

Goldfrap John Henry

The Boy Scouts for Uncle Sam



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CHAPTER I.

THE EAGLES AT HOME

"After all, fellows, it's good to be back home again."

The speaker, Rob Blake, leader of the Eagle Patrol of Boy Scouts, spoke with conviction. He was a "rangy," sun-burned lad of about eighteen, clear-eyed, confident and wiry. His Boy Scout training, too, had made him resourceful beyond his years.

"Yes, and it's also good to know that we each have a good substantial sum of money in the bank as the result of the finding of the Dangerfield fortune," agreed Merritt Crawford, his second in command, a sunny-faced, good-natured looking youth a little younger than Rob and crowned with a tousled mass of wavy brown hair.

"Well, at any rate we've had plenty to eat since we've been back," chimed in Tubby Hopkins, a corpulent youth who owed his nickname to his fleshiness.

"That's right, Tubby," laughed Paul Perkins, another bright-eyed young "Eagle"; "that's something we didn't always get in the Adirondacks. I thought at one time that you'd fade away to a shadow."

"Humph! Pretty substantial sort of shadow," grinned Hiram Nelson, who, besides Paul Perkins, was the inventive genius of the Eagles.

The scene of these reminiscences was the comfortably furnished patrol room of the Eagles, situated over the bank of the little town of Hampton on the south shore of Long Island. Rob Blake's father, the president of the bank, was a patron of the Eagles, and had donated the room to the boys some time before.

Boxing gloves, foils, baseball bats and other athletic apparatus dear to a boy's heart lay scattered about the room in orderly confusion. On the walls were diagrams of the "wig-wag code" and the "Morse code simplified," with other illustrations of Scout activities.

But it was above the door that there was perched the particular pride of the Eagles' hearts – a huge American eagle, a bird fast disappearing from its native haunts. With outstretched wings and defiant attitude it stood there, typifying the spirit of its young namesakes. The eagle had been a present to the lads from Lieutenant Duvall, of the United States Army, whom they had materially aided some time before in various aerial intrigues and adventures. What these were was related in full in the "The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship."

In the first volume of this series, "The Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol," it was told how the boys came to organize, and how they succeeded in unravelling a kidnapping mystery, involving one of their number. In the second volume, "The Boy Scouts on the Range," we followed the boys' adventures in the far southwest. Here they encountered Moqui Indians and renegade cow-punchers. But through all their hardships and adventures they conducted themselves according to the Scout laws.

The third volume was "The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship," referred to in connection with Lieutenant Duvall. In this book a military biplane played an important part, as did the theft of a series of plans of a gyroscope invention of Lieutenant Duvall's, who was an all-around mechanical genius.

In the story that preceded the present account of the Eagle Patrol the lads found themselves in the Adirondacks on a strange mission. With a certain Major Dangerfield, a retired army officer, they searched for a lost cave in which an old-time pirate, one of the Major's ancestors, had hidden his loot when Indians threatened him. How the cave was located and the startling discovery made there, we

have not space to describe here. But in the wildest part of the "land of woods and lakes" the boys encountered some thrilling adventures, not the least of which was Rob's battle with the moonshining gang that infested a lonely canyon.

From this trip they had returned not more than two weeks before the scene in the meeting-room, which we have described, took place. Bronzed, clear-eyed and alert, they were already longing for action of some sort. How soon they were to be plunged into adventures of a variety even more exciting than any they had yet encountered they little dreamed at the moment.

They were still laughing over the idea of the substantial Tubby's rotund form being compared to a shadow when there came a tap at the door of the room in which they were assembled.

"Guess that's Andy Bowles," said Rob, referring to the only member of the Patrol who was not present; "wonder why he's so late."

Then, in a louder voice, he cried:

"Come in, Andy."

But the voice that answered as the door was flung open was not Andy's. Instead, it was a deep, resounding bass one.

"I'm not Andy; but I'll accept the invitation."

As the owner of the voice, a tall, well-set-up man with a military bearing, stepped into the room all the Scouts sprang erect at attention, and gave the Scout salute. Then they broke into three cheers.

