

CHAPTER ONE

Health Problems

There were four of us — George, William Samuel Harris, myself (my friends call me J), and Montmorency. We were sitting in my room and were smoking and talking about our bad health.

We were all feeling very ill, and we were unhappy about it. Harris said he felt dizzy sometimes. George felt dizzy, too.

My big problem was my liver. I knew I had a bad liver. I had read about all the symptoms of liver disease in a book. I had every symptom that was written.

Every time I read about an illness, I realise that I have it.

One day, I had a little health problem. I went to the British Museum Library to read about it. After some time, I began reading about another illness. I don't remember the name now, but it was something terrible. I knew I had that terrible illness, too.

I began reading the book from the letter 'a' to the letter 'z\ I had the symptoms of all the

diseases in the book, except for one!

I didn't have housemaid's knee. This made me a bit unhappy. Why didn't I have housemaid's knee, too?

With all the diseases I had, I knew my life was short. I tried to examine myself. I tried to feel my heart. I tried to look at my tongue. When I had walked into the library, I had been a happy, healthy man. When I left it, I was a very ill man.

I went to see my doctor. He is an old friend. Whenever I think I am ill, he examines me and says I am fine. A doctor really must have practice! This time, I thought, he will get more practice with me than with a thousand normal patients. After all, normal patients have only one or two diseases each.

'Well, what's wrong with you?' he asked.

I said, 'If I tell you what is wrong with me, you will die before I finish. Life is too short! I'll tell you what is not wrong with me... I don't have housemaid's knee. But I have everything else.'

I told him about what I had read at the library.

He looked at me carefully. He listened to my heart and looked at my tongue. After that, he

wrote a prescription I and gave it to me. I put it in my pocket and went out.

I didn't read the prescription. I took it to the chemist's and gave it to him. He read it and gave it back to me. He said, 'I don't have the things on the prescription.'

'But you're a chemist, aren't you?' I asked.

He said, 'You're right, sir. I'm a chemist. I don't have a shop and a hotel.'

I read the prescription. It said:

Every six hours: lb of good, fresh meat

/ pint of beer

Every morning: / ten-mile walk

*Go to bed no later than 11 o'clock each night
and don't read books about things you don't
understand.*

I followed the doctor's prescription. It saved my life. I now feel rather well, except for my liver problem. The main symptom of liver disease is 'a general feeling of sleepiness and no interest in working.'

I have suffered from this illness ever since I was a boy. Medical science was not advanced in those days. Doctors did not know that I had liver illness. They thought I was lazy. People called me 'a lazy little devil', and said, 'go and do your work.' They did not know I was ill with liver disease. Instead of giving me liver pills, they gave me blows on the head. Those blows were good for me, because after each blow I went to do my work. That old remedy worked better than a box of modern pills.

That evening, George, William Harris and I

sat in my room. We described our illnesses. I explained to George and William Harris how I felt in the morning. William Harris told us how he felt when he went to bed. Then George stood up, and told us how he felt at night.

George always thinks he is ill, but there is really nothing wrong with him.

At that moment, Mrs Poppets, the housekeeper, I served our dinner. We were not hungry. We ate some meat, onions and cake. We had no interest in food.

We began talking about our illnesses again. We all knew that our illnesses were caused by too much work.

'We need a rest,' said Harris.

'A rest and a change,' George added. 'Our minds are tired from too much work. We must rest our minds.'

'Let's go to the countryside!' I said. 'We'll find a nice, quiet place, with no people.'

Harris said, 'Oh, how boring! In the country everyone goes to bed at eight o'clock. You can't even find a newspaper! If you want a rest and a change, then the best place is the sea.'

'What a terrible idea!' I said. 'A sea trip gives

you seasickness. Who wants a whole week of seasickness? You leave on Monday and you're feeling well. On Tuesday you feel worse. Then on Wednesday you're really sick. On Thursday and Friday you're almost dead. On Saturday you can finally drink a few teaspoons of tea. On Sunday you can walk again and eat some food. Then on Monday you're happy, because it's time to get off the boat.'

So George said, 'Let's go up the river. We'll have fresh air and quiet on the river. The hard work on the boat will make us hungry, so we'll enjoy our food. We'll be so tired at the end of the day, that we'll sleep well.'

Harris said, 'You don't have any trouble sleeping, George. There are only twenty-four hours in the day, and you sleep most of that time. If you sleep any more, you're dead! However, I like your idea of a holiday on the River Thames.'

I liked it too. George was surprised that we both liked his idea. The only one who didn't like the idea was Montmorency, my fox-terrier. He looked at us with his big eyes.

'You like the idea, but I don't,' his face said. 'On the river there's nothing for me to do. I don't like looking at the trees. I certainly don't smoke.'

If I see a rat, you won't stop the boat so I can run after it. When I'm asleep, you'll probably rock the boat, and I'll fall into the river. The whole idea is stupid.'

We were three to one. So we decided to go on the river trip.

CHAPTER TWO

Planning the Trip

We looked at the maps and we discussed plans. We decided to start from Kingston the following Saturday.

'Harris, you and I will go to get the boat at Kingston,' I said. 'Then we'll take it up the river to Chertsey, I where we'll meet George.'

George works in the City until the afternoon. (George goes to sleep at a bank from ten o'clock to four o'clock, Monday to Friday, except on Saturdays. On Saturdays, they wake him up at two o'clock, and put him outside the door.)

