

Goldfrap John Henry

The Ocean Wireless Boys And The Naval Code



John Goldfrap

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CHAPTER I. VACATION DAYS

"Up with your helm there, Noddy! Luff her up or you'll have the *Curlew* on the rocks!"

"That's right, luff!" cried Billy Raynor, adding his voice to Jack Ready's command.

"That's what I *luff* to do," grinned the red-headed, former Bowery waif, Noddy Nipper, as, with a dexterous motion, he jerked over the tiller of the fine, speedy sloop in which the boys were enjoying a sail on Alexandria Bay, above the Thousand Islands.

The mainsail and jib shivered, and the *Curlew* spun round like a top just as it seemed inevitable that she must end her career on some jagged rocks that had suddenly loomed up ahead.

"Neatly done, Noddy," applauded Jack. "We'll forgive you even that awful pun for that skillful bit of boat-handling."

The freckled lad grinned in appreciation of the compliment paid him by the Wireless Boy.

"Much obliged," he said. "Of course I haven't got sailing down as fine as you yet. How far do you reckon we are from home?"

"From the Pine Island hotel, you mean?" rejoined Billy Raynor. "Oh, not more than ten miles."

"Just about that," chimed in Jack. "If this wind holds we'll be home in time for supper."

"Supper!" exclaimed Bill; "I could eat an octogenarian doughnut, I'm so hungry."

A groan came from Noddy. Although the Bowery lad had polished up on his grammar and vocabulary considerably since Jack Ready first encountered him as second cook on the seal-poaching schooner *Polly Ann*, Captain "Terror" Carson commanding, still, a word like "Octogenarian" stumped him, as the saying is.

"What's an octo-octo – what-you-may-call-'um doughnut, anyhow?" he demanded, for Noddy always liked to acquire a new word, and not infrequently astonished his friends by coming out with a "whopper" culled out of the dictionary. "Is it a doughnut with legs on it?"

Jack and Billy broke into a roar of laughter.

"A doughnut with legs on?" sputtered Billy. "Whatever put that idea into your head, Noddy?"

"Well, don't octo-octo-thing-a-my-jigs have legs?" inquired Noddy.

"Oh, you mean octopuses," cried Jack, with another laugh. "Billy meant an eighty-year-old doughnut."

"I'll look it up when we get back," remarked Noddy gravely; "it's a good word."

"Say, fellows, we are sure having a fine time out of this holiday," remarked Billy presently, after an interval of silence.

"Yes, but just the same I shan't be sorry when Mr. Juke's new liner is completed and we can go to sea again," said Jack, "but after our experiences up north, among the ice, I think we had a holiday coming to us."

"That we did," agreed Noddy. "Some difference between skimming around here in a fine yacht and being cast away on that wretched island with nothing to eat and not much prospect of getting any."

"Yes, but if it hadn't been for that experience, and the ancient treasure we found, we couldn't have taken such a jolly vacation," argued Jack. "It's made Uncle Toby a rich man and put all of us on Easy Street."

"Yes, it was certainly worth all the hardships we went through," agreed Noddy.

"I guess we are in for a long spell of quiet now, though," remarked Jack, after a pause, during which each boy thought of their recent adventures.

"Not so sure of that," replied Noddy. "You're the sort of fellow, judging from what you've told us, who is always tumbling up against something exciting."

"Yes, I feel it in my bones that we are not destined to lead an absolutely uneventful time – " began Billy Raynor. "I – hold hard there, Noddy; watch yourself. Here comes another yacht bearing down on us!"

Jack and Billy leaped to their feet, steadying themselves by clutching a stay. Billy was right. Another yacht, a good deal larger than their own, was heading straight for them.

"Hi! put your helm over! We've got the right of way!" shouted Jack, cupping his hands.

"Look out where you're going!" cried Billy.

But whoever was steering the other yacht made no motion to carry out the suggestions. Instead, under a press of canvas, she kept directly on her course.

"She'll run us down," cried Noddy. "What'll I do, Jack?"

"Throw her over to port lively now," sang out Jack Ready. "Hurry up or we'll have a bad smash-up!"

He leaped toward the stern to Noddy's assistance, while Billy Raynor, the young engineer, did the same.

In former volumes of this series the previous adventures of the lads have been described. In the first book, devoted to their doings and to describing the fascinating workings of sea-wireless aboard ocean-going craft, which was called "The Ocean Wireless Boys on the Atlantic," we learned how Jack became a prime favorite with the irascible Jacob Jukes, head of the great Transatlantic and Pacific shipping combine. Jack's daring rescue of Millionaire Jukes' little girl resulted in the lad's obtaining the position of wireless man on board a fine ship, after he had looked for such a job for months in vain. But because Jack would not become the well-paid companion of Mr. Jukes' son Tom, a rather sickly youth, the millionaire became angry with the young wireless man. However, Jack was able, subsequently, to rescue Mr. Jukes from a drifting boat after the magnate's yacht had burned in mid-ocean and, following that, to reunite the almost frantic millionaire with his missing son.

Other exciting incidents were described, and Jack gained rapidly in his chosen profession, as did his chum, Billy Raynor, who was third assistant engineer of the big vessel. The next volume, which was called "The Ocean Wireless Boys and the Lost Liner," told of the loss of the splendid ship "Tropic Queen," on a volcanic island after she had become disabled and had drifted helplessly for days. By wireless Jack managed to secure aid from U. S. vessels, and it came in the nick of time, for the island was destroyed by an eruption just after the last of the rescued passengers had been taken off. Wireless, too, secured, as described in that book, the capture of a criminal much wanted by the government.

The third volume related more of Jack's doings and was called "The Ocean Wireless Boys of the Ice-berg Patrol." This book told how Jack, while serving aboard one of the revenue cutters that send out wireless warnings of ice-bergs to transatlantic liners, fell into the hands of a band of seal poachers. Things looked black for the lad for a time, but he found two good friends among the rough crew in the persons of Noddy Nipper and Pompey, an eccentric old colored cook, full of superstitions about ghosts. The *Polly Ann*, as the schooner was called, was wrecked and Jack and his two friends cast away on a lonesome spot of land called Skull Island. They were rescued from this place by Jack's eccentric, wooden-legged Uncle, Captain Toby Ready, who, when at home, lived on a stranded wooden schooner where he made patent medicines out of herbs for sailors. Captain Toby had got wind of an ancient treasure hidden by a forgotten race on an Arctic island. After the strange reunion they all sailed north. But an unscrupulous financier (also on a hunt for the treasure) found a way to steal their schooner and left them destitute. For a time it appeared that they would leave their bones in the bleak northland. But the skillful resource and pluck of Jack and Noddy won the

day. We now find them enjoying a holiday, with Captain Toby as host, at a fashionable hotel among the beautiful Thousand Islands. Having made this necessary digression, let us again turn our attention to the situation which had suddenly confronted the happy three, and which appeared to be fraught with imminent danger.

