

BARBOUR RALPH HENRY

THE ADVENTURE CLUB
AFLOAT

Ralph Barbour

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CHAPTER I

HOW IT STARTED

The Adventure Club had its inception, one evening toward the last of June, in Number 17 Sumner Hall, which is the oldest, most vine-hidden and most hallowed of the seven dormitories of Dexter Academy. It was a particularly warm evening, the two windows were wide open and the green-shaded light on the study table in the centre of the room had been turned low—Sumner prided itself on being conservative to the extent of gas instead of electricity and tin bathtubs instead of porcelain—and in the dim radiance the three occupants of the room were scarcely more than darker blurs.

Since final examinations had ended that afternoon and Graduation Day was only some twenty-eight hours away, none of the three was doing anything more onerous than yawning, and the yawn which came from Perry Bush, didn't sound as though it cost much of an effort. It was, rather, a comfortable, sleepy yawn, one that expressed contentment and relief, a sort of "Glad-that's-over-and-I'm-still-alive" yawn.

There was a window-seat under each casement in Number 17, and each was occupied by a recumbent figure. Perry was on the right-hand seat, his hands under his head and one foot sprawled on the floor, and Joe Ingersoll was in the other, his slim, white-trousered legs jack-knifed against the darker square of the open window. Near Joe, his feet tucked sociably against Joe's ribs, Steve Chapman, the third of the trio, reclined in a Morris chair. I use the word reclined advisedly, for Steve had lowered the back of the chair to its last notch, and to say that he was sitting would require a stretch of the imagination almost as long as Steve himself! Through the windows Steve could see the dark masses of the campus elms, an occasional star between the branches, and, by raising his head the fraction of an inch, the lights in the upper story of Hawthorne, across the yard. Somewhere under the trees outside a group of fellows were singing to the accompaniment of a wailing ukelele. They sang softly, so that the words floated gently up to the open casements just distinguishable:

"Years may come and years may go,
Seasons ebb and seasons flow,
Autumn lie 'neath Winters' snow,
Spring bring Summer verdancy.
Life may line our brow with care,
Time to silver turn our hair,
Still, to us betide whate'er,
Dexter, we'll remember thee!

"Other memories may fade,
Hopes grow dim in ev'ning's shade,
Golden friendships that we made—"

"Aw, shut up!" muttered Perry, breaking the silence that had held them for several minutes. Joe Ingersoll laughed softly.

"You don't seem to like the efforts of the—um—sweet-voiced choristers," he said in his slow way.

"I don't like the sob-stuff," replied Perry resentfully. "What's the use of rubbing it in? Why not let a fellow be cheerful after he has got through by the skin of his teeth and kicked his books under the bed? Gosh, some folks never want anyone to be happy!" He raised himself by painful effort and peered out and down into the gloom. "Sophs, I'll bet," he murmured, falling back again on the cushions. "No one else would sit out here on the grass and sing school songs two days before the end. I hope that idiot singing second bass will get a brown-tail caterpillar down his neck!"

"The end!" observed Steve Chapman. "You say that as if we were all going to die the day after tomorrow, Perry! Cheer up! Vacation's coming!"

"Vacation be blowed!" responded Perry. "What's that amount to, anyway? Nothing ever happens to me in vacation. It's all well enough for you fellows to laugh. You're going up to college together in the Fall. I'm coming back to this rotten hole all alone!"

"Not quite alone, Sweet Youth," corrected Joe. "There will be some four hundred other fellows here."

"Oh, well, you know what I mean," said Perry impatiently. "You and Steve will be gone, and I don't give a hang for any other chaps!"

He ended somewhat defiantly, conscious that he had indulged in a most unmanly display of sentiment, and was glad that the darkness hid the confusion and heightened colour that followed the confession. Steve and Joe charitably pretended not to have noticed the lamentable exhibition of feeling, and a silence followed, during which the voices of the singers once more became audible.

"Dexter! Mother of our Youth!
Dexter! Guardian of the Truth!"

"*Cut it out!*" Perry leaned over the windowsill and bawled the command down into the darkness. A defiant jeer answered him.

"Don't be fresh," said Steve reprovingly. Perry mumbled and relapsed into silence. Presently, sighing as he changed his position, Joe said:

"I believe Perry's right about vacation, Steve. Nothing much ever does happen to a fellow in Summer. I believe I've had more fun in school than at home the last six years."

The others considered the statement a minute. Then: "Correct," said Steve. "It's so, I guess. We're always crazy to get home in June and just as crazy to get back to school again in September, and I believe we all have more good times here than at home."

"Of course we do," agreed Perry animatedly. "Anyway, I do. Summers are all just the same. My folks lug me off to the Water Gap and we stay there until it's time to come back here. I play tennis and go motoring and sit around on the porch and—and—bathe—"

"Let's hope so," interpolated Joe gravely.

"And nothing really interesting ever happens," ended Perry despairingly. "Gee, I'd like to be a pirate or—or something!"

"Summers *are* rather deadly," assented Steve. "We go to the seashore, but the place is filled with swells, and about all they do is change their clothes, eat and sleep. When you get ready for piracy, Perry, let me know, will you! I'd like to sign-on."

"Put me down, too," said Joe. "I've always had a—um—sneaking idea that I'd make a bully pirate. I'm naturally bloodthirsty and cruel. And I've got a mental list of folks who—um—I'd like to watch walk the plank!"

"Fellows of our ages have a rotten time of it, anyway," Perry grumbled. "We're too old to play kids' games and too young to do anything worth while. What I'd like to do—"

"Proceed, Sweet Youth," Joe prompted after a moment.

"Well, I'd like to—to start something! I'd like to get away somewhere and do things. I'm tired of loafing around in white flannels all day and keeping my hands clean. And I'm tired of dabbing

whitewash on my shoes! Didn't you fellows ever think that you'd like to get good and dirty and not have to care? Wouldn't you like to put on an old flannel shirt and a pair of khaki trousers and some 'sneakers' and—and roll in the mud?"

"Elemental stuff," murmured Joe. "He's been reading Jack London."

"Well, that's the way I feel, lots of times," said Perry defiantly. "I'm tired of being clean and white, and I'm tired of dinner jackets, and I'm sick to death of hotel porches! Gee, a healthy chap never was intended to lead the life of a white poodle with a pink ribbon around his neck! Me for some rough-stuff!"

"You're dead right, too," agreed Steve. "That kind of thing is all right for Joe, of course. Joe's a natural-born 'fusser.' He's never happier than when he's dolled up in a sport-shirt and a lavender scarf and toasting marshmallows. But—"

"Is that so?" inquired Joe with deep sarcasm. "If I was half the 'fusser' you are—"

"What I want," interrupted Perry, warming to his theme, "is adventure! I'd like to hunt big game, or discover the North Pole—"

"You're a year or two late," murmured Joe.

"—or dig for hidden treasure!"

"You should—um—change your course of reading," advised Joe. "Too much Roosevelt and Peary and Stevenson is your trouble. Read the classics for awhile—or the Patty Books."

"That's all right, but you chaps are just the same, only you won't own up to it."

"One of us will," said Steve; "and does."

"Make it two," yawned Joe. "Beneath this—um—this polished exterior there beats a heart—I mean there flows the red blood of—"

"Look here, fellows, why not?" asked Steve.

"Why not what?" asked Perry.

"Why not have adventures? They say that all you have to do is look for them."

"Don't you believe it! I've looked for them for years and I've never seen one yet." Perry swung his feet to the floor and sat up.

"Well, not at Delaware Water Gap, naturally. You've got to move around, son. You don't find them by sitting all day with your feet on the rail of a hotel piazza."

"Where do you find them, then?" Perry demanded.

Steve waved a hand vaguely aloft into the greenish radiance of the lamp. "All round. North, east, south and west. Land or sea. Adventures, Perry, are for the adventurous. Now, here we are, three able-bodied fellows fairly capable of looking after ourselves in most situations, tired of the humdrum life of Summer resorts. What's to prevent our spending a couple of months together and finding some adventures? Of course, we can't go to Africa and shoot lions and wart-hogs—whatever they may be,—and we can't fit out an Arctic exploration party and discover Ingersoll Land or Bush Inlet or Chapman's Passage, but we could have a mighty good time, I'd say, and, even if we didn't have many hair-breadth escapes, I'll bet it would beat chasing tennis balls and doing the Australian crawl and keeping our white shoes and trousers clean!"

"We could be as dirty as we liked!" sighed Perry ecstatically. "Lead me to it!"

"It sounds positively fascinating," drawled Joe, "but just how would we go about it? My folks, for some unfathomable reason, think quite a lot of me, and I don't just see them letting me amble off like that; especially in—um—such disreputable company."

