

JOHN GOLDFRAP

THE BORDER BOYS
ALONG THE ST.
LAWRENCE

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**The Border Boys
Along the St. Lawrence**

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Fremont B. Deering

The Border Boys Along the St. Lawrence

CHAPTER I

THROUGH THE RAPIDS

“Steady, Ralph, old fellow, the Galoups are right ahead.”

“All right,” responded Ralph Stetson from his position at the steering wheel of the swift motor boat the *River Swallow*, “I saw them ten minutes ago, Hardware. Just give Persimmons down below a hail and tell him to slow up a bit. They’re wild waters and we don’t want to go through them too fast.”

Harry Ware, who (from the fact that his initials were H. D. Ware) was known to his chums by the nickname Ralph Stetson had just used, hastened to the speaking tube connecting the bridge of the *River Swallow* with the engine room, in which Percy Simmons, another of Ralph’s chums, was tending the twin racing engines with assiduous care.

“Slow down a bit, Persimmons,” he yelled, “we’re just about to hit up the Gallops.”

“Whoop! Hurray for the Glues!” floated back up the tube, as Persimmons abbreviated the name of the famous rapids into the form by which they were locally known. “Hold tight, everybody. Zing! Zang! Zabella!”

The rapids the boys were approaching had been well named by the early French settlers along the St. Lawrence the Galoups, or, in plain English, the Gallops, or, again, to give them their local name, the Glues.

For two miles or more near the American side of the river the white-capped, racing waters tore along at thirty miles or so an hour. The great rocks that lay concealed under the tumbling foam-covered waters caused the river to boil and swirl like a hundred witches’ caldrons.

To an experienced skipper, however, the Galoups held no particular terrors. All that was needful was familiarity with the intricacies of their currents and whirlpools and they could be “run” in perfect safety. During the three months that the Border Boys had been the guests of Mr. Stetson at his summer home on Dexter Island, some miles below, they had gained the necessary skill to negotiate the racing, tumbling Glues. Aside from the fact that he had ordered the engines of his father’s fast craft, the *River Swallow*, slowed down as they approached the place, and that his hands gripped the steering wheel more tightly, Ralph Stetson, only son of King Pin Stetson, the Railroad Magnate, felt no particular qualms as the whitecaps of the rollicking Glues appeared out of the darkness ahead.

The *River Swallow* was a narrow, sharp-stemmed motor boat which had more than once successfully defended her title of the fastest craft on the St. Lawrence. She was about sixty feet in length, painted a gleaming, lustrous black, with luxuriously fitted cabins and engines of the finest type obtainable, which drove her twin propellers at twelve hundred revolutions a minute. No wonder the boys, who, since their sojourn on the island, had become adepts at handling her, enjoyed their positions as captain and crew of the craft.

One of the two paid hands, who berthed forward, came up to Ralph just as the latter reached out for the simple mechanism which controlled the powerful search-light mounted near the steering wheel.

The boy had decided to use the rays of the great lamp in picking out his course. In one or two places big rocks bristled menacingly out of the boiling rapids, and if the craft should happen to strike one of them, even with a glancing blow, a terrible accident would be almost certain to result. But with his search-light to act as a night-raking eye, Ralph felt small fear of anything of the sort occurring.

The man who came up to Ralph, just as a sharp click sounded and the bright scimitar of electric light, its power increased by reflectors, slashed the night, was a rather remarkable looking man to be an ordinary paid hand on a wealthy man's pleasure boat.

Fully six feet in height, powerfully built and erect, he had at first glance a look of refinement and intelligence that did not, somehow, appear to blend well with the somewhat inferior position he occupied. It is true that it was honest, clean employment, of which no decent man need have been ashamed, but Ralph felt every time he looked at him that Roger Malvin – such was the name the man gave – might have secured some more suitable occupation.

Yet the first favorable impression that Malvin gave did not, for some reason, survive closer acquaintanceship. Underlying his air of frank intelligence was something else that Ralph had not so far been able to understand. There was something almost sneaking and furtive about Malvin at times. But Ralph, loath at any time to distrust any of those with whom he was thrown in contact, decided that probably this was a mere peculiarity of manner with no foundation behind it.

The other paid hand seemed a less complex person. Olaf Hansen was a short, rather insignificant looking little Norwegian, with light blue eyes, a ruddy complexion and a shock of yellow hair. He appeared to be rather under the sway of Malvin, who, before the boys had arrived, had had command of the *River Swallow*. Whether or not Malvin held any grudge against them for assuming charge of the boat and depriving him of the easy berth he had enjoyed, Ralph was not able to determine; but once or twice he had noticed little things about the man which more than half inclined him to the belief that such was the case. If this were actually so, Malvin had so far adopted no active measures of reprisal and obeyed orders with alacrity and willingness, just as he might have done had he always “berthed forward” in the cramped quarters assigned to the crew of the *River Swallow*.

“Want a hand to get through the Gallops, sir?” he asked respectfully as he came to Ralph's side.

“No, thank you, Malvin,” was the rejoinder. “I guess by this time I'm enough of a skipper to take her through without any trouble.”

“The river's fallen a little and they are pretty bad to-night,” hazarded Malvin. “I thought if I took the wheel – ”

He laid a hand on the spokes as he said this.

“Be good enough not to do that again,” said Ralph, rather sternly, as he spun the wheel, thus shaking off the man's grip. “You made me swerve from my course quite a bit, and that isn't safe right here, as you know.”

He looked sharply at the man as he spoke. The *River Swallow* had been up to Piquetville after supplies, groceries, and so forth, for use on the island. Malvin and the other hand had been given leave to go uptown while the boys marketed. For an instant a suspicion flashed across Ralph's mind that Malvin had been intemperate during his “shore leave.” But a minute later he decided that it was only his imagination. Still, he did not like the way in which the man had deliberately tried to wrest the wheel from him. It savored of insubordination, something which he had never noticed in Malvin's conduct hitherto.

“You can tend the search-light, Malvin,” he ordered sharply. “Try to pick up Big Nigger rock. Our course lies to starboard of that. Then we'll pass the Needles on the port. After that it's a clear run. The current will carry us through without much help from the engines.”

“Very well, sir,” said Malvin respectfully, taking up his position by Ralph's side, one hand on the mechanism of the search-light.

