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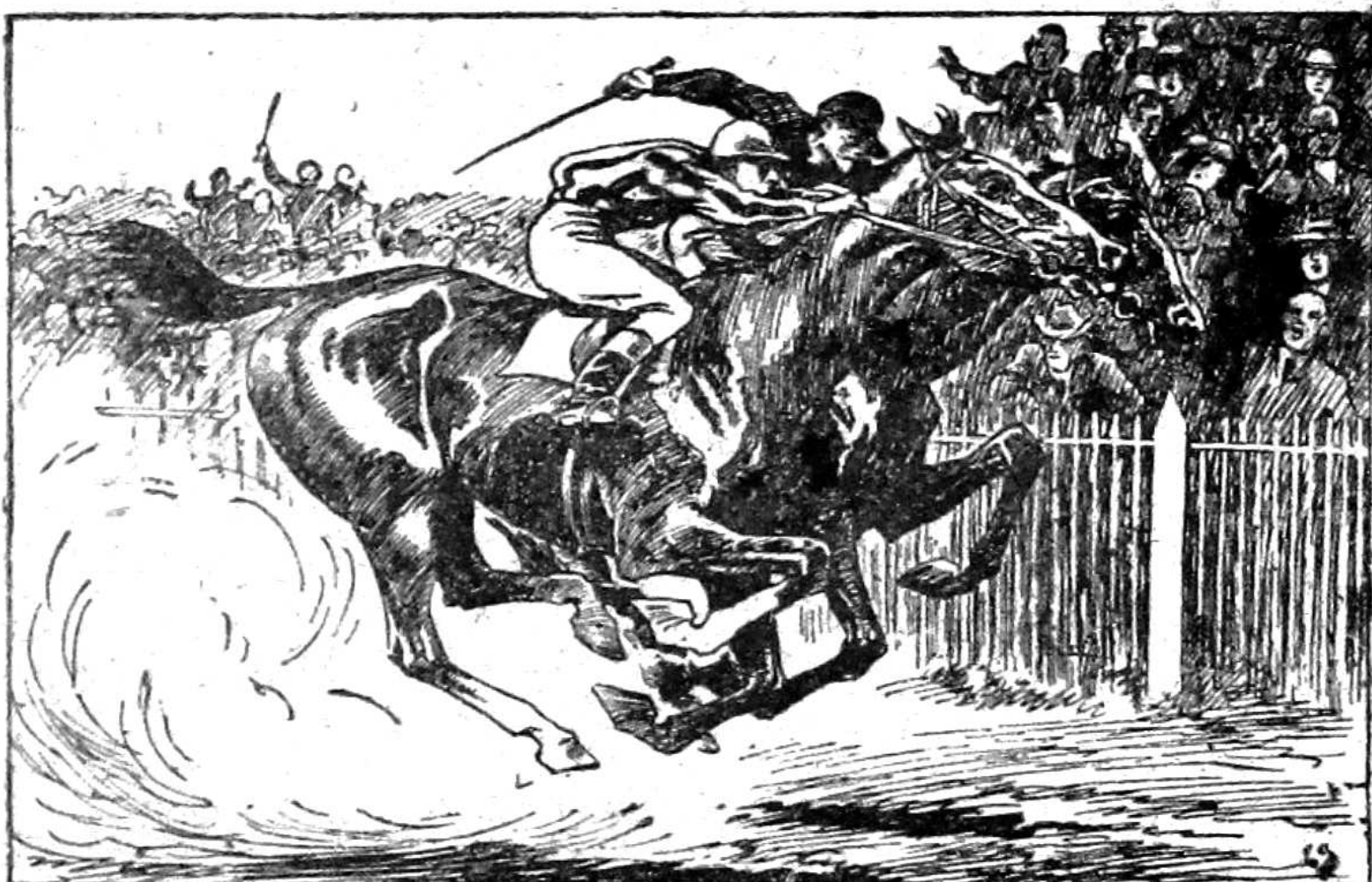


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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

CHOOSING THE GUESTS.

"**B**RAZIL!" 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 definite—not positively fixed, anyhow," said McClure. "It's practically a dead certainty, but there might be a hitch. Quite apart from all 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! And he'd want the Emperor to do that!"

"The which?" asked Handforth.

"That whacking great German liner that's become a Cunarder, or something," said Church. "Lord Dorrimore's yacht is a beauty—one of the finest private ships afloat—but it's not very big. 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 yachting trip, across the Atlantic, to Brazil, and thence up the mighty Amazon, far into the depths of the primæval 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—simply 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 and Co., the cads of the Remove, were amazingly well-behaved. Nothing was too much trouble for them, and their caddish ways were dropped as a man removes 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 and Gulliver and Bell were three of the best juniors in the whole school.

The last trip we had made had been to Africa. Fullwood and Co. had been almost mad to come, and they had nearly succeeded in getting Lord Dorrimore to invite them, for he was an easy going, soft-hearted old beggar. A couple of words to him were almost sufficient. He was genialty itself.

But some of the fellows had discovered Fullwood's game, and a stopper had been put on his plan. This year I knew well enough that Fullwood and Co. were doubly eager to come with us. They were almost off their heads with worry—trying to scheme out some wheeze which would enable them to be invited as guests.

There was practically no hope of this happening, however. I should keep my eyes open, and the other fellows would do the same. We didn't want our holi-

day spoilt by the presence of the three biggest cads in the school.

But, 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 pageboy, 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. "What's the row?"

Tubbs grinned.

"I don't know, sir," he replied. "I don't think there's any row at all. Lord Dorrimore's there, and that big black man, too. They're all looking quite cheerful, sir, so there's nothing to be afraid of."

"You ass!" I said. "Who's afraid?"

I lost no time in going to Nelson Lee's study. I found the guv'nor sitting in his chair, smoking a cigar, Umlösi lolling luxuriously on the couch, and Lord Dorrimore was 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 drily. "He hates writing letters, he hates touching a pen, he hates handling correspondence 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 busi-

ness, as the Professor says. So I want your advice."

"What's wrong with the gov'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! Ain't it enough?" asked Dorrie, glaring.

"I thought it was something vital, 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. Dozens of fellows want to come, of course, but I don't think we shall go wrong if we take the same crowd as last year, with a few additions."

"Any old thing," 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, N. 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 gov'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.

"Rotten!"

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 to 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.

"Souise 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 and 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 glow-

ing 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—all settled!" he gasped. "Ain'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 and 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. Looks pretty bad, I'm afraid."

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

"No."

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

"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."

Poor Tommy was simply bowled over. Handforth and Co. did not wait for Watson to produce the letters. They simply hurled him over, threw themselves upon him, and tore the invitations out of his pocket.

"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 comedian. 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 amuse-

ment. 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 dazed 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! H'm! I am invited to form a member of Lord Dorrimore's party! Dear me! It—it is most extraordinary! The sight of this letter sends a warm feeling throughout my frame."

"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 excited that I scarcely know what I am doing. Do you not think I am handsome, my dear sir? Do you not think I am positively handsome?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

T.T. went off like that quite frequently, and now he proceeded to let himself go in a way that surprised the other juniors. He capered up and down the common-room in a kind of triumphant jig. By the time he had finished he was hot and perspiring, and the other fellows were aching with laughter.

"Dear me! I am feeling quite thirsty!" panted T.T., gazing round amiably. "I think a glass of fizzy would be most acceptable. Admitted. Fizzy is a wonderful drink, and I shall certainly have a large supply on board."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tucker wandered out of the common-room, and wended his way to Mrs. Hake's tuck shop, where he had several glasses of "fizzy" lemonade—a special product which Mrs. Hake stocked in large quantities. He celebrated the occasion by partaking of half-a-dozen drinks straight off. Very shortly afterwards he was complaining woefully of strange and mysterious pains below his belt.

Considering his over-indulgence in liquid refreshment, this was not to be wondered at.