Like their own craft, the other boat carried a single mast and was sloop-rigged. But the boat was larger in every respect than the *Curlew*. She carried a great spread of snowy canvas and heeled over under its press till the white water raced along her gunwale.

As she drew nearer the boys saw that there were two occupants on board her. One was a tall, well-dressed lad in yachting clothes, whose face, rather handsome otherwise, was marred by a supercilious sneer, as if he considered himself a great deal better than anyone else. The other was a somewhat elderly man whose hair appeared to be tinged with gray. His features were coarse, but he resembled the lad with him enough to make it certain he was his father.

"Sheer off there," roared Jack at the top of his lungs, to the occupants of the other boat; "do you want to run us down?"

"Get out of the way then," cried the boy.

"Yes, sheer off yourselves, whipper-snappers!" came from the man.

"We've got the right of way!" cried Jack.

"Go chase yourselves," yelled Noddy, reverting in this moment of excitement, as was his habit at such times, to his almost forgotten slang.

"Keep her on her course, Donald; never mind those young jack-a-napes," said the man in the other sloop, addressing the boy, who was steering.

"All right, pop," was the reply; "they'll get the worst of the smash if they don't clear out."

"Gracious, they really mean to run us down," cried Jack, in a voice of alarm. "Better sheer off, Noddy, though I hate to do it."

"By jinks, do you see who they are?" cried Bill Raynor, who had been studying the pair in the other boat, which was now only a few yards off. "It's that millionaire Hiram Judson and his son Donald, the boy you had the run in with at the hotel the other day."

But Jack made no reply. The two boats were now almost bowsprit to bowsprit. As for Noddy, the freckles stood out on his pale, frightened face like spots on the sun.

CHAPTER II.

"SPEEDAWAY" VS. "CURLEW."

But at the critical moment the lad at the helm of the other craft, which bore the name *Speedaway*, appeared to lose his nerve. He sheered off and merely grazed the *Curlew's* side, scraping off a lot of paint.

"Hi, there! What do you mean by doing such a thing?" demanded Jack, directly the danger of a head-on collision was seen to have been averted.

The other lad broke into a laugh. It was echoed by the man with him, whom he had addressed as "pop."

"Just thought I'd see how much you fellows knew about handling a boat," he sneered. "It's just as I thought, you're a bunch of scare-cats. You needn't have been afraid that I couldn't keep the *Speedaway* out of danger."

"You risked the lives of us all by running so close," cried Billy indignantly.

"Never attempt such a thing again," said Jack angrily, "or – "

"Or what, my nervous young friend?" taunted the elderly man.

"Yes," said the lad, with an unpleasant grin, "what will you do?"

"I shall feel sorely tempted to come on board your boat and give you the same sort of a thrashing I gave you the other day when I found you tormenting that poor dog," said Jack, referring to the incident Billy Raynor had already hinted at when he first recognized the occupants of the *Speedaway*.

"You'll never set foot on my boat," cried Donald Judson, with what he meant to be dangerous emphasis; but his face had suddenly become very pale. "You think you got the best of me the other day, but I'll fix you yet."

The two craft were out of earshot almost by this time, and none of the three lads on the *Curlew* thought it worth while to answer Donald Judson. The millionaire and his son occupied an island not far from the Pine Island Hotel. A few days before the incident we have just recorded, Jack, who hated cruelty in any form, had found Donald Judson, who often visited the hotel to display his extensive assortment of clothes, amusing himself by torturing a dog. When Jack told him to stop it the millionaire's son started to fight, and Jack, finding a quarrel forced upon him, ended it in the quickest way – by knocking the boy flat.

Donald slunk off, swearing to be revenged. But Jack had only laughed at him and advised him to forget the incident except as a lesson in kindness to animals. It appeared, however, that, far from forgetting his humiliation, Donald Judson was determined to avenge it even at the risk of placing his own life in danger.

"I wonder if he followed us up to-day on purpose to try to ram us or force us on a sandbar?" mused Noddy, as they sailed on.

"Looks like it," said Billy.

"I believe he is actually sore enough to sink our boat if he could, even if he damaged his own in doing it," said Jack.

"To my mind his father is as bad he is," said Noddy; "he made no attempt to stop him. If I – Look, they've put their boat about and are following us."

"There's no doubt that they are," said Jack, after a moment's scrutiny of the latest maneuver of the *Speedaway*. The Judsons' boat, which was larger, and carried more sail and was consequently faster than the *Curlew*, gained rapidly on the boys. Soon she was within hailing distance.

"What are you following us for? Want to have another collision?" cried Jack.

"Do you own the water hereabouts?" asked Donald. "I didn't know I was following you."

"We've a right to sail where we please," shouted Judson.

"Yes, if you don't imperil other folks' boats," agreed Jack. "If you've got any scheme in mind to injure us I'd advise you to forget it," he added.

"Huh! What scheme would I have in mind? Think I'd bother with insignificant chaps like you and your little toy boat?"

"You keep out of our way," added the man.

"Yes, just do that little thing if you know what's healthy for you," chimed in Donald Judson.

His insulting tone aroused Jack's ire.

"It'll be the worse for you if you try any of your tricks," he roared.

"What tricks would I have, Ready?" demanded the other.

"Some trick that may turn out badly for you!"

"I guess I don't need you to tell me what I will or what I won't do."

"All right, only keep clear of us. That's fair warning. You'll get the worst of it if you don't."

"So, young man, you are going to play the part of bully, are you?" shouted Donald's father.

"That fits in with what I've heard of you from him. You've been prying around our boat for several days. I don't like it."

"Well, keep away from us," cried Billy.

"Yes, your room's a lot better than your company," sputtered Noddy. "We don't care if you never come back."