Suddenly the even tenor of the *River Swallow's* course was changed. It was apparent that a force superior even to her powerful engines had hold of the craft. Her light fabric shook as if in the grip of a giant's fingers. She wallowed, swerved and plunged in the swift waters, throwing spray high over her bow as she entered the grasp of the Gallops.

Ralph thrilled. There was something that made the blood race through his veins as fast as the rapids themselves in the swift, sweeping dash through the treacherous channel. Once in the grip of the

Gallops, there was no turning back. The task of bringing the *River Swallow* safely through lay in his hands and in his hands alone. On his nerve and skill everything depended during the next two miles.

The *River Swallow* shot forward, drawn by the tension of the racing rapids.

Suddenly Ralph's attention was attracted to Malvin. For the second time that evening an ugly suspicion flashed into his mind.

CHAPTER II

A CLOSE SHAVE

As Malvin had said, the river was lower by a foot or more than it had been earlier in the summer. The Gallops were worse than Ralph had hitherto seen them. In going up the river to the town that afternoon their course had lain on the Canadian side, for it was impossible for any craft to ascend the rapids, no matter how powerfully engined. Therefore, Ralph had had no previous notion of the wildness of the waters which were now hurtling the *River Swallow* forward like a stone out of a sling. Had he known what effect the drop in the river would have had upon the swirling waters, it is likely that he would have taken to the Canadian side on the return trip. But the voyage through the rapids, as has been said, always exhilarated him; and, besides, it was growing late, and the passage through the Gallops shortened the trip to Dexter Island materially.

He was thinking these things over, giving all the while an alert mind to the handling of the boat, when his attention was drawn to Malvin in the manner described. The man was apparently making no effort to use the search-light to find out the jagged outlines of the rock known as Big Nigger. Instead, he appeared to be making aimless sweeps on the water with the light, and not trying in the slightest to locate the chief menace of the Gallops.

“Malvin!” called Ralph sharply.

“Sir!” the man’s voice was steady and respectful.

“I told you to locate Big Nigger.”

“I’m trying to, sir.”

“Nonsense. You know as well as I do that the rock should lie off on the other side. We pass it to starboard. Why don’t you cast the light in that direction?”

“I will, sir. I quite forgot that for a minute, sir,” was the response, in the same respectful tones.

“Odd that you should forget it,” spoke Ralph, “when you have run these rapids scores of times! I don’t understand – ”

“Wow!”

The cry came from Hardware.

“Holy mackerel! Ralph!”

“Great Scott!”

Ralph spun the wheel over with every ounce of power at his command. The rapids strained and tore at the rudder frantically. It was as if they wished to aid and abet in the destruction of the *River Swallow*. For dead ahead of the craft had loomed suddenly a sinister, menacing object that had caused the wave of panic to sweep over the boys on the bridge of the motor boat.

Big Nigger Rock!

Revealed by the rays of the search-light as suddenly as if it had been thrust upward by an unseen hand from the bottom of the rapids, the black boulder that bore the name dreaded by rivermen had appeared.

“We’re goners!” The cry came from Malvin.

He threw off his coat, and Ralph noted with astonishment, even as excited as he was, that the man had on under that garment a life preserver!

But the boy had not a moment to ponder on this strange fact, although it looked almost as if Malvin knew, by some marvelous instinct, that something was going to happen and had prepared for it. All the boy’s energies just then were centered in one task: to keep the *River Swallow* from being shattered into kindling wood against the gleaming, spray-wet sides of the Big Nigger.

“Shut down on your port engine; come full speed ahead on your starboard!”

Ralph had seized the flexible speaking-tube and roared the command down it.

“Jump now!” he added, as Persimmons’ “Aye! aye!” came back to him.

It was the only chance of saving the *River Swallow* from annihilation. By stopping one propeller and coming ahead on the other, Ralph hoped to be able to aid the rudder enough to swing the *River Swallow*’s bow outward from the rock.

Malvin paused by the rail. He had apparently been in the act of casting himself into the waters that boiled and seethed alongside. But Ralph had no time to notice the man now. All that he had eyes to see was the towering black buttress of rock ahead of them, against which it appeared that nothing short of a miracle could save the *River Swallow* from being splintered.

Young Ware, white-faced and tense, stood by Ralph’s side. Like Ralph, he sensed the full measure of the danger confronting them. Yet it spoke volumes for his pluck that he did not utter a sound after that first startled exclamation had escaped him, when the Big Nigger swung into the search-light’s vivid circle of white light. As for Persimmons in the engine room, he knew that some emergency must be confronting them. Yet he did not dream of deserting his post. Then the young skipper’s voice came down the tube once more.

“Get on a life preserver and come on deck. Quick! It may be life or death!”

The *River Swallow* headed straight for the Big Nigger. Ralph, every nerve and muscle in his active body strained to the breaking point, exerted every effort at his command to stave off the apparently inevitable crash. He knew that he had done all he could to avert the disaster that threatened to be swift and annihilating. All that was left to do now was to await the issue. Suddenly a sharp exclamation escaped Persimmons’ lips, and an instant later it was echoed by the others whom the young engineer had joined on the bridge.

“She’s swinging out!”

It was true. Out of the grasp of the rapids a boy’s skill had snatched victory against what had appeared to be overwhelming odds.

The Gallops roared and screamed and threatened in a thousand voices. They danced and leaped like white teeth defrauded of their expected prey. For that time at least they were to be cheated of a harvest of disaster to which, in the years gone by, they had become accustomed as a regular toll on the part of those who braved their fangs.

The *River Swallow*’s bow, forced outward by the engines and the rudder, swerved slowly to port. The next instant, at racing speed, she shot by the Big Nigger, hurtled along like a helpless chip on the surface of the mad waters.

So closely did they shave disaster that, from the bridge, it would have been possible with extended fingers to touch the rough surface of the Big Nigger as they were swept by. The next moment the peril that had chilled the blood in their veins was behind them.

“And now for an explanation from Malvin,” spoke Ralph grimly. “I rather think that there is one coming.”

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERIOUS GRAY NIGHT CRAFT

Perhaps Malvin, who had stood poised as if ready for a jump as they passed the Big Nigger, heard the boy. At any rate, as Ralph spoke, he turned.

“A terribly narrow escape that, sir,” he said.

Ralph told Persimmons to go below and attend to his engines before he replied. Then he turned on the man.