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

Fullwood and 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 ain'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 yachtin' cruise."

"Well, it's no good being 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?

I happened to spot them just as I was coming from the playing fields. It was the following afternoon, and lessons were almost due to commence—not that there would be much work done. Lessons were always something to face during the last week of term.

"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 gov'nor and Dorrie should be taking a trip to London—and I wondered why Stanley Kerrigan should be with them.

He was only a fag in the Third, and a most unimportant person. But then I remembered that he was really closely connected with the whole undertaking. And he was booked to go on the yachtin' cruise.

For Stanley's father had died on the Amazon, four or five years earlier. He had been bent 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 very ground 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 maiden lady. He had been greatly impressed by that conversation, but he was anxious for Nelson Lee to visit the lady, 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 wonder-

CHAPTER II.

THE VISION OF AUNT JANET.

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—looking extremely small and insignificant.

ful woman, and I honestly believe that she's got powers that ordinary people don't know anything about. 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."

"I'm not quite sure that I agree with you, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "There have been cases of clairvoyancy, and second sight, and similar phenomena—but, at the same time, it has always been something of a matter of chance. You say that Miss Kerrigan believes that her brother is alive?"

"Yes, but I'm not going to tell you anything about it," said Dorrie, shaking his head. "You asked for details before, but I wouldn't give you any. I don't mean to. My plan is to let you hear Miss Kerrigan's story yourself. Then you'll be able to judge it better, and you'll be able to tell me whether I'm supplied with horse sense, or whether I'm going dopey."

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, well 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 did not discuss the subject, and when they arrived in London, at about tea-time, they at once chartered 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 Dorri-more 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 was dressed in a somewhat out-of-date fashion, and 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 Dorri-more," 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. I can assure you that he is a most charming man, an' you will be delighted with him."

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 had the most optimistic plans 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 perished. 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. But Nelson Lee was not convinced yet. During the great war he had met

many mothers and sisters who had been absolutely positive that their dear ones were alive—but who had been bitterly disappointed later.

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 fancy that you have more to tell me, and I shall be quite delighted if you will keep nothing back. I am greatly interested."

"I will certainly explain to you why I am so certain," said Aunt Janet quietly. "I am prepared for you to scoff at me, and to laugh at me when you are alone. But I do not care for that—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 am not one of those fanatics. 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—unlike other buildings, but nevertheless built with skill and a wonderful sense of proportion. 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. I believe every word of it. It is not the only instance which has come to my knowledge. Such phenomena do sometimes occur in the case of twins. I don't pretend to know why, but it is just a fact. This power of knowledge 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 do not believe it," she replied. "I know it, Mr. Lee, I know it. 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 the 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 amount of geographical 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 plan, 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; a yacht costs an enormous amount of money," she added wistfully. "Nothing would have given me greater pleasure."

"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 III.

FULLWOOD AND 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; but you made us do 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 kindly 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 the old ass 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!" he said firmly.

"You silly fool——"

"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 complete holiday, and all the fellows would take the train for their various homes. It would be a day of general rejoicing.

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

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 all to get on board.

And this evening, when everything was bustle and disorder, Fullwood and 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—yells of laughter, and all manner of sounds.

Dorrie smiled to himself as he puffed thoughtfully at his cigarette. He was very content. He knew that this trip would be something special—something 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's nature was one brimful of goodness. 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 crept forward silently, attempting to locate 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. They were great, pitiful sobs that went direct to Dorrie's soft heart.

"Hang it all, I can't stand this!" he 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 and 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 and 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 specimen of humanity. He couldn't help himself.

Dorrie also remembered that Fullwood had grossly insulted Umlosi when that black gentleman arrived at St. Frank's. True, Fullwood had paid dearly for his caddishness. At the same time, Dorrie felt that the youngster might have been misguided. He was only a boy, and all boys are liable to make asses of themselves. Dorrie was always ready to excuse misdeeds.

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 mend it, and to make things right.

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 sha'n'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," exclaimed 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—his heart's like gold, an' he's absolutely fine. 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'll nearly break my heart to see all the other chaps goin'. It means such a lot to us, bein' without a decent holiday to look forward to. Oh, I don't know what to do—it's terrible!"

"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——"

"You spoilt it all, Fully," said Bell.

"I—I spoilt it?"

"Of course you did!" said Bell. "The way you treated Umlosi—the way you got up a petition, asking the Head to have Umlosi sent away from St. Frank's——"

Fullwood groaned again.

"Don't rub it in!" he sobbed. "I know I was a cad—a rotter! I don't know what came over me to do a thing like that. I am goin' to apologise to-morrow to Umlosi, and ask him to forgive me. One of the best men breathin'—an' I insulted him to his face! I suppose you're right, Bell—Lord Dorrimore thinks I'm a cad, and he won't have anythin' to do with me."

"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 terrible to ask. We must grin and bear it bravely. 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 was trapped. He fell into the plot with the utmost ease—just as Fullwood had anticipated.

Dorrie was not a suspicious individual—he was just brimful of goodness and cheerfulness. It made him feel bad to listen to anybody sobbing. 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 expressed his earnest regret for acting caddishly towards Umlosi—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 makes me feel bad."

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

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

"You—you heard, sir?" panted Fullwood and 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. "It reminds me of the story of the wolf and the lamb, you know. 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 couldn't 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!" chorussed Fullwood and 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—and pulled hard. He did not even suspect that the three young rascals had been acting specially prepared and rehearsed parts.

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

"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 IV.

THE LAST DAY OF TERM.

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 the 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, unless some urgent matter intervened. Very early on Thursday morning was the latest moment available.

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 was 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! Beds were of no use to him.

The other fellows—Handforth and 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, many envious juniors had wistfully expressed a desire to come too. But it was impossible to take the whole crowd.

Young Stanley Kerrigan came up to London with us, and we saw him home to Aunt Janet's before going along to Gray's Inn Road.

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 glorious. This adventure will be somethin' in the startlin' line—not merely a wishy-washy holiday trip. There'll be troubles and dangers, an' there might be some blood spilt. All round, it's goin' to be great!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "I must remark that you are not very cheerful. Do you call it rippin' to have blood spilt?"

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"A little scrap now and again improves things all round," he said. "What's the good of a holiday without some excitement? Think of the peculiar circumstances of this affair. We're not goin' out to the Amazon on a surveyin' stunt, or anythin' like that. 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 might 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 ain'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. She told us of her strange dreams in a clear, concise manner, with out any hysterics. 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 that 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 squirmy. 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 take 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. "It's no good moonin' about, an' waitin' for trouble, but to get busy. I take things easy, an' there you are. 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 unsightly series of backyards and ugly buildings. Everything was quiet and still, except for the never ceasing roar of traffic in Gray's Inn Road and Holborn.

The thing which had startled us so abruptly was a long stick which came shooting through the window with enormous force. It crashed into a picture on the front side of the 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! It's rather too much of a good thing——"

"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. In fact, I am quite interested."

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

"Exactly," said the gov'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. This is a piece of very excellent advice. Heed it.—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 deduce 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, gov'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 gov'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's marrow in one's bones!"

"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 were anxious to prevent Nelson Lee leaving British shores? It seemed clear to me that the unknown feared the gov'nor's activity.

There was no sense in guesswork, however, and it was idle to surmise with no data 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, with her hair in curls. She looked extremely pretty, and was attired in some light fluffy material in keeping with the weather. 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



Crash! We all jumped to our feet uttering startled exclamations.

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 midstream, looked simply dazzling. It was a fine yacht, and she had been repainted and decorated in a wonderful manner. Her brasswork 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 to the mouth of the Amazon."

"Up the Amazon, you mean," said Church.

"Ass! A sea-going boat can't go up a little river!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling fatheads——"

"A little river!" grinned Watson. "What's become of your geography, Handy? The Amazon is the largest river in the world, and near the mouth is two hundred miles broad—it's like a sea! The *Wanderer* will be able to steam upstream for hundreds of miles—thousands, if necessary."