"Really, what nice language," sneered Donald. "I congratulate you on your gentlemanly friend, Ready. He – "

"Look out there," warned Jack, for Noddy, in his indignation, had sprung to his feet, entirely forgetting the tiller. The *Curlew* broached to and heeled over, losing "way." The *Speedaway* came swiftly on. In an instant there was a ripping, tearing sound and a concerted shout of dismay from the boys as the sharp bow of Judson's larger, heavier craft cut deep into the *Curlew's* quarter.

"Now you've done it!" cried Billy Raynor.

"I – er – it was an accident," cried Donald, as the two boats swung apart, and there was some justification for this plea, as the *Speedaway* was also damaged, though not badly.

"It was no accident," cried Jack, but he said no more just then. He was too busy examining the rent in the *Curlew's* side.

Still shivering, like a wounded creature, from the shock of the impact, the *Curlew*, with the water pouring into the jagged rip in her side, began slowly to sink!

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN SIMMS OF THE "THESPIA."

Silence, except for the inrush of water into the damaged side of the *Curlew*, followed the collision. The three lads on the sinking craft gazed helplessly at each other for a few seconds.

"Get away as quick as you can," whispered Donald's father to the boy who had wrought the damage, and now looked rather scared. The *Speedaway* swung out and her big mainsail began to fill.

"We are going to the bottom," choked out Billy, the first of the party to recover the use of his vocal organs.

"I'm afraid there's no doubt of that," said Jack. "Donald Judson," he shouted, raising his voice and throwing it across the appreciable distance that now separated the two craft, "you'll pay for this."

"It was an accident, I tell you," yelled back the other lad, but in a rather shaky voice.

"You'll do no good by abusing us," chimed in his father.

"What'll we do, Jack?" demanded Noddy, tugging at Jack's sleeve.

"Steer for the shore. There's just a chance we can make it, or at least shallow water," was the reply.

"Doesn't look much as if we could make it," said Billy dubiously, shaking his head and regarding the big leak ruefully, "but I suppose we can try."

The wounded *Curlew* began to struggle along with a motion very unlike her usual swift, smooth glide. She staggered and reeled heavily.

"Put her on the other tack," said Jack. Noddy followed his orders with the result that the *Curlew* heeled over on the side opposite to that which had been injured, and thus raised her wound above the water line. Billy began bailing, frantically, with a bucket, at the water that had already come in.

"Shall we help you?" cried Donald.

"No, we don't want your help," answered Jack shortly. "We'll thresh all this out in court later on," he added.

"I'm a witness that it was an accident," shouted the elder Judson.

"You'll have a swell time proving I ran you down on purpose," added his son.

Seeing that it was useless to prolong such a fruitless argument at long distance, Jack refrained from making a reply. Besides, the *Curlew* required his entire attention now. He took the tiller himself and kept the injured craft inclined at such an angle that but little water entered the hole the *Speedaway's* sharp bow had punched in her.

The shore, on which were a few small houses and a wharf hidden among trees and rocks, appeared to be a long distance off. But the *Curlew* staggered gamely onward with Jack anticipating every puff of wind skillfully.

"I believe that we'll make it, after all," said Billy hopefully, as the water-logged craft was urged forward.

"I wish that Donald, with his sissy-boy clothes, was ashore when we land," grumbled Noddy. "I'd give him what-for. I have not forgotten how to handle my dukes, and as for his old octo-octo – "

"Octogenarian," chuckled Raynor.

"Octogenarian of a father, – I knew I'd get a chance to use that word – " said Noddy triumphantly; "he's worse than his son. They're a fine pair, – I don't think."

"Well, abusing them will do no good," said Jack. "We'll have to see what other steps can be taken. I'm afraid, though, that they were right; we'll have a hard time proving that it was not an accident, especially as Noddy had dropped our tiller."

"Well, I just couldn't – " began Noddy, rather shamefacedly, when there came a mighty bump and the *Curlew* came to a standstill.

"Now what?" cried Raynor.

"We've run on a shoal, fellows," declared Jack. "This cruise is over for a time."

"Well, anyhow, we can't sink now," said Noddy philosophically, "but although the *Curlew's* stuck on the shoal I'm not stuck on the situation."

"Better quit that stuff," ordered Jack, "and help Billy lower the mainsail and jib. They are no good to us now. In fact a puff of wind might send us bowling over."

His advice was soon carried out and the *Curlew* lay under a bare pole on the muddy shoal. The boys began to express their disgust at their predicament. They had no tender, and would have to stay there till help came because of their lack of a small boat.

"Better set up some sort of a signal to attract the attention of those folks on shore," suggested Billy.

"That's a good idea," agreed Jack, "but hullo! Look yonder, there's a motor boat coming out from the shore. Let's hail that."

"Hullo, there! Motor boat ahoy!" they all began to yell at the top of their lungs.

But they might have saved their voices, for the motor boat swung about in a channel that existed among the shoals and began making straight for them. Its single occupant waved an encouraging hand as he drew closer.

"In trouble, eh?" he hailed; "well, maybe I can get you off. I saw that other boat run you down. It was a rascally bit of business."

"Gracious!" cried Jack suddenly, as the motor boat drew closer and they saw its occupant was a bronzed, middle-aged man with a pleasant face; "it's Captain Simms of the revenue cutter *Thespis*! What in the world is he doing up here?"

"If it isn't Jack Ready!" came in hearty tones from the other, almost simultaneously.

CHAPTER IV. ON SECRET SERVICE

There was no question about it. Astonishing as it appeared, the bluff, sunburned man in the motor boat which was winding its way toward the *Curlew*, in serpentine fashion, among the tortuous channels, was Captain Simms, the commander of the revenue cutter on which Jack Ready had served as "ice-patrol" operator. The greetings between his late commander and himself were, as might be imagined, cordial, but, owing to the circumstances under which they were exchanged, somewhat hurried.

"So you've been in a smash-up," cried the captain, as he reduced speed on nearing the stern of the *Curlew*, which was still afloat. "Nobody hurt, I hope?"

"Except the boat," smiled Jack with grim humor.

"So I see. A nasty hole," was the captain's comment. "Lucky that I happen to be camping ashore or you might have stayed out here for some time. Rivermen hereabouts aren't over-obliging, unless they see big money in it for their services."

"We'd have been content to pay a good salvage to get off here," Jack assured him.

"Well, that other craft certainly sheered off in short order after she hit you," was Captain Simms' comment, as he shut off power and came in under the *Curlew's* stern, which projected, as has been said, over fairly deep water, only the bow being in the mud.