“Yes, a terribly narrow escape which might have ended in disaster for us all,” he said, with an emphasis that allowed no doubt as to his meaning. In case that Malvin had not fully understood him, he added:

“Malvin, your carelessness almost cost us all our lives.”

“My carelessness, sir!”

The man’s voice held an aggrieved tone. He tried to slip into his coat and cover the life jacket he wore.

“I said ‘your carelessness.’ I don’t care to use a harsher word. How did it happen, Malvin, that you wore a life jacket to-night?”

“A life jacket, sir?”

“Yes; the one you put on under your coat. Surely you did not have an intuition that we were going to be wrecked?”

Ordinarily a bright, lively lad, Ralph could be stern enough when he chose. His experiences out west and in old Mexico had broadened and developed the youth whom we first encountered on a visit to Jack Merrill’s ranch in search of the health he had almost lost by overstudy at Stonefell College.

Ralph was not that boy now. He was the stern questioner of a man whose recent actions had surely justified him in entertaining black suspicions of the fellow. For the first time Malvin hesitated as Ralph shot out the question about the life jacket.

“Oh, yes, sir. The life jacket, sir. Yes, you see – ”

His voice trailed off. But Ralph pressed him harder.

“Come, I am waiting for an explanation. If one is not forthcoming I shall inform my father of your conduct.”

“I don’t see why I can’t wear a life jacket if I want to,” said Malvin, at length, in a voice that, for the first time, held a note of sullen defiance. “I know these Gallops better than you do, Master Stetson. I have always worn a life jacket when running them.”

“Yes,” said Hardware dryly, “you are more timid than we thought you, Malvin.”

“Never mind, Harry,” struck in Ralph; “tend that searchlight and keep a bright lookout for the Needles. We must pass them to port.”

“All right,” responded Hardware cheerfully; “luckily, there’s no ‘needles in a haystack’ business about them. They are as clear as the freckles on Persimmons’ face. Don’t worry.”

He began swinging the search-light off to the left-hand side of the boat, searching for the group of sharp-pointed rocks known as the Needles, which were by no means the menace to navigation that Big Nigger was.

“So you always wear a life jacket in running the rapids?” insisted Ralph, as his companion carried out his instructions.

“Always, sir; yes, sir. It’s the safest plan.”

“Well, I guess you are entitled to considerable praise for your foresight, Malvin,” said Ralph meaningly. “You can go forward.”

“All right, sir. Very well, sir,” was the rejoinder. Malvin once more appeared to have full control of himself.

He descended the two or three steps leading from the raised bridge from which the navigation of the *River Swallow* was directed. As his figure vanished forward in the darkness, Harry Ware turned to his chum.

“What do you make of that fellow, Ralph?”

“He’s a puzzle to which we have no answer – as yet,” was the reply.

“A puzzle, all right. I sure agree with you. But as to the answer part – ”

“Well?”

“I rather think that we are not so far off from the solution as you fancy. For instance, this business to-night.”

“Let’s hear what you make of it.”

“Why, it looked to me as if the fellow deliberately tried to wreck the boat.”

“But for what earthly reason?” demanded Ralph, in an astounded tone.

“Well, for one thing, we have supplanted him on board her. You must remember that before we came up here your dad had given Malvin absolute charge of the craft. I’ve heard that he took full advantage of this. The boat was seen cruising about at all hours of the night.”

“Even so. Granted that he dislikes us, even hates us, although he has shown no signs of harboring such a feeling.”

“I’m not so sure of that. Under that smooth manner he hides a vindictive nature. I’ve caught him looking at you once or twice, when he thought you weren’t looking and that nobody saw him, in a way that made me think he didn’t like you any too well.”

“Possibly he can’t be blamed for that, either. It is rather a come-down for him to have to take orders where he was used to giving them instead. But, even assuming all this, what reason would he have to try to wreck the *River Swallow*?”

“I imagine that in the answer to that lies the solution of that puzzle you were talking about a while back.”

“Well, let’s suppose – although I don’t for a minute believe it – that he actually was fiendish enough to try to destroy the craft out of malice, would not he have gone to the bottom, too?”

“I’m not so sure. Malvin is reputed to be the strongest swimmer in these parts. He was wrecked in a canoe in the rapids once and swam to an eddy and eventually reached the shore. Then, too, to-night he had on a life jacket. Does not that point to the fact that he believed some accident was going to happen, in which it would be necessary for him to swim for his life?”

“Oh, as to that, he had a good explanation for it,” responded Ralph.

“So I suppose,” was Harry Ware’s dry comment.

“After all, we may be unduly excited and manufacturing a melodramatic scare out of nothing at all,” pursued Ralph. “Well, there go the Needles! In a minute more we’ll be out of the Gallops, and for once I shan’t be sorry. That was just about as near to a smash-up as I care to come.”

The *River Swallow* shot onward for a short distance, and then, as she entered smoother water, Ralph rang for full speed ahead on both engines. He had hardly done this, when Hardware gave a sudden yell and pointed frantically ahead of them.

Through the night the gray, dim outlines of a passing craft, slipping along under the shore of one of the islands which dotted the other side of the Gallops, was visible. She carried no lights and was moving at a swift rate of speed.

In addition to the fact that the other craft carried no lights, she had risked collision with the *River Swallow* by cutting right across her bows. Both these actions were gross violations of the river law. The two boys stared into the darkness ahead as the gray shadow slipped on toward the Canadian shore.

“Well, I’ll be jiggered!” burst from Harry Ware’s lips. “It’s the ghost craft again.”

“Ghost nothing! If we’d hit her we’d have found her solid enough, I’ll bet,” declared Ralph. “Clap the search-light on her, Hardware. We’ve seen that craft so often lately that the thing is getting on my nerves. Men who are out on lawful errands don’t sneak about without lights. Let’s show her up and see what sort of a boat she is, and who mans her.”

Harry obediently turned his attention once more to the search-light. But though he swung it assiduously in the direction in which the “ghost craft,” as he called the mysterious gray motor boat, had last been seen, its rays failed to reveal a sign of her.

“Well, she can appear and vanish in a mighty spook-like fashion, even though she may be built of solid wood and iron,” declared young Ware, with conviction, as he reported no trace of the craft that had glided across their course in the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE TRAIL OF THE GHOST CRAFT

The boys, whom we left so sadly puzzled by the strange appearance and almost simultaneous vanishment of the “ghost craft” at the conclusion of the last chapter, formed part of a group of healthy, high-spirited lads who are already familiar to most of our readers under the name of the Border Boys. They earned this title in the first place by their feats on the troublous Mexican frontier, where, as related in “The Border Boys on the Trail,” they defeated the machinations of a notorious cattle rustler named Ramon De Barrios, who had long proved a thorn in the side of the ranchers along the frontier.

