DON STURDY WITH THE BIG SNAKE HUNTERS

VICTOR APPLETON

AUTHOR OF TOM SWIFT Books

GROSSET & DUNLAP

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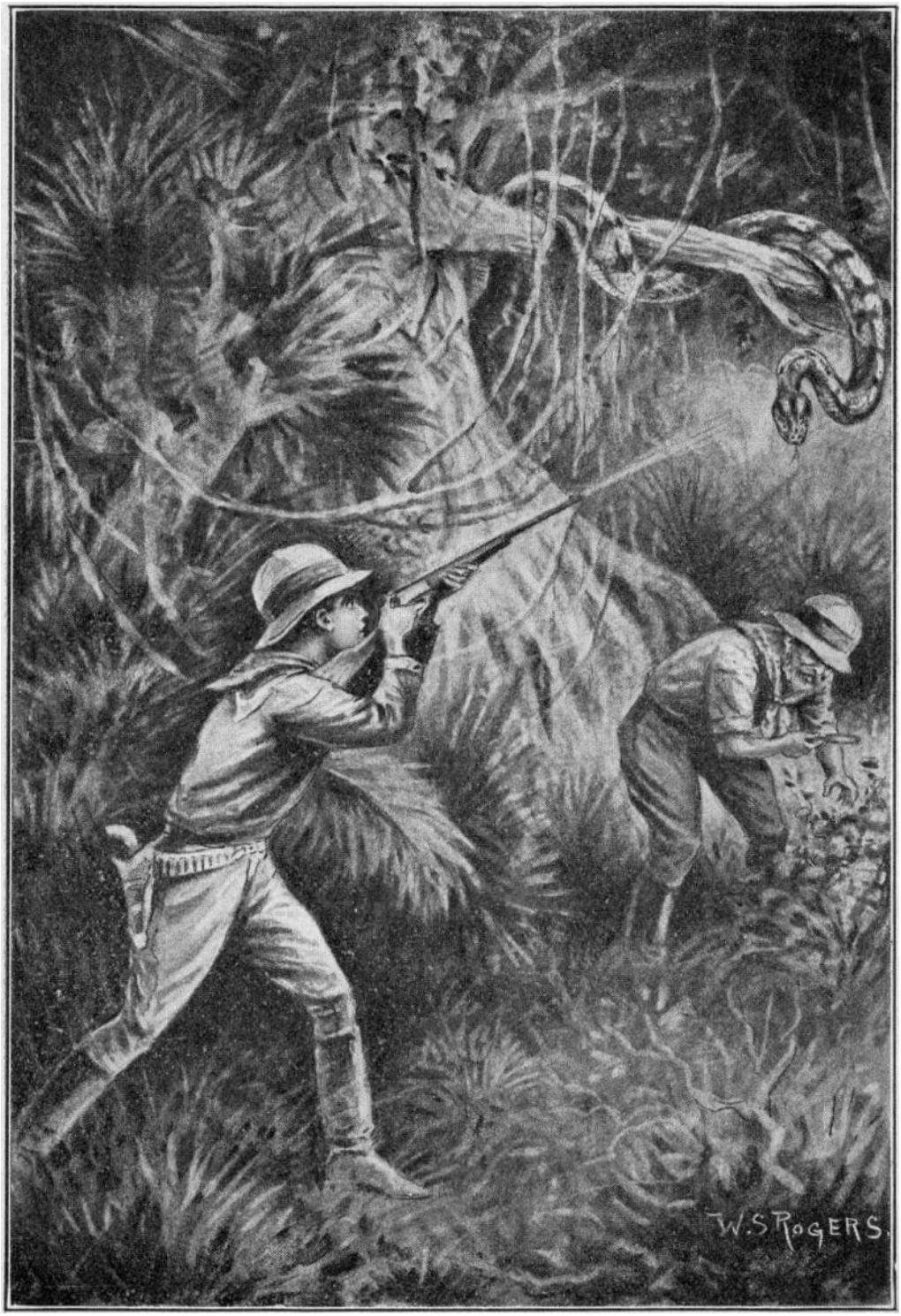
W.S.ROGERS.

DON’S RIFLE FLEW TO HIS SHOULDER AND HE FIRED.
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DON STURDY WITH THE BIG SNAKE HUNTERS

OR

Lost in the Jungles of the Amazon

BY

VICTOR APPLETON

Author of "Don Sturdy on the Desert of Mystery," "Don Sturdy Across the North Pole," "Tom Swift and His Undersea Search," "Tom Swift and His Electric Locomotive," Etc.

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Don Sturdy with the Big Snake Hunters

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CHAPTER I
In Deadly Peril

"Well, Don, I've fixed up the contract for those big snakes I hope to catch in Brazil," said Captain Frank Sturdy to his nephew, Don, as he stopped at the door of the garage where the latter was overhauling the engine of his car.

"That's bully, Uncle Frank!" exclaimed Don Sturdy, a lad of fourteen, unusually tall and strong for his age, as he dropped the spark plug he was grinding and came eagerly to the door. "I hadn't any idea that you'd put the deal through so soon."

"I didn't myself, to tell the truth," admitted the captain. "There's usually a good deal of humming and hawing and backing and filling before the company comes to the point. Big bodies move slowly, you know. But several big orders from zoölogical gardens happened to come in at about the same time; consequently, they were ready and anxious to talk business. So we've signed on the dotted line, and all I've got to do is to get the snakes—that is," he added, with a grin, "if the snakes don't get me first."

"They'll have to be pretty lively to do that," laughed Don. "But honest, Uncle Frank, that's the best thing I've heard since Sitting Bull sat down. When do we start? I'm just crazy to be off."

"Where do you get that 'we' stuff?" asked the captain quizzically.

"You don't mean to say that you're not going to take me along!" exclaimed Don, a look of alarm coming into his eyes.

"Of course I'll take you along," affirmed the captain. "I was just teasing you a bit. Though I'm free to admit that, on your account, I wish the trip were a little less dangerous. Hunting anacondas and boa constrictors is risky business, and capturing them alive is still more risky. I've got a right to take chances on my own life, but I feel uneasy about exposing you to such peril."

"Don't worry on my account," said Don. "Look at the risks we took in the Sahara Desert. But we came through all right. But you haven't told me yet when you'll be ready to start."

"I imagine that we can have all our preparations made in about two weeks—three at the outside," answered Captain Sturdy thoughtfully. "There are a lot of loose ends connected with our last desert trip that have got to be attended to. Then, too, I have to buy a good deal for the outfit we'll take along to Brazil. But I'll make the fur fly from now on, for I'm quite as anxious to get down there as you are yourself, and you know why."

"Yes, I know why," said Don, as a great longing came into his eyes. "It's in

Brazil that we'll have the best chance of finding my father and mother and sister Ruth, if they're still alive."

"They're alive all right," declared the captain heartily, more to reassure the heart-hungry lad than from profound conviction. "I'm sure from the story that Mr. Allison told us that they were rescued from the worst peril of the shipwreck and probably taken to Brazil. We're on a warm trail now, and we'll follow it to the end."

"It was only last night that I dreamed of Ruth," said Don, his voice a trifle husky. "It seemed as though I were in a jungle, and, looking through the trees, I saw her holding out her arms to me and calling me to hurry. I worked like mad to make my way through the brush to get to her, but when I got to the spot where I had seen her she had vanished. But I could still hear her voice calling me to hurry. I'm just sure that she's alive."

He turned away to conceal his emotion, for his pretty sister was inexpressibly dear to him.

"We'll find them all if it's in human power to do so," affirmed the captain. "And Amos will be as keen as any of us."

"Oh, is Uncle Amos going with us too?" asked Don delightedly.

"It would take a team of wild horses to hold him back," laughed the captain. "He'd come anyway, but it just happens that business calls him in that direction too. He's made arrangements to go to Brazil in the interests of a museum, and he's also tied up with a drug company interested in certain specifics that are said to be obtainable in the wilds along the Amazon River. So we'll all go together."

"That's splendid!" cried Don enthusiastically. "Now if we could only get Teddy to come along, we'd have the same party that we had on our Sahara trip."

"It would be great," agreed the captain. "Teddy's a fine boy, and I'd like nothing better than to have him along. But the last time I saw Mr. Allison he said that Teddy would have to devote himself to school studies for some time to come to make up for what he lost while he was in Africa. So we'll have to count Teddy out of it this time."

Uncle and nephew talked for a few minutes longer, and then the captain left to attend to his correspondence. Don spent a little time finishing the work he was doing, and then went into the house to wash himself.

He was passing the living room door when he heard the shrill voice of Jennie Jenks, the maid of all work, in voluble conversation with Mrs. Roscoe, the housekeeper. He glanced in. Mrs. Roscoe, a pleasant, rather good-looking woman, was sitting in a rocking chair. Jennie stood by a table, occasionally shifting a wad of chewing gum from one side of her mouth to the other, while she excitedly poured out

her story.

"I tell you I heard it, as sure as I'm standin' here, Mrs. Roscoe. I was comin' in from hangin' up the clothes, an' as I passed the garage I heard the cap'n sayin' to Mister Don that he was goin' to get a lot of big snakes, Golcondas, I think it was he called 'em, an' I want to say one thing and that ain't two, that if he brings any of them big slimy things into this here house I'm goin' to pack up and get out jest as sure as my name's Jennie Jenks. I never could abide them horrid things, an' it gives me the cold shivers even to think—"

Just then Don gave a loud hiss, and Jennie jumped so convulsively that she swallowed her gum and choked so that Mrs. Roscoe had to thump her on the back.

"Oh, Mister Don, what a start you did give me!" said Jennie reproachfully, as soon as she could get her breath.

"Never mind, Jennie, I'll get you a new stick of gum," said Don, with a grin.

"Wasn't it the truth I was tellin' Mrs. Roscoe about them Golcondas?" Jennie appealed to Don for corroboration.

"Call them anacondas and it's the truth all right," agreed Don. "We hope to bring home a lot of them."

"Bring home!" shrieked Jennie. "Oh, the awful things! To have them crawlin' around and likely enough step on them. I suppose the dratted things are as big as that old black snake that tried to climb into the buggy, when me and Dan Bixby was goin' to the county fair?"

"Let's see, that was about four feet long, wasn't it?" asked Don casually.

"Dan killed the critter, an' said it was all of five feet long when it was stretched out," replied Jennie.

"Well," said Don, "the Golcondas, as you call them, are sometimes twenty-five or thirty feet long."

Jennie showed all the symptoms of having a fit.

"And as thick," continued Don, casting his eyes around the room, "as one of those piano legs over there."

"Heaven have mercy on us!" gasped Jennie.

"We might put them up in the attic," teased Don. "They won't be likely to bother you much. They sleep a good deal of the time, especially after they've eaten a whole goat or sheep. It would only be when they got real hungry again that they might roam over the house. Then, of course, they might snap you up if you got in the way. They could swallow you as easily as you swallowed the gum—more so, in fact, for they wouldn't choke while they were doing it."

Jennie by this time was almost past speech.

"Of course, you might have a chance even then," Don went on, winking at Mrs. Roscoe. "You know the whale swallowed Jonah, and he came out again all right. It might be an interesting experience."

"Now, Mister Don, quit your fooling," admonished the good-natured housekeeper. "Jennie will be having hysterics if you keep this up."

Don went up the broad staircase to his room, took a bath and replaced his overalls with his ordinary clothes. When he went downstairs he found his uncle standing by the window in the living room.

"Got anything special on hand, Don?" the captain asked.

"Nothing but what can wait," was the answer. "Is there anything you want me to do for you?"

"I'd like to have you go over to Mr. Thompson's for me, if you don't mind. There are some business papers that I should like to have him sign."

"I'll be glad to go," said Don, and he took the documents his uncle handed to him. "I've been working pretty hard on the car all morning, and I feel like taking a good walk."

The boy started out at a brisk gait, rejoicing in the bright sunshine, which was all the more welcome because of the heavy rains which had fallen during the two days preceding. The air had been washed clean and was fresh and inspiring, the dust of the road had been laid, and the grass and foliage of the trees were a vivid green. It was one of the days when it is good to be alive.

About half a mile from the house ran a creek which abounded with fish, and where Don had spent many happy hours with rod and reel. It was not very deep, except in spots, and ordinarily ran along placidly.

But as Don neared it that day, he noted that it had become a raging torrent. The heavy rains had swollen it to an unusual height, and the water was rushing through the narrow channel like a millrace and with a roar like that of an angry beast.

An exclamation of surprise broke from the lips of the youth.

"Never saw it as bad as that before," he said to himself. "There must have been a cloudburst up in the mountains. I'd hate to be in it at this minute. No one could fight against that current."

He hurried on to look at the unusual spectacle.

The path that he had been traveling ran almost parallel with the course of the stream, and he had only a few rods to go before he was on the bank of the angry torrent.

A little distance upstream a huge tree trunk bridged the creek, which at that point was about twenty feet wide. It was frequently used by the people of the vicinity as a

convenient method of getting from one side to the other, for the nearest real bridge was more than half a mile below. Don himself had often crossed by way of the tree in the course of his fishing excursions.

He was glad that he did not have to cross it that day, for the spray had drenched it and made it exceedingly slippery. Ordinarily this condition would not have greatly mattered, for a fall would have meant little more than a wetting. But a fall into this welter of waves and foam—the boy shuddered a little as he thought of it.

Absorbed in watching the tumbling waters, Don had not noticed the approach of a boy and girl on the other side of the stream. Only when they were almost on the edge of the bank did his eyes catch sight of them.

The girl, he noticed, was pretty, with sparkling blue eyes, wavy brown hair and a graceful figure. But what immediately fixed his attention and stirred him to pity was the painfully crippled boy, who walked with difficulty by the aid of a crutch, dragging one leg behind him as though it were partly paralyzed.

"Poor fellow," thought Don, as he tried to realize what it would mean to himself if he were so afflicted.

The pity he felt gave way almost instantly to a thrill of alarm, as the girl ran gayly forward and stepped on the slippery tree trunk, with the evident intention of crossing the creek.

"Emily! Emily, come back! You'll fall!" cried her companion, hobbling toward the edge of the bank.

"Oh, no, I shan't," she called back, as she took a few more steps. "I've crossed it a hundred times before."

"Please, please come back!" cried the crippled boy, in a tone frenzied with anxiety.

She was nearly a third of the way over by this time, but the urgency in her companion's tone seemed to swerve her from her purpose, and she turned to go back. In turning her foot slipped, and the next instant she had fallen into the raging waters.

A cry of anguish rose from her companion as he saw her disappear, and he dragged himself forward frantically with the evident design of plunging after her, though in his condition he could render no help and would almost certainly have himself been drowned.

"Wait!" shouted Don, who had thrown off his coat and was racing to the spot.

"Oh, save her!" cried the boy. "She's my sister! Save her!"

"I'll try to!" cried Don, and plunged headlong into the torrent.

CHAPTER II
A Terrific Struggle

Don rose to the surface after his dive. He shook his head to clear the water from his eyes and looked about him. For a moment he could distinguish nothing in the tumult of waters. Then his heart leaped; he had caught sight of the girl being carried on by the resistless force of the current.

But even as he looked she disappeared, to come to the surface considerably farther down the stream.

He struck out vigorously in her direction, with a muttered prayer that he might be in time. He was a powerful swimmer, and the current aided him. But that same current was also hurrying the girl along unpityingly.

It was evident that she could not swim, although her hands were beating the torrent frantically in an effort to keep her head above water. He caught one glimpse of a despairing face turned toward him, and the sight put new power into his strokes.

"Hurry, oh, hurry!" shouted the crippled boy, who was hobbling along the bank as fast as he could, trying to keep pace with Don. "She's gone down twice already. Hurry! Hurry!"

Don needed no urging. Every ounce of strength that he had was being exerted. He had gained considerably. Would he reach her before she went down for the last time?

Nearer and nearer he came, his arms working like piston rods. He could see that she was again sinking. Her head was gradually submerged, until only her long hair streaming behind her was showing.

He made a superhuman effort and fairly leaped forward. Reaching out with his right hand, he caught one of the strands of her hair. He held on to it desperately, and drew her head above the surface of the water.

His exertions had tired him badly, and his lungs felt as though they would burst, while his breath came in gasps. But he held on to his burden tightly with one hand, while he kept himself up with the other.

She was conscious, but too far gone to struggle, which was fortunate, for had she grasped him it might have meant the end for both of them. He got one of her arms over his shoulder, and held it there with his left hand, while with the other he tried to make his way to the bank.

It was hard work to make his course across the rushing current, encumbered as he was, and it might have fared badly with them both had he not been able to grasp the overhanging branch of a tree. He held on to this until he got some of his strength

back, and then painfully and slowly succeeded in making his way to the shore.

The crippled boy was waiting for them, and, bending down, took most of the weight of his sister from Don. Then Don climbed up on the bank, and together they lifted the girl and laid her on the grass.

She was pale and weak, but still conscious, and she tried to summon up a wan little smile of gratitude as they chafed her wrists and hands to get her blood circulating freely. Soon they were able to lift her to a sitting position and prop her against a tree.

Her brother fairly wept with relief.

"Oh, Emily, Emily!" he exclaimed, as he patted her hands. "Oh, but I'm glad that you're safe! What if you had been drowned! And how can we thank you enough?" he added, turning to Don. "You were awfully brave to go in after her."

"Oh, that was nothing," said Don, somewhat embarrassed, not only by the boy's words but by the look of gratitude in the eyes of the girl. "Any one else that happened along would have done the same thing."

The girl shook her head at this and tried to speak, but Don stopped her.

"Don't try to say anything," he said gently. "Wait till you get your strength back. Do you live far from here?" he asked, turning to the boy.

"Only about a quarter of a mile," was the reply. "In the old Turner place. My name is Fred Turner, and this is my sister, Emily."

"Oh, yes," said Don. "I've often heard of you, though I've never met you before. My name is Don Sturdy."

"Don Sturdy!" exclaimed the boy, with quickened interest. "Are you the fellow that had such wonderful adventures in the Sahara Desert?"

"Why, I don't know as I'd call them wonderful," replied Don, flushing a little uneasily, as he always did when any one referred to his exploits, "but I have just got back from there with my two uncles."

"Oh, I have heard all about you," cried Fred Turner with a look akin to hero worship in his eyes. "Gee, I don't wonder now at your pluck in saving my sister!"

"We ought to get your sister home as soon as possible," said Don hastily. "Then your mother can look after her and put her to bed. It wouldn't be a bad thing, either, to send for a doctor."

"We haven't any mother," the boy answered sadly. "An aunt of ours keeps house for us."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Don. "But, anyway, we ought to get your sister home. Do you feel able to walk?" he asked, turning to the girl.

She nodded, and with Don's assistance rose to her feet. But her limbs refused to

support her, and she sank down again.

Don was perplexed.

"I'll run home and get our car," he said. "It won't take me long, and I'll get back in a jiffy. But wait!" he added, as he heard the hum of an automobile on the road. "Here comes a car now. I'll stop it and see if we can get a lift."

He ran out to the road and signaled for the rapidly approaching car to stop. It did so promptly, and it was with great satisfaction that Don recognized in the driver the very Mr. Thompson whom his uncle had sent him to see. He was a big genial man, a lawyer who transacted a good deal of Captain Sturdy's legal business.

"Hello, Don!" he exclaimed, as he looked in surprise at his drenched and clinging garments. "What on earth have you been doing? Taking a swim with your clothes on? You look like a drowned rat."

"I suppose I do," laughed Don. "But look here, Mr. Thompson. There's a girl here who fell into the water, and she needs to get home in a hurry. Will you give us a lift?"

"To be sure I will," replied Mr. Thompson, with ready sympathy, as he climbed out of the car. "Where is she?"

Don led the way to the bank of the creek.

While he and Mr. Thompson are helping the girl and her crippled brother into the automobile, it may be well for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volume of this series to tell just who Don was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Don Sturdy was a tall, muscular boy, fourteen years old, living in the old Sturdy stone house at Hillville, about fifty miles from New York City. He had brown hair and eyes of the same color, a fair complexion, a frank, handsome face and a likable smile. He was generally liked by boys of his age, and excelled in outdoor sports, such as baseball and football, besides being a crack shot.

His father, Richard Sturdy, had been an explorer of note, and on his last trip had taken with him his wife, Alice, and Don's only sister, Ruth, two years younger than Don, and to whom the lad was devotedly attached. They went on the exploring ship *Mercury*, which mysteriously disappeared while on a trip around Cape Horn, South America. She was supposed to have been sunk, and to have carried down with her all her passengers and crew.

The blow was a terrible one to Don, who seemed at one blow to have been deprived of all the members of his immediate family. For many months he cherished the hope that somewhere they were still alive, but as time went on without any news of the missing ones, this hope grew more and more slender. Still he never abandoned

it entirely, and the one purpose of his life was to find them, if they were still alive.

Though apparently an orphan, he had two staunch friends and protectors left in his two uncles, Captain Frank Sturdy, brother of Richard Sturdy, and Professor Amos Regor Bruce, brother of Don's mother.

Captain Sturdy, who had never married, was a noted big game hunter, a large, powerful man with swarthy skin and black eyes that could flash with merriment or grow terrible with anger. He had traveled all over the world, gathering animals dead and alive for museums and menageries. He was a dead shot, and Don's own expertness with the rifle had been gained under the tutelage of his Uncle Frank, who was at the same time his guardian.

Professor Bruce, also a bachelor, was of a different type, rather small in build with gray eyes and gray hair. He was a very learned man, an eminent archæologist with degrees from many universities, and spent most of his time in collecting specimens of ancient life and art for museums and learned societies.

All three, when at home, lived in the Sturdy mansion, which was taken care of by a rather elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Dan Roscoe, the former acting as man of all work about the place while Mrs. Roscoe attended to the housekeeping, helped by the maid, Jennie Jenks, whose gum-chewing proclivities have already been noted.

Both the captain and the professor had, a short time before, been called to go to Algeria in fulfillment of contracts they had with the International Museum and Menagerie Collection Corporation, with their main offices in New York and branch establishments in London and Paris.

They had taken Don with them, largely to keep his mind from brooding over the loss of his parents and sister. They had scarcely reached Tuggurt in Algeria, before they found adventure thickening about them. Don rescued an American boy of about his own age, Teddy Allison—commonly called Brick because of his red hair—from natives who were attacking him, and learned that Mr. Allison, Teddy's father, had been carried away by Arabs in a raid on his caravan, with which he had gone into the Sahara Desert to search for a cave of emeralds reputed to be located somewhere in the Hoggar Plateau.

The plight of the boy enlisted the sympathy of Don and his uncles, and they planned an automobile expedition into the desert to rescue Mr. Allison, if he were yet alive.

They went through many perils and exciting adventures, and more than once found themselves face to face with death. How they suffered from thirst and sand storms, what battles they had with bandits, how gallantly Don bore himself among dangers that might have appalled the bravest, and the news Don learned that gave

new life and hope in the search for his parents—all these and more are narrated in the first volume of this series, entitled: "Don Sturdy on the Desert of Mystery; or, Autoing in the Land of the Caravans."

And now to return to the girl who owed her life to Don's coolness and courage.

They had helped her into Mr. Thompson's car and her crippled brother after her when Don suddenly remembered his coat on the other side of the creek.

"Just a second, Mr. Thompson," he said, as he ran to the tree trunk that crossed the stream. "I have some papers in that coat that Uncle Frank wanted me to give to you."

"You're taking chances on that slippery trunk," warned Mr. Thompson.

"I know it," laughed Don. "But I haven't time to go down to the bridge. I'll take a chance."

Luck was with the boy, and he was back in a few minutes, with the coat. Then Mr. Thompson started the automobile, followed the road indicated by Fred, and in a short time they were at the Turner house.

There were exclamations of alarm from the young folks' aunt, Miss Mary Turner, when she saw the pale face and wet clothes of her niece. But the others speedily reassured her and helped the girl into the house, where her aunt promptly put her to bed, while Fred, going to the telephone, called up the family doctor, who promised to come as soon as possible.