The next problem was where to sleep at night. George and I didn't want to sleep at inns. We wanted to camp out in the middle of nature.

'How beautiful,' we said, 'sleeping in the country, under the stars, by the river!'

'I can imagine it all!' I said. There is a golden sunset. The river is moving along quietly. The forest is full of trees and birds. The grass around us is green, and little flowers grow here and there.

'Soon it is dark. We row I our boat into a quiet corner on the river. We put up our tent and cook a simple, healthy meal. We all sit around a warm fire and eat our meal.

'We look up and see the moon and the stars. Then we sit in silence. How wonderful this is! We go to bed, and then we dream under the stars! We dream that the world is young again.'

As we all sat there dreaming, Harris said, 'What happens if it rains?'

There is nothing poetic about Harris. He is not romantic at all. If Harris ever has tears in his eyes, he is eating raw onions. If you stand by the sea with Harris and say, 'Listen to the sounds of the sea. Can you hear spirits singing sad songs — the songs of those who died in these waters?' he will take you by the arm and say, 'I understand, my friend. You're not feeling well. Now, come with me. I know a place around the corner here, where you can get some good whisky. You'll feel better soon.' Harris always knows where you can find a good whisky.

Harris was right about camping out when it rains. It's not nice at all. Just imagine: it is evening. You are all wet. There is water in the boat and all your things are wet. You find a place

on the river bank. You get out of the boat and pull out the tent. Now two of you try to put it up.

The tent is wet and very heavy. It is raining hard. The wind is blowing. The wet tent flaps about. It falls on your head and makes you angry. It is difficult to put up a tent in good weather. It is impossible to do so in wet weather. The other man is of no help at all. He is a complete fool!

The wind continues to blow and the rain continues to fall. You look at the other man and say, 'What are you doing with your side of the tent?'

'What are you doing?' he answers.

'Don't pull on your side!' you shout.

'I didn't pull. You pulled!' he shouts.

'You're doing everything wrong!' you shout.

'What?' he shouts, 'I can't hear you.'

'You don't know how to put up a tent! We'll never put up this tent,' you say.

At this point, the third man has pulled the boat out of the water. He is completely wet. He wants to know why the tent isn't up yet. Everyone is wet and angry.

Harris was right. Camping out in rainy

weather is not a good idea. We decided to camp out in good weather and sleep at an inn or a hotel in bad weather. Montmorency agreed with this decision. He likes inns and hotels.

Montmorency doesn't like the quiet life. He prefers noise and confusion. He looks like a good, well-behaved dog. But he's not. When you look at Montmorency, you see an angel from paradise, in the form of a small fox-terrier. You think he is a sweet, gentle little dog. When old ladies and gentlemen look at him, tears come to their eyes.

When he killed twelve chickens, and I paid for them, I changed my opinion of Montmorency. In one year, he had one hundred and fourteen street fights with other dogs. An angry woman brought me her dead cat and called me a murderer. Montmorency loves to join the worst dogs. He then takes them around town to fight other dogs. This is his idea of a happy life.

CHAPTER THREE

Packing

The following evening we met again to discuss our plans. Harris said, 'Now, we must decide what to take with us. You get a piece of paper, J, and you get a pencil, George. I'll write the list.'

Harris is always like this. He tells everyone what to do, and he does nothing.

My old Uncle Podger was just like Harris. When Uncle Podger did a job, everybody in the house helped. One day, Uncle Podger bought a picture. Aunt Podger asked, 'Where can we put this picture?'

'Leave it to me. Don't worry about it. I'll do it all,' Uncle Podger said.

He sent one of the girls to buy the nails. Then he sent one of the boys to tell her the size of the nails. He sent Bill to get the hammer, and he sent Tom to get the ruler.

'Now get me a kitchen chair, Jim. I need two people to hold the chair. Maria, come here and hold the light. Tom, come here and give me the

nail.'

He finally had the nail in his hand, but it fell on the floor.

Everyone looked everywhere for the nail. When someone finally found it, Uncle Podger lost the hammer.

'Where's the hammer? Where did I put the hammer? Help me find the hammer!'

When we found the hammer, he lost the place on the wall to put the picture. So each one of us climbed up on the chair to look for the place. Each one thought it was a different place. When Uncle Podger climbed up on the chair, he fell on the piano. Aunt Podger was very angry. She said, 'The next time you put a picture on the wall, please tell me. I'll go and spend a week with my mother!'

Uncle Podger tried again and again. At midnight, the picture was on the wall. However, it was not straight. The wall was dirty. Everyone was tired and unhappy. Uncle Podger looked at the picture and said, 'It was such an easy job!'

I told Harris, 'You get the paper and pencil. George will write the list, and I'll do the work.'

The first list was too long. We threw it

away. We started another list.

'In order to travel to the north part of the River Thames, we need a small boat,' George said. 'With a small boat, we can carry only necessary things. We won't take a heavy tent. We can put a canvas cover I over the boat at night. It will be like a little house, warm and comfortable.'

We made a list of all the clothes we needed. George said he knew everything about the right clothes for a trip. We discovered later that this wasn't true.

We talked about food next. George said, 'Let's continue with breakfast. For breakfast we'll need a frying pan.'

'That's quite difficult to eat,' Harris said, smiling.

'Stop being stupid, Harris,' I said.