"Oh, well, it doesn't make any difference," said Handforth. "We're going there, and we're going to have a fine time. My hat! I'd like to have a bathe now—the water looks jolly inviting."

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. Handforth was still anxious for a bathe when he and his chums and a few others were streaming across to the *Wanderer*.

Handforth looked at the water longingly.

"It's a bit muddy, but I dare say it's clean," he said. "I've a dashed good mind to have a dip as soon as we get on board——"

"Don't you be an ass," said Pitt. "The current's jolly strong. You'd never be able to fight against it."

"What rot!" said Handforth. "I'm a good swimmer, and I only propose to splash about near the yacht. Of course, it's impossible to swim far—for example, nobody could swim from the shore to the yacht. It would be too much for an expert."

Tom Burton smiled.

"I could do it," he said calmly.

"Eh? You could swim from the shore to the yacht?"

"Yes."

Handforth glared at the son of Captain Burton—the skipper of the *Wanderer*.

"You boasting ass!" said Handforth. "I didn't think you were that kind, Bo'sun——"

"I'm not boasting," interrupted Burton. "Souse me! If I can't swim half-way across the Thames opposite Tilbury, I'll scuttle myself! Splice my tops'l! It'll be as easy as swabbing the decks!"

"Rats! You can't do it!" said Handforth.

"I can!"

"The current's too strong, Bo'sun," said Church. "Be reasonable."

"Souse my scuppers!" grinned Burton. "I could do that swim in the dark, at any time you like. I'll do it to-night, if you want me to! That'll show you whether I can swim or not!"

"Don't you be an ass, Burton!" said McClure sharply.

"Keep your hair on," said Handforth. "He daren't do it!"

"Daren't!" shouted the Bo'sun.

"Of course you daren't," said Handforth. "It's only jaw——"

"Swab my fo'c'sle!" exclaimed Burton, warmly. "Jaw, is it! I'll do that swim to-night—and show you! I'll do it——"

"Don't be mad, Burton," I said. "Ignore Handforth——"

"I'll be soused if I will!" declared the Bo'sun. "He's dared me to swim from the shore to the yacht—and I'll do it—current or no current! We'll have the test to-night, and after everybody is in bed."

And nothing would shift Tom Burton from his decision.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERIOUS HUNCHBACK.

"A RARE fine boat—that's wot she is, Jim. I've never seed a yacht in this 'ere river which 'as been 'alf so pretty."

Mr. Bill Stacey put down his pot of beer, and wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his jacket.

"You ain't far wrong, Bill," said Jim, with a nod. "But I don't hold with these 'ere swells going about in them yachts. 'Tain't right. The likes of you an' me have got just as much right as wot he has."

Mr. Stacey grinned.

"Them ideas ain't no good, Jim," he said. "Mebbe you're right enough. It don't seem fair that blokes like us should work for nothink, practically speaking, while them people are goin' about with pocketfuls of money, an' doing nothink. We're all equal on this 'ere earth—or would be, if things was right!"

Lord Dorrimore would hardly have been complimented by this remark. He would certainly not consider Mr. Stacey to be his equal—particularly when it came to a matter of looks.

The two men were a villainous looking couple—drink soaked, and with rough, coarse features. They were attired in a nondescript garb with, however, a leaning towards the seafaring fraternity.

Both men, in fact, were dock loungers—fellows who were too lazy to work regularly, but who picked up odd jobs here and there when the fancy seized them—or when they were in urgent need of liquid refreshment.

It was late in the evening—getting on towards closing time, in fact, and the pair were seated at a wooden bench in the bar parlour of the Blue Barge Inn, somewhere in a none too salubrious part of Tilbury.

The pair had the corner of the parlour to themselves, and were evidently talking about Lord Dorrimore's yacht, *The Wanderer*. It was also clear from their conversation that they held somewhat extreme views.

"Come to think of it" remarked Jim, producing a clay pipe and blowing through it—thereby causing a frightful

smell of foul tobacco to arise—"come to think of it, Bill, you and me don't have no luck at all. Why should these 'ere people be going off to enjoy themselves while we 'as to stay here, working for our blooming bread, an' a drop of something to wash it down."

The other man grunted.

"There ain't nothing surprising in that," he said. "All them folks on board that yacht are profiteers and such like. It's about time it was all stopped. I reckon we ought to have equality. I'm as good as you are, and you're as good as I am—and we're both as good as the biggest millionaire what goes swankin' about in his own yacht. I'd like to do something to make this 'ere Lord Dorrimore give up all his money, and divide it among honest, hardworking men!"

"Well, it ain't no good talkin'," said the other. "I reckon that-kind of thing will come some day—but not in our time. It wouldn't take me two minutes to give the bloke a swipe over the jaw if he got uppish!"

"Hear, hear, my friend—hear, hear!" exclaimed a wheezy, high-pitched voice. "You're talking real common sense. Why, indeed, should these bloated upper classes have the best of everything, while the poor man must grind and grind in order to obtain an all too meagre living?"

Bill Stacey and his companion looked at the owner of the voice with some curiosity, he had come in a minute or two before, and had been quietly drinking a glass of wine at the bar.

But now the man stood in front of their little table. It was not possible to see his features distinctly, owing to the poor lighting arrangements in the establishment. But the two men could see their companion's outline quite clearly.

He was bent and deformed, a high hump projecting from his back. His hair was coarse and rather tangled, while he owned a straggling grey beard. Two eyes gleamed with a good deal of fire; but it was impossible to get a clear, distinct view.

Judging from the conversation, it would seem that these men possessed ideas of an advanced Bolshevik flavour. But the hunchback was probably acting the part in order to obtain the sympathy and support of the other pair.

Bill Stacey looked at the hunchback inquisitively. He was a stranger to Tilbury—at least, as far as Bill knew. His face seemed to be creased and yellow—and, somehow, Bill got an impression that the face was really a mask. It remained perfectly immobile and unsmiling.

"This Lord Dorrimore is a man who has made his fortune by the sweat of other men, whom he has trodden underfoot," proceeded the hunchback, speaking with feeling and bitterness. "It is a terrible injustice that you should be compelled to work for a starvation wage while this man lives on the fat of the land. My friends, you are fully justified in being indignant and angry. I observe that your glasses are rather low. May I be permitted to fill them for you?"

Bill Stacey and his pal exchanged glances.

"That is very kind of you, old mate!" said Jim. "We don't mind another little drink!"

The glasses were refilled, and soon the hunchback was talking on very friendly terms with the two dock loungers. He ordered drink after drink for them, and within fifteen minutes, both men, although perfectly sober, were nevertheless in a somewhat reckless condition.

"It's getting near closing time, Jim!" remarked Bill Stacey, rising to his feet. "I reckon we'd best be getting away."

"One moment!" said the hunchback quickly. "I have something to say to you."

"Something to say to us?" repeated Jim. "What's that, mate?"

"Well, I am well aware of the fact that you men are not overburdened with this life's good things," went on the hunchback smoothly. "Perhaps you would welcome the opportunity of earning a little extra money for yourselves?"

Both men stared.

"A little extra money for ourselves?" repeated Bill Stacey. "What sort of money?"

"Well, a rather substantial sum," said the hunchback. "If you care to listen to me, my friends, I can put you in the way of earning fifty pounds each."

"Fifty quid?" said Jim, with a glance. "You're joking, matey?"

"By no means!" said the hunchback. "I am not joking, my friends. I am in deadly earnest. I can put fifty pounds into your pockets if you will only do

what I require. It is not much, and I will explain it to you if you want me to."

"Have you got the money on you?" asked Jim, suspiciously.

"I have," said the mysterious hunchback. "Perhaps you would like to see the colour of my money? Very well, you shall!"

He produced from an inner pocket a bundle of currency notes—a bundle which caused both the dock labourers to open their eyes with surprise.