"Well," said Mr. Thompson, when, having done all he could, he prepared to go, "I guess I'll be getting along. By the way, Don," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "you told me of the girl falling into the creek, but you didn't say how she got out."

"You see that she's out all right, don't you?" countered Don, with a smile.

"Thanks to you, yes," was the reply. "Her brother told me all about it, while you were getting your coat. And I'm going to tell Frank Sturdy, when I see him next, that he's lucky in having such a nephew! But I must go on. Don't you want to come with me, Don? I'll drop you at your house."

But Don had taken an instant liking to Fred Turner and felt deep sympathy for him. He had the feeling that he would like to stay and talk to the boy, so he said:

"Thank you, Mr. Thompson; but I think I'll stay here with Fred a little while."

Mr. Thompson left, and the two boys were alone together, as Miss Mary Turner was still upstairs with Emily.

Fred Turner seemed to be about the same age as Don. Nature had given him a good frame and had evidently designed that he should be strong and tall, but her designs had been thwarted by his affliction. The lack of exercise showed in his thin face and slender arms. The face, however, though marked with suffering, was keen

and intelligent, and the expression was frank and open.

"It seemed a miracle that you should have come along just when you did. And you had nerve to plunge in after Emily!" Fred said fervently. "I'm sure thankful to you. It was awful to see her there and not be able to help her."

"You had just as much nerve as I had," replied Don. "You were going in after her, if I hadn't stopped you."

"Oh, I'd have gone in," admitted Fred. "I'd rather have died with her than have gone on living without her. She's all I've got in the world, for somehow or other one can't get very near to Aunt Mary. But what good could I have done, anyway? I'm no good with this crippled leg of mine," he ended, with a touch of bitterness in his tone.

"You mustn't talk that way," admonished Don gently. "There's lots in life for you, even if you are lame. That may be cured after a while. Was it the result of an accident?"

"No," answered Fred. "It started years ago with an attack of infantile paralysis. Then there were complications that the doctors didn't seem to understand. If my father had only lived—"

He broke off and sat staring moodily before him. Don's heart was full of pity for the unfortunate boy, so handicapped in the race of life.

"If my father had only lived," Fred repeated, rousing himself, "I might have had some chance of being cured. He was a scientist, interested specially in chemistry, and he had heard of a drug in South America that was reported to have worked wonderful cures for natives whose trouble seemed to be like mine. He was planning to go for that special purpose to Brazil—"

"Brazil!" interrupted Don. "Why, that's where I'm going a few weeks from now. And what's more," he added, as another thought struck him, "my Uncle Amos is going there on a special hunt for rare drugs. Perhaps he'll find the one your father wanted. By ginger, Fred, maybe we'll cure you yet!"

CHAPTER III
A Gleam Of Hope

"Oh, do you think so?" asked Fred, new hope thrilling through his veins.

"I'm almost sure of it," replied Don. "There are mighty few things my Uncle Amos doesn't know or can't find out. I'll tell him all about you, and he'll have the thing in mind all the time he's down in Brazil. I'll bet we'll have you running a Marathon soon after we get back."

"If I do, you'll never hear me complain of anything again!" declared the cripple.

"You've had a mighty tough deal," observed Don. "But just brace up now and everything will turn out all right."

"I hope so," replied Fred. "I've got somehow to make a living for Emily and myself and how can I do it when I'm so lame? We had a little money from father's life insurance, but that will soon be gone. It would be different if father's investments had turned out all right."

"Perhaps they will," Don encouraged him. "What were the investments? Perhaps my Uncle Frank can find out something about them."

"Father put a good deal of money in a rubber company that had been formed to work the forests of Brazil," explained Fred. "He had some, too, in a drug company that was interested in the same country. Up to the time he died he was sure he had a good thing. He kept getting dividends from them all the time. But since then we haven't received a cent."

"It's queer they should have gone flooey all at once," said Don. "Looks as if there were some funny business somewhere."

"I think so myself," said Fred. "Father left us in care of a guardian, a distant relative of his. He's a great traveler, though, and he's been away a long time now and though I've written to him, he probably didn't get my letters. Perhaps he's dead, for all I know. So I've had to attend to this thing myself. I've written to the company again and again, and that's all the good it's done me. I got some letters that I couldn't make head or tail of, full of big words about reorganizations, and consolidations and stuff like that, but what stuck out all over the letters was that our money's gone."

"That's rotten!" exclaimed Don. "Who's the fellow that's running the concern?"

"Glassbury, Henry Glassbury," was the reply. "Father thought he was all right."

"Bet you he's a rascal," said Don. "Why don't you get a lawyer after him?"

"No money to hire one," returned Fred gloomily. "But I'm chinning too much about my troubles and boring you to death."

"Not a bit of it," declared Don warmly. "Now look here. Give me the letters you've had from these crooks and I'll sic my Uncle Frank on them. He'll be glad to look the matter up."

"That's mighty good of you!" exclaimed Fred, his eyes kindling. "I'll go upstairs and get them."

While he was gone, Doctor Wilson drove up, and Don directed him to the patient on the upper floor.

"Here are the letters," announced Fred, on his return. "I hope you'll be able to get more out of them than I have."

"Trust my uncle for that," replied Don, as he slipped the letters into his pocket.

"I notice," said Fred, with some hesitation, "that you speak only of your uncles. Have you had the same hard luck I have had in losing father and mother?"

A shadow of pain passed over Don's face.

"Oh, pardon me!" cried Fred quickly. "Perhaps I shouldn't have asked!"

"That's all right," returned Don. "To tell the truth, I don't know whether my parents are alive or not. We know they were on the ship *Mercury* that went down off Cape Horn. We've never heard from them directly since. But a man in Algeria told us that he knew that a boatload of people from the *Mercury* had been rescued."

"And were your people among them?" asked Fred breathlessly.

"That's what we don't know," answered Don. "But we do know that a woman and a girl were in the boatload that was picked up, and we're hoping that they may have been my mother and sister. Mr. Allison, the man I spoke of, got his information from a scientist and a sailor who were rescued. He didn't know the sailor's name, but he said the scientist was named Webb Reynard. The vessel that picked them up was bound for some port in Brazil. That's all he knew."

"But that's a whole lot," cried Fred. "Now at least you know where to look."

"Yes," said Don, "that's the real reason I'm going to Brazil," he added.

Just then Doctor Wilson came downstairs.

"How is Emily, Doctor?" asked Fred anxiously.

"There's nothing to worry about, my boy," replied the doctor, with a smile. "She isn't suffering from anything but shock. She's young and strong, and she'll be all right in a day or two. Lucky you happened to be around," he added, turning to Don, "or what we'd have needed here would have been an undertaker instead of a doctor."

The doctor departed and Don himself arose to go.

"You'll come again soon, won't you?" implored Fred.

"Sure thing," replied Don. "And I want you to meet my uncles, too. Just as soon as your sister is strong enough, I'll bring our car over and take you to our house for

dinner, your aunt, too, if she'd like to come along."

"That'll be dandy!" declared Fred. "We'll be glad to come."

On his way home Don took short cuts, as far as he could, for in his bedraggled condition he did not care to face curious glances. Not far from his own home, however, he had to turn into the main road.

As he did so, he saw an automobile coming along, with a man at the wheel whom he recognized as a discharged employee of Captain Sturdy's. Don had never liked him, and was passing him with a nod, when the driver brought his car to a stop and looked at him with a contemptuous stare.

"You look like something that the cat dragged in," he remarked.

His intention to be offensive was so evident that Don flared up.

"That'll do for you, Claggett! You mind your own business."

"Mighty uppity, ain't you?" sneered Claggett. "Don't give me any of your back talk or I'll come down and give you a trimming."

"It will be a mighty bad thing for you if you try it," replied Don, his indignation the greater at the insult because it was so wanton and unprovoked.

Perhaps Claggett was privately of the same opinion, for he made no move to carry out his threat. Instead, he changed the subject.

"Tell that uncle of yours that I'm going to get even with him yet," he said.

"Perhaps you'd better come and tell him that yourself," replied Don. "The house is only a little way off."

But a personal meeting with Captain Sturdy was the furthest thing possible from Claggett's desire.

"Or better yet," the latter said, "tell him that I've already got even with him. He doesn't know it, but I have. And with you too, you runt of an orphan."

He threw in the clutch and started off just as Don made a hasty move toward him. The lad watched the car for a moment and then resumed his journey homeward, puzzling over the meaning of Claggett's parting taunt.

Dinner was ready, and he had to hurry to get himself into presentable clothes. His uncles looked at him quizzically and yet with pride in their eyes, as he took his place at table.

"So our knight errant has been busy rescuing a maiden in distress," remarked the captain, as he carved the roast.

"How did you know?" asked Don.

"I've seen Thompson," was the reply. "What he told me was plenty. He thinks you are—let's see, what's the phrase you youngsters use?—the bee's knees, the clam's overshoes, the eel's raincoat, or something along that line."

"I'm proud of you, my boy," put in Professor Bruce. "It was a plucky thing to do."

"I'm afraid Mr. Thompson made too much of it," said Don, turning to his plate to hide his embarrassment. "It was a simple thing after all. But the thing I'm most interested in is that it helped me make the acquaintance of a lame boy, Fred Turner, the girl's brother."

"Turner!" repeated the professor. "I used to know a man of that name, a very bright, clever scientist, who lived somewhere in this vicinity, but I've been abroad so much that I've lost track of him."

"He's dead now," said Don. "But likely enough he's the man you used to know. Fred said his father was a scientist."

"I'm sorry to hear he's dead," said the professor. "I hope he left his family in comfortable circumstances."

"He thought he did," returned Don. "It's just that I want to talk with you about. He left a lot of shares in some company interested in rubber in Brazil, and also some in a drug company that, for all I know, may have some connection with the first. I haven't got all the rights of it yet, but the thing in a nutshell seems to be that the shares are no good, or at least that the company says they're no good. At any rate, the Turners have never realized a cent from them since their father died, and I think there's a lot of crookedness about the whole thing."

"It seems incredible that any concern should try to swindle orphans!" exclaimed the professor indignantly.

"Only seems," said the captain dryly. "You know and I know, Amos, that the thing's being done every day. There are plenty of sharks and wolves in every business."

"I was wondering, Uncle Frank," said Don, "whether you would look the matter up."

"I'll be glad to," returned the captain. "If you can pull the girl out of the water," he added, with a grin, "I don't see why other members of your family can't try to pull her out of a fix."

"I was so sure that you would," said Don, "that I got Fred Turner to get out the correspondence he'd been having with the company and brought it along with me."

"Good!" exclaimed the captain. "Did you bring along the shares too?"

"I didn't think about that," confessed Don. "I guess I can get them if you need them."

"They might make it easier to look the matter up," was the reply. "But I'll look the papers over as soon as I get through dinner. Do you remember what the name of

the company was?"

"Fred didn't say," answered Don. "But he said that a man named Glassbury—Henry Glassbury, I think it was—seemed to be the head of the concern."

"Glassbury," repeated the captain. "I've heard the name as that of a man connected with large affairs. As far as I know he's always maintained a good reputation. I've never heard of any charge of crookedness brought against him."

"Of course that doesn't mean anything necessarily," put in the professor. "All men are straight until they begin to turn crooked."

"To be sure," admitted the captain. "All the same, a good reputation counts for a great deal. But I'll make a careful investigation. I'm only sorry that I have so little time at my disposal before we start for Brazil."

"That's another thing I want to speak of," said Don. "Just before Fred's father died he was planning to go to Brazil to hunt for some drug that he thought would help cure Fred's lameness. He'd heard of something down there that was reported to have worked some wonderful cures among the natives. But he died before he could carry out his plan."

"Too bad," remarked the professor. "What seems to be the trouble with Fred?"

"Infantile paralysis started it," explained Don. "But other things came in later. He's all right except in one leg. That seems to be partly paralyzed and it drags along behind him dreadfully. I can't tell you how sorry I felt for him. He's such a fine fellow, too."

The professor was lost for a time in meditation.

"I've heard of that remarkable remedy," he said, at last. "A paper was read before one of the societies I'm connected with by a scientist who had just returned from Brazil. Among other things he spoke of this drug derived from the bark of a rare tree, which he said had been instrumental in effecting some marvelous cures in just the kind of trouble this young friend of yours seems to have."

"I promised Fred that you'd hunt that up while you were down in Brazil," ventured Don.

"Seems to me you've been promising the services of your family right and left," observed the professor, smiling. "But I regard that as a compliment to us. You can be sure that I'll do all I can. It will be right along the line of the work that I'm going to Brazil to do."

"Bully!" cried Don. "How delighted Fred will be when I tell him that!"

CHAPTER IV
Teddy Turns Up

"I'm going to the city to-day, Don," said Captain Sturdy the next morning. "Suppose you and Dan meet me at the station this afternoon with the car. I expect to be back on the five-thirty express."

"We'll be there," promised Don. "Oh, by the way, Uncle Frank, I forgot to tell you that I met Claggett last night," and he went on to tell of the incident.

"The good for nothing rascal!" growled the captain, as he heard of the taunt hurled at Don. "I guess I got rid of him none too soon. As for that talk about getting even or having got even, there's nothing in it. Just the cheap stuff that blowhards indulge in."

Don was waiting at the station that afternoon when the train drew in. He scanned the passengers as they alighted, and soon caught sight of the tall form of the captain as he treaded his way through the crowd. But who was that young fellow with him?

The next instant Don was out of the car and rushing across the platform. Halfway over he grabbed the newcomer in an impetuous hug.

"Teddy!"

"Don!"

"You old rascal!" chortled Don, in the seventh heaven of delight. "What good wind blew you up this way?"

"You're either glad to see me or you're a mighty good actor," returned the grinning newcomer, adjusting his cap after the tempestuous greeting and accompanying Don to the car with the captain, whose face was one broad smile.

"You're as welcome as the flowers in May!" exclaimed Don. "You don't know how hard and how often I've wanted to see you again."

"Yes, I do," replied Teddy Allison, as he seated himself beside Don, in the tonneau while the captain took his place beside the chauffeur, "for I've been feeling the same way myself. Some class to this car," he added, as the driver started it and it purred smoothly and swiftly along the road.

"It's a dandy," agreed Don. "It moves like a dream. We'll have many a drive in the old bus while you're here."

"Can't have too many to suit me," replied Teddy, removing his cap to enjoy to the full the refreshing evening breeze.

"How in the name of all that's lucky did you manage to come?" asked Don, as the car sped along.

"Lucky is the word," was the reply. "There was a fire in the school I was

studying at, and they had to close a couple of weeks for repairs. You can imagine the bitter tears I shed and how I made hotfoot for home and urged my father to let me come here. By luck again, I met your uncle at the Grand Central and came right along with him."

"I'm tickled to death," said Don. "It would have been rotten if I'd had to go to Brazil without seeing you. What would I give if you were going along!"

"I've been begging my father to let me go," said Brick, running his fingers disconsolately through the fiery mop that gave him his nickname. "But it's no go. He's like the rock of Gibraltar. Says I need schooling. I suppose he's right, but oh, boy, what wouldn't I give to go with you into the jungles of the Amazon! There you'll be seeing all kinds of sights and having all sorts of adventures while I'm plugging away at my books. It's a tough deal!"

"It sure is," agreed Don. "I'd give the world to have you alongside of me."

"Some fellows have all the luck," complained Teddy. "You'll be gallivanting along the Amazon, while I'm sitting at a desk."

"There may be a time when I'll wish I were in as safe a place as a classroom," remarked Don, as they got out of the car and entered the house. "But come along now and wash, for I have a hunch that dinner is just about ready."

In a short time the boys were summoned to the table, where Teddy received as warm a welcome from Professor Bruce as he had from the other members of the family.

He found himself also an object of much interest to Jennie Jenks, who viewed him critically as she moved about the table, but on the whole approvingly.

"He's jest about as tall as Mister Don," she confided to Mrs. Roscoe, on one of her frequent migrations to the kitchen. "Only, of course, he ain't as handsome an' his hair is that red it's somethin' awful."

"Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," admonished Mrs. Roscoe. "Remember you've got red hair yourself, Jennie."

"It isn't red, it's auburn," protested Jennie. "A feller what took me to a picnic wunst told me so."

"He must have been color-blind," scoffed the housekeeper.

"An' he said," went on Jennie, ignoring the comment, "that it looked as if it had sunlight tangled in it. I kinda liked the sunshine part, but I told him he had a nerve to say it was tangled when I combed it regular every day. But he only laughed an' said he was speakin' paregorically."

At the table the conversation was brisk and animated. None of the Sturdys had seen Teddy since their return to America, and there was an abundance of questions

to be asked and answered on both sides.

As the dessert was being brought on, a thought struck Don.

"By the way, Uncle Frank, did you find out anything to-day about those shares belonging to Fred Turner?" he asked.

"Just enough to make me sure there is something crooked in the matter," was the response.

"I was sure there was!" exclaimed Don.

"It's a queer business," remarked Captain Sturdy. "It seems that Henry Glassbury, the head of the concern, is out of the country just now," he went on.

"Out of the country?" repeated Don regretfully.

"They told me at the office," continued the captain, "that he was in Brazil on a tour of inspection of the rubber tracts owned by the company."

"In Brazil!" exclaimed the professor. "Then, if we can't find him here, we may possibly run across him there. Though, after all, Brazil is as large as the United States, and it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. If we should find him, it would probably be by the merest chance."

"But that means, even at the very best, a delay of several months," put in Don. "And all that time Fred and Emily won't know where they stand."

"It's a queer thing," ruminated the captain. "Glassbury himself seems to stand very high in the business world. He's regarded not only as a rich man, but also as a man of integrity. And his company is highly rated by the commercial agencies. The shares are at a premium and command a ready sale in the market."

"Good!" cried Don. "Then Fred and Emily can turn their shares into money right away."

"They could if they had them," replied the captain significantly.

"But they have got them," declared Don. "That is, I suppose they have. Why shouldn't they have them? Their father left them to them when he died."

"They haven't them simply because they've been done out of them," was the reply. "One of those letters you gave me last night contained a request that Fred should forward the shares so that they could be exchanged for new shares under a pretended reorganization of the company then in progress."

"Why do you say 'pretended'?" asked the professor.

"Because that's what it was," replied the captain. "They told me at the office to-day that there had never been a reorganization of the company's affairs; that it had prospered from the beginning."

"How do you know that Fred sent the shares?" asked the professor.

"Because of a subsequent letter in the correspondence which acknowledges the

receipt of the shares and promises that new ones of the reorganized concern would be sent on as soon as they could be prepared."

"What did the officers of the company have to say about the whole affair?" asked Professor Bruce. "Did you show them the correspondence?"

"I did," replied the captain, "with the hint thrown in that it might be shown to the District Attorney later on unless the matter were straightened out. The manager seemed to be flabbergasted. Said he couldn't understand it at all. He sent to the files to get carbon copies of the correspondence, but none were found. Nor could they find any of the letters that Fred had written to the firm. If there had been any, they had disappeared."

"What signature was on the letters that Fred received?" asked Don, in growing perplexity.

"The initials 'H.G.' added to the typewritten name of the firm," replied the captain, taking from his pocket the package of letters. "Here they are, and you can see for yourself."

The others drew their chairs close to the captain's and all looked over the letters together. They were in typewriting except the two initials in script.

"H.G.," murmured the professor. "Of course that obviously suggests Henry Glassbury."

"And they were meant to convey that suggestion," affirmed the captain. "They may have been used as a smoke screen."

"I don't just get you, Uncle Frank," said Don.

"Well, let's look at it in two ways," was the reply. "Suppose Glassbury really wrote those letters. It was common knowledge that Henry Glassbury was head of the firm. Fred himself knew that. The use of the initials H.G. would suggest to Fred, as it has already suggested to us, that Henry Glassbury was the writer. That would allay any apprehension that Fred might have, if the latter seemed suspicious. It would seem to have the stamp of authority and responsibility. On the other hand, in case of trouble later on, Glassbury would have an alibi, as he might say that any number of men beside himself had the same initials, and there would be no positive proof that he was the writer of the letter."

"Catch the coon coming and going, as it were," said Don.

"Exactly," agreed the captain. "Now, on the other hand, suppose Glassbury knew nothing about it. Then the crook who did write the letter could inspire confidence in his victims by using those well known initials. He would not quite dare to write out the full name Henry Glassbury, because if he were caught he could be charged with forgery. But there'd be no such danger in using initials which might

apply to a thousand or a million men.

"Of course," the captain went on, after a moment's pause, "it's a very unusual thing to have only initials appended to a business letter. It isn't good business practice. My suspicions would be aroused at once if I got a letter of that kind from any business firm. But whoever wrote this stuff knew that he was dealing with young people unfamiliar with business forms. He took a chance and got away with it, bad luck to him."

"He ought to be tarred and feathered and ridden on a rail!" exclaimed Don hotly.

"The one thing I can't understand," said the professor, "is how that thing could be kept up, without some of Fred's letters to the firm getting into the hands of somebody besides the man, whoever he was, that was engineering the deal. In that case, the whole game would have been up at once."

"Yes," agreed the captain, "it does look as though the fellow at the other end were taking a mighty big chance. But, of course, he'd figured out some way to prevent that, and the fact that there are none of Fred's letters in the files of the firm show that he succeeded. Suppose, for instance, Glassbury were the rascal. He could have enclosed in his letters to Fred stamped and directed envelopes for reply that were addressed to him personally and marked 'personal.' In that case, they would be transmitted to him unopened and he could do what he liked with them."

"If, on the other hand, it were some one else that was trying to put it over on Fred, he could also have enclosed an envelope for reply that would have a name on it resembling that of the firm so nearly that Fred wouldn't notice the difference, and addressed to a private post office box number at which the man could call and get the letter. I'm only guessing at this, of course, but things like it are being done all the time."

"Well," said the professor, "the only thing that is certain, as far as we've got, is that Fred and Emily have been done out of their shares. And if, as you say, there is a ready market for them, they have probably been disposed of long since, and the crook has got away with the money."

"I'd like to take him by the throat and shake it out of him," snorted the captain savagely.

"Couldn't they be traced?" asked Don, with a sinking heart.

"They might," replied the professor. "I don't suppose that Fred has kept a record of the numbers on them, but they could probably be got from the office of the company that issued them. But if they are now in the hands of some one who purchased them in good faith—an 'innocent holder,' as the law calls him—it's very doubtful if we could recover them. At any rate, we couldn't without legal

proceedings, for the holder would put up a stiff fight to retain them."

"Then, Fred might as well say good-bye to them, I suppose," muttered Don bitterly.

"Not by a jugful!" said the captain, with determination. "We've only just begun to fight, and we'll keep it up to the finish. The thing to do is to find the crook. If it's Glassbury, it will be easy enough to get the money back, for he'd disgorge rather than go to jail. If it's some one else, we may be able to get a strangle hold on him that will bring about restitution. But we'd better get away from here now and let the women clear the table."

"It's a rank shame!" said Teddy to Don, as the two boys strolled out of doors to get a breath of fresh air. "Do two orphans out of their money like that! Your uncle was telling me all about them as we came up on the train."

"It's rotten business!" replied Don indignantly. "You'll feel all the worse about it when you see them and realize how badly they need the money. Emily is a nice girl and Fred's a good fellow. What makes it worse for them is that Fred's awfully lame, and that hurts his chances in getting anything to do."

"I'd like to see them," said Teddy. "Perhaps there may be some way I can help them."

"I'll take you over there to-morrow," volunteered Don. "I was going over there anyway to-morrow to see Fred and find out how his sister is getting on."

They were passing the kitchen door when Jennie stepped out on a household errand. She smiled at Don and looked sidewise at Teddy.

"Hello, Jennie," Don greeted her. "This is my friend, Teddy Allison, that you've heard me speak about, the one that was with us in the desert. Teddy, this is Jennie Jenks. You've heard me speak of her."

"Often," said Teddy. "In fact," he added, as the chewing gum incident, of which Don had told him, recurred to him, "no later than this very afternoon."

