thought perhaps that you were a bit off colour, and were pretending to pass it off. You know—pains in the tummy, and all those sorts of things."

Umlosi nodded gravely.

"I have not been troubled by the pains thou hast mentioned," he said. "But it is not wise to speak too soon. Mayhap I shall be seized by a great illness ere long. Wau! It is a remarkable thing for me—Umlosi—the Chief of the Kutanas—to be stricken down by a malady which twists one up into knots, and that makes a man wish that he were off this earth!"

"Meaning sea-sickness?" remarked Handforth, who had just strolled up.

"I know not its name, O Clumsy One!" said Umlosi. "Methinks that thou art right, however. Sea-sickness, as thou hast termed it, is indeed a malady which one need be nervous of. While coming from mine own country to this great Empire of thine, I was stricken down. N'kose, my father, made light of it. But I will tell thee, O white youths, that I was near unto death."

"Don't you believe it, old son!" I grinned. "But sea-sickness has a way of making a fellow think that he is going to peg out. If we strike some rough sea before long, you'll probably have another attack—only worse!"

Umlosi looked rather alarmed.

"Thou art surely joking, O Manzie!" he said in an anxious voice. "Art thou not attempting to play with me? Is it possible that any attack can be worse than the one I have already experienced? Wau! I do not think so!"

"Well, we shall see," I said cheerfully. "But don't worry, old son. If you have an attack of mal-de-mer this trip, we'll look after you!"

The black giant shook his head dolefully.

"Thou art making use of words which are beyond my comprehension, O Nimble One!" he said. "But mayhap it will be better for us not to discuss this subject, since I have noticed that when one discusses something unpleasant, that something generally comes to pass. It is better to be silent."

We chuckled and strolled away, leaving Umlosi still shaking his head in a doubtful manner. A moment later a steward came hurrying past us, and he paused.

"Do you know if his lordship is about, sir?" he inquired, touching his cap.

"Yes; I think Lord Dorrimore is just behind the bridge," I replied. "Anything important? You look rather anxious."

"I'm not exactly anxious, sir," said the steward. "But there's something

I'd like to tell his lordship right at once."

"You'd better follow me, then," I said briskly.

"Thank you, sir."

We went along the deck, and within a minute or two came to the spot where Lord Dorrimore was chatting with the guv'nor. They both looked round when I spoke.

"This chap wants a word with you, Dorrie," I said.

"He can have fifty if he wants," said Lord Dorrimore obligingly. "Well, my good chap, what's the trouble? Higher wages or shorter hours?"

The steward grinned.

"It's nothing like that, my lord," he said. "It's this way. I didn't go to the cap'n, because I was expressly asked not to. But down below, in one of the spare cabins, there's a lady."

"A which?" said Dorrie with sudden interest.

"A lady, my lord!"

"My dear man, there are a good many ladies on board——"

"Yes, my lord; I know that. But this lady isn't a member of the party," said the steward. "She is looking regular scared, too, and I don't exactly know what to do about it. I thought I'd come and report to you at once, my lord—especially as she asked me to."

"She asked you to?" asked Dorrie. "What sort of a lady is she?"

"An elderly lady, my lord."

"Did she give her name?"

"No, my lord."

"Don't keep 'my lord-ing' me," said Dorrie irritably. "The best thing you can do is to call me 'sir.' It's much shorter, and it doesn't sound so bally formal. Well, about this lady. You say she is in one of the spare cabins?"

"Yes, my lord—I—I mean, sir!"

"An' how did she come to be there?"

"I don't exactly know, sir," said the steward. "I went in that cabin in order to get something, sir, and I was quite thunderstruck when I found the lady there."

"I should think you were," said Dorrie. "Well, I suppose the best thing we can do is to go along an' investigate."

"She wouldn't give no account of herself, sir," said the steward. "By what I could make out, she hasn't got any luggage on board, and she's really scared of seeing you or the skipper."

"A stowaway, eh?" chuckled Dorrie. "By gad! This seems to be rather interestin'!"

His lordship was puzzled, and so was Nelson Lee. Anyhow, they went along the deck with the steward, and I followed. We passed down the beautiful companion, and then went along one of the highly decorated passages, until we came to the sleeping cabins. The steward led us straight to one right at the end.

"This is the room, sir," he said, indicating it.

Lord Dorrimore tapped upon the panels, and we waited for a reply. It was not long in coming, for a somewhat nervous voice made itself heard.

"Come in!" it said.

"Why, that sounds like——" began Nelson Lee.

"By the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Lord Dorrimore, opening the door abruptly.

We passed in, and then we received a big surprise—at least, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrie did. But I was not aware of the identity of the lady who stood before us, for I had not seen her before.

"Why, good gracious!" ejaculated Nelson Lee. "Miss Kerrigan! I had no idea that you were on board——"

"Glory! This is simply great!" shouted Dorrie, rushing forward, and grasping Miss Kerrigan's hand with considerable warmth. "My dear Aunt Janet, I had no idea that I should receive such a pleasant surprise. I didn't know you were comin'."

"Oh, Lord Dorrimore, I'm afraid you will be terribly angry with me!" she exclaimed, rather nervously. "I—I

don't know how to explain—I don't know what to say! I am sure you will think I am a terrible person!"

"Nothin' of the kind!" said Dorrie. "My dear lady, I am more than gratified to find you here. I am certain that you have got a very good explanation, and I've got a feelin' that an apology is due from me."

"No! Nothing of the kind, Lord Dorrimore," said Miss Kerrigan quickly. "It is I who must apologise. I came on board last night, before the yacht sailed from Tilbury——"

"One moment!" interrupted Dorrie. "Please pardon me for buttin' in like this. But if you came on board last night, it stands to reason that you haven't eaten to-day!"

"It really doesn't matter," said Aunt Janet nervously.

"Doesn't it!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "We'll soon see to that, Miss Kerrigan! You'll come along with us at once to the dining-saloon. The explanations can be left until afterwards. They are unimportant, anyhow. The main thing is to have you here with us. By gad! Young Stanley will be nearly off his head with delight!"

"But—but I have no right to be on board, and I feel awfully guilty," said Aunt Janet, looking really upset. "I would best prefer to explain now, Lord Dorrimore, if you don't mind. I want to know what you will think in the circumstances. Oh, I have been so silly!"

"We'll soon have everythin' square an' smooth, Miss Kerrigan," said Dorrie gracefully. "There's no need to be alarmed, an' there's no need to look worried, either. If you're anxious about tellin' us the yarn now—well, perhaps it'll be the best. Go ahead!"

"Sit down, Miss Kerrigan, and please keep calm," said Nelson Lee gently. "It is quite obvious that your presence on the yacht is due to some mistake or other, and if you wish to be put ashore on British soil, it will be quite a simple matter. So you may ease your mind on that point."

Miss Kerrigan shook her head.

"I'm not worrying about that at all," she said. "But I will confess everything."

"Dash it all, Miss Kerrigan, there's no need to talk like that," smiled Dorrie. "There's nothin' to confess, I'm sure. But I won't interrupt again."

"It is really very simple and very silly," said Aunt Janet, flushing slightly. "I am sure that you will laugh at me when I have told you everything, gentlemen. I came on board last night, during all the bustle, before the yacht had received all its passengers. I badly wanted to see you, Lord Dorrimore. I wanted to talk with you."

"That's very charmin' of you, Miss Kerrigan," said Dorrie. "I can't understand why I didn't see you, or why nobody told me you were on board ——"

"Oh, that was really my own fault!" said Miss Kerrigan. "You see, when I came on board I was too nervous to speak to you, or, in fact, to speak to anybody just then. So I came below, and found this cabin. I thought I should be quite safe inside, and so I stepped in, closed the door, and sat down to wait."

"I quite understand," said Dorrie. "What happened then?"

"Oh, that is the very silly part of it!" said Aunt Janet. "I was tired with the heat and with a long, worrying day. And while I was waiting in there, I thought it would be just as well to sit down and take a rest. Well, I must have fallen asleep on the spot, for I did not wake up until it was quite dark, and then I was afraid to come out. I knew that I would be disturbing you, and I decided that it would be better to wait until the morning."

"I'm frightfully sorry you were so troubled, Miss Kerrigan," said Dorrie. "You ought to have aroused some-

body at once, an' I should have come along."

"No, I decided to wait until the morning, and I naturally went to sleep again," said Aunt Janet. "But this time I slept until late, and I knew that the yacht was under way—I could feel the throbbing of the deck, and, when I looked out of the porthole, I saw that we were far away from land. Oh, I was so frightened! I didn't know what to do, and I didn't know which way to turn. I just remained in here, worrying, and waiting for something to happen. I couldn't pluck up enough courage to come out and face you!"

"Hang it all, Miss Kerrigan, I'm not an ogre, you know!" smiled Dorrie. "An' so I suppose you waited until that steward butted in?"

"Yes," said Aunt Janet. "And then, of course, I knew that I should find it necessary to explain my presence. I haven't done that even yet—I haven't told you why I came on board."

"To bid young Stanley good-bye again, no doubt?" asked Dorrie.

"No—not that," said Miss Kerrigan slowly. "I—I was wondering if it would be possible for me to—to—— Oh, I really can't say it! It sounds so terribly impudent, and—and——"

"Don't say it!" said Lord Dorrimore quickly. "I know exactly what you mean, Miss Kerrigan. The fact is, you want to come on the trip with us—and I have been most discourteous in havin' failed to invite you. I really don't know what I can say to apologise. You must be thinkin' me awfully mean."

"Oh, no—I think you're simply splendid!" said Miss Kerrigan. "I came on board because I wanted to ask you if it would be possible for me to come. I really hope you will forgive me, Lord Dorrimore."

"I think it is for me to be forgiven, Miss Kerrigan," said Dorrie. "I ought to have realised that you would like to come to the Amazon—that you would care to accompany your little nephew on the trip. But I never gave the matter a thought—I assumed that you would prefer to remain in London, and that you would have no desire to take this long journey."

"I have always longed for such an opportunity," said Miss Kerrigan simply.

"Then we'll say no more about it," said Dorrie. "I only want you to forgive me for havin' been such a thoughtless bounder. I took it for granted that you wouldn't care to come, an' so I never asked you. It was shockin'ly remiss of me, an' I have no other excuse to offer."

Aunt Janet was immensely relieved. I couldn't help feeling somewhat amused, for the whole affair was certainly rather humorous. Miss Kerrigan had come on board for the express purpose of interviewing Lord Dorrimore; but somehow she had bottled herself up in that cabin, and the result was that we knew nothing of her presence until now. She was, in fact, a kind of stowaway.

"I understand, Miss Kerrigan, that you have no trunks with you?" asked Nelson Lee, after a short pause.

"No, I am afraid not, Mr. Lee," said Aunt Janet. "You see, I really came on board to ask Lord Dorrimore's permission, and then it was my intention to send for my trunks afterwards. I am afraid I am causing a terrible amount of trouble."

"Not at all," said Nelson Lee. "Make yourself quite easy in mind, Miss Kerrigan. I am certain that Lady Helen Tregellis-West will fix you up with everything you need. Our little party is now quite complete, and I am sure that everybody on board will be very pleased to have you amongst us."

"It's awfully nice of you to say that, Mr. Lee," said Miss Kerrigan. "I really don't know how to thank you—or how to thank Lord Dorrimore——"

"That's jolly good, then," inter-

rupted Dorrie. "If you don't know how to thank us, Miss Kerrigan, there's no need to attempt it. Please don't say another word—it'll only make me feel more of a brute than ever."

Aunt Janet was put quite at her ease, and shortly afterwards she came out on deck, and it was not long before young Stanley discovered that his aunt was on board. The fag came running up, flushed with excitement, and panting with delight.

"Auntie!" he exclaimed, throwing himself into her arms. "I didn't know you were here!"

"I didn't know that I was coming, Stanley dear," said Aunt Janet, with a suspicion of tears in her eyes. "I am sure that we shall be very happy together—and it is simply splendid to go out to the Amazon on this trip—to—to find traces of your poor father!"

"We shall find him, auntie—I know we shall!" said the fag firmly. "I'm jolly certain that dad's alive—it's all rot to say that he's dead! I won't believe it!"

Aunt Janet shook her head.

"Stanley dear, you mustn't be too hopeful," she said. "I, too, believe that your father is still alive—but it is just as well not to count too much on it. We may not be able to locate him; it is just possible that we shall find no trace of him. So you must not be too eager, and too optimistic."

"That's all right, auntie," said Stanley. "I know we shall find him—Mr. Lee's with us, and if Mr. Lee can't find anybody, it's a pretty certain sign that nobody on earth can!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Somebody, at least, has a high opinion of me," he remarked smoothly. "Well, Stanley, we will certainly do our best to find your father—and I really have an idea that our quest will not be quite hopeless. Your aunt is with us now, and that makes our party all the more complete. If it is humanly possible, we shall win through!"

And from that moment Miss Kerrigan was a member of Lord Dorrimore's holiday party.

CHAPTER 7.

Many on the Sick List!

AUNT JANET had quite settled down by dinner-time that evening. Everybody made her feel comfortable, and Sir Montie's aunt, particularly, had done everything possible to make Aunt Janet feel that she was more than welcome in the party.

This, in fact, was quite true. We were all pleased to have the elderly lady with us. She had been introduced to everybody, and during dinner she lost all her nervousness, and became quite a merry soul. When the meal was over, she went into the drawing-room with the ladies, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore seized the opportunity to go on deck for a stroll and a smoke.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie and myself, with most of the other juniors, went down into the gymnasium, which had been set aside for our especial use. This apartment was a magnificent place, and it made an excellent Common-room for the juniors. In the gym, we could congregate, and shout, and cause as much row as we liked.

On deck, Dorrie and the guv'nor were pacing up and down, chatting together. It was still quite light, of course, and the evening was fairly fine. A good bit of a breeze had sprung up during the night, and the effect of this was seen and felt.

For one thing, the atmosphere was by no means as warm and cheerful as it had been. In addition, the sea was not so smooth. It was not exactly choppy, but there was a swell which made the yacht roll more. The captain was of the opinion that we should

run into a little summer storm during the night.

"Seems to be making up for a bit of a blow," remarked Nelson Lee, as he tossed his cigarette over the rail. "What do you think, Dorrie?"

"Old man, it doesn't worry me in the slightest," said Lord Dorrimore. "It can blow as hard as it likes, and I shall go on just the same. This little packet is safe enough for any sea. As for having sea-sickness—well, I haven't been troubled with it for ten years—and I don't suppose I shall be troubled with it now!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, Dorrie, you're a hardened sinner, I believe," he smiled.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore chatted for some time about the trip and the object of it—the quest for Colonel Kerrigan. They fully realised that they had a difficult proposition before them, but they were not without hope of being successful. Aunt Janet's story of her visions had impressed them and made them feel that the lost explorer was still in the land of the living.

"Jove! That was a rather heavy roll then," said Dorrie presently.

A heavy sea had struck the ship forcibly, and it heeled over. The dusk was growing, and the sea on every hand was looking murky and forbidding. It was practically certain that we were in for a rough night—for the time of the year.

It was June, and it was not likely that we were to have a real, hard blow—just a little breeze, perhaps, which would clear up before the morning. However, it was quite sufficient to give the yacht a peculiar motion which did not agree at all well with a hearty dinner.

Nelson Lee was rather amused as he and Dorrie went below in order to join the ladies.

"I guarantee that many people won't be at the breakfast table tomorrow morning, Dorrie," he smiled.

"There will be a somewhat sad story to tell; Dr. Brett will be fully engaged."

"Dr. Brett was the practitioner from Bellton—and he had come. He had passed over his practise to the hands of a locum tenens, and had accepted Lord Dorrimore's invitation to come with us on the trip to South America. Dr. Brett was an old friend of Nelson Lee's, and he was delighted to be a member of the party.

Meanwhile, the juniors were discussing particulars in the gymnasium below.

"This is great!" Handforth was saying. "I simply love this motion, you chaps. There is just a lovely swing about it, and it'll give us a terrific appetite for breakfast in the morning."

"I'm not so sure about that," said De Valerie. "It might have the opposite effect, my son."

Handforth sniffed.

"Nothing will affect me," he declared. "Sea-sickness is only known by chaps who haven't got any stamina. I shall never be down with it!"

"Don't you be too sure of that, Handy," I said, grinning. "Sea-sickness comes upon a chap when he doesn't expect it. He thinks he is all serene, and then suddenly he gets an attack."

"Don't you worry about me," said Handforth.

"I'm not worrying, my son—you're the chap who'll do that," I said. "I've had two or three doses of sea-sickness—and I know what it is. I'm pretty well hardened to it by this time."

"Well, it's not the first time I've been to sea, by long chalks," said Handforth. "A chap doesn't have sea-sickness twice. It's like a dose of measles—he has one attack and then he's all right for the rest of his life."

It was getting rather late now, and the yacht was certainly rolling far more than she had done. It was a steady, sluggish roll, which made itself felt very much. The Wanderer dipped

up and down to the seas, and at each dip there was a curious feeling in the pit of one's stomach. To anybody well accustomed to the sea, it was not at all disconcerting, but to a fellow who had not been to sea for some time, the sensation was far from pleasant.

A good many of the juniors were looking rather pale already, although they certainly would not admit that they felt a little groggy. Fatty Little's face was the worst. This was not at all surprising, considering his occupation.

Fatty had eaten an enormous dinner, but even then his appetite was not fully satisfied. It was only in the natural order of things that he should have made great pals of the chief steward. The result was that Fatty could get some extra grub whenever he liked. His appetite was enormous, and it required a tremendous amount of grub to fill him up.

At the present moment he was sitting on the corner of a table, contentedly demolishing a pork pie. The interior was rather fatty, and I noticed that many juniors avoided looking in Fatty's direction.

Not content with the pie, Little started devouring ham sandwiches.

"How the dickens do you manage it?" I asked, grinning. "You had an enormous dinner."

"Enormous!" echoed Fatty, with his mouth full. "What rot! Why, I only just had a snack—a biting on. I don't suppose you call that a dinner, do you? I simply must have something before I go to bed, or I wouldn't be able to sleep a wink. There's nothing worse than a fellow going to bed hungry!"

"Considering the amount you've eaten, you ought not to feel hungry for a week!" said Tommy Watson. "As for those fat ham sandwiches and that awful-looking pork pie, you'll turn everybody in this room sick before long! I'm beginning to feel a bit offside myself!"

"Yes, cut it out, Fatty!" said De Valerie. I don't think I shall be seasick, but—but—well, that stuff makes me bad to look at it!"

"I didn't ask you to look," said Fatty. "These sandwiches are ripping, and the pork pie was first-class. Would anybody care for a sandwich?"

"Not me!" said De Valerie, holding his belt. "I—I feel a bit queer, I'll admit. Oh, my goodness! That—that horrible-looking fat nearly bowls me over!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

De Valerie was making no pretence of it now. He was not only pale, but he looked drawn. And then, without the slightest warning, he made a dive for the door.

"Shan't be long, you chaps!" he gasped hurriedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old chap!" I grinned. "He's got a nice little dose, by the look of it!"

The other fellows yelled, and Fatty Little continued his meal—with greater gusto than ever. Anything of a fatty nature to a chap who is feeling slightly upset in his lower regions is enough to bring on sea-sickness.

Several of the juniors drifted casually out of the gymnasium, one after the other. They protested that they were quite all right, and that Fatty's meal was not affecting them in the slightest degree. But this was quite wrong. The fat junior's snack was having its effect.

"Haven't you finished eating yet, Fatty?" demanded Pitt. "The pork pie was bad enough, but those sandwiches are simply awful!"

"Rats!" said Fatty. "They're ripping! Best sandwiches I've tasted for months. Plenty of fat, and——"

"Oh, my hat! Don't talk about fat!" groaned the Hon. Douglas Singleton. "I was feeling all right until I came in here, but the sight of you is turning me inside out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty laughed with the rest of the

fellows, and he continued eating, with as much gusto as before. But I noticed that his face was getting paler, and I read the signs clearly. Fatty himself was sublimely unconscious of the coming catastrophe.

"Sea-sickness will never affect a chap who's got a good appetite," he said, taking another sandwich. "Take me, for example. I shouldn't be sick if I was to drink quarts of oil!"

"Shut up, you fathead!" howled McClure, holding his waistcoat.

"Is it coming on?" I asked sympathetically.

"Well, I'm feeling a bit wonky!" said McClure. "What else can you expect, with a giddy porpoise in the room gorging himself on fat meat!"

McClure departed, and Fatty Little grinned broader than ever.

"I shan't be long now," he said. "I've just got to finish these three sandwiches, and then I shall be all right until bed-time. I only need another snack, and then I shall be all right for the night."

Fatty suddenly paused in his eating. He held the sandwich half-way between the table and his mouth, and a rather startled expression came into his eyes. He turned paler still, and he gave a curious little gulp.

"Anything wrong, Fatty?" I inquired.

"Nunno! I—I'm all right!" gasped Fatty. "I—I feel a bit——"

"Great pancakes! I—I——"

"Well, what's the matter?" I asked.

"I—I don't think I want any more of these sandwiches!" panted Fatty, looking round with a wild expression in his eyes. "They—they don't taste so nice, you know! Oh, great bloaters! I—I feel awful!"

Fatty doubled in and held his waistcoat, while he writhed in anguish. He had been attacked suddenly—not at all surprising considering the enormous amount of sickly stuff he had just demolished.

"You'd better get out on deck, quick!" I advised. "Buck up, Fatty!"

"Ow! By chutney! Yarooooh!" gasped Fatty painfully. "I—I feel horrible, you know! I—believe it's worse than sea-sickness, you chaps! You're grinning, and I'm in mortal agony!"

"You shouldn't be such a fat gorger!" said Fullwood sourly.

"It serves you jolly well right, Fatty!" sneered Gulliver.

"Yes, rather," said Bell, with relish.

Fatty glared at them.

"You—you rotters!" he roared. "I'll—I'll—— Oh, help!"

He staggered towards the door, but paused when he got near it. He looked round, with an expression on his face which was full of alarm and concern.

"It's not sea-sickness, you chaps!" he panted. "That—that pork pie must have been squiffy, or something! I—I believe I'm poisoned!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't waste any more time down here, Fatty!" I said sharply. "You'd better go on deck at once—and say good-bye to that great supper of yours."

Fatty Little took the advice, and he staggered out of the room, amid a general roar of laughter. Certainly there were not many fellows left in the gymnasium to laugh. Well over half of them had already gone on deck, many of them pretending that they wanted a breath of fresh air. But I knew better. The rolling motion of the yacht had made itself felt, and the juniors were not quite equal to the ordeal.

"I'm blowed if I'd let sea-sickness affect me in that way!" said Ralph Leslie Fullwood contemptuously. "I don't want to boast, but I'll bet nothing affects my stomach! I'm healthy, and a healthy chap's never troubled by sickness."

Handforth strolled across the gym and faced Fullwood.

"What about McClure?" he asked. "Is McClure healthy? He's got it, and

pretty bad, too. Health hasn't got anything to do with it, you ass! I shan't be affected, because I've got a strong digestion. Fats don't trouble me at all. Now, look at margarine, for example. I could take a pound of margarine now, and eat it by the spoonful!"

"Dry up, you ass!" said Church, swallowing hard.

"I don't see why I should dry up!" said Handforth. "It's true, isn't it? Then, again, what about sardines? They're fatty, oily things. The rich, juicy oil out of a sardine-tin is jolly fine stuff to drink!"

"Oh, shut up, you silly rotter!" growled Fullwood, changing colour slightly.

"There's no harm in talking about grub, I suppose?" asked Handforth calmly. "And what about cod liver oil? That's fine stuff, taking it as a medicine. It may not be very pleasant, but it does your inside a jolly lot of good!"

"Can't you dry up?" roared Fullwood savagely. "All this talk about cod liver oil and sardines is makin' me feel bad!"

"I thought nothing would affect your tummy?" grinned Handforth.

"Oh, don't be a fool!" snapped Fullwood. "I'm strong enough, but I can't stand that sort of rot!"

"I—I'm goin' on deck!" muttered Gulliver, in a queer voice.

He made a charge for the door, and disappeared at record speed. Bell was only a few seconds after him, and Fullwood gazed at the door longingly.

His face was pale, and there was a sickly kind of look about it. In spite of all his boasts, it seemed that seasickness was not such a remote possibility with him, after all. Yet he would not admit it.

"Talking about fat," went on Handforth, "there's a jolly fine stuff people make pastry with. I'm talking about lard. Now, lard is all very well used in certain ways, but I shouldn't like to eat it by the spoonful."

"Can't you dry up?" howled Fullwood savagely.

"Why should I?" asked Handforth. "Lard's fine stuff——"

"Oh, by gad!" gasped Fullwood hastily.

He dashed to the door, tore it open, and flung himself into the passage at full speed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's the way to do it!" grinned Handforth. "I thought I'd make that ass do a dance, you know. Talking about lard and dripping and margarine and sardine oil——"

"Dear old boy, I think we've had quite enough about it!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "I'm not gettin' seasick, but the very thought of those things makes a fellow a bit groggy—it does, really!"

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "There's nothing wrong with sardine oil and cod liver oil, and all those other sort of things."

The yacht was heaving rather more vigorously now, and Handforth staggered once or twice as he crossed the gymnasium. As a matter of fact, his own words were beginning to have their effect on himself! Although he tried to put everything from his mind, he kept picturing tins of sardine oil and pounds of margarine, to say nothing of bottles of cod liver oil. The whole conglomeration arose before his mind in a most disconcerting manner.

"I—I think I'll go for a stroll on deck," he said casually. "I'll have a look for McClure. You'd better come, too, Church."

"But I'm not feeling seasick!" said Church.

"Do you think I am?" roared Handforth. "There's nothing wrong with me—— Ow! Garoooh! Oh, my goodness! I—I——"

Handforth could wait for no more. He placed both his hands over the lower region of his waistcoat and fled.

CHAPTER 8.

The S O S Call!

NELSON LEE smiled as he entered the breakfast-saloon on the following morning.

"My prediction was not far wrong, Dorrie," he remarked calmly. "I think there will be many seats empty during this meal."

"Looks like it, old man," said Dorrie. "Just over a little bit of a rock like that, too! Why, it was nothin' to speak of! It's still blowing a bit, but the glass is risin', an' we shall have glorious weather before the day is out, you mark my words."

Lord Dorrimore turned, as a huge figure hove into sight.

"Hallo, Umlosi!" said his lordship. "How goes it, you lump of animated lamp-black? Feelin' sick?"

Umlosi smiled broadly.

"My feelings are of the best, O N'Kose, my father," he rumbled. "The strange sickness has not seized me, although methinks it will be as well not to speak too soon. Wau! It is a bad sensation, my father!"

"It certainly lays a fellow out flat," agreed Dorrie, nodding. "Hallo, Nipper, my worthy son of mischief, how goes it? Where are the others?"

I had just strolled up with Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

"Oh, the others?" I repeated. "They're mostly on the sick list!"

"Just as I thought!" grinned Dorrie. "Think what a savin' of grub!"

"Oh, dry up, Dorrie!" I grinned. "You're a fine chap to talk about saving grub—when you generally splash your money about as though it were so much sand. We had quite a pantomime down in the gym last night. Fatty Little was gorging himself with pork pies and other things, and he suddenly succumbed——"

"I shall probably succumb if you start talking about horrid things like pork pies!" said Dorrie severely. "Dry up, you young ass! I want some breakfast this morning!"

I grinned, and dried up. Only a few fellows turned up for breakfast, the others being still in their cabins, in the throes of anguish. Young Stanley Kerrigan was as lively as a cricket, and he was not affected at all. Neither was his aunt, for she appeared, looking the very picture of health.

Morrow, of the Sixth, was all right, but Frinton had deemed it wiser to remain in his bunk. Breakfast, to his mind, was a horrible concoction, unfit for any human being.

Watson's sister, Miss Violet was looking as fresh and dainty as ever that morning. Sea-sickness had certainly not affected her, although one or two of the other girls had decided to keep to their cabins until later in the day.

During the morning the weather was somewhat cold and rough. The wind was still fresh, and the sea remained rather heavy.

