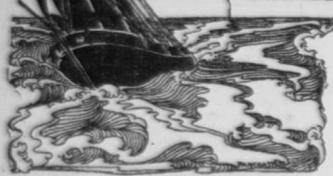


TRAINING IN THE TROPICS

BY WALTER A. MORRIS.

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Continued From Last Sunday

BUT I do not mind him," replied Fred, with a laugh, "and after what we are under way you can rest assured that I shall stay with Arthur in the engine-room."

While this conversation was going on, Doctor Burroughs had been making his arrangements with the Indians for the purchase of the feather-work, and when it had come to a satisfactory conclusion, Val and Fred were called to see that it was stowed away in the cabin, for, as they were going to the schooner, the articles were to be sent by them, in order, as George said, "to have the things out of the way."

When the boys went on board the yacht, the jaguar dashed against the front of his cage as if he would force his way through it, and both Val and Fred felt that it would be a great relief to them when they had landed him safely on board the North Star.

Fred and Val slept in the cabin, and Arthur Fowler in the engine-room, as usual. Perhaps the two former felt a trifle more safe because they were at a greater distance from the jaguar than the engineer, but, if they did, they made no remark, although they noticed that Arthur closed the door leading to the cockpit, regardless of the free circulation of air.

Despite the heat and the passenger forward, all hands slept soundly that night, for they were thoroughly tired, and no one awakened until the report of a gun from the shore brought them out of their hammocks instantly.

For a moment the boys thought an attack had been made on the camp by the Indians, but, as they rushed on deck, they heard George's voice shouting:

"Turn out there on the Midget! It's three o'clock, and by the time you get steam up it will be light enough for you to see your way down the river!"

"All right!" replied Val. "We'll be off directly, and you may expect to see us back by ten o'clock."

"Do your best, lads, but don't take any risks for the sake of making fast time."

"We will be careful," promised Val.

And then he went into the cabin to make his toilet, just as he heard Arthur opening the furnace door.

It was yet as dark as midnight, and the lanterns were lighted both in the cabin and the engine-room, but they did but little toward dispelling the gloom.

"I guess we shall be ready as soon as it is light," said Val, as he groped around on the locker for his hat.

"I'm not so sure of that," differed Arthur. "If you will look out of the starboard windows, you will see the gray streaks in the sky. It will be daybreak in less than ten minutes."

The engineer was right, for before the steam gauge showed a pressure of fifteen pounds it was so light that the lanterns were extinguished, and Val had started forward with Fred to leave the cable short, as the first step toward getting under way.

He had just gotten into the engine room, when an unusually loud roar was heard from the jaguar, followed by the crashing of wood and the fluttering of birds. Then perfect silence reigned for an instant, while the three boys glanced quickly at each other in affright, and then came the sound as of a heavy body leaping from the cockpit to the hurricane deck.

"The jaguar!" exclaimed the officers of the yacht, standing almost as if paralyzed with fear.

And before one of them had time to make any move footsteps were heard on the deck above, then a thud, showing that the animal had jumped on to the quarter.

"The guns! the guns!" shouted Val, as he started toward the door leading to the cabin, where the weapons were.

But before he could reach it there was a rushing sound from the little room, and on the companionway stood the jaguar, his eyes gleaming, his lips curled, displaying his long, white teeth, while his tail swept from side to side in a way that meant mischief.

The boys were indeed defenseless. All the weapons were in the cabin, and for them to attempt to flee would surely be to bring the animal upon them.

CHAPTER XXV.

A NOVEL WEAPON OF DEFENSE.

ARTHUR FOWLER was standing by the engine, where he had been at work when the jaguar first broke loose from his cage, and Fred was in a place of safety, as compared to the others, for he was on the starboard locker, screened from the view of the animal. Val felt as if he must make a dash for the door, when Fowler said, sharply:

"Jump one side! Quick!"

As he spoke, he turned the nozzle of one of the steam-cocks toward the cabin door, and in another instant the room was filled with hot, scalding steam, the boys protecting themselves from it by burying their faces in their hands.

Leaving the steam spouting out directly toward the jaguar, Fowler darted out of the window on the starboard side, shouting, as he stood on the rail:

"Get out here as quickly as you can."