"Laws," said Jennie, as she simperingly acknowledged the introduction, "to think, Mr. Allison, that you've come all the way from the Sarah desert. An' I s'pose you seen the Seminary of the Ephalunts an' all them other things the perfessor talks about so much."

"Yes," replied Teddy, stifling a strong inclination to laugh, "I saw most of the things the others did."

"An' was you in the Hog Platter too when the shootin' was going on?" asked Jennie. "It always gives me the creeps when I hear about that."

"It was pretty lively there for a while," admitted Teddy, taking care not to catch Don's eyes.

"An' I s'pose you did a good deal of ridin' on cambles?" went on Jennie affably.

"Not so much," answered Teddy. "I never cared much for camels. They're ugly brutes. Always cross and discontented. Always got a hump on their back."

CHAPTER V
The Search For The Missing

The boys went on with a good-bye to Jennie, who was rather disappointed at the abrupt end of the conversation and chewed her gum abstractedly as she watched their retreating figures.

"Didn't I tell you she was a scream?" chuckled Don, when they had got out of earshot.

"She was getting better and better all the time," replied the grinning Brick. "She's an education in herself. I was getting new words every minute as she went along. And then you had to go and spoil it all by dragging me away."

"How could I help it?" laughed Don. "There's a limit to everything."

"I haven't had a chance yet," said Brick, "to ask you whether you've had any news from Brazil about your parents and sister."

All the merriment vanished from Don's face on the instant.

"Nothing at all," he answered. "We're still as much in the dark as we were the night your father told us what he knew about the sinking of the *Mercury*. We've done everything that seemed to promise the slightest hope of success. We've cabled or written to every consular office in Brazil. We've communicated with the local authorities of the cities, especially of the seaport towns. We haven't been able to get any news of the sailor who was picked up. We hardly thought we should, since we didn't know his name in the first place, and he's probably off on some sailing voyage anyway."

"How about that French-American professor?" asked Teddy. "I should think he'd be prominent enough for somebody to know about him."

"You would think so," replied Don. "But he seems to have vanished into thin air. We did find that he'd been in two different places a thousand miles or so apart, but each time he had left there for a trip into the jungle, and nobody knew his present whereabouts."

"It's too bad," murmured Teddy sympathetically. "Father and I are as much interested in the matter as if it were some one of our own. We can't forget what you did for us, and anything that touches you touches us."

"It's good of you to say so, Brick," returned Don, as he laid his hand on his friend's shoulder. "It's awfully hard to wait, but I haven't by any means given up hope. I'm counting a lot on this expedition. If we fail in that, I don't know how I can stand it! I'm thinking of my folks all the time, and almost every night I dream of them."

"Keep a stiff upper lip, old boy," Brick encouraged him. "I have a hunch that you'll find them this trip. There's nothing like being right on the spot. Fortune favors the brave, you know, and if that old saying's true, you ought to have heaps of luck."

About the middle of the forenoon the next day, Don got Dan Roscoe, who, in addition to being handy man about the place, acted as chauffeur, to get out the car and take them over to the Turner place, with the idea of later taking a spin through the country.

"Wish we could go without Dan," Don confided to Teddy, "but we're not in the Sahara Desert now—"

"The Sarah Desert, you mean," interrupted Teddy, and they both laughed.

"As I was saying when I was so rudely interrupted," continued Don, "we're not in the Sarah Desert, and the cops are rather particular about a fellow driving without a license, and I'm not old enough to get one yet. Dan says I can handle the car just as well as he can, but all the same I'll have to wait a while yet. But when I once do get the right to drive—oh, boy, just watch my smoke!"

Their road ran along the creek that had been so nearly the witness of a tragedy two days before. But it was no longer the turbulent, foaming torrent that it had been then. The waters had subsided, and although the level was a little higher than normal it ran along placidly between its banks.

"We're getting near the Turner place now," said Don presently. "You can just see the top of the house between the trees."

A minute later they had drawn up before the door. There was an exclamation of pleasure from the porch, where Fred and his sister were sitting. Don and Teddy jumped out and ran up the steps, where they received the most cordial of greetings.

"I'm more glad than I can tell to see you again!" exclaimed Fred, as he shook hands.

"And I too," put in Emily, who, though showing traces of the shock her adventure had been to her, was getting some of the roses into her cheeks again. "I've been aching for a chance to thank you for saving my life."

"Oh, we'll take those for granted," laughed Don. "The main thing is that you seem to be about all right again. I've brought a friend along with me," and he introduced Teddy to his new acquaintances.

The young people took to each other at once, and were soon chatting as merrily together as though they had been friends of long standing. Teddy devoted most of his attention to Emily, while Don took occasion to talk to Fred about the subject of the shares.

"Uncle Frank gathered from those letters that you sent the shares on to the man

who was writing to you," said Don.

"That's right," replied Fred. "I can see now that it was a foolish thing to do, but I had nobody to consult with, since my guardian's away, so I went ahead and did it."

"I don't suppose you have the numbers of the shares," went on Don.

"Yes, I have," was the unexpected reply. "I did have sense enough to make a list of them."

"That's a bit of luck," rejoined Don. "It will help my uncle in looking the matter up. Suppose you get the list for me before I go."

"I'll get them right now, while I think of it," said Fred, suiting the action to the word and going into the house.

It was only then that Teddy fully realized how pitiable was the lame boy's condition as he painfully hobbled along with the aid of his crutch trailing his crippled leg behind him. His face revealed to Don the shock it gave him, though he banished the look instantly and went on chatting with Emily.

In a few minutes Fred returned with the list.

"Here it is," he remarked, handing it to Don, who glanced at it and then stored it carefully away in his breast pocket. "I hope it will help. What does your uncle think of the matter, as far as he has gone with it?"

Don narrated some of the features of his uncle's quest, putting things in the best light he conscientiously could.

"Don't worry, Fred," he counseled cheerily.

"If you knew my uncle Frank, you'd know that when once he gets on the trail he hangs to it till the end. He doesn't start anything he can't finish. He holds on as a terrier holds on to a rat. And he'll get the rat that tried to down you, as sure as shooting."

"It's awfully good of him to take all this trouble for some one he hasn't seen," said Fred gratefully. "It's wonderful to find such friends just when one needs them most."

"That's when they come," replied Don. "By the way, Fred, my Uncle Amos is going to make a special hunt for that drug that he thinks will cure just such troubles as yours, probably the same one your father was hoping to get. He says that he heard about it only a little while ago at some scientific gathering, and he isn't going to rest until he finds it."

"Oh, if he only can!" ejaculated poor Fred, while Emily clapped her hands in delight.

"By the way," went on Don, "how about coming over to dinner at our house to-morrow night? My uncles would like to meet you and Emily, and your aunt as well."

"I'll be only too glad to come," said Fred.

"That will be splendid!" exclaimed Emily. "I'll run in and see what Aunt Mary says."

She returned in a moment, her face beaming.

"Auntie says she's sorry she can't accept, but it will be all right for us to go," she announced.

"Good!" said Don. "We'll send the car over for you."

The young people chatted a few minutes longer, then Don and Teddy took their leave.

"How do you like them?" asked Don of Teddy, as Dan threw in the clutch and the car rolled away.

"Fine," returned Teddy enthusiastically. "Emily's a mighty nice girl. You did a good thing when you pulled her out of the water."

"She is nice," agreed Don. "I like her lots. And she's just about the same age that Ruth would be now," he added softly.

"It's too bad that Fred is so badly crippled," said Teddy. "It made my heart ache. Just think how we would feel if we were in the same condition."

"I'd rather be dead!" declared Don.

"Same here," agreed Teddy. "Gee, Don, wouldn't it be great if you could get hold of that Glassbury, or whoever the rascal is, and make him give up those stocks. And then if you could cap it all by finding a drug that would cure Fred! Wouldn't it be wonderful?"

CHAPTER VI
Off For The Jungle

Don and his chum had a delightful ride through beautiful scenery, and got back just in time for dinner with appetites that would have made a wolf jealous.

"It beats all, the way them two boys do eat," Jennie confided to Mrs. Roscoe. "Talk about them Golcondas! I'll bet they ain't no better at swallowin' things. There's Mister Don has passed up his plate three times, an' his redheaded friend ain't far behind him. It's sump'n scand'lous."

"I'm glad of it," returned the housekeeper complacently. "It shows they like my cooking."

"I hope they don't get et themselves," said Jennie, shifting her gum. "Cap'n Frank was sayin' that there's cannonballs down in them jungles that eats people alive."

"Not so bad as that, I guess," said Mrs. Roscoe, with a twinkle in her eye. "I guess they roast them first. Or perhaps they boil them."

"Ugh, the horrid things!" shuddered Jennie.

The Turners came to dinner the next night, and instantaneously made on his uncles the effect that Don had hoped. They liked Emily at once, and the plight of poor Fred stirred them to the depths. And when, after a pleasant evening, the guests departed, they left in the minds of their hosts a still stronger determination to see that justice should be done to them and brightness brought into their lives.

The time passed rapidly now, as though on wings. All were engrossed with preparations for their departure. The captain and the professor spent most of their days in New York City, completing their arrangements for the trip. Everything had to be planned with the greatest care, for they knew that it would be too late to remedy mistakes or oversights when once they had plunged into the jungles and cut loose from civilization. Supplies had to be provided, additional weapons secured, great boxes and cages made ready for the snakes that they planned to capture.

Don's work was confined chiefly to securing his own individual outfit and to keeping up his rifle practice. In the latter, he was already an adept, owing to his own natural sureness of eye and nerve and the tutelage he had received from the captain, who was a marksman of international fame.

Teddy, too, already a fair shot, was anxious to learn from Don, and the two spent hours at a time on a range that Don had established in the back of the grounds, where there was no danger of injuring anybody, if a bullet should go astray.

"Gee, Don, how do you do it!" asked Teddy in admiration, one day, when Don,

scarcely taking time to aim after lifting his rifle to his shoulder, had made ten bull's-eyes in rapid succession.

"Part practice, part instinct," said Don, as he slipped more cartridges into his repeater. "All you need in order to do the same is to keep everlastingly at it. But, after all, shooting at an immovable target is only the first step. It's shooting at moving things that makes the real marksmen."

"I'll bet that, like our Revolutionary fathers, you could shoot the eye out of a squirrel," said Teddy.

"I don't know about that," laughed Don. "I don't care to shoot squirrels. They're too helpless. But when it comes to shooting the eye out of an alligator or an anaconda—that's different. I may have to do that more than once, and that's why I'm taking so much practice. There may come a time when the ability to do that will spell the difference between life and death."

"I'll bank on you to do it, if the time comes," said Teddy.

"Let's hope you're right," returned Don. "But talking about shooting at moving things, do you see those two tomato cans over there?"

"I see them," replied Teddy, "they're not moving."

"No," laughed Don. "But they will be in a minute if you do what I say."

"I'll bite," said Teddy. "What's the game?"

"I'll hold my rifle with the muzzle to the ground," said Don. "You take the two cans and go off to a distance of forty feet. Then throw them both in the air at once. I'll plug both of them before they reach the ground, and then I'll put another bullet in each of them before they stop rolling."

"Yes, you will!" jeered Teddy incredulously.

"Honest Injun," asseverated Don. "Go ahead and do it. You can easily prove whether I'm right or not."

Still unbelieving, Teddy did as directed. He threw the two cans into the air at once.

Don's rifle leaped to his shoulder.

Bang! Bang! Each can gave a convulsive jump as the bullet hit it.

Bang! Bang! The cans jumped again, as they rolled on at an accelerated pace.

Teddy's eyes were fairly popping out of his head as he ran to pick up the cans. Each had two clean holes drilled through it.

"Jumping Jehoshaphat!" gasped Teddy, as he held them up. "What do you mean by it? I thought you were only kidding when you said you'd do it."

"Uncle Frank can do the same trick with three cans," said Don modestly. "I'm only a false alarm compared with him."

"Shades of William Tell!" exclaimed Teddy. "I wouldn't have believed this if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. If the anacondas and alligators knew you were coming, they'd all be making a quick sneak for their hiding places. Somebody ought to send them a radio warning."

"Perhaps they wouldn't worry much," laughed Don. "They'd probably consider that they are quicker than I am. You have to be quick in the Brazilian jungles. It's a case of the quick or the dead."

Teddy stayed at the Sturdy home until within a week of the time fixed for sailing. Then a message came that the repairs had been completed at the school, and he was summoned to return. He went with the utmost reluctance, not only because he was leaving Don, but also the Turners, with whom he had become very friendly.

"Hard luck, Brick," agreed Don. "But of course we'll see each other again before our boat goes. You'll be down to the pier to see us off."

"I'll be there with bells on," promised Brick. "But, oh, if I were only going with you!" he groaned for the hundredth time, as he finally tore himself away.

"We've taken steps to help out the Turner youngsters, Don," his uncle Frank said to him, on the night before they were to leave Hillville for New York.

"How's that, Uncle Frank?"

"We've put the whole matter in Thompson's hands. We've left some funds with him that will tide them over the rough places till we get back."

"That was mighty good of you!" exclaimed Don, his eyes shining.

"Not a bit of it," returned the captain. "Your uncle Amos is in with me on that. We concluded that as we have no kids of our own, the least we could do was to look after these orphan children that Providence seemed to have put directly in our hands."

Don threw his arms impulsively about his uncle's neck, and then executed a war dance on the living room floor.

"Thompson has his directions," continued the captain. "They're not to know anything about the source of the funds. If they guess it, we can't help it."

As they were to leave for New York in the afternoon, in the morning Don had time to run over to the Turner place for a hurried farewell. He gave the brother and sister the news that his uncle had made considerable progress in tracing the matter of the shares and had left the following up of the case in the capable hands of Mr. Thompson. He hoped to meet Glassbury on the trip to Brazil, but whether he did or not, he would take up the matter as soon as he returned and press the thing to a conclusion.

Both Emily and Fred were warm in their expressions of gratitude for what Don

and his uncles had done for them, though as yet they had had no inkling of the other benefits that were to come from the same source.

"Good-bye, Emily," said Don, as he rose to go. "Don't fall into the water again," he added, with a laugh. "Good-bye, Fred. You're going to throw your crutch away when we get back. Remember what I said to you about that Marathon."

Emily wept openly and Fred's eyes were moist as they wrung Don's hand and stood on the porch watching him until he was out of sight.

There were tears too shed in the Sturdy home as the household help bade the voyagers farewell. They all loved Don, and were also attached to the captain and the professor.

"Good-bye, Don," said Dan Roscoe, gripping his hand. "If you're as good at catching snakes as you are in driving a car, you'll get back all right."

"And I hope you'll find your folks," said Mrs. Roscoe. "My dear master and mistress and dear Ruth—" Here her feelings overcame her and she fled into the house weeping.

"An' don't get et up by no Golcondas and no cannonballs," whimpered Jennie, wiping her eyes with her apron.

Their sincere grief at the parting affected all the members of the party, and they were more quiet than usual as the train bore them to the metropolis.

They reached New York before night, and as the steamer was to sail at ten o'clock the next morning, they drove to the dock in the Hudson River and went on board at once.

The *Southern Queen*, as the vessel was named, well deserved the title. She was a new steamer and the pride of the line under whose flag she sailed. All of her equipment was thoroughly up to date. She was as palatial in all her appointments as the transatlantic liners that ply between New York and European ports. The staterooms were large and luxurious, the great dining and lounging saloons were beautifully furnished, and, as they found out later, the meals were the finest that skilled chefs knew how to prepare.

There was an orchestra that played during meals and gave afternoon and evening concerts, a well stocked library, with all the latest books and magazines, and a great swimming pool, in which Don promised himself many a delightful hour as they neared the heat of the equator.

"Some class to this steamer," remarked Don, as he bestowed his belongings in his stateroom.

"They don't come any better," said the captain.

"Make the most of it, my boy," remarked the professor. "There won't be any

luxury when you strike the jungle."

The next morning dawned bright and clear, and Don, after an abundant meal, was on deck watching the busy preparations for starting when Teddy and Mr. Allison came on board. It was the first time Don had seen Mr. Allison since they had returned from the Sahara, and the greeting on both sides was exceptionally warm and hearty.

"So this young Alexander is off for new worlds to conquer!" said Mr. Allison, with a touch of jocularity. "Quite a different kind of world from the one we were last in."

"Yes," replied Don. "About the only similarity is in the heat. In both places you can cook eggs on the ground in the open."

"True," laughed Mr. Allison. "You won't feel any need of sweaters where you're going. You'll be almost on the direct line of the equator. But at least you'll have plenty of shade. And you'll have plenty of life too, for the place is fairly swarming with all varieties of bird and beast and reptile."

"Oh, we'll not be lonely," returned Don, grinning. "In fact, there'll probably be plenty of times when loneliness would seem a blessing."

"You mean when anacondas and boa constrictors get too sociable," suggested Mr. Allison. "I guess you're right. I've met those fellows before now, and sometimes under rather embarrassing circumstances. But you showed what mettle you're made of in the Sahara, and I'll bank on your getting through all right."

He went off to look for Don's uncles, and Don took Teddy through the ship and showed him all its attractive features.

"Do I look green?" asked Teddy suddenly.

"No," replied Don, in some surprise. "What do you mean!"

"Then I don't look as I feel," returned Teddy. "I'm green with envy."

All too soon the gong rang for visitors to go ashore. Then, while Teddy and his father stood on the pier waving their handkerchiefs in farewell, the great steamer moved majestically out into the stream and turned its nose toward the Battery.

As they moved down the river they could still see Teddy gesticulating and moving his lips.

"Listen to Teddy," said Don.

"Listen?" repeated Captain Sturdy. "You can't hear him."

"I don't need to," replied Don. "I know what he's saying."

"What?"

"Oh, how I wish I were going with you!"

CHAPTER VII
Nearing The Equator

Don's emotions were varied as he stood at the rail of the *Southern Queen* while she was making her way down the river and through the bay. His uncles had gone to their staterooms to arrange their belongings and read the letters that had come to them on that last morning, so that there was nothing to disturb the current of his thoughts.

These were tinctured in part by regret at leaving Teddy and other friends behind him. Besides, he was bidding farewell to his loved country, typified for him by the Goddess of Liberty that stood out in full relief against the sky, upholding the torch that enlightened the world. How many things might happen before he again beheld that glorious emblem!

But the predominant feeling was that of joy and exhilaration. Now at last he was actually embarked on the adventure to which he had looked forward with such unspeakable longing for so many weeks. Now every turn of the screw was taking him toward the land where he might find the parents and sister who were so inexpressibly dear to him. He had seen Ruth calling to him in his dream. Would he now see her in reality? The thought made his blood thrill and his pulses quicken.

The stately vessel threaded its way through the teeming commerce of the river, crossed the bay, reached the tumbling billows of the Atlantic, turned her nose southward, and straightened out for the long run to Para, the Brazilian port for which she was bound.

Don was a seasoned sailor by this time, and the long ocean swells did not affect him in the least. One by one, however, the crowd that had gathered at the rail slipped away, their faces a greenish white, and sought the seclusion of their staterooms, from which many of them did not emerge until two or three days later.

"There'll be plenty of room at the tables for a while," Don mused to himself, with a smile. "Here's where the steamship company saves money."

At dinner, Don and his uncles were seated at the captain's table. The autocrat of the ship was a grizzled old seadog, Merriman by name, a man of great skill as a navigator and of wide experience. He was an entertaining talker and full of tales of the seven seas, and Don enjoyed his conversation immensely.

"So you're going up the Amazon," Captain Merriman observed, when he had learned the purpose of the party. "Well, it's a great river and Brazil is a great country. One thing is certain," he added, with a smile, "there won't be any monotony in your journey. You'll have to keep your eyes open all the time. Even when you sleep, it will

be just as well to keep one eye open, because there are lots of other eyes that will be watching you all the time. Some of them will be animal and others will be human."

"We don't imagine it will be in the nature of a picnic," remarked Captain Sturdy. "We're pretty well prepared for anything that may happen."

"You two men no doubt can take care of yourselves," agreed the master of the ship. "But with a boy to look after—" here he gazed dubiously at Don.

"Don't worry about the boy," said Captain Sturdy dryly. "That boy has fought with bandits in the Sahara Desert. He can hit a coin with a rifle bullet at forty yards. There's no full grown man I'd rather have at my back in a tight place."

Don blushed to the ears, and Captain Merriman looked at him with a new respect. And that respect grew visibly as Captain Sturdy gave a brief sketch of the way Don had borne himself in the auto trip across the desert.

"And that brings me to another point," Don's uncle went on. "As a business proposition, Professor Bruce and I are going into the jungles to collect big snakes and rare drugs. But a thing that's more important to all of us is to find out, if we can, the whereabouts of my brother and his wife and daughter. You've heard perhaps of the steamer *Mercury*—"

"The one that went down off Cape Horn?" interrupted the captain, with quickened interest.

"Yes," replied Captain Sturdy. "My brother and his wife and daughter sailed on that ship. For a long time we feared that all on board had been lost—"

"Not all," said Captain Merriman.

"What do you know about it?" broke in the professor, while Don leaned forward with breathless interest.

"Why, not very much," replied Captain Merriman, cudgeling his memory. "I had a sailor once on my ship that was in that wreck. He was picked up and taken to Brazil with others of the passengers and crew."

"Do you know the names of any who were rescued?" asked the professor eagerly.

"No," was the answer. "I wasn't especially interested at the time and I didn't inquire. I wish I had now."

"Did he say whether there were any women or girls in the party?" asked Don.

"Not that I remember," replied the captain.

"What was the sailor's name?" asked Captain Sturdy.

"Lopez, I think," was the reply. "Miguel Lopez, or something like that. I can't be sure offhand. But I have the crew lists that cover that time and I'll look up the name."

"I don't suppose you know where he is now?" said the professor.

"Not the faintest idea," replied Captain Merriman. "He left the ship at Para. But of course that's not much of a clew, for fellows of that kind drift all over the world. I only wish I could be of more assistance to you."

"You've been of great assistance already," said the professor gratefully. "You've given us some one to look for, anyway. Now, just one other question. Have you ever heard of a scientist named Reynard, Professor Webb Reynard? We understand that he was rescued from the *Mercury*."

Captain Merriman looked blank.

"Never heard of him," he said. "It's an entirely new name to me."

And with this they had to be content for the present. But it was something, and filled them with new hope. They had at least something definite, something that they had not known before, something that would enable them to make intelligent inquiries. And the information, coming at the very start of their journey, seemed to them a good omen for the future.

The next morning at breakfast, Captain Merriman told them that the name of the rescued seaman was what he had surmised it was the night before—Miguel Lopez.

"It's a slender enough clew," he said regretfully, "but I hope it will do you some good. It's a very common name in Brazil and in the Spanish-American countries, and I suppose there are thousands that bear it."

"Many a mystery has been unraveled from a beginning just as slight," returned the professor. "It gives us at least something to start with, and we're grateful."

The next few days were full of interest for Don. He explored the ship from end to end, and found the officers courteous and amiable and willing to give him all the information he desired. Especially was he interested in the wireless room, for he himself had a radio set and was well versed in the marvels of the wonder science.

Day by day the weather became warmer as the ship neared the tropics. There was plenty to watch as Don stood by the rail, for the waters were teeming with life. Flying fish leaped from their native element, their scales reflecting all the colors of the rainbow before they dropped again into the water. Porpoises in huge schools gamboled in the waves. Now and then the boy caught glimpses of sharks swimming along lazily near the surface, their wicked eyes slanted up at the ship as though waiting for some luckless sailor to fall overboard.

For the first week the weather held fair. The boisterous Atlantic seemed to have gone to sleep.

Then, toward evening on one day, a change was noted. The day had been intolerably hot. Scarcely a breath was stirring. Had the ship been a sailing vessel, it

would have been becalmed. The stewards were kept busy serving cooling drinks to the passengers, who sweltered in their deck chairs under the awnings.