"Then you can tell who was to blame?" asked Billy eagerly.

"I certainly can and will, if I am called upon to do so."

"Thank you," said Jack. "I mean to make them settle for the damage, even if I have to go to court to do it."

"That's right. It was a bad bit of business. She followed you right up. I'd be willing to swear to that in any tribunal in the land. I hope you bring them to justice. Who were the rascals?"

"A millionaire named Judson, who owns an island near here, and his son, who is a fearful snob."

The boys saw a look of surprise flit across the naval officer's face. But it was gone in an instant.

"Surely not Hiram Judson?" he demanded.

"The same man," replied Jack. "Why, do you know him, sir?"

"I – er – that is, I think we had better change the subject," said Captain Simms with odd hesitation. Jack saw that there was something behind the sea officer's hesitancy, but of course he did not ask any more questions.

"I can give you a tow to the shore where there is a man who makes a business of repairing boats," volunteered Captain Simms. "But will your craft keep afloat that long?"

"I think so," said Jack. "We can all sit on one side and so raise the leak above water. But can you pull us off?"

"We shall soon see that," was the rejoinder. "It looks as if it would be an easy task. Throw me a line and I'll make it fast to my stern bitts."

This was soon done, and then the little launch set to work with might and main to tug off the injured yacht.

"Hurray, she's moving!" cried Billy presently.

This was followed by a joyous shout from all the boys.

"She's off!"

They moved down the channel with the boys hanging over one side in order to keep the *Curlew* heeled over at an angle that would assure safety from the leak. They landed at a rickety old dock with a big gasoline tank perched at one end of it. Attached to it was a crudely painted sign:

"Charles Hansen, Boats Built and Repaired.
All work Promptly Exicutid."

Hansen himself came toddling down the wharf. He was an old man with a rheumatic walk and a stubbly, unshaven chin stained with tobacco juice. A goodly sized "chaw" bulged in his withered cheek.

"Can you repair our boat quickly?" asked Jack, pointing to the hole.

Old Hansen shot a jet of tobacco juice in the direction of the injury.

"Bustitupconsiderable," he remarked.

"What's that?" demanded Billy. "Doesn't he talk English?" and he turned an inquiring glance at Captain Simms, who laughed.

"That's just his way of talking when he's got a mouthful of what he calls 'eatin' tobacco.' He said, 'he is of the opinion that your boat is bust up considerable.'"

"Well, we don't need an expert to tell us that," laughed Jack.

"Doyouwantmetofixit?" inquired the eccentric old man, still running his words together in the same odd way.

"Yes," replied Jack, "can we have her by to-morrow?"

"Haveterseehowbadlyshesbusted," muttered the old man.

"He'll have to see how badly she's busted," translated Jack. "Suppose you take a look at her," he added to the boatman.

"Maybeagoodidee," agreed old Hansen, and he scrambled down into the boat.

"I'llfixherbyto-morrow," he said at last.

The charges, it appeared, would not be more than ten or twelve dollars, which the boys thought reasonable.

"Especially as they won't come out of our pockets," commented Billy.

"Not if I can help it," promised Jack decisively.

"And now," said Captain Simms, "as I happen to have some business at the Pine Island Hotel, I'll run you down there in the *Skipjack*, as I call my boat."

"That's awfully good of you," said Jack gratefully. "I began to think that we would have to stay ashore here all night."

Before many minutes had passed they were off, leaving old Hansen, with working jaws, examining the hole in the *Curlew's* side. The *Skipjack* proved speedy and they made the run back to the hotel in good time, arriving there before sundown. Captain Toby had met Captain Simms after the latter had found the treasure party at the spot where they had unearthed the rich trove. But he proved equally reticent as to the object of his presence at Alexandria as he had been with the boys. He was doing some "special work" for the government, was all that Captain Toby could ascertain.

"There's considerable mystery to all this," said Captain Toby to the boys after Captain Simms had left them to write some letters which, he said, he wished to send ashore by the hotel motor boat that evening.

"It's some sort of secret work for Uncle Sam, I guess," hazarded Jack, "but what it is I've no idea. Anyhow it's none of our business."

The boys little guessed, when Jack made that remark, how very much their business Captain Simms' secret mission was to become in the near future.

CHAPTER V. NIGHT SIGNALS

After supper Captain Simms suddenly announced that he wished to make a trip to the mainland to the town of Clayton. He wished to send an important telegram to Washington, he explained.

"How are you going?" asked Jack. "The hotel boat has stopped running for the day."

"I know that, but I'll go on the *Skipjack*. You lads want to come?"

"Do we? I should say we do."

"You lads must be full of springs from the way you're always jumping about," remarked Uncle Toby, with a smile, "but I suppose it's boy nature."

The run to the shore was made quickly. It seemed almost no time at all before they made out the string of lights that marked the pier and the radiance of the brilliantly lit hotel behind them. But as they were landing an unforeseen accident occurred. Mistaking his distance in the darkness, the captain neglected to shut off power soon enough, and the nose of the *Skipjack* bumped into the pier with great force. At the same time a splintering of wood was heard.

"Gracious, another wreck," exclaimed Jack.

"Wow! What a bump!" cried Noddy.

"Is it a bad smash?" asked Billy anxiously.

The captain was bending over the broken prow of the boat examining it by the white lantern.

"Bad enough to keep us here all night, I'm afraid," he said. "Do you boys mind? It looks to me as if it could soon be repaired in the morning, and the boat will be safe here to-night at any rate."

"It's too bad," exclaimed Jack. "We seem to be regular hoodoos on a boat."

"It was my own fault," said the captain, "but the lights on the pier dazzled me so that I miscalculated my distance."

"Well, it's a good thing no other harm was done," was Billy's comment.

The boat was tied up and the watchman on the dock given some money to keep an eye on it. They engaged rooms at the hotel, and while Captain Simms composed his telegram, the boys took a stroll about the grounds of the hostelry, which sloped down to the bay. They had about passed beyond the radiance of the lights of the hotel when Jack suddenly drew his companions' attention to a figure that was stealing through the darkness hugging a grove of trees. There was something indescribably furtive in the way the man crept along, half crouched and glanced behind him from time to time.

"A burglar?" questioned Billy.

"Some sort of crook I'll bet," exclaimed Noddy.