'Let's continue,' said George. 'We'll need tea, sugar, eggs, bacon, bread, butter and jam. For lunch, we can take biscuits, cold meat, and fruit — but no cheese. The smell of cheese is too strong. After a day or two, everything will smell of cheese.'

'For dinner, we can take meat pies, fruit pies, tomatoes and green vegetables. This good

food will keep us healthy,' George said.

We didn't take wine or beer, because they both make you sleep.

George continued, 'We'll also need a teapot, a pan and a camping stove. We don't want a paraffin oil stove.'

'Oh, no, not a paraffin oil stove!' I said. We once took a paraffin oil stove. It was horrible. The smell of paraffin oil was everywhere. The river smelled of paraffin. The wind smelled of paraffin. Even the sunset smelled of paraffin. When we visited the town of Marlow, it smelled of paraffin, too! Even the church of Marlow smelled of paraffin. The countryside for miles around smelled of paraffin. We decided never to take a paraffin oil stove again.

The next day we bought everything we needed. We met in the evening to pack our suitcases. We got a large suitcase for the clothes, and two large hampers for the food and utensils.

I am very good at packing. Packing is one of those things that I do best.

'I'll organise the packing,' I said to George and Harris. They agreed. George sat in the armchair and Harris put his feet up on the table.

This was not what I had intended. I wanted to organise the packing — not do it! I wanted George and Harris to do all the work. However, I didn't say anything. I started packing the clothes. It took a long time, but I finally finished. I sat on the big suitcase to close it. George and Harris watched me.

'Aren't you putting the boots in?' asked Harris.

I had forgotten them!

'Why didn't you tell me before?' I said. Harris said nothing. George laughed. I was furious. I opened the suitcase again, and packed the boots. Then an awful idea came to me. Did I pack my toothbrush?

I started looking for it. I took everything out of the suitcase. I found George's toothbrush. I found Harris's toothbrush. But I didn't find mine. In the end, I found it inside a boot. I packed everything again.

When I finished, George asked me, 'Is the soap in the suitcase?'

'I don't care about the soap,' I answered. I sat on the big suitcase again to close it. Then I remembered that my cigarettes were in the

suitcase. I opened it again and finally closed it at 10:50 p.m.

There were still the two hampers to pack. Harris and George decided to pack them. I sat down to watch.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ready for the Trip

There were dishes, cups, bottles, pans, tomatoes, cakes and many other things to pack in the hampers.

As soon as George and Harris started packing, they broke a cup. And, this was just the beginning! George is the worst packer in the world. When George dies, Harris will be the worst packer in the world.

They walked on things and broke them. Harris put a big jar of jam on top of a tomato and crushed it. George stepped on a big packet of butter, and Harris sat on it. Soon there was butter everywhere. They packed the pies in the hamper. Then they put heavy things on top of them. The pies were crushed, just like the tomato.

In the middle of all of this, there was Montmorency, of course. He put his leg in the sugar, and soon there was sugar everywhere. He ran away with the teaspoons. He pretended that the lemons were rats, and killed three of them! This was Montmorency's idea of fun.

At one in the morning, the packing was finished. We were ready for bed.

George said, 'What time shall I wake you up?'

Harris said, 'Seven o'clock.'

I said, 'Six o'clock.'

'Wake us up at half past six, George,' we said.

It was Mrs Poppets who woke me up the next morning. 'Do you know that it's nearly nine o'clock?'

'What!' I shouted, as I jumped out of bed. I woke up Harris and George. We began to get ready, and we remembered that we had packed our toothbrushes. So we went to get them out of the suitcase. This was not an easy job.

At last, we were ready to eat breakfast. While we ate breakfast, George read the newspaper. He told us about the people killed on the river, and about the bad weather report.

George went to work, and Harris and I finished our breakfast. That morning, Montmorency invited two of his friends to the house. They fought most of the time.

When we were finally ready, we carried our luggage to the road. We waited twenty minutes for a taxi. Taxis usually come every three minutes.

A crowd of people was watching us. They looked at us, at Montmorency, and at Montmorency's friends. They looked at all our luggage: a big suitcase, a small bag, two big hampers, some pans, some umbrellas, five coats and raincoats.

At Waterloo Station, we took the 11:05 train to Kingston. At

Kingston, our boat was waiting for us below the bridge. Harris and I put our luggage in it. We got on the boat happily, but Montmorency was worried. Harris took the oars and we started our two-week trip on the River Thames.

Harris was wearing a red and orange blazer. It was a beautiful, sunny day. We were enjoying the first moments of our holiday.

When we passed Hampton Court Palace, Harris asked, 'Have you ever visited the maze here?' He said he had gone into the maze once to show a friend. He studied a map of the maze before going in. He knew it was very easy to get

out again.

Harris said to his friend, 'We'll go in and walk around for ten minutes. Then we'll come out and have lunch. It's very easy. Take the first turn to the right each time.'

In the maze, they met some people who had been there for forty-five minutes. They wanted to get out because they were lost. Harris said, 'Follow me! I'm going out in ten minutes.' The people thanked him and started following him. Other people began following Harris, too. Some of them were worried and afraid. He continued turning to the right, but he was still in the maze.

Harris got lost! The people were angry with him. They all started calling for help. A young keeper 4 heard them and came to help. But, he got lost, too! Finally, the old keeper came back from lunch. He let the people out. Everyone was tired and angry.