"I should think they'd be glad to be rid of you for a Summer," said Perry. "Anyhow, let's make believe it's possible, fellows, and talk about it."

"Why isn't it possible?" asked Steve. "My folks would raise objections as well as yours, Joe, but I guess I could fetch them around. After all, there's no more danger than in staying at home and trying to break your neck driving an automobile sixty miles an hour. Let's really consider the scheme, fellows. I'm in earnest. I want to do it. What Perry said is just what I've been thinking without saying."

Why, hang it, a fellow needs something of the sort to teach him sense and give him experience. This thing of hanging around a hotel porch all Summer makes a regular mollycoddle of a fellow. I'm for revolt!"

"Hear! Hear!" cried Perry enthusiastically. "Revolution! *A bas la* Summer Resort! *Viva* Adventure!"

"Shut up, idiot! Do you really mean it, Steve, or are you just talking? If you mean it, I'm with you to the last—um—drop of blood, old chap! I've always wanted to revolt about something, anyway. One of my ancestors helped throw the English breakfast tea into Boston Harbour. But I don't want to get all het up about this unless there's really something in it besides jabber."

"We start the first day of July," replied Steve decisively.

"Where for?"

"That is the question, friends. Shall it be by land or sea?"

"Land," said Joe.

"Sea," said Perry.

"The majority rules and I cast my vote with Perry. Adventures are more likely to be found on the water, I think, and it's adventures we are looking for."

"But I always get seasick," objected Joe. "And when I'm seasick you couldn't tempt me with any number of adventures. I simply—um—don't seem to enthuse much at such times."

"You can take a lemon with you," suggested Perry cheerfully. "My grandmother—"

Joe shook his head. "They don't do you any good," he said sadly.

"Don't they! My grandmother—"

"Bother your grandmother! How do we go to sea, Steve? Swim or—or how?"

"We get my father's cruiser," replied Steve simply. "She's a forty-footer and toggled out like an ocean-liner. Has everything but a swimming-pool. She—"

"Nix on the luxuries," interrupted Perry. "The simple life for me. Let's hire an old moth-eaten sailboat—"

"Nothing doing, Sweet Youth! If I'm to risk my life on the heaving ocean I want something under me. Besides, being seasick is rotten enough, anyhow, without having to roll around in the cockpit of a two-by-twice sailboat. That cruiser listens well, Steve, but—um—will papa fall for it? If it was my father—"

"I think he will," answered Steve seriously. "Dad doesn't have much chance to use the boat himself, and this Summer he's likely to be in the city more than ever. The trouble is that the *Cockatoo* is almost too big for three of us to handle."

"Oh, piffle!"

"It's so, though. I know the boat, Perry. She's pretty big when it comes to making a landing or picking up a mooring. If we were all fairly good seamen it might be all right, but I wouldn't want to try to handle the *Cockatoo* without a couple of sailors aboard."

"I once sailed a knockabout," said Perry.

"And I had a great-grandfather who was a sea captain," offered Joe encouragingly. "What price great-grandfather?"

"Don't see where your grandfather and Perry's grandmother come into this," replied Steve. "How would it do if we gathered up two or three other fellows? The *Cockatoo* will accommodate six."

"Who could we get?" asked Joe dubiously.

"Neil Fairleigh, for one."

"How about Han?" offered Joe.

"Hanford always wants to boss everything," objected Perry.

"He knows boats, though, and so does Neil," said Steve. "And they're both good fellows. That would make five of us, and five isn't too many. We can't afford to hire a cook, you know; at least, I can't; and someone will have to look after that end of it. Who can cook?"

"I can't!" Perry made the disclaimer with great satisfaction.

"No more can I," said Joe cheerfully. "Let Neil be cook."

"I guess we'll all have to take a try at it. I dare say any of us can fry an egg and make coffee; and you can buy almost everything ready to eat nowadays."

"Tell you who's a whale of a cook," said Perry eagerly. "That's Ossie Brazier. Remember the time we camped at Mirror Lake last Spring? Remember the flapjacks he made? M-mm!"

"I didn't go," said Steve. "What sort of a chap is Brazier? I don't know him very well."

"Well, Oscar's one of the sort who will do anything just as long as he thinks he doesn't have to," replied Joe. "If we could get him to come along and tell him that he—um—simply must *not* ask to do the cooking, why—there you are!"

"Merely a matter of diplomacy," laughed Steve. "Well, we might have Brazier instead of Hanford—or Neil."

"Why not have them all if the boat will hold six?" asked Joe. "Seems to me the more we have the less each of us will have to do. I mean," he continued above the laughter, "that—um—a division of labour—"

"We get you," said Perry. "But, say, I wish you'd stop talking about it, fellows. I'm going to be disappointed when I wake up and find it's only a bright and gaudy dream."

"It isn't a dream," answered Steve, "unless you say so. I'll go, and I'll guarantee to get the *Cockatoo* without expense other than the cost of running her. If you and Joe can get your folks to let you come, and we can get hold of, say, two other decent chaps to fill the crew, why, we'll do it!"

"Do you honestly mean it?" demanded Perry incredulously. "Gee, I'll get permission if I have to—to go without it!"

"How about you, Joe?"

"Um—I guess I could manage it. How long would we be gone?"

"A month. Two, if you like. Start the first of July, or as soon after as possible, and get back in August."

"How much would it cost us?" inquired Perry. "I'm not a millionaire like you chaps."

"Wouldn't want to say offhand. We'd have to figure that. That's another reason for filling the boat up, though. The more we have the less everyone's share of the expense will be."

"Let's have the whole six, then, for money's scarce in my family these days. Let's make it a club, fellows. The Club of Six, or something of that sort. It sounds fine!"

"Take in another fellow and call it The Lucky Seven," suggested Joe.

"We might not be lucky, though," laughed Steve. "I'll tell you a better name."

"Shoot!"

"The Adventure Club."

CHAPTER II

THE CLUB GROWS

And that is the way in which it happened. It began in fun and ended quite seriously. They sat up in Number 17 Sumner until long after bedtime that night, figuring the cost of the expedition, planning the cruise, even listing supplies. The more they talked about it the more their enthusiasm grew. Perry was for having Steve send a night message then and there to his father asking for the boat, but Steve preferred to wait until he reached home and make the request by word of mouth.

"He would just think I was fooling or crazy if I telegraphed," he explained. "Tomorrow we'll try to dig up three other fellows to go along, and then, as soon as we all get home, we'll find out whether our folks will stand for it. You must all telegraph me the first thing. Don't wait to write, because I must know as soon as possible. I dare say there's work to be done on the *Cockatoo* before she's ready for the water, and we don't want to have to wait around until the end of July. The fun of doing anything is to do it right off. If you wait you lose half the pleasure. Now you'd better beat it, Perry. It's after ten. If you meet a proctor close your eyes and make believe you're walking in your sleep."

Perry reached his own room, on the floor above, without being sighted, however, and subsequently spent a sleepless hour in joyous anticipation of at last finding some of those adventures that all his life he had longed for. And when he did at length fall asleep it was to have the most outlandish dreams, visions in which he endured shipwreck, fought pirates and was all but eaten by cannibals. The most incongruous phase of the dream, as recollected on waking, was that the *Cockatoo* had been, not a motor-boat at all, but a trolley-car! He distinctly remembered that the pirates, on boarding it, had each dropped a nickel in the box!

Fortunately for the success of the Adventure Club, the next morning held no duties. In the afternoon the deciding baseball game was to be played, but, except for gathering belongings together preliminary to packing, nothing else intervened between now and the graduation programme of the morrow. Hence it was an easy matter to hold what might be termed the first meeting of the club. Besides the originators there were present Messrs. Fairleigh, Hanford and Brazier. After Steve had locked the door to prevent interruption, he presented to the newcomers a summary of the scheme. It was received with enthusiasm and unanimous approval, but Neil Fairleigh and Oscar Brazier sadly admitted that in their cases parental permission was extremely doubtful. George Hanford, whose parents were dead and who was under the care of a guardian, thought that in his case there would be no great difficulty. The other two viewed him a trifle enviously. Then, because one may always hope, they had to hear the particulars and each secretly began to fashion arguments to overcome the objections at home. Finally Oscar Brazier inquired interestedly:

"Who is going to cook for you?"

"Oh, we'll take turns, maybe," answered Joe. "Or we might hire a cook."

Joe stole a look at Steve. Oscar only shuffled his feet.

"I say hire," remarked Perry. "Any of us could do it after a fashion, I dare say, but you get frightfully hungry on the water and need good stuff well cooked, and lots of it."

"Yes," agreed Steve, "any of us would make an awful mess of it. Cooking's an art."