"Why, Lieutenant Duvall, what are you doing here?" exclaimed Rob, coming forward.

The young officer shook hands warmly with the leader of the Boy Scouts. Then, while the others pressed closer to the lieutenant – the same officer who had conducted the aviation tests at the "tunnelled house" – he addressed Rob.

"The fact is, I came down here to see if you are willing to tackle some more adventures," he said.

"Are we – " began Rob; but a roar from the Scouts interrupted him.

"Just you try us, Lieutenant."

"More adventures? Great stuff!"

"I'm ready right now."

"You can count on me."

The air fairly bubbled with confusion and excitement.

The Lieutenant roared with laughter.

"I do believe if you boys were told to lead a forlorn hope up to a row of machine guns you'd do it," he exclaimed; "but all this time I've been leaving my friend outside. May I bring him in?"

"Why ask the question?" exclaimed Rob. "This room is at the disposal of the United States Army at any time."

"Well, in this case it must be at the disposal of the Navy also," smiled the officer. Then, turning his head, he called to someone outside in the hallway, "Dan, the Eagles are prepared to receive the Navy."

At the word, a stalwart young man of about Lieutenant Duvall's age, stepped into the room. He was deeply sun-burned, and had an alert, upright carriage that stamped him as belonging to Uncle Sam's service.

"Scouts of the Eagle Patrol," said Lieutenant Duvall, with becoming formality, "allow me to present to you Ensign Daniel Hargreaves, of the United States Navy, just now detailed on special service."

Once more came the Scout salute, and then, given with a will, the long drawn "Kr-e-e-ee" of the Eagles.

The naval officer's eyes twinkled.

"These are Eagles that can scream with a vengeance," he exclaimed to his companion.

"Yes; and they can show their talons on occasion, I can assure you," declared Lieutenant Duvall.

"But 'heave ahead,' as you say in the Navy, Dan, and put your proposition before them."

The boys greeted this announcement with wide-open eyes. Somehow or other they felt impressed immediately that they were on the verge of another series of important adventures; that the unexpected visit of the officers had something to do with their immediate future. And in this they were not the least bit out of the way, as will be seen.

CHAPTER II.

THE FACE AT THE TRANSOM

"Of course what I am going to say will be held strictly confidential?" began Ensign Hargreaves, looking about him at the bright, eager faces of the young Eagles.

"We are Boy Scouts, sir," responded Rob proudly.

"I beg your pardon; but what I am going to say is so important to the nation that one word of it breathed abroad might cause endless complications and the ruin of certain plans. I have come to see you because my friend, Lieutenant Duvall, told me that he did not know anywhere in the country of a band of boys of similar resourcefulness, courage and high training."

"That's going some," whispered Tubby, behind a plump hand, to Merritt Crawford.

"I said no more than they deserved, Dan," observed Lieutenant Duvall.

"So I should imagine from what you told me about the part they played in the matter of the biplane and the tunnelled house," responded the young officer. "I came to you for another reason, also," he went on reverting to the subject in hand; "I have heard that as well as being land scouts you are thoroughly at home on the water."

"Well," said Rob, "we've all of us been brought up here on the south shore. I guess we are all fair sailors and know something about sea-scouting as well as the land variety."

"It is mainly for that reason that I came to you," rejoined the naval officer. "For the mission which I am desirous to have you undertake a knowledge of sea conditions is essential."

"Gee! He's a long time coming to the point," mumbled Tubby impatiently.

"Have any of you boys ever heard of the 'Peacemaker submarine'?"

"So called because the nation possessing it would be so formidable as to insure naval peace with other countries?" exclaimed Rob quickly. "Yes, sir, I've heard of it."

"What has reached your ears about it?"

"Why, a week ago the papers said that a submarine of that type had been sold to Russia and shipped for that country from the factory of the inventor at Bridgeport, Connecticut," said Rob, with growing wonder as to what all this could be leading.

"Correct. But that submarine never reached Russia!"