Particularly had De Barrios harassed the cattle and horses of Mr. Merrill, whose son Jack, a school-fellow of the others at Stonefell College, had invited Ralph Stetson, son of the railroad “king,” and Professor Wintergreen, to spend some time with him and “rough it.” In this volume the secret of the lone mission was revealed, and the boys, by pluck and brain, regained the stolen herd of stock rustled under cover of night from the Merrill ranch by De Barrios and his followers. A thrilling experience was that of the attempted dynamiting of a big irrigation dam in the midst of a violent storm, which had raised the prisoned waters almost to the breaking point. Jack Merrill and his chums succeeded in thwarting the plans of the rascals who hoped to inundate half a county and ruin much valuable property, out of revenge.

In the second volume of this series, “The Border Boys Across the Frontier,” we made the acquaintance of Buck Bradley, a bluff and hearty circus manager who proved to be a trusty ally of the boys when they made their escape from a band of Mexican revolutionists. The boys’ capture had followed their attempt to prevent a large consignment of arms and ammunition from being shipped from Uncle Sam’s side of the line. Once more they proved their right to the title of “Border Boys,” for, by a subterranean river flowing under a supposedly “haunted” mesa, they crossed the international boundary, and at once plunged into a series of strange and exciting adventures, including a ride on a big locomotive that ran the gauntlet of armed rebels.

The boys were next met, together with other old friends, in a succeeding book, which was called “The Border Boys with the Texas Rangers.” Again, amid new scenes, the lads found themselves in exciting predicaments. Jack was lost in a hidden valley from which he escaped by a climb up steep and rocky cliffs, triumphing over apparently insurmountable obstacles. But his pluck and sturdy training brought him successfully through this adventure, and he rejoined his comrades in time to participate in the heading off of a wild stampede of cattle, an opportunity which tested the boys’ best efforts.

In yet another volume, the experiences of the lads with the rurales of Mexico were set forth. This book was called “The Border Boys with the Mexican Rangers,” and painted a picture of life in the wilder parts of old Mexico amid rugged mountains and brigand-infested plains. A clever use of an extemporized heliograph was made by the lads and saved them from a predicament into which they had been forced by a stupendous cloud-burst which swept their camp away. At a lone ranch, too, they met with some surprising adventures which culminated in a ride for life across the plains. At a grand fiesta they won several of the prizes, a feat which earned them the still further enmity of men who had good reason to dislike and fear them. In old Mexico, the land of fascinating romance, the boys surely had their full share of incident and adventure, and their experiences served to strengthen their characters and broaden their minds. To cope successfully with difficulties forms the best sort of training for lads, and our Border Boys showed that when it came to the test they were not lacking in energy or grit.

A fifth volume, called forth by the demand on the part of our readers to follow the boys still further through their lives, dealt with a different phase of their existences altogether. In “The Border Boys in the Canadian Rockies” the lads traveled on their sturdy little mustangs through a wild and

rugged country. Not the least interesting phase of their experiences dealt with the mystery surrounding Jimmy, the waif, who came into their lives when they landed at a tiny way station on the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Several mysterious happenings, too, puzzled and annoyed them not a little while they were on their journey to the Big Bend of the Columbia River. These incidents involved a man of strange personality who, for no apparent reason, harassed and alarmed them on numerous occasions. However, in the end all that had appeared inexplicable was cleared up, and Jimmy, the waif, came into his own at last.

About two months before the present volume dealing with their adventures opens, the lads had accepted the invitation of Ralph Stetson's father to spend some time with him at his estate on Dexter Island, in the wonderful St. Lawrence River, that mighty outlet of the Great Lakes, which rolls its turbulent current along the border line between the United States and Canada. The scene of much historical interest in the past, the making of history is still going on along the St. Lawrence. Both the United States and Canada keep a sharp lookout for smugglers and other evildoers along the line which extends through the exact center of the great river. Interesting adventures are of almost daily occurrence in that region.

Beginning with the night upon which we encountered them in the rapids, the boys were destined to be plunged into experiences along the international boundary line that would demand all the resourcefulness and efficiency which had been developed in them by the scenes through which they had already passed.

But for the time being, at any rate, the mystery of the ghostly craft had to wait for a solution. The next day was the one selected by the boys for a joyous excursion on their swift, sure craft down the historic waters of the St. Lawrence, which has been called "the noblest, the purest, the most enchanting river on God's beautiful earth."

For a thousand miles from Lake Ontario to the sea the mighty current of the great waterway runs, embellished with islands and made beautiful by leaping rapids and swirling whirlpools. Except to the specially built river steamers these rapids, that is the larger ones, are not navigable except on the way down the river. Coming up, even the most powerful craft have to take to the canals, of which there are several, all on the Canadian side and free to all commerce.

The boys planned a quick trip down to Montreal and thence to Quebec. The return trip would have to be made more slowly, owing to the obstacles already mentioned.

Having provisioned the *River Swallow*, on which they intended to make their home during the cruise, there was nothing left to do but to start up the engines and set out. For this trip Malvin and Hansen were left behind, as Mr. Stetson needed them to do some work about the island and they were not actually required on the river craft.

It was a glorious morning when the boys started out. The sun lay glitteringly on the clear, swiftly flowing waters, and the *River Swallow* glided from her dock as if she were as pleased with the prospect of the cruise as were the boys.

Ralph Stetson, naturally studious, had found much to interest him in the history of the great river they were navigating; and, indeed, no stream in the world has more storied interest than the mighty water course that marks the border of the United States and Canada.

Jacques Cartier is generally given the credit of the discovery of the St. Lawrence, although some historians mention other candidates for the honor. Ralph's studies told him that little is known of Cartier, beyond the fact that he belonged to a hardy race of French fishermen.

By some writers he is even referred to as a corsair, although there does not appear to be much evidence to support this theory. It was not until his second voyage, however, that Cartier really entered the river, to the mouth of which he gave the name of the Bay of St. Laurens.