Oscar cleared his throat and frowned. "You'd have to pay a lot for a cook," he said. "It isn't hard, really. I could do it—if I were going along."

"That's so," George Hanford confirmed. But the rest seemed unflatteringly doubtful. The silence was almost embarrassing. At last Joe said hurriedly:

"Well, we don't have to decide that now. Besides, if you can't come with us—um—" His voice trailed off into a relieved silence. Oscar smiled haughtily.

"That's all right," he said. "If you prefer a cook, say so. Only, if I did go I'd be willing to do the cooking, and I'll bet I could do it as well as any cook you could hire. Isn't it so, Han?"

"Yes, I call you a mighty nifty cook, Ossie. I've eaten your biscuits more than once. Flapjacks, too."

"Well," said Joe politely, "camp cooking is um—different, I guess, from regular cooking. Of course, I don't say Ossie couldn't do it, mind you, but—we wouldn't want to take chances. On the whole, I think it would be best to have a regular cook."

"We might let Ossie try it," suggested Perry judicially.

"Oh, I'm not crazy about it," disclaimed Oscar, piqued. "If you prefer to pay out good money for a cook—"

"Not at all," interrupted Steve soothingly. "We want to do the whole thing as cheaply as we can. I see no harm in leaving the cooking end of it to you, Brazier; that is, if you can go."

"I'm going to make a big try for it," declared Oscar resolutely. "If my folks won't let me, they—they'll wish they had!"

Whereupon, emboldened by Oscar's stand, Neil Fairleigh expressed the conviction that he, too, could manage it some way. "I dare say that if I tell my dad that all you chaps are going he will think it's all right. It wouldn't be for all Summer, anyway, would it?"

"The idea now," responded Steve, "is to start out for a month's cruise and extend it if we cared to. I suppose any of us that got tired could quit after the month was up." He smiled. "We'd all have to sign-on for a month, though."

"Right-o," agreed Hanford. "What about electing officers? Oughtn't we to do that? Someone ought to be in charge, I should think."

"Sure!" exclaimed Joe. "We'll ballot. Throw that pad over here, Ossie."

"Wait a minute," said Steve. "I've been thinking, fellows. The *Cockatoo* will hold six comfortably. The main cabin has berths for four and the owner's cabin for two, but if I'm not mistaken the berths in the owner's cabin are extension, and if they are we could bunk three fellows in there, or even four at a pinch. That would give us room for seven or eight in all. Eight might make it a bit crowded, but she's a big, roomy boat and I think we could do with seven fellows all right. And seven's a lucky number, too. So suppose we take in one more while we're at it?"

"The more the merrier," agreed Joe. "Who have you got in mind?"

Steve shook his head. "No one, but I guess we can think of a fellow. There's—"

Steve was interrupted by a knock on the door, and when Hanford, who was nearest, had, at a nod from Steve, unlocked the portal a tall, rather serious-faced youth of seventeen entered.

"Oh, am I butting-in?" he asked. "I didn't know. I'll come back later, Joe." Philip Street smiled apologetically and started a retreat, but Steve called him back.

"Hold on, Phil!" he cried. "Come in here. You're the very fellow we want. Close the door and find a seat, will you?"

"By Jove, that's so!" exclaimed Joe, and the others heartily endorsed him. Oddly enough, not one would have thought of Phil Street in all probability, but each recognised the fact that he was the ideal fellow to complete the membership. Steve, Joe aiding and the others attempting to, outlined the plan. If they had expected signs of enthusiasm from Phil they were doomed to disappointment, for that youth listened silently and attentively until they had ended and then asked simply:

"When are you planning to get away?"

"As near the first of the month as we can," replied Steve.

"I'm afraid I couldn't go, then," said Phil. "I'm a delegate to the C.B. Convention, you see, and that doesn't end until the sixth."

"I'd forgotten that," said Joe disappointedly.

"What's C.B. stand for?" inquired Hanford.

"Christian Brotherhood," supplied Steve. "Look here, Phil, could you go after the sixth?"

"Yes, I'd love to, thanks."

"All right then, you're signed-on. If we get away before that we'll pick you up somewhere. If we don't you can start with us. How is that?"

"Quite satisfactory," answered Phil.

"But are you sure your folks will let you?" asked Perry.

"Oh, yes, I spend my Summers about as I like."

"Think of that!" sighed Perry. "Gee, I wish my folks were like that."

"I guess," said Steve, "that Phil's folks know he won't get into trouble, Perry, while yours are pretty certain that you will. It makes a difference. Now we can go ahead with that election, can't we? How about nominations?"

"No need of them," declared Joe. "What officers do we want?"

"Well, this is a club—the Adventure Club, Phil, is the name we've chosen—and so I suppose we ought to have a president and a vice-president and—"

"Rot!" said Perry. "Too high-sounding. Let's elect a captain and a treasurer and let it go at that."

"I never heard of a club having a captain," Oscar Brazier objected.

"Nor anyone else," agreed Joe. "Let's follow the Nihilist scheme and elect a Number One, a Number Two and a Number Three. Number One can be the boss, a sort of president, you know, Number Two can correspond to a vice-president and Number Three can be secretary and treasurer. How's that?"

"Suits me," said Steve. "Tear up some pieces of paper, Perry. We'll each vote for the three officers, writing the names in order, then the fellow getting the most votes—"

"I don't know as I ought to vote," said Neil Fairleigh, "because I'm not sure I can go. Maybe I'd better not, eh?"

"Oh, shucks, never mind that," replied Perry. "You can join the club, anyway, and be a sort of non-resident member. Here you are, fellows. Who's got a pen or something?"

During the ensuing two or three minutes there was comparative silence in Number 17, and while the seven occupants of the room busy themselves with pens or pencils let us look them over since we are likely to spend some time in their company from now on.

First of all there is Steve Chapman, seventeen years of age, a tall, well-built and nicely proportioned youth with black hair and eyes, a quick, determined manner and an incisive speech. Steve was Football Captain last Fall. Next him sits George Hanford. Han, as the boys call him, is eighteen, also a senior, and also a football player. He is big and rangey, good-natured and popular, and is president of the senior class.

Joe Ingersoll's age is seventeen. He is Steve's junior by two months. He is of medium height, rather thin, light complexioned and has peculiarly pale eyes behind the round spectacles he wears. Joe is first baseman on the Nine, and a remarkably competent one. He is slow of speech and possesses a dry humour that on occasion can be uncomfortably ironical. Beside him, Perry Bush is a complete contrast, for Perry is large-limbed, rather heavy of build, freckle-faced, red-haired and jolly. He has very dark blue eyes and, in spite of a moon-shaped countenance, is distinctly pleasing to look at; he is sixteen.

Neil Fairleigh and Phil Street are of an age, seventeen, but in other regards are quite unlike. Neil is of medium height, with his full allowance of flesh, and has hair the hue of new rope and grey-blue eyes. He is even-tempered, easy-going and, if truth must be told, somewhat lazy. Phil Street is quite tall, rather thin and dark complexioned, a nice-looking, somewhat serious youth whose infrequent smile is worth waiting for. He is an Honor Man, a distinction attained by no other member of our party save Steve. The last of the seven is Oscar Brazier, and Ossie, as the boys call him, is sixteen years old, short and square, strongly-made and conspicuous for neither beauty nor scholarly attainments. Ossie has a snub nose, a lot of rebellious brown hair, red cheeks and a wide mouth that is usually smiling. Renowned for his good-nature, he is nevertheless a hard worker at whatever he

undertakes, and if he sometimes shows a suspicious disposition it is only because his good-nature has been frequently imposed on.

When the last pencil had stopped scratching Joe gathered the slips together and after a moment's figuring announced that Steve had been elected Number One without a dissenting vote, that he himself had been made Number Two and that Phil was Number Three. If Perry felt disappointment he hid it, and when Phil declared that in his opinion Perry should have been elected instead of him, since Perry was, so to say, a charter member, Perry promptly disclaimed any desire of the sort.

"No, thanks," he said. "If I was secretary I'd have to keep the accounts and all that sort of thing, and I'm no good at it. You're the very fellow for the job, Phil."

The assemblage broke up shortly after, to meet again that evening at eight, Steve undertaking to have a map on hand then so that they might plan their cruise. As none of the seven was bound to secrecy, what happened is only what might have been expected. By the time the ball game was half over Steve and Joe had received enough applications for membership in the Adventure Club to have, in Joe's words, filled an ocean liner. It is probable that a large proportion of the applicants could not have obtained permission to join the expedition, but they were each and all terribly enthusiastic and eager to join, and it required all of Steve's and Joe's diplomacy to turn them away without hurting their feelings. Wink Wheeler—his real name was Warren, but no one ever called him that—refused politely but firmly to take no for an answer. Wink said he didn't care where he bunked and that he never ate anything on a boat, anyway, because he was always too seasick to bother about meals.