"What's this 'ere game?" demanded Jim.

"Well, I hardly like to speak about it here," said the hunchback. "It would be better, for us, if we went outside. I shall then be able to speak to you freely, and without anybody overhearing."

The two men didn't quite know what to make of it, but they followed the hunchback out of the bar-parlour into the night. It was quite dark, and the lights from the river gleamed out clearly in the still air. The two men lounged along, and the hunchback walked between them. He took both their arms in a very friendly fashion, and led them to a very quiet spot where they were quite alone.

"Now, guv'nor, what's the little game?" asked Jim.

The strange hunchback gave a little chuckle.

"It is hardly a game, my friends," he declared. "What I wish you to do is not so much a difficult task, but rather a delicate one. While we were in that public-house, we were talking about Lord Dorrimore and his yacht. You both know that the Wanderer is now lying in mid-stream, ready to leave the Thames with the tide to-morrow morning."

"That's right, guv'nor," said Jim. "Well, what about it?"

"Just this," said the hunchback. "I want you to take a boat out, at about eleven o'clock, and you must fix a small box, which I shall give you, near the bows of the vessel."

"A small box?" repeated Bill Stacey. "What for?"

"Never mind what for!" said the other. "It is just a fancy of mine that it should be fixed. And remember, I am paying you fifty pounds because I want you to do this for me—and you must ask no questions. That is understood."

"Well, it don't make much difference to us!" said Jim. "If we get the old iron, we're all right!"

"Oh, you will get the money. Never fear!" said the hunchback. "I intend to pay you twenty-five pounds now—on the spot—if you agree to what I say. And when you have completed your task, I will pay you the remainder of the money. Is that quite clear?"

"Clear enough for us!" said Jim. "We're on it—you bet!"

"I should say so," said Bill, nodding his head. "Fifty quid ain't raked up easy every day!"

"But what's the job?" asked the other man.

"I have already told you," said the hunchback. "It is very simple—but very delicate. I will give you a small wooden box. What you have to do is to take this box, and secure it to the bows of the Wanderer, just above the water-line. Under no circumstances must you allow yourselves to be seen, and nobody on the yacht must know that this operation has been performed. I want you to listen carefully, and to do everything that I say. Furthermore, this box must be placed in position at eleven o'clock precisely—almost to the minute."

Jim scratched his head.

"Well, this seems to be a queer sort of game!" he remarked. "Still, as you say, we will ask no questions, sir. You want this done, and we are willing to do it. Fifty quid is fifty quid, all said and done!"

Both the men were rather full of drink, and they did not think it necessary to go into any close questions. They were not at all particular, and they both spoke as if they had a grudge against Lord Dorrimore—not for any personal reasons, but because he was rich, and they were poor. At all events, they fell in with the hunchback's scheme at once.

The plan was discussed in detail, and the hunchback made it quite clear that he would be watching all the time, at a convenient point of vantage. At last all the details were discussed, and the whole game was clear.

"Well, that's all right, sir," said Jim, with unusual politeness. "Hand over the money, and the job will be done—and we'll do it properly, too—eleven o'clock to the minute!"

The yellow-faced stranger nodded.

"That is what I require," he said.

"Here are fifty pounds in notes—you must divide it between you. When you have completed your task, I will hand you another fifty—but not before. Come to me as soon as you get ashore, and everything will be all right."

"But where shall we find you, guv'nor?" asked Jim.

"You will find me all right," said the hunchback. "I will come to meet you when you land. You had better accompany me now, and I will give into your charge the wooden box, which I require you to fix to the bows of the Wanderer."

"That's good enough, guv'nor," said Bill Stacey. "We're your men for the job!"

A few moments later, Bill Stacey and his companion were the richer by twenty-five pounds each. This fact, coupled with the fact that they would receive a similar sum later on, made them quite content to do the work which the hunchback required.

What this work actually was, they did not trouble about. It was obvious, however, that the mysterious individual was determined to do something of a somewhat sinister nature. Whether he would succeed, remained to be seen. As it happened, certain events were destined to take place which would considerably alter the hunchback's programme.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BO'SUN DISCOVERS SOMETHING.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH gave a snort.

"I don't like it!" he declared vehemently.

"Don't like what?" asked McClure. "What's wrong, Handy?"

"You know as well as I do!" said Handforth. "I think it's perfectly idiotic of Burton to try to swim across the Thames on a night like this."

"What's wrong with the night?" asked McClure. "It's simply glorious—as still as anything, and the river is dead calm. Of course, there are rather tricky currents, but the bo'sun is a ripping swimmer."

"Ripping swimmer or not, I don't want him to go!" said Handforth.

"What the dickens will happen if he's drawn under, or something like that?"

"Well, it was your own suggestion!" said Church.

Handforth glared.

"My suggestion!" he roared. "Why, you—you——"

"Oh, keep your hair on!" said Church. "You know jolly well that you dared Burton to swim to the yacht. I don't blame him for taking on the game. He's due to start in five or ten minutes, so we'd better be getting out. In any case, there won't be much danger, because we shall be following behind him in a boat."

"Yes, I know that," said Handforth; "but it's pretty dark to-night, and we sha'n't be able to see much of him."

The three juniors were in their little cabin, and they had made no attempt to undress themselves and get into bed. The hour was rather late—in fact, the clock pointed to half-past ten. Tom Burton was fully determined to carry out his plan. Handforth had dared him to swim from the shore to the yacht, and the bo'sun was determined to prove that it could be done—and done with ease, too. Burton was justly proud of his swimming prowess, and he absolutely knew that he could perform the task without much effort.

Practically everybody on the yacht were all asleep by this time. They had purposely gone to bed early, because the start was to be made very soon after dawn, which would be between three and four o'clock in the morning. And naturally the guests wanted to be up to see the departure. But a good many juniors were not in bed, for they were determined to see the result of the bo'sun's swim. It had been arranged that Handforth and Co. and myself would follow immediately behind Burton in a small boat, in case of trouble. Certainly I didn't anticipate anything of the sort, for I knew that the bo'sun was a really wonderful swimmer.

Handforth and Co. left their cabin, and crept out on deck. They were just in time to run into Tommy Watson and myself. Tom Burton was just behind, clad in swimming costume, and a light dressing-gown thrown over.

"Hallo, you chaps!" said Handforth. "Everything ready?"

"Yes, I think so," I replied. "We've taken the second officer into our confidence, and he has entered into the dark

plot with enthusiasm. We couldn't do a thing like that without telling anybody, because we should be spotted, and then inquiries would be made."

"I think it's a lot of rot!" said Handforth. "I don't like Burton going on this swim——"

"Why, souse my scuppers!" said the bo'sun. "You dared me to do the swim!"

"I know I did!" said Handforth. "But that was only a bit of fun—I didn't really mean it. Of course you can swim the Thames—I don't deny it. Take my advice, bo'sun, and give it up!"

Tom Burton shook his head.

"Not now!" he said firmly. "I've made all the preparations for it, and I'm going through with it. Everybody would think that I funked the job, or something of that sort. Souse me, it's going to be done now!"

We walked along the deck, and came across two or three other fellows who had turned out in order to see the start. Burton's plan was to row over with us to the shore, and then swim back, with the boat in close attendance. The night was dark and very mild, and, indeed, the conditions could not have been better for the project in hand.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "I don't quite like the idea of this, dear old boys. The river may look calm and smooth, but there are some frightfully treacherous currents about here. Burton, dear old boy, I wish you'd give it up—I do, really! I'm shockin'ly uneasy!"

The bo'sun grinned.

"Well, you needn't be uneasy any longer," he said. "I shall be all serene. Swab my decks! A little swim like this is just what I want—it'll put my blood into circulation, and give me a jolly healthy appetite for breakfast!"

