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Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
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Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
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Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
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Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
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Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntatz
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Chums in Dixie or The Strange Cruise of a Motorboat

St. George Rathborne

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CHUMS IN DIXIE

OR

The Strange Cruise of a Motor Boat

By ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

CHAPTER I

THE VOYAGE BEGUN

"Phil, oh! Phil, won't you please hurry up? I'll go to sleep pretty soon, if we don't get a move on us."

"Just give me five minutes more, Larry, and I promise you we're going to leave this place, and start on our cruise down to the big Gulf. I've got a couple of nuts to put on again, and then you'll hear the little motor begin to hum."

The last speaker was bending over the engine of a fair-sized motor boat, which had a stationary roof, and adjustable curtains that in time of need could be made to enclose the entire vessel.

This modern craft was tied up against the bank of one of those narrow but swift streams that, having their source in southern Georgia or Alabama, find their way to the Gulf of Mexico, after passing through many miles of Florida cypress swamps that are next to unknown territory to the outside world.

Phil Lancing was the son of a well-to-do Northern physician, who had some time previously come into possession of a very large tract of territory in Northern Florida. Considerable of this property was in vast swamps; and here squatters had settled many years back, cutting the trees at their pleasure, and making vast quantities of cypress shingles, which were floated down the river to markets along the gulf.

The second occupant of the brave launch *Aurora* was a rather chubby specimen of a half grown lad, with a rosy face, and laughing blue eyes. Larry Densmore expected to become a lawyer some fine day, and in evidence of his fitness for the business he was constantly asking questions, and finding debatable points in such matters as naturally came up.

Phil being an amateur naturalist, knew considerable about the woods and their numerous denizens. Larry was an utter greenhorn, and apt many times to display his gross ignorance concerning the habits of game; as well as the thousand and one things a woodsman is supposed to be acquainted with. But his good-nature was really

without limit; and one could hardly ever get provoked with Larry, even when he committed the most stupendous of blunders.

Upon hearing these consoling words from his chum, Larry, who was sitting well up in the bow of the boat, yawned and stretched himself. The southern sun was inclined to be warm, and Larry had not slept very well the two nights he had been aboard the motor boat. But then it was nothing very singular to see the chubby lad yawning at any time of the day.

"I'm real glad we've got all our supplies aboard," he said, aloud, just to pass the time away, and to keep awake while Phil was fussing with the engine preparatory to starting on their trip downstream. "I'm tired of this dead little village that they call a town. And tired of hearing what an awful lot of trouble we're bound to buck up against when we get two-thirds of the way down to the gulf. Wonder what they'd say if they knew your dad owned most all of that property along this crazy old creek they call a river. And that you even expect to stop off to interview that terrible McGee they talk about! Oh, my! what was that, now?"

Larry ceased to stretch himself. He even sat up, his eyes wide open now, as if he had noticed something away out of the usual; and they were fastened on the stern of the boat, where he had certainly seen something slip over the gunwale, and vanish under a pile of blankets that had been airing.

Phil raised his head. He did not even glance at his chum, but seemed to be listening intently.

"Now what d'ye suppose all that shouting means?" he exclaimed. "Seems to be coming this way too, and mighty fast at that. There, look, Larry, don't you see them running through the woods? As sure as you live they're coming this way! I wonder if it's a fox hunt, or what?"

"Mebbe—" began Larry; and then his comrade interrupted him before he could say what was on his mind.

"They're heading right for us; and there's that big Colonel Brashears at their head, the fellow who told us all those awful stories about the shingle-makers of the swamps. Here they come, seven

of 'em; and look, Larry, as many as four have got ugly whips in their hands! Something's up, I tell you."

Again did Larry open his mouth as though to say something; and for the second time, after a swift glance toward the blankets, he closed it again resolutely.

The seven men who were running speedily drew near. Most of them were out of breath, and all looked very much excited. The leader, who was quite a character in the Southern town, and a fierce appearing individual, with a military swagger, which Phil believed to be wholly assumed, immediately addressed himself to the two young Northerners on the new-fangled motor boat, which had been the wonder of the townspeople ever since it was dropped off the cars to be launched in the so-called "river" at their doors.