Harris said, 'Let's ask George to try the maze, on our return trip.'

'Not a bad idea,' I said.

When we passed Molesey Lock, we were the only boat in the big lock. Usually, the lock is a very busy place. On Sundays, there are boats

everywhere. People like the river and the sun. It's such a beautiful picture — the river, the trees, the flowers and the people, in their colourful clothes.

At Hampton, Harris wanted to stop the boat and have a look at the church. I don't like visiting churches, but Harris loves it.

'I came on the trip only because I wanted to visit Hampton Church. You know, I love churches, churchyards and tombs. The idea of not seeing Hampton Church, with Mrs Thomas's tomb, makes me angry.'

'Who is Mrs Thomas?' I asked.

'I don't know, but she has a strange tomb.'

I said, 'We must be at Shepperton at five o'clock to meet George.'

Harris said, 'George! Why can't George be here to do some work? Why doesn't he help us with this heavy boat? What does he do at the bank? He sits behind a piece of glass all day and does nothing. I work! Why doesn't he work? I'm going to have a drink!'

'There are no pubs near here. The nearest pub is far away,' I said.

'What! We'll all die of thirst. No pubs!'

'If you're thirsty, we have water in the boat.'
I said.

'Water! Water makes people ill!' he said.
'However, I am very thirsty and I must drink
something.' So he took the bottle and drank some
water.

CHAPTER FIVE

First Day on the Boat

We stopped at Kempton Park and had lunch under the trees. QE Good food always calms Harris.

We reached Sunbury Lock at half past three. We then went to Walton, which is a historical town. Julius Caesar stayed there with his soldiers. Queen Elizabeth I stayed there, too. You can never escape from that woman. She was everywhere!

Next we came to Halliford and Shepperton. There is a tomb in the Shepperton churchyard with a poem on it. I was afraid Harris wanted to stop and visit it. I saw him looking at the church, as we passed near it, so I moved the boat suddenly, and Harris's cap fell into the water. He pulled it out and was angry with me. Fortunately, he was worried about his wet cap and forgot about the church.

As we came to Weybridge, the first thing we saw was a coloured blazer. When we got closer, we saw that George was inside the blazer.

Montmorency started barking I furiously.

Harris and I shouted loudly. George waved his cap and shouted, too. The lock-keeper I ran out, because he thought someone had fallen into the water. When he saw that no one was in the water, he returned to his work.

Now that George was on the boat, we decided to make him work. He did not want to work, of course.

'I had a bad day at the bank,' George said.

Harris, who is a little cruel, said, 'Now you're going to have a bad day on the river. A change is good for you. It's healthy! Come on! Get out of the boat and TOW!'

George didn't know what to say. After a moment, he said, 'It's better if I stay here and prepare tea. It's very difficult to prepare tea, and you look tired.'

We didn't answer. We gave him the rope. He started walking and pulling the boat.

I remember that George once saw a young couple who were walking by the side of the river. They were pulling a rope behind them, and they were talking. They didn't notice that there was no boat at the end of the rope. They had probably

had a boat at the end of the rope when they started. But they had lost it.

When George saw this, he took the rope out of the water. Then he tied it to his own boat. So, the young couple towed George and his three fat friends up to Marlow. When they looked back, they saw that they were towing a boat that was not theirs. The young man was surprised and angry. The young lady said, 'Oh, Henry, where is Aunt Mary?'

No one knew what happened to Aunt Mary.

The most exciting thing is to let girls tow your boat. You always need three girls. Two of them hold the rope. The third one runs around and laughs all the time.

When they are finally ready to pull, they start running. They pull the boat too fast, and they are soon tired. They sit down on the grass to rest and laugh. While they rest, your boat goes out into the middle of the river. 'Oh, look,' they say, 'the boat's gone to the middle of the river!'

They laugh, jump up and start pulling it again. Then one of them decides to stop, because she needs her hat. Then another wants her red shawl. I Now one of them needs a comb for her

hair. The other wants her handkerchief. This goes on for most of the afternoon. It is never boring when three girls tow a boat.

George towed us to Penton Hook. We stopped there and decided to spend the night on the boat. We found a pretty place. We tied our boat to a big tree.

We were all hungry and we wanted to eat. However, George said, 'No, let's put the canvas cover on the boat first. It will only take a few minutes.'

It looked simple, but it wasn't. There were five metal rods. You put them into special holes in the side of the boat. I didn't think this was dangerous work, but it was. I'm surprised that we are still alive to tell the story.

First of all, the metal rods did not go into their holes. We jumped on them, kicked them and pushed them. When the rods were in their holes, we tried to put the canvas cover on the boat.

George took one part of the cover. He tied it at the front of the boat. Harris stood in the middle to help George with the cover. George did his job well, but Harris was completely confused.

After ten minutes of hard work, Harris was

inside the cover! He was fighting to get out. He accidentally knocked George down. Now George was inside the cover, too. They fought with the cover. I heard some very bad words. I thought the job must be very difficult.

I didn't understand what was happening. George and Harris had told Montmorency and me to stand at the back of the boat. We did exactly that. We waited quietly. We saw the cover moving violently, but we thought this was the correct method.

After a long time, we heard George shout, 'We can't breathe under here! Why don't you help us, you idiot!'