"One more won't matter, Steve," Wink pleaded. "Be a good chap and let me in, won't you? My folks are going out to California this Summer and I don't want to go, and they'll let me do anything I like. Tell you what, Steve. If you'll take me I'll buy something for the boat. I'll make the club a present of—of a tender or an anchor or whatever you say!"

Steve found it especially hard to turn Wink down, because he liked the fellow, just as everyone else did. Wink was eighteen and had been five years getting through school, but he was a big, good-hearted, jovial boy, and, as Steve reflected, one who would be a desirable companion on such an adventure as had been planned. Steve at last told Wink that he would speak to the others about him that evening, but that Wink was not to get his hopes up, and Wink took himself off whistling cheerfully and quite satisfied. But when Steve tentatively broached the matter of including one more member in the person of Wink Wheeler, Joe staggered him by announcing that he had promised Harry Corwin to intercede for the latter.

"He pestered the life out of me," explained Joe ruefully, "and I finally told him I'd ask you fellows. But I suppose we can't take two more. Nine would—um—be rather overdoing it, eh?"

Everyone agreed that it would. Han suggested that Wink Wheeler and Harry Corwin might toss up for the privilege of joining the club. "After all," he added, "we aren't all of us certain that we can go. If one or two of us drop out there'll be room for Wink and Harry, too."

"Seems to me," said Phil Street, "it might be a good plan to enlarge the membership to, say, twelve, and let the new members find a boat of their own. I dare say they could. Then—"

"Fine!" exclaimed Joe. "Harry and his brother have some sort of a motor-boat. He told me so today. That's a bully idea, Phil! With twelve of us we could divide up between the two boats—"

"How many will Corwin's boat hold?" asked Neil.

"I don't know. I'll see him and find out. But it ought to be big enough to hold four, anyway. There are seven of us now, and Wink and Harry and his brother Tom would make ten, and we could easily pick out two more."

"Let's make the membership thirteen," said Perry.

"Thirteen!" echoed Han. "Gee, that's unlucky!"

"Rot! Why, you've got thirteen letters in your name. George Hanford." Perry counted on his fingers. "This is the Adventure Club, isn't it? Well, starting out with thirteen members is an adventure right at the start!"

"Sure!" agreed Ossie. "Let's take a chance. It's only a silly what-do-you-call-it anyway."

"Meaning superstition?" asked Steve. "Well, I'm agreeable. Who else do we want? Bert Alley asked to join, and so did George Browne."

"And Casper Temple," added Joe. "And they're all good fellows. But I want it distinctly understood that I'm going on the *Cockatoo*."

"Me too!" exclaimed Perry. "All of us fellows must go on the *Cockatoo*. We were the first."

"But suppose Corwin's boat won't hold five?" said Han.

"We can squeeze eight into the *Cockatoo*, if we have to," said Steve. "Joe, you cut along and find Corwin and bring him up here. We might as well settle the thing now."

"All right, but don't settle about the cruise while I'm gone," answered Joe. "I'll have him here in ten minutes."

When the meeting adjourned that evening the club had added six new members and enlarged its fleet by the addition of the cabin-cruiser, *Follow Me*. It was just half-past ten when Joe and Steve produced the last of their supply of ginger-ale from under the window-seat and, utilising glasses, tooth-mugs and pewter trophies, the members present drank success to the Adventure Club.

CHAPTER III

CAST OFF!

Some two weeks later, or, to be exact, sixteen days, making the date therefor, the eighth day of July, a round-faced, freckle-cheeked youth in a pair of khaki trousers, white rubber-soled shoes, a light flannel shirt that had once been brown and was now the colour of much diluted coffee and a white duck hat sat on the forward deck of a trim motor-boat with his feet suspended above the untidy water of a slip. By turning his head slightly he could have looked across the sunlit surface of Buttermilk Channel to the green slopes of Governor's Island and, beyond the gleaming Statue of Liberty. But Perry Bush was far more interested in the approach that led from the noisy, granite-paved street behind a distant fence to the pier against which the boat was nestled. As he watched he sniffed gratefully of the mingled odours that came to him; the smell of salt water, of pitch and oakum, of paint from a neighbouring craft receiving her Summer dress, of fresh shavings and sawdust from the nearby shed whence came also the shriek of the band-saw and the *tap-tap* of mallets. Ballinger's Yacht Basin was a busy place at this time of the year, and the slips were crowded with sailboats and motor-boats, while many craft still stood, stilted and canvas-wrapped, in the shade of the long sheds. Perry whistled a gay tune softly as he basked there in the warm sunlight and awaited the arrival of the rest of the boat's crew.

Much had happened since that Thursday when they had toasted the Adventure Club in Steve's and Joe's room in Sumner. Graduation Day had sent them scurrying homeward. Then had followed much correspondence with Steve. After an anxious four days, Perry and the rest had each received a brief but highly satisfactory telegram: "*Cockatoo* ours for two months. Meet Ballinger's Basin, Brooklyn, fourth." But work on the cruiser had delayed the starting date, and they had now been kicking their heels about New York for four days. Perry and Phil Street had been taken care of by Steve, and Joe had had Neil, Han and Ossie as his guests. At Bay Shore, on the south side of Long Island, the *Follow Me* was awaiting them impatiently. The *Follow Me* had been ready to put to sea for a full week.

Although Steve and Joe had provisioned the *Cockatoo*—which, by the way, was no longer the *Cockatoo*, but the *Adventurer*, having been renamed during the process of painting—the crew had not been altogether idle during their wait. Each had thought of something further to add. Ossie, who, as a special favour, was to be allowed to try his hand at cooking, had made several trips between a big department store on Fulton Street and had returned to the basin laden each time with mysterious packages, many of which rattled or clinked when deposited in the galley. Perry had purchased an inexpensive talking machine and a dozen records. Neil had contributed a patent life-preserver that looked like a waistcoat to be used by an Arctic explorer and was guaranteed to keep Barnum and Bailey's fat man afloat. Phil had supplied the cabin with magazines, few of them, to Perry's chagrin, of the sort anyone but a "highbrow" would care to tackle. Joe, as an after-thought, had stocked up heavily with Mother Somebody's Cure for Seasickness. George Hanford had tried to smuggle on board a black and white puppy about a foot long which he had bought on a street corner for two dollars and a half. Steve, however, had objected strenuously and Han had been forced to see the puppy's former owner and sell his purchase back for a dollar, the value of it having decreased surprisingly in a few hours. Even Steve had supplemented the boat's contents the day before by stowing two desperate-looking revolvers and several boxes of cartridges in a locker in the forward cabin.

Then, too, they had each outfitted more or less elaborately, according to their pocket-books. Steve and Joe had pointed out that, with seven aboard, locker room would be at a premium, and had urged the others to take as little in the way of personal luggage as they could get along with. But when the out-of-town boys got into the stores the advice was soon forgotten. Neil had outfitted as if he was

about to set forth on a voyage around the world, and Han was not far behind him. Perry would have liked, too, to become the proud possessor of some of the things the former fellows brought aboard, but Perry's finances were low after he had paid for that talking machine, and so, with the exception of a new grey sweater, he had made no additions to his wardrobe. This morning he had volunteered to go to the basin early and superintend the loading of ice and water, and now, those things aboard, he was wondering, a trifle resentfully, why the others didn't come. They were to cast off at eleven and it was now well after ten.

"Probably," he muttered, edging back so that he could have the support of the big, round smoke-stack, "Neil's buying another necktie! It would serve them right if I started the thing up and went off without them." As, however, Perry knew absolutely nothing about a gasoline engine, there was little likelihood of his carrying that threat into action. In any case, there would have been no excuse, for less than a minute later he descried the tardy ones skirting the shed and coming along the wharf. They looked, Perry thought with satisfaction, very hot and disgruntled as, each carrying his belongings in a parcel so that there would be no bags to stow away, they approached the boat. Although Perry was no mechanic, he quite understood the operation of an electric horn, and now, swinging nimbly down to the bridge deck, he set the palm of his hand against a big black button. The result was all that he desired. An amazing, ear-splitting shriek broke the ordinary clamour of the scene. Perry smiled ecstatically and peered out and up from under the awning. But the half-dozen countenances that looked down at him expressed only disgust, and Joe's voice came to him even above the blast of the horn.

"Don't be a silly fool, Perry!" shouted Joe peevishly. "Let that alone and catch these bundles!"