With the spirit of exploration strong upon him, Cartier pushed onward, hugging the southern shore of a river eighty miles wide. To his mind, he had found the Mecca of every explorer of that

day: the visionary passage to Cathay. For to discover a waterway to the far east was the dream of every early voyager.

As he sailed onward, mighty rock walls rose up majestically on each side of the great stream he was traversing. Gray rocks piled themselves tier upon tier, topped by huge forests and backed by glimpses of mountains beyond.

Then came bold headlands, thrusting their fronts into the river. From day to day the scene shifted, with the current ever increasing in swiftness. The rocky headlands gave way to long level reaches of swampy land. Cartier, in his records, speaks of the innumerable crows that haunted these marshes, although there were plenty of duck and other wild fowl.

But at last Cartier began to realize that he had not stumbled on the passage to Cathay as he had fondly dreamed.

The year before he had taken two Indians captive. They were still part of his crew. He summoned them before him.

“What river is this?” he asked.

One of the Indians pointed majestically to the west.

“The river without an end,” he said solemnly.

Cartier found the Indians extraordinarily skillful in managing their frail birch bark canoes, even in the wildest of the rapids. He was greatly interested in all the different tribes which he encountered. Many of them were at war with each other, although all sprang, according to present-day opinion, from the Cree stock.

The old French traveler says that he found the Indians friendly. He describes a visit to one of their towns, which stood at the base of a hill surrounded by cornfields, with the river and the primeval forest beyond. This village, occupied by a tribe known as the Amerinds, was well fortified, as were all the villages of this tribe, by a high stockade.

With a body guard of twenty of his men Cartier entered the walled village. They found inside the stockade a gallery from which missiles could be hurled down on any foe. Piles of stones lay in readiness for this purpose.

Behind the village stood an imposing height of land which Cartier, impressed by the noble view from its summit, named Mont Royale. This was the origin of Montreal, which city stands on the site of the stockaded Indian village of Hochelaga.

It was too late in the season when the bold investigator reached this village to press on further, and he therefore made his way back to winter quarters at Havre de St. Croix on the St. Charles River. His experiences during the “white winter,” as he called it, were enough to daunt even his courageous spirit. To add to his troubles, his men contracted scurvy, and many died before spring came, from the close confinement and lack of proper food.

The Indians brewed for the sufferers a sort of tea of pine boughs and bark called “ameda,” which appeared to have a good effect on the victims and, in Cartier’s opinion, saved the lives of many of them.

He returned to France and, some time later, made a third voyage. This time it was a trip for colonization. But the little colony suffered terrible privations and much illness and misery, and it was to the Indians that they owed what succor in the way of provisions and primitive medicine they were able to obtain. Cartier sailed back to France, leaving the remnants of the colony, and never returned again.

Then came Champlain, the founder of Quebec. It is a far cry from the noble city of Quebec as it is to-day to the huddle of huts erected in the form of a square by Champlain, and surmounted by a dovecote on the top of a pole to symbolize his peaceful intentions. Of his discovery of the historic lake that bears his name it would be beside the mark to speak here, inasmuch as this necessary digression is simply to acquaint our readers with a little of the history of the river on which our Border Boys

were destined to meet such surprising adventures, and with the city of Montreal, to which they were now bound.

CHAPTER V

DOWN TO MONTREAL

The run down the river to Montreal was made rapidly and without incident. The boys found the slow progress they had to make through the canals adjoining the Lachine and Long Sault rapids, which they could not descend, rather tedious. Nevertheless, they thoroughly enjoyed watching one of the red-funneled excursion steamers from up the river shoot through the boiling waves and cascades, apparently to certain destruction.

At the Lachine Canal they were “locked down” eighty-two feet, passing through three locks in the process. They arrived at Montreal, Canada’s “White City,” that evening. The next morning they devoted to seeing the sights of the town.

Perhaps some extracts from a letter written some days later by Ralph to a school chum will give our readers a boy’s idea of this city and of Quebec.

“About the first thing we noticed,” wrote Ralph, “was the Victoria Bridge, which spans the south channel of the St. Lawrence and carries the rails of the Grand Trunk Railway. It is almost two miles long, has twenty-four spans, and hangs sixty feet above the river. We saw it first in the twilight. It looked like a black ribbon stretched across the sky.

“Montreal is the queerest city from the point of view of design that I ever saw. It is built up from the river in a series of terraces. It is chock full of fine buildings, as fine and finer than any in New York, but of course not so tall. There is the big cathedral of Notre Dame, with twin towers like the one in France. It has a bell weighing 24,780 pounds, the heaviest bell in North America. The church will seat fifteen thousand people.

“The ice cream sodas here are not good. We know, for we sampled them. But I was going to tell you, under Notre Dame Street are buried the bones of Le Rat, a Huron chief, who broke the peace pact between the French and his tribe. He fell dead as a door nail while addressing a lot of Hurons and French who had come together to have a pow-wow.

“We didn’t spend very much time here, however, being anxious to get on to Quebec. Besides, something happened the other night at the island that we are anxious to get back to solve. I can’t tell you more about it now than to say that it was a ‘ghost ship’! That sounds promising, doesn’t it?

“Now, to tell you something about Quebec. I am mighty glad to have been there. It is truly a wonderful city. Somebody told us that it got its name from Cartier exclaiming, as he saw the three-hundred-foot rock that rises from the river, ‘*Que bec!*’ Knowing that you are not much of a French scholar, I will translate. That means ‘What a beak!’ And so that is how Quebec got its name, and, if you’d ever seen it, you would think it was a good one.

“I can’t describe the city better than to call it a huge cliff all stuck over with spires, roofs, chimneys, ramparts and muzzles of antiquated guns that a modern piece of artillery could knock into a cocked hat. Cape Diamond, as the immense rock is called, is all tufted with patches of shrubs. It made me think of Professor Crabtree’s face. You know: all hard and rugged, with whiskers scrawling over it!

“The Lower Town, as it is called, lies at the base of this rock. Here is the water-front section, and streets that turn and twist about like corkscrews. It is a smoky, ancient, old place full of queer smells and business.

“You get out of it to the Upper Town by Mountain Street, and it’s all of that! They say that till thirty years ago a carriage couldn’t get up it, but it has been graded so that now you can drive up. We walked, thinking it would be good exercise for Persimmons, who hates walking, anyhow.

“The citadel is a wonderful place perched up on a high rock, and you can see all over the region from it. One thing to be seen there is a brass cannon the Britishers captured at Bunker Hill. No wonder they’re proud of it. I guess it’s about all they did get.