But by noon the sun had broken through the clouds, and the day was rapidly becoming a glorious one.

In fact, by tea-time one would have imagined that such things as dull skies and high winds were impossible.

After tea it was hot and sunny, and the sea had calmed down considerably. Only one or two fellows remained in their cabins during the evening. The others got over their slight attack of sea-sickness and appeared, vastly relieved at the change in the weather conditions.

The evening was well advanced when we sighted a dirty old tramp steamer ahead. She lay almost directly on our course, and appeared to be stationary, for some reason or other. We soon found out what this reason was.

For, when we got close, we discovered that the old tramp steamer was disabled and unable to proceed on her journey. Captain Burton signalled to ask if any help was required.

The tramp replied that everything was all right. The propeller-shaft had developed a defect, and the engine-room staff was busily engaged upon re-

pairing it. Until this repair was effected, the tramp would have to remain in her present position. So the Wanderer proceeded on its course.

After dinner, Miss Violet expressed a desire to have a look into the wireless-room, so Tommy Watson and I offered to show her round. Montie, of course, came with us. It was growing dusk, and when we went into the wireless-room the operator switched on the electric light, and was only too pleased to describe everything in detail to Miss Violet.

Everybody on the yacht was perfectly willing to leave anything in order to grant a favour to Miss Violet Watson. She was certainly the belle of the whole party. The prettiest of girls, she was, at the same time, extremely dainty and wonderfully attractive.

"You see, Miss Violet, there's nothing particularly complicated about it," I said, after she had been told everything.

"It seems terribly complicated to me!" she laughed. "All these wires, and instruments, and things! Why, I should be dreadfully confused if I were left in here alone! What should I do if another ship tried to communicate with us?"

"Why, you'd simply do this, Miss Watson," said the operator, a cheerful young fellow named Green. "It's as simple as A B C—really!"

Miss Violet did not appear to think so, but she was greatly interested in everything that was shown to her. And we were just about to leave the wireless-room when something of a startling nature occurred.

The receiver began buzzing, and Mr. Green lost no time in getting down to his bench. I stood quite still, listening—for, of course, I was well acquainted with the code. And I read the message that came through.

"Oh, this is quite interesting!" exclaimed Miss Violet, clapping her hands. "Some other ship is speaking to us! I'd love to know what they are saying!"

"It's something important, Miss Violet!" I said quickly. "That's the S O S call they're giving!"

"Begad!"

"The—the which?" gasped Watson.

"It's S O S," I repeated. "It's an appeal for assistance, Miss Violet! Some ship must be in distress!"

"Oh, dear!" said the girl, looking grave.

We all stood by tensely, watching while Mr. Green took down the message and communicated with the ship which was appealing for help. It was not long before he turned round to us, with a flushed expression and with his eyes gleaming animatedly.

"She's not far off, Nipper!" he exclaimed. "They've given me the latitude and longitude, and we ought to be able to reach the place within two or three hours. It's that old tramp steamer we passed early this evening!"

"But she wasn't sinking then?" said Tommy Watson.

"No; she's developed a leak, or something," said Mr. Green. "They said something about an explosion, or a breakage—I couldn't quite make it out. Anyhow, they're in distress and need help immediately."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Watson. "What the dickens shall we do?"

"That's for the skipper to say," I replied quickly. "I'll take that message, if you like, Mr. Green—you'd better stop here in case they call again."

The operator was agreeable to this, and I lost no time in hurrying out and making for the bridge, where Captain Burton was at the wheel. Watson, and his sister, and Sir Montie came after me, but at a more sedate speed.

I found Captain Burton chatting with Lord Dorrimore. He looked round quickly as I called him by name.

"Yes, Nipper?" he said. "Is there anything wrong? You seem to be rather excited, my boy——"

"It's a distress signal, sir—just come by wireless!" I said rapidly.

"Let me see it!" said Captain Burton, in crisp tones.

He took the sheet of paper which I was carrying, and he glanced at it rapidly. Lord Dorrimore removed his panama and scratched his head.

"Distress signal, eh?" he murmured. "That's frightfully interestin', you know."

Captain Burton looked up.

"This seems to be very serious, sir," he exclaimed. "You remember that tramp steamer we passed early this evening—the vessel that was disabled?"

"Yes, I remember it," said Dorrie.

"She's sinking," declared Captain Burton. "The S O S message has just been received from her. It appears that they have a leakage now, owing to the damaged propeller. They are asking for assistance to be sent at once, and they are not more than twenty or thirty miles away. We must alter our course at once, sir."

"Well, rather!" agreed Dorrie. "If there's any ship in distress, we'll go to the rescue and do what we can. Full speed ahead, captain!"

Clang! Clang!

The engine-room telegraph rang out, and Captain Burton gave some brisk orders. Very shortly afterwards the Wanderer had practically doubled back on her course, and she was speeding away to the rescue of the disabled steamer at full speed.

Everybody on board knew that something unusual was happening, for not only had the yacht altered her course, but she was now going all out—she was no longer travelling along at her even pace.

The dusk was now rather deep; the hour was certainly late, and, in ordinary circumstances, most of the guests would be preparing for bed at about this time. The juniors were particularly excited, and they declared that they had no intention of turning in until the disabled steamer was found. However, this plan was soon knocked on the head.

"It's no good you boys waiting about now," said Dorrie, strolling along the deck. "There'll be nothing to see!"

"But I thought that we were going to the rescue of a sinking ship?" asked Pitt.

Dorrie nodded.

"Well, so we are," he admitted, "but you mustn't think that we shall sight the vessel within a few minutes, my lad. It's a good distance away, and there's no hope whatever of reaching her until one or two o'clock in the morning."

The fellows were rather disappointed, but they realised that it would be far better to go to bed as usual, and to get up at the first sign of activity.

We received no further wireless message, although Mr. Green sent out inquiries at frequent intervals. What this portended we did not know, but it was rather significant.

There was nothing to do but wait, and I did not see the fun of waiting on deck when there was a comfortable bed below. So I went down with Sir Montie and Tommy, and we were soon fast asleep. But I had made up my mind to wake between one o'clock and half-past, and my chums had made me promise that I would arouse them at the same time.

Sure enough, I woke up at a quarter-past one.

I awoke my chums, and we lost no time in slipping some clothes on and going up on deck. The short summer night was soon showing signs of coming to an end. Over in the East, the sky against the horizon was red and flushed with the first gleam of a summer's day.

We met Mr. Hudson, the first officer, just coming down from the bridge. He nodded and smiled at us.

"Well, boys, what's the meaning of this?" he asked. "You ought to be asleep——"

"We've come up to hear about the

ship, sir," said Watson. "You know—that one that sent out the SOS message. Has she been sighted yet?"

"Not yet, Master Watson," said Mr. Hudson. "The captain is on deck at the present moment, and the fact is, he is rather worried."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because we have already reached the spot mentioned in that wireless appeal," said the first officer. "We've been here for some little time, pottering about. Personally, I think the ship has sunk—it's possible that we shall see some of the lifeboats as soon as the light gets stronger."

"Look here! But everybody might have gone to the bottom," replied Sir Montie.

Mr. Hudson shook his head.

"That's hardly likely," he replied. "The sea is quite calm, and the crew had plenty of time to get into the boats and to put out before the vessel had fully sunk. I expect we shall find them knocking about somewhere in the vicinity."

But Mr. Hudson's prophecy did not seem a very excellent one. As the daylight grew stronger we looked about us with interest, but the sea was clear and absolutely bare on every side. There was no sign of a steamer, and no sign of a lifeboat.

But, just as we were beginning to fear the worst, the look-out man in the bows—who had been placed there by special orders—gave a sudden hail, and the next moment there was a wave of subdued excitement passing over the Wanderer's decks.

For something at last had been seen.

The other fellows gazed around them eagerly and excitedly, but I did not do this. I gave my full attention to Captain Burton, who was on the bridge, and I saw that he was using his binoculars, and he was gazing at one spot away over the starboard bow, with fixed intentness.

This was good enough for me.

I soon focused my own binoculars, and I stared out in the same direction. Almost at once I was rewarded.

Something could be seen low down in the water, and a considerable distance from the yacht. With the naked eye, the object was nearly invisible, but the binoculars brought it up in sharp relief, and I was very soon able to see what the object was.

A man was lying on a small portion of wreckage, which I could not quite make out; but the man was evidently alive, for I saw signs of movement.

The yacht, meanwhile, was steaming at full speed towards the spot.

The man was now standing up—or, at least, leaning, and waving a handkerchief. The piece of wreckage seemed to be the cover of a hatchway, and the man was alone upon it. There was no sign of any other object in the vicinity, and there were certainly no boats.

"This is rather queer, my sons," I said, addressing Sir Montie and Tommy. "It'll be pretty awful if there's been a tragedy—if all the other members of the crew have gone to the bottom."

"Dear old boy, it'll be simply shockin'," said Sir Montie, shaking his head. "I sincerely hope that nothing so dreadful has come to pass."

By the time the yacht drew right up and hove to, there were a good few other juniors on deck. We all watched with great interest as a boat was lowered and quickly launched into the water. At the last moment Tom Burton came rushing up to the group with whom I was standing.

"Are you coming, Nipper?" he asked eagerly.

"Eh? Coming where?" I asked.

"Well, souse me, in the boat, of course!" said the Bo'sun. "They've given me permission to go, and you can come as well if you want to!"

"I'm your man!" I said promptly.

Some of the other juniors wanted to come, of course, but this was impossible. So Tom Burton and I hurried into the boat, and we were soon pull-

ing away towards the wreckage, on which the man was now lying quite leisurely. Our boat contained two sailors, Lord Dorrimore, Mr. Hudson, Tom Burton, and myself. Nelson Lee had remained on deck, chatting with Dr. Brett, who had everything ready in case of emergency.

Lee said very little as we left the yacht's side and pulled away towards that insignificant little scrap of flotsam upon which a human being rested. What were we to discover? What story would this castaway have to tell?

CHAPTER 9.

Fullwood Asks For It!

"TAKE it easy, old man—take it easy!" said Lord Dorrimore kindly. "There's no need to exert yourself; neither is there any reason for getting excited."

"Thank Heaven you've come, sir!" exclaimed the castaway fervently.

His voice was weak, and he looked up at us with an expression of gratitude in his eyes. Only a moment or two before we had rescued him from the floating hatch cover, and he was now in the boat, supported by Tom Burton and Lord Dorrimore.

Judging by his uniform, the man was an officer, and he was not really exhausted. His period of exposure had not been of long duration, and he was not really soaked through, the sea being comparatively calm.

When we arrived back at the yacht, the fellow was hoisted on board, and taken below, in Dr. Brett's charge, where he was soon wrapped in warm blankets, and made comfortable. Hot beef tea and other stimulants were given to him.

Captain Burton came down to the cabin after the man had been made comfortable, and the skipper was quite satisfied that nothing further could be done at the moment. He smiled down at the castaway, and nodded.

"You're all right there, my friend," he said. "Just go to sleep, and have a good long rest—you can tell your story afterwards. All we want to know at present is whether there are any boats belonging to your ship cruising about ——"

"I'm afraid not, sir," interrupted the castaway sadly.

"What?" I exclaimed. "You—you don't mean to say——"

"I think the worst has happened," said the man. "As far as I know, every soul on board, with the exception of myself, went down with the old hooker."

"Good gracious!" said the captain.

"This is shockin'," said Dorrie, looking grave.

"It's worse than that, sir," said the man. "I'm feeling almost fit now—thanks to the doctor's splendid services. I want to tell you all about it at once. I don't want to sleep—I couldn't close my eyes just now. The poor old tub has gone down to Davy Jones!"

"How did it happen?" asked Nelson Lee quietly.

"Well, sir, I hardly know—and that's the truth," replied the man. "My name's Robertson, and I was third officer on board the poor old Copperfield. She wasn't much of a boat at the best—a saucepan with an engine in her, the skipper used to say—but it's bad to think of her going down like that."

"I judge that the disaster occurred suddenly?" asked Captain Burton.

"So suddenly, sir, that there wasn't a chance for the crew to get away," said Mr. Robertson. "You remember passing us last night, just before it got dark?"

"Of course," said the skipper. "We asked your captain if he wanted any help, and he said that he could manage. It's rather a pity he didn't take advantage of my offer."

"It is, sir," agreed the third mate of the Copperfield. "You see, at that time we were repairing the shaft—it had broken, and the chief engineer

reckoned that he could put it right. Well, sir, fairly late in the evening, the chief sent up word that she was all ready to resume her voyage, and that's when the accident occurred."

"What happened?" asked the Bo'sun eagerly.

Mr. Robertson shook his head.

"That's just it, young gent," he said. "Heaven knows what happened—I don't! I was on deck when the skipper rang down to have the engine started. I can remember the telephone clanging, and I can remember the engine starting. The poor old tub vibrated in every plate, and then there was a terrific crash below, and everything stopped. We could hear the water rushing in. Those below must have been caught like rats in a trap."

"Shockin'!". said Dorrie seriously. "Well, go on."

"The skipper was on the bridge, and he was shouting out wild orders to everybody," continued the castaway. "There's no sense in keeping back the truth, so I may as well tell you that the old man was rather full up with rum—a habit of his. The first officer wanted to have the boats launched at once, but the skipper wouldn't hear of it. He said that the old Copperfield would never sink. All this, you must realise, happened in the course of a minute or two—the whole disaster was over, from start to finish, within five minutes.

"She didn't sink at once, sir," said Mr. Robertson. "What happened was really worse. The boilers blew up, and the old boat simply rolled over—she turned turtle completely. Everybody below decks was trapped, and I think those who were on the bridge and on deck were sucked down. I don't exactly know what happened to me, because when I went overside I hit my head against a piece of wreckage. Everything else is rather hazy—at least, until the first sign of dawn."

"And then?"

"Well, then I found myself on that hatch cover, alone," said the castaway. "There wasn't a sign of a boat in any direction. It's pretty clear that everybody went down, and I believe I'm the sole survivor. It's a great blow to me, because my brother was on board. It's a bad business, sir, and one result of having a drunken skipper."

The castaway was unable to tell us much more, and presently we left him to sleep, acting under Dr. Brett's instructions. It was now broad daylight, and the sun was shining brilliantly.

We were all feeling rather affected by Mr. Robertson's story. We could not help thinking of those poor souls who had been sucked down into the Atlantic when the old tramp steamer took her last dive.

Captain Burton decided that it was quite useless to remain in the vicinity, since we had proved that no other survivors were about. The yacht resumed her voyage, and by dinner-time the fatal spot was well in the rear.

Mr. Robertson had almost recovered, too. Being summer-time, the exposure had not affected him much. Moreover, he was a hardy, thick-set individual, with a wiry frame and a constitution of iron. He didn't like being an invalid, and during the afternoon he insisted upon getting up and walking about just the same as the others. He was a very willing fellow, and he inquired if he could be of any use—if he could be put to some work or other.

Captain Burton did find him something to do, and Mr. Robertson was highly pleased. He made himself at home, but it was easy to see that he was very sad, and that he was thinking constantly of the companions he had lost only a short while before.

We were all affected by the incident, and there was not the same gaiety and laughter during the evening as there had been before. It was fine and warm, and under ordinary conditions we should have spent a very happy evening indeed—dancing, singing, and all the rest of it.

But this time we took it quietly. We

stood about chatting or reading, or doing anything that was quiet.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood seemed quite callous, which was, of course, in keeping with his character. He made no attempt to sympathise, and he expressed the opinion that we were making altogether too much fuss.

He set himself in a deckchair, got a book, and lolled there in ease and comfort. But he only did this after we had positively forbidden him to engage in a sing-song at the piano with Gulliver and Bell.

He was rather incensed about it, and I could see that he was sulky as he sat there in the chair, pretending to read. He didn't actually read—he was simply doing it to show off, and to make us think he was quite indifferent.

Violet Watson, by pure chance, happened to come along that portion of the deck just when Fullwood was sitting down in his deckchair. There were no other juniors on the spot, the majority of them being below in the gymnasium; and the main subject of conversation was, of course, the disaster to the steamer Copperfield, and the rescue of Mr. Robertson.

Miss Violet was looking for Ethel Church, and she was rather warm and out of patience, having been chasing about for quite a time.

The air was quite still and rather humid. Miss Violet caught sight of Fullwood, and she smiled to herself. She felt very much like enjoying an ice-cream at that moment, and she saw no reason why she shouldn't ask Fullwood to fetch her one. She had had very little to do with him so far, mainly because Tommy had warned her not to be friendly with Ralph Leslie.

But Violet had seen nothing very dreadful in Fullwood's character. He was not a bad-looking fellow, he always dressed very smartly, and she believed that her brother had a boyish prejudice against him. In any case, there was no reason why she should not ask Fullwood to fetch her an ice-cream.

She walked up to his deckchair, and stood there for a moment or two before speaking. Fullwood, of course, was quite aware of her presence, but it pleased him to take no notice of her. Being Watson's sister, Fullwood regarded Miss Violet as a second edition of Tommy himself. He sneeringly referred to her as "Tommy's echo."

"Isn't it dreadfully warm this evening?" asked Violet, breaking the silence.

Fullwood took no notice—deliberately.

"There seems to be something dreadfully humid in this air," went on Violet.

Had Fullwood possessed any sense of decency at all, he would have jumped up at once, and would have offered his chair to Miss Violet, as there was no other chair near by. In fact, the two had that portion of the deck to themselves, and Fullwood was lolling back with ease, while the girl was standing. In that respect alone, the cad of the Remove was acting up to his reputation.

"I'm speaking to you, Fullwood," said Violet, raising her voice slightly.

Ralph Leslie lowered his book, and glanced up.

"Eh? Speaking to me?" he drawled languidly.

"Yes, I was."

"Awfully sorry!" said Fullwood. "I was so bally interested in that story that I hardly noticed you, Miss Violet."

Fullwood yawned widely, and Miss Violet flushed.

"I was only going to ask you to fetch me an ice-cream," she said quietly. "Will you please do so?"

"That's rather queer, you know," said Fullwood, with studied indifference. "Fetch you an ice-cream, eh? Why, I always understood that there were stewards on the job. If you only look around, you will soon find one."

Violet flushed even more.

"Yes; I suppose I shall," she said simply. "Thank you very much, Fullwood. It is awfully good of you to tell me."

"Oh, don't mention it!" he remarked, with a wave of the hand. "I am always ready to oblige a young lady, you know. But I shouldn't advise you to eat too many ice-creams. They are liable to make one's complexion look a bit sick. Your complexion, even now, isn't as good as it might be. I'd be careful, if I were you!"

"I'm very sorry that I spoke to you at all!" said Violet coldly. "I've been told that you were a cad—and I know it now!"

"Oh, you've been told, have you?" sneered Fullwood. "By your bally brother, I suppose? It's just like him to tittle-tattle. Not that I care twopence, Miss Violet. I hold the opinion of a pretty girl very highly, but your remarks don't affect me in the slightest degree."

Fullwood leaned back in his chair again, and began to read his book. His words had been directly insulting. He had implied that Violet was far from good-looking, and that he did not value her opinion at all.

The girl turned on her heel and walked away, very red.

"Oh, what a dreadful boy!" she murmured to herself, filled with indignation. "I don't think I have ever met anybody who talked to me so rudely. Tom was quite right, and I felt like slapping his face!"

Miss Violet certainly would have slapped Fullwood's face, but she did not want to cause any unpleasantness, particularly on such an evening as this. She decided that she would say nothing at all. But she knew well enough now that it was quite hopeless to have anything to do with Fullwood.

The girl was just going down the companion, when she ran into Tommy Watson himself. The lights were on bright here, and Tommy had at once noticed that Violet was looking unusually flushed. She could not conceal the fact that she had been inwardly boiling the moment before. Her dark eyes flashed with suppressed indignation.

"Hallo, sis!" exclaimed Tommy. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all, Tom!" said Violet, attempting to push past.

"Rats!" said Watson. "There is something wrong—you can't kid me, sis! Somebody's been upsetting you, or something. You look frightfully wild, you know."

"Why, don't be silly, Tom!" protested Violet. "I'm not wild at all. Please don't ask me any more. I can't say anything."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I can't—that's all!"

"Rot!" said Tommy bluntly, using a brother's privilege of speaking straight from the shoulder. "Rot, Sis! Now can't you tell me? Somebody's been upsetting you—and if it's one of the fellows, I'm going to punch his nose!"

But Violet would not tell her brother anything, and, try as he would, he could not get a word of the story from her. He was finally compelled to give it up, and he went on deck wondering what on earth could have been the matter with her. He didn't quite like it, and he meant, if possible, to find out the truth as soon as he could.

But this was rather a difficult proposition. Watson did not exactly know how to go to work. He had found out that it was quite useless asking Violet anything—she had positively refused to give a word in explanation of the matter which had upset her so obviously. It would be equally hopeless to ask Ethel Church, or any of the other girls.

Tommy, therefore, found it necessary to look about him, and to find other signs. He could not imagine any fellow such as Pitt, De Valerie, or Singleton acting in any way that would upset his sister.

Watson was not absolutely dull, although as a rule, he was rather a stolid sort of individual. But on this occasion he realised that the only fellows on board who could possibly upset Violet--or who would have the

nerve to do so—would be either Fullwood or Gulliver or Bell. Therefore, Watson kept his eyes open for Fullwood and Co.

As it happened, his task was not such a difficult one.

He was just walking down the deck in the hope of meeting somebody whom he could question when he caught sight of Fullwood & Co. over by the wireless-room. They were standing together and talking—and, far more significant, they were chuckling in a manner which proved they were enjoying some joke.

Watson's suspicions were aroused on the instant. He walked up determined, meaning to tax them there with the question point-blank. It was just Watson's way. He always liked to have a matter out on the spot, without any beating about the bush.

He really didn't mean to walk up quietly, or to overhear anything, without them knowing that he was there. But he happened to be wearing rubber-soled shoes, and his approach was, therefore, quite noiseless. He came up in the rear of the nuts, and, as the evening was very dim, the three juniors had no knowledge of Watson's presence. Their backs were towards him.

"Yes, by gad!" Fullwood was saying, with a chuckle. "I gave the little snob something to think about! Coming to me to run and fetch her an ice! What does she think I am, a giddy servant? It's likely I'm goin' to take an ice to her, isn't it?"

Gulliver, who had some decency of feeling, shook his head.

"Well, I quite don't agree with you, Fully," he said bluntly.

"Don't agree with me?" repeated Fullwood.

"No, I can't say that I do," repeated Gulliver. "Hang it all, man, you might be decent to a girl, anyhow! There was nothing much in her asking you to fetch an ice-cream for her. It's what a girl would expect of a fellow!"

Fullwood grunted.

"Well, no girl's going to get me to do it," he said grimly. "I'm not going to be the rotten lackey of Watson's sister, I can tell you. If she wants an ice-cream, she can get a steward to get it for her, or go and get it herself! What's more, I gave her something to think about, too—about her good looks!"

"Well, she's jolly pretty, if you ask me," said Bell. "I've tried to be nice to her several times, but I don't seem to manage it. It's a pity if you can't be nice to the only really pretty girl on board, Fully!"

Fullwood scowled.

"You ought to have heard me telling her off about her complexion!" he said unpleasantly. "There's nothing wrong with it really, but I gave her a bit of a shock."

"Phew!" whistled Gulliver. "That was a bit too bad, Fully——"

"You—you rotten cad!"

Fullwood & Co. turned round, and found Tommy Watson facing them, with clenched fists, blazing eyes, and burning cheeks.

"What the thunder do you want?" demanded Fullwood, backing away hastily.

"That's what I want!" roared Watson fiercely.

Smack!

Tommy's fist thudded into Fullwood's face, with a slap that sounded all over the deck. Fullwood staggered back, howling.

"Yarooh!" he roared, holding his nose, as he sat down on the deck. "You—you——"

"Get up! Get up, and I'll give you another!" roared Watson, beside himself with rage. "You unmannerly brute! You insulting cad! If you dare say another word to my sister while you're on board this ship, I'll give you a thrashing that'll make you sore for the rest of your life!"

Fullwood scrambled to his feet, his face black with fury.

"Hang you!" he snarled. "I'll make you pay for this, you—you——"

But he was unable to say any more, for Tommy Watson, already feeling in a desperate mood, to wipe Fullwood up,

rushed in, and the next moment the two were fighting hammer and tongs. But it did not last long.

Gulliver and Bell stood by, without offering to help, for they probably felt that Fullwood deserved a good thrashing. They were not quite such cads as he was. In no circumstances would they go out of their way to insult a young lady. But there were other juniors on deck, and they had already heard the sounds of strife.

Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey and De Valerie came hurrying up, and close beside them was the Bo'sun and Singleton and Handforth.

"Hallo!" said Handforth. "What's the trouble here? Go it, my sons!" he added, as he saw what Watson was doing. "That's the style! Now bash him in the left eye! Good! You can easily give him one on his jaw now ——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Pitt. "This won't do, you know!"

"You mind your own giddy business!" said Handforth sharply. "This is a fight! Watson's got every right to punch Fullwood. He deserves a punching about twenty time a day, on the average. He escapes as a rule, but now he's getting what he deserves. Go it, Watson! Don't ease off!"

Handforth, of course, was always ready for a fight, and he simply revelled in this present scrap. The other juniors realised that it would not look nice if Lord Dorrimore happened to come on deck, or if any of the ladies were present. A fight was only to be indulged in down in the gymnasium, where the juniors would have the place to themselves.

So Tommy was dragged off, and Fullwood was allowed to go free. The cad of the Remove was boiling with rage, and he was already marked severely.

"You will pay for this, you madman!" he gasped. "By gad! I'll make you pay for this!"

"What's happened, anyhow?" asked Pitt. "What's the trouble about, Watson?"

"That—that beastly rotter has been insulting my sister!" gasped Watson fiercely. "I haven't finished with him yet!"

Handforth looked grim.

"Insulting your sister, has he?" he said. "By Jove! If that's the case, I'll give him a darned good hiding on my own account—after you've done with him! Why, your sister's the prettiest girl on board! She is—she is a girl that any chap could fall in love with——"

"According to your statements, you've fallen in love with her already, Handy!" chuckled Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth turned red.

"I don't want any rot!" he roared. "Just because I speak the truth about Miss Violet, that doesn't mean to say that I'm in love with her! As a matter of fact, I've got a very great regard for for her. But that doesn't mean to say that I'm full of silly, sloppy rot!"

"Quite right, old man," grinned Pitt. "Miss Violet is certainly a peach, and if Fullwood said anything to insult her, he's a bigger cad than I ever took him for!"

A considerable number of juniors had come by this time, and I strolled up, having just come on deck. I wondered what the trouble was about. With me were Fatty Little, Timothy Tucker, and Tregellis-West.

"Great bloaters!" exclaimed Fatty. "What's all this about? Anything to do with grub?"

"Oh, dry up about grub!" said Handforth. All you live for is grub—all you think about is grub—all you can talk about is grub! Give it a rest, my son!"

"I don't see why I should," said Fatty. "There's nothing better to talk about than grub, and there's nothing better to think about than grub—and, as a matter of fact, I often dream about it!"

"You would!" said De Valerie, with a chuckle.

Fullwood, by this time, had slunk off,

and Gulliver and Bell had gone with him. We all stood in a knot round Watson, and he briefly explained to us what the trouble was. He did so with flashing eyes, and his voice filled with indignation. By the time he had finished, we were nearly all as angry as he was, and we certainly came to the conclusion that Ralph Leslie Fullwood had not received sufficient punishment.

"Why, the chap ought to have been whipped!" said De Valerie fiercely. "Fancy him treating Violet like that! I never thought that Fullwood was such an absolute cad."

"I vote we get the rotter and give him a frog-march round the deck!" said Handforth, who was always ready to do something practical. "After that, we can shove him on a line and chuck him overboard!"

"That's a jolly sensible idea—I don't think!" said Pitt. "The frog-march might be all right, but we couldn't put the rotter overboard. He might get mixed up in the propeller—and then there might be a casualty!"

"Well, we've got to do something ——"

"You're quite right," I put in. "We have got to do something, Handy. Watson has given Fullwood a few punches, but that doesn't meet the case. This is an affair for serious consideration, and we can't very well do it here."