"Seen anything of him acomin' this aways, sah?" he asked, in a high pitched, raspy voice. "We done chased him through the woods, and he's give us the slip. Thinkin' he mout have come in this direction, we changed our course to put the question to yuh."

"What was it—a fox?" asked Phil, innocently enough.

"No, sah, it was not a fox, but a miserable whelp of a boy!" exclaimed the indignant colonel, drawing his military figure up, and cracking his whip with a vindictive report that sounded like the discharge of a pistol.

"A boy?" ejaculated Phil, astonished at all this display of force under such peculiar conditions.

"A boy!" echoed Larry, some of the color leaving his face, and a look of genuine concern taking its place.

"A mighty sassy and desp'rit critter at that," the colonel went on. "One of that McGee tribe from down-river way. He's been loafin' 'round town some days, I'm told, an' we're lucky not to have our homes robbed o' everything wuth while. My Bob met him on the street a while back; an' jest like boys, they had words that led to blows. The miserable beggar actually had the nerve to lick my Bob; foh yuh see I reckon he's just like a wildcat in a fight. When I seen the black eye and bloody nose he give my Bob I jest natchally ached to lay it on him; and organizin' a posse o' my neighbors, who has

reason to hate them McGees like cold pizen, we started out to lay hands on the cub an' tan his hide black an' blue."

"But he managed to escape after all, you say?" asked Phil, who had some difficulty in keeping a grin of satisfaction from showing on his face; for the idea of these seven stalwart men chasing one puny little chap was pretty close to ridiculous in his eyes.

"He was too slick foh us, I reckons, sah," the colonel went on, snapping off the heads of a few wild flowers with the lash of his constantly moving whip. "We done lost sight of him in the woods, and thought as how possibly you mout aseen him thisaways. And so we turned aside to ask you that question, sah."

Phil shook his head in the negative.

"I give you my word, Colonel Brashears, I haven't seen the least sign of any boy for the last five hours," he said, positively, and with truth. "I've been busy making a few changes in my engine here; and we expect to start down the river inside of five minutes or so."

"Thet's all right, sah," returned the other, with a slight bow. "And such bein' the case me and my posse had better be turnin' our attention in another quarter. We're gwine tuh find that little scamp yet, and tickle his hide foh him. When he goes back tuh his kind below, they'll understand that weuns up-river don't tolerate thieves and brawlers in ouh town. Good day, sah, and we sure hope you-all may have a pleasant voyage; but we done warn yuh tuh look sharp when yuh gets nigh the stampin' place o' the terrible McGee!"

The posse turned away, and went trooping back into the open woods. Larry had listened to all that was being said with his mouth half open, and a look of real concern on his face. He saw with a thrill that once the leader of the crowd seemed to pause, as if to dispute with his men as to what their next best course might be.

"Oh, do hurry, Phil!" cried the watching lad, as he jumped up from his seat, and going ashore, started to unfasten the cable that held the motor boat to a tree.

"In a minute or two, Chum Larry!" sang out; the other. "What's your haste? Upon my word, I never knew you to act like that before.

Generally you're the last one to want to rush things. See here, was it the visit of those fellows that upset you, Larry?"

"Yes, yes," answered the other, with a voice that actually trembled with anxiety; "that Colonel Brashears is such a fierce fire-eater, and he cracked that awful whip just like he itched to lay it on the bare back of that poor little chap. Let's get out of this before they can come back. Why, they might even want to search our boat, you know!"

"Oh! I guess there's no danger of that," laughed Phil. "Anyway, you can see that they've gone into the woods again."

"And headed down-stream; notice that, Phil," went on the stout boy, nervously. "Say, I'm going to unfasten the rope now, and let her swing off on the current. It will give us a start, you know, and make me feel easier."

"All right, let her slip," answered the engineer; "I'm just about ready to turn the engine, and get power on her. Come aboard, Larry. We're off!"

Phil waved his hat, and gave a little cheer as the Aurora began to move through the dark water of the stream, with her nose pointing due south. The merry popping of her unmuffled exhaust told that the engine was busily at work, even if turned on at part speed.

When he saw the shore slipping rapidly by Larry seemed to breathe easier. Still, he kept his gaze fastened upon the woods, as though not quite sure that the posse might not unexpectedly heave in sight again, with a new demand.