As night came on, however, slight gusts of wind began to raise ripples on the oily swells of the ocean. They were hailed gratefully by the passengers, but Don noted that the officers of the ship did not seem to share in the satisfaction. There was a good deal of uneasiness manifested, a scanning of the sky where great banks of clouds were heaped against the horizon, frequent consultations and readings of the barometer. The crew were kept on the jump, awnings were taken down and everything loose on the decks made snug and shipshape.

"Looks as though a storm were coming," remarked Don to his Uncle Amos.

"Shouldn't wonder," was the reply.

"I'll be glad to see it," said Don. "I've never yet seen a real storm at sea."

"I have," replied the professor. "That's one of the reasons I never want to see another. It's bad enough anywhere, but in these tropical waters—"

He did not finish the sentence, but his silence was eloquent.

But the storm took time in coming. Don read a little after dinner, listened to the orchestra for a while, and then went to bed a little earlier than usual.

He dropped to sleep almost immediately. The next thing he knew he was hurled from his berth as though sent from a catapult and landed on the floor of the cabin!

CHAPTER VIII
In The Grip Of The Storm

In his dazed and bruised condition, Don could not realize for a moment what had happened to him.

He scrambled to his feet, and instantly went down again. The vessel was pitching and rolling fearfully. There was a roar like thunder that seemed as if it would split his eardrums.

He crept over the floor, grasping at whatever he could, until he reached the door of the cabin. Then he caught hold of the knob, and with this to steady him he gradually dragged himself to an upright position.

The vessel groaned and shivered as it rose on the crest of a mountainous wave and then, with a sickening sweep, sank down into the trough of the sea. It reared and plunged like a frightened thing held in the grip of a giant and trying vainly to escape.

Don, as he looked about the narrow cabin, had the sensation of being trapped. If the ship should sink, this room would prove his tomb. He had a wild desire to get out in the open.

He knew that the vessel was new and staunch, but he also knew that vessels just as staunch had sunk and left no trace. Anything built by human hands was, after all, a puny thing when in the grasp of the elements.

With great difficulty he gathered enough clothing to cover him and opened the door.

He stepped into the passageway, and was nearly swept from his feet by the wind that rushed through the corridor as though it were a funnel. But he steadied himself and pressed forward toward the companionway that led to the deck.

He was passing the room occupied by his uncles when their door opened and they stood framed in the doorway.

"That you, Don?" asked Captain Sturdy, in some surprise. "I was hoping that you hadn't been awakened."

"I might not have been if I hadn't been thrown from my berth," replied Don, with a grin. "That waked me up good and proper."

"Weren't hurt, I hope?" put in the professor anxiously.

"Nothing except some barked shins, I guess," replied Don. "Luckily I didn't go out on my head."

"Where are you going now?" asked his Uncle Frank.

"I thought I'd get out somewhere that would let me see something of the storm,"

was the reply. "Anything is better than being cooped up in that stuffy room when a gale like this is raging."

"We'll go with you," said Captain Sturdy. "I don't suppose there is any real danger, but in case of trouble I want that we should all be together."

With infinite difficulty, owing to the tossing of the vessel, uncles and nephew made their way along until they reached the deck. Each selected a stout stanchion and held on to it with a deathlike grip. Then they turned their gaze out to sea.

It was a terrifying spectacle. The waves were running mountain high, their dark green masses topped with foam. The steamer's head was kept directly toward them, for, big as the vessel was, she would have been instantly swamped had she been broadside to the seas.

Again and again it seemed as though she were doomed to be submerged, as the tremendous billows came at her, head on. But she climbed them gallantly, mounting to their peak and sliding down what seemed to be an endless slope, only to repeat the climb and descent a moment later.

But not always did she resist the savage onslaught. Every once in a while, a wave still more huge than its fellows, broke over the bows, hurling tons of water on the lower decks and sweeping them from end to end. One such wave tore three of the lifeboats loose from their fastenings and carried them into the angry spume of the vessel's wake. Another smashed the rail and bore off a section of a hundred feet.

It was a terrible demonstration of the ocean's power and fury, and, combined with the hideous roar of the gale, was calculated to strike terror to the heart. That it had done so to many, Don was able to assure himself by a glance through the lighted windows of the saloon. There scores of passengers had congregated, the men pale and excited, the women weeping or wringing their hands and gathering their children close to them. Many of them were on their knees, praying.

"You were saying only this afternoon that you'd like to see a storm," said the professor to Don. "How do you feel about it now?"

"I certainly am getting what I hoped for," admitted Don. "Still, I wouldn't have missed the experience for anything. But this sure is a sockdolager."

"It's more than a storm, it's a hurricane," said Captain Sturdy. "I've never seen a fiercer one in all my life, and I've seen a great many. Great Scott! look at that thing yonder!"

Don looked, and for a moment his heart stood still.

Some distance off, moving directly toward the ship, was a great whirling cone of water that seemed almost to reach the clouds. Faster and faster it came toward them, fairly leaping like a wild beast eager to fall upon its prey.

That the officers of the ship had seen it too and recognized its deadly menace was evident from the frantic jangling of bells in the engine room signaling for full speed ahead. The vessel leaped forward in response.

Don felt the convulsive grip of his Uncle Frank on his arm.

"Stick close to me, my boy," his uncle muttered. "If that waterspout hits us, the vessel's doomed."

Nearer and nearer came the whirling cone with a roar that made all the previous thunder of the gale seem as nothing. On and on, remorselessly it rushed, while the spectators watched it with bated breath and sinking hearts. Ten seconds more would decide their fate.

Now it was towering over them and they involuntarily closed their eyes and waited for the shock.

With a hideous roar it swept past the stern, missing it by a bare ten feet and leaving behind it a maelstrom in which the great vessel tossed like a chip, barely able to maintain steerageway in the boiling caldron.

Captain Sturdy's grasp on Don's arm relaxed.

"A close shave," he muttered huskily. "We'll probably never again be nearer death and live."

"The vessel would have gone down like a stone if that had hit her," said the professor soberly.

An officer came along and told them they would have to go inside. They did so reluctantly and joined the haggard and anxious throng in the saloon. Here they did their best to reassure the frightened passengers, not only by words but by their own cheerful and confident bearing, and were measurably successful.

Gradually the storm blew itself out, the vessel ceased its frightful pitching and rode on a steadier keel, and the passengers retired again to their rooms, though few slept till morning.

Don was an exception, however, and soon dropped off to sleep, to find the sun shining brightly through the porthole of his cabin when he awakened.

"Still a glutton for storms?" asked his Uncle Frank, with a smile, when they met at the breakfast table.

"Oh, my appetite is pretty well satisfied," replied Don, with a grin. "But all the same I'm glad I had the experience now that we've come through it safely."

"I've sailed the seas for thirty years," put in Captain Merriman, "and while I've been in storms that endured for days, I never saw one that was fiercer while it lasted. And when I saw that waterspout coming, I thought we were booked for Davy Jones' locker. Things looked hopeless for a few minutes."

For the rest of the trip the Atlantic was calm and the ship kept steadily on its way. But the heat grew steadily greater, and as they approached the equator Don spent most of his time, both in the mornings and the afternoons, splashing about in the swimming pool.

"Make the most of it, my boy," remarked the professor. "You won't do much swimming when you get to Brazil."

"I thought it was about the best watered place on earth," responded Don.

"So it is," agreed the professor. "But what with the alligators, the anacondas, the electric eels and other pests that swarm in the rivers, it's a mighty unhealthy place in which to bathe. No sensible man goes into a Brazilian river unless he falls in."

A few days later Don, coming on deck, was struck by the peculiar color of the water. He bent over the ship's rail.

"I never saw the ocean look like this," he remarked to his Uncle Amos.

"No, and you never will," replied the professor, with a quizzical smile.

"What do you mean?" asked Don quickly.

"Simply, that we're not on the ocean," was the reply.

CHAPTER IX
Up The Amazon

Don looked around him in some bewilderment.

"If we're not on the ocean, where are we?" he asked, straining his eyes to catch some glimpse of land.

"On the Para River," was the response; "or the Tocantins, if that suits you better. Both names are applied to it."

"Widest river I ever saw," remarked Don.

"It is remarkably wide at its mouth, but it grows narrower as we get further on," agreed the professor. "As to the color of the water, you will see almost every variety in the spectrum before you get through—violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. You won't miss black either, for the Rio Negre looks like ink. It's due, of course, to the different colors of the land and the vegetation through which the Brazilian rivers run."

"If we've already entered the river, it won't be long before we land, I suppose," said Don.

"Some time about noon or a little later," was the reply. "The city of Para is about seventy-five miles from the river's mouth. It might be a good idea to get your traps together, so that there won't be any delay in getting ashore."

"How long shall we stay in Para?" asked Don.

"Perhaps a couple of days," replied the professor. "We'll have to complete our equipment there. It's the last city of any account that we'll come across before we get into the jungles."

The jungles! The word sent a thrill through Don's veins. At last he was on the very brink of the great adventure, was in the Brazil of mystery and romance and peril and—what appealed to him most strongly of all—in the country where he might find some trace of his parents and his sister Ruth. His pulses throbbed with impatience and he could hardly wait to get ashore. He grudged the time they would have to spend in Para. He wanted to plunge at once into the wilderness.

But he had to control himself and possess his soul in patience, for after they had landed at Para there was much to do. Letters of credit had to be changed into Brazilian money. Strong boxes and cages had to be secured for the monster snakes that they were out to get. Permits for the work they wanted to do had to be secured from the authorities. And inquiries had to be made to find out if possible the whereabouts of the sailor Lopez.

All this would have taken time under the best of conditions. But Don soon found

that to get anything done in a hurry in that country was practically impossible. The natives did not know the meaning of the word. Everywhere they came up against delays that were maddening to Don.

"They say that home is the sweetest word in the English language," remarked Don, after a peculiarly exasperating example of this dawdling. "But I know what is the dearest word to a Brazilian."

"What is it?" asked the captain, with a twinkle in his eye.

"To-morrow."

"That's about right," agreed Captain Sturdy. "But it's the same in all Latin-American countries. They simply haven't any idea of the value of time. The calendar means nothing to them, and they think we North Americans are crazy to hustle as we do. But when we are in Rome we must do as the Romans do, and we'll have to make the best of it."

The two days they had expected to stay in Para lengthened into a week. But this had some compensations, for on the evening of the sixth day the professor came in with as much excitement as he ever permitted himself to show.

"What's up, Amos?" asked Captain Sturdy.

"Anything good to tell us?" inquired Don eagerly, for he knew that the professor, who spoke Portuguese, the language of Brazil, like a native, had been spending most of the last two days down on the waterfront trying to get some information about the sailor rescued from the *Mercury*.

"Yes," replied the professor, as he seated himself. "I've found a man at last who knew something of the Lopez that we've been hunting for."

Don bounded from his chair.

"Oh, tell us, Uncle Amos," he implored. "Quick! Please! I can't wait!"

"I ran across the man just an hour ago, after I'd been talking to all sorts and conditions of men—captains, mates, stevedores and sailors—almost all day, and had begun to think that it wasn't any use," explained Professor Bruce. "But this man brightened up at once. Sure, he knew Miguel Lopez. He had sailed with him on a voyage from which the ship returned only a few days ago. Had this Lopez ever been in a shipwreck? Yes, he had heard him speak of it. What was the name of the ship that had gone down? He couldn't remember that. The wreck had taken place somewhere about Cape Horn. Was the ship the *Mercury*? Oh, yes, that was it, the *Mercury*, he remembered it now. Who had been rescued with Lopez? He didn't know, a boatload, quite a lot of people."

The professor stopped for a moment to regain his breath.

"Oh, do go on, Uncle Amos," Don begged, his heart thumping like a

triphammer.

"I asked him," continued the professor, "whether there had been any women or girls in the party. He didn't know. His comrade hadn't mentioned any, as far as he remembered. Where was this Lopez now? He had gone up the Amazon to spend a few days with his family before starting on another voyage. What was the name of the place where he lived? He didn't know."

Here a cry of bitter disappointment came from Don.

"Almost as much in the dark as ever!" he exclaimed, sinking back in his chair. "Oh, if we could only have got hold of him before he left Para."

"Hold your horses," counseled the professor. "I haven't got through yet."

Don looked up with renewed hope.

"As soon as I had got out of him all he knew and had given him some money for his trouble, I made at once for the captain of the ship on which Lopez had served, which, luckily, was still in the harbor. He was very courteous and obliging, and got out for me the ship's list which had the home town of Lopez on it. They have to have that, you know, so that in case of death they may notify his people."

"And the town?" asked Don.

"Is Manato," was the reply. "It seems it's a small place, but of some importance as a market and shipping place for rubber. And, by a bit of luck, it's a stopping place for the little steamer that we're going on up the Amazon. So, in all probability, we'll be able to get in touch with Lopez."

Don sprang up in jubilation and danced about the room.

"I'll never kick again about the slow way they do things here," he cried. "If we'd got away from here at the time we wanted to, we wouldn't have got this information."

"So even laziness can be sometimes a blessing in disguise," remarked the captain, who was almost as delighted as his nephew, though somewhat less demonstrative.

Now the party was more eager than ever to be off. Still one more day had to be spent in Para. Then, early on the following morning, they went on board the river steamer *Aldebaran* and before long found themselves in one of the mouths of the Amazon and beginning the ascent of that mightiest of all rivers on the globe.

To call it a river seemed at first to Don absurd. Because of its enormous breadth, it might more accurately, he thought, be described as a small sea. At times the river widened so that he could not see the farther shore except by the help of glasses. Sometimes even these failed to reveal more than a boundless expanse of water, muddy water for the most part, strewn in places with mighty logs brought down by

the current which it required all the dexterity of the captain of the little steamer to avoid.

"If the Mississippi is the father of waters, this must be the grandfather," remarked Don, as he sat on the deck under an awning with one of his uncles on each side of him.

"There is nothing in the whole world to be compared with it," observed the professor. "Not only is it enormous in itself, but it is the heart of a huge system that drains the greater part of South America. It is linked to the Orinoco by the Casiquiare, and it has been said that a boat entering the mouth of either one of those two rivers could explore two-thirds of the entire continent. And further, if this supposed boat did not draw more than two feet of water, it could travel over one hundred thousand miles of waterways."

Don gave a long whistle.

"Why," he said, "that would be equivalent to going four times around the globe!"

"Precisely," answered the professor. "And what is true of the Amazon and its tributaries is true of almost everything else in this wonderful country. Everything is on a gigantic scale. The forests are greater and thicker than anywhere else on earth. There are thousands of square miles that have never been trodden by a human foot, simply because even an Indian could not force his way through the brush and the trees. Nowhere else does vegetation flourish so abundantly. You've heard the expression that you could almost 'see a plant grow.' Well, that is literally true here. You can cut a path in the morning through tangled grasses, and when you come back in the afternoon the path has disappeared. Sometimes the grass grows three feet high in twenty-four hours."

"And what is true of plant life is true of reptile life, as you'll soon have an opportunity of finding out," put in the captain. "Nowhere in the world are there such snakes and lizards and alligators as there are here. There are lizards six feet long, alligators twenty-five feet long, anacondas from thirty to forty feet long."

"Jennie ought to be here listening to you," said Don, with a grin. "She'd throw a fit."

Early the next day they reached Manato, where the captain of the boat told them they would stay for several hours while discharging and taking on cargo.

The vessel had scarcely been moored to the wharf before Don and his uncles were ashore, in eager search for the sailor Lopez.

For nearly an hour they sought in vain, but at last a small boy was found who knew where he lived, and who volunteered to act as their guide, in return for a silver piece that represented more money than he had ever seen in his life.

He led them to a poor quarter of the town and stopped at last in front of a little cabin before which several barefooted half-clothed children were playing.

"There's where he lives," he said.

They went up the path and knocked at the door. It was opened almost at once by a lean, medium-sized man, whose naturally swarthy complexion was still further deepened by the bronze that came from a seafaring life. A bandana tied over his forehead and a pair of huge earrings gave a piratical suggestion, though there was nothing savage in his face or bearing.

He looked in some surprise from one to the other of the unexpected visitors.

"Good morning," said the professor in Portuguese. "Is this Miguel Lopez?"

"Si, senhor," was the reply.

Don's heart bounded violently. Here at last was the man they had come thousands of miles to see, the man who had been on the ill-fated *Mercury*, the man who perhaps could give him news of those who were dearer to him than life!

CHAPTER X
The Anaconda Strikes

"We have some questions to ask you," went on the professor. "May we come in?"

The man hesitated a moment, looking keenly from one to the other, and then, apparently satisfied with the scrutiny, stood aside and asked them to enter.

They went into a poorly furnished room, which was apparently one of three of which the cabin consisted. They caught a glimpse of a woman with a baby in her arms just disappearing behind the door that led into the adjoining room.

They seated themselves, and there was a pause for a moment that Professor Bruce was the first to break.

"We have come a long distance," he said, "to find out, if we can, something about the *Mercury* that went down off Cape Horn. We understand that you were in that wreck."

A gleam of interest and reminiscence came into the sailor's eyes.

"I was," he said. "But the saints preserved me! I have burned a candle for my deliverance before the shrine of Our Lady Of Mercy at Para."

"I am glad you were saved," continued Professor Bruce. "I understand that you were picked up in an open boat, and that there were a number of other people with you?"

"Yes," the man assented, "there were eighteen or twenty in my boat."

"Do you know whether any of them were named Sturdy?" the professor asked, while Don leaned forward eagerly for the answer.

But the man's face was a blank.

"I do not know," he replied, throwing out his hands with a deprecatory smile. "I was only a sailor and I did not know the names of the passengers. Besides, I had only been on the *Mercury* for a few days. I had been in another wreck and had only been picked up by the *Mercury* three days before she herself sank."

"Were there any women or girls in your boat?" was the next question.

"Yes," Lopez replied, "there were two women and one girl. One of the women was the mother of the girl."

Don drew from his pocket pictures of his father, mother and sister and gave them to the professor who in turn handed them over to the sailor.

"Were any of these people in your boat?" he asked.

Lopez examined them with great care. His face lighted up as he saw the photograph of Ruth.

"That looks something like the girl," he said, and Don in his great delight could have hugged him.

"I do not know the others," he said.

"That," commented the professor, "is not surprising, seeing that they must have looked very different under the hardships of shipwreck from what they do in these photographs. Where were you landed after you were picked up?" he asked his host.

"At Bahia," was the answer. "One thing I remember," he volunteered. "I said I did not know the names. But I do remember one name. It was Reynard."

"Reynard!" repeated the professor. "What became of him?"

"I do not know," the sailor replied. "He went somewhere in the jungle country."

"You don't know just where?" queried his interrogator.

"No," replied Lopez, with a vague gesture that might have included the whole of Brazil, "I cannot tell."

It was evident that they had extracted from him all the information he had to give, and they reluctantly prepared to depart. The captain took some money from his pocket and handed it to the sailor, who received it gratefully. They thanked him in return and departed.

"Something, at any rate," commented Captain Sturdy, as they made their way back to the *Aldebaran*.

"I should say it was!" ejaculated Don jubilantly. "He was almost sure that Ruth was in the party. And he said that the girl had her mother with her. And we can be pretty sure that if mother and Ruth were there, father was too. They'd keep close beside him in a wreck."

His heart sang with gladness. For months he had been clutching at straws. But this seemed much more than a straw.

Of course the mystery still remained. If they had been saved from the hungry maw of the sea, why had they not cabled? They could easily have done this from Bahia. And why later had they not returned home? They must have known what anxiety was torturing the hearts of those who loved them.

These were questions that still awaited an answer. They could only wait and search and hope. But enough had been vouchsafed them to fill their hearts with renewed hope as they resumed their journey up the river.

For some days they followed the windings of the Amazon, until navigation grew more difficult and they had reached the heart of the jungle country. At a point where a tributary debouched into the main stream, they left the steamer to pursue their trip by canoe.

They sought out the head riverman of the little town that stood at the junction of

the two rivers, and by a liberal expenditure of money and effort enlisted him in the work of securing for them the right kind of canoe and a crew of five men familiar with river voyaging, four to serve at the oars and one at the rudder.

"Pretty staunch looking craft," commented Captain Sturdy, as they caught their first sight of the canoe that the mayor had provided.

"Just what the doctor ordered!" exclaimed Don.

"Looks as though she'd stand hard knocks," remarked the professor, "and that's a very important quality in these snag-infested streams."

"What shall we call her?" asked Don.

"Leave that to you," replied the captain, and the professor nodded in agreement.

"Let's call her the *Teddy* then," suggested Don.

"But a boat's a she," objected the captain. "More appropriate perhaps to call her the *Jennie Jenks*," he added, with a grin.

Don laughed, but stuck to his first choice.

"Many a boat has a masculine name," he said. "And Teddy wanted so badly to be with us that this will be the next thing to it."

So *Teddy* it was, and as it proved an ideal exploring boat, Teddy Allison had no reason to be ashamed of his namesake.

The boat was about thirty-six feet long and was stoutly constructed. The hull was made of *ita-uba*, or ironwood, noted for strength and elasticity, the ribs were of *jarana* wood, similar to the oak, and the gunwales were of *acapu*, very tough and durable. About six feet back of the bow the deck began, and this extended to the storeroom, which was capable of holding a ton or more of supplies and took in the whole width of the boat. In the stern there was a wide-bladed hinge rudder, governed by a stout tiller.

The crew that had been gathered consisted of strong, lithe natives of mixed Indian and Portuguese descent, who answered respectively to the names of Pedro, Ximenes, Arando, Manuel, and Cupira. They were vouched for by the mayor of the town as faithful and hard-working and thoroughly familiar with the Amazon forests, in which they had lived all their lives.

Apart from their food supplies, which were ample, Captain Sturdy had stocked up with many staples which he expected to use as presents and for purchases, for money was of little use in the district where they were going. There were matches and fishhooks, for which the Indians were extremely eager, saws and axes, hammers and nails, sugar, salt, beans, flour, coffee, condensed milk and other edibles to be used in barter.

They had expected to start early in the morning, but owing to delays, which they

had begun to find were inseparable from everything Brazilian, they did not really begin their journey till about an hour after noon.

The first reaches of the river were comparatively wide and clear, and as the rowers bent sturdily to the oars they had covered a gratifying distance before the approach of dusk compelled them to look for a landing place.

They found what looked to be a suitable one on the shore of a little inlet that bore traces of previous human habitation. There was a deserted cabin near the shore, over which extended the branches of a large tree. The rest of the trees and underbrush had been cleared away for a little space by some adventurous and hopeful soul, who had perhaps planned to establish a small plantation, but had given up the project.

They secured the boat and clambered ashore, where they soon had a good fire going and cooked an appetizing meal.

Moved by curiosity, they examined the deserted cabin. It was in a dilapidated condition and the door hung rotting on its hinges. There was no furniture except a wooden bed with a mattress woven of heavy rope. Half of the roof had fallen away, and over this protruded the boughs of the great tree left standing in the clearing.

"Not much of a bed," remarked the captain, as he surveyed the rope mattress, none too clean and marked with red stains that seemed to be rust, "but it's the last one you'll be likely to see for a long time, Don, and you'd better bunk in it to-night. Amos and I are old campaigners, and will curl up near the fire."

They sat for a time chatting about the fire and listening to the insect din that made the Brazilian night vocal. Then, as they wanted to start at dawn the next morning, they turned in early, leaving the men to stand guard by turns and replenish the fire so as to keep wild beasts at a distance.

The novelty of the situation kept Don awake for a long time after the others had settled to slumber. He lay on his rude rope mattress, watching the moonlight shining through the branches of the tree.

Drowsily he noted how thick and knotted was the bough that hung over the cabin. Were all Brazilian trees as big as that?

He closed his eyes sleepily and opened them again. The bough seemed to be bending, moving, twisting.

Probably the wind was rising, causing the branch to sway.

Once more his eyelids drooped and opened again. Something had come between him and the moon. Was it a passing cloud? No, something heavier than that, thicker than that, something sinuous, sinister, horrible—

With a startled cry Don hurled himself from the bed and rolled under it.

At the same instant there was a hideous hiss, a whistling rush, and the anaconda struck!