But there was no further necessity for flight, so far as the jaguar was concerned, for before the steam had entirely filled the little boat,

there was a crashing of glass, a heavy splash, and the disagreeable intruder was in the water.

In an instant Fowler was inboard, and had turned off the steam. Val had run into the cabin to get his gun for the double purpose of firing at the animal and to arouse those in the camp, and Fred had rushed toward Tiny Tim's nest, to make sure that he had suffered no harm from the steam.

It was well that Val thought of rousing those in the camp, otherwise some serious damage might have been done, for the animal was in that condition of rage and pain from the burns that he would have made an attack upon any one whom he met from sheer savageness.

The mark presented by the jaguar as he swam through the water in the gray light of the morning was anything but a good one, and, although Val fired three times in rapid succession, he did not succeed in hitting the beast.

The report of his rifle, however, brought the occupants of the tents out very quickly, and, seeing such a force opposed to him, the jaguar slunk away into the woods, apparently unharmed by the shower of bullets that were sent after him.

It was some minutes before those on the shore could understand whether the jaguar they had seen sinking off into the bushes had swum across the river, or whether it was the one they had proposed to add to the menagerie collection on the schooner.

Val soon informed them, however, that the animal was the identical one he had been ordered to carry down the river, and George and Doctor Burroughs at once came on board to see what damage had been done.

It was found that the jaguar had literally sprung his narrow cage apart, probably by arching his back like a cat, but that the remainder of the prisoners were still securely caged. Save for the window the animal had broken when, scalded by the steam, he had leaped into the water, no damage had been done. Protected by his nest, Tiny Tim had experienced no bad effects from the deluge of hot vapor that had filled the cabin, and those from the shore, as well as those on board, breathed more freely when they learned how trifling had been the mischief.

You had better come on shore and get your breakfast now," said Doctor Burroughs, as he stepped into the boat again. "For there is no necessity of your going to the North Star, now that the jaguar has escaped. We can carry the birds and the armadillos until we get a load for the long boat."

"We can run down as well as not, sir," replied Val, just a trifle disappointed because he was not to have the opportunity of showing what the Midget could do.

"There is no need for it, and it would simply be waste of time to make a trip with the small number of specimens we have got on board. Come ashore, and we will be on our way up the river in half an hour."

On shore the boys went, as a matter of course, after the decision was announced, and as soon as breakfast had been served, the camp equipage was packed up and put on board the yacht, ready for a continuation of the journey.

At six o'clock every one was on board the Midget, the goods that had been used on shore were packed away in the cockpit, and Val gave the signal to go ahead, the moment Captain Thompson and Fred had the anchor apeak.

For three hours the yacht steamed up the river without meeting with any signs of life save the sluggishly-moving alligators in the water and the birds that fitted from branch to branch with songs that had in them very little that was melodious.

At the end of that time, and just when Val was asking his father how much further he intended to run, the Midget stopped with a shock that threw every one from his feet, and then, heeling over slightly, lay hard and fast aground in what appeared to be the very channel of the river.

The engine was at once reversed, and Captain Thompson called every one aft, in order that by bearing the stern down the bow might be raised, but still it was impossible to move her from the bank.

"It's no use," said Captain Thompson, after half an hour had been spent in trying alternately to push the yacht off by the means of oars used as poles, and by reversing the engine. "She won't float until we lighten her, and the best thing we can do is to set up the tents on shore, taking everything from the yacht that we can."

Every one saw that it would be useless to attempt to float the Midget as they were then working, and Doctor Burroughs gave orders that the party make a landing. Val, Fred and Arthur were to remain on board to try to float the yacht as soon as the heaviest articles were taken on shore.

It was by no means an unpleasant place at which they had been forced to encamp. Just opposite where the yacht was aground a small clearing in the forest afforded a good camping place, and nearby a tiny stream trickled down into the river, showing that the cooks would not have far to go for pure water.

The work of unloading the Midget was necessarily slow, and by the time the last article was loaded into the long boat it was noon.

Fowler had tried the engines, but, as they were powerless to move the boat from the sand bank, Captain Thompson shouted from the shore:

"You had better have the fires banked, Val, and give over trying to move her until it is cooler! Drop your anchor, in case she should float after you leave her, and come on shore!"

The anchor was accordingly dropped, the fires banked, and in the long-boat all three of the boys went on shore!