Perry obeyed and one by one the fellows scrambled from wharf to boat. And, having reached the bridge deck, they subsided exhaustedly onto the two cushioned seats or the gunwale. Perry viewed their inflamed, perspiring faces in smiling surprise. "What did you do?" he asked. "Run all the way?"

"Joe got us on the wrong car," panted Neil, "and we went halfway to Coney Island, I guess."

"It wasn't my fault any more than it was yours," growled Joe. "You had eyes, hadn't you?"

"We had eyes," replied Ossie from behind his handkerchief, as he wiped his streaming face, "but we aren't supposed to know where these silly cars go to."

"I didn't have any trouble," murmured Perry.

"Well, we did," said Han resentfully. "We waited ten minutes on a broiling-hot corner and then, when we did get another car, it got blocked behind ten thousand drays and we had to foot it about eleven miles! Got any ice-water aboard?"

"We've got ice and we've got water," replied Perry. "If you mix 'em in the proper proportions—"

"Oh, dry up and blow away," muttered Han, dragging himself painfully down the companion on his way to the galley. Phil Street smiled.

"Seems to me we're starting our adventure rather inauspiciously," he said. "If we have a grouch before we leave the dock what's going to happen later?"

"Maybe it's a good thing to have it now and get over it," laughed Steve. "It was hot, though! And it isn't much cooler here. Let's get under way, fellows, and find a breeze. It will take us the better part of four hours to get to Bay Shore, anyway, and I telephoned Wink yesterday that we'd be there by three. Every fellow into sea-togs as quick as he can make it. Joe and Phil and I bunk aft, the rest of you in the main cabin. Get your things put away neatly, fellows. Anyone caught being disorderly will be keel-hauled. Have a look at this thermometer, Joe. It's almost eighty-nine! Let's get out of here in a hurry!"

For the next ten minutes the fellows busied themselves as Steve had directed. All, that is, save Perry. As Perry was already dressed for sea he used his leisure to sit in the hatchway of the after cabin and converse entertainingly with the occupants until, on the score that he was keeping the air out, he was driven up to the cockpit. There he perched himself in one of the four comfortable wicker

chairs, placed his feet on the leather-cushioned seat across the stern and languorously observed a less fortunate person scrape the deck of a sloop on the far side of the slip.

Suppose that, while the *Adventurer's* crew prepares for service, we have a look over the boat. The *Adventurer*, late the *Cockatoo*, was a forty-foot V-bottom, military type cruiser, with a nine-foot beam and a draught of two feet and six inches. Below the water-line she was painted a dark green. Above it she was freshly, immaculately white as to hull, while decks and smoke-stack were buff. The exterior bulkheads were of panelled mahogany, and a narrow strip of mahogany edged the deck. There was a refreshing lack of gold in sight, and, viewed from alongside, the *Adventurer* had a very business-like appearance. As she was of the raised-deck cabin type, with full head-room everywhere, she stood well above the water, and the low, sweeping lines that suggest speed were lacking. But the *Adventurer* had speed, nevertheless, for under the bridge deck was a six-cylinder 6x6 Van Lyte engine that could send her along at twenty miles an hour when necessary. On the stern was the legend "ADVENTURER: NEW YORK," and the name appeared again on each of the mahogany boards that housed the sidelights. The cockpit, which was self-bailing, was roomy enough to accommodate seven persons comfortably. A broad leather-cushioned seat ran across the stern and there were four wicker chairs besides. Life preservers were ingeniously strapped under the chair seats and two others hung at each side of the after cabin door.

The after cabin, or owner's stateroom, held two extension seats which at night were converted into wide and comfortable berths. At the forward end a lavatory occupied one side and a clothes locker the other. Other lockers occupied the space between the seats and the three ports. This compartment, like the main cabin, was enamelled in cream-white with mahogany trim. Three steps led to the bridge deck, a roomy place which housed engine, steering wheel and all controls. The engine, although under deck, was readily accessible by means of sectional hatches. On the steering column were wheel, self-starter switch, spark, throttle and clutch, making it easily possible for one person to operate the boat if necessary. Two seats were built against the after bulkhead, chart boxes flanked the forward hatchway and the binnacle was above the steering column. Forward, the compartment was glassed in, but on other sides khaki curtains were depended on in bad weather. When not in use the curtains rolled up to the edge of the awning, which was set on a pipe-frame.

From the bridge deck three steps led down to the main cabin. Here in the daytime were two longitudinal couches with high upholstered backs. At night the backs swung out and up to form berths, so that the compartment supplied sleeping accommodations for four persons. There were roomy lockers under the seats and at meal times an extension table made a miraculous appearance and seated eight. Forward of the main cabin was the galley, gleaming with white enamel and brass. It was fitted with a large ice-chest, many lockers, a sink with running water, a two-burner alcohol stove with oven and a multitude of plate-racks. It was the lightest place in the boat, for, besides a light-port on each side, it had as well a hatch overhead. The hatch, although water-tight, was made to open for the admission of ice and supplies. Still forward, in the nose of the boat, was a large water tank and, beyond that, the rope locker. The gasoline tanks, of which there were four, held two hundred and fifty gallons. The boat was lighted by electricity in all parts by means of a generator and storage battery. An eight-foot tender rested on chocks atop the main cabin. The boat carried no signal mast, but flag-poles at bow and stern and abaft the bridge deck frame held the Union Jack, the yacht ensign and the club burgee. All in all, the *Adventurer* was a smart and finely appointed craft, and a capable one, too. Steve's father had had her built only a little more than a year ago and she had seen but scant service. In the inelegant but expressive phraseology of Perry, "she was a rip-snorting corker of a boat." The consensus of opinion was to the effect that Mr. Chapman was "a peach to let them have it," and there was an unuttered impression that that kind-hearted gentleman was taking awful chances!

For, after all, except that Steve had had a brief week or so on the boat the preceding Summer and that Joe had taken two days of instruction in gasoline engine operation, not a member of the crew knew much of the work ahead. Still, George Hanford had operated a twelve-foot motor dingey at one time,

Phil Street had sailed a knockabout and all had an average amount of common-sense, and it seemed that, with luck, they might somehow manage to escape death by drowning! Mr. Chapman surely must have had a good deal of faith in Steve and his companions or he would never have consented to their operating the cruiser without the aid of a seasoned navigator. As for the boys themselves, they anticipated many difficulties and some hazards, but, with the confidence of youth, they expected to "muddle through," and, as Neil said, what they didn't know now they soon would.

At exactly seven minutes past eleven by the ship's clock the *Adventurer* gave a prolonged screech and, moorings cast off, edged her way out of the basin and dipped her nose in the laughing waters of the bay, embarked at last on a voyage that was destined to fully vindicate her new name.

CHAPTER IV

THE *FOLLOW ME*

Two days before they had decided that Steve was to be captain, Joe, chief engineer, Phil, first mate, Perry, second mate, Ossie, steward, Neil, cabin boy and Han, crew. Neil and Han had naturally rebelled at being left without office or title and the omission had been laughingly remedied to their entire satisfaction. In fact, Han was quite stuck up over his official position, pointing out that it might be possible for a boat to get along without a captain or mate or even a steward, but that a crew was absolutely essential. He declared his intention of purchasing a yachting cap at the first port of call and having the inscription "Crew" worked on it in gold bullion.

When the *Adventurer* left her berth each member of the boat's company was at his post, or, at least, at what he surmised to be his post. Steve, of course, was at the control, Joe, with the hatches up, was watching his engine approvingly, Phil, boat-hook in hand, was on the forward deck, Perry hovered around Steve, begging to be allowed to blow the whistle, Ossie and Neil watched from opposite sides of the bridge deck and Han, in the role of crew, hitched his trousers at intervals, touched his cap when anyone so much as looked at him and said "Ay, ay, sir!" at the slightest provocation. And with all hands on duty the cruiser pointed her white bow towards The Narrows.

Steve never took his eyes from the course for more than a moment until they had passed Coney Island Light, for there were many craft bustling or slopping about and it really required some navigation to get through The Narrows and past Gravesend Bay without running into something. Perry suspected that Steve was working the whistle overtime, but realized that too many precautions were better than too few. It was Perry's ambition to learn navigation so that he might ultimately be entrusted with the wheel, and to that end he stood at Steve's elbow until, when they gained the Main Channel, Ossie's dulcet voice was heard proclaiming, "Grub, fellows!" from below. Steve was rather too preoccupied to be very informative, but Perry did manage to imbibe some information. For instance, he learned that a sailing craft had the right of way over a power craft, something he had not known previously, and observed that a large proportion of them used that right to its limit. He got quite incensed with a small, blunt-nosed schooner which insisted on crossing the *Adventurer's* course just as they were passing Fort Hamilton. Steve had to slow down rather hurriedly to avoid a collision and Perry viewed the two occupants of the schooner's deck with a scowl as they lazed across the cruiser's bows.