"He's up to some mischief or I'm much mistaken," said Jack, as he drew his companions back further into a patch of black shadow cast by some ornamental shrubs.

"Let's trail him and see what he's up to," said Noddy.

"Gracious, you're a regular Sherlock Holmes at the drop of the hat," laughed Billy. "What do you think, Jack?"

"I don't know. He's going toward the wharf and I don't see just what he could steal there."

"Look at him stop and glance all around him as if he was afraid of being followed," whispered Billy.

"That doesn't look like an honest man's action, certainly," agreed Jack. "Come on, boys; we'll see what's in the wind. Do you know, somehow I've got an idea that we've seen that fellow somewhere before."

"What gives you that impression?" asked Billy.

"I can't say – it's just a feeling I've got. An instinct I guess you might call it."

The three boys moved forward as stealthily as did the man whose actions had aroused their suspicions. Presently they saw him cut across a small patch of lawn and strike into a narrow path which led among some trees.

With every care to avoid making any noise, the three boys followed. The path led to the edge of a cliff, down the face of which a flight of stone steps ran down to the water's edge. The man descended these.

"What can he be? A smuggler," suggested Billy.

"I don't see any boat down there, if he is," rejoined Jack in low tones.

Suddenly a sharp, low exclamation came from Noddy, who had been looking out over the lake. He caught Jack's arm and pointed.

"Look, boys, a yacht!" he breathed.

"Heading in this way, too," rejoined Jack. "It looks like – but no, it cannot be."

"Cannot be what?" asked Billy, caught by something in his companion's voice.

"Cannot be the *Speedaway*."

"Judson's craft, the one that ran us down? Nonsense, you've got Judson on the brain, Jack."

"Have I? Well, it's an odd coincidence, then, that the yacht yonder has a tear in her foresail exactly where our bowsprit tore the *Speedaway's* jib this afternoon."

"By hookey, you're right, Jack!" cried Noddy. "There may be more to this than we think."

Billy was peering from behind a bush over the edge of the cliff, which was not very high.

He could see below, the dark figure of a man making a black patch in the gloom upon the white beach. He was moving about and pacing nervously to and fro on the shingle as if awaiting something or somebody.

Suddenly he made a swift move.

"He's waving his handkerchief," whispered Billy to the others, as he saw the man make a signal with a square of white linen.

"To that yacht, I'll bet a cookie," exclaimed Noddy.

As if in answer to his words there suddenly showed, on the yacht, a red lantern, as if a scarlet eye had suddenly opened across the dark water.

CHAPTER VI. IN THE DARK

"Something's in the wind sure enough," said Jack. "Hark, there's the plash of oars. They must be going to land here."

From below there came a man's voice.

"Right here, Judson; here's the landing place. Are you alone?"

"No, my son is with me," came the reply, "but for heaven's sake, man, not so loud."

"There's no one within half a mile of this place. I came down through the grounds and they were deserted."

"Humph, but still it's as well to be careful. One never knows what spies are about," came the reply.

The boys, nudging each other with excitement, heard the bow of the boat scrape on the shingly beach and then came the crunch of footsteps.

"They are coming up the steps," whispered Jack in low, excited tones.

"That's right, so they are," breathed Billy cautiously. "Let's get behind the trees and learn what is going on."

"It's something crooked, that's sure," whispered Noddy.

"I begin to think so myself," agreed Jack, "but that man's voice, as well as his figure, seemed familiar to me when he hailed Judson, but I can't, for the life of me, think where I heard his voice before."

The three lads lost no time in concealing themselves behind some ornamental bushes in the immediate vicinity. They were none too soon, for hardly had they done so when the figures of two men and a boy appeared at the top of the steps.

"Phew," panted Judson, "I'm not as young as I was. That climb has made me feel my age. Let's sit down here."

"Very well, that bench yonder will be just the place," agreed the man the boys had followed, and who had seemed so oddly familiar to Jack.

The seat they had selected could hardly have been a better one for the boys' purpose. It was placed right against the bush behind which they were hiding. The voices came to them clearly, although the speakers took pains to modify them.

"Well, I've been waiting for you," came in the voice of the man the boys had instinctively followed.

"We'd have got here sooner, but were delayed by an accident, or rather a sort of accident on purpose that occurred this afternoon. I was glad to see that you hadn't forgotten our night signal code," said Judson.

"What was the accident?" asked the man, who was a stranger to the boys, who were listening intently.

"Oh, just three brats who are summering here," scoffed Donald Judson. "They appeared to think they owned the bay, and I guess it was up to me to show them they didn't. I guess Jack Ready will be on the market for another boat before long and –"

"Hold on, hold on," exclaimed the strange man. "What was that name?"

"Ready, Jack Ready. He thinks he's a wizard at wireless. Why, do you know him, Jarro?"

Jarro, at the sound of the name there, brought into Jack's mind the recollections of the rascally partner of Terrill & Co., who had financed his uncle's treasure hunt and had then tried to steal the hoard from him. It was Jack who had overthrown the rascal's schemes and made him seek refuge in the west to escape prosecution. Yet he had apparently returned and in some way become associated

with Judson. Noddy, too, as had Bill, had started at the name. Both nudged Jack, who returned the gesture to show that he had heard and understood.

"So Ready is here, eh?" growled Jarrow. "Confounded young milksop."

"You appear not to be very fond of him," interjected the elder Judson.

"Fond of him! I should think not! I hate him like poison."

"What did he ever do to you?"

"He – er – er – he upset an – er – er – business deal I was in with his uncle."

"The one-legged old sea captain?"

"That's the fellow. He trusted me in everything till Jack Ready came nosing in and spoilt his uncle's chance of becoming a rich man through his association in business with me."

"I've no use for him either," exclaimed Donald vindictively. "I'll give him a good licking when I see him."

"Well, well, let's get down to business," said the elder Judson decisively. "You have been to Washington, Jarrow?"

"Yes, and found out something, but not much. The new naval wireless code is not yet completed. I found out that by bribing a clerk in the Navy Department and – "

"This business is proving pretty expensive," grumbled Judson.

"We're playing for a big stake," was the reply. "I found out that the code has been placed in the hands of a Captain Simms, recently attached to the revenue service, for revision. I believe that it is the same Captain Simms against whom I have a grudge, for it was on his ship that I was insulted by aspersions on my business honesty, and that, also, was the work of this Jack Ready."

"Pity he didn't tell them that he was in irons at the time," thought Jack to himself.