"You won't have any giddy appetite left, if you swallow a quart or two of Thames water!" remarked McClure, with a grin. "I think it's a potty idea, if you ask me. You're not trying the thing for any honour, or a prize—it's just a bit of bravado!"

"Nothing of the kind," said the bo'sun. "Handforth dared me to do it, and I'm soused if I'll let a thing like that stand! I'm going to do this swim, or be scuttled in the attempt!"

"It's a good thing Dorrie doesn't know anything about it!" I remarked.

"If he came along, this little stunt would be stopped. In any case, bo'sun, we'll see that you don't get into any danger."

"Well, are you chaps ready?" asked Handforth. "There's no reason why we should hang about here all the giddy night. Buck up, my sons!"

It did not take us long to slip down the accommodation ladder and to get into one of the little boats which were waiting there. The river was so calm that it was quite possible to have the boat handy. Early in the morning, members of the crew would take in the boats, and would raise the accommodation ladder in readiness for departure. But just at present everything was handy for our project.

The bo'sun was quite cheerful as we rowed across to the shore. He insisted upon going to Tilbury shore because it was rather further than the Gravesend shore, and he meant the test to be absolutely fair. We arrived in a very quiet part of the place, and the bo'sun lost no time in throwing off his dressing-gown and preparing to dive in.

"Are you sure you're all right, bo'sun?" asked Handforth, rather anxiously.

"Why, souse my scuppers, I'm feeling as fit as a sailing schooner with a fair wind behind it," said Burton. "Don't you worry, old mate. I shall get to the yacht all right—and the current won't worry me a bit!"

He waited no longer, but dived in, and a moment later he was striking out for the yacht with a powerful, crisp stroke; in fact, he went so fast that he had covered a good many feet before we could get the boat under way. However, we soon overtook him, and then we followed alongside, watching him. We soon found that there was no need for anxiety, for the bo'sun was a fully capable swimmer. The current, as he had said, did not worry him in the slightest degree. True, he was swept slightly out of his course when midway between the shore and his objective; but he soon corrected this, and was striking out for the Wanderer with the same powerful stroke as before.

It was really a very praiseworthy effort, for the current was strong, and the eddies were rather treacherous. But the bo'sun was a marvellous swimmer, and the task was nothing to him. I think I could have managed it all right

myself, but I should have had far more trouble than he had.

It was close upon eleven o'clock when the side of the yacht was reached. We lost no time going up the accommodation ladder, and tying up. The bo'sun was still in the water, swimming about like a fish. He came up to the boat, caught hold of it, and grinned.

"Well?" he asked. "What about it, Handy?"

Handforth grinned, too.

"You're a marvel, my son," he said frankly. "I didn't think you'd be able to do it. We've simply been wasting our time, following you about. Why. I believe you could swim the giddy Channel, and look smiling and cheerful at the end of it!"

The bo'sun laughed, just called, and swam about for the sheer pleasure of doing so.

"Ain't you coming in?" asked Church, leaning over the water.

"Not yet," said the bo'sun. "I feel just fresh, and I'm going to take a swim round the yacht before landing."

"Landing!" said Handforth. "Why, you're not going to swim back to the shore, are you?"

"Of course I'm not, you ass!" said the bo'sun. "I mean, before I come on board!"

He struck out towards the stern of the vessel, and we soon lost sight of his bobbing head in the gloom of the night. It was quite clear that he was in no danger, and so we ran up to the deck, and then went round to the other side of the vessel, in order to catch sight of him as he came round.

But we saw no sign of him for some little time, and the reason for this was known to us shortly afterwards. The bo'sun, in fact, was experiencing something which he had certainly not anticipated.

Soon after turning the stern of the vessel, he was striking out for the bows, when he noticed that a small boat was also making for the front part of the yacht. Burton couldn't quite understand it, for he knew the boat did not belong to the yacht, and it struck him as peculiar.

Being right down on the water-line, he could easily see that the boat contained two men, and they were rowing towards the yacht in a rather strange manner. The bo'sun could see that they were using their oars in such a way

that they made very little noise—in point of fact, the boat was approaching as noiselessly as possible. This incident had something secretive about it, and the junior was rather puzzled.

“Wonder what their game is?” he murmured to himself. “They can’t be coming to the yacht for anything at this time of night. Besides, they’re making for the wrong part—they’re not going to the accommodation ladder!”

He was curious, and he still swam about, without making any noise, determined to watch the boat, and to see what it was doing. And the movements of the two men inside were still more puzzling after the bo’sun had been watching for some time. The boat drew right up to the bows of the yacht, and then was held firm by one of the men. The other man appeared to be doing something with a somewhat heavy article which he held in his hand. It was too dark for the bo’sun to really see what the game was, but, at the same time, he felt quite certain that these men were up to no good.

He determined to wait a little longer before showing himself.

Even after his somewhat arduous swim the bo’sun was still quite fresh, and it was no effort for him to remain in the water and to watch the men in the boat.

The men did not remain long in their present position, but, after a short while, the boat moved off, slipped round the bows, and rowed away as rapidly as possible—allowing for the fact that the oarsman plied his oars as quietly as possible. The whole proceeding struck the bo’sun as being rather extraordinary. Why had these men come to the Wanderer? Why had they stopped at the bows of the vessel, and what had they done? Furthermore, what was the object which the bo’sun had seen the men handling?

The bo’sun was not the kind of fellow to let a thing like this pass unheeded. He swam round, saw that the boat was making for the shore still, and then he turned back, with the intention of investigating on the spot. But he had not reached the vessel’s side when a voice floated down to him from the deck. It was a whispered voice, and somewhat hoarse.

“Is that you, bo’sun?” it demanded.

The bo’sun looked up.

“Who’s that?” he asked. “Is it you, Handy?”

“Of course it’s me, you dotty ass!” said Handforth. “Why the thunder don’t you come up?”

“I sha’n’t be long!” said Burton. “I just want to have a look at something first.”

“Have a look at something!” echoed Handforth. “What the dickens can you look at down there—in this darkness, too? If you don’t hurry up, you’ll get the cramp, or something; it’s a fat-headed idea to stick out there!”

“Yes, you’d better come up, bo’sun!” I called down. “What’s the idea of swimming round the yacht like this?”

“I’ve got a good reason for doing so, matey!” called up the bo’sun cheerfully. “I don’t suppose I shall be long. By the way, did you notice that boat just now?”

“What boat?”

“Well, it’s pretty clear that you didn’t see it, so I’m not going into any details now,” said Burton. “I sha’n’t be long before I’m up.”

He refused to say any more, and we stood against the deck rail, watching him. We were rather surprised at his actions, and wondered what in the world he could be doing.

Tom Burton went to the exact spot where the boat had been held, and he looked up at the cream-painted side of the yacht, with the idea of seeing if there was anything there. He soon discovered that there was. A small, dark object was affixed to the side of the vessel, and it projected outwards. From above, of course, it was quite invisible, and it would even have been invisible from a boat. But the bosun was gazing up at it from the water-line, and he could see it distinctly outlined against the dark sky.

“Now, I wonder what the blue Peter that could be?” he murmured to himself. “Well, I’ll soon see!”

He swam closer, grasped a chain that was hanging loose, and pulled himself half out of the water. In this position he was just able to reach the object, and he soon found that it was a small wooden box, and it was fixed to the vessel’s side by means of some peculiar-looking hooks.

Under any other circumstances, the Bo’sun would not have given the matter a moment’s thought—he would have supposed that the little box had a good

reason for being there. He would probably have come to the conclusion that it was one of Lord Dorrimore's ideas—perhaps some new patent instrument or other.

But the present circumstances were quite exceptional.

The Bo'sun knew that the boat had come up secretly, and he had seen that both the men in it were rough-looking characters. What was their object of coming here—at dead of night—and fixing something of a suspicious nature to the vessel's side? It was more than ever peculiar, and the Bo'sun was by no means satisfied.