"Cheeky beggars," he muttered.

He also learned the whistle code that morning: one blast for starboard, two for port, four short blasts for danger and three for going astern. Joe, who had applied oil to every part of the engine that he could reach, supplied the added information that a sailboat under way on the starboard tack had the right of way over anything afloat—with the possible exception of a torpedo!—and that other craft had to turn to port in passing them. Joe had wrested that bit of knowledge from a volume entitled, "Motor Boats and Boating," which he carried in a side pocket every minute of the trip, and passed it on with evident pride. For the next few days he discovered other interesting items in that precious book and divulged them at intervals with what to Perry seemed a most offensive assumption of superiority.

"You just read that in your old book," Perry would grumble. "Anybody could do that!" Nevertheless, he hearkened and remembered against the time when the conduct of the boat should be handed over to the hands of the efficient second mate. When Joe became insufferably informative Perry blandly asked him questions about the engine, such as, "What's the difference, Joe, between a two-cycle and a four-cycle motor?" or "What happens when the water-jacket becomes unbuttoned?" and was delighted to find that Joe lapsed into silence until he had had time to surreptitiously consult his book.

Today, however, Joe's ignorance of motors mattered not at all, for the engine ran sweetly and the *Adventurer* churned through the green water without a falter. More than once Joe might have been observed gazing down at the six cylinder-heads surmounted by their maze of wires with an expression of awe. Joe's thoughts probably might have been put into words thus: "Yes, I see you doing it, but—but *why*?"

Steve didn't go down to the cabin for dinner, but ate it as best he could on the bridge. Neil, in his capacity of cabin-boy, arranged a folding stool beside him, and from that, at intervals between moving the wheel, blowing the whistle or anxiously scanning the course, Steve seized his food. The others descended to the main cabin and squeezed themselves about the table, which, adorned with a cloth of wonderful sheen and whiteness that bore the cruiser's former name and flag woven in the centre, held a plentiful supply of canned beans, fried bacon, potato chips, bread and butter and raspberry jam. Everything was thrillingly fine, from the pure linen tablecloth and napkins to the silverware. The plates held the same design that was worked into the napery, as did even the knives and forks and spoons. Ossie was apologetic as to the menu, although he need not have been.

"There wasn't time to do much cooking," he said, "and, besides, I haven't got the hang of things yet. I never tried to do anything on an alcohol stove before. It takes longer, seems to me. I couldn't get the oven heated until about five minutes ago, and so if those potato-chips aren't very warm—"

"I'm warm enough, if they aren't," said Neil. "How do you open these little round window things?"

"Turn the thumb-screws," advised Han. "I think everything's bully, and I'm as hungry as a bear. Pass the beans, Perry. Got any more tea out there, cook?"

"Yes, but I'm steward and not cook," replied Ossie, arising from his camp-stool and stepping into the galley. "Hand over the bread plate, someone, and I'll cut some more. Bet you it's going to cost us something for grub, fellows!"

"Well," responded Han, "I'd rather go broke that way than some others. What kind of tea is this, Ossie?"

"Ceylon. Doesn't it suit you?"

"Oh, I can worry it down, thanks. Sugar, please, Phil. I generally drink orange pekoe, though. You might lay in a few pounds of it at the next stop."

"I might," said Ossie, resuming his place at the end of the board, "and then again I might not. And the probabilities are not. If you don't want all the potatoes, Joe, you may shove them along this way."

The repast was frequently interrupted by the shrill blast of the whistle, and whenever that sounded most of the diners scrambled up to peer interestedly through the ports. In fact, so loth were they to miss anything that might be happening that they finished dinner in record time, consuming dessert, which consisted of bananas and pears, outside. Ossie alone remained below, and from the galley came the clatter of dishes and a cheerful tune as the steward cleared away and washed up. Joe smiled at Phil.

"Ossie's having the time of his life now," he said, "but wait until the novelty wears off. Then we'll hear some tall kicking about the dishwashing, or I miss my guess."

"We'll have to take turns helping him at that," said Steve. "If we don't he's likely to mutiny. There's Coney over there, fellows."

The others gathered on the port side to gaze across the water at the crowded beach and the colourful maze of buildings. "It looks jolly, doesn't it?" asked Han. "Couldn't we run in closer, Steve?"

"We could, but it would take us out of our course. I'm heading for Rockaway Point over there. We've got a good ways to go yet before we reach Fire Island." Steve had the chart opened before him and he laid a finger on the point mentioned.

"Looks like it would be more fun to duck in there," said Neil, vaguely indicating the neighbourhood of Hempstead Bay.

"Maybe it would," answered the Captain, "but there are too many islands and things to suit me. I'd rather stay outside here and slip in through Fire Island Inlet. After I get used to running this hooker I'll take her anywhere there's a heavy dew, but right now I'm all for the open sea, Neil."

Phil and Han, who had never before gazed on the marvels of Coney Island, even from a distance, were listening to Joe's tales of the delights of that entrancing resort and following his finger as he pointed out the features he recognised. "There's the coaster where I bounced up and came down on a nail," he chuckled. "It was a fine, able-bodied nail, too, and I—um—had to stay on it all the rest of the trip because the car was so crowded there wasn't room to shift."

"Smell the peanuts, fellows," murmured Perry dreamily. "Gee, I wish I had some!"

Ossie appeared on deck ten minutes later and was very indignant because he had not been informed that they were passing Coney. "I think some of you lobsters might have sung out," he mourned. "I've never seen Coney Island."

"Well, have a look," laughed Han. "That's it back there."

"Huh! Can't see anything at this distance," growled Ossie. "It's just a smear of buildings. What's the place ahead there!"

"Rockaway," answered Joe, "and that's Jamaica Bay in there. Say, there's some sea on, isn't there?"

In fact the *Adventurer* was now doing a good deal of plunging as she made her way through the long swells that swept around the sandy point. And she wasn't satisfied with merely kicking her head and heels up, either, for with the forward and aft motion there was considerable rocking, and as the point came abreast a shower of spray deluged the forward deck and spattered in on the bridge. At Steve's direction the windows were closed, Han performing the task with many "Ay, ay, sir!" Joe looked anxious and presently sought the forward cabin, reappearing a minute later to ask all and sundry if they knew where he had put his supply of "anti-seasick stuff." No one could tell him and he again took himself off, and before he could locate the medicine the *Adventurer* had passed the inlet and had settled down on an even keel again. Han and Ossie spread themselves out on the forward cabin roof and the others made themselves comfortable on the seats of the bridge deck, Phil pointing out seriously and with evident satisfaction that the cushions were not only cushions but life-preservers as well. Perry was for borrowing Phil's fountain-pen and putting his name on one.

There was no longer any talk of being too warm, for the breeze was straight from the southeast and soon sent them, one after another, into the cabins for their sweaters. They passed Rockaway Beach a good three miles to port and by half-past one were off Point Lookout. Every instant held interest, for many pleasure boats were out and their white sails gleamed in the crisp sunlight. Three porpoise appeared off Short Beach and proved very companionable, for they stayed with the *Adventurer* for quite ten minutes. One placed himself directly in front of the boat and the others took up positions about six feet apart on the starboard bow, and for two miles or more they maintained their stations, their dusky, gleaming backs arching from the water with the regularity of clock-work. Most of the boys had never seen the fish before and were much interested. Joe called them "puffing pigs" and Perry insisted that they were dolphins, and a fervid argument followed. They finally agreed, at Phil's suggestion, to compromise and call them "porphins." Possibly the discussion bored the subjects, or maybe they were insulted by the title applied to them, for about the time Joe and Perry reached an agreement the porpoise disappeared as suddenly as they had arrived on the scene and it was minutes later before the puzzled mariners descried them heading shoreward some distance away.

They missed Ossie after that and when he was found he was stretched out on a seat in the main cabin sound asleep and snoring. Neil came back with the news that one of the "puffing pigs" had flopped aboard and was asleep below. Steve took advantage of plain sailing to instruct Joe, Phil and Perry in the handling of the wheel and controls, and each of the pupils took his turn at guiding the cruiser along the sandy coast. Fire Island Inlet was reached shortly before three and Steve took the wheel again and ran the *Adventurer* past Jack's Island, around the curve of Short Beach and into the

waters of the Great South Bay. There was still a six-mile run to their anchorage, however, and it was nearly four when the cruiser at last crept in among the clustered craft off Bay Shore and dropped her anchor. A hundred yards away a cluster of boys on the deck of a sturdy cabin-cruiser swung their caps and sent a hail across. Steve seized the megaphone from its rack and answered.

"*Follow Me*, ahoy!" he shouted.