"Where is this Captain Simms?" asked Judson, not noticing, or appearing not to, his companion's outbreak.

"That's just it," was the rejoinder. "Nobody knows. His whereabouts are being kept a profound secret. Since it has become rumored that the Navy wireless code was being revised, Washington fairly swarms with secret agents of different governments. Simms is either abroad or in some mighty safe place."

"Our hands are tied without him," muttered Judson, "and if I don't get that code I don't stand a chance of landing that big steel contract with the foreign power I have been dealing with."

"I'm afraid not," rejoined Jarrow. "I saw their representative in Washington and told him what I had learned. His answer was, 'no code, no contract.' I'm afraid you were foolish in using that promise as a means to try to land the deal."

"I had my thumb on the man who would have stolen it for me at the time," rejoined Judson, "but he was discharged for some minor dishonesty before I had a chance to use him."

"The thing to do is to locate this Captain Simms."

"Evidently, you must do your best. The wind has died down and I guess we'll stop at the hotel till to-morrow. Anyhow, it's too long a sail back to-night. Come on, Donald; come, Jarrow." The bench creaked as they rose and made off, turning their footsteps toward the hotel.

Not till they had gone some distance did the boys dare to speak, and even then they did not say much for a minute or two. The first expression came from Jack. It was a long, drawn-out:

"We-e-!"

"And so that is the work that Captain Simms has been doing in that isolated retreat of his," exclaimed Billy.

"And these crooks have just had the blind luck to tumble over him," exploded Noddy. "Just wait till they take a look at the hotel register."

"Maybe by the time they enter their names the page will have turned," suggested Billy.

"No," rejoined Jack, "our names were at the top of the page and there would hardly have been enough new arrivals after us at this time of night to have filled it since."

"We must find Captain Simms at once and tell what is in the wind," decided the young wireless man a moment later. "I guess the instinct that made us follow Jarrow was a right one."

"I wonder how the rascal became acquainted with Judson?" pondered Billy.

"Mixed up with him in some crooked deal or other before this," said Noddy.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Jack.

They began to walk back to the hotel. They did not enter the lobby by the main entrance, for the path they followed had brought them to a side door. They were glad of this, for, screened by some palms, they saw, bending intently over the register, the forms of the three individuals whose conversation they had overheard.

CHAPTER VII. THE NAVAL CODE

"Now that you boys know the nature of the work I have been engaged on, I may as well tell you that confidential reports from Washington have warned me to be on my guard," said Captain Simms. "It was in reply to one of these that I sent a code dispatch to-night."

It was half an hour later, and they were all seated in the Captain's room, having told their story.

"But I should have imagined making up a code was a very simple matter," said Billy.

"That is just where you are wrong, my boy," smiled Captain Simms. "A commercial code, perhaps, can be jumbled together in any sort of fashion, but a practical naval code is a different matter. Besides dealing in technicalities it must be absolutely invulnerable to even the cleverest reader of puzzles. The new code was necessitated by the fact that secret agents discovered that an expert in the employ of a foreign power had succeeded in solving a part of our old one. It was only a very small part, but in case of trouble with that country it might have meant defeat if the enemy knew even a fragment of the wireless code that was being flashed through the air."

"Have you nearly completed your work?" asked Jack.

"Almost," was the reply, "but the fact that these men are here rather complicates matters. At Musky Bay, the name of the little settlement where I am stopping, they think I am just a city man up for the fishing. I do not use my right name there. By an inadvertence, I suppose it was habit, I wrote it on the hotel register to-night. That was a sad blunder, for it is practically certain that these men will not rest till they have found out where I am working."

"At any rate I'm mighty glad we followed that Jarrow," said Jack.

"And caught enough of their plans to put you on guard," chimed in Billy.

"Yes, and I am deeply grateful to you boys," was the rejoinder. "'Forewarned is forearmed.' If Judson and his crowd attempt any foul tactics they will find me ready for them."

"Judson apparently wishes now that he had not been so anxious to secure that contract as to promise the naval code as a sort of bonus," said Jack.

"I don't doubt it," answered Captain Simms. "Now that I recall it, I heard rumors that Judson, who once had a steel contract with our government, is not so sound financially as he seems. I judge he would go to great lengths to assure a large contract that would get him out of his difficulties."

"I should imagine so," replied Jack. "What was the reason he never did any more work for the government?"

"The inferior quality of his product, I heard. There were ugly rumors concerning graft at the time. Some of the newspapers even went so far as to urge his prosecution."

"Then we are dealing with bad men?" commented Jack.

"Unquestionably so. But I think we had better break up this council of war and get to bed. I want to get an early start in the morning."

But when morning came, it was found that the repairs to the *Skipjack* would take longer than had been anticipated. While Captain Simms remained at the boat yard to superintend the work, the lads returned to the hotel and addressed some post cards. This done they sauntered out on the porch. Almost the first person they encountered chanced to be Jarrow. He started and turned a sickly yellow at the sight of them, although he knew, from an inspection of the register the night before, that they were there.

"Why – er – ahem, so it is you once more. Where did you spring from?"

"We came out of that door," murmured Jack, while Noddy snickered. "Where did you come from?"

"I might say from the same place," was the rejoinder, with a look of malice at Noddy.

"We thought you were in the west," said Billy. "Great place, the west. They say the climate out there is healthier than the east – for some folks."

"Boy, you are impudent," snarled Jarrow.

"Not at all. I was merely making a meteorological remark," smiled Billy.

"Wait till I get that word," implored Noddy, pulling out a notebook and a stub of pencil.

"Splendid grounds they have here for taking strolls at night," Jack could not help observing.

From yellow Jarrow's face turned ashen pale. Muttering something about a telephone call, he hurried into the hotel.

"Goodness, that shot brought down a bird, with a vengeance," chuckled Billy.

Jarrow's head was suddenly thrust out of an open window. He glared at the boys balefully. His face was black as a thundercloud.

"You boys have been playing the sneak on me," he cried angrily. "If you take my advice, you will not do so in the future."

He withdrew his head as quickly as a turtle draws its headpiece into its shell.

"He's a corker," cried Noddy. "I'll bet if he had a chance, he'd like to half kill us."

"Shouldn't wonder," laughed Jack, "but he isn't going to get that chance. But hullo! What's all this coming up the driveway?"

The others looked in the same direction and beheld a curious spectacle.