For a short time there was silence aboard the rapidly speeding boat. Phil busied himself with his engine, watching its performance with more or less satisfaction; for his heart was set on mechanics, and he anticipated great things of the motor he had put into his boat before sending her south for this especial trip.

Larry on the other hand never once turned to look at the shore along the larboard quarter; that which he knew sheltered the seven burly boy hunters claimed all his attention.

"I wonder will they find the poor little chap?" Phil finally remarked; showing that after all his thoughts were not wholly taken

up with the working of the engine at which he was gazing so proudly.

"Say, did you hear what he said about the swamp boy licking his Bob?" demanded Larry, with sudden glee. "Don't you remember what we thought of that big loafer; and how he seemed to lord it over all the other boys of the town, when they came out in a bunch to see what our boat looked like? I'm awful glad he got his, ain't you, Phil?"

"Sure I am," grinned the other. "Thought at one time I'd have to tackle Bob on my own account, when he got so sassy; but I knew his dad would make it rough for us, and I managed to hold in. Yes, he got only what he deserved, I guess. And if I ever meet up with that swamp boy, I declare I'd like to shake hands with him, and tell him he is all right for doing what he did. It took some nerve to tackle Bob—just like a little rooster going next door and licking the cock of the barnyard."

"Would you really like to tell him that?" exclaimed Larry, as he clutched the shoulder of his chum; and Phil, looking up was astonished to see how his eyes danced.

"Give you my word I would," he declared, vehemently.

"Good!" ejaculated the other, with a nervous laugh; and springing over to a spot nearer the stern of the boat he called out: "You might as well come out now. The colonel and his crowd are far away, and we want to see what you look like!"

Thereupon, to the immense amazement of Phil Lancing, the blankets began to heave; and being speedily tossed aside, behold there came forth the figure of a tattered, half-grown boy—a boy with a face as brown as that of an Indian, and with a pair of defiant black eyes that flashed fire as he looked straight at the owner of the motor boat.

And Phil realized that he was gazing upon the boy belonging to the terrible McGee tribe from down-river, who had just licked the big Brashears cub in his own home town!

CHAPTER II

A BOY OF THE SWAMPS

"Well, if this don't beat all creation!" exclaimed Phil, as he continued to stare at the uninvited passenger on board the Aurora. "See here, Larry, own up now that you saw him crawl aboard our boat?"

"That's just what I did," chuckled the other, as though he enjoyed the joke. "If you hark back a bit, perhaps you'll remember my calling out, just at the time you discovered moving figures through the trees? That was because I had caught just a glimpse of something, I didn't know what, slipping under the blankets.

"Now I can understand why you were so nervous, and wanted to hurry off," said Phil. "You were afraid the fierce colonel would come back, and search our craft for stowaways."

"Sure I was; I admit it," echoed Larry. "But Phil, you really meant what you said just now, didn't you—about wanting to shake hands with the boy who knocked Bob Brashears galley west, you know?"

Phil turned to the sallow-faced, defiant figure that was observing their every action. The boy looked as though ready to brave them to their face, if so be they turned out to be new enemies; or even take a header over the side, should they show signs of wanting to detain him against his will.

But as soon as he looked into the smiling countenance of Phil he must have realized that in taking this liberty of boarding the motor boat, when so hard pressed by his enemies, he had made a lucky move indeed. For in those friendly eyes he saw genuine warmth.

"Shake hands, won't you, my friend?" said Phil, thrusting out his own digits in the free and easy fashion customary with boys. "I'm glad you punched that Bob Brashears. I hope his black eye will hang to him for a month. And I'd have given a heap to have seen the mill when you licked him. I'm only surprised he dared tackle you alone, big cub that he is."

"Huh!" the boy broke out with, as a glimmer of a smile appeared flickering athwart his thin, serious looking face; "they was two of

'em, mister. But t'other, he run like a scart rabbit the first crack he got under his ear."

Then Larry insisted on also squeezing his hand warmly.

"When I heard that man say they were chasing a boy," he remarked, "I knew what it was I'd seen scramble under the blankets; and I made up my mind that they wasn't going to get you, if we had to fight for it. Just to think of seven hulking men after one small boy. But we're too far away now for any of them to get you; and perhaps you'd like to stay aboard till we reach your home below; because we expect to pass all the way to the gulf, you see. He'd be welcome, wouldn't he, Phil?"