"Then we'll go down in the gym and have a confab!" said Handforth firmly.

"That is exactly what I was about to suggest. Fullwood needs a sharp lesson—and he's going to get it. He must be made to understand, one thing for all, that he cannot insult any of the young ladies on board this ship, without being severely punished. Come on, my sons."

"Good!" said Handforth. "That's the ticket!"

And, all of us looking rather serious, we went down the deck in a body, descended the companion, and made our way to the gymnasium.

Fullwood's punishment was to be decided upon!

CHAPTER 10.
Solitary Confinement!

TOMMY WATSON looked impatient.

"I don't see the reason for all this business!" he declared. "All I want is Fullwood down here, and I'll give him the thrashing he deserves. That's about the shortest way out of it—he deserves a hiding."

"That's exactly what I suggest," said Handforth. "And don't forget that I'm going to give him a second hiding on the top of yours!"

"Fullwood won't be fit to take any second hiding!" said Tommy Watson grimly.

I shook my head.

"What we've got to do is to be calm," I said. "There's no sense in doing anything in a hurry. To begin with, Tommy, we don't want your sister to know that we've become aware of this business—it wouldn't be nice for her. And if she sees Fullwood going about with a beautiful pair of black eyes, a swollen nose, sundry thick ears, and one or two teeth missing—well, she'll guess it."

"I suppose she would!" grinned Watson, in spite of himself. "But I shan't do so much damage as all that!"

"Well, in any case, you'll make a pretty bad mess of his face, once you get really started," I said. "And that won't do. It's hardly right to Dorrie, is it, to come to that? What we've got to do is think of some scheme to punish Fullwood, but won't leave any signs."

"I've got it!" said Handforth brilliantly. "We'll go and fish out a cane, one of you chaps can hold Fullwood down, and I'll lam into him as hard as I can go. There'll be marks, I dare say, but not where they can be seen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's all very well," I chuckled; "but even that isn't severe enough. Corporal punishment is all very well in its own way, but I want something more lasting. I want to do something that will give Fullwood time to think—

something that will make him hesitate before insulting Watson's sister again; in fact, I've got an idea already."

What is it?" asked a dozen voices.

"I'll tell you in a minute, when I've got it quite clear," I said. "Just let me think it out."

"What's wrong with shutting Fullwood up with T. T., and letting Tucker give him a lecture on anthropoid apes?" asked Pitt humorously.

"Oh, don't rot!" said Handforth. "Let Nipper think of something sensible!"

"My dear sir, I fail to see the reasonableness of your suggestion, in any case," remarked Timothy Tucker, blinking at Pitt in a puzzled way. "Surely it would be no punishment for Fullwood to listen to one of my lectures on anthropoid apes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No punishment at all!" repeated Tucker. "In fact, it would be a highly educative half-hour—or I might even make it an hour. The position is this ——"

"Blow the position!" roared Handforth. "Shut up, you ass!"

"Really, my dear sir, I don't see why I should shut up," said Tucker. "You must also allow me to remark that your face frightens me—your face positively frightens me. And your face, my dear sir, closely resembles a fog-horn——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There'll be another fight in a minute!" chuckled De Valerie.

"No, there won't!" I said grimly. "Shut up, Handforth—don't start making a fuss now. Listen to this wheeze of mine, and tell me what you think about it."

"Go ahead!" said De Valerie. "We're all here!"

"Now, my idea is this," I said. "Fullwood deserves a lesson, and he deserves a strong lesson. I think we ought to allow him to imagine that we've overlooked the whole affair, and that everything is all serene. He'll go to bed tonight, feeling comfortable—and then he'll get a shock."

"What shock?" asked Watson.

"Well, at midnight several of us will get up, and we shall commence the sinister deed," I said mysteriously. "You see, the thing has got to be done in secret—without the ladies knowing anything about it—without the guv'nor or Dorrie knowing anything, if possible. So we've got to move cautiously. If you fellows will only give me your help, we can do the trick fine—and we can make Fullwood grind his teeth with fury, and make a resolve never to make a cad of himself again."

"He can't help being a cad!" said Handforth bluntly. "It's born in him!"

"Well, he won't insult Tommy's sister—or any of the other girls—that's what I mean!" I said. "Listen to me—and don't keep interrupting.

The juniors did listen, and by the time I had finished they were all quite in agreement with my suggestion. There was not one fellow who voted against the idea. Tommy Watson himself thought it was pretty good, but he considered that Fullwood ought to be given a good thrashing in addition to my own form of punishment. But, as I pointed out, this was the very thing we wished to avoid. We did not want Fullwood to show any marks of the fray in the morning.

The details were soon settled, and then it only remained for the party to be chosen. This was not a very long job. Naturally, Watson would be there, and Tregellis-West and myself. Handforth was determined to come, Pitt wanted to be there, and De Valerie was equally insistent. In the end we chose about two other fellows, and left everything else until the moment arrived for action.

We didn't see any more of Fullwood that night. He probably thought it would be far safer for him to keep out of our way, and he evidently went down to his own cabin with Gulliver and Bell—for they, too, were conspicuous by their absence.

When I saw Violet Watson—just

before turning-in time, she had recovered her spirits, and was her own sunny self again. She evidently meant to let the matter pass without making any fuss, and without telling anybody about it. Fullwood had insulted her grossly, but she was not the kind of girl to complain about anybody else.

It was left for me, of course, to awaken just before midnight—for the juniors knew that they could rely upon me to get them all up at the appointed time. They regarded me as a sort of human alarm clock.

Sure enough, I awoke just about ten minutes to twelve. It did not take me long to arouse Sir Montie and Tommy—Watson, in fact, was only dozing. He had not fallen off soundly to sleep, for he took a very grim interest in the affair. He fully intended to make Fullwood pay.

We only slipped on a few things, and then we went and aroused the other juniors. They were only too eager to take part in the little escapade. Fullwood had been a rotter, and he would have to pay.

"Now, my sons, we must do the job quietly," I said in a low voice. "It's just possible, of course, that one of the crew on duty might catch sight of us, but that won't matter a jot. No one will interfere with us, and we can carry on all serene."

The cabin occupied by Fullwood & Co. was just near by, and we lost no time in going to it and opening the door. I entered first and switched on the electric lights, and looked round.

Fullwood & Co. were all fast asleep in their bunks.

"The youthful innocents!" I murmured. "Fully will have a bit of a shock in a minute, my sons—just wait till he knows what we're going to do!"

"Well, let's get busy!" said Handforth impatiently.

I walked into the cabin, seized Fullwood by the shoulder and shook him. He awoke after a moment or two, blinked at me, then sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes.

"What the dooce are you doin' in this cabin?" he said tartly.

"You'll find out soon enough!" I said. "Just keep calm and you'll have the minimum amount of trouble."

Gulliver and Bell were awake by this time, and they both sat up and looked on with interest and with a certain amount of apprehension.

"I say," protested Bell, "what's the idea of this? We've done nothin', Nipper!"

"Oh, you needn't be afraid," I said. "We're not goin' to touch you—we've come here for Fullwood."

"For me?" said Fullwood, his voice unsteady with nervousness. "What do you mean? What the dickens is the game?"

"A game you won't like," I interrupted. "We want you, Fullwood—and if you don't come quietly we shall be compelled to gag and bind you. So you can take your choice."

He didn't like it at all, but he saw that he was hopelessly outnumbered, and that any kind of resistance would be quite useless.

"Well, what are you going to do?" he demanded.

"You'll see that before long," I said. "Just come along with us, and don't make any more noise than you can help."

"But I don't believe in these mad japes!" interrupted Fullwood. "You can do without me——"

"I don't think so," I said. "You're the most important fellow here, Fullwood—without you this little game of ours would be quite pointless. Now then, buck up—don't waste any more time!"

Fullwood sulkily put some clothes on, and then we took him outside on deck. As it happened, Mr. Hudson came along at that moment, and he smiled at us as he paused.

"Why, boys, what's the meaning of this?" he asked good-naturedly. "Midnight, and you are out of your bunks and roaming about the decks!"

"Yes, sir, I wish you would say some-

thin' to these asses!" said Fullwood sourly.

"It's all right," I put in. "Don't you worry, Mr. Hudson. Just a little joke—that's all. Leave it to us, and everything will be all serene."

The first officer grinned, and passed on, leaving us to our own devices. I led the way down the companion, and then we went through a maze of passages, down further ladders, until we were right in the bowels of the ship—almost down to the keel.

Everything down here was dark and silent, except for the throbbing of the engine.

Once below, Fullwood was gagged and bound. He protested with all his might, but it made no difference. When he was quite helpless he was taken into an old store-room—a place that had a lock on the outside, in addition to bolts, and which was quite empty within.

We all entered, I switched on the electric light and the door was closed.

Everything was very solemn, and not one of us smiled as the gag was removed from Fullwood's lips. He glared at us helplessly.

"Now, prisoner at the bar, hear your sentence," I said grimly. "You have been guilty of insulting conduct to a young lady on board this ship. You have acted like a cad and a brute—and you are now going to be punished. It is quite simple. You are sentenced to remain in this store-room for the period of twelve hours—alone, and unattended. At twelve o'clock noon tomorrow you will be released.

"You—you fool!" shouted Fullwood thickly. "You wouldn't dare to leave me here all that time! What will everybody say at breakfast? Why, I'll have you up before the captain if you dare to——"

"My dear chap, you won't do anything of the sort," I interrupted. "We can easily account for your absence during the hours of the morning—not that anybody will trouble to inquire after you. Well, that's all. We'll leave you to your punishment now!"

Fullwood persisted, but it was in vain. We had carried out our task, and there was nothing further to do but retire.

Handforth was not quite satisfied. He could see no earthly reason why Fullwood should not have been punched, and he would have liked to punch his head on the spot.

However, this sort of thing wouldn't do. Fully had to be punished without any violence—and this was a certain way of doing it. We left the room, and I locked and bolted the door. Fullwood himself would never dare to hammer and make a noise, for he would fear the ridicule which would follow his release.

We crept away silently, and made for the iron ladder which led up to the more frequented part of the yacht.

I led the way, for the others were not familiar with the way; but I had come down earlier in order to find out the lie of the land.

"This way, my sons!" I said softly. "Go easy—we don't want to wake everybody up!"

We had been speaking in whispers all the time, but now we crept cautiously along the passage, and made for a ladder at the end. The floor was of iron, but our feet made no sounds whatever, because we were wearing rubber-soled shoes.

Handforth wanted to argue over some small point, and he remained behind with the other fellows, who were attempting to bring him along. Meanwhile, I went on in advance, and suddenly I came to a pause.

A curious sound reached my ears. I looked round rather wonderingly. The dim passage was deserted, except for the crowd of juniors at the end. Before me an iron ladder led up the middle portion of the ship. But this strange sound was coming from below, and I was puzzled.

And, just as I was beginning to tell myself that I had imagined something, I noticed an iron ring in the flooring,

almost at my feet. There was a trapdoor, and, what was more to the point, it had recently been raised—as I could tell by the disturbance of the dust.

What could it mean?

CHAPTER 11.
Caught in the Act!

I DID not waste any time.

Hurrying back, I soon put a stop to the argument, which was progressing rapidly. Handforth, in fact, had just rolled up his sleeves, and was preparing to punch somebody on the nose.

"Pack up all this rot!" I whispered. "Don't make a sound; come along with me, and be as quiet as ever you can!"

"Why, what's wrong, Nipper?" asked Tommy Watson, looking at me in surprise.

"I don't know," I replied, "but there's some queer sound going on right beneath this passage—down in the bilges. A trapdoor just along here has been disturbed, and I believe there's somebody down there."

"Only a member of the crew doing some job or other," remarked Grey.

"It's a queer time to be doing a job down in the bilges," I said significantly. "I'm going to investigate, my sons, and what you've got to do is to stand by—and be absolutely quiet!"

I walked off, leaving the others to follow out my instructions. I was anxious to look into the matter at once.

In fact, I had a suspicion in my mind—a suspicion which somewhat startled me.

The other juniors remained some little distance down the passage, while I went to the trapdoor and slightly raised it. I did this with extreme caution, and I got it higher, until I was able to glance below into the black depths.

During the very first second I saw something which almost confirmed my suspicions. Down there, right on the keel of the ship, clinging to the heavy ironwork, was a figure. Near him rested a small electric lamp, casting a small light on one particular place.

The man was Mr. Robertson—the castaway from the Copperfield!

I looked down at him grimly. What was the meaning of this? What was that man doing here, down in the bowels of the Wanderer at midnight? The whole affair was suspiciuos, to say the least of it. But the man's actions were even more suspicious.

He was placing a small tin box between two of the girders, and from this tin box projected a long piece of string—at least, it seemed to be a piece of string, and Mr. Robertson was simply setting the box into position. I did not remain looking at him for long, for I realised that here was something that demanded instant attention—not from us, but from the skipper.

I closed the trapdoor and stood up. It was a signal for the other juniors to approach. But I held my hand to my lips, as a sign for them to be silent, and we all mounted the ladder until we reached the next deck. Then they all grabbed hold of me and demanded to know what I was having a game at.

"I can't explain now!" I said rapidly. "I want to find the skipper at once—and Nelson Lee, too, and Dorrie. You chaps remain here, and if anybody comes up collar him—keep him a prisoner!"

I rushed off, leaving the juniors staring after me rather blankly.

But I knew how urgent the case was, and there was no time to explain things to the juniors. Every second was of importance; in fact, I really blamed myself for coming up at all—I felt that I ought to have taken some action on my own account.

But, anyhow, I wanted to see the guv'nor—and I wanted to tell Captain Burton. I hardly liked taking the responsibility on my own shoulders.

By a piece of luck I found the skipper on deck, just about to make his way up

to the bridge. I rushed straight up to him.

"Why, Nipper, what's the matter?" asked Captain Burton.

"Quick, sir!" I panted. "There's a man right down in the hold—that fellow we rescued from the sea!"

I lost no time in explaining the details to the skipper, and he listened with a face which expressed surprise at first, but then it took on a grim look. I had only just finished when Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee came on deck, both of them lighting cigars.

They had been indulging in a game of billiards, and it had taken rather longer than they had expected. And they were just coming up for a breath before turning in. They, too, heard the news, and they at once realised the significance of the discovery.

Nelson Lee lost no time.

"Come!" he exclaimed briskly. "We will have a look into this matter immediately. I do not think it will be wise to waste any time."

"Why, old man—what do you suspect?" asked Dorrie.

"I don't know exactly, but I am very much afraid that Mr. Robertson is a traitor!"

Nelson Lee hastened down into the bowels of the ship, and Dorrie followed him. I went, of course, and Captain Burton brought up the rear. We found Handforth and Tommy Watson and the others still standing in the same position, and they reported that Mr. Robertson had not come up; there had not been a sign of any person, in fact.

Nelson Lee quietly descended to the lower portion of the yacht, and I pointed out to him the trapdoor. The guv'nor made no attempt at secrecy; he lifted up the cover and stared down.

As he did so he flashed a powerful electric torch downwards, and a startled gasp came up to our ears. The castaway was standing there, a match in his hand, and he was about to apply it to the long piece of string which I had seen, and which I knew to be a fuse.

"You scoundrel!" shouted the guv'nor angrily.

He simply dropped down into the bilge, and the next moment he and the castaway were fighting fiercely. The fellow had attempted to set light to the fuse at once, but he had failed. He was using all his strength to defeat the guv'nor, but he was like a baby in the great detective's hands.

Almost before he knew what had happened he was lying flat on his back, and he was pinned down. By this time I had dropped by the guv'nor's side; Dorrie was there, to say nothing of Handforth and others. The castaway was made a prisoner. His face was distorted with rage and disappointment, and he glared at us balefully.

"Well, you nearly got it, anyhow!" he snarled. By thunder, another minute and it would have been all up!"

Members of the crew were soon on the spot, and Robertson was taken away and put in irons, and locked in a cabin. It was only too clear that his whole story had been a fake. The wireless appeal for help had been a fake, too—it had been a put-up job in order to get the man on board; there had been no wreck; this man had simply been left on the hatch-cover for the especial purpose of being found by the yacht. Taken on board as a castaway, he had had ample chances to work out his nefarious scheme.

The little tin box contained explosive of a very dangerous character, and if that fuse had been lit, and if the charge had exploded, a hole would have been blown in the yacht's bottom, which would have disabled her completely. She would have sunk ultimately; but there would have been ample time for everybody on board to get away without loss of life.

Who was this mysterious enemy? Who was this man who had plotted against Lord Dorrimore? It was clear that the strange enemy had no intention of doing any bodily harm—he merely wanted to sink the yacht. It seemed, therefore, that his main object

was to prevent us going to the Amazon.

It was altogether a puzzle, and we hardly knew what to think. However, we were not likely to be caught napping again, after that experience. The rest of the voyage to South America would probably be quite peaceful and uneventful.

We didn't get to bed until after three o'clock, and, naturally, breakfast was somewhat late. And during the morning the sole topic of conversation was the treacherous behaviour of Robertson. We were so engrossed in the discussion, in fact, that when twelve o'clock came we forgot all about Fullwood down in his prison.

It was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that Gulliver came to us and wanted to know what we had done with his leader. Then we remembered.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was released, and he was completely cowed. The lesson had been a severe one, and he promised that he would be different in future. Whether we could rely upon that or not remained to be seen. I had an idea that it was rather hollow.

And so, after this little bit of excitement, the voyage to the Amazon continued. Nothing further of an exciting nature took place, and day after day the sun became hotter, and the yacht steamed on into tropical zones, and then on up the Amazon itself.

CHAPTER 12.

The Mighty Amazon!

THE flaming sun shone down with bristling intensity from a sky of deep blue. Here and there a few fleecy clouds flecked the heavens.

The air itself was as hot as a glass-house, and all the brasswork on the Wanderer was hot to the touch.

The Amazon!

I stood against the yacht's rail with Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Watson. Close by Umlosi was gazing out over the water, with an expression of pure joy on his great black face. Young Stanley Kerrigan was standing close to his arm, and the pair of them were looking with eager, longing eyes over the great forest which lay in the distance.

Flies buzzed incessantly. The very air quivered with the heat as the Wanderer made her way up the river leisurely.

It was midday, and we were all feeling rather excited. This was not our first sight of the Amazon by any means. A good many days had passed, and we had been on the Amazon for quite a time. Our journey was nearly at its end.

For we had not only reached the Amazon—we were hundreds of miles up the mighty river; hundreds of miles above Manaos, that being the Brazilian city of fifty thousand inhabitants which lies on the banks of the Rio Negro, a few miles above the junction of that river with the Amazon.

At Manaos we had taken in fresh supplies, and we had done everything possible to obtain information about Colonel Kerrigan—not that we had been very successful. Try as we would, we could find no trace of him—except that he had died over four years earlier.

But Aunt Janet was not convinced. Now that she was on the spot—on the Amazon itself—she was more than convinced that her brother was alive; that he was imprisoned somewhere, far beyond these great forests, which bounded us on both banks of the enormous river.

We were all bronzed and sun-dried, so to speak. The tropical heat was almost stifling; but we did not care about that—we were eagerly watching the river—we were scanning the mighty trees, which were plainly visible on the banks.

It was impossible to find a cool spot. Even under the canvas deck awning the deck-plates were hot to the touch, and everything was uncomfortably moist.

For the atmosphere here was by no

means dry—on this particular day, at least. The heat was of a clammy kind. It was really an effort to walk from one side of the deck to the other, and we found that it was best to keep quite still and watch the banks.

"Begad!" said Montie, speaking in a hushed voice. "Isn't it grand, old man? Just look at those trees over there—they're a tremendous size!"

"Everything grows large in this region," I said. "Trees or bushes, or flowers or creepers—they all grow to a terrific size, Montie. You'll find out more about it when we get ashore. Then, of course, there are thousands of insects——"

"Dear old boy, you needn't mention it," said Tregellis-West, with a sigh. "I have seen all the insects I want to see for the rest of my life! They are frightful. The flies are bad enough without anything else!"

"You'll have worse troubles than these flies before you've done, Montie," I smiled. "By thunder! Look at that place over there. Did you ever see anything so impressive in all your life?"

The juniors were already looking, and they were fascinated.

The river was vast, the northern bank being far distant and studded with those huge trees, like a Spanish lime. The Wanderer was cruising easily against a sluggish current and making easy work of it.

The river was quiet and solemn, and the mighty waters were moving down to the sea nearly two thousand miles distant.

Yes, we were over two thousand miles up the Amazon already, so it is easy to picture that we had been in the tropics for some considerable time. Our journey was nearly at an end.

We were now on that portion of the river where Colonel Kerrigan had last been seen, and before long it would be necessary to make a landing, and to institute inquiries.

Dotted about here and there were rubber plantations, wheat farms, and all sorts of other enterprises—many of them run by British capital. We thought that it would not be so difficult to obtain information if we only persevered.

All the juniors were vastly impressed by what they had seen during the voyage up the Amazon. They felt carried away by the tremendous grandeur of it all.

Trees and flowers and shrubs in Europe were puny compared with those on the Amazon. It seemed as though Nature herself had taken on a mighty spurt and had caused everything to grow to treble the size.

The trees which lined the banks presented a great, vast green frontage to the river which seemed impenetrable.

It was an endless rampart. Wild animals, snakes, and goodness knows what else, lay hidden among those mighty trees and masses of creeper.

Towards evening Captain Burton decided to make a stop. We had just drawn level with a little settlement—a rubber plantation—on the left bank of the river. There was life here, and it was probable that we should find some information. We never dreamed that luck was to be with us right from the very first moment.

Aunt Janet was very excited, but Stanley seems rather subdued by it all, and he kept his feelings to himself.

Umlosi, of course, was absolutely in his glory. He was himself again; but he wanted to get ashore—he wanted to get into the forests, his native element.

Before we had been anchored long, one or two boats came out from the little landing jetty towards us. One of the boats contained the owner of the rubber plantation—an American—his wife, and daughter. They were welcomed warmly by Lord Dorrimore.

"But, meanwhile, a little incident which happened was destined to alter the whole course of our arrangements. Round about the yacht there were several native boats, manned by Indian boys, for the most part. Their canoes were laden with nuts and fruit of every

description. And they were selling it at a very low price.

One of these Indian boys was induced by Fatty Little to come on board, and Fatty promptly proceeded to purchase his entire stock. Not only that, but he proceeded to transfer the stock into his own interior.

The little Indian boy was a queer fellow—only a small, wiry individual, even smaller than Stanley Kerrigan himself—and Stanley was only a fag in the Third.

The Indian had a brown face, and his teeth were like pearls, his eyes twinkling and merry, as if he found it difficult to keep his face straight.

It wore an infectious grin—a grin which made everybody else want to grin with him.

"Plenty fruit," he kept repeating. "Allee same cheap! Dis you like um, eh? Heap plenty good stuff, I guess."

We were quite amused by the Indian boy's talk. At first we couldn't understand why he could speak English so well. But then we learned that he was constantly in contact with the American servant of the rubber plantation, and he had been able to collect many of his sayings. Not only this, but there were one or two Chinamen on the plantation, and the little boy had picked up pidgin English, too—to say nothing of a few Spanish words, put in here and there. His conversation, on the whole, was quite funny.

He kept us in roars of laughter.

"The kid's a nut, and no mistake!" grinned Handforth.

"Kid!" echoed Pitt. "I'll bet he's nearer twenty than sixteen, my son!"

It was really impossible to gauge the Indian boy's age. He told us his name, but as it was unpronounceable we never attempted to say it. We decided that we would give him another name. But we couldn't think of one on the spur of the moment that was exactly suitable.

While we were talking with the boy, Aunt Janet was dragged along the deck by Stanley, who wanted her to see the native.

Aunt Janet was quite amused—until about one minute had passed. Then, with strange suddenness, her expression changed, and she stared hard at the Indian boy's neck.

She walked forward eagerly.

"Where—where did you get that?" she asked, her voice quivering.

She pointed, and we saw that the object of her interest was a small charm, which was hung on a piece of string round the Indian boy's neck.

The charm was a curious little object—a little white elephant, no bigger than a penny, and with little green glass eyes. And upon it were engraved the letters "S. K."

I had not noticed them before.

"Where I get um?" said the Indian boy, grinning. "He give to me. Allee same present, fine lady. I get sure dandy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, auntie," shouted Stanley, "this little elephant used to belong to dad!"

"Begad!"

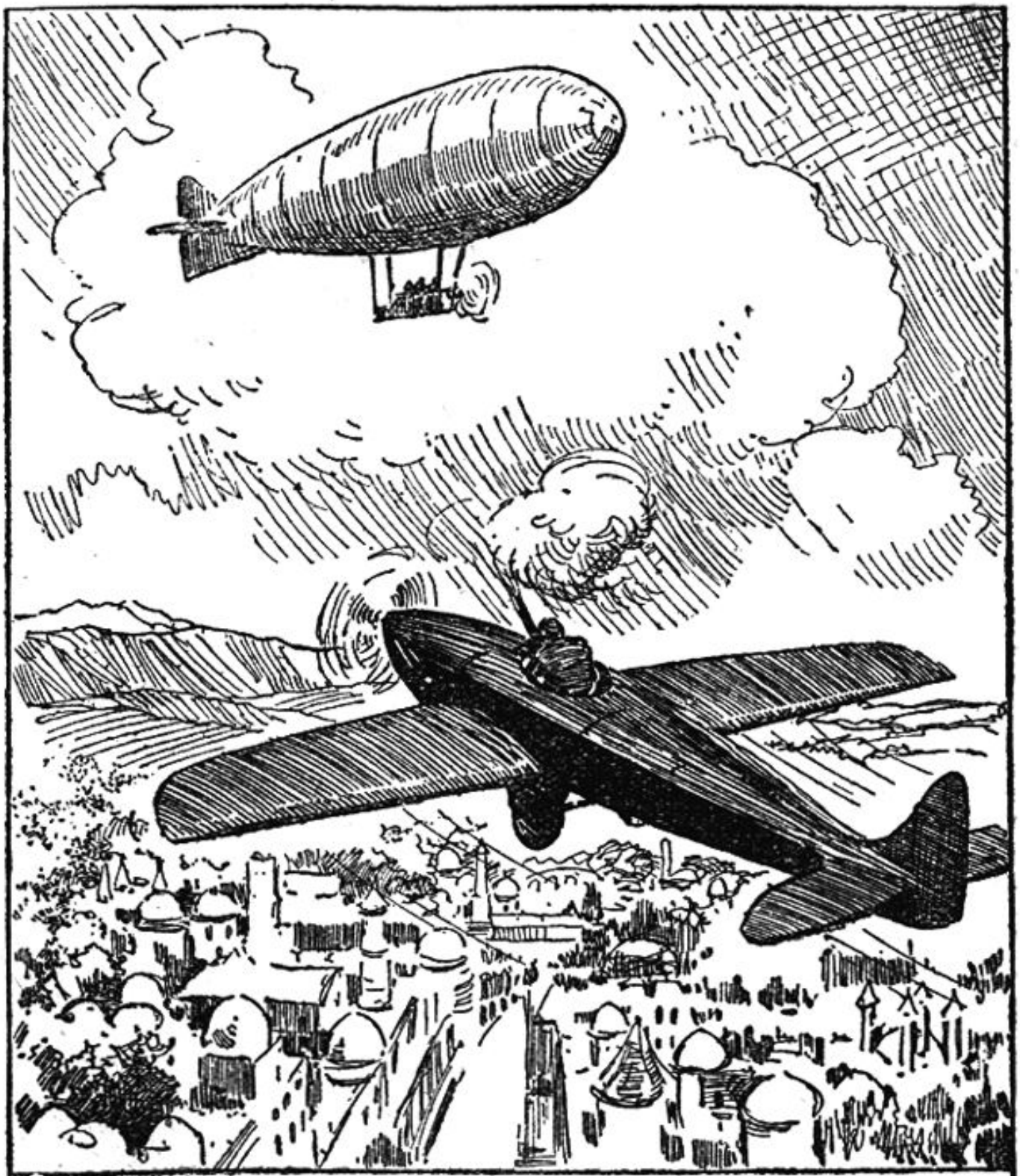
"Oh, my hat!"