“The Citadel runs, in the form of a big granite wall with towers and bastions stuck on it at regular intervals, all along the brow of the height overlooking the city, like a wrinkle on a forehead. Quebec, as perhaps you know, is the only walled city in America. It certainly is a great place to see. You might think that you were looking down from the Citadel on some old town in the middle ages – except for the tourists with their cameras!

“We went out to the Plains of Abraham; that is, Persimmons didn’t go, having overeaten on some cake he made himself and we wouldn’t touch, having sampled his cooking before. This is the place where Wolfe licked Montcalm. But both their names are carved on a monument just as if they had fought side by side.

“In the Post Office, where I am going to mail this letter, there is a block of granite from an old building that once stood on its site. It was called the *Chien d’Or*, or the Golden Dog. There is a story connected with Phillibert, the merchant who built it. He came here when Bigot, a ‘grafter’ or ‘boss,’ as we should call him nowadays, had control of the city and of New France. He ran things to suit himself and pocketed all kinds of crooked money. Phillibert ran a sort of department store and fought Bigot all he could. Over the door of his store he had the figure of a dog cut. It was gnawing a bone. The dog was meant to be Bigot and the bone the country he was ‘grafting’ on. Bigot got so sore at this that he had his brother-in-law assassinate Phillibert.

“There are more churches here than in any place I ever saw. The folks of Quebec ought to be the best in the world. Near the market in the Lower Town is one of the first churches built in America. A porch was built over its door as a token of thanksgiving when a fleet of British ships on its way to wallop Quebec was wrecked off the mouth of the St. Lawrence.

“Near where this church stands is a place where they will tell you Champlain lived in 1608 and planted the first garden in the country with seeds brought from France. In a convent on Garden Street Montcalm is buried. The Canadians have marked all these places with tablets. I think it would be a good scheme to do the same thing with historic places at home.

“But you are probably getting tired of all this. Tell the fellows we are having a great time and expect to have a better. Anyhow, I will write you before long how we come out about that queer motor boat. We are going to find out what is up; you can bet your life on that.

“Always your pal,
“Ralph.”

CHAPTER VI

HOMEWARD BOUND

The next day the boys, enriched by many postcards and souvenirs, set out on their return trip. They voyaged along under the high banks of the St. Lawrence, from Cape Diamond to Cape Rouge, drinking in every bit of the striking scenery with interest.

About a mile above Wolfe's Cove they passed the historic little village of Sillery, where, in the stormy days of the Christian conquest of Canada, the Jesuits called about them the Hurons and preached to them in a language of which the wondering Indians, listening with stoical patience, understood not a word.

In later years there came a dispute as to whether the land about Sillery belonged to the Jesuits or the Hurons. The British decided in favor of the Jesuits, but offered the Hurons other lands. These they refused, and the red men soon melted away into the forests to dwindle ultimately to extinction.

About midway between Quebec and Montreal the boys stopped at the town of Three Rivers, so called from the fact of its being on the triple junction of the St. Maurice River with the St. Lawrence. Three Rivers was an important early trading post, being the head of tide water on the St. Lawrence. Champlain erected a fort there on the site of a primitive defense built by the Algonquins and destroyed by the Iroquois. It was from here, too, so Ralph was able to inform his chums, that Father Brebeuf set forth with a party of Hurons to preach in the farthest wilderness.

The good father, according to history, was as much of a fighting man as a preacher. He taught the Indians how to build fortifications and to palisade squares with flanking towers, which were a vast improvement on their round stockades.

The boys stopped at a dock adjoining a small farmhouse, not far from Three Rivers, to buy some fresh provisions, for Persimmons' experiments in cookery had proved disastrous to their larder.

The place was kept by a descendant of the old "*habitants*" of the country, a man as brown as a berry, with high, Indian-like cheek bones and beady black eyes. His house must have stood there for hundreds of years. It was of rough, whitewashed stone, and had a steep roof, with a huge chimney at one end.

While they were waiting for the fresh milk and the eggs that the *habitant* promised to produce promptly, they gazed about the living room into which they had been ushered.

Its rough walls were whitewashed and adorned with crude pictures, chiefly of religious subjects. Ropes of onions, hams and dried fruit hung from the roof beams. In a corner, snowshoes and sleds and firearms told a mute story of the severity of the Canadian winter. It was all as it might have been in the days of the earliest settler.

But, if the people were primitive, they had a clear idea of how to charge for their viands! There was no help for it but to pay the bill, while the cunning little eyes of the *habitant* surveyed the roll from which Ralph peeled the required amount. He was plainly wishing that he had charged twice as much, particularly when he saw the fine boat the boys had.

The return trip through the canals with occasional stretches of clear water was monotonous. Nothing occurred out of the ordinary. But the delay in the canals and a slight overheating of the machinery resulted in its being dark by the time they neared their island.

"Well, we've had a grand trip, but I'm glad to be back again," declared Ralph, as they came into familiar waters once more.

"So am I," agreed Hardware. "I'll be glad to get a decent meal again."

He glanced in an aggravating way at Persimmons, who had been the ship's cook and bottle washer, as well as engineer at times, and was now getting a breath of fresh air above deck. He ducked

just in time to avoid a well-aimed piece of oily waste which Persimmons, justly indignant, flung at him.

“Next cruise we take,” declared the disgruntled lad, “you can take the pots and pans, Hardware. And I’ll bet that anything you make will taste like your name!”

“I’d rather it did than like an unripe persimmon!” declared Hardware. Then Ralph had to exercise his good offices to make peace between the belligerents. But soon more important matters occupied their minds.

The strange craft that they had almost forgotten on their cruise of sight-seeing came back now with vividness to their recollections. The surprising appearance and equally startling disappearance of the mysterious motor boat were recalled as they threaded home waters again. As the *River Swallow* moved through the darkness with her electric side and bow lights glowing like jewels, each boy was busy with speculations concerning it.

Their reveries were cut short by a sudden shout which appeared to come from right under the bow.

“What was that?” exclaimed Hardware in a startled tone. He was alone on the bridge with Ralph. Persimmons was below, having returned to his engines.

“Jiggered if I know! Somebody shouted, though. It was right under the bow.”

“That’s what I thought. Hark, there it is again!”

Both boys strained their ears. Unmistakably a hail had come out of the darkness.