"Sure he would," affirmed the other, heartily, as he eyed the boy; and perhaps a dim suspicion that he might find the fugitive valuable as a guide began to flit through his mind then and there.

"We've got oceans of grub aboard; and perhaps you wouldn't mind helping out in the cooking line; because, you see, I'm the one in charge of that part of the game; while Phil, he takes care of the running gear. Anyhow, no matter, you're welcome to stay with us on the trip. We're glad to know the fellow who dared lick that big bully of a Bob Brashears, see?"

The boy let his head drop. Perhaps it was because he did not want to let these generous fellows see the tear in his eye, and of which he was possibly ashamed, though without reason.

"Say, that's right kind of you both," he exclaimed presently, when he could look them in the eyes without winking. "And I'm gwine to say yes right away. I wanted to stay up here yet a while; but I saw the town was gettin' too hot foh me; and I made a fix with a friend I got thar, so's I could know how it all came out. Yep, I'll stick with you, and be glad in the bargain."

"What might your name be?" asked Larry, frankly.

"Tony," came the immediate answer; but although it might be supposed that the swamp boy had another name besides, he somehow did not seem to think it worth while to mention the same — or else had some reason for keeping it unspoken.

"Well," remarked Phil, who had listened to the way the other spoke with more or less surprise; "I must say that if you do live in the swamp, and your folks are a wild lot, according to what these people around here say, you talk better than any of the boys we've yet run across since we struck this place. Ten to one you've been to school a time, Tony?"

The swamp boy smiled, and shook his head in the negative.

"Never seen the inside of a school in my born days till we come up here a while back, me an' little Madge. But my mother didn't always live in the swamps. Once she taught school down in Pensacola. Dad met her when he was ferryin' shingles, an' that's how it came around. She says as how her children ain't a-goin' to grow up like heathen, if they does have little but rags to wear. And so she showed me how to read, and I'm wantin' to get more books. Looky here, this is one I bought since we kim up the river," and as he spoke he drew out from the inside of his faded and torn flannel shirt a rather soiled volume.

"Robinson Crusoe!" exclaimed Phil, as he vividly remembered the time away back when he too had treasured the volume so dear to the heart of the average boy at a certain age. "Well, Tony, I'm going to make you a promise, that when I get home again there's going to come down this way a box of books that will make you happy. Just to think of it, a boy who longs to know what is going on in this big world, and kept back to spend his life in a swamp. Why, we've got a few aboard here right now, that you shall have when we say good-bye to you."

Tony hardly knew whether he might be dreaming or hearing a blessed truth. The look he bent on the kind-hearted Northern lad told how his soul had been stirred by these totally unexpected acts of friendly regard.

"That's awful good of you, sah!" he murmured, as his eyes dropped again—perhaps because he felt them moist once more; and according to a swamp boy's notions it was a silly thing to give way to weakness like this.

"But whatever made you come up here, Tony, so far away from your home?" Larry asked. "You must have known how the people

in this town hated your folks; and that if they found out you came from the McGee settlement of squatters they'd make it hard for you."

"Yes, I knowed all that," replied the other, slowly; "but you see, somebody jest had to come along with Madge; an' dad he dassent, 'case they had it in foh him."

"Madge—that means your little sister, doesn't it, Tony?" queried Larry.

"Yep. She's jest so high, an' she's been blind a long time. Last year a gent from the No'th that called hissself a professor, happened to git lost in the swamps, and some of our folks they fetched him in. He was took good care of, an' after a bit was guided out of the swamps. He seen Madge, an' he told dad an' mam that if only she could be treated by a friend o' his'n, who was a very great eye doctor up No'th, he believed Madge, she'd git her sight back ag'in."

Phil started, and looked more closely at the boy as he heard this; but he did not say anything, leaving it to his chum to learn all there was to know about the mission of Tony from the swamps, to the town of those who hated his clan so bitterly.

"And you brought your little blind sister all the way up here, did you?" asked Larry, with a ring of real sympathy in his cheery voice.