The Indian boy grinned broader than ever.

"Him give to me by very fine white gentleman!" he said, with a nod of his head. "I guess that gentleman big um chief. Him big nice man. I guess so. Allee same lucky charm. Me no part with him for no price!"

Dorrie and Nelson Lee strolled up, and they soon understood what the excitement was. Bit by bit, the story was dragged out of the Indian boy. And we learned that Colonel Kerrigan had given him the charm four or five years before. He had prized it highly, and had never taken it from his neck.

And, what was more to the point, the Indian boy positively declared that he knew the exact spot where the colonel had been last seen—where he had been struck down by fever. This spot was a good distance up a small tributary of the Amazon—a river which



The red monoplane turned almost within its own length and came roaring back at us like an angry wasp. Then—Crack, crack, crack! The rapid staccato crackle of a machine-gun was heard above the sound of the plane's engine. We were being attacked by the unknown machine!

was never negotiated by any of the river steamers. It was, in fact, in the heart of unexplored territory.

Before the evening was out, everything was fixed—and the Indian boy became a member of our party. It was the biggest piece of luck that had happened to us. The boy promised to act as our guide; he would show us the way to the spot, and then our chances of success would be far greater.

That night, just before turning in, most of us were lolling about on the deck, in the cool of the night air. It was glorious, sitting there out of the terrific heat of the day. The stars were shining overhead. From the forests near by came the strange and rather sinister cries of the night—cries which came from prowling wild animals. But we all felt secure on board the Wanderer.

"Well, boys, we're nearing the end of our journey now," said Lord Dorrimore, strolling over to a group of juniors who were standing near the rail. "To-morrow we shall be steaming up the Majarra—and then some mighty interesting events will take place I fancy."

"I hope so, sir!" said Handforth. "By the way, sir, how do you know that we're doing right in going up the Majarra?"

Dorrie shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know that we are doing right," he replied; "but we've got to do as our new guide directs. Personally, I've got a good deal to say for the young beggar."

"And so have I, Dorrie," I put in. "I think that little Indian boy is a real find, and he'll prove his value before long, or else I'm greatly mistaken."

"Yes," went on Lord Dorrimore thoughtfully, "we shall be up the Majarra to-morrow, boys, and then we shall see a few things worth looking at. In any case, Joe E. Brown is directing the way, so we shall have to go——"

"Who, sir?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Joe E. Brown!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the laugh for?" asked Dorrie in surprise.

"I don't think Mr. Joe E. Brown would be very complimented, sir, if he saw this little Indian boy," grinned Pitt. "It's a bit of an insult for you to compare him to a native of the Amazon district!"

"I was thinking about his grin, you see," explained Dorrie. "I've seen one or two good films featuring Joe E. Brown, and I was particularly struck by his broad grin. Now, this Indian youth has a smile like Joe E. Brown. He shows his teeth in just the same way, and has a merry twinkle in his eye."

"Well, we'll call him Joe E. Brown, too, then!" chuckled Handforth.

"You can call him what you like!" said Dorrie.

Everybody was grinning, and, personally, I was of the opinion that the name would stick to our young Indian friend for good.

CHAPTER 13.

A Near Thing for Handforth!

THE Majarra!

We had left the Amazon, and we were now in the comparatively narrow waters of the tributary. It was midday, and the sun was glaring down with pitiless and relentless force. And here there were fresh marvels to engage our attention—that seemed to fill us with delight and wonder.

The Majarra, we found, was a fairly wide river at the mouth, and during the morning we saw little difference in the scenery. One might have still imagined that we were steaming up the Amazon itself; but, after an hour or two, the river narrowed down quite surprisingly. There were swamps on both sides, and any amount of low-lying islands, which were packed to suffocation with trees, creepers, and vegetation. The river itself teemed

with life, and we were warned that it was very dangerous.

By three o'clock in the afternoon we wished to stop, as the current increased to a surprising degree—indeed, the yacht had a great deal of difficulty in making any headway at all, and she was a very powerful vessel. The water was deep enough for an Atlantic liner, but the current was rather treacherous. However, this did not last for long. A little higher up the river broadened out again, and the current consequently became slower.

We dropped anchor in the evening, and Joey Brown—as his nickname had been shortened to—assured us that very early on the morrow we should arrive at our destination. Meanwhile, we had nothing to do but to admire our surroundings.

The evening was hot and still, the air being particularly humid. Our clothing, light as it was, clung to us uncomfortably, and it was almost an effort to walk across the deck. The majority of us simply sat down in deck-chairs, and lolled about.

Then somebody discovered that the air was much cooler down in the saloon and in the drawing-room. There were numerous electric fans there, and all sorts of modern contrivances for cooling the air; consequently, a good many fellows went below.

The girls were below, too, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie were playing billiards. Before the evening was fully out, the deck itself was practically deserted. Handforth & Co. seemed to have it to themselves; they were still sitting in the deck-chairs, finishing up an argument. There was no difference whatever in Handforth—he was still as self-willed and obstinate as he had ever been. Transferring Handy from St. Frank's to the Amazon made no difference to him whatever.

"Well, if we go on at this rate, we shall stick here arguing all night!" exclaimed Church irritably, at last. "I am going down below!"

"Nobody's stopping you!" snapped Handforth.

"I'm going, too," said McClure, rising to his feet. "I'm fed up with all his jaw!"

"You—you rotters!" roared Handforth as his chums walked away. "You're going to desert me, are you?"

Church looked round.

"You can come with us if you like!" he said. "Nobody's stopping you!"

McClure grinned, and Handforth glared. Then he was left alone on deck, staring at the companion. But he didn't follow his chums.

Handforth was determined to give Church and McClure a lesson. He would not join them at all. He would wait till they came back for him. Handy fondly imagined that his faithful chums could not possibly get on without him.

After a while he rose to his feet, went to the rail, and gazed out across the river. The water looked delightfully cool and inviting. It was as clear as a bell in this particular part, and Handy could see right down, deep in the depths. The water was like crystal, and it seemed a pity that bathing was not allowed.

Handforth was rather inclined to be rebellious. He really could not see any reason for Lord Dorrimore putting a ban on bathing.

"It's all rot!" Handforth told himself. "There's nothing dangerous in this giddy river! This water is as clear as glass, and there's not an alligator in sight. I'm a dashed good mind to have a bathe and chance it!"

Handforth had always been reckless, and he was just as reckless now. Any number of lessons never taught him anything. He remained just as obstinate and just as self-willed as before.

But he knew better than say a word about his project to anybody. If Nelson Lee or Lord Dorrimore got to know that Handforth was thinking about having a bathe—well, the bathe would never materialise. And Handforth did not want that.

He firmly believed that there was no danger of any sort in having a bathe. The fact that Lord Dorrimore had warned the juniors not to bathe made no difference whatever.

Handforth's opinion was that it was safe. Therefore, there would be no harm in going into the water. That's how Handforth looked at it.

He was perspiring freely, and the very thought of diving into that cool stream made him want to go below, and wrench his clothing off.

The desire was irresistible, and it did not take him more than ten seconds to make up his mind.

"Yes, I'm going in!" he declared. "It's all tommy-rot to say that there's any danger. I'm going to dive in, and if there's any danger, it won't take me two seconds to come out. All I've got to do is to stick near the ladder, and then I shall be all right!"

Handforth went below, overlooking the fact that the accommodation ladder was not yet in position. He went along to the cabin which was occupied by himself and Church and McClure, and in less than five minutes he was attired in his bathing costume.

The next part was to get on deck and dive overboard before anybody could notice him.

Handforth was rather doubtful of this. He slipped out, and made the companion stairs in safety. Then he came out on deck, and no eyes were watching him. Within a few seconds he was at the rail, and he quickly climbed over the rail, took a deep breath, and dived.

Splash!

Handforth went in, and soon came to the surface, shaking his head, and getting the water out of his eyes. It was delightful. He had never enjoyed a dive so much in his life before. He simply splashed about with the joy of being in the cool water.

"Danger!" gurgled Handforth. "Oh, what rot!"

There certainly seemed to be no danger at the moment. The water was clear, there was no sign of any lurking enemy, and the river itself was peaceful and calm.

Handforth was revelling in his bathe as he had never revelled before. It was so glorious that he could not contain himself. He let out several lusty shouts.

The first officer happened to be on the bridge, and he was at once attracted by the row. He stared down at Handforth in some surprise and alarm.

"You'd better come out of that, my boy!" he said quickly. "Who gave you permission to go in?"

"I did, Mr. Hudson!" replied Handforth joyously.

"Were you not warned——"

"Oh, I've been warned about all sorts of things," went on Handforth. "But that doesn't make any difference. The water's simply grand, and if everybody else had sense, they would join me!"

"But, my boy, you must be very careful!" shouted the first officer. "The river may be quite safe at the moment, but there is no telling. A cayman does not show himself very particularly, and if you once get in the grip of one of those brutes—well, we shall never see you on board again!"

"Why, I'm blest if you are not just as scared as the rest," said Handforth, with much amusement. "There's no danger here, Mr. Hudson—not the slightest danger in the world. Hallo! There's Nipper! I say, Nipper, put on your bathing-suit and join me!"

I had come on deck at that moment, and I was accompanied by Tregellis-West, and one or two other juniors. We all rushed to the rail, and gazed down at Handforth in amazement.

"Come out of that, you silly ass!" I shouted. "Who the dickens told you to go in?"

"That's what Mr. Hudson just asked me!" grinned Handforth, treading water and looking up at us. "Why, you silly asses, there's no danger here—why don't you chaps be sensible, and come in?"

"If you don't come out of that in two minutes, my son, we'll jolly well fetch you out!" I said grimly. "You may not think there's any danger—but there is danger. Just because you don't happen to see anything it doesn't mean to say that this river is as safe as an ordinary swimming-bath! The alligators——"

"Oh, rats to them!" said Handforth. "There's not a sign of one of them about here. We've left them all behind, in the swampy part of the river. You can't kid me that I'm in any peril. The water's simply glorious, and I'm staying here for a bit! Why don't you come in?"

"It seems safe enough," said Hart looking down at the water. "I say Nipper, why not chance it——"

"We're not going to chance it!" I interrupted. "And Handforth is coming out of that water pretty quick—I can tell you! The silly idiot doesn't know what danger he is running."

"Oh, dry up!" said Handforth, who had been listening. "I'm all right. I mean to have a bathe in the morning, like this, before we get under way!"

I was feeling rather worried about Handforth. I knew well enough that even this clear part of the river was frequented by caymans, and, if Handforth once got in the grip of one of those dreadful creatures, there would be no chance for him whatever. One flick of its tail, one grip of its jaw, and Handforth would be no more. The very thought was horrifying.

And Handforth continued to splash about with serene indifference.

"Buck up, my sons!" he called up to us. "The water's grand, I tell you."

At that moment he spotted something which he took to be a log, some distance from him over to the shore. It seemed to be drifting sluggishly with the current, and Handforth struck out for it vigorously.

If I had seen him I should have yelled out a warning, but, just at that moment, my attention was distracted by the fact that Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore came up, having been sent for hastily by Mr. Hudson.

Both the guv'nor and Dorrie were startled to hear of Handforth's reckless escapade.

They hurried to the rail at once.

Meanwhile, Handforth had arrived at his destination—the innocent-looking log. It was his intention to grab hold of it, and to get astride of the log, and then drift down past the yacht. Handforth thought it would be rather good sport.

And then he received a big shock!

In that second, Handforth knew well enough Lord Dorrimore's warning had been fully justified, and that he had been extremely foolish to dive into the water. For, just as Handforth was about to make a grab at the supposed log, the thing moved!

One end of it came out of the water, and rose in the air, curling as it did so. Handforth stopped suddenly, and gave a gasp. For, at the same moment, he caught sight of two wicked-looking eyes, and then, for the first time, he realised that he was at close quarters with a cayman!

"Good heavens!" gasped Handforth faintly.

Several of the other juniors on deck had also seen Handforth's peril, and Violet Watson and Ethel Church, and two of the other girls were also aware of the Removite's danger.

"Oh, look—look!" screamed Ethel, pointing.

She was as pale as a ghost, and clung to Miss Violet nervously. Tommy Watson's sister was made of sterner stuff, however, and she turned round quickly.

"Can't something be done?" she asked, her pretty voice quivering with anxiety. "Mr. Lee! Handforth is in terrible danger——"

"I know it, Miss Violet. I am well aware of it!" said Nelson Lee.

Even as the words were leaving his lips his hand went round to his hip-pocket, and the next second a revolver gleamed in his fist.

Lord Dorrimore's hand was acting in the same manner.

As for myself, all I could do was to stare down at Handforth in a kind of fascinated horror. I expected to see the poor chap killed as we looked at him.

Handforth himself, it must be said, acted with great presence of mind. He promptly dived under the water.

It was fortunate that he did so, for the cayman lumbered round clumsily, with its tail lashing over the surface of the water on the spot where Handforth had just been floating.

The leader of Study D came to the surface, and wasted no time by glancing round. He struck out for the yacht's side with all the power he could put into his strokes. But, left to himself, he would have found his task a hopeless one. The river monster would have overtaken him, and the end would have been swift and sudden.

Nelson Lee's revolver was ready, and he took steady aim. The whole affair happened so quickly that I hardly realised it—it was over almost before it had begun.

Crack!

The report of Lee's revolver echoed over the water, and I stared at the cayman wonderingly. I knew well enough that a revolver bullet is almost useless against such a creature as a cayman. There is only one really vulnerable spot, and that is the monster's eye. Its hide is so tough and hard that an ordinary revolver bullet will have little effect.

But the guv'nor's aim was true.

Crack!

Barely a second after Lee's shot, Lord Dorrimore's revolver echoed the report. I don't know where his bullet went—possibly it entered the cayman's left eye, where Lee's had entered. At all events, the river monster lashed about in the water for a few minutes in a terrible frenzy of fury.

The water was lashed into foam, and the noise was considerable. But the cayman did not follow Handforth—it was dead!

This, however, did not mean to say that there were no more fellows of the same variety knocking about the water. The sooner Handforth was on deck the better.

Floats were flung over the side by several members of the crew in charge of Mr. Hudson. Handforth lost no time in grasping one of them as soon as he reached the vessel's side.

A moment later he was being hauled up, and when he stood on deck we all breathed with heartfelt relief.

"Look—look, down there!" panted McClure, who was almost white to the lips. "I can see some more of 'em, you chaps!"

We needed no telling. There were several other caymen about near the vessel's side. How Handforth had escaped was rather a miracle. It was just his usual luck, I suppose. He usually blundered into trouble, and blundered out of it again.

Miss Violet rushed up to Handforth, and her face was flushed with excitement. Handforth was there, looking bewildered, and looking decidedly scared.

"Oh, you silly boy!" said Violet reprovingly. "You ought not to have got into the water like that—you have given us all such a fright!"

"I—I—I'm awfully sorry, Miss—Miss Violet," stammered Handforth. "You—you see—somehow I didn't know——"

His nerve gave out, and he simply fled down the deck, and vanished into the vessel's interior.

And we all gathered together, discussing the narrow escape which Handforth had just had. Church and McClure, of course, raced down after their leader.

"That was a marvellous shot of yours, guv'nor," I said, as Nelson Lee came up. "By jingo, you caught the brute right in the eye!"

"It is fortunate I did so, Nipper," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Another two seconds, and Handforth would have

been done for. The reckless young idiot—he deserves a strong lecture for this!"

"He deserves a jolly good hiding, sir," I said. "He knew as well as the rest of us that it was dangerous to swim in these waters. I thought he could be trusted alone, but it seems that he can't!"

"Well, it's all over now, and the kid is quite unharmed," said Lord Dorrimore. "I think it'll be a lesson to him that he won't forget in a hurry, Lee. That shot of yours, old man, was great!"

"I think your shot was just as accurate, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "I cannot imagine what possessed the boy to go bathing in these waters!"

"Oh, I expect he was feeling warm, and thought a bathe would be rather nice," said Dorrie. "The young ass didn't realise that it might be a bathe of death!"

Umlosi, who was standing by, shook his head gravely.

"Wau! Thou art indeed a giant among men, Umtagati!" said the black giant. "With thy wondrous fire stick thou saved the white lad from a terrible death. I praise thee, O my master!"

"That's all right, Umlosi," smiled Nelson Lee. "The shot was really a simple one, after all."

"It was a shot which meant life or death for that lad, O Umtagati," said Umlosi. "Thy aim is true, and thine hand steady. Thou are truly a wondrous warrior, O my master!"

We were still on deck, talking, when Handforth came up, fully dressed, with Church and McClure on either side of him.

"Here comes the silly ass!" said Pitt. "I think he deserves——"

"Leave him to me, boys," said Nelson Lee quietly.

Handforth came straight up to us, looking very sheepish and shamefaced. But his first words were rather unusual—for him.

"I deserve a ragging for that, and I give you chaps permission to do what you like. I'll run the gauntlet. I was a double-barrelled idiot to dive into the water like that!"

"You were," I agreed promptly.

"Dear old boy," declared Sir Montie Tregellis-West, "it was shockin'ly reckless of you—it was really. You knew quite well that the river was dangerous, an' how in the world you were idiotic enough to go bathin' is beyond me."

"I thought the water was safe enough," said Handforth. "It looks all right, you know!"

Nelson Lee strolled up.

"You must not judge by the looks, Handforth," he said sternly. "Let this incident be a lesson to you—let it sink in deeply. On no account must you disregard any warning of mine in future."

"I won't, sir," said Handforth. "I'm awfully sorry I've caused you this worry and trouble, sir—and I want to thank you for what you did!"

"There is no necessity for you to thank me, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "You acted very foolishly, and there is nothing more to be said. I had intended giving you a very severe lecture, but I fancy this lesson has been sufficiently severe. I do not think that any words of mine will impress themselves upon you more than your narrow escape. My boy, you must be very thankful that you're alive at this present moment."

"I am, sir," said Handforth fervently. "That shot of yours was fine—I thought I was done for at the moment. I hope you'll forgive me, sir—I deserve a good swishing!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, it is quite refreshing to hear you speak in such a strain for once, Handforth," he remarked. "You do deserve a swishing, as you call it—I am quite in agreement with you; but we will let that pass. Never, in any circumstances, bathe in these waters until you are told it is perfectly safe to do."

Handforth nodded.

"Trust me, sir," he said. "My goodness! I'm not going to have any more

bathes while I'm on the Amazon—not me! I've had a lesson this evening that I shan't forget in a hurry!"

And Handforth, for once, meant what he said.

CHAPTER 14.

A Land of Wonders!

"WELL, we're here!" said Reginald Pitt, looking round. "We've arrived at the spot, my sons!"

"There's nothing particularly startling about it," said Watson. "And what do we do now?"

It was the following day, and the time was just after noon. Joey Brown had called a halt, and it seemed that we had travelled as far up the river as it was possible to go—at all events, there was no need for us to proceed any farther up the Majarra.

The Indian boy was talking to Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, and some of the juniors were standing by, listening with interest. Young Stanley Kerrigan was there, his face flushed with excitement, and his eyes gleaming. He was enormously anxious, and it thrilled him to know that before very long he would see the very spot where his father had last been seen alive.

"You are quite sure that this is the place, my son?" Dorrie was asking.

"Me allee same heap big shore," declared Joey Brown, grinning hugely. "This de place, I guess. It is silly to go farther in ship; we now go on foot, and allee same find village. Indian people tell you much—me know!"

"Well, if you know, that's good enough," said Dorrie. "But how far shall we go on foot—how long would it take us?"

"Allee same one—two hour!" replied the Indian boy. "Journey not long, I guess. We soon reach um place. Me know dis river—me been here before, I reckon. Me seen um plenty time. I lead de way to place where mighty big white gentleman last seen. You trustee me—me know."

"I think we had better take a party ashore, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "We have apparently to journey to an Indian village, where we shall meet some of this boy's personal friends. We may be able to learn something of great value from them. In any case, we must do our best."

It was some little time before everything was fixed up. We had arrived at a portion of the river where the water was fairly narrow. It was almost possible to throw a stone from one river bank to the other. The water was very deep, and the current extremely sluggish. Giant tropical trees grew in great profusion, and the wild flowers and the creepers were quite bewildering in their varieties and colours.

The sun did not shine directly down here, owing to the tall trees and the thickness of the foliage. We were in a kind of deep shadow, where the air was hot, still, and almost unbearably humid.

The bird life was amazing in its splendour and colour. Humming-birds were numerous, and the whole scene was one of tropical beauty and gorgeous colour.

It was arranged that Nelson Lee himself should lead the shore party. Dorrie would come with us, Dr. Brett, Umlosi, and half a dozen of the juniors. There was a good deal of trouble about this.

All the St. Frank's fellows wanted to come—as, of course, was only natural. But on the first trip ashore, it was impossible to take the whole crowd—it was only a small party who could actually go.

At last, however, by a simple system of drawing lots, the matter was settled.

I was fortunate enough to be one of the lucky ones. Sir Montie was coming with us, too, and Handforth, Pitt, Fatty Little, and Tom Burton. Young Stan-

ley Kerrigan, of course, was going in any case.

In addition, we took four members of the yacht's crew, all fully armed with repeating rifles. Nelson Lee was leaving nothing to chance, and he had no intention whatever of being caught by surprise by hostile natives.

It was quite likely that Joey Brown's friends would not be quite so amiable as he was.

There was nothing like being on the safe side. In all probability we should meet with no dangers at all. Preparedness was, however, essential. The Brazilian forests are not exactly peaceful.

By one o'clock the accommodation ladder was in position, and the Wanderer's little launch was ready to take the party ashore—for the yacht itself was in midstream. The water was shallow near the banks.

"Well, we're all ready now," said Reginald Pitt. "I've got my camera, and we shall be able to get a good few snapshots. Hallo! Have you got a camera, too, Fatty? It seems to be a big one."

Fatty Little grinned

"Rats!" he said. "This isn't a camera!"

He was holding a large, square leather case, and it was so full that it bulged somewhat dangerously. The fastenings were strained to their utmost. I chuckled as I glanced at it.

"Grub!" I said. "Enough for the whole party."

"Great pancakes!" ejaculated Fatty. "This is just a snack for me, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only a few sandwiches, and cakes, and pastries," said the fat junior. "There isn't enough to go round. I thought it would be as well to be prepared. A chap never knows what might happen!"

"You needn't be afraid of starving, my son," I said. "Or even going hungry, if it comes to that. And we shall find tons of fruit in the forest—to say nothing of nuts, berries, and goodness knows what else. Still, I suppose you'll manage to eat all that lot you've got in addition, eh?"

"Rather!" said Fatty. "I was allowing for that, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty's appetite was always a source of amusement to the other fellows. He was certainly never satisfied, and the one thing he thought of always was grub—grub, and nothing else but grub. When he awoke in the morning he was thinking of his tummy, and when he went to bed at night he was still pondering on the same subject. It was a kind of religion with Fatty Little.

Nelson Lee came hurrying along the deck.

"Well, boys, we're all ready now," he said briskly. "You'd better get down into the launch as quickly as possible."

"Rather, sir!"

The fellows tumbled down the accommodation ladder rather excitedly. This was the first real trip ashore—at least, the first journey into the jungle itself. And it promised to be rather interesting and exciting. I was carrying a revolver with me—because I could handle one fairly well—and it was just as well to be on the safe side.

We all entered the launch, and then made the very short trip to the shore. On the yacht, the rail was lined with the other juniors—who were all extremely envious—the girls, and the other members of the party. They waved us a farewell.

"You might think we were going away for a month!" grinned Handforth. "We shall be back by tea-time—if Joey Brown has been telling the truth!"

"This native village, I believe, is only a mile or two from the river," I said. "I'm rather curious to find out what'll happen when we get there. These pals of Joey's may not be so

harmless as he is. Still, we are well armed, so we're in no danger."

"Dear old boys," murmured Sir Montie, "just look at Umlosi!"

We glanced round, and smiled when we saw the giant Kutana chief a short distance away from us. Umlosi was overjoyed to be on solid ground again. He was capering round in a most undignified manner—in a way which he would never have descended to in ordinary circumstances. But he had been so long on the yacht that it was like being released from prison, to be ashore.

He saw us watching him, and he came bounding over towards us—his white drill suit being in imminent danger of bursting. Umlosi was not at all particular about clothing, and he would have much preferred to cast the majority of it off, light though it was.

"Wau! I am indeed pleased to be away from the great kraal that floats on the water," said Umlosi, in his deep, rumbling voice. "But I am sorely troubled, my young masters!"

"Troubled?" I repeated. "What about?"

"Thou must surely know, O Manzie, that this journey into the forest is to be of short duration," said Umlosi, in a sad voice. "We are to return before nightfall—and then we shall once more remain on the floating kraal. O, Nimble One!"

"You needn't be sad, old son!" I grinned. "We shall soon be off in earnest now. This is just a preliminary trip, you know. As soon as we find some real information, we shall make a stand accordingly."

"Mayhap it will happen as thou sayest, O Manzie," said Umlosi. "Last night I had dreams—in which I saw the red mists before mine eyes, and methinks there is some wondrous adventure near at hand."

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore, coming up. "You had red mists before your eyes, O, thou of the Coal-box face—that looks pretty bad!"

"Not so, N'Kose, my father!" said Umlosi. "It is good, for I see much fighting!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth. "That sounds pretty off-side, you chaps!"

"You mustn't take too much notice of Umlosi," I grinned. "He frequently has these mists and dreams, and all the rest of it. But, somehow, it often happens that he's right to a certain degree. You can take it for granted that we're going to have some exciting times before long."

"Good!" said Pitt. "There's not much sense in coming out to the Amazon unless we have some excitement. The sooner it turns up the better—that's what I say!"

Handforth nodded.

"I shan't be satisfied until we've had a few scraps with the cannibals," he said grimly. "Then there's all sorts of wild animals to encounter—snakes, and jaguars, and elephants——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at, you asses!" said Handforth, glaring.

"Not about the elephants?" I grinned. "I don't think you'll find any of those gentlemen in this region, Handy. Elephants don't grow here, you know."

"Well, lions, then!" said Handforth. "I'm not particular!"

"Well, that's one good thing," I said. "I don't think you'll find any lions, either," I said. "And, if it comes to that, you're not likely to have much luck in the way of cannibals. These Indian tribes may be hostile, but they're not of a cannibalistic nature. At the same time, I expect we shall find plenty of excitement."

It was not long before we started off for our journey through the forest. Joey Brown led the way, since he was familiar with this particular neighbourhood. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorri-

more followed immediately behind, then two members of the crew, Umlosi, we six juniors, and two other members of the crew brought up the rear. Rifles and revolvers were close at hand in case of emergencies.

This was not actually the virgin forest—it had been broken by man on many an occasion—indeed, there was quite a well-defined path through the forest. I had been expecting that we should be compelled to cut our way through, yard by yard. But this was not the case; our journey through the forest was comparatively easy.

We lost sight of the Wanderer within three minutes, and then one might have supposed that we were thousands of miles away from any river and from civilisation. We were buried right in the forest, with nothing but wild nature on every side.

The heat, as we walked, became greater. We were sheltered from the direct rays of the sun, but, at the same time, a heavy sultriness rose up from the lower regions.

"Dear old boy, I am feelin' frightfully queer—I am, really!" murmured Sir Montie, turning to me. "This forest, you know, seems to be frightfully weird, you know. I don't know whether it has the same effect on you, you know——"

"Yes, Montie," I broke in, "I think it has that effect on everybody. I dare say we shall get used to it before long, but it certainly seems rather rummy to begin with."

After a while the ground was somewhat open, and it was not so thickly wooded. We came upon patches of sunlight, where graceful palms grew. The ferns in the undergrowth were delightful in their varieties and beauty. Trees of every description were passed on the way. Mimosa, bombax, myrtle, and rubber trees were everywhere, and generally dominated by palms. The flowers were really beautiful—large masses of rich colour, in great profusion.

"Isn't it marvellous!" remarked Pitt, in tones of great admiration. "I've never seen anything so gorgeous in all my life! Africa can't compare with this place for beauty!"

Handforth grunted.

"I'm not so sure about beauty!" he growled. "A beastly insect just stung me on the neck, and there's a bump rising as big as an egg!"