His father was the captain of the vessel, and what the Bo'sun didn't know about ships was hardly worth the trouble of learning. And he was well aware of the fact that an object of this kind, secured to the bows of a vessel, was decidedly unusual. It was only loosely affixed, and the first wave that struck it after the yacht had got under way would dislodge it from its hold.

Tom Burton, in fact, was somewhat alarmed, if the truth must be told. He felt, inwardly, that here was something which demanded instant investigation—and, what was more, instant attention.

He lifted the wooden box slightly with one hand, and, to his considerable surprise, it came away, hung loose for a second, and then dropped, with a splash, into the water.

"Souse my decks!" muttered the Bo'sun. "That's done it!"

He was rather dismayed, for he did not know what the box contained, and now there was very little prospect of finding it out. For it was heavy, and it undoubtedly sank with considerable speed.

"What the deuce are you up to down there?" came a voice from above.

The Bo'sun looked up, and saw several juniors leaning over the rail.

"I say, you fellows, just fetch the first officer, will you?" asked the Bo'sun.

I was among those on deck.

"What do we want to fetch the first officer for?" I asked.

"There's something I want to say to him," said Burton. "It might be rather important."

"My dear chap, can't you say anything to us?" I asked. "What is the idea of swimming about like this, when you ought to be up here with us. In fact, you ought to be in your bunk, fast

asleep. What was that splash just now?"

"That's what I want to talk to the first officer about," said the Bo'sun. "That splash you just heard was caused by a wooden box which I just dropped into the sea. I found it hanging to the side of the ship!"

"Found it hanging to the side!" repeated Handforth. "What rot!"

"I tell you I did find it hanging to the side," called up the Bo'sun. "It was put there not five minutes ago by two men who came up in a boat. Souse me! I don't know what it all means!"

We were all considerably puzzled.

"What's the silly ass talking about?" muttered Watson.

"I'm blessed if I know!" I said. "But the Bo'sun isn't an ass, you know. He must have some pretty good reason for swimming about down there."

"But he said something about a wooden box!" said Watson.

"I know he did," I replied. "He said it was fixed to the side of the ship by two men who came up a little while ago in a boat."

"Begad! We didn't see anythin' of a boat, dear old boys!" murmured Sir Montie.

"That doesn't mean to say there wasn't a boat there," I replied. "The Bo'sun saw it, and he's evidently suspicious. There seems something queer about this, my sons!"

I leaned over the rail.

"Aren't you coming up, Bo'sun?" I called down.

"Yes; I think I'd better!" said Burton. "I can talk to the first officer when I get on deck. The captain isn't up, is he?"

"I don't think so," I replied. "But what on earth do you want to speak to your dad about?"

"I'll tell you when I get up there," said the Bo'sun.

We saw him turn away, and he started swimming alongside the yacht, towards the accommodation ladder. And just at that very moment something of a very startling nature took place—something which we had certainly not anticipated, and which absolutely took us by surprise.

Without the slightest warning, there came a dull, booming thud from beneath us—the sound of a heavy explosion, far under the water. A shudder ran throughout the length of the Wanderer, and she heaved as she lay in the river. The next

moment there was a tremendous splashing of waves, and the yacht heaved right over, and I caught a fleeting vision of the Bo'sun being flung clean through the air, and into the river again a moment later.

"Good heavens!" I gasped. "What the dickens——"

The Wanderer rolled back, and I was flung to the deck. The other fellows were sent sprawling over, too, and a number of cries came from various parts of the vessel. There was instant confusion.

CHAPTER VII.

OFF FOR BLAZING BRAZIL.

"**G**REAT pip!" gasped Handforth, picking himself up from the deck.

"What—what on earth was it?" panted Church.

"Begad! It's no good askin' me, old fellow!" said Tregellis-West, as he picked himself up. "Somethin' dreadful has happened—somethin' frightfully dreadful!"

"What about the Bo'sun?" I asked anxiously. "He was lifted clean out of the water, and flung down again—— Hi, Bo'sun! Are you all right?"

"It's all right, mate!" shouted up Burton. "I'm not hurt! Swab my decks! It's a good thing I threw that box down into the water!"

"That box!" yelled Handforth. "Do—do you mean——"

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed. "The Bo'sun's right! That box must have contained explosive, and it was hung on the yacht's side in order to blow us to atoms!"

"Begad!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

We stared at one another with rather startled glances. And just then the first officer, Mr. Hudson, came hurrying along the deck.

"Do you know anything about this, boys?" he asked anxiously. "What was that explosion just now?"

"It's no good asking me," I replied. "The Bo'sun knows something about it—— I—I mean——"

"The skipper's nipper?" asked Mr. Hudson.

"Yes—he's still in the water," I replied.

The first officer hurried away, and it was not long before other people came on deck, including Captain Burton himself. Nelson Lee came up, too, to say nothing of Lord Dorrimore. Both the latter were attired in their pyjamas only.

"It's all right, guv'nor!" I said, running up to him. "There's nothing to be alarmed about——"

"I'm not alarmed, Nipper!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "But I am somewhat curious to know what caused the yacht to heave just now. And there was a dull, booming explosion, too——"

"Yes, I know, sir," I said. "I believe somebody tried to blow up the yacht a little while ago, and Tom Burton put a stopper to the game."

I quickly told the guv'nor all about it, and he listened with grave attention all the time. When I had finished he was wearing a puzzled expression.

"Well, Nipper, I must confess that I do not know what to make of it," he said. "It seems quite certain that somebody has attempted to blow up the Wanderer, although why in the world anybody would want that to happen is beyond my comprehension."

"Here comes the Bo'sun, sir," I said. "Let's hear what he has to say."

Tom Burton had just come out of the water, and he hurried along the deck to where we were standing, with several other juniors close behind him. It did not take him long to give us all the details of what had happened, and when he had finished Nelson Lee patted him on the shoulder.

"Well done, my boy!" he said approvingly. "You have acted with fine judgment, Burton. If you had not taken that box down, and dropped it into the sea, it is practically certain that the yacht would be in a sinking condition by this time."

The Bo'sun looked rather scared.

"And should we all have been drowned, sir?" he asked. "I mean, would you have been drowned, and everybody else on board?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"No, my lad; I hardly think that," he said. "The explosion would have been somewhat severe, but the yacht would certainly have taken at least an hour to sink—thereby giving us more than ample time to make our escape."

Nevertheless, the affair would have been serious enough, since it would have delayed our departure for Brazil almost indefinitely. In fact, we could not have gone on the trip at all."

"Souse me!" exclaimed the Bo'sun, rather staggered.

"But who could have done it, sir?" I asked. "Who, in all the name that's wicked, would have tried to sink the yacht? Bo'sun hasn't got an enemy, and I'm jolly certain the thing was deliberate."

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"It seems to me, Nipper, that Lord Dorrimore has got an enemy," he remarked rather grimly. "But who that enemy is we must simply imagine. The affair is decidedly mysterious, and I am greatly exercised in mind."

Dorrie himself came up, scratching his head.

"Well, it beats me, old man!" he exclaimed, addressing the guv'nor. "According to all I could hear, some confounded fellow, with a keen eye for the melodramatic, attempted to send this little packet to the bottom of the Thames into the mud. The explosion we heard was a pretty powerful one, and if it had happened on the surface—well, good-night to the Wanderer!"

"You have to thank the Bo'sun, here, for saving the yacht——"

"Swab me!" protested the Bo'sun. "I didn't do anything to speak of. As a matter of fact, I didn't know there was any danger at all. It was simply a stroke of luck!"

Nelson Lee smilingly shook his head.

"I can't quite agree with that, my boy," he said. "You kept your eyes open, and you used your wits to advantage. If you had been at all dull, the explosion would have occurred before you could have had time to dislodge the bomb to its resting-place."

"Well, I am soused if I know what to make of it!" said Tom Burton. "I suppose it's no good scouting about? There's no chance of finding the rotters who did the trick?"