CHAPTER VIII. A MONKEY INTERLUDE

"Well, here's something new, and no mistake," cried Billy.

"Good, it will help pass our morning," declared Noddy, who was beginning to find time hang heavily on his hands now that he had nobody to play pranks on, like those he used to torment poor Pompey with.

An Italian was coming up the road toward the hotel. Strapped across his shoulders was a small hand-organ. He led a trained bear, and two monkeys squatted on the big creature's back. He came to a halt near the grinning boys.

"Hurrray! This is going to be as good as a circus!" declared Noddy. "Start up your performance, professor."

"They're off!" cried Billy.

Summer residents of the hotel, anxious for any diversion out of the ordinary, came flocking to the scene as the strains of the barrel organ reached their ears, and the bear, in a clumsy fashion, began to dance to the music of the ear-piercing instrument.

"Where are you going, Noddy?" asked Jack, as the red-headed lad tried to get quietly out of the crowd.

"I just saw a chance for a little fun," rejoined Noddy innocently.

"Well, be careful," warned Jack. "This is no place for such jokes as you used to play on Pompey."

"Oh, nothing like that," Noddy assured him as he hurried off.

"Just the same I'm afraid of Noddy when he starts getting humorous," thought Jack.

He would have been still more afraid if he could have seen Noddy make his way to the hotel kitchen and bribe a kitchen maid to get him three large sugar cakes. Then he made his way to the dining-room, and boring tiny holes in the buns filled each of them with red pepper from the casters.

"Now for some fun," he chuckled.

"I just know that boy is up to some mischief by the look on his face," remarked an old lady as he hurried by.

Quite a big crowd was round the Italian when Noddy got back. Almost as soon as he arrived the man began passing the hat, and taking advantage of this, Noddy proffered his buns to the animals. They accepted them greedily.

"Peep! Peep!" chattered the monkeys.

"You mean 'pep,' 'pep'," chuckled Noddy to himself.

Both bear and monkeys tore into their buns as if they were half starved. In their hunger they got a few mouthfuls down without appearing to notice that anything was wrong. Then suddenly one of the monkeys hurled his bun at the bear and the other leaped on the big hairy creature's head. Apparently they thought the innocent bear had something to do with the trick that had been played on them.

"Da monk! da monk!" howled the Italian, "da monk go a da craz'."

"He says they are mad," exclaimed an old gentleman, and hurried away.

Just as he did so, the bear discovered something was wrong. He set up a roar of rage and broke loose from his keeper. The monkeys leaped away from the angry beast and sought refuge. One jumped on the head of an elderly damsel who was very much excited. The other made a dive for a fashionably dressed youth who was none other than Donald Judson.

"Help!" screamed the old maid. "Help! Will no one help me?"

"I will, madam," volunteered an old gentleman, coming forward. He seized the monkey and tugged at its hind legs, but it only clung the tighter to the elderly damsel's hair.

Suddenly there came a piercing scream.

"Gracious, her hair's come off!" cried a woman.

"She's been scalped, poor creature!" declared another.

"Oh, you wretch, how dare you!" shrieked the monkey's victim, rushing at the gallant old gentleman. She raised her parasol and brought it down on his head with a resounding crack. In the meantime the Italian was howling to "Garibaldi," as he called the monkey, to come to him.

But this the monkey had no intention of doing. Clutching the old maid's wig in its hands, it leaped away in bounds and joined its brother on the person of Donald Judson.

"Ouch, take them off. They'll bite me!" Donald was yelling.

The monkeys tore off his straw hat with its fancy ribbon and tore it to bits and flung them in the faces of the crowd. Then, suddenly, they both darted swiftly off and climbed a tree, where they sat chattering.

It was at that moment that the confused throng recollected the bear, which had not remained in the vicinity but had gone charging off across the lawn looking for water to drown the burning sensation within him. Now, however, an angry roar reminded them of him. The beast was coming back across the lawn, roaring and showing his teeth.

"Look out for the bear!"

"Get a gun, quick."

"Oh, he'll hug me," this last from the old maid, were some of the cries which the crowd sent up.

"He's mad, shoot him!" cried somebody. The Italian set up a howl of protest.

"No, no, no shoota heem. Mika da gooda da bear. No shoota heem."

"If you don't want him shot, catch him and get out of here. You'll have my hotel turned into a sanitarium for nervous wrecks the first thing you know," cried the proprietor of the place.

"Somebody playa da treeck," protested the Italian. "Mika da nica da bear, da gooda da bear."

"I guess he's like an Indian, only good when he's dead," said the hotel man. "I'm off to get my gun."

Noddy watched the results of his joke with mixed feelings. He had not meant it to go as far as this. He looked about him apprehensively, but everybody was too frightened to notice him.

Suddenly the bear headed straight for Noddy. Perhaps his red head was a shining mark or perhaps the creature recollected the prank-playing youth as the one who had given him the peppered bun. At any rate he charged straight after the lad, who fled for his life.

"Help!" he called as he ran. "Help, help!"

"Noddy's getting a dose of his own medicine," cried Jack to Billy.

"But we don't want to let the bear get him," protested Billy.

"Of course not, but he'll beat the bear into the hotel, see if he doesn't."

The hotel front door was evidently Noddy's objective point. It appeared he would reach it first, but suddenly he tripped on a croquet hoop and went sprawling. He was up in a minute, but the bear had gained on him. As he rushed up the steps it was only a few inches behind him.

Noddy gave a wild yell and took the steps in three jumps. The next second he was at the door and swinging it shut with all his might. But just then an astonishing thing happened.

Just as Noddy swung the door shut the bear made a leap. The result surprised Noddy as much as Bruin.

The edge of the door caught the big creature's neck and held him as fast as if he had been caught in a dead-fall. He was gripped as in a vise between the door and the frame. But poor Noddy was in the position of the man who caught the wild cat.

He didn't know how to let go!

CHAPTER IX.

NODDY AND THE BEAR

"I've got him!" yelled Noddy. "Help me, somebody!"

"Goodness, Noddy's caught the bear," cried Jack, as he and Billy streaked across the lawn, followed by the less timid of the guests.

"Hold him tight," shouted some in the crowd.

"Let him go," bawled others.

Perspiring from his efforts, Noddy braced his feet and kept the door tightly closed on the bear's neck. But the creature's struggles made the portal groan and creak as if it would be shoved off its hinges.