"You mustn't take any notice of insects, Handy," grinned Pitt. "I've had a good few bite me already—and the mosquitoes at night, as you know, are a bit of a handful."

This was quite correct. We had been troubled by mosquitoes for quite a while now—but usually late in the evening. And the mosquitoes of this region were aggressive fellows, who would not let you alone. But we were rapidly becoming accustomed to tropical insects which flew through the air in myriads.

"Good heavens!" shouted one of the juniors abruptly. "Look—look up there! Oh, my goodness!"

Nelson Lee looked up sharply.

"What is it?" he asked, holding his revolver ready.

"There, sir, up in that tree!"

Everybody looked up in the tree indicated, and I gave a sudden little gasp. Handforth stared up with his eyes goggling somewhat.

"Shoot it!" he shouted, rather huskily. "Oh, my hat! What an awful-looking creature!"

"Kill it, sir!"

But Nelson Lee only laughed.

"There is no reason why I should kill that creature, my boy," he smiled. "It is quite harmless, I assure you."

The fellows could hardly believe that this was the case, for the object in the tree was indeed a terrible-looking thing.

It seemed to be some dream monster—a positive nightmare. It was fully five feet in length, and the neck and back were furnished with a high crest, made up of several spines. A similar row of spines were to be seen beneath

the chin. The body and tail were long, and seemed to be compressed, and it's face was truly awful.

"What—what is it, sir?" asked Handforth, in a startled voice.

"An iguana," replied Nelson Lee.

"A which, sir?"

"It is a kind of a giant lizard," replied Nelson Lee. "They are quite harmless, my boys, and it may come as a surprise to you, but the flesh of the iguana is greatly esteemed as food."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Pitt. "I would not touch a bit even if I was starving!"

"Oh, I'm not so sure!" said Fatty Little. "You can't judge by the look of an animal what its flesh will be like when it's cooked. I wouldn't mind tasting a bit, anyhow."

"Oh, you'd eat anything!" said Handforth, with his eyes still fixed upon the iguana. "My hat! And that thing's harmless! Somehow I can't quite believe it!"

We passed on, and I am quite sure that the majority of the fellows were glad to be out of reach of that awful-looking lizard. Its very size made one feel rather nervous.

Shortly afterwards we entered upon a large clearing, with a path faintly discernible, winding its way through to the forest on the other side. One or two enormous trees grew in the centre, trees which made us fairly stand still and stare. They were nothing less than two hundred feet in height, and they were wonderfully impressive.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "Look at all those butterflies, dear old boys! Aren't they simply gorgeous?"

"Butterflies?" repeated Dorrie, looking round. "I can't see any butterflies, my lad."

"They're flying all round, sir," said Sir Montie.

"Oh, those!" said Dorrie, smiling. "They're not butterflies, my son—they're humming-birds."

"Begad!"

"Well, they're jolly lovely, anyhow!" said Handforth. "What glorious colours! But don't they fly about beautifully? This place seems to be a paradise!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Nelson Lee. "Death lurks in almost every yard of this country, in one way or another. It is always wise to be on one's guard. Wild animals, poisonous insects, snakes, and——"

"Snakes, sir?" said Pitt. "We've never seen any yet."

"You are quite likely to see a snake at any moment," said Nelson Lee grimly. "On no account approach one if you do. The snakes of this region are frequently of a very deadly character."

"Hallo! There's something else over there!" I put in suddenly. "What's that thing in the trees?"

I pointed to a clump of trees away to the left, and Nelson Lee looked.

"Oh, that gentleman is a sloth," he replied. "A fairly big fellow, too, by the look of him. I dare say you have seen some of the smaller varieties at the Zoo in Regent's Park."

We all stared at the sloth with interest. It was a queer-looking animal. It was hanging upside-down, clinging to a branch of one of the trees. The four limbs were greatly elongated by the look of them, and the creature was clinging to the tree by means of hooks in its feet. The whole body was covered with long, coarse hair, which seemed to have a peculiar greenish colour. And it was moving slowly and deliberately, as though weak and tired with old age.

"It doesn't seem to be a very energetic specimen, anyhow," remarked Pitt.

"Sloths are the laziest creatures on earth," smiled Nelson Lee. "They are never in a hurry, my boy."

"Are they dangerous, sir?" asked Tom Burton.

"Not at all," replied Nelson Lee. "At least, not to my knowledge. If we do not interfere with the sloth, it will not interfere with us. But we

must be getting on; all these stoppages are delaying us."

We continued our journey in the forest, having almost forgotten our objective. We were fascinated by everything that we saw, and had overlooked for the moment that we were bound for the little Indian village from which we should probably learn some news regarding the late Colonel Kerrigan.

Umlosi was oblivious of all ordinary matters. His whole attention was given to the wonderful sights which surrounded us. All this was new to the great Kutana chief. There were a great many things on the great Amazon which Umlosi had never seen before. It was not like Africa, and the giant black was amazed with wonder and delight.

"I am filled with pleasure, O Nimble One!" said Umlosi, turning to me as we walked along. "This is indeed a great day! Methinks that this great land is one of beauty and charm. I am filled with admiration, O Manzie!"

"Yes, Umlosi, this country is a bit staggering at first," I agreed. "It's so full of surprises that we can't appreciate them all."

We soon entered the thick jungle again, and as we passed along through the tangled masses of trees, we saw many other wonderful sights. As Nelson Lee had intimated, it was not long before we encountered some snakes.

It was Handforth who pointed them out, high up in the trees amongst the branches, vivid in their colourings, and wicked in their looks. But they were high above us, and we were in no danger.

And then quite suddenly we reached our destination.

Turning a little bend in the narrow path we came into another clearing, and we caught sight of rough dwellings, made of wood and grasses. A few human figures were in sight, most of them nearly devoid of clothing, and there was a babble of voices.

Our arrival was evidently causing some little excitement.

CHAPTER 15.

News of the Colonel!

JOEY BROWN was a most important person.

He had been acting as our guide up till now, but he was also an interpreter. It was necessary for him to question the natives, and then translate their replies into English. It was a talk he revelled in, and he was grinning all over his face with pleasure.

We found the Indian village to be a very small, grubby place, and the Indians themselves were a grubby lot, too. They seemed rather scared, and at first were too nervous to interview at all.

Joey Brown, however, could not remain quiet. He gabbled at them like one o'clock, and quickly convinced them that we were perfectly harmless, and we had only come to gain a little information, and that we should depart peacefully as soon as we had gained our object.

The Indians were undersized and half-naked. I was not at all impressed by them, and they struck me as being a treacherous-looking lot. I should not have cared to be left alone with them for very long.

A kind of council was held in the middle of the clearing. The male members of the little Indian settlement were all grouped around us, looking deadly serious, and extremely stolid; round the huts, were the women and children; they were too nervous to come near. As a preliminary, Lord Dorrimore distributed a fair amount of ornaments and jewellery—trinkets and such like. The Indians did not seem to be very impressed, but I expect they were delighted in their own way.

"Now, look here, Joey!" said Dorrie.

"What you've got to do is this, my son. Listen to my instructions carefully, and then get busy with your own special lingo."

"Me understand, boss," said Joey Brown. "You talkee, and me allee samee repeat to Indian man. He answers—I guess!"

"All right, go ahead," said Dorrie. "What we want to know is this. Do these natives remember anything concerning Colonel Kerrigan, the big white man, who was in this region several years ago? I want you to ask these fellows if they remember the white man. That will do for the start. Get busy!"

Joey Brown nodded and turned to the villagers.

Then he commenced gabbling away at a terrific speed, and for some little time the natives looked as blank and stolid as ever. Then some of them seemed to become rather more intelligent, and they nodded repeatedly. After that two of them talked and talked, until we thought they would never stop. But at last our Indian guide turned to us.

"Allee same remember much!" he exclaimed. "They know plenty, boss. Allee same remember white man!"

"Good!" said Nelson Lee. "What else, my boy?"

"White man no more here," said Joey Brown. "White man gone—him gone one year, two year, three year—more than that, boss! Him no more here. Him gone up in 'um sky."

"Up in the sky?" repeated Dorrie, wonderingly.

"Sure, dat's what 'um say," said our guide. "Plenty much gone, boss. Allee same, up in 'um sky!"

We looked at the Indians curiously. They were still talking—now amongst themselves. And several of them were pointing continuously to the sky. Then they looked at us, and apparently thought that we understood.

"What do they mean, sir?" asked Stanley Kerrigan. "Do—do they mean that dad is dead? That he has gone up to Heaven?"

Nelson Lee compressed his lips.

"I don't quite know, Stanley. But I cannot quite believe that these ignorant natives mean that your father has gone to Heaven. I expect they know precious little about Heaven, my boy. Their actions must have some other interpretation. But we shall soon know."

"Has that fellow gone dotty?" asked Handforth.

We looked at one of the Indians—an old man, and probably the father of the village, so to speak. He was on his feet, and he was making curious motions with his hands and arms, as though he were endeavouring to describe some object. It was quite impossible to understand what he meant, but he seemed to think that we ought to know. And then he pointed to the sky again, and once more repeated his gyrations.

"The chap's dotty!" said Handforth.

"Don't you believe it," I said. "He's trying to make us understand something, but in his own primitive way he can't quite do it. What do you make of those signs, guv'nor?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I must confess, Nipper, that I am somewhat puzzled," he replied. "However, we must not give up."

"Perhaps Joey will be able to find out," said Lord Dorrimore.

Joey Brown lost no further time in putting questions to the natives. After they had been talking for some time he turned to us again.

"Me no understand, boss," he said, with a painful expression on his quaint-looking face. "Allee samee strange things. Indians talk of big house which went up in the air. I guess they must be sure loco!"

Nelson Lee smiled at this bit of American slang.

"A house that went up in the air?" he repeated slowly. "That certainly sounds somewhat extraordinary, my

lad. But there must be some explanation. Wait! I have an idea! By James, I wonder if it could be possible that——"

Nelson Lee paused, and Dorrie looked at him curiously.

"Well?" he said. "Go on, old man!"

"Not yet!" said Nelson Lee. "I have a little test I should like to put to these men. My idea is rather wild. But it is just as well to make sure."

The guv'nor pulled a notebook out of his pocket, and then commenced drawing several objects in pencil. They were rough little pictures, but clear enough. I was surprised to see that the first little object he drew was a balloon. What could his idea be?

Lord Dorrimore was equally astonished, and the other juniors were looking on with mild expressions of wonder. They were even more surprised when Nelson Lee proceeded to draw a parachute. Finally the guv'nor executed a very creditable picture of a box-kite.

"What on earth's the idea?" I asked curiously.

"Oh, I expect you will laugh at me, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee. "In all probability this notion of mine is absurd, but I just want to satisfy myself."

He took a step forward and held his pocket-book in front of the group of natives. They gazed at it blankly for a few moments, but then their expressions changed. They gabbled to one another, their eyes gleamed, and they were obviously excited.

Then they pointed to one of the drawings. They pointed continuously, and followed this up by looking at the sky, and by jerking their fingers upwards. The meaning of it all was quite obvious, and could not possibly be mistaken.

"This is splendid—far better than I ever thought!" said Nelson Lee keenly. "Don't you understand, Dorrie? All these Indians are pointing to the box-kite!"

"By gad!" said Dorrie, taking a deep breath.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed, startled. "Do you mean to say, guv'nor, that Colonel Kerrigan constructed a box-kite, and went up into the air on it?"

"That is the only possible explanation, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "These Indians started by pointing into the sky, and we could not quite understand their meaning. Then, after the old gentleman had made certain movements with his hands, I had a dim impression that he was attempting to describe something which went up into the air with the colonel. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"Very well, then," said Nelson Lee. "It stands to reason that the colonel could only leave the earth in one of three ways, that was clear. A balloon, a parachute, or a box-kite. An aeroplane, of course, is quite out of the question in this region. It was very doubtful if the colonel had brought a balloon with him, and a parachute was also a questionable alternative. The box-kite, however, struck me as being possible. But I drew all three in order to see what effect it had on the natives. As you have observed, they all pointed to the box-kite."

"But where could the colonel have got a box-kite from, sir?" asked Handforth.

"It is fairly clear, Handforth, that the colonel manufactured it himself," said Nelson Lee. "On one occasion, a year or two ago, I myself did the very same thing. I was with Nipper in a desert in North America, and we escaped from certain death by constructing a rough kite, and we allowed ourselves to be carried up by the wind and deposited into safety. It was a risky expedient, but it saved our lives. The colonel obviously did something of the same nature, but with a different object."

"What could his object be?" asked Stanley excitedly.

"There is just a chance your father is alive," said Nelson Lee. "The colonel constructed the box-kite of some materials and he went up into the sky with it. What for, I do not know, but it is quite possible that we shall find this out before long."

An answer was provided almost at once by Joey Brown. That cheerful youth knew a great deal more than we had supposed—and he was proving himself to be an extremely valuable individual.

He had been listening to our conversation with interest and he now grasped Nelson Lee's sleeve and plucked at it. His face was flushed with a sudden excitement and was looking far more intelligent than usual. Nelson Lee turned to him and regarded him with interest.

"Well, Joey," he said, "what is it?"

"Me know!" said the Indian boy grimly. "Me allee samee know truth, boss!"

"You know why the colonel constructed the box-kite?"

"Sure!" said Joey Brown. "Me know why big white man make box 'um kite! Big white man explorer—want to see over forest—him no go."

"Him no go!" repeated Nelson Lee. "What do you mean?"

"Allee same heap big swamp!" said Joey Brown, shaking his head. "Lil way over there, boss," he added, pointing over the trees. "Swamp, him mighty big proposition, I guess. Allee samee quick death!"

"A swamp!" repeated Dorrie. "There are plenty of swamps about here, my boy. The colonel wouldn't construct a kite just in order to cross a swamp ——"

"You no understand, boss," said Joey. "Me know! Me heap big clever person! You bet your sweet life! This swamp miles long—miles and miles and miles and miles!"

"How many more miles?" asked Dorrie.

"Him big swamp; so big 'um can't describe him!" said the Indian boy, stretching his hands in order to indicate that the swamp was of an enormous size. "Terrible, boss—swamp so big, no man cross it! Never been crossed by anybody—not by Indian or white man or animal! Nobody know what beyond—allee same mystery!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I am beginning to understand much more clearly," he said. "I have heard from several people that there is a terrible swamp in this region, Dorrie. It extends for hundreds of miles. As Joey has said, nothing human can live on it, and it has never been crossed. It is a swamp infested by fever, poisonous insects by the million, and there are snakes galore. It is quite impossible for anybody to cross it. The colonel evidently constructed this box-kite with the idea of solving the difficulty."

"Then—then dad must have fallen into the swamp and is dead?" said Stanley, with dismay.

"Not necessarily, my boy," said Dorrie. "It is quite likely that the colonel crossed the swamp and could not possibly get back. Then, at all events, this tallies with your aunt's peculiar visions. It is a likely supposition, in my opinion."

"I am inclined to agree with you, old man," said Nelson Lee. "Kerrigan may have crossed the swamp in the kite, and then found it impossible to get back. He is, therefore, marooned hundreds of miles away from civilisation, with no possible means of getting back."

The theory was a sound one, and we were all intensely interested. The swamp that Joey Brown had mentioned was indeed a reality, and we had heard many stories concerning it.

It was regarded as a kind of myth down the Amazon, in Manaos, and other towns. Many people did not believe that it actually existed, and they were inclined to look upon the yarn as a mere tale. But I believed it to be true—and so did the guv'nor.

The swamp formed a complete barrier, some miles beyond the river. Exploration was finally stopped at that point where the swamp commenced. It was supposed to extend for so many miles that no human being had ever discovered its actual size.

What lay beyond was a complete and absolute mystery. The country had never been explored, and the possibilities were enormous.

But what was the use of us thinking of the matter? We could not cross the swamp, we had no box-kites, and even if we had it would have made no difference. The enterprise was altogether too risky for serious consideration.

One party had attempted to solve the problem by starting a trip to the other side of the continent—hoping to get to the unexplored region from there. But they had met with the same difficulty. They had come across this dreadful swamp, and it was absolutely out of the question to get across.

It seemed, therefore, that this horrible morass formed a kind of circle with a huge tract of land—like an island, in the centre.

That great tract of land had never been seen by modern eyes—no human being had ever crossed the swamp. There was something thrilling about the whole idea. If it turned out to be true, there were endless possibilities.

And it now seemed that Colonel Kerrigan had crossed the swamp on the box-kite and was now on this huge island—that is, the tract of land which the swamp surrounded. We were all impressed.

What was far more to the point, Joey Brown declared he could lead us to a hill-top, within a couple of miles, where we could view the swamp with our own eyes. He would take us to a place where we could see for miles across the swamp itself.

Nelson Lee decided that it would be as well to take advantage of Joey's knowledge.

We had learned some very valuable information in the Indian village, and we realised that we were fully repaid for our troubles in coming. And the Indians were highly delighted, too—for they were the richer by many trinkets and ornaments, which they valued far more than an Englishman would have valued a handful of the biggest and most expensive diamonds.

We took our departure, after learning that the colonel had stayed for several weeks in the Indian village. He had been there, resting after a bout of fever—during which he had nearly died. It was after his sojourn in the village that he had made his box-kite, and had commenced his perilous trip over the swamp.

The Indian boy assumed the lead again—a position he was by no means unaware of. He knew quite well that he was an important person, and he let us all see it.

He led the way through the village, and then left the beaten track, until we were making our way through forest where is seemed no man had ever set foot before.

After a while the ground became clearer, and then, finally, we came upon a rough hill, which ascended steeply. The sun was glaring down with terrific power, and we were soon perspiring from every pore.

But at last we reached the top of the hill—a very high hill, too. And then Joey Brown took us round to the other side, and pointed right out into the distance.

We had a magnificent view from there. We could see for twenty or thirty miles in the clear, brilliant atmosphere.

The hill, this side, went down much more steeply, and, right up the foot, the forest grew in dense profusion. But it soon thinned out, and we could see patches of water here and there..

"Me know!" said Joey Brown, nodding his head. "That 'um swamp, boss. Him mighty heap big swamp!

Allee samee bad place!' Quick death—him there—sure!"

"It looks all right!" said Handforth. "A jolly fine place, I should say!"

"You really cannot judge from this distance, my boy," said Nelson Lee. "As far as eye can see, the whole country is one dreadful swamp—a place which is infested with fever and death."

"By gad!" said Dorrie. "It stretches right away to the horizon. There's no end to the bally thing!"

Very soon several pairs of binoculars were focused on the swamp, and there was no doubt that the stories were true—and were not merely travellers' yarns.

Down in that green morass snakes could be numbered by the thousand. And there was fever—poisonous fumes coming from the swamp, and endless other perils.

Even to attempt to cross that stretch of land would be a mad act. It would be certain death for any party, and there would be no escape, once the swamp had the party in its clutches.

"Do you think we could get across, sir?" asked young Stanley Kerrigan, with great anxiety in his voice.

"Not on foot, my boy," said Nelson Lee kindly.

"Couldn't we get across on a boat, sir?"

"Oh, no," replied Lee. "I may as well tell you at once, my lad, that it is utterly out of the question to attempt to cross it either by boat or on foot. That is why your father constructed the box-kite—for he knew that the only method was to go by air. He was blown across by a high wind, probably, and he has vanished. He has been missing for over four years, and he will be missing for all time unless he is rescued."

"But we're going to rescue him, aren't we, sir?" asked Stanley.

"I hope so, my boy," put in Dorrie, with a curious note in his voice. "I certainly hope so—and I can assure you that I'm not hoping in vain. I've got a card up my sleeve that'll give you a bit of a surprise before long!"

. . . . . .

The return journey was just as interesting as the trip out. Better still, we had definite information to take back to the yacht. We had news of the colonel, and I could picture the delight we should give to Aunt Janet when we told her.

But I was rather puzzled about what Dorrimore had said. He intimated clearly that there was a chance of us crossing the swamp. Personally, I couldn't see how it was to be done. We certainly had no box-kites, and we had no aeroplane.

I found myself near his lordship after we had been walking for some time, and I tapped him on the subject.

"What's the idea, Dorrie?" I asked.

"The idea of what, my son?"

"Why, you said you had a card up your sleeve, or something—that we shall probably be able to cross the swamp," I said. "How do you make that out? How will it be possible for us to get across——"

"Little boys should be seen and not heard," interrupted Lord Dorrimore calmly. "Ask no questions and I shan't be tempted to tell any whoppers! But I've got a little surprise—and I'm not going to spring it just yet. Get your brainbox to work, and see if you can't think of something."

He would say no more, and I was left still wondering. I dropped back among the other fellows.

My thoughts were busy during the journey back to the Wanderer, but by the time we reached the Majarra I had found no solution to Dorrie's cryptic words.

CHAPTER 16.
Dorrie's Little Surprise!

BOOM—rumble—boom!

The sound rolled out deeply and solemnly overhead as we came out of the path to the River Majarra with the Wanderer near by.

It was evening, and we had arrived back. But the sun had disappeared, and the sky was obscured by masses of terrifying-looking clouds. A storm was coming up—that was certain. We heard the first sounds of it a few minutes before, and it was apparently about to break.

"We'd better get on board as soon as possible," said Nelson Lee, glancing anxiously at the sky. "These tropical storms are very severe."

"It's all right—they've seen us, and the boat's already waiting," said Dorrie calmly. "We shall make the Wanderer all right—don't worry."

Nelson Lee was not worrying on his own account—he was thinking of us. We heard cheers from the yacht as we appeared on the river bank, and very shortly afterwards we were safely on the little launch, speeding away across the water to the ship's side.

Boom! Boom!

A clap of thunder rolled out which fairly deafened us, and it went echoing across the river.

We reached the accommodation ladder, and then we all scrambled up, thirsty, tired, but content.

"Well, you've got back, then!" said Tommy Watson, grabbing my arm. "Lucky beggars! I wish I'd been with you! Have you discovered anything?"

"Oh, lots," I replied. "But Mr. Lee will tell you all about it—there's no need for me to say it first. I expect the guv'nor will tell everybody. Anyhow, we will——"

Crash! Crash!

The rest of my sentence was completely drowned by the peals of thunder that cannoned overhead. The lightning was terrible, vivid flashes of fire across the heavens. And at that moment the rain came down.

Somehow, I felt like a little ant would feel if a bucket of water was suddenly turned over it. The rain came down in sheets—in dense, solid masses. I was soaked to the skin before I could move a yard.

Not that this was at all unpleasant. The cool rain, in fact, was decidedly refreshing and enjoyable. I stood there, revelling in it.

It was impossible to see across the decks even. The trees, the river—everything was blotted out by the downpour. I have seen tropical storms on many occasions, but this storm fairly left all the others standing. It was amazing in its violence and fury.

Thunder boomed every moment, and the lightning was so intense that it was really impossible to remain on deck.

The yacht's crew found it necessary to get extremely busy. For everything of a loose nature was liable to be washed away. The decks were flooded in next to no time, and the water poured down the companion-way in a great cascade.

Even below it was impossible to speak. At least, it was impossible to make oneself heard. The beating of the rain and the peals of thunder caused such an amount of noise that we were all deafened. The girls, in fact, were rather terrified. They had never experienced anything of this nature before, and it startled them.

On the Amazon there is an enormous annual rainfall, and it was because of this, perhaps, that the trees and the vegetation were so vast. But, fortunately this present storm did not last for long. It was just a taster, so to speak, an indication that we were not to have fine, sunny days all the time.

The thunder grew less, and the rain ceased almost as abruptly as it had begun. And when we went up on deck again the sky was clear, the sun was shining brilliantly over the trees, and the decks were steaming in clouds.

The rain had cooled the air considerably, and now a most pleasant soft breeze sprang up, making the evening very enjoyable.

We all changed our clothing, and then found the tea was ready under the awning of the promenade deck.

Aunt Janet was extremely anxious to hear what had happened, and she was not kept waiting for long.

Lord Dorrimore acted as the spokesman, and he told all the members of the party exactly what had happened on our trip.

He related our adventures in the Indian village, and he told Aunt Janet the news concerning her brother. She was overjoyed, and she was all the more certain that her vision was true—that Colonel Kerrigan had crossed the swamp, and was now safe and sound, but unable to return to civilisation.

"What I'm anxious to know is how you propose to get over that swamp, Dorrie," I said.

Dorrie chuckled.

"Well, there is a way," he replied smoothly.

"Going by air, you mean?" I asked.

"Exactly."

"But we can't do that, Dorrie!"

"Why not?"

"Well, because we haven't got any means of going into the air!" I replied. "We can't put wings on the yacht, can we?"

"Certainly we could," grinned Dorrie. "But that doesn't mean to say that the yacht would fly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, it's all very well being funny," I protested. "But it doesn't alter the fact that we're still in the same position. How on earth can we cross the swamp—that's what I want to know. Boats are useless, we can't go on foot."

"You're quite right, my son," said Dorrie. "If we mean to cross the swamp, we shall have to do so by air—an' I don't particularly hanker after the idea of goin' up in a bally box kite! It doesn't seem quite safe enough for my likin'."

"But what else is there, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Well, there's this, for example," replied Lord Dorrimore smoothly.

He fished about in his breast-pocket, and produced a thin slip of pasteboard about the size of a postcard. I judged it to be a photograph, and this was right. Dorrie passed it round, and when it came to me I gazed at the photo with great interest.

What I saw was rather surprising.

The picture was that of a very business-like looking airship. It was not a large one, and there was only one carriage underneath—a well-built car but not enclosed. There was a deck-rail all round, and the motors were evidently at the rear of the car.

The airship was fitted with two propellers—both of them fixed to outriggers from the car itself. And on the front of the gas bag was painted the name, in great big letters. "Adventurer."

I looked up at Dorrie rather curiously.

"What's this?" I asked in surprise.

"A photograph, my son."

"I know that!" I replied. "But what is it—a photograph of what?"

"An airship!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what airship?" I yelled. "It's all very well to show us this, Dorrie, but what's the good of it? We can't go back to England for the airship, I suppose?"

"It won't be necessary to do that," replied Dorrie.

"Why not?"

"Because the airship is here."

"Here!"

The shout was uttered by every junior on deck.

"By gad!" said Dorrie. "Are you trying to imitate the thunder?"

"But—but what do you mean?" I asked excitedly. "How can the airship be here, Dorrie?"

"Well, it's not exactly here," said Lord Dorrimore, with a patient sigh. "It's down below, if you want to know. It's in the hold!"

I jumped to my feet.

"In—in the hold," I echoed. "Great Scott! You don't mean to say that

you've brought an airship out with you, Dorrie?"

"That's exactly what I mean to say," replied his lordship.

"My hat!"

"Great pip!"

"Begad!"

"Oh, how perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Miss Violet.

"There's only one stipulation I make," said Lord Dorrimore. "This airship is a special sort of thing, and it cost a pile of money—you can guess that for yourselves. I'm not particularly anxious to see it wrecked. Therefore I must insist that Master Little does not come on board!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The airship is capable of carrying a ton or two, but when it comes to Fatty——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Falstaff!"

"Oh, it doesn't make any difference to me!" said Fatty, who was still busy with his tea. "I know I'm big—but a chap can't enjoy life unless he's big. How should I get on without my appetite, I should like to know?"

"I dare say you'd manage to scrape through life all right," said Dorrie calmly. "The fact is, my son, you eat too much now. You're quite welcome to everythin' in the yacht—but I'm thinkin' about your health. If you keep growin' at the rate you're growin' now, you'll be like a balloon when you're fifty——"

"Not in weight, sir!" grinned Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But we were all excited about Lord Dorrimore's bombshell—his little surprise, as he called it. It was extremely interesting to learn that he had brought a complete airship out from England with him. We had known nothing about it—and he had kept it quiet until now.

And yet the airship was down below, all packed up in cases, and in separate parts, ready to assemble at any given moment.

The airship, we learned, was constructed specially, and was capable of being put together in a very short time. Several members of the crew were capable mechanics—they had been shipped on board for the especial purpose, and would be able to put it together without the slightest trouble.

"But what about gas?" asked Tommy Watson. "You can't fly an airship without gas!"