CHAPTER XI
Capturing A Monster

The great snake struck the bed with a terrific thud. But lightning-quick as its stroke had been, it came a fraction of a second too late.

There was a terrible commotion as the huge reptile thrashed around the narrow confines of the cabin.

Don's rifle stood near the door and the writhing folds of the serpent were between him and it. He did not dare emerge from his temporary hiding place for fear those terrible coils would close around him. Every moment he expected to see the horrid head and fiery eyes coming under the mattress to close upon him.

But his revolver had been close beside him on the bed, and now he reached carefully up and felt for it. He got it! He drew it and was about to fire into the twisting folds when he heard the shouts of voices and the sound of running feet. Then he dared not fire, for fear of hitting his rescuers.

"Look out! Look out!" he shouted, with all his might. "There's a big snake loose in here!"

The next instant Captain Sturdy burst in, with the professor close on his heels. The glare from the fire outside streamed through the doorway and revealed Don crouching beneath the bed. The captain leaped over the reptile's body, grabbed Don by the collar and pulled him out into the open through the doorway. Then he raised his rifle to shoot, and tried to find the snake's head as a target.

But no report followed. The next instant the captain dropped his rifle with a shout.

"He's caught himself!" he cried. "He's struck through the blankets and he's tangled in the cords of the bed. Quick, Amos! A piece of rope! Quick!"

The professor rushed to the boat and was back in a moment with a coil of rope. With expert quickness, yet with great care, lest he be caught in the thrashing coils, the captain slipped the rope about the monster's neck and made it taut.

Tighter and tighter he pulled until the writhing folds at last straightened out and lay motionless.

In the meantime, following his hurried directions, Don and the professor, with the aid of the crew, had brought up one of the big boxes, reinforced with strips of iron, that had been designed for the purpose for which it was now to be used.

Seizing a machete, the captain cut away the enshrouding blanket and cords in which the snake's head had become entangled. Then by the united efforts of all, the great reptile was pulled out of the door and his limp body dumped into the box, after

the captain had loosened the rope about the neck.

In a trice the cover was fastened on securely, and then for the first time they dared draw a long breath. Their faces were bathed in perspiration and their nerves were in a jumpy condition.

Captain Sturdy threw his arms about Don.

"Dear boy!" he said, his voice husky with emotion. "Thank God that you escaped a horrible death!"

The professor was quite as deeply stirred.

"It was a terribly narrow escape," he said. "I don't dare to think of what might have happened."

"What surely would have happened if I had dropped off to sleep," said Don, and he went on to tell of the moment it had flashed on him what that shadow against the moon meant.

"And now I know what those stains that looked like rust were on the cords of the bed," he concluded, with a shudder. "Those probably were the blood stains of some poor fellow that lay down to sleep there and wasn't as lucky as I was."

"Of more than one, likely enough," said the captain. "Probably the snake has chosen his haunt in that tree just for that purpose. That broken roof was just made for him."

"Do you suppose he's still alive?" asked Don, as he glanced at the box that contained the captive.

"Oh, yes," said the captain. "I took care not to choke him too much, just enough for him to become unconscious. They're pretty tenacious of life, and he'll come to in a little while. Whopping big specimen he is too. Twenty-five feet if he's an inch, likely enough a little more. He'll be a prize specimen in my collection. And the joke of it is, he trapped himself."

"Do you think his mate is anywhere around?" asked the professor, as he glanced at the tree.

"Hardly likely," was the response. "If it had been, it would have probably been down to share in the racket. But all the same, it will be just as well to steer clear of the tree while we stay in this neck of the woods. And we'll break that bed to pieces, so that nobody else will be tempted to sleep on it again."

There was not very much sleep for any of the party that night. The cook made some hot coffee and passed it around, the fire was heaped high with fresh fuel, and they sat around it, the men talking and smoking and dozing off at intervals until the dawn came up in the Eastern sky.

The water of the stream looked cool and refreshing, but they did not dare

indulge in a bath, dearly as they would have liked to, for they could see the dreaded piranhas darting around on the lookout for prey. They are not large fish, are something like a pike or pickerel, but with teeth like razor blades.

"Vicious beggars," remarked the captain, looking at them ruminatively. "Take a piece out of your arm or leg as quick as a wink. And where one is there's a swarm. They're on you like a pack of wolves, and many a man's been eaten alive by them."

They proved good eating, however, when one of the crew caught several of them for breakfast and broiled them over the embers of the dying fire.

They drew large bucketfuls of water from the stream and sluiced themselves thoroughly, and, cool and refreshed, prepared to resume their journey.

"Come here, Don," said the captain, who had been peering through the stout bars of the box that held the snake. "You were wondering last night whether his snakeship was still alive. See for yourself."

Don looked and saw great coils like rolls of oilcloth, above which swayed to and fro a wicked head, the eyes of which scintillated like coals of fire. The head struck at the steel netting behind the bars and from the hideous mouth came something more than a hiss, almost a roar.

"Nice baritone voice he has," observed the captain, grinning.

"I don't care much for his singing," replied Don.

"That's what they call the bellowing of the anaconda," explained his uncle. "No other reptile has anything just like it. He's probably trying to tell us what he thinks of us."

"More probably what he'd like to do to us," rejoined Don. "Well, I'd rather be on the outside looking in than on the inside looking out."

They got the box on board amid the chattering of the monkeys and the screams of parrots, and resumed their journey. Thus four days passed. The stream grew gradually narrower as they proceeded. There were trunks of fallen trees that they had to paddle around; snags projected from the water with sharp points that threatened to puncture the canoe.

The richness and beauty of the flowers and plants with which both shores were covered furnished a spectacle that none of the party had ever before beheld. There was the bright yellow trumpet flower with blooms so large that they were often worn as hats by the natives, creepers covering whole acres with masses of snowy blossoms, white star-shaped flowers with discs eighteen inches in circumference, clusters of brilliant scarlet blossoms like gossamer in texture, curious shapes and glorious colors that at times made the travelers catch their breath at the sheer beauty that Nature had spread so lavishly along the banks of the Amazon.

Narrower still grew the stream, and, though it had seemed impossible, denser the jungle. Monkeys scolded and ran away at the approach of the boat. Birds of brilliant plumage fluttered about and shrieked or squawked in harsh tones. Huge creepers descended from the trees on the banks into the water. At the sides of the river, which in places was not more than seventy yards wide, were thick growths of canes and reeds, eminently suited for the lurking places of snakes and other unpleasant denizens of jungle and stream. At times the trees stretched so far over the water that it was like going through a tunnel.

Don and his uncles sat forward near the bow with their rifles on their knees and keeping a sharp lookout on either side. The forest was closing in upon them, and in that forest death lurked in innumerable shapes.

"They say that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," the professor remarked. "But in these forests eternal vigilance is the price of life."

He had scarcely spoken when there was a sharp bump that shook the canoe from stem to stern.

"Must have struck a snag!" exclaimed Don.

There was a swirl at the side of the boat, and from the water emerged a repulsive head with flaming eyes.

A moment later the water broke in twenty places and as many heads emerged.

The scourge of the Amazon were out in force. They were in a swarm of alligators!

CHAPTER XII
Ringed About By Foes

The fierce eyes of the saurians turned from one to the other of the inmates of the canoe, as though wondering which one would be the first victim of their terrible jaws, which were opened to the fullest extent, showing the powerful teeth and gaping, cavernous throats.

Don and his uncles grasped their rifles.

"Straight at their eyes, or right behind the ear," commanded the captain. "It's the only way a bullet can reach the brain."

The rifles cracked and each missile found its mark. There was a tremendous thrashing about and the water was churned into red-streaked foam. Then three of the great brutes went down.

Once more the shots rang out, and, as at that close range it was almost impossible to miss, another trio joined their comrades.

The rest of the alligators seemed for a moment undecided whether to retreat or rush at the boat. But the noise had daunted them, and the blood of their companions had carried its own warning. With grunts of rage they sank beneath the surface, which in a short time renewed its usual appearance.

"Guess that taught the brutes a lesson," commented the captain as he reloaded his weapon. "But it's lucky that our boat is as large and stout as it is. If we'd been in a light canoe they'd have overturned it in a minute. And in that case, you can guess as well as I where we'd be now."

"It's lucky that they have one or two vulnerable points," remarked Don. "Unless you knew where they were, you might shoot at them all day without hurting them. They've got a regular suit of armor on them."

"The eye's their weak point," returned the captain. "That's a good thing to remember. If ever you are seized by one—which Heaven forbid—reach for the eyes and try to gouge them. The pain may make them loose their grip. Men have sometimes escaped that way, but not very often."

"Before you could do that, they'd have bitten you in two," remarked Don.

"No," replied the captain, "they don't bite like the shark. Their jaws are made for holding. They drag their prey under water and hold it there until it drowns. Then they tear away pieces of flesh by main force and eat them at leisure."

"Sounds good—I don't think," commented Don, with a wry smile. "Hello!" he cried suddenly, as a tremendous racket arose from the nearer shore. "What's going on over there?"

They focused their eyes on the river reeds and the underbrush on the banks that were bending as though in a storm. It was as though a battle of Titans was being fought. They could get momentary glimpses of a monstrous body and thrashing coils, but could not discern the combatants clearly.

The captain spoke to the steersman, and the course of the canoe was turned in the direction of the bank, though the rowers moved with extreme slowness and caution.

"One of them's an alligator!" cried Don, whose eyes were the keenest of the party.

"And the other's a boa constrictor!" exclaimed the captain. "Well, here's a case where we don't have to interfere. Whichever wins there'll be one less pest on earth, and if both pass out, so much the better."

By this time the grasses and reeds had been so beaten down in the struggle that they could get a clearer view of the combatants.

A huge alligator had his grasp on the writhing body of a big boa constrictor and was trying to drag it into the water. He had probably attacked the snake when the latter had come to the water to drink. He had caught his enemy about a third of the way down the body and held on with a death-like grip.

The boa could have offered little resistance to the superior muscular strength of its adversary, had it not been able to catch its tail around a stump near the end of the bank. This gave it a purchase, and it had managed to get a couple of its coils around the alligator's body and was trying to crush the breath out of it. In addition, it was striking savagely with its open jaws at the alligator's head and neck, which the saurian kept moving from side to side as rapidly as it could, in an effort to ward off the terrible fangs.

"A battle of the giants," muttered the professor, whose eyes had lost their usual placidity and whose quickened breathing showed that his sporting blood had been aroused.

"Which do you think will win?" exclaimed Don, wildly excited by the struggle.

"Looks like an even thing," judged the captain, "but I'd be inclined to bet on the alligator."

The correctness of his choice was justified a moment later. The alligator gave a tremendous pull and jerked the boa's tail away from the stump. This robbed the snake of its greatest advantage. It could no longer maintain its coils so tightly around its opponent's body. They relaxed somewhat, and the alligator, relieved of the deadly pressure, backed toward the river, which it had all this time been trying desperately to reach.

A certain feeling of sympathy for the defeated prompted the professor to lay his hand upon his rifle.

"I could spoil the 'gator's triumph even now," he muttered. "The boa will have no chance in the water."

But the captain laid his hand upon his arm.

"Softly there, Amos," he admonished. "It's been a fair enough fight as those things go. They're playing the game according to the law of the jungle. The stronger survive and the weaker perish. Each has risked his life on the outcome, and the loser pays."

The alligator reached the bank and plunged into the water, carrying his foe with him. A moment more and both had disappeared, the boa's tail still lashing the water as it was dragged down.

"All over," pronounced the captain, as he motioned the rowers to move out to the middle of the stream, "but it was a rattling good fight while it lasted. And we had front seats in the orchestra without paying a cent."

The rowers bent to their work and for the next few hours they made rapid progress up the stream. Their immediate objective was an Indian village, inhabited by a curious tribe of whom little was known. But it was located in a section known to be infested with big snakes, as well as those of the poisonous variety, and the captain hoped to obtain valuable help from the Indians who would be familiar with the habits and haunts of the reptiles.

The professor, too, was building considerable hopes on the natives' knowledge of curious drugs and herbal remedies, for it was from this district that rumors had reached the outside world of wonder-working cures for diseases that had baffled the resources of civilized peoples.

Don was almost as much interested in this as the professor himself, for the thought of Fred Turner was seldom absent from his mind, and he could not bear to think of the disappointment in the crippled boy's face if the party returned without the remedy that would make him as straight and strong as other boys.

"How long do you think it will be before we get to the Indian settlement?" asked Don.

"Pedro thinks that we ought to reach it by to-morrow afternoon," replied the captain. "But ideas of time and distance are so vague here that I don't know how much we can depend on them," he continued. "And another thing that has given me a little uneasiness is some uncertainty as to the kind of reception we'll get."

"Why, I thought they were friendly to the whites," said Don. "The captain of the *Aldebaran* told me that they were a peaceable lot."

"And the scientist that I heard tell about them had no trouble when he was among them," remarked the professor.

"That's true enough," replied the captain. "But Pedro told me yesterday that a party of white men raided their settlement some months ago and killed some of their women and children. Pure wantonness, as far as I can make out, simply the arrogance and cruelty of the so-called superior race toward the poorer and weaker. I suppose some trifling misunderstanding cropped up and the whites started shooting. And of course it's possible that we may reap the punishment for their brutality. Indians have long memories. But there's no use crossing a bridge before we come to it, and I hope we'll be able to smooth things over."

Night found them in the very heart of the forest region, with the jungle on both sides crowding close to the river banks. The experience of the night before was still strong in their memories, and they anchored in the middle of the stream and slept on board. Don found the quarters a little cramped, but reflected that on that night at least no sinister shadow need be expected to come between him and the moon. Still, it was an hour or more before he fell asleep, for the dank odor of rotting vegetation and the noises of night life in the jungle excited him and kept him awake.

At about five o'clock on the following afternoon, they came opposite a sand flat beyond which, on a bank about fifteen feet high, was a little cabin.

"Indian settlement," announced Pedro, who spoke a little English, and by virtue of his superior strength and intelligence was usually the spokesman for the crew.

There was no human being in sight, as, in obedience to Captain Sturdy's directions, the boat headed toward the shore.

All looked carefully to their weapons, and as soon as the canoe grounded on the flat the three Americans leaped over the bow of the boat, followed by as many members of the crew, two being left to guard the boat.

They made their way cautiously to the hut, which bore evidence of recent habitation. There were signs of a fresh fire outside, and a score of burned jaboty shells were scattered over the dirt floor of the interior.

Beyond lay the frowning forest, dark and, as they all felt, threatening.

"Indians there," said Pedro, pointing to the woods. "Fire two shots. That means you are friends."

The captain raised his rifle and fired twice into the air. Nothing happened. No flitting forms appeared among the trees.

Cautiously the landing party advanced, until they stood just within the forest fringe.

"Call out," suggested Pedro. "Call 'Katu Kama-rah.' That mean: 'White man

good friend.'"

The captain strode a little in front of the others.

"Katu Kama-rah," he shouted in a stentorian voice.

No answer came back except the echoes.

"Katu Kama-rah," he called again.

An arrow whistled by his head, and buried itself in a tree trunk.

"Down!" shouted the captain, setting the example.

All threw themselves to the ground as a shower of arrows passed over them, buzzing like wasps.

CHAPTER XIII
Open Jaws

"Every one get behind a tree!" shouted Captain Sturdy, and, still keeping on the ground, those from the canoe wormed themselves into the shelter of the nearest cover at hand.

Don and his uncles held their rifles ready for any emergency. The three members of the crew had no firearms, but each had a machete, an ugly weapon like a broad sword with a sharp double edge, that when not needed for warlike purposes served for slashing a way through the underbrush. They were proficients in its use, but how courageous they might be in an actual fight, or how desirous to take part, was yet to be shown.

"The Indians may rush us," said the captain. "If they do, shoot low and shoot fast. We don't know how many there may be of them, but likely they outnumber us ten to one, perhaps a hundred to one."

But the expected rush did not come. They waited with every nerve tense, but no human sound disturbed the profound silence of the thick woods beyond.

"Lucky we're on the edge of the forest," muttered the captain. "At any rate, they can't surround us without our knowing it and as a last resort we have a way of retreat left open to the boat."

"Shall we shoot if we see any one?" asked Don.

"Shoot to scare but not to kill," was the reply. "I don't want to hurt any of the poor beggars, unless it comes to a matter of self defense. There's already more than enough of Indian blood on the white man's hands."

Don's keen eyes scanned the forest ahead. He saw a form slipping like a shadow to the shelter of a large tree. He watched the tree closely, and in a moment saw an arm protrude, holding a bow with an arrow fitted to the string and turned in their direction.

Like a flash his rifle leaped to his shoulder and he fired. There was a cry of consternation from the partly concealed archer as the shattered bow was torn from his hands.

"Good shooting, my boy," commented the captain. "That made the splinters fly and I'll bet it threw a fright into the fellow who was trying to plug us."

Some minutes passed without any move on either side. The captain looked uneasily at the sky, over which the dusk was already beginning to steal.

"I don't care much to be in this forest when dark comes on," he remarked. "We'd be at a disadvantage then, while it wouldn't bother them at all. They have

eyes like cats, and of course they know every inch of the ground."

"What's that noise?" asked Don. "It sounds like rain."

"More like acorns dropping from the trees on dried leaves," judged the professor.

There was a slight pattering often repeated and sounds scarcely more than sighs like a noise that might be caused by tiny objects gently striking against the tree trunks.

Something small dropped close beside Don. He picked it up and examined it curiously. It was a small dart with a feathered head.

"Careful, senhor, careful," warned Pedro, clutching anxiously at his sleeve. "It is poisoned. A scratch from it means death."

Don handled it gingerly, and turned it over to the captain who examined it with a frown.

"Might as well be struck by a rattlesnake's fangs as by one of these darts," he remarked. "They've been dipped in wourali poison, one of the most virulent of all."

He considered for a moment.

"We'll give them a fusillade just to daunt them, and under cover of that we'll get back to the boat," he said. "Shoot high among the trees. Three volleys as fast as we can give them."

The rifles reverberated through the forest, and that they were not without effect was shown by the sudden cessation of the pattering of the darts. Either the natives had retreated a little further into the forest or they were lying close under cover to escape the dreaded bullets.

By this time it had grown so dark that they had a reasonable probability of being able to get away from their perilous position unnoticed.

The captain gave the word, and they slowly backed away on their hands and knees until they reached the edge of the woods. It was nerve-trying work, for they did not know what their hands might encounter among those dank, dripping leaves that carpeted the ground. Once Don felt a slimy, slithering body slide away from under his touch, and he had all he could do to repress the startled exclamation that rose to his lips.

Finally they reached the open ground.

"One last volley as a warning," directed the captain, "and then we'll make for the boat."

Again the rifles cracked, and then the little party hurried to the boat, where they found the two men who had been left in charge consumed with anxiety. They had heard the frequent discharges, and had everything in readiness for a quick retreat if

necessary. The canoe had been shoved oft the shelving flat, so that it was only the work of a moment to pile into the boat, grasp the oars, and put a safe distance between themselves and the shore. Only when they had got beyond the reach of arrow and poisoned dart did they relax and draw a long breath of relief.

"A rather inauspicious beginning of our attempt to establish friendly relations with the natives," grumbled the captain. "Looks as if we'd have to get along on our own without any help from them."

"It's too bad," mused the professor. "All due no doubt to the way that other party of white men treated them. Well, we'll have to try farther on up the river. There are other tribes that may be more friendly."

They went a little farther up the river and dropped anchor. There they prepared supper, and, as they were all tired out after the recent strain, they turned in early, leaving one of the crew on guard.

It was exceedingly hot and Don found it difficult to sleep. He tossed about restlessly for a while, and then concluded that he would go out on the deck and get a breath of fresh air.

There was a moon that night, but there were many clouds in the sky, so that a gleam shot through only at intervals and touched up the reaches of the river. From the banks on either side came the monotonous croaking of thousands of frogs. The forest loomed dark and threatening. Suddenly came a blood-curdling, wailing scream. Some animal had gone to its doom, a prey to the eternal jungle hunger. Don wondered what countless tragedies were going on in the leafy depths where numberless animals and reptiles were stalking abroad or lying in wait for their prey.

Suddenly his ears caught a slight sound which was different from those to which he had been listening. It seemed like a soft splashing, that came and went at regular intervals. He thought at first it might be caused by the movements of some one of the many fish or reptiles with which the river swarmed. He strained his eyes but could see nothing.

Still the sound continued. With every sense on the alert, he listened. Could it be the dip of a paddle?

Just then the moon shone for a moment from behind a cloud, and in the momentary beam Don could faintly discern the shape of a canoe, in which sat a solitary figure moving with extreme caution.

Then the moon was obscured again, and the figure vanished. But the soft rythmic dipping of the paddle continued and grew a trifle more distinct. The man was coming toward them.

Don as a matter of habit had picked up his rifle as he had come from the cabin,

and now his grip tightened on it as he sought to pierce the shadows. He crouched down behind the gunwales and waited.

Of one thing he was certain. The man was alone. Only the dip of that one paddle broke the silence. Why was he approaching so stealthily? Certainly not with any friendly purpose. A scout probably, sent out to find the exact position of the boat, so that he could return and notify his comrades and then bring them down in force for a surprise attack on the exploring party.

Again the moon came out and Don could see the solitary paddler, now much nearer than before. But he also saw something else.

Behind the approaching canoe was a monstrous form moving stealthily through the water. Don could see the corrugated back and the flaming eyes of a huge alligator.

But the oarsman, intent only on the boat in front for which he was searching, was evidently unaware of danger. His frail craft came nearer and nearer.

Suddenly there was a rush, the crashing of a great body against the little canoe, and the next moment it was overturned and its occupant thrown into the water.

He rose almost instantly and gave an affrighted yell as he caught sight of the alligator coming toward him, its monstrous jaws wide open, ready to seize its prey!

CHAPTER XIV
Quick Work

The thing had happened so suddenly that Don had had no time to shout a warning. For he would have warned the Indian, although the man no doubt was an enemy, intent upon Don's death and that of his party.

The fellow had turned and was swimming desperately toward the boat. Not six feet behind him was his pursuer, sure now of his victim.

Aiming directly at the alligator's eye, Don raised his rifle and fired.

The great brute leaped convulsively half out of the water, thrashed violently about for a moment and then sank in a welter of foam. The bullet had found its mark.

But as though the explosion had been a signal, the water broke in all directions and the ugly heads of other saurians appeared above the surface.

The swimmer now was close to the boat, and Don could see the agony of fear and apprehension in his eyes.

Manuel rushed to Don's side, quickly followed by the captain and the professor and the rest of the crew, startled out of sleep by the shot.

Don reached over the side and grasped the right arm of the swimmer. Manuel caught the other, and together they lifted him to the deck, just in time to escape the rush of an alligator who crashed heavily against the side of the boat.

There was a hubbub of excited exclamations; that was not quieted until Don had told his story.

The rescued man lay panting heavily on the deck for a moment, then rose to his feet. He was a lithe, muscular specimen, as straight as an arrow and fully six feet tall. He wore only a loin cloth, but the circlet of feathers on his head and the rude symbols tattooed on his breast seemed to indicate that he was a man of some importance in his tribe.

He seemed to realize that he was a prisoner, but he bore himself with a certain air of dignity and showed no signs of quailing. His relief at rescue from an awful death evidently obscured for the time all other feelings. There was no ferocity in his eyes, only gratitude, as he turned them on Don.

"Evidently a person of some importance with his people," remarked the captain, as he examined him carefully. "Suppose you see what you can make of him, Amos. Get him to talk if you can, and see if you can understand his lingo."

The professor spoke to the man, and elicited some broken and monosyllabic answers.

"Guess I can get on with him," he said, with a gratified look at his companions.

"He's picked up enough Portuguese from the traders on the river to understand and reply to simple questions."

"Good!" exclaimed the captain. "Now suppose you pump him a little. Ask him what he was doing prowling out here in the river. Find out why we got such a hostile reception to-day. Impress upon him that we have nothing but friendly motives. Tell him that we're not going to hurt him or any of his people."