"Ahoy yourself!" was the ribald reply. "We're coming over!"

The crew of the *Follow Me* tumbled into a tiny dingey, cast off and were lost to sight beyond the intervening craft. Then they reappeared, their small boat so deep that the water almost spilled over the sides, Wink Wheeler struggling with a pair of ludicrously short oars and the other five laughingly urging him on.

"Throw a couple of fenders over, Han," instructed Steve, "and stand by with your boat-hook."

The *Follow Me's* tender crept alongside amidst noisy greetings, Perry performing excruciatingly on the whistle until pulled away, and in another moment the visitors were aboard. They were a nice-looking, upstanding lot, already well sunburned by a week afloat. Wink Wheeler was the oldest of the six, for he was eighteen. Harry Corwin, Bert Alley and Caspar Temple were seventeen and George Browne, or "Brownie," as he was called, and Tom Corwin were sixteen. First of all they had to see the boat and so the whole gathering trooped from one end to the other, exclaiming and admiring.

"The *Follow Me's* a regular tub compared with this palace," said Harry Corwin. "Why, there isn't anything finer than this along the South Shore, I guess!"

"Don't you call our boat names," protested "Brownie." "The *Follow Me* may not be as nifty as this, but she's one fine little boat, just the same. How long did it take you to come from New York, Joe?"

"Nearly four hours and a half, but we ran slow. I guess we could have done it in three hours easily if we'd tried to. This boat can do twenty at a pinch. How fast is the *Follow Me*?"

"She's done eighteen," answered Harry Corwin, "but fourteen's her average gait. She burns up gas like the dickens when she does any more. Yesterday we went to Freeport in fifty-seven minutes, and that's a good seventeen and a half miles. She had to hump herself, though."

After the wonders of the *Adventurer* had been exhausted the boys gathered on the bridge deck and Steve laid a chart on the floor and they discussed their plans. It had already been decided that they should cruise northward as far as Maine. As there was no hurry in getting there, they were to take things easy, stopping at such points as promised interest and putting into harbour at night. As it was already after four o'clock, they finally concluded to stay where they were until morning, although the *Follow Me* crowd were eager to be away. "Our first harbour would be Ponquogue," said Steve, "and that's a good forty-six or-seven mile run. Personally, I don't care much about messing around outside after dark. This is all new water to me. If we start in the morning we'll have plenty of time to run as far as Shelter Island, if we want to."

This was agreed to, although Perry protested that as the charts showed a life-saving station every five miles or so all down the shore it was a shame not to take a chance. "I've always wanted to be taken off a sinking ship in a breeches-buoy," he said.

"Would you mind being wrecked in the daytime?" asked Neil. "I'd love to see you in a breeches-buoy, Perry, and I couldn't if it was dark."

"Let's all go up to the hotel for dinner," suggested Wink Wheeler. "They have dandy feeds there, and maybe we can scare up some fun. Any of you fellows like to bowl?"

"First of all," said Han, "we want to see your boat, fellows. Let's go over now. I'm ready for hotel grub if the rest of you are. Can we all go, Steve, or does someone have to stay behind and look after the boat?"

"That's the crew's duty," said Phil gravely. "We'll bring you back a sandwich, Han."

"Yes, a Han-sandwich," added Perry.

When he had been toppled backward down the after cabin steps Harry Corwin said that they'd been in the habit of leaving the *Follow Me* unguarded for hours at a time and that so far no one had molested her, and Steve decided that it would be safe enough if they locked the cabins. So presently the *Adventurer's* tender was lifted off the chocks and put overboard and after hasty toilets the boys piled into it and the two dingies, each loaded to the limit, set off for the *Follow Me*. The latter was a thirty-four foot craft, with a hunting cabin that reached almost to the stern, leaving a cockpit scarcely large enough to swing a cat in; although, as Perry remarked, it wasn't likely anyone would want to swing a cat there. The cabin was surprisingly roomy and held four berths, while a fifth bunk was placed forward of the tiny galley. The latter was intended for the crew but at present it was the quarters of "Brownie." The sixth member of the ship's company occupied at night a mattress placed on the floor and philosophically explained that sleeping there had the advantage of security; there was no chance to roll out of bed in rough weather. The engine compartment lay between cabin and cockpit and held a six-cylinder engine. Steering was done from the cockpit, under shelter of an awning, but the engine control was below. The *Follow Me* was four years old and had seen much service, but she had been newly painted, varnished and overhauled and looked like a thoroughly comfortable and seaworthy boat. She was copper painted below the water-line and black above, with a gilt line and her name in gilt on bows and stern. Compared to the *Adventurer* she was a modest enough craft, but her six mariners asked nothing better and secretly believed that in rough weather she would put the bigger boat to shame. Captain Corwin levied on the slender supply of ginger-ale and sarsaparilla contained in the tiny ice-chest and after that they again set forth, this time for the nearest landing.

They "did" the town exhaustively and at six-thirty descended on the hotel thirteen strong and demanded to be placed together at one table. It is doubtful if the hotel management made much money on the thirteen dinners served to the boys, for everyone of them ate as though he hadn't seen food for days. Somewhere around eight or half-past they dragged themselves back to the boats and paddled out to the *Adventurer*, where, since the evening was decidedly chilly, they thronged the after cabin and flowed out into the cockpit. Perry started up his talking machine and played his dozen records over a number of times, and everyone talked at once—except some who sang—and, in the words of the country newspapers, "a pleasant time was had by all." And at ten the *Follow Me's* crew got back into their dingy and went off into the darkness of a starlight night, rather noisy still in a sleepy way, and, presumably, reached their destination. At least, no more was heard of them that night. On the *Adventurer* berths were pulled out or let down and a quarter of an hour after the departure of the visitors not a sound was to be heard save the lapping of the water against the hull and the peaceful breathing of seven healthily tired boys.

CHAPTER V

SUNDAY ASHORE

Before the sun had much more than climbed to a position where it could peer over the low yellow ridge of Fire Island and see what the Adventure Club was up to, the two cruisers were chugging out of the harbour with all flags flying. First went the *Adventurer*, as flag-ship of the fleet, to use Neil's metaphor, and, a little way behind came the *Follow Me*, her black hull and battleship-grey deck reminding the occupants of the other boat of one of the "puffing pigs" of yesterday. The bay was almost as smooth as the proverbial mill-pond this morning, and the slanting shafts of sunlight cast strange and beautiful shades of gold and copper on the tiny wavelets. It was still cool, and in the shadow of the bridge deck one felt a bit shivery. But the sun promised a warm day. The crew was polishing bright-work rather awkwardly but most industriously and with a fine willingness, explaining that if he polished brass some other poor Indian would have to swab decks, a remark which inspired Neil to state with much emphasis that cleaning decks was not, at all events, within the province of the ship's boy, and that, anyway, he had helped with the dishes and that right now he was going to lie in the sun on the galley roof and that if anyone disturbed him there'd be trouble.

Joe had been having a fine time with his engine. He was getting on terms of real familiarity with it now, having lost some of the awe with which he had regarded it yesterday. Today he called it "She" almost patronisingly and even dared lay his hand on the cylinders with a knowing cock of his head. Perry, looking on, asked sarcastically if he was feeling the engine's pulse, and Joe haughtily replied that he wanted to make sure the cylinders weren't overheating. Ossie, emerging from the cabin, wiping his hands on his khaki trousers after wringing out his dish cloths, gave it as his opinion that if there was any overeating done it would not be done by the engine, accompanying the statement with a meaning glance at Perry.

About this time the *Follow Me* left her position astern and began to creep alongside. Steve supposed she wanted to send a message across and told the others on the deck to keep still a minute. But the *Follow Me* kept on her way, the fellows sprawling around her deck and cockpit looking across the few fathoms of water in silence.

"Well, what do you know about that?" gasped Neil. "She's trying to pass us!"

Steve grunted, smiled and advanced his throttle. The click-click from under the engine hatches became hurried and louder. Joe wrinkled his forehead anxiously. The *Adventurer* stopped going astern of the other boat and for a little distance they hung bow to bow. They saw Harry Corwin, at the wheel of the *Follow Me*, lower his head to speak to his brother in the engine room. The *Follow Me* began to forge ahead again, slowly but certainly.

"Give her more gas, Steve," begged Perry. "We can't have a little old 'puffing pig' of a boat like that walking away from us. Look at those idiots grin!"

"And watch them change their faces," laughed Steve as he drew the throttle forward another two or three notches. Under the hatches the engine uttered a new note and a quick jarring became felt. Joe's anxiety increased to uneasiness.