When someone calls for help, I always answer. I went to help them. Poor Harris, his face was almost black.

CHAPTER SIX

Harris Makes Scrambled Eggs

As soon as the cover was in place, we started to prepare supper. We wanted some hot water to make tea. We put the tea kettle on the stove. We pretended that we were not interested in the water. We wanted the water to think that we did not care about it. We began to prepare supper.

This was the only way to make the water boil on a boat. If the water knows you are waiting for it, it will never get hot. You must not look at it. It's a good idea to shout, 'I don't want any tea. Do you, George?'

George shouts back, 'Oh, no. I don't like tea. I'll have milk.'

'And you, Harris?'

'Tea is terrible. I never drink it. I'll have lemonade.'

This makes the water very angry. At this point, the water will boil!

We really wanted that supper. We needed that supper. For thirty-five minutes nobody spoke. We just ate and ate. Finally, we all had full

stomachs, and we were happy. A full stomach makes you feel kind and generous. We sat and smiled at each other. We smiled at Montmorency, too. We started smoking our pipes and began to talk.

We went to bed at ten o'clock. I didn't sleep well. I wasn't comfortable in the boat. I woke up at six o'clock the next morning, and George did, too. There was no reason to wake up so early. We were on holiday. Why did we wake up so early? It never happens to us when we're working.

We decided to wake up Harris. This was hard work. We used an oar to help us. Harris moved a bit and said, 'I'll be downstairs in a minute. Get my best boots ready, please.'

We tried again with a boat hook. Harris sat up suddenly and Montmorency fell off the bed. We pulled up the canvas cover and all four of us looked out at the river. We were very cold. We had planned to go swimming, but the water looked so cold and wet.

'Well, who's going swimming first?' asked Harris.

No one wanted to be first. George decided to get dressed. Montmorency barked with horror at

the idea. Harris went to look for his trousers.

I decided to go to the river bank and throw some water on myself.

I held on to the branch of a tree as I moved to the water. It was very cold and I decided not to go in. I wanted to go back to the boat. But suddenly, the branch of the tree broke! I fell into the river along with my towel. I also drank about a bottle of Thames water.

'Good heavens! Old J is in the water!' Harris said.

'How's the water?' George asked.

'It's lovely!' I answered. 'Why don't you come in?'

Nobody wanted to try the water. When I got back to the boat, I was very cold. I wanted to put on my shirt, but it fell into the river. This made me angry. George started laughing.

'I don't see anything to laugh at,' I said.

George laughed even more. I never saw a man laugh so much. I was cold and furious. I was trying to get my shirt out of the river. George was laughing louder and louder.

'Stop laughing, you stupid idiot!' I shouted.

When I finally pulled the shirt out of the river, I saw that it wasn't mine — it was George's shirt! I started laughing too. I laughed so much that I dropped the shirt into the river again.

'Aren't you going to get it out?' said George, who continued laughing.

I didn't answer him for a while, because I was laughing so much. At last I said, 'it isn't my shirt. It's yours!'

I never saw a man's face change so quickly.

'What!' he shouted. 'You donkey! I Why can't you be careful with things? Why don't you go and get dressed on the river bank? People like you don't know how to live on a boat!'

I tried to tell him how funny it was, but he didn't understand. George is a little slow at understanding a joke sometimes.

Harris said, 'I'm cooking scrambled eggs for breakfast this morning. Once people try my scrambled eggs, they always want them.'

He was quite famous for his scrambled eggs. George and I got the stove and the frying pan ready. Then we looked for the eggs that weren't broken. We found only six of them.

'Now you can start,' we said.

Breaking the eggs was difficult for Harris. The eggs got on his trousers and went up his arms. He put six eggs into the frying pan. Then he sat down by the stove and mixed them with a fork.

George and I saw that it was difficult work. Harris often burnt his fingers. Then he danced around the stove. He waved his hands in the air and shouted. George and I thought that this was an important part of his cooking method.

We didn't know what scrambled eggs were. We thought they were some sort of Red Indian food, and, to cook them correctly, it was necessary to do special dances with magic words.

Montmorency went to put his nose over the frying pan once, and burnt himself. He, too, began dancing around and barking. It was interesting and exciting to watch this show. George and I were sorry when it was finished.

When the scrambled eggs were ready, there was very little to eat. Six eggs had gone into the pan. But, all that came out was a teaspoon full of burnt eggs.

'The problem is the frying pan,' Harris said. 'I need another type of pan and another stove.'

We decided not to try scrambled eggs again,
until Harris had the right pan and stove.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Laughing Tin

When we finished breakfast, the sun was up and it was a warm morning. I sat on the river bank near Runnymede. I thought about King John, who signed the Magna Carta at Runnymede, in 1215. What a great moment in English history! I imagined the scene!

George came over and said, 'When you finish resting and dreaming, please help me wash the dishes and other things.'

I cleaned the frying pan with some grass and with George's wet shirt.

Later on, we went to Magna Carta Island. We saw the stone where the Magna Carta was signed. In this area, King Henry VIII met with his sweetheart, Anne Boleyn. I am certain that King Henry VIII met Anne Boleyn in several other places, too.

We continued slowly up the river, and stopped for lunch near Monkey Island. We had cold meat for lunch.

'Where's the mustard?' I asked.

'The mustard?' Harris said.

We had forgotten to bring the mustard. At that moment, we all wanted mustard more than anything in the world.