The professor turned to the native and a long conversation ensued, broken and halting, but fairly intelligible.

"He says," explained the professor, "that he is a great chief among his people. For a long time they have been on friendly terms with the white people. They have no desire to harm any one. But some moons ago white men killed some of their women and children, and that has made the tribe bitter against all the whites. When they saw us to-day they thought they might be attacked again, and that was the reason they used their arrows and darts. He came out to-night to discover whether we were still near the village. If so, he was to go back and tell his people, and they were to come out in their canoes to drive us away for good and all."

"Well, he's frank enough to tell the truth," remarked the captain. "How does he feel about it now?"

"Very differently," was the reply. "He says he knows if we were bad people we would have let the alligator get him. Why should we have saved him if our hearts were black?"

"Right enough, too," remarked the captain. "You did a good piece of work for us, Don, when you plugged that alligator."

"And he says," went on Professor Bruce, "that if we want to come back, he and his people will treat us like brothers. They will help us in every way they can. They know, or will know when he has told them all, that our hearts are kind and filled with friendship."

"That sounds mighty good," said the captain dubiously. "But how do we know he will keep his word?"

The professor spoke again to the native. He drew himself up proudly and spoke with emphasis.

"He says," reported the professor, "that he is a great chief and does not speak falsehoods. Besides, his heart is full of gratitude to the white boy. He wants to repay him for saving his life."

At this juncture the Indian made some cabalistic signs, moving his fingers diagonally and then in a circle across his breast.

"It is his oath, the most sacred oath these people make," put in Pedro. "They

would be accursed if they failed to keep it. They would die rather than break it."

"I really think, Frank," said the professor, "that we can rely upon what the man promises. His words and his actions carry conviction."

"Strikes me that way too," reflected the captain. "But how do we know that even if he feels that way, his people will too?"

The man drew himself up haughtily when this question was put to him and spoke rapidly.

"He says," translated the professor, "that he has the power of life and death in his tribe, and that none would dare disobey him."

"As in the old feudal days," observed the captain, "the high justice, the middle and the low. Well, I guess we'll take a chance. We'll put him ashore in the morning and see what develops. Perhaps that shot of Don's has solved our whole problem."

They brought out some blankets and spread them on deck, indicating to the man that he could sleep there if he liked. He readily availed himself of the opportunity. The captain himself stayed on guard for the rest of the night, after insisting that the others should go to their bunks.

All were up at dawn and after a hearty breakfast, of which the man ate voraciously, they made for the same sand flat at which they had landed the day before.

They gave the man gifts of matches and fishhooks and mirrors, the latter for use by the women of the tribe, and prepared to put him ashore.

Before he went he took his knife from the belt formed by his loin cloth and made a tiny puncture in a finger, from which the blood oozed. Then he approached Don, and motioned that he should do the same.

Don looked at him uncomprehendingly, as the man jabbered something that he did not understand.

"It's a symbol of blood brotherhood," explained the professor. "He wants to blend his blood with yours to show that he's your friend for life. Better do it to please him."

Don made a slight cut in his own finger and pressed it against the puncture in that of the native. The latter smiled his gratification, leaped ashore and vanished into the woods.

"Nothing to do now but wait," remarked the captain. "All the same, hold your weapons ready and keep a sharp eye on that forest."

In about an hour a shout came from the woods, and the travelers saw about fifty natives, most of them men, but some women with babies, coming out from the trees, led by their chief.

None of them was armed, and they came forward extending their open hands to show that there was nothing in them, calling out in friendly fashion and making every demonstration of amity and good will.

"He's evidently brought the whole population along with him," remarked the captain. "I guess it's our cue to meet them in the same spirit. Come along."

All went ashore and approached the natives, who had halted at a distance of some fifty feet.

The chief came forward, took hold of Don's hand, and, turning to his followers, spoke rapidly.

"He's telling them that Don is the one who saved him last night," remarked the professor.

A shout went up from the natives after their chief had finished, and they crowded around Don and the rest of the party with an enthusiasm quite childlike, and so evidently sincere that from that time on the last vestige of mistrust on the part of the visitors vanished.

The chief led the way, and all followed a beaten trail through the woods until they came to a large clearing, about which were scattered a number of native huts. Some of them were mere shelters or sheds of the simplest kind, without side walls. Others were a little more elaborate, with four walls and a thatched roof. The only light for the interiors was that furnished by the opening without doors that served for entrance.

The chief escorted the party to three large huts that had been set aside for their use, and from which their previous occupants had but recently been dispossessed, to judge by the fragments of food that lay scattered about and the embers from dying fires in front of the rude dwellings.

One of these was taken possession of by Don and his uncles, while the other two were assigned to the members of the crew. There was no furniture, except a few simple native utensils.

The rest of the day was spent in bringing up needed supplies from the boat and in stringing hammocks in which to sleep. The chief was unremitting in his efforts to do everything for the comfort of the newcomers, sending them in roast fish and fowls and curious native concoctions more or less palatable, but all of which they managed to eat out of courtesy to their hosts.

The professor lost no time in acquainting the chief, Antikara, as they found his name to be, with the purposes of the expedition. They wanted snakes and they wanted drugs. Why they wanted snakes was beyond the chief's imagination. He himself had been only too glad to steer clear of them. Still if the queer white men

wanted them, it would be easy to get them. The place abounded with them, boas, anacondas, surucurus, rattlesnakes, jaracaras. He would show them their lurking places. He and his people would assist in catching them.

The hunt for drugs was more intelligible. He had met drug hunters before, and it turned out to the professor's delight that Antikara knew the scientist by whose lecture he had been so much impressed the year before.

Yes, Antikara told him, there were many herbs and barks that worked miracles among sick and ailing people. His witch doctor knew where to find them, how to brew them. Drugs that made the crooked straight, that made the lame walk. Look at the lithe, straight members of his tribe. They could leap and run like the deer. Yet some of them had been crippled, had been bent, had had to walk by the aid of sticks. But now they were well. The medicine man had mixed potions that had cured them. Of course his spells and incantations had helped. He had put magic into the drugs.

Don's eyes glistened with delight when the professor repeated to him what Antikara had said on this point.

"Fred may run that Marathon after all!" he ejaculated.

"I shouldn't wonder," rejoined the professor, with a smile. "I rather think we're on a warm trail. What the drugs will do to Brazilians, they ought to do for the people north of them. But we mustn't get our hopes raised too high, or we may be disappointed."

All that day and the most of the next the members of the party were busy in preparing for their trips into the forest. The professor was deep in consultations with the witch doctor of the tribe, whom Antikari had ordered to give every assistance in his power to the visitor. The captain was gaining information about the haunts of the reptiles that he was planning to catch.

In the afternoon Don took up his rifle and in company with Pedro took a stroll into the surrounding forest, promising the captain that he would not go far and would avoid the more thickly wooded sections.

"Perhaps I'll bring home a little game for supper, if I have luck," he said, as he prepared to start.

"A little fresh meat wouldn't go amiss," remarked the captain. "We're getting pretty well fed up with canned goods. But keep within the sound of gunshot and take no chances."

In the vicinity of the native settlement the woods were comparatively thin. Many of the trees had been cut down for fuel or to make native canoes and dugouts. There were many plainly marked trails and clearings, in which only a few of the giants of

the forest had been left standing.

The proximity of the village seemed to have driven most of the game deeper into the forest, and for an hour or so neither Don nor Pedro caught sight of anything worth wasting a shot on. There were plenty of monkeys, whose chattering filled the forest with discord, but they seemed too nearly human to shoot and Don, although he had tasted monkey flesh, did not care for it as a food.

Birds too were abundant, and Don could easily have brought some of them down had he not been looking for four-footed game. They were of many varieties, and most of them were gorgeously colored. There were macaws that were like living rainbows; sun-birds beautifully marked; powise; maroudi; humming-birds glowing with yellow, white and red; toucans; trogons and a myriad of other species that made the forest radiant with color.

Suddenly, in one of the clearings, he saw a pig rooting among the damp leaves and fungi that carpeted the ground. It was not as large as those he had been accustomed to see in the States, but there was no doubt as to the species.

"A little roast pork wouldn't be bad for supper," he said to himself, as he took careful aim.

There was an exclamation of warning and alarm from Pedro, but it came too late.

Bang! Don's rifle spoke and the pig toppled over.

"What have you done?" cried Pedro, in consternation.

"Only shot a pig," replied Don, in some surprise at his companion's excitement.

"Only!" Pedro fairly screamed. "Look! Look!"

From the underbrush came rushing a drove of peccaries, forty or fifty in number, gnashing their tusks in rage and charging toward them.

"Quick!" shouted Pedro. "A tree! The nearest tree! Run for your life!"

CHAPTER XV
Treed By Peccaries

There was mortal terror in Pedro's tones, and Don, though bewildered by what seemed to him unreasonable alarm, asked for no explanations.

At a little distance was a tree, the lower branch of which was within easy reach. Don ran for it like a deer, grasped the branch with his right hand, still holding his rifle in his left, and swung himself into the tree.

Pedro was close on his heels. But he was heavier and less athletic than his companion, and was partly unnerved by fear. He made unavailing efforts to swing himself up, at the same time muttering incoherent prayers to the saints.

Don laid his rifle across two branches, reached down and grasped Pedro's arms and by a mighty effort pulled him up into the tree. This was accomplished not a moment too soon, for one of the peccaries slashed at the man as he went up and sliced off the heel of his shoe as neatly as though it had been done by a razor.

The two hunters rested for a moment in the branches, panting and too exhausted to speak.

The drove had halted in their headlong charge and now raged about beneath the tree, looking up with such rage and malignity in eyes that seemed fairly to emit sparks that Don involuntarily shuddered.

"I didn't know they were as bad as that," he said, as soon as he got back his breath.

"Bad!" gasped Pedro, crossing himself. "They are fiends. There is nothing fiercer on the face of the earth. If we were down there now we would be already cut to ribbons. Their tusks are like knives. They fear nothing."

The band of peccaries kept rushing back and forth like mad, with high-pitched squeals of fury and defiance, and gnashing their tusks with a grinding, rasping sound that set Don's teeth and nerves on edge.

"Perhaps if I bring down a few of them it may scare the others off," said Don, reaching for his rifle.

"You cannot frighten them," said Pedro. "I told you they are fiends. They wish our blood."

Nevertheless Don shot three times, and each time with deadly effect. The comrades of the dead showed no sign of consternation. They nosed about the bodies for an instant and then turned with redoubled fury to their enemies. They were as active and lithe-limbed as wolves and leaped again and again toward the branch that was fortunately out of their reach.

"Lucky they can't climb," muttered Don. "But there's no use wasting ammunition upon them. I've only a few cartridges left, and I can't shoot them all."

He looked anxiously at the sun, which was already sinking low in the heavens. He knew that if he did not get home soon his uncles would grow anxious about him and come out in search of him. And he dreaded the thought of their coming unawares upon that infuriated drove that would have made short work of them. A pack of wolves would have been much less to be dreaded.

"Wish I hadn't been so keen about fresh pork for supper," he said to himself, with a smile that had no mirth in it.

A half hour passed, and still the beseigers showed no sign of leaving, though their first fury had somewhat spent itself.

Suddenly a diversion came from an unexpected quarter. A fierce squealing arose from a thick patch of brush a little distance away. Those in the tree looked and saw a peccary in the enfolding coils of a huge boa constrictor, near whose lair the unwary peccary had wandered. The trapped animal was struggling fiercely and trying to free himself from the vice-like grip that held him.

Instantly there came answering squeals from his comrades, and they charged down in a body against the common enemy.

The boa was quick to sense the danger. His coils released the captive, and the snake tried to retreat through the thicket. But he was too late. The animals pounced upon him with demoniac fury, slashing and tearing with their tusks.

Seeing that he could not escape, the boa tried to make head against his foes. He reared his great head and struck savagely at the peccaries, his blows falling with lightning rapidity. But against so many his case was hopeless. They dragged him down, slashed at him and tore him to pieces. Then they feasted on him, and in ten minutes there was nothing left of him but the tail and some fragments of the bony structure of his head and jaws.

"Another one that wanted fresh pork and afterward wished he hadn't," said Don grimly to himself. "Now I suppose they'll come back in the hope of finishing on us."

But much to his surprise and infinite relief, the peccaries seemed to have forgotten all about him and his companion. The excitement of the battle with the snake and the subsequent feast had driven all other thoughts from their minds. They browsed and rooted about for a while, and then wandered into the depths of the forest.

Don and Pedro looked at each other, scarcely daring to believe in their good fortune.

"Do you think they've really gone?" Don asked.

"Yes, praise be to the saints," said Pedro devoutly. "The snake did us a good turn. They will not come back. They are fierce, but they are too stupid to lay traps. They are gone."

Despite this conviction, they kept wary eyes about them as they slid down from the tree.

"I think I've earned this one," said Don, as he stopped over the body of one of the peccaries he had slain. "Give me a hand, Pedro, and we'll get this fellow into camp."

The welcome they received showed how uneasy his uncles were becoming.

"We were just going to set out after you," said the captain. "What on earth kept you so long?"

"This fellow was one of the reasons," replied Don, pointing to the carcass. "And there were about fifty other reasons of the same kind that were camped under our tree. They were so anxious for our company that they wouldn't let us go."

"A close call," said the captain, after Don had told his story. "I should have warned you against peccaries. They're about the fiercest things that breathe when there are a lot of them together."

"We've got a bit of news for you," said the professor.

"What is it?" asked Don quickly.

"A native came in a little while ago, and reported that there was another party of white men about two days' march away. And the head of the party is Henry Glassbury."

Don jumped as though he had been shot.

"Glassbury!" he exclaimed. "The man who cheated Fred and Emily out of their money!"

CHAPTER XVI
Caught In The Bog

"The man we think cheated them out of their money," corrected the professor. "We'll find out more about that when we see him."

"Oh, are you going to hunt him up?" asked Don, in delight.

"We surely are," declared the captain. "When it's only a matter of two days' march we're not going to let the opportunity slip. We understand from the report that was brought in that he and his party will be in the neighborhood for a month or more on an inspecting trip; so we'll have plenty of time. I have my plans laid here for about a week in advance, but in ten days or so we can start for Glassbury's camp. And there'll have to be a satisfactory showdown on that crooked business, or my name isn't Frank Sturdy."

Don was jubilant at this lucky windfall. There had been hardly an hour when Fred and Emily Turner and their pitiable situation had been out of his mind. It would be a great thing if Fred could be cured, and Don had drawn new hope of that from what the professor had learned from the medicine man of the tribe. And if, in addition to this, the orphans could have justice done them in righting the cruel swindle of which they had been the victims, Don would have nothing left to ask for as far as they were concerned.

But far more heavy on his mind was the uncertainty that veiled the fate of those who were dearer to him than life. Antikari had been plied with questions by the professor, in the hope that he might at least have heard of Webb Reynard. But he knew absolutely nothing. It was evident that the prolonged journeyings of the French-American scientist, extensive as they were, had not brought him into this section of the country.

What had become of his father? Of his mother? And of Ruth, dear Ruth, to whom his heart was ever turning with a daily greater longing?

His heart ached with the eagerness to have these questions answered, and every day counted as a day lost that still held him off from the goal he sought. He welcomed whatever excitement came to him from his jungle experiences, even when they brought with them great peril, because they at least diverted his mind for a time from brooding.

"Up by daybreak to-morrow morning, Don," said the captain that night, after they had made a hearty meal from the peccary that had been brought in; "that is, if you want to be in at the capture of an anaconda that will be a fitting mate to the one we have already in the box."

"You bet I want to," replied Don, with eagerness. "Have you spotted the lair of one of them?"

"I understand that there's a whopping big one that has his hole about three miles from here," replied the captain. "He's been a kind of king of the roost about these parts for a long time, and nobody's cared to tackle him. They've been perfectly satisfied to let him alone as long as he lets them alone, and I don't blame them.

"But if we have luck, there'll be a little surprise in store for his snakeship to-morrow morning. One thing is pretty certain. If we don't get him alive, we'll get him dead. But it's only as a live snake that he has any value to me."

"Perhaps he'll be altogether too alive to suit us," said Don, with a grin.

"That's a possibility that has to be reckoned with," was the reply.

The first streaks of dawn were visible the following morning when the party got under way. A guide went along in front, followed by natives carrying a heavy box. Then came the captain and his party, with Manuel and Pedro bearing ropes and long poles.

After they had gone about two miles and a half, they trod with caution and spoke in whispers, for much of the success of their expedition lay in taking their quarry by surprise.

They came at last to a patch of marshy ground, not far from the shore of the river. There the guide pointed out to them an irregular opening about three feet in circumference that led to an underground passage. Having done this, he retired with great celerity to what he considered a safe distance.

The captain took from Pedro a strong coil of rope, in which he made a noose. With great care, he encircled the hole with the noose, letting it lie loosely on the ground. Two other long ropes were attached to parts of the noose, and these were laid out so that they radiated from the noose like spokes from a hub.

The captain held the main rope on one side of the hole, while the professor and Don, in accordance with directions, took hold of the further ends of the other two.

Close at hand the captain had a net of cords that had been drenched with a strong anæsthetic.

Pedro and Manuel were armed with heavy poles that were forked at one end. It was not the first time they had assisted in work of the kind, and they knew throughly what was expected of them.

A tense period of waiting followed. No one was positively certain that the anaconda was in his retreat, but the captain had based his plans on his general knowledge of the reptiles' habits and the information that had been gleaned from the natives about this one in particular.

Suddenly, their strained ears caught the sound of a part hiss, part roar, part yawn, such as they had already heard more than once from their first capture. The anaconda was awaking.

From the hole upreared a horrid head that sent a thrill through their veins. It came out lazily at first, evidently without suspicion of danger. Then the wicked eyes caught fire as they fell on the figures about.

"Now!" shouted the captain, and he drew the noose taut about the reptile's neck. At the same instant, with a quick movement of his left hand, he threw the net over the anaconda's head.

The snake's first impulse was to draw back into his hole. But the ropes attached to the noose, held by six stout arms, prevented this, and, abandoning the idea of retreat, the reptile launched itself forward. At least eight feet of his body followed.

The anaconda dashed its head toward first one and then another of its enemies. But in whatever direction the attack was made, two ropes from other directions pulled the reptile back.

Had he been able to get his entire body out of the hole, he might have encircled one or another of the party with his crushing folds. But Pedro and Manuel had darted forward, and with the forked sticks pinned the body to the ground. Again and again the hold was broken by the furious writhings of the monster, but the sticks were instantly renewed.

For some minutes the terrific combat lasted. Then the choking of the noose, combined with the powerful anæsthetic with which the net was soaked, began to tell. The fury of the attack lessened, and finally the reptile's head and neck lay still on the ground.

Then all present took hold of the ropes, and the long body was drawn from the passage, evoking exclamations of astonishment as its enormous length was revealed. It measured thirty-two feet, it was judged. None of those present, either the explorers or the natives, had ever seen a specimen so large.

But there was no time for measurement then. By the united efforts of all, the anaconda was dumped headforemost into the box, and the cover fastened on.

"A good morning's work," exulted the captain, as he gathered up the nets and ropes and handed them over to the natives. "The people at home will crowd the zoo when this fellow reaches there. But it was a tussle, all right. You've got to hand it to him for putting up a good fight."

The box was too heavy to be carried back to the village, and it was left where it was until the crew could bring the boat up the river and put it on board.

Many other trips in the week that followed added to the captain's collection of

big snakes. Not all of those he set out to capture were taken alive. Many times an unerring bullet was the only thing that saved the life of the hunter. But despite these misadventures, enough were taken alive to keep the captain smiling with satisfaction. Many methods were employed. Some of the reptiles were found in a lethargic condition after a heavy meal, and in that case the capture was comparatively easy. In other cases fires were built about their retreats to bring them into the open. The net, the noose, and the forked stick, combined with unfailing coolness and courage, proved weapons that could not be resisted.

While the captain, with his dusky assistants, was thus engaged, the professor met with equal success in his collection of the rare drugs and specifics that abounded in the herbs of the fields and bark of the trees. Nature had been lavish with her gifts in these Brazilian forests, as though to show that there was something else in those savage wilds but tragedy and death. The success that the professor met with exceeded his most sanguine hopes, and he was already planning addresses before learned societies that would make the men of science open their ears in wonder.

Don often accompanied his uncle on these expeditions, always with rifle ready, for the professor himself was likely to be too engrossed in his discoveries to be on the lookout for danger.

They had gone one day several miles from the village, and found themselves in a marshy region, where water oozed up in their footprints almost as soon as they had passed.

Don had dropped behind a little to watch a curious plant, the Amazonian flytrap, in operation. This was a shrub-like growth about four feet high, with spike-protected leaves, four inches long and nearly two inches wide. The instant an insect landed on the prickly leaf, the leaf closed like the fingers of a hand, only to open a little later and throw out the crushed remains. Flies, spiders, beetles, caterpillars, butterflies were thus engulfed, while Don stood watching. Nothing that touched that sinister leaf could escape. There was a coldblooded, fiendish malignity about it that gave Don a little shiver.

"I didn't dream that plants could be so diabolical," he muttered to himself, as he watched the unending massacre.

Just then he heard a loud call from his uncle. There was something in the tone that set the boy to running.

As he emerged from the trees, he caught sight of his uncle standing in a patch of bog about an acre in extent. He seemed to have dwindled in size, to be a foot shorter than usual.

Don's blood ran cold as he realized that his uncle was engulfed in mud more than

halfway to his knees. Even in the instant of his startled glance, he thought he could see him sinking. He started to run toward him, but the professor stopped him with a shout, and waved him back with his hands.

"Not another step!" he called. "Not for your life! You'd only get trapped yourself and couldn't do me any good. I'm sinking in the bog."

"I'm coming anyway, Uncle Amos!" cried Don desperately.

"Stop! Stop!" called the professor. "I command you. Stop!"

"But what shall I do? What can I do?" cried Don frantically.

"Run for help," was the reply. "Get men with ropes. That's the only thing that can get me out. Run!"

Don turned and ran like a deer toward the village.

CHAPTER XVII
A Run For Life

Don had often run fast before, and many times he had taken prizes in school competitions for his fleetness of foot. But all his past performances were put in the shade by the time he made through the forest. For now he was running for a man's life, and that man an uncle whom he dearly loved.

He had need of all his quickness of sight to make his way over the rough trails without being tripped by the tendrils and creepers that beset his path. How he did it he never knew, but although at times he had almost miraculous escapes, he managed to keep his footing.

At times the mental pressure he was under made him feel as though he were in a nightmare. His feet seemed to drag, to be reached out for and caught by a myriad of cunning enemies. Yet he knew that this was fancy, and that he was traveling as though on wings.

He had gone perhaps a mile when there was a wicked snarl ahead of him, and a huge jaguar—the tiger of Brazil—leaped directly in his path, so that Don had all he could do to keep from plunging headlong into the beast.

By a mighty effort he checked himself and slipped behind a small bush that stood to the right of the path.

The great cat was somewhat disconcerted by the sudden cessation of speed, and in that moment of hesitation Don had time to unsling his rifle and prepare for action.

It was the first time he had come in direct contact with this terror of the Amazonian forests. He had caught occasional glimpses of one swimming the river or gliding away through the trees, and sometimes at night, beyond the zone of the campfire, he had heard the pad of stalking feet and had seen eyes that glowed like coals. Now, however, the brute, tawny, beautiful, but evil beyond compare, blocked his path and was stealthily drawing nearer, crouching almost to the ground, his wicked eyes fastened on his intended victim.

Don leveled his rifle, stepped out from his shelter and fired. At the same instant the brute sprang, and the bullet met it in midair. But the jaguar had not been struck in a vital spot, and the wound served only to enrage it.

Don dodged with lightning swiftness, and the jaguar landed several feet beyond him. With a terrible snarl, it turned and sprang again. But quick as he was, Don was quicker, and his second bullet caught the animal straight between the eyes.