As usual, Fred had an adventure when he landed, but this time it was nothing more than the finding of a very beautiful and harmless snake. He was swinging his hammock more to suit him, when, on brushing the leaves aside, he uncovered a little reptile, with a red and

black head, and with alternate bars of black and rose color down to the tail.

Doctor Burroughs immediately captured it and popped it into one of the jars of alcohol as a valuable addition to his collection.

After a light lunch had been partaken of—and it was so warm that no one cared for very much to eat—they all took a siesta in the hammocks.

"There's one thing certain," said old George, as he tried to catch a wasp that had found its way through a rent in the canopy of his hammock. "If this kind of weather continues, we shall give Swazey a chance to get to Para sooner than he bargained for."

"Why?" asked Val. "Can't you stand the heat?"

"It ain't the heat, lad, for I can stand as much of that as anybody else can, but it's the fever that will put an end to our trapping if we don't get out of this pretty soon."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MARMOSET HUNT.

THE siesta had lasted two hours, when the boys were awakened by an unusual stir and confusion in the camp, which was caused by the report made by the Indians that a number of marmosets, similar to Tiny Tim, had been seen in the vicinity.

The hunters were already making preparations for the chase by overhauling the finest meshed nets, preparing a sort of punch, such as Val had seen used in Africa with marked success in the capture of monkeys, and looking to their arms and ammunition.

Doctor Burroughs and Captain Thompson were also getting ready for the hunt, and Val began to buckle on his cartridge belt and to lace his leggings more tightly about his ankles.

"It isn't possible that you think of going with us—is it, Val?" asked Doctor Burroughs, who was greatly surprised that his son should even have thought of such a thing.

"Why not, sir? I see that you and the captain are going."

"That is true; but we have no duties that oblige us to remain near the river."

"I wasn't aware that you had given me any particular work to do, sir," said Val, looking at his father in astonishment.

"Have you forgotten so quickly that you are the captain of the Midget? Your craft is aground, and from what little I know of the duties of steamboat captains, I should conclude that it must be necessary for you to get your craft out of a dangerous position before you could leave her."

"I hadn't thought of that, sir," replied Val, ruefully.

And for the first time since he had been the owner of the Midget, he looked at her in the light of an incumbrance.

Every officer of the yacht was eager to join in the hunt for marmosets, for Val had often told stories of his monkey hunt in Africa, and they were desirous of seeing something similar. But there was the yacht fast on the sand bank, and there was nothing for them to do except to try to get her off while the others would probably be having a glorious time in the woods.

"It's too bad!" said Fred, disconsolately. "Ever since we started from New York, I have been thinking that I should see them catch monkeys, and now, when the time comes that it is to be done, we have got to do something else."

"There's no use in feeling so badly about it since we can't help ourselves," rejoined Val, philosophically. "We are here and we've got to stay; so we might as well make the best of it by commencing work. Even if they are going out to catch monkeys, that is no proof that they will get any; for, if you remember, we have been on one such hunt since we have been here, and the only monkeys we brought back were ourselves."

If Arthur Fowler was disappointed in not being able to accompany the hunters, he was determined not to show it. He was loading into the long-boat a quantity of half-dry wood the Indians had cut before they discovered the marmosets, and paying no attention to the bustle and confusion of departure as made by the hunting party.

Val and Fred, however, waited until the last man had disappeared among the trees before they set about their work, and then, just when they thought the hunting party were out of hearing, Val heard his father call:

"Even if you float the yacht before we come back, remember that the orders are to remain in the camp."

"Aye, aye, sir."

And Val tried hard to answer cheerily, that the disappointment in his heart might not be apparent in his voice.

"Do not venture into the woods under any circumstances!" shouted Doctor Burroughs again.

And this time his voice sounded farther away in the distance.

"We won't leave the yacht, sir!" cried Val, in reply.

And then he and Fred helped Arthur push the long-boat off the beach, all three leaping into her just as the black nose of an alligator appeared close beside them.

Once on board the yacht, there was nothing to do but wait until the engineer could get steam up again, and, while this was being done, Val and Fred had plenty of time to observe the position of the stranded yacht.

Her engines had been working at full speed when she struck. Consequently she had run up on to the sandbank, until nearly one-half her keel was on the shoal, in hardly more than three inches of water.

ed as she was, it had resulted in fixing her more firmly in the sand, while the current was rapidly making a bank around her.