'How boring life is without mustard!' said George.

We ate our cold meat in silence. We thought about the happy days of childhood when there was lots of mustard on the table. The adult world can be a cruel place.

All three of us loved tinned fruit. George brought out a tin of pineapple. This was perfect to make us forget the mustard. We felt that life was smiling at us again.

'Look at the picture on the tin!' said Harris.

'Ah, I can't wait!' I said.

'I'm dreaming about the sweet juice,' George said.

Harris got a spoon ready.

Then we looked for the tin-opener. We took everything out of the two hampers. We took everything out of the bag. We looked in every corner of the boat. There was no tin-opener.

Harris tried to open the tin with a little knife,

and he cut himself. George tried to open it with a pair of scissors. The scissors flew up and almost cut his eye. I tried to open it with a piece of metal. I did something wrong, because I fell into the river. The tin flew away and broke a teacup.

Then we all got angry. I started hitting the tin with a piece of wood. Harris hit the tin, and so did George. We changed its shape. We made it square. We made it round. Then we made it flat. But, we still couldn't open it.

The tin looked at us and seemed to be laughing. It was ugly and it frightened us. I threw it in the river! Then we rowed away and didn't stop until we reached Maidenhead.

It was evening and a strong wind started blowing. The wind was behind us and we put up the sail quickly. The wind blew and the boat flew up the river.

I was steering I the boat, and George and Harris were enjoying the trip. Sailing is exciting. It's almost like flying. You feel that you are part of nature. We were alone and we flew along the river. Far in the distance, we saw a small fishing boat. There were three fishermen in it.

The sun was going down, and there was a

red light on the water. The river seemed magic. It was like a dream. We felt that we were sailing into a strange land.

We did not sail into a strange land. We sailed straight into the fishing boat with the three old fishermen! At first, we didn't know what was happening. But, when we heard the bad words that came from the other boat, we knew we were near people. We also knew that those people were not happy.

The three old fishermen fell off their seats. There were fish all over them. They slowly tried to get up. As they did this, they cursed us. They didn't curse us with common curses. They used long, special curses. They also cursed our parents, families, friends, neighbours, pets and jobs. These curses were for the present and the future.

Harris stood up and said, 'Be thankful for a bit of excitement in your lives! Your lives must be so boring, just sitting and fishing all day. My friends and I are very unhappy to hear men of your age use such bad words.' The three old men did not agree with Harris.

'I'll steer the boat now, J,' said George. 'An intelligent man like you must do better things.'

Leave the steering to me, before we all drown.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

Montmorency Meets a Cat

At Marlow, we left our boat by the bridge. We spent the night at the Crown Hotel. The next morning we went swimming before breakfast.

On the way back, Montmorency met a cat. Montmorency and I don't agree on cats. I like cats. Montmorency doesn't. When I meet a cat, I stop and say hello. I pet it gently. The cat is happy, and I am too. When Montmorency meets a cat, the whole street knows about it. A lot of bad words fly through the air.

As soon as Montmorency saw the cat, he barked with happiness. The cat was walking slowly across the street. Montmorency ran after the cat. But the cat didn't run. He didn't understand that his life was in danger.

This cat was big and black. It had half a tail, half a nose and only one ear. It was a clever street cat.

Montmorency is a courageous dog, but the cold eyes of that cat terrified him. The cat stopped in the middle of the road and looked at

Montmorency.

Neither spoke, but the conversation was probably like this:

Cat: Yes! You want me? Can I do anything for you?

Montmorency: No, no thanks.

Cat: If you really want something, please tell me.

Montmorency: (walking backwards) Oh, no, not at all. Don't disturb yourself. I'm afraid I made a mistake. I thought I knew you. Sorry I disturbed you.

Cat: Not at all. It's a pleasure. Are you sure you don't want anything now?

Montmorency: (still walking backwards) No, thanks. Nothing at all, thanks. Very kind of you. Good morning.

Cat: Good morning.

The cat got up and walked away. Montmorency came back and followed us quietly. He was silent all day long.

To this day, if you say the word 'Cats!' to Montmorency, he'll stop walking. Then he'll look up at you, as if to say: 'Please don't!'

After this, we did our shopping, returned to the boat and continued our trip up the river.

At Hambledon Lock, we discovered that we had no water. We went to the lock-keeper to ask for some. George spoke for us. With a friendly smile he asked, 'May we have some water, please.'

'Certainly,' said the old lock-keeper. 'Take as much as you want, and leave the rest.'

'Thank you very much,' said George, looking around. 'Where is the water?'

'It's where it always is,' said the lock-keeper. 'It's behind you.'

George turned around and looked. 'I don't see it.'

'What! Where are your eyes?' the lock-keeper said. He took George's arm and turned him around.

'Oh!' George said. 'But we can't drink the river!'

'No, but you can drink some of it,' said the lock-keeper. 'I've drunk river water for the past fifteen years.'

'Well, sir, I don't think you look very

healthy, after drinking all that river water. But thank you anyway,' George said.

We left the lock-keeper's place and we found some water at another house.

We towed the boat past Henley and stopped near Wargrave for lunch. We were sitting in a green field near the river. Harris was cutting a meat pie. George and I were waiting with our dishes.

'I need a spoon,' said Harris.