"I hardly think so, Burton," said Nelson Lee. "They have had ample time to get away. I have certain suspicions, however, which might possibly materialise in something a bit later on."

"Suspicions, guv'nor?" I repeated.

"Exactly, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Some little time ago I noticed a peculiar little hunchback man loitering

about the shore. I observed him for some little time through my binoculars, and I was struck by the fact that he appeared to be singularly interested in the Wanderer. I think it is quite possible that this hunchback has something to do with the attempt to blow up the vessel."

Lord Dorrimore was grunting.

"Hang it all, old man, we sha'n't do anything now," he said. "We're sailing the first thing in the morning," he said. "And there's no time to get busy. The rotters won't have time to play any more monkey tricks with the yacht, anyhow!"

Nevertheless, Nelson Lee ordered Lord Dorrimore to give orders to send a boat out at once, in order to see if any trace could be found of the two men who attempted the outrage. Captain Burton himself was quite keen upon this, and not one boat, but three, were dispatched, and we waited till they returned.

The result was somewhat disappointing, for all three boats reported that they had seen nothing suspicious, and there was nothing whatever to tell. By this time it was fairly early in the morning, and it was hardly worth while turning in.

However, after things had settled down, we went to our cabins. Meanwhile, Captain Burton had put on a treble watch, and there was no chance whatever of a second attempt being made. Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West, and I were awakened by a loud blowing of 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 turned out 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—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 we both 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 and Co!" yelled Tommy Watson.

"Begad!" said Montie, addressing his glasses.

"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 and Co. aren't coming with us!"

Handforth grinned.

"This is rather good!" he said. "We shall have a little bit of pleasure before starting off. It'll be simply glorious to see Fullwood and Co. get the boot off the accommodation ladder. Don't say anything to Lord Dorrimore yet. Let the chaps come on board first!"

"That's the idea!" grinned McClure.

The boat containing Fullwood and Co. drew nearer. And at length it came alongside the little ladder at the bottom of the accommodation ladder. The Nuts came on board, and mounted to the deck, 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.

"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 white 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 the guests of Lord Dorrimore!"

"The 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 preach—there's no need for you to say anythin' at all. And it may interest you to know that we are the 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 shouted, grabbing Dorrie by the coat-sleeves. "Do you mean to tell me that you planned all this without telling us a word about it?"

"There's no need to get excited, youngster," said Dorrie. "Of course I planned it—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 on board, and these three fellows were so cut up that I simply had to invite them."

Fullwood and Co. glanced at us with expressions of positive 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. The voyage has practically started already. We've got to resign ourselves to the fact that Fullwood and 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'!"

"That's not the word!" said Watson. "We sha'n't enjoy the trip at all! I've a dashed good mind to go ashore!"

"Don't be an ass, Tommy," I said. "The only thing we can do is to grin and bear it. 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 place had been a different one, Fullwood and Co. would have fared badly.

They had deliberately plotted this affair. They had set to work with all the cunning they could command—a considerable quantity—and they had succeeded in hoodwinking the genial Dorrie.

But, as I had said, it was too late to make objections.

Fullwood and Co. had been invited, and Fullwood and 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.

Watson's sister, Violet, appeared on deck soon afterwards, and Tommy lost no time in telling her of what had happened. Violet had already met Fullwood and Co. down below, and she was by no means impressed.

"How are we going to stick it?" asked De Valerie. "I'm blessed if I know what we can do, you chaps. It'll be simply awful!"

"Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk," said Reginald Pitt. "All we can do is to make the best of it. It's simply awful, having Fullwood and Co. on board, but there you are. These things will happen, even on the best regulated yachts. It's all happened because Dorrie is such a good-hearted bounder."

I didn't like it at all, and I had anticipated a pleasant voyage, with nobody but friends around me. But now that Fullwood and Co. were on board, there was bound to be trouble sooner or later.

However, I decided to have a word with the trio without delay.

While the others were engaged in watching the preparations for departure, I ran Fullwood and Co. to earth, in the cabin which had been allotted to them. They were quite cool and comfortable.

"Well?" said Fullwood, as I entered. "Anything you want?"

"Yes," I replied grimly. "I want a word with you fellows——"

"Sorry—we're busy just now."

"Then you'd better cease being busy—until I've finished," I said. "I'm not going to inquire how you spoofed Dorrie into inviting you. I don't suppose you'd tell me the truth, anyhow."

"That's quite probable," said Fullwood smoothly.

"I can guess how you managed it," I went on. "Well, I just want to tell you that you've got to behave yourselves while you're on this trip. If you attempt any of your usual cad's tricks, you'll get

wiped up. The first time I catch either of you with a cigarette, I'll give you a black eye."

Fullwood yawned.

"If you spring your old games here, you'll be slaughtered," I said. "I'm speaking plainly, mind; and I mean it. We can't kick you ashore, as we'd like to, but we can keep you in order."

Fullwood nodded.

"If you've quite finished, I shall be obliged if you'll close the door," he remarked. "You might make a point of gettin' outside first. We're not at St. Frank's now, an' you can go to the deuce! We'll behave as we like, an' not accordin' to your silly orders!"

I opened the cabin door.

"Well, remember what I said!" I exclaimed. "It'll be worth while, my sons. If you haven't got sense enough to keep yourselves in order, we'll do it for you. And we'll do it so well that you'll wish you'd never come."

I walked out of the cabin without another word, knowing full well that the Nuts took no heed to my words. It was up to them. If they behaved themselves decently, all would be O.K. If they didn't—well, trouble would follow.

My fears were destined to be fulfilled before so very long, for Fullwood and Co. were certainly booked to cause a large amount of trouble on that voyage—and afterwards.

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.

What excitements and adventures we should experience up the Amazon we did not know, but I had an idea in my mind that the trip would be full of thrills and full of dangers.

As events turned out, I was not wrong. Our adventures beneath tropical skies were to surpass all other events that had ever happened to us.

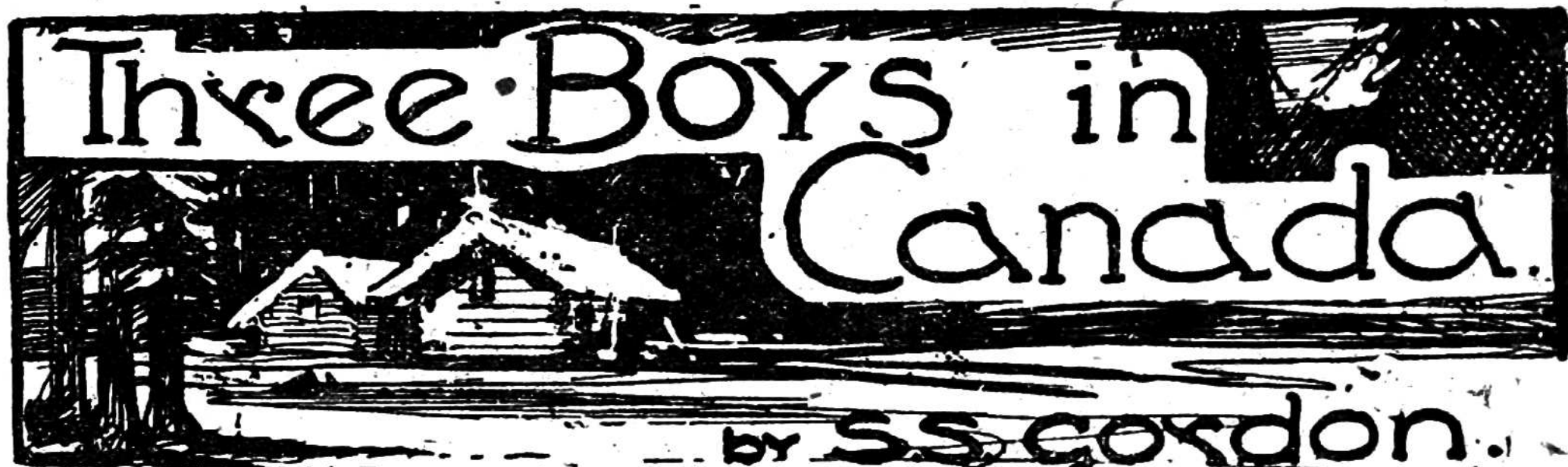
Lord Dorrimore's quest had commenced in earnest!