"Say, Steve, do you think—is it all right—I mean—"

"She's only doing about seventeen," replied Steve calmly. "The throttle isn't nearly open yet. But I guess that's enough," he added as he glanced across the water. Perry, leaning across the gunwale, beckoned insultingly.

"Come on!" he called. "What are you stopping there for?"

The *Follow Me* replied to the taunt, but what the reply was they didn't know on the *Adventurer*, for the latter was ahead now by its full length and gaining perceptibly every moment. Tom Corwin's head appeared over the cabin roof, he took a look at the rival craft and popped from sight again. The

Follow Me stopped going back and hung with her nose abreast the *Adventurer's* stern. Phil, who had been writing a letter in the cabin, emerged and joined the group outside.

"How fast is she going, Steve?" he asked.

"About seventeen, I think. Still, Harry said the *Follow Me's* best was eighteen, and she isn't losing any, and so we may be doing eighteen, too. Guess we might as well settle the matter right now, though."

With which he pulled the throttle to the limit, and the white cruiser, quivering from stem to stern, forged ahead. "We're doing a good twenty miles an hour now," shouted Steve above the hum of the motor, "and she won't go any faster unless we get out and push!"

But twenty miles was fast enough to distance the *Follow Me*, although that boat held on gamely all the way across the bay and only slowed down when, a good quarter of a mile behind the *Adventurer*, she was abreast Pelican Bar. The *Adventurer* dropped her gait to twelve and presently the black cruiser, having negotiated the inlet in the wake of the other craft, drew within hailing distance and Harry Corwin called across through the megaphone.

"Some boat, Steve!" he shouted. "We're satisfied!"

Steve waved back and the two cruisers settled down to their forty-mile run along the shore, the *Follow Me* gliding smoothly along abaft the *Adventurer's* starboard beam. They sighted few other craft this morning, and, as there was a deal of sameness in the coast, the fellows settled down to various occupations. Steve conducted a second class in navigation, with Perry and Han as pupils, and Perry was allowed to take the wheel all the way from Smith's Point to a position off the Moriches Life-Saving Station. Phil went on with his letters, Ossie performed mysterious rites in the galley, with Han looking on interestedly from atop the dish-board, and Neil, exhausted by his labours as crew, reclined on the seat in the cockpit and stared sleepily at a blue and unclouded sky. Joe hunched himself on a seat on the bridge deck and studied his book on motor boating, becoming, if truth were told, more and more mystified as to the working of that remarkable affair that was click-clicking away under his feet.

The *Adventurer* reached the inlet to Shinnecock Bay a few minutes past ten and, closely followed by her companion boat, put through and turned her nose past Ponquogue Point. As Comorant Point drew near the shores of the bay closed in and the cruiser turned to port and, signalling her way past various craft, finally came to a pause outside the canal entrance. When the *Follow Me* floated alongside Wink Wheeler called across.

"What do you say to going ashore, fellows?" he asked. "It looks like a jolly sort of place. We've got plenty of time, haven't we?"

"All the time in the world and nothing to do," replied Steve cheerfully. "We'll make that landing over there and you can come alongside us, Harry."

Ten minutes later they were stretching their legs ashore. Canoe Place held plenty to interest them. The view was magnificent, for on one side of them lay Shinnecock Bay, across whose still, pond-like waters they had just sailed, and on the other stretched the blue expanse of Great Peconic Bay, sun-bathed, aglint with rippling waves and dotted with white sails. A small boy with one suspender performing the duty of two and a straw hat minus about everything except the brim offered to guide them and his proposition was quickly accepted and a bright new quarter changed hands. The quaint old Inn was visited and their informant gravely pointed to two sentinel willow trees and told them that "them trees was planted by Napoleon a couple o' hunerd years ago. He got 'em some place called Saint Helen. They had him in prison there for somethin'." The boys viewed the willows doubtfully, but, as Phil said, it was more fun to believe the extraordinary tale and they tried hard to do so. Steve attempted to secure more historical information from the small boy, but the latter appeared to have exhausted his fund. After that they viewed several Summer estates from respectful distances and, finding that their guide had nothing further of real interest for them, went back to the landing and re-embarked.

A quarter-mile or so of artificial canal took them through the narrow neck of land between the two bays and let them out in a cove beyond whose mouth the waters of Great Peconic stretched, apparently illimitable. The course was set northeast by east and they began the trip to Shelter Island. About half an hour later Joe discovered that the *Follow Me* was far behind and it was soon evident that she had stopped. After a moment Steve decided to turn back and see what was wrong, and when the *Adventurer* rounded the smaller boat's stern they learned that the *Follow Me* was having engine trouble. For a few minutes the *Adventurer* hovered by, and then, as there was a fair breeze blowing now and Joe and Neil were showing interest in the sea-sickness remedy, Steve suggested a tow and Harry Corwin, after some hesitation, pocketed his pride and agreed. A little before one o'clock the two boats slipped into North Sea Harbour and dropped anchors. While the *Follow Me* doctored her engine the *Adventurer* sat down to a delayed dinner. Ossie gloomily predicted that everything would be spoiled, but if it was, no one save Ossie apparently knew it. There was broiled bluefish and boiled potatoes and spinach and sliced cucumbers that day, followed by a marvellous concoction which the steward called a prune pudding. Perry said he didn't care what it was called so long as it came, and, please he'd like some more! No cook can withstand such a compliment as that, and Ossie cast off his gloom. They all declared that that dinner was just about the best they had ever eaten, and they meant it, and Ossie swelled visibly with pride and almost declined Han's half-hearted offer to help wash dishes!

When the rest went back to the deck and saw the fellows on the *Follow Me* eating sandwiches and other items of a cold repast on deck they felt rather apologetic, and Joe and Steve slung the tender over and paddled across to lend what assistance they might. But they found Tom Corwin, very dirty and hot and somewhat peevish, reassembling the engine with the help of "Brownie," and learned that the trouble had been discovered and that the boat would go just as soon as they could get her together again, which, from present indications, would be some time the day after tomorrow! Harry Corwin told Steve he had better go ahead, that there was no use in the *Adventurer* lying around and waiting, but Steve replied that there was no hurry and that they'd stand by. The atmosphere on the *Follow Me* was not very cheerful and the visitors went back to their own craft after a decent lapse of time. About three the fellows donned swimming tights and went in from the boat and had a fine time in the water, and by the time they had had enough of that there came a heartening *chug-chug-chug* from the *Follow Me's* exhaust and Wink announced that they were ready to go on.

As a result of the delay, it was almost six when they reached Shelter Island and steered the cruiser to an anchorage. They had supper ashore at seven, having dressed themselves in shore-going attire, but it was noticeable that it was the *Follow Me's* company who made the most of the meal. Neil met up with an acquaintance on the hotel porch after supper—they chose to call it supper although it was really a full-course dinner—and that meeting led to introductions and the boys "did the society act," to use Perry's disgusted phrase, for the rest of the evening. As it was a Saturday night there was a dance going on, and Steve and Joe and Han, of the *Adventurer's* crowd, and several of the other boat's company, took part. They didn't get back to the boats until almost midnight, and Perry fell asleep in the dingey, on the second trip, and had to be practically hoisted aboard. He muttered protestingly until he had been dumped in his berth and then promptly went to sleep as he was.

They spent the next day at Shelter Island, not because anyone considered it wrong to cruise on Sunday, but because Steve and Joe and Han had discovered attractions at the hotel. Perry demanded that the question of staying be put to a vote and the rest agreed, but the result wasn't what Perry had hoped for because Neil basely cast his ballot with Steve and Joe and Han. The four went off soon after breakfast, having spent much time and effort on their various attires, and weren't seen again until late afternoon. At least, they weren't seen again aboard the cruiser until that time, although Perry, Phil and Ossie, following them ashore after dinner, were scandalised to see them strolling around quite brazenly in the company of an equal number of young ladies.

"Girls!" snorted Perry scornfully. "Why, the big chumps, they look as if they liked it! Gee, it's enough to sicken a fellow!"

CHAPTER VI IN THE FOG

"We've been going two whole days now," declared Perry, "and we haven't even glimpsed an adventure." It was Tuesday morning and the two cruisers were lying side by side in New Bedford harbour. A light drizzle was falling and even under the awning of the bridge deck everything was coated with a film of moisture. The *Adventurer* and the *Follow Me* had done just short of a hundred miles yesterday, reaching the present port at nightfall. They had averaged fifteen miles an hour and neither engine had missed an explosion all day long. Joe had been rather stuck-up over the way his engine had performed and had been inclined to take a good share of the credit to himself. Perry, however, had declared that the only reason the thing had run was because Joe had left it alone.

"It's lucky for us you're afraid to touch it," said Perry. "If you weren't we'd have been wallowing around somewhere between here and Africa two days ago!"

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