“Clap on the search-light quick, Hardware,” ordered Ralph.

The boy snapped the light on. It blazed out fan-like in the night, cutting a broad circle of light that revealed the whole river as Hardware swept it from side to side. Suddenly he gave a shout and pointed.

Embraced in the circle of light, and right under their bow almost, was a frail boat. In it were seated two Indians. Their craft was piled high with baskets which they had been trying to sell among the islands.

The boys knew at once that the red men came from a reservation down the river and belonged to the St. Regis tribe.

“They’re coming right down on us!” cried Ralph.

“What’s the matter with them?” cried Harry. “I see,” he added immediately, “they’ve broken their paddle. See, they are waving the stump of it in the air! Steer out, Ralph! Steer out, or you’ll run them down!”

“I – I can’t,” exclaimed Ralph in an agitated voice.

“Can’t! Why not?”

“Don’t you see where we are? There are rocks on each side. If I turn out we’ll be ripped like an egg shell on them.”

“Gracious, that’s so!” And then Hardware noticed for the first time that they were running through a narrow channel between two islands.

CHAPTER VII

RUN DOWN

Something must be done. In another moment the frail boat would be drawn by the current right down on the bow of the *River Swallow* and cut in two. But there was no room to turn out or avoid them!

Ralph was the first to gain possession of his senses. He sounded the gong impatiently for Persimmons. Then in the same breath he ordered Hardware to hand him one of the life belts.

"Now then, you take a rope and when we strike them, for it can't be helped," he breathed, "lower it over and try to catch one of the men. I'll get the other."

Young Ware with compressed lips nodded. At the same moment Persimmons came on deck.

"Take the wheel, Perce," exclaimed Ralph in a low tense voice, "and keep going upstream whatever happens."

"What's going to happen?" asked the alarmed boy.

"In another second we are going to hit an Indian canoe. If we can we are going to save their lives. Hold fast!"

There was a grating bump and a jar, and a cry of alarm came out of the night. Hardware cast his rope, while Persimmons, with a white face and strained muscles, kept the *River Swallow* on her course. Ralph had taken off his boots; now he ran to the other side of the bridge.

For a flash he saw below him an upturned face, borne past with the rapidity of lightning on the swift current. He cast the life preserver, which had a rope attached to it. To his joy he felt the life-saving device caught and the rope grow taut. But the next moment, under the sudden strain of his weight, a line, stretched across an opening in the bridge against which he had been leaning, parted.

While the other lads set up a yell of alarm, they saw Ralph jerked from the bridge into the tempestuous current. Ralph struck the water and went under.

When he came to the surface, he felt as if a hundred hands had hold of him drawing him under again. Weighted by his clothes, he was sadly handicapped. But he made a valiant fight for it. He still held the rope, but he was unable to reach the life preserver, because it was borne down stream with the Indian clinging to it, as fast as he was.

For what appeared an eternity the battle kept up, and then Ralph felt himself suddenly hurled upon some rocks. Gripping them with the grasp of desperation he hauled himself out of the water and laid hold of the rope with both hands.

It pulled taut. It was plain, then, that the Indian still clung to the life preserver. Conserving his strength for a few minutes, Ralph began to draw steadily in on the line. To aid him he took a turn of it around a small tree. The slender trunk bent like a whip under the strain, but it held without snapping.

Inch by inch Ralph hauled in, and after what seemed an interminable struggle, he pulled up on the bank a dripping, half-dead figure. It was that of the Indian who had grasped the life preserver. The man cast himself down on the beach for a short time, but soon recovered with the vitality of his race.

He gazed at Ralph as if the boy had been a being from another world. Then he appeared to realize what had occurred and broke out angrily into a tirade. Ralph held up a roll of dripping bills to appease his wrath.

"All right. No could help. Me pay," he said, trying to placate the angry Indian.

The man nodded, but still sullenly.

"Where my friend? You drown him, you pay lot more!" he said.

"So that's the way they rate friendship, is it?" reflected Ralph. "I guess 'Lo, the poor Indian,' has been a lot overestimated, or else this is an exceptional specimen."

"I hope your friend is all right," he said aloud, "but anyhow, we'll soon see. Look!"

From up the river came a sudden glare of blue light. It was a Coston signal from the *River Swallow*.

"There they are now," cried Ralph. "They are lying to for us. Lucky thing I have along my water-proof box of matches."

He fumbled for the metal cylinder which had been of so much use to him in many tight places. Then, followed by the Indian, he set off across the little island to the side on which, judging by the light, the *River Swallow* was lying to. It did not take long to collect dry sticks and leaves and make a bright glare.

Through the night came a hail from the *River Swallow's* megaphone.

"Are you all right, Ralph?"

Ralph cupped his hands. "Fine; but mighty wet! You'd better send ashore. I've got the Indian."

"Good! We got the other," came back another hail.

"Your friend all right," said Ralph turning to the Indian. "Pretty soon they send small boat ashore for us."

"Huh," muttered the Indian, leaving a doubt to be inferred as to whether he would not just as soon have had the extra money as learn that his friend was safe. Not long afterward the small boat carried by the *River Swallow* came ashore, and they were rowed off by Hardware.

Full speed was made to the island, where the Indians were accommodated for the night. The next day they were sent on their way rejoicing with a skiff which had been lying idle in the boat house and a substantial recompense for their misfortune.

It was two nights later, after the boys had made a flying trip to the Thousand Islands with some guests of Ralph's father, leaving them there, that, on the return voyage, they once more encountered "the mystery of the river," as they had come to call it.

Malvin and Hansen were both on board, but neither was on deck, when suddenly out of the darkness the form of the gray, ghost-like motor craft emerged once more, like a figure in a fog, lightless and suddenly vanishing, as if swept from sight by an invisible hand.

Ralph had the wheel. He gave a sudden gasp as the apparition appeared before his eyes, then faded, vapor-like.

"The search-light, quick!" he ordered Hardware in low breathless tones. A bright spear of light cut the night. Here and there it swung, like a radiant, pointing finger. But it settled on no gray, swiftly sneaking craft.

The momentary reverie into which Ralph had been plunged by the mysterious appearance of the "ghost craft," already encountered upon other night trips in the *River Swallow*, lasted but a brief time.

"You can't find her with the search-light, eh, Harry?" he asked.

"Not a hide nor hair of her, as Mountain Jim would have said," was the reply; "she's certainly a big mystery, Ralph."