"Well, hardly," agreed Lord Dorrimore. "I think gas is fairly essential."

"I suppose you've brought a big supply?" I asked.

"Well, I'm not quite in my dotage yet," said Lord Dorrimore, with a smile. "I shouldn't bring out an airship to the Amazon if I didn't bring any gas. Down below, in the forward hold, there are a few thousand tubes of a new kind of gas that is non-inflammable and very light, too. It costs about six times as much as hydrogen—but that's only a detail?"

"But what about when the gas runs out?" asked Watson.

"Well, then we shan't be able to use the airship any more," said Dorrie. "That stands to reason. But I've taken all precautions. There are enough cylinders below to fill the bally gas bag three times over. So that allows us plenty for leakage and wastage, and all that sort of thing. We shall make the yacht our base. An' we shall go backwards and forwards from here. You see, I realised it was no good comin' out to the Amazon unless we had some special kind of craft to suit our purpose."

"A jolly ripping idea, sir," I said. "There's only one point I think that might be uncertain. Supposing a sudden thunderstorm comes up—like that storm we just experienced—how about the airship, then? If she's fully inflated, and lies somewhere about here, why—she'd be a wreck in less than half an hour."

"Dorrie has taken all precautions, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "The air-

ship is provided with floats, and it will remain on the surface of the river. There are also some special guards to protect the airship against a sudden storm. I think everything will be quite all right."

After tea the juniors collected together, and animatedly discussed the situation. We learned that the airship was to be erected at once—on the morrow.

In fact, active preparations were commenced that very evening. Men were sent down into the hold to prepare the various parts of the airship for hoisting up on deck. A large space was cleared, and here the erection was to take place.

"My hat! It's a glorious adventure, and no mistake!" declared Handforth, just before dinner-time. "There's no telling what it will lead to, either. I'm anxious to get to the other side of that swamp, and see what exists there. If we can only find Colonel Kerrigan—well, our mission will be a huge success."

"Rather!" I agreed. "And, somehow, I've got an idea in my head that everything will turn out O.K. I don't suppose you chaps will be permitted to make a trip in the airship at first. Dorrie can't afford to take any risks."

"Dash it all, I'm going!" said Handforth firmly.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Handy," said Church. "Lord Dorrimore has got to look after his guests—he's got other people to think about. Personally, I'm as eager as anybody to go on board the airship, but we must be patient, and wait our turn."

"That's the spirit," I said heartily.

"Oh, it's all very well for you to talk!" said Handforth gruffly. "I expect you'll go up on the first trip!"

"That's very likely," I agreed.

"Well, I don't consider that it's fair," said Handforth. "Why should you go——"

"My dear old chap, all you've got to do is to be reasonable," I said. "I don't happen to have any parents, and if the airship comes a cropper, and I come a cropper with it—well, nobody will worry particularly. The guv'nor will go up, and I shall go up with him. With you fellows it is different. You've got parents and brothers and sisters—in England—and a trip in an airship in this region is always a jolly risky proceeding."

Most of the fellows were quite ready to see the point, and they realised that it was out of the question for them to take a trip in the airship to begin with. But they also realised the immense possibilities which now unfolded themselves.

With only the yacht as a means of conveyance, there had been utterly no hope of getting across the terrible stretch of swamp, that morass which extended for hundreds of miles.

With the airship it was different.

There would be nothing easier than for us to fly over the swamp, and to accomplish each trip in an hour or two. A journey of a hundred miles through the virgin forest would occupy anything from a week to a month, but with the airship it could be accomplished in two hours. The vessel was an enormous advantage.

Very soon now we should learn the secret of that country which lay beyond the morass.

CHAPTER 17.

A Trial Trip!

FOUR days passed.

Those four days were busy ones—from sunrise to sunset of each day. The Wanderer was transformed into a busy hive of industry, and everybody was found a job to perform. Even the junior members of the party were given certain work, and they were only too willing to do it.

The airship took shape fairly rapidly. By the end of the fourth day it was completely constructed, and it was not such a small object, after all.

Down on the river, fairly near to the Wanderer, some specially constructed

floats had been anchored. They were huge things, and they were so made that the airship could rest upon them and be perfectly safe.

The anchorage selected was near the other shore of the Majarra. The airship itself would be protected by special lines and cables in the event of any sudden squall.

The great gasbag had been filled, and there still remained an enormous number of cylinders left. So there was an ample supply to allow for wastage and leakage.

It was decided that if the airship was ready in the morning several of us would go up on a trial trip—just a little journey round to see if everything was in perfect order.

Lord Dorrimore, of course, insisted upon going—and he appointed Nelson Lee as chief pilot. This was only natural, since Nelson Lee was an expert airman, and he was capable of managing an airship.

The next morning the air was perfectly still; hardly a breath of wind stirred—and this was very fortunate. Nelson Lee decided that the conditions were perfect for the trip, and preparations were immediately put in hand. There was no sense whatever in delaying.

Everybody on board was up, ready to see the start. Although the hour was very early, all the girls turned out in good time, and Aunt Janet was looking very anxious and excited. She knew that much depended upon the success of this trip. If her brother was to be rescued, he could only be rescued by means of the airship; therefore, if this trip was a success, it seemed likely that Colonel Kerrigan might be saved.

By eight o'clock everything was ready.

There were six of us on board—Nelson Lee, Dorrie, two members of the engine-room staff, and myself.

I don't think I have mentioned that the airship was anchored in a very unusual manner. Vessels of this type are generally held down by a few hundred people on the ground. But Lord Dorrimore's airship had a device of a far more satisfactory nature.

It was anchored to four separate points, thus making it impossible for any wind to blow it away or to shift it from its moorings. And these cables could be slipped at a moment's notice, without the slightest trouble.

"Well, are we all ready?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, rather, sir," I replied.

"Go ahead, old man," said Dorrie. "I've got plenty of faith in this little craft. You'll be surprised when you find how she takes to the air. The chap who designed her is going to make a fortune, unless I'm mistaken."

The engines were started, and then they increased their revolutions—a soft, purring noise, accompanied by the swishing of the propellers, as they whizzed through the air. A moment later the cables were cast off, and the airship was free!

We were off!

Rocking slightly, the Adventurer rose swiftly above the trees, Nelson Lee stopping the engines at once, and allowing us to glide up. We went right over the yacht's decks, and I looked down with great interest as we did so.

"Hurrah!"

A cheer came up to us from below. There were many hands waving, and many handkerchiefs, too. Everybody on the yacht seemed to be rather excited—and they had reason to be.

By all appearances, the airship was a great success, for it had started off from the river quite smoothly. And now, with the engines starting up again, the vessel flew over the forest. The propellers whirled, and our speed increased.

"Not so bad, eh?" said Dorrie calmly.

"It's fine, sir," I agreed heartily. "This is the way to get over the forest—no trouble, no fever, no wild animals, or anything!"

It was, after all, only a trial trip—a

very short affair. But Nelson Lee tested the Adventurer thoroughly. He took her up higher and higher, and the panorama which was spread out for our eyes was positively wonderful.

We could see for hundreds of miles in the clear air of that morning. To north, south, east, and west, we could see the great forest stretching away in one mass of green—here and there broken by silver threads, these latter being rivers and streams and creeks.

And there, clearly visible, lay one very broad river—a huge slash in the forest, as it were.

It was the Amazon—the mighty river, flowing its sedate course down to the Atlantic.

Through the binoculars we could even make out ships here and there—river steamers, small sailing craft in the far distance. But the Majarra was deserted—the Wanderer was the only vessel on its waters.

We were up at a great height—probably ten thousand feet. We could see over a tremendous radius.

The swamp stretched for hundreds of miles—it went right out into the distance, and beyond there was nothing but a hazy mist.

We arrived back at the yacht in perfect safety, and Nelson Lee quickly manipulated the controls, and the airship slowly descended, and found her place on the floats as though she had performed the operation on many occasions.

Very soon the real trip would commence—that trip across the mysterious swamp. What were we destined to find beyond that place of death?

Nobody could guess, but we were all thrilled by the very thought of the adventure.

CHAPTER 18.
Off Into the Unknown!

"BEGAD! Doesn't she look simply rippin', old boys?" asked Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

Montie was standing on deck, and he was gazing across the water to the spot where Lord Dorrimore's airship was moored. And the Adventurer undoubtedly did look very splendid as she hovered there in the morning sunlight.

The airship was not in its original mooring-place. Lord Dorrimore had not considered the anchorage safe. For, in the event of a sudden tropical storm, it would probably go very hard with the light craft.

And so something special had been provided. Moving up the river for a mile, we had come upon a small island, right in the centre of the stream. It was bare, but for a few bushes and tropical plants. And, right in the centre of this little island, a huge post had been erected.

This post had been brought in sections, and it was especially made for Dorrie's airship. It stood at a great height, and it was strengthened by many cables, secured in every direction.

And the nose of the airship was anchored to the top of the post, the latter being on a kind of a swivel.

In the highest gale, no harm could come to the craft, and we all felt safe concerning her.

"Yes, Montie, she looks fine," I agreed. "It won't be so long now before we're off. By Jingo! I wonder what we shall find beyond that terrible swamp? I wonder if it's all a myth about that city, or whether we shall really make some surprising discoveries!"

Montie shook his head.

"Dear fellow, I'm not worrying my head about it," he said. "I'm sorry we can't all go, you know."

"Well, you're one of the lucky ones," I said. "You're coming on the trip with us, Montie."

"Exactly, dear boy," agreed Tregellis-West. "I'm thinking of the fellows who will be left behind. It's rather rough on them."

"Oh, I don't know!" I said. "It's not reasonable to suppose that every-

body can come on a trip of this sort. The airship can only accommodate a certain number of passengers, and we don't want to overcrowd her."

Sir Montie nodded.

"Yes, dear boy, I suppose you're right," he agreed.

The other fellows, as a matter of fact, were rather sorry for themselves. But it was quite impossible for the whole crowd to go. They realised this, and they accepted the inevitable with quite a good spirit.

The party which had been chosen to make the trip consisted of Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, Tregellis-West, Watson, Handforth, Tom Burton, and myself. There would also be Stanley Kerrigan, and two engineers. And we were due to start almost at once.

We should not be gone for long, of course. It was reckoned that the airship would arrive back at the yacht easily by the early evening—and probably before. But during that time it was our intention thoroughly to explore the big swamp from above, and, if it was at all within our power, we should ascertain what lay beyond that deadly morass.

Everybody was on deck, waiting to see us off, and there was a sensation of excitement in the air.

Somehow, we all instinctively knew that this trip was to be something very much out of the common.

Very soon the launch was ready to take us off to the Adventurer, where many members of the crew had already unmoored the airship and brought her down on floats on the river.

And soon, with many expressions of goodwill and good luck from the other fellows on board, we started out for the airship's side.

It did not take us long to get on board. All we had to do was to glide up in the launch, and step straight into the airship's car.

This was quite roomy and extremely comfortable. It had been built especially for a tropical climate, and there was no enclosed cabin. A kind of wide deck ran all round the engine-house, with polished brass railings and guard. It was possible to walk all the way round, and we could lean over, and look directly down at the ground beneath.

"My hat! This is great!" exclaimed Handforth, as he found himself in the airship's car. "I didn't think it was half so big as this, you know!"

Nelson Lee was in full charge. Lord Dorrimore simply remained a passenger, pleading that he was entirely ignorant on all mechanical matters.

Young Stanley Kerrigan, of the Third Form, was open-eyed with wonder at everything he saw.

Buzz-z-z-z!

The engines commenced to hum musically, and the propellers whistled as they cut through the air. And then the mooring ropes were cast aside, and the Adventurer rose clear, and soared aloft.

"Hurrah!"

A cheer came from the yacht's decks, and we looked down, and saw everybody standing there, waving. We were now practically over the vessel, and we had a splendid view. The airship was rising higher and higher every moment, and soon she circled gracefully round over the river.

Higher and higher we went, until we had attained at least two thousand feet.

Then, with the sun's rays held off by the big envelope, we set off across the forest, losing sight of the yacht after the first minute or two.

The dense forest looked very different from the sky. We were gazing down upon the tree-tops, upon tangled masses of foliage, and here and there, through our binoculars, we could see crowds of monkeys playing about among the branches, gesticulating and jabbering. And the birds to be seen were of the most gorgeous plumage and

colour. This forest, however, did not extend far.

For the character of the country soon began to change, and we saw small lagoons of water here and there—most of them infested with caymans. The ground was getting swampy already.

It must not be forgotten that we were travelling at a speed of ninety miles an hour—for the airship was a very fast vessel. We therefore traversed as much space in half an hour as it would take on foot during the course of two or three days.

"Here's the swamp!" exclaimed Dorrie, pointing. "By gad! It seems to be quite all right from this distance. But I dare say it's a little different down there."

"We will descend much lower, and examine it closely," said Nelson Lee. "There can be no danger in doing that."

He gave instructions to the engineers, and almost at once the airship commenced to descend in a long glide. And before long we were travelling over the forest at a height which could not have been more that fifty or a hundred feet. We seemed to be right on the tree-tops, and we could see everything to perfection.

And now we were directly over the deadly swamp. We could see everything clearly.

"No wonder it is impossible for any human being to cross this horrible swamp!" said Handforth, looking down. "By George! What a ghastly place!"

"Rather!" said Watson.

"Dear old boys, can you see the snakes?" asked Sir Montie. "Look! I can see at least a dozen in one spot!"

Sir Montie was not exaggerating.

The place was indeed a deathtrap. The trees, for the most part, were small and straggling. There were no stately giants, as in the forests; it was simply one reeking mass of creeping, crawling vegetation and reptile life.

The ground, in most places, was simply nothing better than mud, with pools of wicked-looking water here and there. And over all this grew the dense tropical growth.

No matter in which direction we looked we could see snakes of all varieties—from giant anacondas to small green snakes and other kinds. There were lizards, too, and reptilian objects which we could not name—which we had never seen before. It was like a nightmare rather than anything else.

I am certain that there were monsters in that swamp which no human eye had ever gazed upon before.

And so we sped on mile after mile, at the same rapid speed.

After some time we ascended to a higher altitude, for we discovered that some highly unpleasant fumes were coming up from the swamp—fumes which sickened us.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Handforth, with a slight shudder. "What's going to happen if the engines go wrong, and we come down in this place?"

"We shall all die in about half an hour—that's what'll happen!" I said grimly. "But you needn't be afraid of that, Handy. Even if the engines do fail, we shall be all right. This is a lighter than air craft, and we can drift with the wind back to the forest. But these engines are reliable, and they won't fail."

"My hat!" said Watson. "I hope not!"

It seemed that the swamp would never end. The minutes passed, and we did not decrease our speed, but still on every side there was nothing but the same drab, dismal scene to witness.

And then, in order to obtain a better view, Nelson Lee ordered the airship to be taken higher, and we were soon climbing into the sky quickly and smoothly. At last we were fairly shivering with the cold, for we had attained a height of something like ten thousand feet. And from there we could see for hundreds of miles in every direction.

The swamp was nearly at an end, for

we could see rocky ground in the dim distance ahead.

But, to the right and left, the mire extended as far as the eye could see. But, on our own tracks, we could just faintly discern the Amazon, like a thin white pencil line on the horizon.

"It seems that the stories we have heard concerning the swamp are quite true," remarked Nelson Lee. "It appears to extend in a circular form—a band about a hundred miles wide stretching away in a gigantic circle, leaving in the centre a tract of land which is entirely cut off from the rest of the world."

"That's about the size of it, old man," agreed Lord Dorrimore, nodding. "We're just coming to that piece of land now—an' I'm interested. By what I can see, the ground becomes rocky soon, and then rises up."

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee, gazing through his binoculars. "But what lies beyond that rocky region, Dorrie? That is the main question."

His lordship nodded.

"And it's a question we'll find an answer to if we're lucky," he observed. "What's your opinion, coalbox?" he added, turning to Umlosi.

"Thou art using a strange term, O N'Kose!" rumbled Umlosi. "But thou art asking what is in my mind? Methinks it is difficult to answer thee, my father. We shall see many wondrous sights, and we shall meet with many wondrous adventures; but it is not for me to anticipate. There will be fighting, but we shall conquer. I have spoken!"

"You have!" agreed Dorrie. "I generally notice that you manage to be pretty cheerful on such occasions as these."

We had, by this time, almost reached the farther end of the great swamp, and in the short distance below—and ahead—we could see rocky ground rise up towards a fairly high ridge. What lay beyond this ridge we did not exactly know, for it was all hazy and blurred.

And just then our attention was attracted by something else—something which we could hardly believe at first. In any case, it drove all thoughts of the landscape out of our heads.

Handforth was the first to spot the object, and he was looking at it for some few moments before he spoke. Then he clutched at my sleeve, and pulled me round.

"I say, Nipper, there's a queer bird over there!" he remarked. "You might hand me your binoculars. I'd like to have a squint through them!"

"Which bird?" I asked.

"That one over there—right in the sky!" said Handforth, pointing. "Can't you see it?"

I couldn't. Though I searched the sky in the direction that Handforth indicated, I could see nothing except the deep blue heavens, and here and there an occasional white fleecy cloud. Handforth, meanwhile, was focusing the binoculars, and he stared through them eagerly.

I watched him, and wondered why he was getting so excited. Finally, he turned to me with gleaming eyes.

"Great pip!" he exclaimed huskily. "It's—it's not a bird at all!"

"Not a bird?" I repeated. "Then what is it?"

"An—an aeroplane!" gasped Handforth. "A real, modern aeroplane!"

CHAPTER 19.

The Mysterious Enemy!

"AN aeroplane!"

"Begad!"

"Souse my scuppers!"

We all stared at Handforth, who was looking thoroughly startled.

"Draw it mild, Handy!" I grinned. "There aren't any aeroplanes in this region——"

"I tell you it's an aeroplane!" bawled Handforth excitedly.

"Really, my boy, I think you must be mistaken," said Nelson Lee, coming

up. "I can hardly credit that your statement is true. You must remember that we are in the wilds—hundreds of miles from civilisation and, at least, several thousand miles from any spot where there is likely to be a modern aeroplane. Moreover, you have indicated that this machine is coming from the direction of the unknown land!"

"That's right, sir!" agreed Handforth. "Have a look for yourself. Why, great pip! You can see the giddy thing without any glasses now!"

We all turned instinctively, and gazed out into the bright sky—out in the direction where the mysterious dream city was supposed to lay. And we saw something in the sky—not a speck now, but something black and distinct. It was too steady to be a bird, and it was growing larger every second.

I grabbed my binoculars from Handforth's fists, levelled them, and then searched the sky.

For a moment or two I was unsuccessful, and then an object came into sharp relief within the compass of the glasses. I lost it momentarily, found it again, and then held the binoculars steady.

There, clear and distinct, was an aeroplane—a single seater scout monoplane.

There was no mistake about it. The machine was painted red all over—wings and everything. And it was coming directly towards the airship at a terrific speed.

"Well, I'm hanged!" I ejaculated, in amazement.

"Well, am I right?" demanded Handforth.

"Yes!"

"There you are! I told you so!" said Handy triumphantly.

"Upon my soul!" said Nelson Lee. "This is indeed surprising, my boys! I am at a loss to understand where this aeroplane has come from, and why it should be here—in this terribly dangerous region. There is no safe landing ground whatever."

Everybody on board the airship was thunderstruck. All the available pairs of binoculars were levelled at the mysterious stranger, and it was very soon quite needless to use glasses at all.

For the aeroplane came nearer and nearer, until we saw its outline clearly with the naked eye. It was flying straight towards us at a higher altitude than we were. And we suddenly observed that the aeroplane was gliding down towards us.

"Well, this is really amazing," remarked Dorrie. "I didn't expect to exchange greetings with any other airmen over unexplored Brazil. I wonder who on earth the fellow can be!"

But we were too interested in the plane itself to conjecture much concern the pilot. It was now quite close, and when within two or three hundred yards it proceeded to circle round us, for, of course, we were going at a much slower speed.

The Adventurer was capable of travelling at something like ninety miles an hour.

But this monoplane was of the very latest type—a regular speed merchant. It was shooting through the air at nothing under a hundred and forty miles per hour, and we could hear the aggressive roar of its powerful engine above the steady hum of our own motors.

We watched it intently. The machine, as I have already said, was red all over. Its design was very similar to that of a Bristol Scout, and it was a single seater. We could just distinguish the pilot's head over the cockpit.

The man was attired in ordinary airman's clothing, with a complete covering over his head. It was impossible to distinguish the man's features.

Dorrie and Nelson Lee made several signs—they were waving their hands, and other things to attract the pilot's attention. But the fellow made no reply whatever.

He simply circled round us, growing nearer and nearer with every circle. And he remained crouched in the cockpit, not giving us the slightest atten-

tion. We might have been non-existent, for all the notice he took of us.

After the machine had circled round about eight times, the pilot commenced "stunting."

Three times he looped the loop, and he did it perfectly. Then he treated us to some wonderful exhibitions of nose diving, tail sliding, and all manner of other stunts.

Finally, he came shooting up to our level again, and flew right past within twenty yards, so that we could see every part of his machine distinctly.

It was rather a thrilling moment as the 'plane came tearing by, overtaking us as a modern motor-car will overtake a bicycle. Then the aeroplane had gone by, and he at once turned and commenced circling again.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "This is most remarkable, dear old boys—it is, really!"

"It beats me!" I confessed. "I'd like to know who the dickens the chap is!"

"Probably he's a foreigner!" suggested Tommy Watson. "He can't speak English, and that's why he hasn't made any sign."

"You silly ass!" said Handforth, glaring. "What difference does it make whether a chap's foreign or not? He can wave his hand, I suppose?"

There was no arguing with this logic, and Tommy Watson made no reply. And then something occurred which drove all else from our minds. It was so staggering that we were left quite breathless.

By this time the engines of the airship had been stopped, and we were simply hovering there, practically motionless. Our ears were filled by the roar of the aeroplane's engine as it circled round and round, like an enraged hornet.

Puff! Puff!

Several little white clouds of smoke appeared just above the engine cowling, and these were followed by several other puffs. Then, faintly, we heard several sharp cracks.

"Why, what the dickens——" began Handforth.

"Great Scott!" said Nelson Lee. "It can't be possible that——"

Ping!

Something struck the brass rail just where we were standing, and this caused a sharp metallic sound. Gazing at the spot, I saw the rail was distinctly dented—and there was only one explanation.

The brass rail had been struck by a bullet!

"My hat!" I ejaculated.

I really was incapable of saying anything else at the moment, for this affair was too astounding for words. The pilot was operating a wicked-looking machine-gun which was mounted just in front of his cockpit.

We were being attacked!

Puff! Puff! Puff!

The gun continued to fire, and I knew that the bullets were aimed at the airship's gasbag, not at the car, where we were standing. The bullet that had struck the rail was a stray one.

The pilot of the aeroplane was evidently intent upon punching holes through the gasbag so that we should lose gas. Without gas we should never hope to get back to our base, and we should descend into the swamp, never to rise again.

"The infernal scoundrel!" roared Lord Dorrimore, his face distorted with rage. "Upon my soul! This is a bit too much for me, Lee!"

"I cannot understand it!" ejaculated Nelson Lee in a troubled voice. "The man must be mad. Either that, or there is something more in this than we can realise at the moment."

Dorrie set his teeth.

"I realise one thing, anyhow!" he said grimly. "I'm not going to stand being potted at without making any reply!"

He whipped out his big service revolver and cocked the trigger. The next moment he levelled the weapon, and Nelson Lee followed his example.

Crack! Crack!

"That's the stuff to give him!" shouted Handforth. "Two can play at that game!"

"Souse me! Rather!" said Tom Burton.

Crack! Crack!

Dorrie continued to fire, and we noticed that the 'plane at once sheered off, its circles became wider, and it steered clear of the airship.

I watched closely through my binoculars, and I distinctly saw the pilot throw up his hand, as though he was in some pain. A bullet had probably found its mark.

In any case, the result was immediate.

The red aeroplane, instead of coming round at us again, turned tail, and flew away. It climbed higher and higher, and rapidly became a speck in the sky.

Lord Dorrimore, his face flushed with anger and emotion, stowed his revolver away.

"By the Lord Harry!" he exclaimed. "It's not often I show temper, but I'm decidedly wild now, Lee!"

"With every justification, old man," said Nelson Lee quietly. "This affair is a big shock. We may thank our lucky stars that we have not been vitally struck."

"We don't know yet, sir!" put in one of the mechanics, who was looking very anxious. "Most of the bullets hit the gas-bag, and it's pretty certain that there are some punctures in the gas-containers."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I am afraid you are right, Jarvis!" he remarked. "If gas is escaping rapidly, we shall lose height, and it may be difficult for us to return to the Majarra!"

"That's what I was thinking sir," said Jarvis.

"Is it possible to repair any damage—here on the spot?" said Dorrie.

"It might be, sir, if we land," said the mechanic. "There's practically no wind, and if we could only find a clear pace, sir, it would be an easy matter. At all events, we could make one or two quick repairs, and thus prevent the gas from escaping so rapidly."

"Then we had better search for a landing-place," said Nelson Lee briskly. "There is no time to lose."

Indignation ran high on board, and we were all talking at once, and wondering what in the world had possessed the pilot of the aeroplane to fire at us in such an outrageous manner.

I noticed that we had left the swamp behind; we were now directly over rocky, bare ground. The airship was descending fairly rapidly in a long, straight glide.

"There's no need for all this!" said Handforth. "We can get back to the yacht all right."

"It's all very well to say that, Handy; we don't know," I replied. "The airship seems to be light enough now, I know, but the Majarra is well over a hundred miles away, and all sorts of things might happen before we cover that distance. If there are many holes in the gas-bag, they will probably grow larger unless they are attended to at once."

"Yes, I suppose that's right," agreed Handforth. "By George! What a murderous rotter!"

"But who the dickens could he have been?" asked Watson blankly.

"I think it is quite possible that the pilot is our unknown enemy," said Nelson Lee. "Do not forget, boys, that an attempt was made to sink the Wanderer while she was in the Atlantic. We don't know why the man is attacking us, and we don't know who he is. It is, therefore, up to us to be on our guard."

"My only hat!" I ejaculated. "Have you any suspicion, sir?"

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have," he admitted.

"What is your idea?" I asked eagerly.

"It is hardly my way to give voice to suspicions, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Before I say anything at all, I shall

wait until I have some definite clue to work upon, for, as I have said, I have suspicions, and I intend keeping them to myself."

Ten minutes later we succeeded in making a perfect landing on a bare, rocky piece of ground, where the sun was blazing down with terrific heat. We scrambled out of the car, and we anchored the airship securely. Then, without loss of time, both the mechanics climbed up into the envelope to inspect the damage, using the network as a foot and hand-hold. They soon came down and made their report.

The gas-containers were plugged in at least twenty places. Sixteen of these were very tiny holes, and there was no likelihood of them enlarging, and the escape of gas was only trivial.

But the other four holes were more serious. They were long, jagged rents, and the gas was literally pouring out. It was imperative that repairs should be undertaken at once.

This would be a job which would occupy all of three hours, and Nelson Lee and the two engineers did not lose a moment in getting to work. They were all extremely thankful that the damage was no greater.

The one insistent thought which kept recurring in my mind was this—who was the man in the aeroplane, and why had he attempted to cripple us?

CHAPTER 20.

The Army of Giants!

LORD DORRIMORE rapidly recovered his composure.

"Well, it's been a bit of excitement, and I suppose we must be thankful that the damage is only trivial," he remarked. "At the same time, I feel angry, and if ever I see that fellow again, I'll have no mercy on him!"

His lordship took out a magnificent gold cigarette-case, selected a cigarette, and placed it between his lips. Nelson Lee, who was just about to mount into the gas-bag, turned.

"If you want to light that cigarette, old man, I should advise you to walk a hundred yards away," he said quickly. "This gas is escaping, and we don't want the airship to go up in one huge blaze."

"That would be rather unpleasant, old man," grinned Dorrie. "By the way, did you say that we should have to stay here about three hours?"

"Just about that," said Nelson Lee.

"Can we be of any assistance?" asked Dorrie.

"I hardly think so," smiled Lee. "I can manage quite easily with the assistance of these two mechanics."