It fell so close to the boy that one of its outstretched paws grazed his leather

leggings. It writhed about convulsively for a moment, then straightened out and lay still.

At any other time Don would have stopped to examine and exult over the magnificent specimen that had fallen a victim to his marksmanship. But all he was conscious of now was not elation over his victory, but irritation over the delay, when minutes, even seconds, were precious.

With scarcely a glance at the motionless jaguar, the boy resumed his flight. His nerves were in a jangle from the unexpected encounter, and it was sometime before he could get into his stride. But he soon settled down into the precision of a fast working machine, his legs moving like piston rods.

On he went and on, as though he were on wings. His breath came almost in sobs, his lungs seemed as though they would burst. How far off the village seemed! And all this time his uncle was in the morass, sinking, sinking! Perhaps even now he was beyond aid! Finally he got his second wind and ran on, all sense of time and distance lost.

Suddenly he burst through a patch of woodland almost into the arms of his Uncle Frank and a party of natives, returning from a snake-hunting expedition.

There was a shout of alarm from the captain, as he rushed to meet him.

"What is it?" he cried.

"Uncle Amos!" gasped Don. "He's in a bog! He's sinking! Come! Bring ropes! Come quick!"

The captain, accustomed to quick action, asked no more. He called to the natives to drop everything but the ropes, and the whole party set off at top speed, with Don in the lead.

In a little while, which, however, seemed ages to their apprehensive minds, they reached the edge of the bog in which the professor had been trapped. Don was almost afraid to look for fear the treacherous slime had engulfed its victim. A great sob of relief broke from him as he saw that the chest and head of his uncle were still showing.

"Courage, Amos!" shouted the captain. "We're here and we'll get you out of that in a jiffy."

In a trice he had rigged a running noose in a long rope and thrown it out into the bog. Twice this had to be repeated before the loop came within reach of the professor's hands. Then he grasped it and slipped it over his head and under his arms.

Strong arms seized the rope and pulled, gradually at first and then more strongly. The bog was reluctant to release its victim, and it was some time before the rescuers'

efforts began to tell. Slowly, however, the terrible grip loosened, and finally the professor was drawn out and on to the solid ground, where, all muddy as he was, Don and the captain hugged him in the exuberance of their relief.

The professor's face was ashen pale from the awful strain he had undergone, and they propped him up against a tree until he could rest and recover.

"Thank God that we came in time!" ejaculated the captain.

"And that I happened to run into you as I did," added Don, looking at the captain. "If I'd had to run all the way to the village, I'm afraid that we'd never have made it in time."

"I had almost given up hope," said the professor. "It was awful, feeling one's self being dragged down remorselessly into a tomb like that. It was lucky for me that I had such a fleet-footed messenger at hand."

"At that," said Don, "there came near being no messenger at all. A jaguar tried to block the way."

"He did?" exclaimed the captain.

"He did," replied Don, with a grin. "But it was rather ill-advised on his part. He'll never try the trick again. We'll pick him up on our way back to the village."

They waited until the professor felt strong enough to walk, and then made their way to the settlement, stopping just long enough to skin the jaguar, the skin of which later on served as a rug in Don's room at Hillville.

Two days later Don, in charge of the crew and a party of Indians, went up the river in the *Teddy* to gather up from various points along the shore the boxes containing big snakes, of which there were now almost as many as had been embraced in the captain's plans.

At some places, it was not possible for the boat to get in close to the shore, and with this contingency in view they had towed along with them a large raft, on which the boxes could first be placed, and from that transferred to the boat.

The work took the greater part of the day, but all were anxious to complete the task before night, and they kept at it until close on the edge of dusk.

The day was bright and clear until late afternoon, when heavy clouds came up and spread in banks over the sky. Pedro cast many anxious glances toward them and hurried the natives on with the work.

"Storm coming," he said sententiously. "Bad storm. Must work quick."

Don brought over the last box on the raft, which lay against the boat's side, held in place by a small rope. The box was lifted on board, and the natives followed to help in stowing it away, with the exception of one man left with Don on the raft.

They were about to follow, when suddenly a terrific gale burst upon them with all

the fury of a cyclone. It snapped the rope that held the raft to the vessel's side as though it were thread. The next instant, the raft was being borne away on the surface of the river, whipped into foam by the fury of the storm.

It had come, as tropical storms do come, with such startling suddenness that Don had had no time to jump for the boat. In the twinkling of an eye the raft was whirling far out on the surface of the maddened stream.

Don's first impulse was to plunge in and try to swim back to the vessel. But a glance at the whirling waters told that that would be impossible. And the glimpse of an enormous alligator between him and the vessel confirmed the conviction.

On went the raft, tossed about in the boiling caldron like a chip in the rapids of Niagara. Both Don and the Indian had been thrown to the planking, where they plunged their fingers into what crevices they could find and held on for their lives.

Again and again it seemed as if the raft would turn over as it was tossed up and down by the rushing waters. If it had, Don's doom and that of his companion would have been sealed, for no swimmer could have lived in that raging torrent.

The raft was swept in near the shore and the trailing rope that had held them to the boat caught on a projecting rock. It looked for a moment as though the end had come for the two on the raft; but the rope broke, and once more they were swept along on the swirling waters.

CHAPTER XVIII
A Terrible Enemy

Huge logs, caught in the current, were dashed against the raft repeatedly, and every moment Don feared that the frail structure would go to pieces before those grinding blows.

Inky blackness covered the scene and added to its terrors. The howl of the wind was like pandemonium, and the roar of the churning waters was deafening.

A huge boa constrictor was washed on the raft, and for a moment Don's heart stood still. He had no rifle, and even if he had it would have been doubtful if in that maelstrom he could have sufficiently steadied himself to use it.

But there was no fight in the great reptile at that moment. Like its human companions, it was equally the victim of the storm, and was probably too stunned and frightened to think of anything but the temporary safety that the raft afforded. Nor was its stay an extended one. It was soon washed off again by the turbulent waters, and Don breathed a sigh of relief as it vanished into the darkness.

In addition to the gale, the heavens had opened and the rain was coming down in torrents. Not even the terrible rainstorm that Don had experienced in the Sahara Desert exceeded in fury the one that now threatened to sweep him from the raft. It seemed as though their one hope of safety would be swamped by the tons of water that fell upon it.

There was no use of planning. They were in the grip of the elements, now unleashed in all their savage strength. As far as Don could think at all in the terrific uproar, he hoped that the raft would somewhere strike the shore and permit them once more to get a footing on land. The solid earth had never seemed so dear to him.

And never had it seemed so inaccessible! As far as appearances went, they might as well have been in the middle of the ocean. The banks were blurred by the sheets of rain and the darkness that prevailed. Only when a jagged streak of lightning tore across the sky could the black masses of forest that stretched on either side of the river be seen.

Don and his fellow victim were even denied the slight solace of conversing with each other. Speech was impossible in the terrible uproar that prevailed.

For more than an hour the tempest raged in unbridled fury. Then Don thought he could detect a faint lessening of its wrath. The wind, instead of a steady gale, began to come in gusts, with intervals of comparative mildness. The waters, though still running high, no longer threatened to overturn the raft. The black banks of clouds

began to show occasional rifts.

Then at a sharp turn of the river, the raft struck with such force upon a projecting point of land that those upon it were almost thrown into the water. It rebounded and again struck, and this time was held in the mass of canes and weeds that fringed the shore.

Before it could be sucked out again by the force of the current, Don leaped into the mass of underbrush, motioning to his companion to follow him.

The Indian obeyed, and, grasping the swaying canes, they struggled through the mud and slime until they reached the bank and drew themselves upon it. There they threw themselves down, utterly exhausted by their terrible experience. At last they were safe.

Safe, at least, for the time being. About them swarmed the myriad beasts and reptiles of the Amazonian forest, and a thrill of apprehension ran through Don as he remembered that he had no rifle with him.

True, he had his revolver safely ensconced in his holster in its waterproof wrapping. That at least was some comfort. But how little that would avail against a jaguar or an anaconda he knew only too well.

Neither Don nor the Indian had as yet any idea of where they had landed. For all they knew, it might be an island, one of the many Don had seen that were the favorite haunts of alligators, and where he had often seen scores basking in the sun. If that were true, their danger would he redoubled. They would have no craft that would enable them to reach the mainland, and swimming was not to be thought of. If the alligators did not get them the piranhas would.

But the lad tried to dismiss the grim thought for the present. At the moment he and his companion were safe. There would be few if any beasts abroad in the forest that night. The storm would keep them in their lairs. But the next morning—that might be a different story.

Don had some matches in waterproof boxes, but the comfort of a fire was denied them because of the drenched condition of leaves and branches.

Now that the first excitement had somewhat subsided, the lad began to realize that he was hungry. He had some crackers in his pocket and his companion had a few handfuls of the farina that the Indians always carried around with them. They were mere soaked masses of pulp, but they helped to assuage the inward gnawing.

Wet and miserable, the two crouched down on the sodden leaves and waited for the day. Tired as Don was, he could not sleep. Never had a night been so long! Never had he so longed for the dawn!

That dawn came at last with every promise of a glorious day. The storm had

subsided, and as soon as they could see clearly, they started out on their journey.

Don did not know, except in the most general way, the direction in which the Indian settlement lay. But his companion seemed pretty sure of himself, and with him as guide they plodded along as rapidly as they could through the forest.

The native had his machete with him, and he and Don took turns in wielding it at places where they had to hack their way through some especially thick growth of underbrush. It was a powerful and effective implement, with the keenest kind of an edge, that sliced the shrubs and creepers as though they were that much cheese.

Don was using it when suddenly the Indian stopped short in his tracks, staring fearfully ahead of him.

"What is it?" asked Don, alert on the instant.

"A cooanaradi!" exclaimed the man.

Don looked, and saw coiled at a little distance the most dreaded poison snake of the Brazilian jungles, the largest venomous reptile in the world.

It was glowing with all the colors of the rainbow, an evilly beautiful creature, as its slender head rose and swayed over its coils that were fully twelve feet in length.

"Run!" cried the native, as he turned to retreat by the way they had come.

For the snake, instead of gliding away, glad enough to avoid an encounter with man, as most venomous reptiles do, had followed the invariable habit of its own particular species and launched itself forward in attack.

Don shifted the machete to his left hand, drew his revolver with his right and fired.

CHAPTER XIX
The Edge Of The Machete

That the bullet fired by Don had nipped the snake was evident from the slight shiver that ran through its coils. But that it had been merely grazed was shown by the quickness with which it again darted forward, its eyes gleaming with rage, its mouth open, showing its terrible fangs.

There was no time for another shot, and the lad turned and ran, the snake pursuing him.

Don had a start of about twenty feet. He knew that in all probability he would be overtaken if the chase continued, for the underbrush hindered him more than it did that lithe, sinuous body, winding its way through it like a flashing streak. As he ran, he dropped his now useless revolver and shifted the machete to his right hand.

As he reached a comparatively open space, he ventured to look behind. The snake was gaining and was barely eight feet away. A moment more and it would be on him.

He turned and leaped quickly to one side. The cooanaradi's coils flashed past, the reptile's aim slightly disconcerted by the sudden movement.

With all his might Don swung with the machete at his foe. The heavy razor-edged weapon caught the reptile at the slender neck and sliced its head from its body. The two parts fell to the ground, where they lay quivering and writhing.

A faint sick feeling swept over Don as he leaned heavily against a tree and thought of the terrible fate that he had so narrowly escaped. Another moment and he would have been doomed, with the poison of the cooanaradi coursing through his veins.

As soon as he had somewhat recovered, he shouted for the Indian. It was some time before he received an answering shout, for his companion had put a long distance between him and his terrible enemy. He appeared at last and looked wonderingly at the dead reptile and admiringly at Don.

"White-boy magic," he said. "Big medicine man."

He went to where the head lay and picked it up.

"What do you want with it?" Don asked in disgust, as he looked with a shudder at the hideous trophy.

"Use poison to dip darts in," was the reply. "Sure kill."

Again Don felt a shiver go through him as he remembered the soft pattering of those deadly darts as they thudded into the tree trunks on the occasion of their first landing at the Indian settlement.

They resumed their journey, guided somewhat by the sun but more by the instinct of the native, Don first picking up his revolver and returning it to its holster.

They toiled on until the position of the sun in the heavens indicated that it was nearly noon. Then they stopped to rest for a few minutes, for they were almost exhausted after the arduous work of the morning.

They lay down on the leaves and relaxed their weary limbs. The native had a handful of farina left, and they ate it raw. It was not much, but it was better than nothing.

Between two bushes near by was spread a heavy web, much larger and thicker than any spider's web that Don had ever seen. As he glanced at it listlessly he saw a small bird dart up from the bush where it had been nesting or hiding.

It struck the web, and Don expected to see the apparently frail substance give way. But to his astonishment, it yielded just far enough to permit the fluttering creature to get entangled in its meshes.

It struggled desperately, but its efforts only served to get it more and more entangled.

Moved by pity, Don was about to rise to his feet to free the captive when a great horrible spider rushed from its lurking place, darted upon its prey, buried its fangs among the feathers and threw at the same time its long legs about the victim. The bird struggled and screamed, but fruitlessly. Soon its flutterings ceased. Then the spider spun a few strong lines about it and dragged the body to the shelter of a broad leaf where he finished his meal, dropping the remains later to the ground beneath.

Don had witnessed the forest tragedy with a strong feeling of repulsion, but his surprise had been so great at seeing the spider attack so large a victim that the whole thing was over before he had recovered from his amazement.

"Teeteeroo," said the Indian laconically, using the name for the bird-eating spider common along the Amazon.

Don picked up a stick, and, approaching the web, demolished it with a stroke, bringing along with it the spider. The creature was gorged and not as lightning quick as usual. It crouched as though to spring, but another quick blow ended its baleful career.

Don did not care to pick it up, but bent over and examined it closely. It was by far the largest of its kind he had ever seen, and a more horrible thing even than the tarantulas he had encountered in the Sahara Desert. It was grayish-black in tint, with a body almost as large as that of a sparrow and legs which when extended covered nearly a foot in surface.

"Spider!" muttered Don to himself, as he pushed it further away from him. "More like a crab."

He picked up a fragment of the web, and found it so strong that it took considerable effort to break it apart, in addition to which it was covered with a sticky substance that helped to gum the wings of its prey. The ground beneath the place where the web had been was strewn with wings, feet and other fragments of birds, beetles and smaller victims.

With a shudder of disgust, Don turned away, and he and his companion resumed their journey.

All that afternoon they toiled through the jungle, which seemed to grow thicker and thicker as they proceeded. The steaming heat from the rank vegetation was almost intolerable. The perspiration rolled from them in streams. They took turns in wielding the machete, but the brush was so tangled that sometimes they did not make a mile in an hour. Their muscles ached, and their blood seemed to have reached the boiling point.

Don's heart sank as he realized the slow progress that they were making. At this rate it might be days before they could regain their party. And added to this was the apprehension that grew even deeper that they did not really know whether they were going in the right direction.

The Indian, Uungus, by name, was young; he had, in fact, but recently been initiated by the rites of his village into manhood, and this was his first trip as a man with the older members of his tribe. Don suspected that the lad had lost his bearings, that his woodcraft had failed him in that almost impenetrable forest.

When, a little before dusk, they came to a place they recognized as having passed two hours before, Don's suspicions woke to sickening certainty and the Indian acknowledged his bewilderment.

They were lost—lost in the jungles of the Amazon!

CHAPTER XX
A Night Of Horror

The situation might have daunted the stoutest heart. If Don had had his rifle with him, he could have borne his plight with more composure. The machete had of course a certain value, as he had demonstrated that very morning. And the revolver, though he had only three cartridges left, might be effective at close quarters. But against the larger beasts of prey, with which the forest swarmed, they would count for little.

But it was not in Don's nature to give way to despair, and he resolutely put any such feeling away from him.

"We're up against it, Uungus, but we'll get out of it all right," he remarked, putting as much buoyancy in his tone as he could and summoning up a smile. "Now we've got to hustle enough wood together to make a fire. It won't be the first time we've had to make the best of things."

The Indian replied with a grunt of stolid resignation, and they set about gathering as much brush and as many branches as possible, so as to maintain a fire that would burn all night—their only protection against the marauders that would soon be softly slinking through the forest seeking for prey.

Most of the twigs and branches lying on the ground were so sodden from the storm of the night before that they had difficulty in finding any that would burn, being forced to depend on those that had been sheltered to some extent by fallen trees that lay over them.

Don was bending over to gather some branches when a heavy body descended suddenly on his back, bearing him to the ground.

Fortunately his outstretched arms had saved his head in falling, and he retained full possession of his senses. With a violent twist, he threw himself over on his hack, dislodging for an instant his burden, which, however, immediately bounded on his chest and reached for his throat.

In the rapidly dimming light Don saw that he was looking into the eyes of a Brazilian tiger-cat, somewhat like the catamount or the ocelot, but larger and more vicious than either.

As the spitting, snarling creature, its eyes glowing like coals, sought for his throat, Don threw up his hands and grasped the brute's neck and held on with the grip of desperation.

Over and over they rolled in a terrific struggle, the great cat plying its claws and tearing at Don's clothes while it sought to get its head free.

Don hung on tenaciously with the energy of despair. His strength was fast ebbing, and he knew that it would be but a matter of seconds before his hands would be torn loose from their grasp.

One of the hind legs of the animal caught in Don's belt. As it struggled to release itself, Uungus came running up and slashed at the leg with his machete. The cat tore itself loose from Don's grasp, and turned with a ferocious snarl to face its new enemy.

As it did so, Don reached for his revolver and fired at the beast. There was no time to take careful aim, but the bullet found its mark in a vital spot. The brute fell, writhing, struggled about convulsively for a few minutes and lay still.

The Indian rushed forward and helped Don to his feet. The latter was panting and exhausted, and some minutes elapsed before he could speak. Then he took account of himself, and though his clothes were badly torn and blood showed itself in a few places, he had suffered nothing worse than some painful scratches.

"You came just at the right time, Uungus," he said gratefully. "If you hadn't it would have been all up with me."

The native grasped his meaning, if he did not understand the words, and his eyes glowed with satisfaction.

After resting a few minutes, they built their fire and over it roasted a slab of meat cut from the flank of their dead enemy. It was tough and stringy, but in their half-starved condition they were in no mood to be critical, and they feasted bountifully.

Then the Indian told of a discovery he had made while he was gathering wood.

"Find cave," he said. "Come."

Though reluctant to go far from the fire, Don rose and followed his companion.

At a distance of about a hundred yards, the Indian drew aside some bushes revealing an opening in the side of a small knoll. They had taken the precaution to bring torches along with them, and Don flashed the light of his in the opening. It revealed a small cave about twenty feet square. It seemed to be uninhabited, and there were no bones lying around to indicate that it was the lair of a wild animal.

With his revolver drawn, and moving with extreme caution, Don entered followed by the Indian. They made the circuit of the cave, which evidently had only the one opening. It was dry and snug, and appealed to Don as infinitely safer and more inviting than the forest without. It would be easy to block up the entrance with logs and rocks that would leave only crevices enough to insure a supply of air.

"Seems as though it were made for us," Don said to his companion. "A mighty sight safer, anyway, than the open. I guess we'll camp here for the night."

The native made no objection. They set to work and in a short time had

barricaded the entrance securely. Then, as they were frightfully tired, they lay down on the dry ground, and in less than a minute were wrapped in slumber.

How long he slept Don did not know, but he was awakened by a burning, irritating sensation all over his face and body. He lay for a moment half-dazed with sleep. He could hear a rustling sound, something like that produced by the crumpling of a piece of paper—a sound of innumerable stealthy creeping things.

He felt a sharp nip on his cheek, and as he reached his hand to his face it brushed against a pulpy, hairy body, the feel of which was unutterably loathsome.

He leaped to his feet with a shout, shaking off from him as he did so a score or more of the horrid creatures that were swarming over him.

He knew immediately what had happened. They had stumbled upon one of the nocturnal haunts of the dreaded bird-eating spiders, to which they repaired sometimes by the thousands after a day of slaughter and from which they went back to their individual webs in the morning.

Don's shout brought his companion, already half-awakened, to his feet, and in a moment both of them were battling desperately to free themselves from the spiders that were attacking them.

Alone, no one of the marauders would have been formidable against a human foe, but there was strength in numbers, and the creatures seemed to know it.

They attacked Don and his companion like so many rats, biting at face and hands and making their nips felt through their clothes. They came in myriads. Don and Uungus brushed them off, stamped on them until the floor was covered with blood and pulp, but as fast as some were dislodged others took their places. And the horrid, continued rustling on floor and walls and roof showed that legions more were coming to the attack.

Frenzied and panting, Don and his companion, after they realized the impossibility of conquering the horde, rushed to the opening and worked desperately at removing the barricade so that they could escape from that place of horror.

It seemed as though they were working in a nightmare. The moment they desisted from brushing off their foes and turned their attention to the barricade, their hands and faces were covered with the repulsive insects and they had perforce to stop and free themselves. Then they would resume, only to stop again a moment later.

It was torture unspeakable, but at last they had flung enough of the logs aside to form an opening and they threw themselves out into the black forest, which, whatever its terrors, held nothing they would not rather meet than face the horrors of the cave.

They brushed off the spiders that still clung to them, and rushed back to the dying embers of the fire. They flung themselves down, gasping and faint from their terrible experience. Only after a long time did they rouse themselves to the dangers that still surrounded them and build up a roaring fire, which they could depend upon to keep the forest denizens at a safe distance.

There was no more sleep for either of them that night, and as soon as day dawned they made a hasty meal of the meat they had saved from the night before and started off, choosing the direction that they hoped was right, but of which they were by no means sure.

Until the sun was high in the heavens they plodded along, when, too tired to go farther, they threw themselves down in the shade of a tree.

Don, after a moment, saw a look of terror come into his companion's eyes. He sat upright with a jerk and followed the direction of his glance.

On a branch of the tree above him crouched a great jaguar, its quivering body poised for a spring!

CHAPTER XXI
Touch And Go

Don sprang from the ground and felt for his revolver. But that was simply an impulse of despair. It was a mere toy when it came to dealing with this tiger of the jungles. But he drew it, nevertheless, just as the brute launched itself into the air.

But simultaneously with the spring a rifle cracked. The great beast whirled around and around and fell almost at Don's feet, writhing in the agonies of death.

The next instant, Captain Sturdy burst into the little clearing, followed by the professor, Pedro and a group of shouting natives.

"Dear, dear boy!" cried the captain, as he encircled Don with his arm and drew him close, while the professor patted his hands and muttered some words that were almost unintelligible from emotion.

"You came just in the nick of time," said Don, trying to smile but feeling giddy and lightheaded. "Another minute and it would have been too late."

There was a chorus of questions and answers as they sat down together, while the boat's crew lighted a fire and prepared a meal from the abundant provisions that the captain had brought along.

Don ate heartily, while his uncles told him of their consternation when the news was brought to them of the breaking loose of the raft. They had of course only the most general idea of where they would find the lost ones, knowing only that they would be swept downstream, but they had at once started out in search. They had made their way through the forest, firing guns at frequent intervals in the hope that they would be heard and serve to bring about a reunion.

Don in turn narrated what had happened, including his horrible adventure in the cave with the spiders.

After they had rested a while, they took up their journey to the native village, where the joy of Antikari and his people was great at the return of the wanderers, for not only did they rejoice over Uungus, but Don had been a great favorite with them ever since he had saved the life of the chief.

"And now," said the captain that night, "we're going to pack up and start out for Glassbury's camp."

"Bully!" cried Don, "I didn't think you were quite through here yet."

"I had intended to stay here a day or two longer," replied the captain, "but something Antikari told me a few minutes ago has made me decide to start at once."

"What was that?" asked Don in lively curiosity.

"A native had just come in from the Glassbury rubber plantation," replied the

captain, "and he says that there is a new man with the Glassbury party, a man who hunts bugs and butterflies and queer flowers and plants. It has struck me that this might possibly be the Webb Reynard that we are looking for."

Don bounded from his seat.