"Sho! that want nawthin' much," declared the other, scornfully. "I had a little dugout, which I paddled easy. I spected to stay 'roun' till the doctor he kim, which was to be at a sartin day; but yuh see they run me out. But I gotter a chanct to fix it all up. Madge, she's stop-pin' at the cabin o' a man dad used to know. His name is Badger, an' he's got a boy Tom, jest my age."

"That's nice now," remarked Phil, taking a hand in the talk. "And is she going to stay there till this Northern eye doctor arrives, to perform the operation?"

"Yep; but mam guv me the money to let her into the horspittal, so she c'n stay thar, and be looked arter till she's well. Mam sets a heap of store by Madge; an' dad too, I reckon. They ain't gwine to sleep much till they knows whether the operation pans out right or not."

"But how will you know, now that you have been chased out of town?" asked Larry. "Perhaps this Tom Badger will go down the river to carry the news?"

"Shucks, no," said the other, with a flash of pride coming over his thin face; "I fixed that up all right. He's gwine to send a message to weuns just as soon as he knows what's what; and we'll git the news sure inside o' a few hours."

"But say, you don't mean to tell me there's a telegraph station in the swamps?" ejaculated the astonished Larry.

"Nope," replied Tony, instantly. "Jest a pigeon. Tom, he knows how to write, and he's gwine to tuck a little letter under the wing o' the bird I fetched up."

"A carrier pigeon, you mean!" cried Larry. "Why, how fine you planned it, Tony. Just to think of it, having the news flashed straight home, over miles and miles of swamps. But what if a hawk got your bird, what then?"

"I tuck up three of 'em, so's to make sure," Tony made answer. "He promised to set 'em all free one after t'other, and each carryin' the news. So you see, sah, one of 'em's jest bound to sure git home."

"But see here, where under the sun did you ever get carrier pigeons? That's the last thing I'd expect to find away down in the Florida swamps," Phil asked.

"A man in Pensacola, as knowed my mam afore she married dad, sent a pair home to her last time they took shingles down thar, which was a year back. I made a coop foh the birds an' they hatched out a heap o' young uns. These hyah three is the pick o' the flock; an' I sure has hopes o' seein' one of 'em right soon after Tom he starts 'em loose."

"Well, you've interested me a heap," declared Larry. "Why, it's just like a story, you see. The good doctor comes, restores the sight to your sweet little sister's eyes; and then the glorious news is flashed home by a dove of peace and good tidings. Of course it'll be good news, Tony. Didn't the dove bring that kind back to old Noah in the ark? I'm awful glad you just happened to hit our boat when you wanted some place to hide. Why, I wouldn't have missed meet-

ing you for a whole lot. Have you had anything to eat this morning, Tony?"

When he learned that their guest was really hungry, Larry immediately started to get something going. He drew out a little square black tin box; this, on being opened disclosed a brass contrivance which turned out to be a German Jewel kerosene gas stove. This was quickly started, and began a cheery song, as though inviting a kettle to accept of its genial warmth.

Evidently the swamp boy had never in all his life seen anything like this, to judge from the way he gazed. Nor had he ever scented coffee that had the aroma such as was soon filling the air about them; for he could not help sniffing eagerly every little while, to the secret amusement of Larry.

All this while the boat had been speeding down the narrow but deep stream. Phil could look after the wheel and the engine at the same time; though as a rule he depended on his chum to stand in the bow, and warn him of any floating log or snag, such as might play the mischief with the cedar sheathing of the modern motor boat.

When Larry announced that lunch was ready Phil slowed down, and presently came alongside the bank, at a place where a cable could be warped around a convenient tree. For, since they were in no particular hurry, they did not feel that it was necessary to keep on the move while eating.

Larry had heated up a mess of Boston baked beans. Besides this they had some soda biscuits which had been purchased from a woman in the town; some cheese; and a can of sardines; the whole to be topped off with a dish of prunes, cooked on the preceding evening, and only partly eaten.

When Tony received his share he ate ravenously. Perhaps the boy had seldom tasted such a fine variety of food, for the canned stuffs likely to reach these squatters of the big cypress swamps were apt to be of the cheapest variety.

They were sitting thus as the lunch drew near its conclusion when, in addressing his chum in some laughing way, Larry happened to mention his name in full.