Lord Dorrimore glanced round, and grunted. The spot was by no means alluring. Nothing but bare rocks on every hand, with the sun beating down, and radiating from the ground in suffocating waves. There was no shelter to be seen anywhere, and we were already perspiring freely.

We were standing on a long, sloping hillside. Far away, down the slope, we could see the green of the swamp, stretching away in the distance, right to the horizon.

Up the hill there was nothing but the same bare rocks, with, however, a few patches of green in the distance.

Lord Dorrimore looked up there, and then he looked at us.

"What do you say, boys?" he asked. "I don't quite cotton to the idea of standing here, do you? What's wrong with taking a walk up the hill?"

"I'm game, sir," said Handforth promptly.

"It'll be hot work, though," remarked Watson.

"No hotter than if we stand still," said Dorrie. "Come on, you fellows. We'll take a walk and be back in a couple of hours. We might as well explore the country, and see where we are. I can't say that I'm impressed with the landscape."

"Thou art surely right, O my father," said Umlosi. "This is indeed a barren wilderness, and methinks it will be better to get on the move. This country is a strange one, and I am full of interest."

"Well, I certainly didn't think that a rocky waste of this description existed in this Amazon plain," said Lord Dorrimore. "However, this is all unexplored territory, and I expect we're the first white men to set foot on it. We're on the other side of the swamp—where no Europeans have ever trodden before."

It was quite a good idea of Dorrie's to take a stroll, for we certainly could do nothing by remaining near the airship. The guv'nor, indeed, preferred to be alone with the two mechanics. So, shortly afterwards, we started off—Dorrie, Umlosi, Sir Montie, Watson, Handforth, Burton, Young Stanley Kerrigan, and I.

We walked up the long slope, and presently turned and looked back at the airship resting on the ground, and looking extremely impressive there.

Dorrie lit his cigarette and puffed it with keen enjoyment.

"That's one disadvantage of being in the air," he remarked. "A fellow can't have a cigarette, you know! Still, it's all the more enjoyable afterwards."

We walked on, greatly interested in all we saw. After about half and hour, the ground was not so rocky, and here and there we came upon patches of coarse, rough grass. It was sun-dried, baked, and the blades of grass were as sharp as knives.

We traversed another half-mile of this kind of ground, and then the grass was no longer in patches, but it covered the whole expanse of country before us.

We had left the rocky ground behind, and other changes were shortly to occur. For example, the grass became smoother and greener, and here and there patches of flowers, gorgeous in their colouring, and cacti stood up on every hand, in curious, uncouth shapes.

At last we appeared to reach the very top of the long ridge, and we were all literally dripping with perspiration.

Fortunately the sun had disappeared behind a bank of clouds, and we were not troubled by the terrible glare. The air, however, was close and hot, and there was no refreshing breeze to cool us.

Turning, we gazed out upon a really wonderful sight.

At a good distance from us stood the airship, looking quite small and insignificant. And beyond the airship, right into the dim, hazy distance, stretched the terrible swamp.

As far as the eye could see, in every direction, that ghastly morass stretched out its tentacles, and barred the path.

It was like some ugly monster lying there, poisonous, treacherous, and waiting for victims.

The sight was so impressive that we all stood gazing upon it for some minutes without making any remark. And we did not fail to recognise that we were on the wrong side of the swamp—that civilisation lay beyond, and that if, through some unforseen chance the airship never got into the air again, we should be cut off completely.

"H'm! A pretty lively sort of place," remarked Lord Dorrimore, lighting a fresh cigarette. "What do you say, boys?"

"I was just thinking, sir, how the dickens we shall be able to get back to the Majarra if the airship doesn't do the trip," said Handforth.

"If the airship doesn't do the trip, my son, we shan't," said Dorrie grimly. "It's the only conveyance we've got, an' if that fails us—well, I'm afraid we shall be so many souls missin'!"

"How cheerful!" murmured Watson.

"However, there's not much fear of that," went on Dorrie cheerfully. "You can trust the professor to see that the airship is O.K. What your guv'nor

doesn't know, Nipper, could be written on a postage stamp. I've always pinned my faith to the professor—an' he never fails me."

"Oh, we shall get back to the yacht all right," I said. "The airship isn't disabled—those few holes only amount to a trifle—once they're seen to, the Adventurer will be as airworthy as ever. By the way, are we turning back now, or shall we go to the top of the ridge?"

Dorrie turned, and looked in the other direction.

"I think we might as well have a squint over the top," he observed. "It's not far now—only about another half-mile, by what I can see. We might as well have a look over the summit, if it's possible. According to my calculations, this ridge extends from the swamp right up here, an' then slopes away again—probably to another swamp. Anyhow, we shall see if we look."

"That's the idea, sir," said Handforth.

We walked on again, with the intention of reaching the top. We could see for half a mile ahead, and then only the sky met our gaze. This indicated that the ground sloped away beyond that point. But it was quite possible that the very opposite was the case. One is always apt to be deceived over these matters.

However, as it turned out, I was wrong. We were able to see down the other slope, and a fresh surprise was awaiting us.

But the distance was more than half a mile, and we were tired and hot and thirsty by the time we reached the crest. However, we were well repaid.

A clump of trees grew in front of us, and we reached these, and passed between the trunks, at length emerging on the other side, half-expecting that we should have some further ground to traverse.

But it was not so.

As soon as we emerged into the open air again, we discovered we were looking straight down a tremendously long slope, and we could see for miles—twenty, thirty, forty miles—into the valley. The spectacle was absolutely astounding.

For, unlike the deadly swamp over which we had just flown, there was no swamp here. We did not gaze down upon a terrible morass which was infested by snakes and insects and fever. We looked, instead, upon a valley which held us motionless with wondering delight.

Intensely green fields, sparkling streams, clumps of stately palm trees—all of these sights met our gaze. We were looking down into a gorgeous valley—a place that was literally a paradise.

Lord Dorrimore was the first to speak.

"A bit of a contrast—what?" he remarked calmly.

"A contrast!" I echoed. "Great Scott! I've never been so surprised in all my life, Dorrie! This—this doesn't seem like Brazil at all!"

"It's—it's wonderful!" said Handforth in an awed voice.

"Thou are surely right, O my son!" exclaimed Umlosi. "This spectacle is one which fills us all with glorious pleasure. Thou art right when thou sayest that it is wonderful. Even the most beautiful portions of Africa cannot compare with this scene!"

"And if we look the other way we see nothing else but that horrible swamp!" said Tommy Watson. "It seems almost impossible to be true, you know. How can this extraordinary change be a reality?"

"It's no good askin' me questions of that sort, my son," said Dorrie. "At the same time, there must be a good explanation. This tremendous ridge, you see, cuts off the swamp completely from this other land. It seems to stand up in a great barrier for hundreds of miles. The swamp ends, this rocky ground comes in between, mountin' to a great height, and then

it drops away again, and at the bottom is this valley."

"That's about it," I agreed. "It's a valley of beautiful fields and rivers and woods, right in the heart of this terrible mire. It must extend for hundreds of miles, by the look of it.

"Quite probably," agreed Lord Dorrimore. "We shall certainly have to explore this territory, my lads. I didn't think such splendid country existed in Brazil."

"I wonder if it's inhabitated?" said Watson.

"It might be, although we can see no sign of any native villages, or anythin' of that sort," said Dorrie. "But this place, don't forget, is completely cut off from the Brazilian forest. It is a kind of island, in the middle of that swamp—which is quite impassable. It's on the cards that this huge tract of lovely country is barren of human bein's."

"What about that aeroplane, sir?" asked Handforth suddenly.

"Eh?"

"That aeroplane!" repeated Handforth. "It came from this direction, you know."

"By gad! So it did!" said Lord Dorrimore, looking thoughtful. "Now you come to mention it, Handforth, that aeroplane did come from this part of the country, and it went back there, too! The whole adventure is gettin' quite interestin'."

He unslung his binoculars, released them from their case, and focused them. Then, for some moments, he stared through the glasses into the dim distance. We had not come prepared in this way—we had no glasses with us. Dorrie's were the only pair.

"Can you see anything particularly interesting, sir?" asked Handforth.

Dorrie made no reply for a moment. Then he put the glasses down, and regarded us with an amazed expression on his face which arrested my attention at once.

"By the Lord Harry!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore softly.

"What's the matter, sir?"

"What have you seen, Dorrie?" I asked.

"Speak, O my father!" said Umlosi, "for we are of the great curiosity."

Lord Dorrimore took a deep breath.

"Well, I don't know whether my eyes are going wrong, or whether these binoculars are squiffy—or what! But I'll swear I can see a town lyin' down there in that valley—about twenty miles away, as the crow flies!"

"A town!"

"A town in this valley!"

"Hundreds of miles from civilisation?"

"Exactly!" said Dorrie. "That's what I said. Either my eyes are wrong, or the glasses are wrong, or it's actually a fact. Take a squint through them yourself, Nipper, an' tell me what you can see. If there isn't a town there, I'll eat my own sun helmet!"

I took the binoculars at once, and a moment later, I was looking through them interestedly and intently.

The whole landscape ahead sprang into sharp relief as I gazed through the binoculars. The clumps of trees came to my vision distinctly, and I could see sparkling rivers, glorious green fields, and myriads of gorgeously coloured flowers.

The whole scene was one of extreme delight, and I was held spellbound. It was all so unexpected that I could hardly believe it to be true.

And then something really curious happened. I was looking at a dense clump of trees, when something moved out into the open—something huge, and of uncouth shape.

It was alive, and was certainly an animal of some description. But the thing which fairly made me quiver with excitement was the fact that the animal was of an enormous size compared to the trees. Moreover, it was shaped in the most astounding manner

—unlike any other animal I had ever seen.

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated. "What on earth——"

"Well, young 'un," asked Dorrie, "can you see it?"

"Look—look, Dorrie!" I gasped. "I don't mean the city—I've seen something else! There's an animal there—an animal as big as a house——"

"Begad! So you're seeing things, too!" said his lordship, seizing the glasses.

He held them to his eyes, but after searching the landscape for some little time, he lowered them, and turned to me.

"I can't see anythin' particularly startlin', Nipper," he said. "Look again, an' tell me where to gaze!"

I did look again, but now the strange animal had vanished back into the recesses of the forest, and I could see no sign of it whatever. I was greatly excited—far more excited than I had been for many a day—and I was flushed with the emotion of it all.

"It is not there now!" I said, without lowering the binoculars. "I expect it's gone back into the wood."

"You must have imagined it, you ass!" said Handforth.

"I didn't!" I declared. "I saw it as clearly as I see you! A great hulking animal, looking something like one of those prehistoric monsters we see illustrated in natural history books."

The other fellows were plainly sceptical, and they did not actually believe that I had seen anything out of the common. I gave it up after a moment or two, and held the glasses at a different angle.

And then something sprang into view which gave me fresh surprise. It was many miles away, and, even with the binoculars, it was impossible to see everything distinctly. But I was quite certain of one thing—I was looking down upon a city!

It seemed to be of a Moorish type, with great white buildings, minarets, and domes. It was gleaming gloriously in the sunshine, and it seemed to be a city of dreams, rather than an actuality. I stared at it long and wonderingly.

"Yes, there's a city, right enough, Dorrie," I said at length. "Good gracious! It's almost impossible—but yet it's there!"

I handed him over the binoculars, and very soon he was gazing into the distance, too. After him the other juniors had a look, and we were all positively convinced that what we saw was a huge city. There was no hallucination about it—the place positively stood there.

"It must be a dead city," said Handforth. "I couldn't see anybody moving about!"

"Well, there's nothing very surprising about that," said Dorrie. "It's as much as we can do to distinguish the buildings. The place is a tremendous distance away, don't forget. It's not likely that we should be able to see any human figures. Let me have a look through the glasses again."

The binoculars were handed back to Dorrie, and once more he gazed through them at the strange sight in the distance.

We were all so excited and surprised that we did not realise the lapse of time, and we stood there, minute after minute, until over an hour had passed. We were entranced by the scene, and we were never tired of looking through the glasses and seeing fresh wonders.

It was a valley of surprises. It was so unlike the forest land we had already seen, that it did not appear to be really true. For here there were open spaces, beautiful meadows, and the trees grew in clumps—in isolated woods and spinneys. And there were innumerable little streams, trickling between wooded banks, with waterfalls plainly discernible here and there.

At last it was realised that we must make a move—for we had an hour's journey back to the airship.

"I suppose we'd better be goin',"

said Lord Dorrimore reluctantly. "What a pity Lee wasn't here to see it with us! But we shall be able to go up in the airship and take a closer view."

He had one last look through the binoculars before stowing them away. And it was fortunate that he did so. For he saw something else which made everything pale into insignificance. A sight met his gaze which left him dumbfounded and staggered.

"Oh, there's no doubt about it!" said Dorrie in a dazed voice. "I'm seeing things!"

"Eh?"

"What sayest thou, N'Kose?" said Umlosi.

"The heat must have affected my eyes!" said Lord Dorrimore. "There's no doubt about it at all!"

"What do you mean, sir?" grinned Tommy Watson.

Dorrie handed the binoculars to me.

"Look!" he said impressively. "Look through these, and tell me if you don't see something that's absolutely impossible!"

"But if it's there, Dorrie, it must be possible——"

"It's not there—I'm seeing things. There can't be anything else for it, my son!"

I was struck by his tone, and I took the binoculars from him—much to the chagrin of Handforth, who wanted to grab them first. I placed them to my eyes and focused them on the spot which Lord Dorrimore had indicated. For a moment or two I could see nothing that was really staggering, and then became as still as a statue, and I held my breath in sheer stupefaction.

For there, down in the valley, and about five or six miles from us, I could see hundreds of figures moving. They were coming straight in our direction in a great long column. With the naked eye it was not possible to see them, but those binoculars were excellent ones, and they brought the view into sharp relief.

The figures were those of human beings, but they were of such an extraordinary character that I glued the glasses to my eyes and stared in amazement.

Judging by the trees on every hand, it seemed quite certain that these men were nothing short of eight feet in height. They were robed in curious white clothing, and they had glittering gold bands on their heads, the gold scintillating in the sunlight.

Not only this, but the men were white, to judge by all appearances. They were not black, or brown, or yellow, but white, and they were gigantic.

In addition to this, the column of strange men approaching in orderly file were covering the ground at a most astonishing speed. They were running, and they must have been travelling at something like fifteen miles an hour.

"You were not seeing things, Dorrie!" I exclaimed hoarsely. "It's true; they're really there! An army of giants!"

"What!" yelled Handforth.

"Look—look for yourself!" I exclaimed.

He looked through the binoculars, and the others had a look in turn. And when they had finished we all stared at one another in a rather scared fashion.

There was no doubt about the thing at all—a great body of giants were coming towards us as fast as their legs would carry them. And they were running in orderly style.

The whole thing was positively staggering!

CHAPTER 21.
The Dream City!

LORD DORRIMORE looked rather grave.

"The truth about this thing has just struck me," he exclaimed, "and we shall be well advised to get a move on at once!"

"That's exactly what I was thinking, Dorrie," I said breathlessly. "Why are these giants coming in this direction? The only possible explanation is that they are making for the airship. They intend to capture it if they can."

"Begad!"

"My only hat!"

"It's a fact," said Lord Dorrimore. "Nipper's right. It's the only explanation, as he says. That aeroplane must have flown back to the city, and these giants were given warning, and they've now come over to locate us and make a nice little capture."

"And if we're not quick they'll do it!" I exclaimed. "They're running at double the speed we can run, and if the airship isn't ready to take to the air we shall be properly in the cart. The best thing we can do is to hurry back with all speed."

"Thou are right, O Manzie!" rumbled Umlosi. "Even as thou sayest, I will speak. But I am reluctant to leave the spot, for I should dearly love to have a great fight with these warriors whom we see before us!"

"You wouldn't stand much chance against that crowd, old Coalbox!" said Lord Dorrimore. "Strong as you are, you'd be wiped up!"

We did not lose any time in turning on our tracks and hurrying back down the long slope towards the airship, which was quite visible a good distance away.

We did not speak much as we ran, for our minds were too full of thoughts. From the first to the last we had met with nothing but amazing surprises since we had commenced this trip.

What could it mean?

We knew that a wonderful city existed down in that valley, and we knew that there were human beings there of a tremendous size. But this did not account for the aeroplane. Where had that come from, and how had these strange men obtained anything so modern?

It was too ridiculous to suppose that these people, cut off completely from the rest of the world, could have built a flying machine exactly similar to our familiar aeroplanes. That machine had come from Europe, and unless I was mistaken it was a British-made aeroplane, by all appearances. Then how in the name of all that was miraculous had it got into this strange corner of the world? Who was the pilot, and why had he attempted to send us to destruction?

All of these thoughts chased themselves through my mind as I ran, and I wondered if Nelson Lee would believe our story. Certainly it was a story which one could be excused for not believing.

The valley, the city, the strange monster I had seen, and, last of all, those extraordinary human beings—they were all fantastic, and Nelson Lee would find it difficult to believe that we were speaking the truth.

He and the two mechanics clearly saw that something out of the common was afoot, for we were approaching in a terrific hurry, running for all our worth, in spite of the intense heat. By the time we arrived we were bathed in perspiration, and we were almost exhausted. Nelson Lee came out to meet us with an expression of keen inquiry on his face.

"What is the matter, Dorrie?" he asked in concern. "Why this hurry?"

"Old man, we've got to get into the air at once!" panted Lord Dorrimore. "There's an army coming along!"

"A which?"

"An army, sir!" I gasped. "An army of white giants!"

The guv'nor stared at us wonderingly.

"I don't understand what you're talking about!" he said.

But we very soon made him understand. Dorrie and I did most of the talking, and we related all our adventures. We told Nelson Lee exactly what we had seen, and we warned him about the approach of the giants.

The guv'nor was reluctant to believe

that we were speaking the actual truth. For some little time he believed that we were attempting to pull his leg. But at last he knew that we were in deadly earnest.

"As it happens the repairs are just about completed," he said. "We can get into the air within a quarter of an hour, if necessary. But I must admit that your story sounds incredible."

"I quite realise that, old man, and I shan't blame you if you call me a prevaricator of the truth," said Lord Dorrimore. "But it's the truth. The white giants are coming even now, and it's quite likely——"

He paused, and stared up the long slope towards the top of the ridge.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" he ejaculated. "The beggars are coming now! Look! Use your glasses, man, and look!"

We all stared up the hill, and we could see one or two spots moving about against the skyline. Through the binoculars, however, the dots became human beings, and it was easy to see that there were hundreds of them, coming over the crest of the ridge in a never-ending column.

Nelson Lee looked long and searchingly.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed at last. "These men are even bigger than you stated, Dorrie! I judge that there is not a single one of them less than nine feet in height! And they're covering the ground at an amazing speed!"

"The best thing we can do is to get in that car and sail into the air!" said Dorrie. "I'm not a quitter, but when it comes to fighting an army of giants, you can count me out? I'm as willing as anybody to engage in a nice little scrap, but this is altogether different. I don't like the idea of being captured by a crowd of fellows out of 'Gulliver's Travels'!"

There was really no sense in delaying matters, and Nelson Lee gave his instructions briskly and sharply. Within three or four minutes we were all in the car, and the airship was released from her anchorage.

It was not possible to get the great vessel into the air in a minute, and there were several minor delays, and all this time the strange giants were coming towards us at a terrific speed.

They were now not more than half a mile distant, and they would be actually on the spot within a few minutes.

We could see them clearly with our naked eyes, and our first estimate of their size was by no means exaggerated. The smallest man out of the lot was certainly eight feet six inches in height, and the majority of them were nine feet or over. They were broad in proportion and perfectly shaped.

Their features were quite normal and of a rather refined type. There was nothing whatever of the savage about them. Every man was clean-shaven, and his white robe in no way interfered with his movements. Upon every head rested a ring of gold-coloured metal.

"By gad! We shall have to look sharp!" said Lord Dorrimore urgently.

"If once they get near enough, we shall never be able to escape!" exclaimed Handforth excitedly. "They've only got to grab these trailing-ropes and we shall be pulled down again. There are hundreds of them, and we won't stand an earthly chance!"

But this did not happen.

Just in the nick of time we succeeded in getting clear of the ground, and we soared aloft with roaring engines. And as we went up the giants came to a halt and stared into the sky, gesticulating strangely.

Then I saw that they were operating some curious instruments they were holding. Each man was provided with one of these things, which seemed to be a kind of stick with some curious mechanism at the other end.

Click! Click!

Something struck the rail just near me, and a small object fell to the floor

of the car, rebounding from one of the supports.

"It's a dart!" I exclaimed.

I picked the thing up, and saw that it was about four inches long, and was made of metal, a metal of a dull, brassy colour. The end was as sharp as a needle—that is to say, the point, and it was turned over as the result of its contact with the support.

It was fortunate that we had attained a good height, for a perfect shower of these darts came shooting round us, and it was apparent that the weapon held by the giants were nearly as powerful as any modern rifle.

"Well, Dorris, this is a rather surprising adventure," said Nelson Lee calmly. "I certainly didn't anticipate anything of this nature when we started off."

"It's too much for me!" complained Dorrie. "I've got a frightful headache, you know. All this excitement is inclined to have a weakening effect on a fellow. What I don't understand is these merchants down below wanting to throw things at us. We've done them no harm, so why should they cut up rusty?"

"They are hostile, and that is all that really matters," said Nelson Lee. "Perhaps they consider that we are intruding, and that we have no right here."

"Well, we're certainly intruding, in a way of speaking," said Lord Dorrimore. "At the same time, it's not exactly a pleasant way to greet strangers from the outside world."

I was staring down over the rail of the car, and I was not much interested in any conversation that was going on. My whole attention was centred upon that great crowd of giants below.

Even now it seemed almost impossible—it seemed that we were in the middle of an extraordinary nightmare. We had not been prepared for an adventure of this nature.

We had come expecting to find nothing but a deadly swamp, with perhaps a continuation of the dense forests beyond, and here we were in the midst of a land of wonders!

In any case, I was positively convinced by this time that Colonel Kerrigan was alive. Aunt Janet's visions were, by some extraordinary means, real. The strange city she had seen in her dreams was here before us, down in the valley. It therefore stood to reason that the colonel was there, too. He was probably a prisoner in the hands of this strange race of giants.

"I'm blessed if I know what to make of it, you chaps!" said Handforth, who for once was almost subdued. "It's a pity we've come up so high. We haven't been able to inspect these chaps very closely."

"We couldn't stay down there, you ass!" said Watson. "What about those darts? We simply had to get out of their range. Thank goodness we got off the ground in time, that's all I say!"

"Yes, it was a pretty narrow escape," I agreed. "I'd rather inspect those fellows at a distance!"

"I don't blame you, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "Begad! I really don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels!"

The airship was behaving really well considering that she had lost a quantity of gas. She did not have her former buoyancy, but she rose in the air gracefully and obedient to her controls.

We rose higher, and then circled round majestically, with Nelson Lee in full control of the helm.

"Well, what's the programme, old man?" asked Dorrie. "Shall we go straight back to the yacht, or shall we sample a little more of this fare?"

"Well, I suppose the most sensible course would be to turn our nose towards the Majarra," said Nelson Lee. "At the present time I am strongly tempted to take a short flight over this wonderful valley you speak of. My curiosity has been aroused, Dorrie, and I want to see this strange city with my own eyes."

"I don't blame you, professor," said Lord Dorrimore. "And that idea falls in exactly with my own scheme. It won't take us long to slip over that city, and then we can set our course for home straight away. Do you think the old bus is in a fit condition to do the trip?"

"The airship? Of course!" said Nelson Lee. "She has lost a certain quantity of gas, I will admit, but she is still airworthy. My only doubt was concerning the aeroplane."

"You think it will attack us again?"

"It is quite likely."

"Good!" said Dorrie. "We shall be better prepared this time."

"That is all very well, old man, but you must remember that we have several boys on board," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I do not want to take them into any unnecessary danger."

"Don't mind us, sir," put in Handforth. "We're willing to take any old risks!"

"That is quite likely, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "But your father and mother might not be quite so keen on it. I do not wish to return to England with any of my guests injured."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Dorrie. "There's no need to be scared about that, professor. If that merchant in the aeroplane attacks us next time, we can dispose of him quickly enough. I've got a good rifle on board and a decent revolver. I'm game, anyhow!"

"Same here, sir!"

"Begad, rather!"

"Oh, let's go, sir!" said Stanley Kerrigan eagerly.

Nelson Lee was prevailed upon, and at length consented to fly over the valley, and, if possible, to get a good sight of the Dream City. We called it the Dream City because it had appeared to Miss Kerrigan in her dreams—and it had been, until now, only a vision. It had suddenly become a reality.

We were soon speeding through the air at full speed, and we left behind the army of giants on the hillside—quite amused at their helplessness. They had come all the way out of the valley with the express intention of capturing us—but they had met with failure.

It seemed that if we had only kept in the air slightly longer in the first place, we should have looked right into the valley after proceeding a very short distance.

For now, having attained a fairly good height, we very rapidly passed over the ridge, and there, below and ahead of us, was the valley itself—a gorgeous panorama of green, and sparkling rivers. From the air it looked even better than it had looked from the hill-top.

We were not mistaken with regard to the character of this paradise. It was indeed a wonderful valley, and I longed to set foot on the ground, so that I could explore it at leisure, and obtain a nearer view of its wonders.

This, however, would probably never be—for it would be an extremely risky undertaking to land in the valley.

Very soon the city came into prominent sight, and we could see its gleaming white walls down ahead of us, and we gazed over the rail in delight and wonder. Nelson Lee was as much interested as we were.

"Your description was not exaggerated, Dorrie," he declared. "This town is a glorious place indeed. It is the very last thing I should have expected to find on this terrible Brazilian swamp. It only proves that there are many more wonderful things to see in this old world yet!"

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"This part of the globe has never been explored, of course," he said. "At the same time, I never expected to find a civilised town here—to say nothing of giants eight or nine feet high. Begad! I've got a sort of feeling that we shall wake up before long and find ourselves nearly falling out of bed!"

Dorrie was not alone in this sensation. The whole adventure seemed altogether too absurd to be actually

true; but it was true, and we could only gaze in silent wonder at the scene before us.

We reduced our height somewhat, until we were flying at an altitude of about fifteen hundred feet. From this height we could look down and see every detail of the city.

For we were already over the outskirts, and we were intensely interested.

We had noticed that for a good many miles beyond the city the fields were cultivated, and they were orderly and neat, and we also observed that there were many people working on them.

From the air it was not easy to judge the size of the workers, but we gathered that they were giants like the rest. And over the city itself, the sights which met our gaze were of enthralling interest.

The whole place was laid out in beautiful terraced streets, with big square stone houses, gleaming white in the sunshine.

The streets themselves were extremely wide, with beautiful rows of palm and other trees growing along the borders and in every square.

Fountains played here and there, and the whole city was alive with the strange, white-robed giants, who were staring up at us with intense interest.

This intense interest was reciprocated on our part, and we had an urge to land and become acquainted with this extraordinary race of people.

But Nelson Lee decided that it would be altogether too risky to attempt a landing, or even to descend lower than a thousand feet. We had already learned that these giants were hostile.

Somehow or other I had a feeling within me that we were gazing down upon a scene from ancient Rome—it looked as though a giant cinema picture was being taken, and that we had arrived at the very moment when the cameras were "shooting" the various scenes.

But it was too stupendous for that—it was a real life picture, a picture which we had never dreamed of seeing.

And then, before we had half traversed the city—before we could really take stock of the scenes—something of a startling nature took place.

We became aware of a buzzing roar, and then the red aeroplane swooped down out of the upper sky, its machine-gun spitting viciously as it flashed down.

At the very same moment we felt the airship quivering slightly, and then all our attention was fixed upon the red machine. It turned almost within its own length, and came roaring back at us like an angry wasp.

Its machine-gun was popping away incessantly.

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore, between his teeth. "By gad! We'll show him something this time!"

The aeroplane came swooping past us, and I managed to get a fairly good sight of the pilot, crouching in the cockpit. Of one thing I was certain—he was no giant like the rest of these people. He was undoubtedly an ordinary human being, as it were. He was not a native of the extraordinary land.