"Did the ship that was carrying it sink?" asked Tubby innocently.

"No," smiled the ensign, amused at the fat boy's goggling eyes and intent expression; "the *Long Island*, the freighter conveying it, did not sink. Instead, it hung about the coast, and then, under cover of fog, slipped into the harbor of Snug Haven on the South Carolina coast. Snug Haven is a small place and a sleepy one. Under the blanket of fog the *Long Island* slipped in, as I have said. Then the submarine was hoisted overboard by means of a derrick, and under her own power run to anchorage off a small island not far from Snug Haven. The captain and crew of the *Long Island* were sworn to secrecy, and so far as we know not a soul, but those directly interested, is aware of the present location of the *Peacemaker*."

"But why, if the submarine was sold to Russia, was she not sent there?" inquired the mystified Rob.

"For the excellent reason that she was *not* sold to Russia at all," was the naval officer's rejoinder; "that was simply announced for the benefit of inquisitive newspapers who have been trying for a long time to get at the details of the 'Peacemaker submarine.' But it is not alone the newspapers we have had trouble with. Foreign spies, anxious to secure the *Peacemaker* for their governments, have harassed us at Bridgeport ever since the keel plates were laid."

"Then the United States has bought the submarine?" asked Merritt Crawford.

"Not yet. But the construction and principles of it are so efficient that Uncle Sam wishes to have first call on the craft."

"And you are going to test it at this lonely island in South Carolina?" cried Rob, guessing the truth.

"Perfectly right, my boy," was the response. "Off that little-frequented coast, beset with islands and shoals, we hope to carry out our tests unobserved. At Bridgeport this would have been an impossibility, and for that reason the story of the sale to Russia was concocted. Russia, I may add, was about the only country not represented by spy service at Bridgeport."

"And you say that nobody but the officials directly connected with the craft has any knowledge of its whereabouts?" asked Rob with deep interest.

"As far as it is humanly possible to be certain, such is our positive belief."

"But where do we fit into all this?" sputtered Tubby, acutely coming to the main point.

"I am coming to that," was the response. "From what I have told you, you will have gathered that no ordinary class of watchmen could be trusted to keep quiet about what is to go forward on the island. Yet it is necessary to have sentries of some sort to keep constant watch that no one approaches unexpectedly. For that purpose we have adopted various mechanical precautions, such as submarine detector bells, etc. But our main reliance must be on human intelligence."

"I see," said Rob, nodding. The object of the officer's visit was beginning to dawn on him.

"To come straight to the point," went on the officer, "how would you boys like to take a camping trip to the South Carolina coast on Uncle Sam's service?"

"You mean to act as guards to the submarine?" almost shouted Rob.

"Just that," responded the officer. "I have –"

But a roar of cheers drowned any further remarks he might have had to make.

"I knew it would happen," cried Merritt when the riot had, in a measure, subsided.

"What?" demanded Tubby.

"Action!" responded Merritt briefly.

The hubbub grew tumultuous. All the Eagles were trying to talk at once. The wonderful prospect opened up before them of fresh adventures fairly set them wild.

At last, above the turmoil, Ensign Hargreaves managed to make his voice heard.

"Boys! Boys!" he exclaimed, "one minute till I outline the plans."

A respectful silence at once ensued in which each Scout was prompt to join.

"Of course, it will be necessary for you to obtain written consent of your parents," spoke the naval officer.

At this some of the faces in the room fell several degrees.

"The government will absolutely require such authority," he continued. "The service on Barren Island, as it is called, while not necessarily hazardous, may prove dangerous, and each boy's parents must be so informed."

"We'll get plenty to eat, I suppose?" inquired Tubby anxiously.

"Why, of course," laughed the officer; "moreover, I forgot to inform you that there is a wireless plant on the Island, and other conveniences unusual in so remote a situation."

"Well, so long as the grub holds out, I'm satisfied," muttered Tubby in a contented tone.

"How soon will we start, supposing our parents allow us to go?" asked Rob, as soon as the laughter over Tubby's remark had subsided.