THE END.

"BOUND FOR BRAZIL!" is the next Story of the Great St. Frank's Holiday series. Describes what happened on the voyage out to the Amazon.

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

INTRODUCTION.

Two brothers, Jack and Teddy Royce, with their chum, Gerald Telford, are trying their luck in the wilds of North-West Canada. A plan of a gold mine is stolen from them by three ruffians—Connell, Olesen and Snaith. Teddy and Gerald follow the rascals, but are captured and forced to work for the men. They make a spirited attempt to escape. Later, Connell disappears into the forest. Left to the mercy of the other two villains, the boys are bound and put into a canoe, which is pushed down stream in the direction of some falls. As they are nearing destruction they observe a camp fire on the distant bank. Their call for help is answered by a canoe setting out to overtake them.

Now read on.)

A Race for Life.

I SAY," said Teddy suddenly, "don't it seem to you that we're travelling a lot faster? And look! The river's narrowing! We're getting near the falls!"

Gerald sighed. It was true. The canoe was travelling much more swiftly now than it had previously travelled; and, experience told him this was what generally happened to a canoe when it gets nearer to a drop-away in the river's level.

The din of the falls grew louder now. They had a sad, mournful note, perhaps not unpleasant to listen to—or it would not have been unpleasant had these two listeners been better placed to appreciate their sound.

But above the rumble of the falling waters came another hail, and, looking back, the boys thought they could see something dark and indistinct moving out on to the bosom of the river.

"Chap's coming, in another canoe!" shouted Gerald. "Oh, the dear old chap, whoever he is!"

He raised his voice again and shrieked, as though hoping to draw his rescuer nearer to him.

He was right; there was a man in a canoe, heading diagonally from the bank in their direction.

But the boys' canoe was now speeding along like a racehorse. To be sure, it was travelling without the aid of any paddle, but the speed the flimsy craft got up was surprising.

The man who was following them had a paddle, and he was using it lustily; but the boys, who now never took their eyes off him, seemed sure, in their distress, that he was not gaining on them; or, if gaining, but very slowly.

Their canoe turned another bend just here, and the banks of the stream suddenly seemed to raise themselves into hills, while they seemed to come very close together. Almost, it now seemed, as though they were rushing along at breakneck speed between the walls of a big canyon, with ever-narrowing bounds.

Now the din of the falls was immense, even though they were approaching them from the top.

"I think he's gaining on us!" cried Gerald. "Yes, so he is! He's got right into the current himself, and—my goodness! What a stroke!"

As a matter of fact, the pursuing canoe was gaining on them hand over fist. But to the boys, in their suspense, it seemed as though the decrease in distance between them was very small, and slow in being brought about.

"Will he do it?" panted Teddy. "Say he'll do it, Gerald!"

"He's doing his best!" shouted Gerald excitedly; indeed, so excited in the chase was he now that his fear of the death that loomed so closely ahead took a very second place in his thoughts.

And the man certainly was doing his best. He drove his paddle deep into the water, and sent his canoe leaping along down the now pretty turgid stream. Every stroke brought him nearer the boys.

They could now see fairly well how hard he was straining to succour them. They could see he had his head well bent, that he was on his knees, and getting out all the effort he was capable of.

At length, when the boys' canoe was bobbing somewhat dizzily in the swift current, the nose of the pursuing canoe came so close to Gerald and Teddy that, had they had their hands free, they could have reached out astern and caught it. But, being as they were, they could only watch.

It was plain that the man astern of them had yet no idea that they were bound hand and foot, for, all at once, he stopped paddling, threw his paddle down to the bottom of his canoe, and shuffled his way forward on his knees. His craft drifted downstream, keeping pace with the boys.

"Catch!" they heard him roar at length; and a rope whizzed over the heads of Gerald and Teddy.

But the boys could not throw out their hands to catch it; and as the man began to draw back on the rope, they watched its end disappear, and groaned.

"What's up?" they heard the man shout. Then he seized his paddle again, urged his canoe forward again, until it was running broadside on to the boys' craft.

Gunnel touched gunnel. The man leaned over.

"Why——" he cried.

"It's Jack!" Teddy yelled. "Oh, Jack, we're bound!"

"Gosh!" exclaimed Jack Royce, for it was indeed Teddy's big brother. "Bound!"

Both canoes drifted downstream together, while the elder Royce stared at his brother and his chum.

The roar of the falls grew louder.

Then the elder Royce stirred himself into fresh action. The time to effect a rescue was all too short; the falls, he knew, were not two hundred yards downstream now.

There was a small ring fixed to the stern of the younger boys' canoe, and to this Jack affixed his rope, which he again affixed to a similar ring in his own craft, so that only about four feet of hemp stretched between the two. Then he seized his paddle anew, and began what he ever afterwards believed to be the hardest spell of work he had ever done in his life.

He got his own and the other canoe turned round safely, but, when he strove to paddle straight towards the shore, the current caught the broadside-on canoes and seemed determined to suck them both down and over the dreadful edge of the falls so near.

Jack strained at the paddle like a madman. His strength always was enormous; but he would have thanked Heaven for twice the strength he had at just this moment.

But he persevered, although his breath soon began to come and go in painful coughs. He fought that river desperately, and, an inch at a time, he conquered it. But it was a long, grim struggle, and the two boys he was saving strained and tugged at their

bonds anew, striving to release themselves in order that they might, with the paddle they knew Snaith had left in their canoe, lend their strength to Jack's aid.

But they could not help him a jot. Jack had to fight the fight singlehanded, like the good Britisher he was. Like all other Britons, he fought all the better for fighting against mighty odds.

His victory was a triumph when it was accomplished. And accomplished it was after half an hour of heartrending struggle. At length, as the big lad was sure his strength would give out, as he felt his aching arms and shoulders refusing to obey the impulse of his brain, the struggle became less acute, and both canoes were close inshore.

Before he rested, Jack secured them to a small tree that grew literally in the water. Then he lay back in the bottom of his own canoe, and gasped and choked, and waited for his strength to come back to him. Which at length it did.

His first action was to sever the bonds of the boys. Then he assisted them ashore. When their feet touched solid ground again, both Gerald and Teddy felt they could have kissed mother earth, for they had not thought to feel their feet on firm ground again.

Their limbs were cramped by the confinement their bonds had caused. Some hard rubbing, and much stretching was necessary ere they could walk. At length, however, Jack Royce gave them an arm apiece and piloted them towards the camp-fire he had been sitting over when first Gerald and Teddy had seen him.

"How did you happen to be here?" was the first question Teddy asked his brother.

"The surveying gang's camped here for the night," answered the elder Royce. "But what I want to know is, how did you get into that mess, and where have you been all these days?"

"We've been prisoners in the hands of that Chap Johnson, the big Swede, and the cook," answered Teddy. "We'll tell you all about it to-morrow, old chap." He was dog tired. He had had no proper rest for many nights, and the work his captors had put him and Gerald through prior to their final act had worn both Gerald and Teddy out completely.

Indeed, Teddy's head even now was resting on his brother's stalwart shoulder. He was only a youngster, anyhow, and he had gone through much of late.

"To-morrow'll do," said Jack. "What about the cook, though, Gerald? He's the fellow who batted me on the head, I know. I never connected his disappearance from the camp with yours, though, I must confess."

"I'm afraid he's dead," said Gerald. "I think Johnson murdered him. Oh, yes, old chap; we've got a lot to tell you! We've got to thank you for saving us to-night, too."

(To be Continued.)



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