The hamper was behind us. George and I both turned around to get a spoon. In five seconds, we had the spoon. When we turned back, Harris and the meat pie were gone! Disappeared!

It was a wide open field. There were no trees nearby. Harris did not fall into the river, because the river was far from us. George and I looked all around. Then we looked at each other.

'Has he gone up to heaven?' I asked.

'Angels don't take meat pies to heaven,' George said.

'You're right!' I agreed.

'Then there has been an earthquake,' George

said. 'I'm sorry he had the meat pie with him.'

Sadly, we looked at the place where Harris and the meat pie were sitting. Then, with horror, we saw Harris's head — only his head. It was in the grass! His face was red and furious.

George was the first to speak. 'Say something! Are you dead or alive? Where is your body?'

'Oh, don't be an idiot!' Harris shouted. 'I think you made this happen. You told me to sit there. It's your stupid joke! Here, take the pie.'

Harris didn't know it, but he had been sitting next to a big hole. The long grass covered it. He fell into the deep hole without knowing anything. At first, he thought that it was the end of the world.

Harris still thinks that George and I planned it all.

CHAPTER NINE

Fighting Swans

After lunch, a gentle wind pushed us up the river past Wargrave and Shiplake. We got out of the boat at Sonning and walked around the village. Sonning is a lovely village. Everything is clean and beautiful. Each house is covered with roses. We decided to return to one of the Shiplake islands to spend the night.

George said, 'Let's have a special supper tonight. Let's make an Irish stew. We can put everything into one big pan.'

'What a wonderful idea!' Harris and I said.

'I'll get the wood and make a fire,' George said. 'You two can peel the potatoes.'

This was a very big job. We were happy and excited. But when we peeled our first potato, we understood that this was not exciting — it was hard work. The first potato we peeled looked like a pea.

George looked at it and said, 'No, no, no! There's no potato left. Do it like this/

We worked hard for half an hour, but we

peeled only four potatoes. We refused to continue.

'Well, just put the potatoes in without peeling them. Let's add some carrots and other vegetables. Look in the hampers and take out all the pieces of old food. We'll put them in the stew. You can put anything in a stew.'

We found half a pork pie, a tin of fish and a few broken eggs. We added these to the stew. Montmorency watched us carefully and then left. After a while, he returned with a dead rat in his mouth. He wanted to add something to the stew, too. We discussed it first.

Harris said, 'It's all right to add the dead rat. It will be mixed with the other things. A stew needs many ingredients.'

George said, 'Well, I don't want to try anything new. Maybe next time. I'm sorry, Montmorency.'

Harris said, 'If you never try anything new, you'll never discover things. It's men like you, George, who slow down the progress of our world.'

George didn't listen to Harris.

The stew was a great success. It was

delicious — excellent in every way. We all really enjoyed it.

After the Irish stew, George and I decided to go to Henley for an evening walk. Harris wanted to stay on the boat and drink a whisky.

When we returned to the boat, Harris was sad and confused.

'What happened to you, Harris?'

'Swans!' he said.

We had left the boat near a swan's nest. When George and I were in Henley, Mrs Swan came back to the nest. She started to shout at Harris. Harris frightened her away. She went to get her husband, Mr Swan. Harris had a terrible fight with these two swans. Harris finally won the fight.

However, half an hour later, Mr and Mrs Swan returned with eighteen other swans. There was a horrible fight. The swans attacked Harris and tried to pull him off the boat. They wanted to drown Harris and Montmorency!

Harris fought with courage for four hours. In the end, the swans slowly swam away to die.

'How many swans were there?' George asked.

'Thirty-two,' said Harris, who was sleepy.

'But you said eighteen before,' George said.

'No, I didn't. I said twelve. Do you think I can't count?'

We never discovered the truth about the swans. We asked Harris about it the next morning. He said, 'What swans?' He thought that George and I were dreaming.

That night Harris had trouble sleeping. He woke me up about twelve times during the night. He was looking for his clothes. George woke up, too.

'Why do you need your trousers? It's the middle of the night!' George said.

Later, Harris was looking for his shoes. Then he asked for his socks and his umbrella.

We woke up late the next morning. We had a small breakfast and we were ready to go.

We agreed that we would row the boat, and not tow it. Harris said, 'George, you and J can row. I'll steer.'

I didn't like this idea, and I said, 'No, Harris. You and George row, so that I can rest.'

I was doing too much work on this trip. I always think that I work too much. It's not because I don't like work. I love it! I find it very interesting. I can sit and look at it for hours. You can't give me too much work. I like collecting it. My office is full of it.

I'm very careful with my work, too. Some of the work in my office has been there for years. It is in perfect condition. It isn't dirty or anything. That's because I take good care of it.

Harris said, 'On this boat, I'm the only one who works.'

George said, 'You do nothing but eat and sleep, Harris. I'm the only one who works. You and J are very lazy people.'

Harris laughed and said, 'George! Work! Have you ever seen George work?'

I agreed with Harris, George never worked.

'How do you know if I work, Harris? You're

always sleeping, except at meal times. Have you ever seen Harris awake, except at meal times?' George asked me.

I agreed with George. Harris worked very little on the boat.

'Oh, please! I do more work than old J,' Harris said.

'Well, it's difficult to do less work than old J,' George added.

'Old J thinks he's a passenger and doesn't need to work,' Harris said.

After this discussion, I said to Harris, 'You and George row the boat up to Reading. At Reading I'll tow it.'