"At the end of this week if possible. Mr. Danbury Barr, the inventor of the *Peacemaker*, will meet us in New York. We shall voyage south on the U. S. Derelict Destroyer *Seneca*."

"Derelict Destroyer," repeated Rob. "Those are the craft that Uncle Sam sends out to destroy drifting wrecks that might prove a menace to navigation, aren't they?"

"Correct, my boy," rejoined the officer. "Our reason for making the voyage on the *Seneca*," he continued, "is that no regular passenger steamer makes a stop near Barren Island. Furthermore, if we

went down on a naval vessel some of these sharp reporters would be sure to make inquiries, with the result that our retreat might be discovered."

"And that would be a serious matter?" put in Rob.

"Yes, very serious. Several nations are on the *qui vive* to discover just what the *Barr Peacemaker* is. They have sent shrewd, cunning men, versed in the art of espionage, to this country on that mission. These men will stick at nothing to ferret out the secret if they can. Mr. Barr has been approached with all sorts of offers. But he is a staunch American to the backbone, as you will discover when you meet him. If anyone is to have the *Peacemaker* it is to be Uncle Sam, first, foremost and all the time."

"Kree-e-ee-ee!" shrilled the Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol in unison.

The sharp, screaming note of the Eagle was still resounding when Merritt uttered a startled cry, and pointed to the open transom above the door. The others were still staring at him when he darted toward it and flung the portal open. The passage beyond was empty, and the boy turned to his companions with a puzzled look on his face.

"What's up, Merritt?" asked Rob.

"Seeing spooks?" inquired Tubby.

"Seeing nothing," snapped out Merritt; "I *saw*—"

"Saw what?" demanded Lieutenant Duvall.

"A face peering at us over that transom. It dodged into the darkness as I looked up, but I saw it as plain as daylight."

Both officers bent forward almost breathlessly. Merritt's communication appeared to affect them strangely.

"What kind of a face was it?" demanded Ensign Hargreaves.

"A wild looking one. Very pale, and fringed with dark whiskers."

The effect on the officers was electrical. They both sprang up and made for the door followed by the puzzled Scouts.

"Was – was it anyone you know?" demanded Rob, as he paced beside Lieutenant Duvall.

"Yes. From the description it was Berghoff, the spy of a powerful European nation whose ambition it is to outgeneral all other powers on the sea. We must apprehend him if possible. It is only too clear that he followed us here from Washington and must have heard a great part of our conversation."

"Phew! This is action with a capital A!" gasped Rob as they ran down the stairway and out into the lighted street.

But although a rigorous search was made and all trains watched, no trace was found of Nordstrom Berghoff, the naval spy. It was surmised that he must have made good his escape in a speedy "roadster" car in which he had crept into Hampton earlier in the evening.

CHAPTER III. AN OCEAN DERELICT

"What's that object off on the starboard bow, sir?"

It was a week after the events narrated in the preceding chapters, and the *Seneca*, a converted gun-boat fitted with torpedo tubes for the destruction of derelicts, was plowing her way southward through an azure sea under a cloudless sky.

Rob Blake asked the question. In full Boy Scout Leader's uniform, and wearing the different badges to which he was entitled, the young chief of the Eagles stood on the *Seneca's* bridge with Ensign Hargreaves and Lieutenant Murray, who were in command of the destroyer.

"Jove, lad, you have sharp eyes!" exclaimed Lieutenant Murray. "Even the lookout has not yet spied it. Let's see what it may be. Possibly it's our 'meat' – food for our torpedoes."

"In that case the boys are in for a bit of excitement," said Ensign Hargreaves.

"You think it is a derelict!" exclaimed Rob. "Oh, boys!" he called down to the shady deck below, where the other lads lay reading or writing letters or studying the Scout Manual, "we've sighted a derelict."

"An ocean hobo, eh?" hailed back Merritt.

"Hold on! Hold on! Not so fast!" laughed Lieutenant Murray.