"We've got a good afternoon's work before us," said Val, "and if it gets her afloat by dark, we shall have done a good job."

"How would it do to tow from the stern in the long-boat, while the engines are reversed?" asked Fred.

"It would have been a good idea while the sailors were here, but now I don't believe we could do much, if any good, although we might as well try it."

By this time a full head of steam was on and the real work began. The engine was reversed, but with no other effect than to throw up the sand at the stern and to wash it in more firmly around the bows. Any attempts to pole her off with the oars were quite as fruitless, owing to the fact that little more could be done than to push the improvised poles into the sand.

Then Fred's suggestion of trying to tow her off was tried, but all in vain. The Midget appeared to be firmly fixed upon the bank, and Val understood that more help would be needed before the task could be accomplished.

There was no use to try any more until the sailors came back, when we can have them in the long-boat." Then he added, as he looked at his watch, "Why, it's nearly sunset. Let's go ashore and start the fire, so that they can begin to get supper as soon as they get back."

The furnace fire was drawn, the steam allowed to escape slowly, and, after the boiler had cooled down somewhat, the officers of the Midget went on shore, leaving their craft helplessly stranded.

The boys had been so busily engaged upon their work that they had hardly had time to think of anything else; but once they were on shore and the darkness began to gather, the non-return of the hunters troubled them.

Two fires were built instead of one, and all three cut wood to keep them blazing fiercely, so that the hunters might be guided by the light; but the night came, seemingly all the darker because of the brilliancy of the flames, while nothing was heard of those who should have returned some time before.

"It can't be possible that they are lost in the woods," said Arthur, after an unusually long silence, during which the fears of each one gained the ascendancy. "They ought to be able to find their way out easily enough; and, even if George and Dave got bewildered, they have the Indians there to guide them."

"Something has happened to them, certainly, or they would have been here before dark," said Val, apprehensively. "I don't know but that we ought to try to find them."

"How could we, in the darkness?" replied Fred. "If we should try it, we should probably get lost ourselves; and do you remember that your father told you not to leave the camp under any circumstances?"

"Yes, but that wouldn't apply in such a case as this."

"An order is an order," said Arthur, decidedly. "Even if there was any chance that we could find them, I should say that we ought to stay here; and since we know that it would be worse than useless to go into the woods in the night, there's nothing else for us to do."

Val reflected a few moments.

"We'll set all the lanterns on the yacht," he said, at length, "and then, if they have struck out on the river above or below us, they will have those to guide them. Arthur, you see to the fires for an hour, and we will stand regular watches at it. Fred, you fire your rifle every five minutes, and I will set the signal lanterns."

Val lighted every lamp on the Midget, set the red and green lanterns on the foreward and after flagstaffs ran two white ones out of the engine-room window on the blade of an oar, and so brilliantly illuminated the little craft that she could have been seen several miles away.

Meanwhile Fred discharged his rifle at regular intervals, and Fowler piled the fires high with fuel; but nothing was seen or heard of the hunting party, who should have been at the river bank at least three hours before.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A NEW PERIL.

AN hour passed and the situation was unchanged. In order that they might be able to continue at their work all night, Val relieved Fowler from the duty of attending to the fires, and the engineer in turn relieved Fred, who was thus allowed an opportunity for rest.

At the end of the next hour Fred, who had been asleep, was called to look out for the fires; Val took his turn at discharging the rifles, and Fowler went into the tents for a nap. In this manner the long, weary hours of the night passed, and all the labor had been in vain, so far as guiding the hunting party to the camp was concerned.

The boys had had no supper on the night previous, and as soon as the day dawned, rendering the fires useless as signals, Fowler cooked a hearty breakfast, while Fred extinguished the lanterns on the yacht and Val kept up the discharge of musketry.

"Perhaps they got as far away in the chase for the marmosets that they couldn't get back before dark, and concluded to camp where they were rather than take the risk of coming through the woods in the night," said Fred, for at least the twentieth time.

"Yes," replied Val with a sigh, as he made the same answer that he had before. "That must be the way of it, and yet it doesn't seem likely that either Captain Thompson or father would go so far, for neither of them is very fond of hunting."

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