"Reynard!" he cried. "Oh, Uncle Frank, let's hurry! Oh, if we can only get to him quick! If any one can tell us about father and mother and Ruth, he can!"

"I know just how you feel," replied his uncle. "And I, too, am eager to get to him. We'll start the first thing to-morrow morning, and we ought to get there before night of the next day."

In his feverish impatience, Don would have liked to start that night, but he had to restrain himself for a few hours more as best he could.

Was he nearing the end of his search at last? His father! His mother! Dear Ruth, that precious sister with whom all the associations of his childhood were so closely connected! A perfect passion of longing welled up in his heart.

They started early the next day and made such rapid time, urged on as they were by consuming impatience, that by a little after noon on the second day they were at their destination, a rough log camp in the midst of a rubber plantation that extended for many miles in every direction.

As they approached it, a big hearty looking man, dressed in a worn but serviceable suit, detached himself from a group and came forward to meet them.

"Don't know who you are," he said, as he extended his hand in greeting, "but it's mighty good to see white faces in this wilderness, and you're welcome. My name's Glassbury, Henry Glassbury, of New York."

The captain took the extended hand and introduced himself and his companions.

"So you're from New York, too—or near there," their new acquaintance said, with a smile. "Better and better. Come right in now and have some refreshment and make this place your headquarters while you're in this vicinity. Apart from a couple of my engineers and helpers, I haven't seen a white face for a dog's age. That is with one exception, a wandering scientist. But he isn't with me now."

A pang of bitter disappointment shot through Don's heart at this intelligence.

"Are you referring by any chance to a Professor Webb Reynard?" asked the captain, as they followed Glassbury into the house.

"That's the man," replied their host. "Why? Do you know him?"

"Only by hearsay," was the reply. "But we are very anxious to meet him, because of some important information he may be able to give us."

"Too bad, but he left here yesterday and I don't know when he'll be back, or whether he'll be back at all," said Glassbury. "He's a wanderer if there ever was

one. Wrapt up wholly in science and discovery."

Poor Don! Again his hopes were dashed. His cup of bitterness was brimming over. Would he never reach the end of the trail? Or was that trail unending?

CHAPTER XXII
What Hung From The Tree

At their host's direction, refreshments were brought in by native servants and while the members of the party were eating, the captain explained the reason for their solicitude about Reynard.

Mr. Glassbury listened with interest and sympathy, and was profuse with offers of any help he could render.

"I'm more sorry that I can tell that you didn't get here a day sooner," he said. "Still, Reynard can't have got very far. He's on foot, and as I don't think he had any definite destination in mind he's probably just wandering around looking for specimens. I'll send out parties in various directions, in the hope that they'll be able to find him and bring him in."

"That's mighty good of you," said Don, as he looked at him gratefully.

It did not seem to him that this genial good-natured man could be a swindler. His face was frank and open, his glance was clear and direct. There was an indefinable something about him that inspired respect and confidence.

It was not until they had chatted for a considerable time on a variety of topics that the captain broached the delicate matter that he had in mind.

"I've been familiar for a long time with your name, Mr. Glassbury, as that of a leading business man of New York," he said. "But of late it has been especially impressed on me by a matter that came to my attention shortly before I left for this trip."

"Indeed?" said their host politely. "Something in connection with business?"

"Yes," replied the captain; and then without further preamble he launched into the story of the shares out of which Fred and Emily Turner had been defrauded.

Glassbury's looks during the recital changed from mild bewilderment to almost uncontrollable anger. When the captain had finished their host bounded from his chair.

"It's almost unbelievable!" he exclaimed. "The scoundrel! To think that two orphan children should be so heartlessly swindled!"

He turned to the captain.

"I'm more obliged to you than I can tell you for having brought this thing to my attention," he said. "I hate to think of a scandal of this kind threatening the good name of my firm. I'm proud of my business and the way I've always tried to carry it on. It's reputation is as clean as a hound's tooth."

"So I found out on inquiry," said the captain. "The commercial agencies spoke of

it in the highest terms."

"Before I go a step further," declared their host, "I want to assure you solemnly that this wrong shall be righted."

A great feeling of relief welled up in Don's heart as he heard this statement which, he felt, meant so much to Fred and Emily, for the sincerity in the man's tone carried conviction, and he could see that the same feeling was shared by his uncles.

"Now as to the whys and wherefores of this matter," went on Glassbury, resuming his seat and biting viciously at the end of his cigar, "I don't know any more than you do, and won't until I can get back to the States and run the matter down. But I can hazard a shrewd guess at the man who's responsible.

"We had a man in our employ," he continued, "who was discharged for dishonesty shortly before I left. His name was Hallock Gordon—"

"Hallock Gordon?" interrupted the professor. "That gives him the same initials as yours. 'H.G.'"

"Exactly," rejoined Glassbury. "And that similarity may go far toward unraveling the fraud when we get at it. As I was saying, we caught him in some crooked work for which we could have had him arrested. But the amount involved was not very large, and as he had a wife and children we didn't prosecute. Simply fired him. I heard that he drifted out West somewhere. Ten to one he's at the bottom of this. By some hocus pocus he's got hold of the shares and turned them into cash. I'll do my best to have him traced and caught as soon as I get back. I'll never rest until the mystery is solved and justice done."

Don's heart hounded in exultation. What glorious news for Fred and Emily!

It was too late to send out scouting parties for Professor Reynard that afternoon, as it was verging toward night, but early the next morning three groups, headed respectively by Captain Sturdy, Professor Bruce and Don, went out in different directions, intending to cover a zone of ten miles or so in circumference.

All through the early hours of the morning Don's party searched in vain. At frequent intervals Don discharged his rifle, in the hope of attracting the attention of the scientist, if he should be within hearing.

His hope of success was waning when suddenly his eyes brightened. He saw a human figure some distance ahead of him. That it was not a native he detected at a glance. The man was bending low over a plant that he was examining with close attention.

Don started to run toward him, but he suddenly caught sight of something else that froze his blood with horror.

From the bough of the tree under which the man was standing a giant boa

constrictor was stealthily lowering his huge body to get within striking distance!

CHAPTER XXIII
Exciting News

Don's rifle flew to his shoulder and he fired, and then fired again.

The bullets shattered the boa's head, and the whole huge body left the limb and fell writhing at the unsuspecting man's feet, one of the folds almost grazing him as it fell.

The man jumped away with a startled exclamation and hurriedly got out of reach of the thrashing body of the reptile.

His eyes fell upon Don, who came rushing toward him, and into them came a look of the warmest gratitude.

"So you are my deliverer," he said in excellent English, with merely the slightest suggestion of a foreign accent. "That timely shot undoubtedly saved my life. I can't thank you enough."

"That's all right," said Don. "I'm glad I happened to be on hand. But tell me," he continued eagerly, "are you Professor Webb Reynard?"

"That is my name," was the reply.

"Mine is Don Sturdy," Don hurried on. "Tell me. Does that mean anything to you? Have you ever heard the name Sturdy before?"

His breath was coming fast and his attitude was that of supplication.

"Sturdy?" repeated the professor. "Why, to be sure I have. I know a Mr. Richard Sturdy very well. He is a good friend of mine."

"He is my father!" burst out Don. "Where is he? Is he alive? What do you know about him? Tell me! Quick!"

"Your father?" exclaimed Reynard, shaken somewhat by the boy's evident emotion. "Why, I suppose he's alive. He was in a shipwreck with me, and he was picked up by the same boat that rescued me and that landed us here in Brazil."

"And my mother, my sister?"

"They were with us too. I parted with them in Bahia. They stood the voyage well and seemed to be in the best of health."

Don sank down on a log and burst into tears. He could not help it. All the accumulated grief and longing and heartache of the past dreary months found vent in sobs that shook him convulsively.

They had been rescued then from the hungry sea! That much was certain. It was the first definite assurance he had had that they had survived the wreck. Oh, God was good! He had heard his prayers.

Professor Reynard, deeply stirred, patted him on the shoulder.

"There, there," he said. "I'm glad that I am the messenger who could give you this assurance."

"You will never know how much it means to me," said Don, as he tried to get a grip on himself.

Reynard waited a minute or two, and then went on:

"I thought that they had reached the United States long ago," he said. "They have had time to make the voyage many times over. I do not understand."

"We've never seen them nor heard a word from them," explained Don. "We feared they were dead."

The scientist looked deeply puzzled.

"That is strange," he murmured. "It is true that they could not have gone directly home from Bahia at that time, because there was a strike on in the harbor and all transportation was tied up. But they got in communication with an acquaintance of your father's in Brazil who owned an ocean-going steam yacht and he agreed to take them home."

"What was his name, Professor Reynard?" asked Don eagerly.

The scientist cudgeled his memory.

"His name was Clifton," he said at last. "Martin Clifton. I understood he was a wealthy man with a coffee plantation at Santarem, near the northern coast of Brazil. Your family were to make the journey overland and embark from there."

"Won't you come back to Mr. Glassbury's camp with me, and let us talk the matter over with my uncles?" asked Don.

"I can refuse you nothing after you have saved my life," was the reply. "I will be glad to come and do all I can toward clearing up the mystery."

He got together his belongings, and they started back toward the camp, Don at intervals discharging his rifle three times in succession, the agreed-upon signal for summoning together all that were within sound of the shots, with the consequence that before long all were reunited and in earnest conference over the scientist's story, in which Don's uncles shared his delight.

The mystery was still far from unraveled. The missing ones were not yet found, but all felt that a great step had been taken toward the finding and were filled with new and buoyant hope.

Before they separated that night a course of action had been agreed upon. It was planned that Don and his uncles should return to the village of Antikara, gather up the drugs and the collection of big snakes and smaller ones of the venomous variety and travel with them down the river in the *Teddy* until they reached the main stream, where they would board a steamer and proceed to the plantation of Martin

Clifton. There they would gather what information they could about Don's parents and his sister Ruth, and let their future actions be determined by what they should learn.

They were pleased to learn too that Glassbury was about ready to return, and extended to him a hearty invitation to join their party, which was promptly accepted. It would take them some time to wind up their work at the Indian settlement, and by that time Glassbury hoped to be with them.

They parted with reluctance from Reynard, who still had work to do in the jungle. All liked him, but the professor had been especially drawn to him by the similarity of their scientific tastes. The two sat up almost the entire night exchanging experiences and discussing the rare drugs of the Brazilian forests, which Webb Reynard had made his special study.

Especially did they dwell upon the specific that the professor had in his mind for Fred's crippled condition. The professor was delighted to learn of many instances that Reynard himself had noted of its remarkable qualities. Now he had not only the testimony of Antikari and his medicine man, but the reliable investigations of a trained scientific mind to depend on, and he was correspondingly satisfied and elated.

No untoward incident interfered with the plans that they had marked out. Mr. Glassbury joined them on time, and, after the distribution of many presents among the simple people who had treated them so hospitably, they left the settlement, with Antikari and all the tribe shouting farewells and invitations to return soon.

They reached the mouth of the tributary in safety, and after a day or two of waiting found passage on the same *Aldebaran* on which they had made their voyage up the river. Their boxes were stowed away in a storeroom on the after part of the main deck, and the party settled down to enjoy a little of the repose that had been denied them during the last strenuous weeks.

That repose was rudely broken on the afternoon of the second day when a sudden clamor rose among the crew.

"What's the matter, I wonder!" exclaimed Captain Sturdy, starting up from his deck chair.

There were wild shouts and scamperings all over the vessel. One of the crew came running past, his eyes wild with terror.

"Snakes!" he shouted. "Snakes! The snakes have broken loose!"

CHAPTER XXIV
A Thrilling Experience

All the members of the party jumped to their feet.

At the same instant the hideous head of an anaconda was thrust through the window of the storeroom followed quickly by his whole body, like a hawser uncoiling.

"Quick! Get your rifles!" commanded Captain Sturdy, himself running toward his cabin, from which he emerged a moment later with an armful of ropes, nets and forked sticks.

Don and Professor Bruce were quite as quick, and Glassbury, who was a crack shot and had had many encounters with the reptiles in his frequent visits to Brazil, also secured his weapon.

It was evident that they would have to rely on their own endeavors. Captain, officers and crew alike had vanished from the deck.

"Shoot if you have to," commanded Captain Sturdy, as he took a rope with a noose in it in one hand and a net in the other, "but not unless you have to. That's one of my best specimens. He'll be the largest of his kind in the States, and I don't want to lose him."

Two other snakes followed the anaconda from the window and fell wriggling on the deck. One was a jaracara and the other a rattlesnake. The instant they struck, they coiled themselves in an attitude of defense, heads lifted and fiery eyes darting about as they hissed defiance. But they made no aggressive move, and for the moment they were disregarded. It was the anaconda that demanded first attention. The others could be attended to later.

Slowly, very slowly, Captain Sturdy advanced toward the great constrictor. The latter watched him steadily with baleful eyes.

"Throw one of those sticks at it, Don," directed his Uncle Frank.

Don picked up one of the forked sticks and threw it at the reptile. With a wicked hiss the snake struck at it.

Its momentary distraction was its undoing. In that instant Captain Sturdy threw the noose, as though it had been a lasso, directly over its head. It tightened about the creature's neck, and the next moment the net enmeshed the anaconda's head in its fold.

The instant the rope had tightened, Don, the professor and Mr. Glassbury sprang to Captain Sturdy's side and took hold of the rope, which the furious tugging of the monster threatened to pull from his grip. For a moment it seemed as though the

united efforts of all four would be insufficient, but Don gave a quick turn of the end about a stout stanchion and knotted it fast.

"Now we'll let him choke himself," said Captain Sturdy, as all jumped back to escape the heavy coils that were thrashing all over the deck. "The harder he pulls the closer he'll draw it."

His prophecy was quickly verified, for the struggle grew feebler and soon the snake lay motionless.

"Guess he's out of action for a while," commented Don. "Now for the lesser fry."

It was a comparatively simple matter to capture the jaracara and the rattlesnake. A stick was held out at which they sprang, and before they could recoil a forked stick pinned them to the deck, from which they were transferred to a bag and later to their box.

Then, by the expenditure of a little money, Captain Sturdy got some of the crew to help get the unconscious anaconda back into his narrow quarters, from which it developed later he and the other reptiles had escaped owing to carelessness of the crew in handling the boxes, two of which had been partly broken in stowing them away.

This time the boxes were made secure beyond the shadow of a doubt. One experience of that kind was all the party cared for.

But this, too, was quickly forgotten, for now they were approaching the town of Santarem, near which was the plantation of Martin Clifton.

Don and his uncles left the vessel at Santarem, leaving their collections in the care of Mr. Glassbury, who promised to see to their safe shipment from Para to New York.

Don's mind was in a tumult of emotion, as, after a half hour's ride in an automobile, they drew near the Clifton home, a beautiful building in the midst of a splendid estate. What would this visit mean to him? What did it hold for him of happiness or misery?

They announced their names, and were ushered into a magnificently furnished room, in which they were promptly joined by the master of the house.

"Your name brought me running," he said, with a genial smile. "Any one with the name of Sturdy finds a hearty welcome here."

"Thank you, very much," replied the captain, as they took the chairs to which their host motioned them. "No doubt you guess the object of our visit."

A troubled look came over Mr. Clifton's face.

"I suppose of course you want to find out the whereabouts of Mr. and Mrs.

Richard Sturdy," he said. "Well, I wish I could tell you. But I don't know myself."

Don, who had been leaning forward eagerly, sank bank, feeling utterly crushed, while Captain Sturdy explained briefly about Don and Professor Bruce and himself.

"Mr. and Mrs. Sturdy came here as my guests," continued Mr. Clifton, with a glance of pity at the stricken boy, "and I had planned to take them on my yacht to America. Then one night they mysteriously disappeared."

"Disappeared!" exclaimed the professor.

"Yes, vanished as though into the air," replied Mr. Clifton. "I've never been able yet to understand the matter, but no doubt Ruth can tell you more about it. That is, if she's well enough—"

He stopped short, for Don had sprung from his chair and stood white and trembling.

"Ruth!" he shouted. "Ruth! Is she here?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Clifton; "that is, she's in a hospital in the town here. She's been ill—"

But Don, with a muttered word of apology, seized his hat and rushed from the house.

His uncles also arose.

"I'm sure you'll pardon our abruptness," Professor Bruce said. "You can understand."

"Surely," replied Mr. Clifton graciously. "Come again after you've seen her. Good luck."

"Hurry, hurry!" cried Don frantically, as he flung open the door of the auto tonneau. "Ruth is here! Ruth is near us! Hurry! Hurry!"

CHAPTER XXV
The Joy Of Reunion

Don was almost crazed with excitement, and his uncles scarcely less so, as they urged the driver of the machine on.

They whirled up in front of the hospital, a white, well appointed institution, and rushed up the steps and into the office of the superintendent.

The physician looked up in some surprise at the sudden irruption into the almost monastic calm of the hospital.

The professor hastily explained in Portuguese the errand on which they had come.

"Yes," said the superintendent, "there is a young girl, a Miss Ruth Sturdy here. She has been very ill with a fever, brought on by nervous worry and excitement. But she passed the crisis last night and we have good hope of her recovery. That is"—he hesitated.

"Please go on," urged the professor.

"That is," the superintendent repeated, "if she has the will to live. She is listless, despondent. If something could arouse her—"

"Oh, let me see her!" cried Don. "I'm her brother! I love her. She feels that she is alone. She needs me. She loves me dearly. Oh, let me see her! Please! Please!"

The superintendent pondered for a moment, after the professor had translated Don's impassioned plea.

"Well, why not?" he murmured, half to himself. "It may be for the best. Joy seldom kills. Yes, I think you may see her. But you must restrain yourself. And you cannot stay long."

He summoned a nurse, who led the way up the stairs and down a long corridor. She stopped at the door of a private room, and, motioning them to stand there, stepped softly inside.

She came to the door a moment later and with her finger on her lips stood aside for them to enter.

Don's head was whirling and his eyes wet with tears that almost blinded him as he looked toward the bed.

There lay his precious sister, Ruth, dear Ruth, frail, white, like a crushed lily, her eyes closed, her golden hair spread out on the pillow.

He had feared that he would never see her again. But she was here, here within reach of his eager arms that longed to enfold her! He took a quick step forward, but the nurse restrained him.

"No, no," she whispered.

So he had to stand looking at her, longing to touch her, to speak to her. But at least he was near her.

Then his heart almost stopped beating. Ruth slowly opened her eyes. She looked about uncomprehendingly, then her eyes fell on Don.

Her eyes widened unbelievingly and then joy sprang into them.

"Don, Don!" she murmured weakly, reaching out her arms toward him.

"Ruth! Oh, Ruth!" cried Don, throwing himself down on the floor beside the bed and taking her wasted hands in his.

What they talked about incoherently they could not afterward remember. But all too soon the nurse touched Don gently on the shoulder and told him he must go. But before he went, he told Ruth that he would be there every day and that as soon as she was well enough they would go home together. Her uncles too had a loving word with Ruth, and the eyes of all were moist with happy tears as they were reluctantly forced to leave her.

From that day on Don haunted the hospital in all the hours that visitors were permitted to come. The coming of her brother had acted as a tonic on Ruth, and her recovery was steady. But it was not till a week later, when she was almost ready to leave the hospital, that she was strong enough to tell about her own experience and those of her parents after the shipwreck and their arrival at the Clifton home.

"Father had been acting strangely ever since we had been rescued," she said. "He had been hit by a falling pulley block at the time of the wreck, but it didn't seem to hurt him much and we thought nothing more about it at the time. But he kept talking all the time of a trip that he had intended to take in former years to the Valley of the Kings in Egypt.

"There was a harbor strike in Bahia, where we landed, and we could not sail from there. After a long time father got in touch with Mr. Clifton, who said he would take us north on his yacht. But by that time the strike had spread, and we had a perfectly awful time getting away from there and up here. Father and mother were both almost worn out. But, in time, we reached Mr. Clifton's.

"Then one night, when we were sitting up late, father suddenly cried out: 'I must go to Egypt!' and rushed out of the house into the darkness. Mother was bewildered and hurried out after him. I've never seen them since."

Tears came into her eyes, and Don, though his own heart was heavy with grief and bewilderment at this development, patted her hand soothingly.

"I was distracted with grief and worry," Ruth went on. "Mr. and Mrs. Clifton were very dear, and they did everything in their power to find out where father and

mother were. But we could get no news of them, and finally I fell sick and the doctors insisted that I must go to the hospital."

"Why didn't you cable home?" asked the captain. "You know how instantly we would have dropped everything and come to your help."

"We couldn't from Bahia because of the strike," replied Ruth. "But Mr. Clifton did, and he got an answer that you were all out of the country and they didn't know how or where you could be reached."

"But we were there!" exclaimed the captain, when he had learned the date on which the cablegram was sent. "What on earth can that mean? Nobody ever reported to me that a cable message had been received."

He knitted his brows in deep thought.

"Say, Uncle Frank!" broke in Don, as the memory of a long forgotten incident came into his mind, "could Claggett have been at the bottom of this? Do you remember what I told you he said to me that day he met me on the road—that he had already got even with you, though you didn't know it?"

The captain brought his hand down on his knee.

"By ginger!" he exclaimed. "I'll bet you struck it. That fellow was as sore as the mischief when I had to discharge him for incompetence. I kept him on for a couple of weeks after giving him notice to quit, and probably the cablegram came at a time when I was absent from the office. He saw his chance, tore up the message and sent back the false answer that we were out of the country. I'd like to wring his neck!"

That they had guessed correctly was confirmed later by an investigation that the captain undertook after his return to New York.

"Still, I don't understand," the captain went on thoughtfully, "why Mr. Clifford didn't send other messages later on, in the hope that we might have returned to America."

"He did intend to," explained Ruth. "But he was called away suddenly to a wild part of Brazil and was detained a good deal longer than he expected. He got back about three months ago, and since then he's cabled several times, always getting the same answer that you had gone abroad."

"And those answers were true," said the captain, "for it's over three months now since we set out for Brazil. If we had only received that first message! Oh, that scoundrel Claggett!"

His clenched fist and flashing eyes told what would have happened to the rascal had he been within reach.

It was a great day when Don and Ruth, with their uncles, after warmest thanks to the Cliftons for all their kindness, were able to start for home. The voyage proved

of benefit to Ruth, and the sea breezes began to bring back the roses to her cheeks.

When the party at last reached Hillville, the way that good Mrs. Roscoe and Jennie cried over Ruth and gruff old Dan dashed his hands over his eyes told her how much they rejoiced over her home-coming.

Don and his uncles had many earnest conferences on the voyage, looking toward the lifting of the veil of mystery that still hung over the fate of the boy's parents, and what they determined on will be told in the next volume of this series, entitled: "Don Sturdy in the Tombs of Gold; or, The Old Egyptian's Great Secret."

Wonderful news awaited them on their return to Hillville. Mr. Glassbury had been as good as his word, even better than his word as far as quickness was concerned, for without waiting until he had tracked down the swindler who had defrauded the Turners he had sent his own personal check with interest for the full value of the missing shares.

One of Don's first acts after his return was to take Ruth over to the Turner home, and the royal welcome they received there was beyond all words. Ruth and Emily became warm friends, and as for Fred, his feeling toward Don was one almost of adoration.

And this feeling grew deeper yet when the remedy that Professor Bruce had brought home speedily began to manifest an efficacy that seemed almost magical. Day by day, Fred grew stronger and straighter, and the day finally came when he threw aside his crutch for good, his ailment gone forever.

"I guess I'm pretty poor as a prophet, eh, Fred?" said Don one day exultingly.

"Meaning just what?" asked Fred, with a smile.

"That little thing I said about going in a Marathon," responded Don Sturdy.

THE END

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This volume tells how the club journeyed to the seashore and how they not only kept up their riddles but likewise had good times on the sand and on the water. Once they got lost in a fog and are marooned on an island. Here they made a discovery that greatly pleased the folks at home.

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Don Sturdy with the Big Snake Hunters or Lost in the Jungles of the Amazon* by Victor Appleton [John W. Duffield]]