He took his powerful naval binoculars from their case and carefully focussed them on the dot which Rob's sharp eyes had espied at so great a distance.

"You are right, Master Rob," he exclaimed the next instant; "it *is* a derelict, and a big one, too."

"And you are going to blow it up?" asked Rob, his voice quivering with excitement.

"That's our business, lad."

"Hooray! Boys, stand by for the fireworks!" shouted the delighted Rob.

The Boy Scouts, who had pretty well the run of the ship and were favored alike by officers and men, came swarming upon the bridge. Lieutenant Murray was adjusting the range finders and directing the quartermaster at the wheel to change his course so as to bear down on the drifting hulk. As they drew closer to the dismantled derelict they saw that, as Lieutenant Murray had declared, she had been a large vessel. Stumps of three masts rose from her decks above the broken bulwarks. Ends of bleached and frayed-out shrouds hung from her fore, main, and mizzen chains. From the look of her, she had been a considerable time adrift.

As she rolled slowly on the gentle swell they could see that her underbody was green with seaweed and slime, the accumulation of years. Amidships stood a small deck house, and at the bow a broken bowsprit pointed heavenward as if invoking mercy on her forlorn condition.

"Why, she might have been drifting about since the time of Noah, to judge by her looks," exclaimed Merritt, gazing at the odd sight.

"I have heard of derelicts that have followed the ocean currents for fifty years and more," declared the Lieutenant. "This craft looks as if she might date back that far. Certainly she has been a long time adrift. Sailors sometimes become panic-stricken and leave their ships when there is no real necessity for so doing. A case in point is that of Captain Larsen of the *Two Sisters*, which sailed from Bath, Maine, for a West Indian port. She was abandoned in a hurry after a hurricane, and the captain and crew took to the boats. After drifting for weeks – they had had time to provision the boats well – they arrived in Kingston, Jamaica, and the first sight that greeted the captain's eyes was the hulk of the *Two Sisters*. She had drifted close to the island and had been towed in, arriving ahead of the crew that had forsaken her!"

"Hark!" cried Merritt, while they were still commenting on the Lieutenant's story, "what was that?"

"Sounded like a bell tolling," exclaimed Rob.

"It is a bell!" cried Merritt.

Sure enough, borne over the gently heaving water, there came to their ears the melancholy ding-dong of a deep-toned bell. Coming as it did from the abandoned sea-riven hulk it cast a gloom over them.

"Who can be ringing it?" cried Tubby, in what was for him, an awe-stricken voice.

"No mystery about it, I guess," said Lieutenant Murray; "it is the ship's bell, and as the craft rolls it is ringing a requiem for the dead."

"Ugh! It gives me the shudders!" exclaimed Hiram.

"It's not a cheerful sound certainly," agreed Rob.

"Bom-boom; bom-boom," chimed the bell, waxing now faint, now loud, as the wind rose and fell.

"I'd like to go aboard that boat and explore her," declared Merritt.

"That's an opportunity you shall have," said the Lieutenant. "It is our rule to explore all such derelicts for a hint as to the fate of their crew before we consign them to the deep."

Orders were given to check the speed of the *Seneca* and to prepare to lower a boat.

"Are we to go?" chorused the Scouts eagerly.

"Of course. Mr. Hargreaves will accompany you."

"Aren't you going?" asked Rob.

"No. It's an old story with me. While we are waiting for you, I will work out our position, which must go in with my report of the derelict's destruction."

Five minutes later, in one of the *Seneca's* whale boats, the boys were skimming over the sea toward the melancholy old derelict. As they glided along, the bell kept up its monotonous booming with the regularity of a shore bell summoning worshippers to church.

As the whaleboat was pulled around the derelict's stern they could see a name painted on the square counter, surrounded with many a scroll and flourish in the antique manner. These flourishes had once been gilded and painted, but the gilt and color had long since worn off them.

"*Good Hope of Portland, Me.*," read out Rob. "What a contrast between her name and her fate!"

"Bom-boom," tolled the bell as if in answer to him.