CHAPTER TEN

Three Men Out of a Boat

We reached Reading at about II o'clock. The river here is very dirty, so we moved on to Streatley. We stayed at Streatley for two days. We took our clothes to a laundry woman. We had tried to wash them in the river, as George told us. The river was so dirty that our clothes collected all the dirt from the water. The river became cleaner, but our clothes became dirtier.

The laundry woman was very surprised to see such dirty clothes. She looked at them and said, 'This will cost you three times the usual price.'

We agreed and paid her.

The river near Streatley and Goring is excellent for fishing. It is full of different types of fish. Some people sit and fish there all day. However, they never catch any fish. The local fisherman's guide book doesn't say anything about catching fish. It only says that the place is a good fishing area. And it is!

You can see many fish swim past, but you

can't catch them.

When you go for a walk by the river, you can see hundreds of fish. They come and stand half out of the water. Their mouths are open for bread. If you go swimming, they come to look at you and disturb you. You cannot catch them, however.

We passed by Wallingford and Dorchester. Both are ancient British towns. In the days of the Roman Empire, the Romans camped here and built fortifications. We spent the night at Clifton Hampdon, which is a pretty village.

We finally arrived at Oxford and spent two excellent days there. Oxford is a beautiful town with its old university. Oxford is also full of dogs. Montmorency was very happy. He had eleven dog fights on the first day and fourteen on the second day. He probably thought he was in heaven.

We left Oxford on the third day, to return home to London. When we left Oxford, it was raining. The rain continued without stopping.

When it's sunny, the river is a dream. But when it's rainy, the river is brown and unfriendly.

It rained all day. At first, we pretended to

enjoy it.

'Well, this is a nice change. Too much sunshine is boring. Nature is beautiful even when it rains,' I said.

'Yes,' Harris said, 'it's good to see the river in all kinds of weather. The rain is good for you. I can't understand people who are afraid of a little rain.'

Harris and I sang songs and we were quite happy.

George did not agree. He stayed under the umbrella.

We put up the canvas cover before lunch. We left a little opening to see where we were going. We continued our trip for another nine miles. We stopped for the night at Day's Lock.

We did not have a happy evening. The rain never stopped. Supper was not good. We were really tired of cold meat. We dreamt about our favourite foods. Harris talked about fish cooked in a special sauce.

Harris gave his cold meat to Montmorency. He looked at it and turned his head. He seemed insulted by Harris's offer. He went to sit at the other side of the boat, alone.

George said, 'Please don't talk about good food, until I finish this cold meat.'

We played cards after supper. After that, we had some hot water and whisky. George told us about a man he knew. This man had slept on the river in a wet boat, like ours. He got very ill and died ten days later.

Of course, we began talking about other illnesses. After a while, I Harris said, 'I've got an awful headache. It must be the rain.'

'Well, I've got a bad backache,' I said.

To make us feel happier, George sang to us. That made Harris and I cry, and it made Montmorency howl.

There was nothing else to do, so we went to bed. We didn't sleep well at all. We were awake at five o'clock the next morning.

Our second rainy day was the same as the first. It rained all day. We moved slowly along the river. We agreed to continue our trip, even if it killed us.

'It's only two more days,' Harris said. 'We're young and healthy. Maybe we'll be all right.'

We talked about our evening. 'With this weather, we can have dinner and take a walk in

the rain. Or, we can have dinner and spend an hour in a pub,' I said.

'That's not very exciting,' said George.

'It's much more interesting to go to the Alhambra Theatre in London,' said Harris.

'And then have supper at that little French restaurant,' I added.

'But we have decided to stay and die on this boat,' said George. 'However, there's a train that leaves Pangbourne after five o'clock. It gets to London in time to eat something, and then go to the theatre.'

Everyone was silent. We didn't say one word. We looked at one another. Then, we got out the big bag and got our clothes ready.

Twenty minutes later, three men and a dog were going to the railway station.

We lied to the boatman at Pangbourne. We didn't have the courage to tell him the truth: we were running away from the rain!

We asked him to take care of the boat until the next morning. 'If something happens, we'll write to you,' we said, telling him a big lie.

We reached Paddington Station at seven

o'clock. We went directly to the restaurant and had a small meal. Montmorency stayed at the restaurant, while we went to the theatre.

'We'll return at half past ten for the dog and for a good supper,' I told the restaurant owner.

The man at the ticket office of the theatre said, 'Oh, you're the famous acrobats from the Himalaya Mountains. You're late for the performance. Please use the side door.'

We explained to him that we were not acrobats. He understood and sold us three tickets. Our clothes probably looked a bit old and strange.

At the Alhambra Theatre everyone looked at our clothes and smiled. Some people laughed.

After the theatre, we went back to the restaurant.

We enjoyed our delicious supper. After ten days of eating cold meat, we were thankful for this supper. We ate it without speaking. Then we sat back and felt happy and kind.

Harris, who was sitting next to the window, pulled back the curtain. He looked at the wet street. It was rainy and dark. The wind was blowing. A few people walked past under their

umbrellas.

Harris took his glass and said, 'Well, we had a good trip, and I say thank you to Old Father Thames. But, I think we were right to come back when we did. Here's to Three Men well out of a boat!'

Montmorency stood on his back legs in front of the window. He looked at the wet night and gave a short bark of agreement.