"And one which it is going to be up to us to solve," was the rejoinder. "You remember the last time we saw her, she was sneaking away from Dexter Island. This is the first time we have noticed her since, and she is coming from the same direction. From the fact that she carries no lights and altogether acts in a highly suspicious way, it is fair to assume that she is after no good. In some way that I can't just explain I'm pretty sure that whatever tricks she is up to are in some manner connected with Dexter Island."

"Just the way I feel about it, old fellow," was his chum's rejoinder. "I'd give a lot to unravel the mystery and – hello! Look there!"

Right ahead of them seemingly a light had suddenly flashed up out of the darkness. It was out of the path of the search-light and shone quite brilliantly. The light was in about the location where they had last sighted the gray night rover.

"Out with that search-light instantly," ordered Captain Ralph snappily.

Instantly the bright rays of the big electric night-piercer were cut off.

“Now switch off the other lights, the running lamps and the stern one.”

Harry Ware hesitated an instant.

“You are going to run without lights?”

“For a time, yes.”

Snap!

Out went every light on board the *River Swallow* that might betray her whereabouts to any other craft.

“We’re taking a big chance, Ralph,” said Harry Ware curiously. “What’s the game?”

“Why, that light ahead belongs to the ‘ghost craft’; I’m sure of it. At any rate, it’s a clew worth following.”

“You’re going to chase her?”

A thrill of excitement vibrated in Harry’s voice.

Ralph’s jaws came together with a click. It was characteristic of his father, the “railroad king,” to do this when he had reached an important determination.

“Yes, Harry, I’m going to follow that light up for a while. See, it’s moving pretty quickly. Ring for more speed.”

“Well, that old spook of the St. Lawrence will have to go some to dodge the *River Swallow*,” ejaculated Harry, as he obeyed Ralph’s order; and almost simultaneously the swift craft leaped forward in pursuit of the Will o’ the Wisp ahead of her.

The chase was on. It was destined to be the beginning of a strange series of adventures.

CHAPTER VIII

A MISLEADING LIGHT

“Can you make out anything of that craft yet, Harry?”

The chase had been on for half an hour, and still the elusive light bobbed along ahead of them.

Percy Simmons, down in the engine room, had been fully informed by young Ware of what was going on, and he was coaxing his fine machines to their top notch of effort.

“I can’t see anything of her outlines yet, Ralph,” was Harry’s response to Ralph’s interrogation. “She must be a flyer.”

“She’ll have to be to get away from us.”

“Anyhow, it looks like a stern chase.”

“But not necessarily a long one. I haven’t heard of a craft yet that could get away from the *River Swallow*, at least, in these parts.”

“You mean an earthly craft,” rejoined young Ware, in rather quavery tones.

“Good gracious! What’s got into you? You surely don’t think that the boat we are after is anything but a motor boat like this one, run by men who have a good reason for not wanting us to catch up with them?”

“Um-er, I just had a shiver. A ‘goose walked over my grave.’ My grandmother says that that means that some sort of spirits are about.”

“Rubbish! I thought you were a different sort of a fellow from that, Harry. We’ll have to quit calling you ‘Hardware’ if you are going to be so soft as to think there is anything supernatural about that elusive boat.”

“Just the same, there’s something queer about her.”

“Nothing but what will admit of an explanation,” was the reply. “As for the way they are dodging us, it’s just what I expected. Honest men would not run away from us any more than they would go sneaking about in such a mysterious way at night.”

“Maybe they are only fish dynamiters,” suggested Harry Ware. “You know how strictly the law is dealt out to those rascals, and there have been several Canadian fish destroyers caught on the American side lately, and stiff terms dealt out to them.”

“Pshaw! Fish dynamiters are poor, poverty-stricken fellows who are too lazy to get fish in a proper, lawful manner, and crawl out at night to ply their trade in wretched, patched-up boats! No mere fish dynamiters could afford a swift, powerful craft such as the one ahead surely is.”

“That’s so,” agreed Harry, “but that craft ahead is surely a riddle just the same. I think – ”

He broke off with what might be fairly termed a yell.

“Ow! – oo! Look there! *Now* do you say that there isn’t something more than natural about that boat?”

In spite of himself, Ralph felt his scalp stiffen as he beheld the extraordinary sight to which Harry’s alarmed exclamation had attracted his attention.

Outlined against the night in a vivid green glare was what appeared to be a boat of living flame!

The water around her burned lambently as the apparently flaming boat plunged along through it.

“Gracious!” gasped Ralph, as he looked at the strange spectacle. There was a touch on his arm. He started in spite of himself and turned quickly.

Malvin was at his elbow. He was pointing at the green, blazing craft ahead of them.

“It’s – it’s the *Lost Voyager*!” he exclaimed, in trembling tones. “Don’t chase it any more, sir! The legend is, that it means death to those who see that boat and pursue it.”

By this time Ralph had recovered his equanimity. His sturdy common sense asserted itself. He listened impatiently while Harry exclaimed triumphantly:

“There; what did I tell you! That’s the boat I heard about! The boat in which a party of the old voyageurs committed all sorts of outrages on the St. Lawrence Indians. In revenge for their cruelties the Indians attacked the boat one night and massacred the whole party. Ever since, at times, the ghost craft has been seen on the river, and death has followed every one who has tried to chase it or inquire into its mystery.”

“Oh, dry up!” snapped Ralph. “Malvin, get forward where you belong instantly.”

“But, sir – ”

The man appeared genuinely frightened, but somehow Ralph had an idea that he was not so scared as he seemed.

“See here, Malvin, obey my orders. I am in command of the *River Swallow*. Get forward at once and keep a bright lookout. As for you, Harry, I’m more than astonished at your being foolish enough to believe such a pack of children’s stories.”

As Malvin left the bridge, seemingly with reluctance, Harry spoke up:

“But, Ralph, look at that green fire! Ugh! it makes me shudder.”

“Heard of phosphorus, haven’t you?”

“Y-y-y-yes, but – ”

“No ‘buts’ about it. Those fellows think that we are just a pack of kids that they can scare by a foolish ghost trick. See, the light is dying out. Well, they’ll find out in a few minutes that their trick didn’t scare us. I’m more convinced than ever now that we have tumbled headlong into a big game of some kind. What it is I can’t imagine, but that fellow Malvin knows more about that boat than we do.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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