"She must have been one of those old-time clippers that sailed round the Horn with Yankee notions for the Spice Islands and China, and came back with tea and other Oriental goods," opined Ensign Hargreaves.

"She was a fine ship in her day, sir," ventured the old quartermaster who pulled stroke oar.

"Aye, aye, Tarbox; in those days the American mercantile marine was a thing to be proud of," agreed the ensign. "To-day not one-tenth of the craft that used to fly the Stars and Stripes remain afloat. They have vanished and their keels sweep the sea no more."

By this time they had arrived below the derelict's port main chains. From these several bleached ropes hung down, but all proved too rotten to support the weight of a Boy Scout, let alone a man. But by good fortune a chain, rusty, but still strong seemingly, depended from the bows of the old craft. This withstood a test, and, led by Ensign Hargreaves, the boys clambered on deck. Quartermaster Tarbox and the four sailors who had manned the oars were left in the boat.

The boys' hearts beat a little faster as they stood on the forecastle of the abandoned *Good Hope*. Nor was this caused by the exertion of the climb altogether. There was something uncanny in standing upon that long-untrodden deck, while right below the break in the forecastle the bell kept up its doomsday-like tolling.

The ensign's first task was to make fast a lanyard to the clapper of the dismal thing, and thereafter their nerves felt steadier. With the dying out of the clamor of the bell, a death-like hush fell over the abandoned ship. Only the rippling complaint of the water as she rolled to and fro broke

the stillness. The boys actually found themselves talking in whispers under the spell that hung above the decks of the ill-fated *Good Hope*.

"Let us explore that deck house first," said Ensign Hargreaves, and, followed by the boys, he started for the small structure which stood just aft of the wreck of the foremast.

Little dreaming of the surprise that awaited them within, the boys followed, on tip-toe with curiosity and excitement.

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERY OF THE SEA

The door of the deck house was closed. But the ensign opened it without difficulty, and with the boys pressing close on his heels he entered the place.

Hardly had he done so before he fell back with a sharp exclamation. The next instant the boys echoed his interjection with a tone in which horror mingled with surprise. Seated at a table in the cabin was what at first appeared to be a man. But a second glance showed that, in reality, the figure was a grim skeleton upheld by its posture and still bearing mildewed and mouldy sea clothes.

"What a dreadful sight!" cried Rob, shivering, although the day was hot.

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the naval officer. "He must have perished just as he sat. See, there is a paper under his hand, and there lies the pen with which he had been writing."

He stepped forward to make a further examination, and the boys, mastering their instinctive dread of the uncanny scene, also approached the table.

The writing beneath the dead man's hand was on a fragment of paper, yellowed with age and covered with scrawlings grown brown from the same cause. Mastering his repugnance, the ensign took the paper from under the skeleton's fingers that still rested upon it.

"What is it?" demanded Rob.

"Look at it for yourself," returned the officer after scrutinizing the document.

Thus addressed, Rob took the mouldy screed while his chums looked over his shoulder curiously.

"Why, it's nothing but a mass of figures," he exclaimed.

"That is certainly so. Some sort of cipher, I suppose," struck in Merritt.

"That's what it is, I imagine," agreed the ensign; "but see this cross marked in red ink in the midst of the figures! What can that be intended for?"

"If you don't mind, I'll try to figure this out sometime," said Rob. "I'm rather fond of working cryptograms and such things. It will serve to pass the time, too, when we reach the Island."

"That is perfectly agreeable to me," returned the officer. "If you can make anything of it, it may serve to solve the mystery of this ship. For that a mystery there is about the whole thing, I feel certain."

"It does seem uncanny, somehow," agreed Rob; "the posture of this man, this strange writing! I wonder how he died?"

"Impossible to say," rejoined the officer; "but let us investigate further. We may make some more discoveries."

"I hope we don't make any more finds of this character," rejoined Rob with deep feeling.

Reverently and quietly they made their way out of the presence of the dead mariner.