Then the excitement began.

We already knew that many bullets had taken effect on the gasbag—and these seemed to be a different class of bullet. They were not the same as the man had used during the earlier attempt. They were probably far more effective, for even now we were losing height, proving that the gas containers had been ripped rather badly in more places than one.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Nelson Lee's revolver spat viciously, and Lord Dorrimore's revolver echoed the sound. Both men were dead shots, and, although there were many disadvantages in firing at such a swiftly moving object, some of the bullets took effect.

I distinctly saw a splinter of wood fly away from the aeroplane's undercarriage, and a portion of flapping fabric on a wing told its own story

And then the red attacker received his deserts.

Quite abruptly the aeroplane seemed to shiver. It stumbled in its track, so to speak, hovered for a moment; and then we saw the reason for this.

The propeller had splintered into a thousand portions, and had gone to nothing. One of the revolver shots, apparently, had struck the propeller, and it had splintered to atoms.

In any case, the result was disastrous —for the airman.

His machine was thoroughly out of hand, for the engine had raced at a terrible speed to begin with, really causing the whole motor to wrench itself out of its seating. And the aeroplane got into a spin, and nose-dived for the ground in a headlong fall.

The aeroplane went down, down, and we were all convinced that it would smash itself to atoms when it struck the ground. We watched it, fascinated, hardly realising what had happened.

At the last moment, however, and when within three or four hundred feet from the ground, the pilot managed to flatten out, and, more by chance than anything else, the machine landed on its wheels, in one of the great wide streets.

CHAPTER 22.

Left Behind!

"WELL, to give the fellow his due, I must say that he is a wonderful pilot!" said Nelson Lee, as we leaned over the rail and saw a tiny figure getting out of the cockpit of the aeroplane, and walking round to inspect the damage. "I never expected him to regain control of his machine."

"It was certainly a clever piece of flying, old man," said Lord Dorrimore. "At the same time, he thoroughly deserved to have a crash. The infernal ruffian was intent upon sendin' us to destruction, at all events."

"I should like to investigate more closely," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I am intensely curious regarding—— Well, Jarvis, what is it?"

One of the mechanics had come up and was saluting.

"I'm afraid there's a bad leak of gas, sir," said Jarvis. "We are losing height all the time, and I don't think there's any remedy—unless we throw some weight overside."

"This is serious!" said Nelson Lee gravely. "I had feared something of the sort, but I did not think it was so serious."

"Handforth, I'm afraid you'll have to jump overboard!" said Lord Dorrimore, looking very solemn.

Handforth grinned. But it was really no joking matter, as we soon found. The second attack by the aeroplane had been more severe than the first, and it was quite obvious that the Adventurer was in a rather bad way. She was moving nearer and nearer to the ground constantly, in spite of all the efforts of the mechanics and Nelson Lee to remedy matters.

This meant that the gasbag had lost its buoyancy, and was unable to carry its load.

The peril, indeed, was startling.

To remain over the city was quite suicidal, so Nelson Lee set the nose of the airship straight for home, and the engines were raced with all their pressure. It would be a rush to the Majarra—as hard as we could possibly go.

But, steadily and insistently, we grew nearer and nearer to the ground, and it was only possible to come to one conclusion.

Before we had covered half the distance home—while we were over the deadly swamp—the airship would be compelled to make a landing—she would be unable to carry the weight. This meant that we should be precipitated into the mire, and there would be no escape. We should all go to death.

It was little wonder, therefore, that

we were all looking extremely serious and grave. There was even a doubt whether we should clear the ridge which surrounded the valley—whether we should sustain height long enough in order to get over that great barrier.

However, we just managed to scrape over, with less than a hundred feet to spare, and once more the great swamp was in sight, with the bare rocky ground in the short distance ahead of us. The Dream City had now been left behind, and it was only a haze in the distance.

We had carried a certain amount of ballast, but this had already been thrown overboard, and although it lightened the airship for a certain time, it was only temporary.

Gradually we descended lower and Nelson Lee came to one conclusion—it would be madness to attempt to cross the swamp in our present condition.

A landing, therefore, was imperative.

The country was scoured carefully in every direction, and there was no sign whatever of any hostile forces; therefore it was fairly safe to land.

We succeeded in getting to the ground safely, and with only a slight bump. Then the airship was anchored, and Nelson Lee and the mechanics lost no time in examining the damage. This time their report was serious.

There were several big rents in the gas containers, and two of them were practically empty.

The gas contained in the huge bag was, of course, not in one body. There were at least a dozen different compartments, each one in its own casing, so to speak.

It was ascertained that two of these containers were very short of gas; in fact, one was practically empty; and the other was rapidly becoming in a similar condition. The other gas-bags were comparatively whole and were not punctured severely.

This, however, was very serious.

With those two compartments emptied the airship did not have enough buoyancy to carry its load home. No matter which way we looked at the problem, there was only one solution.

It was impossible for us all to return.

Every available pound of material had been cast overboard, and only the human freight remained. Nelson Lee was not long in coming to a decision.

"There is only one way out of this difficulty," he declared. "I am very reluctant to take this course, but it must be done. Several of us must remain behind."

"Begad!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"I was about to say the same thing, guv'nor," I put in. "Well, it's not such a serious matter, after all. I'm perfectly willing to remain behind here, and I'm sure that these chaps are willing, too. Then you'll be able to slip off home in the airship, refill her with gas, and come back here for us."

"That was my idea, Nipper, but I do

not like to go off alone—without you," said Nelson Lee. "I must insist upon remaining behind—in order to look after you."

"My dear old man, you can dismiss that idea from your head straight away," said Lord Dorrimore calmly. "I'm remainin' behind, an' so is Umlosi. If there's any lookin' after to be done, we're the men for the job. Don't forget that you're the pilot of this bus, an' you've got to stick to the helm!"

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"I admit that there is sense in your suggestion, Dorrie," he said. "At the same time, I don't like it at all."

"Will the airship be able to get home safely if six of us are left behind?" asked Dorrie.

"My dear man, it is not even necessary to leave six behind," said Nelson Lee. "But, lightened in that manner, there will be no doubt whatever as to the result. The Adventurer will be able to slip back to the yacht without the slightest trouble, and it will not take long to make repairs and fill up the gasbags once more."

"How long do you think it'll be before you can get back?" asked Dorrie.

"Four or five hours—probably five," said Nelson Lee. "Certainly no longer than that."

Dorrie grinned.

"My dear man, there's nothin' better," he declared lightly. "Why, I thought the whole thing was really serious! Instead of that, we find it's as simple as A B C! If we can't look after ourselves for five or six hours, you can write me down as bein' no good. Buzz off, as soon as you like!"

"That's right, sir," said Handforth. "We don't mind staying behind."

It was really the only way, and everybody realised this. The airship, in order to reach its base, would find it necessary to fly light, and, once there, it would be quite an easy matter to make quick repairs and refill the empty gasbags.

It was still comparatively early in the day, and there were very many hours of daylight left. The atmosphere was calm, there was no sign whatever of a change in the weather, and everything was suitable for the work in hand.

It was decided that Lord Dorrimore would stay behind with Umlosi, and Watson and Tregellis-West and Handforth and myself would be with them. The others would remain in the airship, and would fly over the swamp to the Majarra with all speed.

Reluctant as Nelson Lee was to adopt this course, he was compelled to do so. There was nothing else to be done. It was the only way out of the difficulty.

So, without wasting any further time, the airship was released, and she rose in the air lightly. Now that a lot of her weight had been taken off, the Adventurer slipped away splendidly.

We were left behind!

We stood in a little group, watching the airship as she rose, her engines humming musically. As far as outward appearances went, there was nothing wrong with her whatever, and nobody could have seen that she was short of gas.

Having reached a height of at least five thousand feet, her nose was set for the distant Majarra, and she sped off at a great speed. She grew smaller and smaller as we watched, until she was but a speck in the sky. And then she vanished altogether.

Lord Dorrimore turned to us, and he was smiling.

"Well, boys, this is a bit lively—what?" he asked, lighting a cigarette. "We're left in sole possession of this tract of land, an' if the airship doesn't come back, we shall be left in the cart properly. There'll be no returnin' to Piccadilly for us!"

"Oh, the airship's bound to come back, sir!" said Handforth.

"Of course it is—Dorrie is only trying to be funny!" I said. "Personally, I don't mind this arrangement in the least. We're a long way from those giants, and they're certainly under the impression that we've flown away. They

won't send out any scouts to see if a few of us have landed. We're as safe as houses."

"And the professor will turn up smilin' an' cheerful almost before we know it," smiled Lord Dorrimore. "But if he doesn't bring some fizzy lime juice and some sandwiches with him, I'll make use of some extra sweet words. Egad! I'm feelin' peckish—to say nothin' of bein' frightfully thirsty."

"Umlosi was right, sir," said Tommy Watson. "He told us long ago that we should meet with all sorts of queer adventures and we should have tons of excitement."

"Umlosi's got a way of seein' these things," said Dorrie. "I can't understand it, but there you are. I think he must be possessed of second sight!"

The Kutana chief smiled, revealing all his teeth.

"It is not that I claim to be a man of wonder, O N'Kose," he rumbled. "I have said that we should meet with many wondrous excitements in the future—and I will tell thee that these excitements have but commenced. We have received only a slight taste of what is to come. Methinks that thou art sceptical, O my masters—but thou wilt find that I am right. There will be many dangers yet."

And, somehow, I felt certain in my own mind that Umlosi was right!

CHAPTER 23.

Umlosi's Great Fight!

IT would be idle to pretend that we were not all rather anxious. We knew well enough that Nelson Lee was determined to reach the yacht, and that he was equally determined to come back to our rescue—at the earliest possible moment.

But the guv'nor's determination was not everything. Airships are not absolutely the most reliable method of travelling, and they are sometimes apt to make bad landings, or to have slight mishaps.

Consequently, our anxiety was not exactly misplaced. Nelson Lee had set off with all the best intentions in the world, but it was on the cards that he would not be able to return in the time he had specified.

An hour or two would make little difference, but if it dragged out to two or three days—well, our plight would be a serious one indeed.

It was not my way to be an alarmist and to look upon the worst side—neither was this Lord Dorrimore's habit.

At the same time, we could not help thinking of these things. One tiny mishap, and we should be left helpless—beyond all hope of assistance.

For the airship was the only possible method of reaching us. If anything happened to that frail craft, we should be doomed.

However, the Adventurer was not so frail, after all—she was a sturdy vessel.

Dorrie puffed at his cigarette quite calmly.

"Well, boys, we shall have to do somethin' to pass the time, I suppose," he remarked. "This heat is infernally exhaustin', an' I wish I could find some shade somewhere. There's not a bally tree to be seen!"

"And there's no water, either!" said Handforth. "I'm gasping!"

"Methinks water is nigh, O my master!" exclaimed Umlosi, looking round. "If thou will permit me, I will rapidly bring thee water—mayhap thou art all of the big thirst!"

"There's no mayhap about it, old son," said Dorrie. "We're nearly all on the last verge of exhaustion. If you can see some water, then my eyesight must be goin' wrong—because I can't see any!"

Umlosi smiled.

"Water is not to be seen, O my father," he replied. "But I can feel that we are near a stream—I can feel it in my nostrils."

"I'd rather feel it in my throat," said Dorrie calmly. "Buck up, Ink Pot!"

"Thou are pleased to be humorous, N'Kose!" smiled Umlosi. "Thou hast a new name for me, I fear. It matters little. I am thy servant, and thou art my master. It is for thou to call me as thou wish!"

"I shall call you somethin' you won't like, if you don't buck up about that water," said Dorrie darkly. "Can't you see that I'm dyin'?"

Umlosi smiled, and walked off. He walked quite straight, as though he knew exactly where to find the water, although there was none in sight. His instinct probably told him where to look, and in which direction the stream lay.

He soon disappeared behind some rocks, and, meanwhile, we looked round for shelter. The glare of the sun was very trying, and we wanted to find some shade.

This was not such a difficult job as we had supposed, for, after walking along for some few yards, we came within sight of a great wall of rock which jutted out from the hillside. And there, low at the foot of the rocks, stood a large opening, which seemed like the mouth of a cavern. Lord Dorrimore pointed to it triumphantly.

"That's our destination, my sons," he said. "It's bound to be cool in that place! Come on!"

His lordship led the way, and we followed him. And Dorrie was quite correct in his surmise.

The opening in the rock proved to be the mouth of a deep cavern. We did not penetrate too far, for we were not bent upon an exploration tour. Our main object was to get out of the heat of the sun and cool down somewhat.

In this we succeeded, for in that dark opening there was no glare, and the air was delightfully cool. We all sat down gratefully, and took a rest.

"Well, this is all serene," said Handforth comfortably. "We're as right as ninepence here. Mr. Lee will be back almost before we can have time to look round."

"Let's hope so, anyway," I said cheerfully. "There's no sense in looking on the dark side of things. By the way, why didn't we go with Umlosi? We're all thirsty, and he can't bring any water to us."

"Why not?" asked Dorrie.

"Well, he hasn't got anything to carry it in——"

"That's all you know, my son. Umlosi generally carries a water-skin—a kind of flabby leather bag, which folds up to nothing, but which will hold about half a gallon of water any day!"

"Oh, that's good!" said Handforth. "I can drink about a quart on my own account!"

We were doing our utmost to keep cheerful, and to continue conversation for the sake of keeping up our spirits.

And then our attention was diverted by the approach of Umlosi.

Sitting in the cave-mouth, in the grateful shade, we could see the giant Kutana chief coming round some of the rocks, and we all noticed that he was carrying the bag which Lord Dorrimore mentioned.

"Good old Umlosi!" I said. "How the dickens did he know where to find that water?"

"How does he know all sorts of things?" asked Dorrie. "Umlosi's got a wonderful nose, my lads—he can sniff things for miles off! That's what gets over me—there's no sniff in clean water!"

We smiled, and watched Umlosi as he came along. And then our attention was diverted. I think I was the first to see a movement among the rocks just in the rear of Umlosi.

Then, as I watched, I saw two figures appear. I jumped to my feet, filled with sudden alarm. For these two figures were huge, they were clothed in white robes, and gold bands glittered on their heads.

They were two of the giants.

"Great Scott!" I shouted. "Look there!"

"Eh?" gasped Dorrie, "What on earth——"

"The giants!" I yelled.

Everybody was on his feet in a moment, and we all stared out across the rocky ground towards the spot where Umlosi was walking. About twenty yards behind him the two giants were clearly visible, and they were running up with the evident intention of taking our black friend prisoner.

"Look out, Umlosi!" roared Handforth, at the top of his voice.

But Umlosi did not need any warning. He had already turned, and he was aware of his danger. The Kutana chief did not run—he stood his ground, and waited for the attack. He was quite unarmed, but this made no difference to him. Umlosi was fearless, and he did not wait for the giants to attack him. He came to the conclusion that the best kind of defence was to assume the offensive.

For he ran forward, yelling at the top of his voice, and looking extremely warlike. The two giants came to a halt, and waited.

And now he could see how huge these men really were.

Umlosi himself stood quite six foot six inches in his shoes—but, standing near these giants, he looked a mere pigmy. They were head and shoulders above him. They were broad in proportion, and their strength was evidently considerable.

"Look here, we can't leave Umlosi in this predicament," said Lord Dorrimore quickly. "It's up to us to go to the rescue—an' if we can't drive the beggars off without inflicting injury, I shall use my revolver."

"Good egg!" roared Handforth. "Come on!"

We rushed out of the cavern-entrance, and pelted across some rough ground. Umlosi heard us coming, for he turned and held up his hand steadily.

"Be thou still, O my masters!" he shouted, in his rumbling voice. "Methinks I shall be able to deal with these strangers single-handed."

"It can't be done, Umlosi!" shouted Dorrimore. "You must let us give you a hand——"

"Nay, N'Kose, I beg of thee to remain still!" interrupted Umlosi. "For many moons I have been awaiting this opportunity—I have been awaiting for a real fight. Wau! My muscles need exercise—a great battle is what I need! I beg of thee to let me fight these warriors alone. If I grow weak, then thou shall come to my aid!"

Dorrie looked uncertain.

"I suppose we'd better let him have his own way," I said. "But if those fellows overpower him, we'll soon rush forward!"

"They'll wipe him up in less than a minute," said Dorrie. "Hang it all, he can't perform the impossible. He'll be like a baby in their hands!"

However, we decided to give Umlosi just a minute or two—to see what he could do. So we stood in a group about twenty yards off, waiting and watching.

Strange to say, the two giants did not seem inclined to attack. They had come to a halt within a few feet of Umlosi, and they were examining him with open-eyed astonishment. I could see the expressions of surprise in their eyes. They were quite child-like in their naive curiosity.

"I don't suppose they've ever seen a nigger before," I whispered. "They're quite bowled over, you see. Umlosi's as black as coal, and they can't understand it!"

"They don't seem to be armed, either!" murmured Tommy Watson.

We could take better stock of these giants than we had been able to of the vast army, which we had seen earlier. These two men were fully nine feet in height, and their white robes were worn very gracefully. Upon their feet were curious leather shoes, which were not

exactly sandals, but which looked something like them. Strapping extended half-way up their calves.

The white robes were drawn together over the chest by means of a gold clasp, and the men wore gold ornaments round their necks.

Their faces were even and well proportioned, with no trace of negroid features, and they were finely built.

And then one of them moved.

He put out a huge hand, and touched Umlosi's shoulder. The touch was evidently a heavy one, for Umlosi wrenched himself away.

"What thinkest thou?" he shouted. "Wouldst thou lay thy fingers on one of noble blood? Thou art venturesome, O thou of mighty frame. Thou art a real man—as thy brother. I greet thee, and if thou art peaceful, there will be no fighting!"

There was fighting, however.

For the two giants came forward, and they both seized Umlosi at the same time, although they did so in quite a gentle manner. Umlosi was not standing this, and he lunged out with all his strength.

Crash! Crash!

His fists thudded upon the chests of the giants, and they staggered back in some little surprise.

Their expressions changed, and they came forward to the attack with grim determination.

"We'd better chip in now!" said Handforth excitedly.

"Wait!" said Dorrie. "We're not wanted yet!"

It did not seem that we were wanted at all. For Umlosi was lunging out with all his amazing strength and agility. His arms whirled, and every one of his punches found its mark. The white giants returned the attack, and hit out fiercely. But, somehow, their blows did not go home. Umlosi guarded himself cleverly, and every one of the giants' thrusts went aside, and did not find its mark.

Meanwhile, Umlosi himself was landing many blows.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

His one great advantage was his nimbleness. In spite of his size, Umlosi was able to dodge about with the agility of a bantam, and he kept up a constant rain of blows.

They found that they could do nothing to hurt this man, and their attempts were not exactly to their liking. The giants were beaten back, battered and confused.

And, at last, realising that this black man was their master, they gave up the fight.

With one accord they turned on their heels and ran for the rocks.

"Wau! Thou art of cowardly blood!" roared Umlosi. "Stay and finish this contest, thou great weaklings! Wau! Are thy veins filled with water, that thou should leave the battle so soon?"

And we all returned to the cavern and lay down in the cool, awaiting the return of Nelson Lee with the airship.

But we all had an uneasy feeling that those two giants whom Umlosi had beaten, would return to their comrades. What then? It was only too clear that they would return with reinforcements.

Would Nelson Lee come back in time? Would the airship appear before it was too late?

There was excitement in store for us—excitement and adventure which would surpass anything that had ever happened to civilised human beings.

Our stay in the land of the white giants was by no means over!

THE END.

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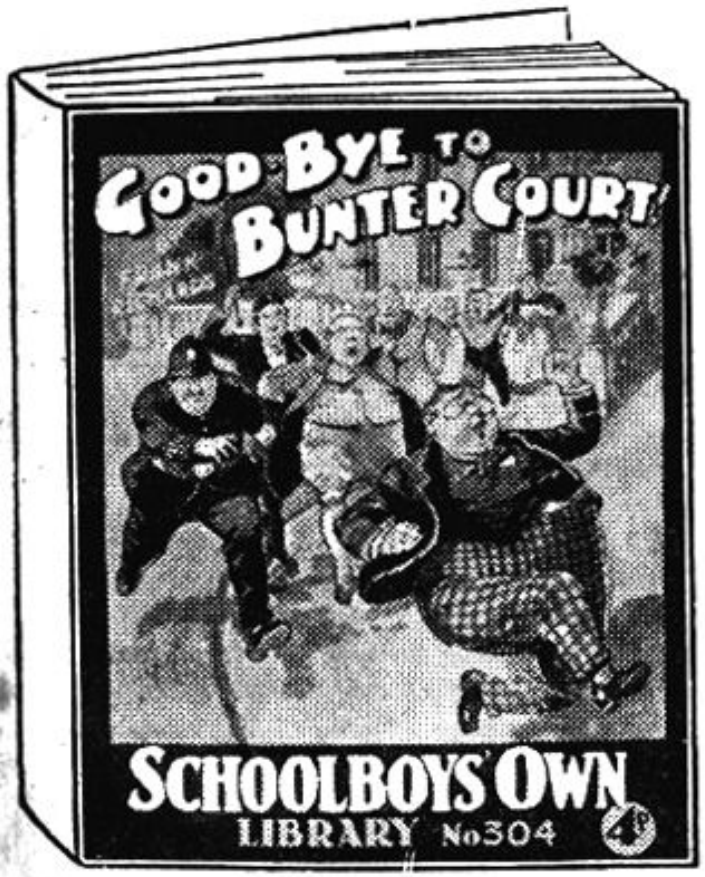

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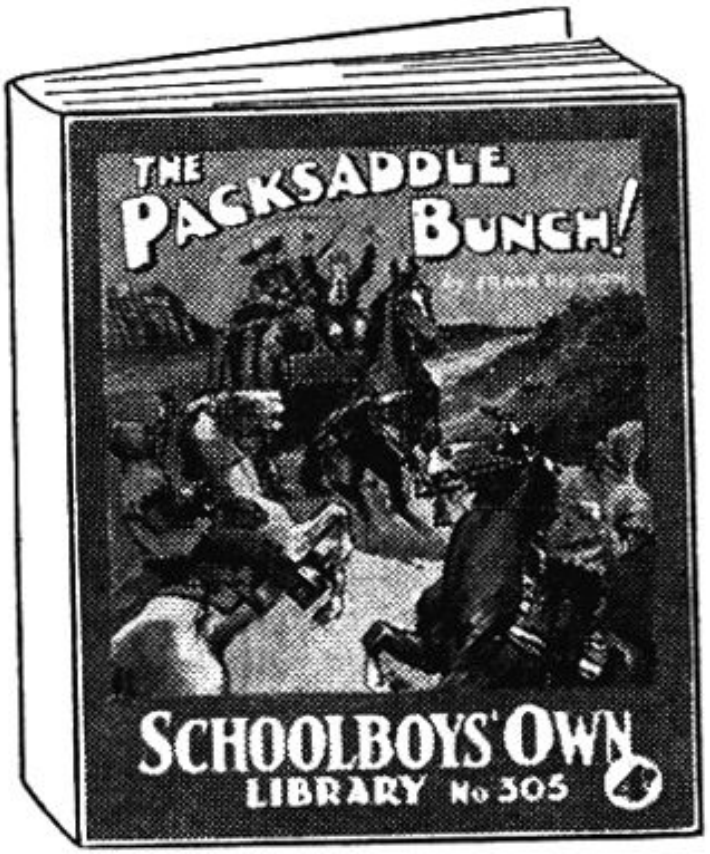

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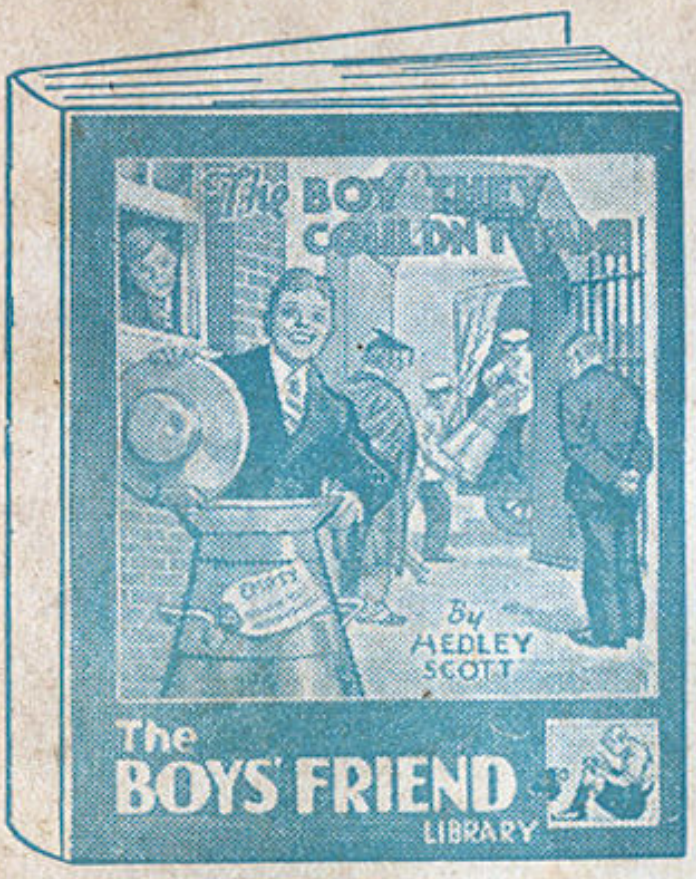

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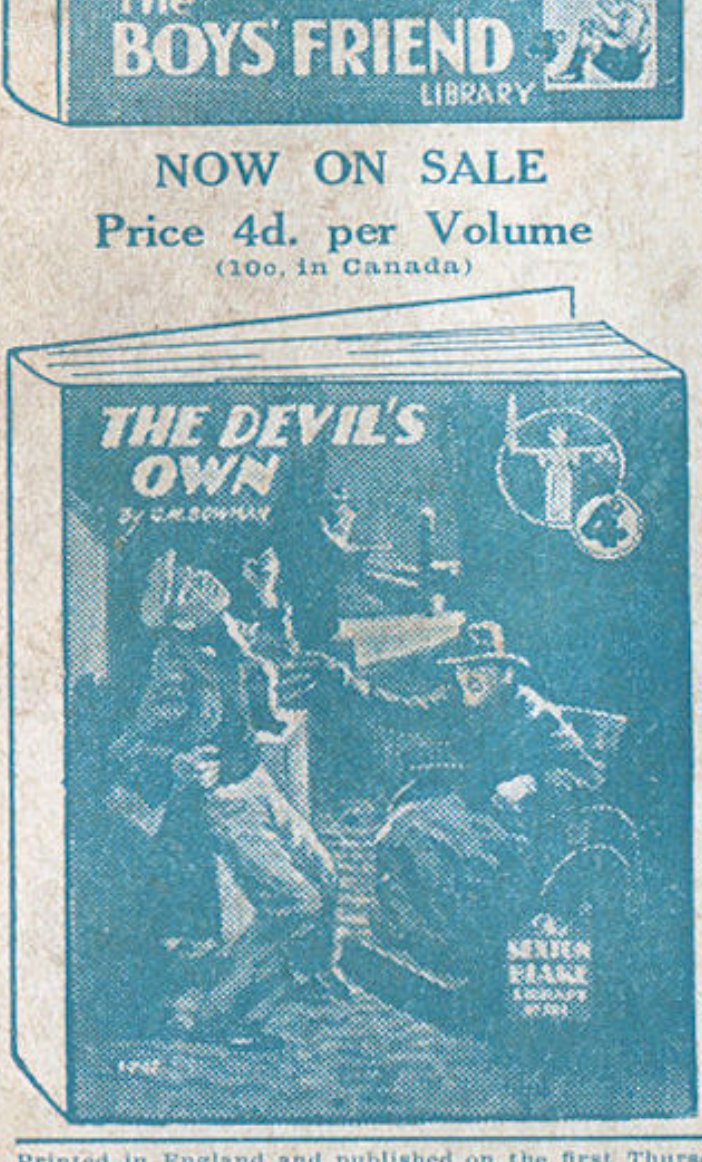

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