"Gracious, I can't hold it much longer. Can't somebody hit him on the head with a club?"

The negro bell boys and clerk, together with several of the guests who had been in the lobby, began to come back, now that they saw there was no immediate chance of the bear rushing in.

"Ah reckon ah knows a way ter fix dat b'ar widout hurting him," cried one of the negro boys.

He snatched a fire extinguisher off the wall of the office and squirted its contents full in the bear's face. The animal gave one roar of dismay and a mighty struggle that burst the door open and threw Noddy off his feet. He set up a yell of fright. But he need not have been afraid. The ugliness had all gone out of the bear, and besides being half choked he was temporarily blinded by the contents of the fire extinguisher.

The Italian came running up, carrying a chain and a muzzle.

"Gooda da boy! Gooda da Mika!" he cried ingratiatingly.

The bear was as mild as a kitten, but nevertheless the muzzle was buckled on and the Italian departed in search of his monkeys just as the manager appeared with his gun. It had taken him a long time to find, he explained, whereat Noddy, who had recovered his spirits, snickered.

"I'm going to pay the bill and get out of here," whispered Jack in Noddy's ear. "You'd better get away as quietly as you can. Several people saw you give those buns to the animals. If they find you here, they'll mob you."

"Being chased by a bear is quite enough excitement for one day," rejoined Noddy, "but my! It was good fun while it lasted. Did you see that old maid's hair, did you see Donald Judson, did you –"

"Get out of here quickly," warned Jack, and this time Noddy took his advice without waiting. It was just as well he did, for the elderly gentleman, whose shining bald head had been belabored by the old maid's parasol, came in, accompanied by the damsel. She had recovered her hair when the monkeys were caught and had tendered handsome apologies to the would-be gallant.

"Where is that boy who started all this?" demanded the old gentleman.

"It was one of that gang there," cried Donald Judson, who had followed them and whose face showed plenty of scratches where the monkeys had clambered up to demolish his hat.

"Oh, what a terrible boy he must be," cried the old maid. "He ought to go to prison. Where is he?"

"Ask them, they'll know," cried Donald, pointing to Jack and Billy.

"No, it wasn't either of them. They were back in the crowd," cried the old maid; "it was another boy, a red-headed one."

"I'm glad I told Noddy to get out," whispered Jack to his friends.

"Look, they are whispering to each other. I told you they knew all about it," cried Donald, who saw a chance of avenging himself for his treatment by the monkeys.

"Say, young man," said the manager, coming up to Jack, "I think your friend was responsible for this rumpus."

"What rumpus?"

"Why, that trouble with the bear, of course. You boys are at the bottom of it all."

"Why, the bear chased my friend harder than anyone else," said Jack, with assumed indignation.

"I guess we'll pay our bill and leave," struck in Billy.

"Think you'd better, eh?" sneered the manager.

"If you want your money you'd better be civil," said Jack.

"Yes, but – your bill is eight dollars."

"Here it is. Now don't bother us any more or I'll report you to the proprietor."

"I know, but look here."

"I can't see in that direction."

"I don't know if that man has caught his monkeys yet."

"No use of your worrying about that unless you're afraid one of them will get your job."

There was a loud laugh at this and in the midst of it the boys passed out of the hotel, leaving the clerk very red about the ears.

"I hope that will teach Noddy a lesson," said Jack, as they hurried down to the boat yard where Noddy had been instructed to precede them.

"It ought to. Being chased by a bear is no joke."

But when they reached the yard they were just in time to see the man who was working on the boat clap his hand to the back of his neck and yell:

"Ouch! A bee stung me."

Not far off, looking perfectly innocent, stood Noddy, but Jack detected him in the act of slipping into his pocket a magnifying glass, by which he focused the sun's rays on the workman's neck.

CHAPTER X.

"WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF IT?"

The *Skipjack* was all ready for them and no delay was had in making a start back to Musky Bay, where, it will be remembered, the boys had left their boat to be repaired. A brief stop was made at the Pine Island hotel and then the trip was resumed.

"Wonder where Judson and his crowd have gone to?" pondered Jack, as they moved rapidly over the water.

"One thing sure, they never started back home in the *Speedaway* this morning," said Billy. "The water is like glass, and there's not a breath of wind."

"Look, there's a handsome motor boat off yonder," exclaimed Jack presently. He pointed to a low, black craft, some distance behind them and closer in to the shore.

"She's making fast time," said Bill.

"Maybe she wants to give us a race," suggested Noddy.

"I'm afraid we wouldn't stand much chance with her," laughed Captain Simms.

They watched the black boat for a time, but she appeared to slacken speed as she drew closer, as if those in charge of her had no desire to come any nearer to the *Skipjack* than they were.

"That's odd," remarked Jack. "There is evidently nothing the matter with her engine, but for all that they don't seem to want to pass us. That's the first fast boat I ever saw act that way."

"It does seem queer," said Captain Simms, and suddenly his brow clouded.

"Could it be possible – " he exclaimed, and stopped short.

Jack looked at him in a questioning way.

"Could what be possible, sir?" he asked.

"Why, that Judson and the others are on board that black craft?"

"Ginger! That never occurred to me!" cried Jack; "and yet, if they were following us to find out where you are located that would be just the sort of way in which they would behave."

"So I was thinking," said Captain Simms thoughtfully. "However, we can soon find out."

He opened a locker and took out his binoculars. Then he focused them on the black craft.

"Well?" questioned Jack, as the captain laid them down again.

"There's a man at the wheel, but he isn't the least like your descriptions of your men," said the captain.

"What does he look like?" questioned Billy.

"He's rather tall and has a full black beard," was the answer.

"Then it's not one of Judson's crowd," said Jack with conviction.

"I guess we are all the victims of nerves to-day," smiled the captain.

They swung round a point and threaded the channel that led among the shoaly waters of Musky Bay. The point shut out any rearward view of the black motor boat and they saw no more of it. Captain Simms invited them up to the house he occupied, which was isolated from the half dozen or so small habitations that made up the settlement. It was plainly furnished and the living room was littered with papers and documents.

"What made you select Musky Bay as a retreat?" asked Jack.

"I come from up in this part of the country," rejoined Captain Simms, "and I thought this would be a good quiet place to hide myself till my work was complete. But it seems," he added, with a smile, "that I may have been mistaken."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Jack. "Those fellows would never think of trailing you here. I guess they think you are still in Clayton."

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