Their next objective point was the poop of the vessel, where a high, old-fashioned quarter-deck upreared itself above the main deck. Port holes looked out from this, and the party of explorers rightly judged that here had been the living-quarters of the ship's officers. A door of heavily carved mahogany gave access to the space below the lofty poop-deck. Pressing through this, they found themselves in a dark, dingy-looking cuddy. The cushions of the lockers, which ranged along each side, were green with mould and in the air hung the odor of decay.

A skylight above gave light to this chamber, and at its sides four doors, two to a side, opened off.

"Those doors must lead to the staterooms of the former officers," declared the ensign, and a tour of inspection of the rooms was begun at once. In the first three, after a thorough ransacking nothing more interesting was to be found than some old sea chests, containing garments and nautical instruments of antique pattern. In the last, however, which bore traces of having been better furnished than the others, there hung a crudely painted picture of a grizzled-looking seaman, on whose breast

hung conspicuously a gold image of a whale. Apparently this was some sort of an emblem. But to Rob the portrait presented a clew.

"Why, that same emblem hung on the uniform of the dead man in the deckhouse!" he exclaimed.

"So it did," cried the ensign. "Boys, from the looks of it, this was the cabin of the master of the ship, and yonder body, it is my firm belief, is his."

But Merritt had stumbled upon another discovery. This was nothing more than a large book, bound in leather. But to the ensign it seemed to be apparently a highly important find.

"It's the ship's log-book," he exclaimed, pointing to the embossed words on the cover. "Now perhaps we may light on a partial solution of this mystery."

He opened the book at the first page, and learned from the crabbed writing with which it was covered, that the *Good Hope*, Ezekial T. Daniels, master, had set sail from New Bedford for the South Pacific whaling ground in April, 1879.

"Gracious, that was about thirty-three years ago," stammered Merritt.

"I have heard of derelicts that drifted longer than that," said the naval officer calmly.

He began turning over the leaves of the log book. It was an epic of the sea. Every incident that had befallen the *Good Hope* on her long voyage was faithfully set down. He skimmed through the records, reading the most interesting bits of information out aloud for the benefit of his youthful companions.

From the log book it was learned that the *Good Hope* had met with indifferent luck on her long three years' cruise, but had suddenly run into a most extraordinary bit of good fortune.

"Listen to this, boys," exclaimed the ensign with what, for one of his self-contained nature, was strong excitement, "it reads like a bit of wild romance."

Without further preface he began reading:

"May, 1883 – This day encountered the strangest thing in all my experience. As set down, we have drifted into the Antarctic ice pack. This day sighted a berg within which was a dark, shadowy object. On going in the ship boats to investigate we saw to our amazement that the said object was a ship. The ice surrounding it was thin, mostly having melted.

"From what I knew of such craft I decided, incredible as the idea might seem, that the craft within the berg was a long frozen up Viking ship. Not knowing just what her recovery might mean, I undertook to blast her free of her prison. We had plenty of dynamite on board for the very purpose of ice-blasting. By three of this p. m. we had the ship blasted open. I and my officers at once entered the hole the explosive had made in the craft's side. We expected to find strange things, but none of us was prepared for what followed. The hold of the imprisoned ship was full of ivory.

"My first officer, William Clydesdale, an Englishman, and a college man before strong drink ruined him, pronounced the ivory to be that of the tusks of the extinct mammoths which scientists say formerly inhabited these regions."

"Phew! This is romance with a vengeance!" exclaimed Rob.

"Did they get the ivory?" asked the practical Paul Perkins.

"Yes," rejoined the officer, rapidly skimming over the further pages of the log, "and they estimated the stuff roughly at about five hundred thousand dollars' worth of exceptional quality."

"How did the ship get frozen in the ice?" asked Hiram. "The Viking ship, I mean."

"Who can tell," returned the ensign. "I have heard of such things at the North Pole. Several explorers have even brought back fragments of the Norseman's lost craft; but I never heard of such an occurrence transpiring in the Antarctic regions. But let's read on."

The log continued to tell of hardships encountered in beating back around the Horn with the valuable cargo; of discontent of the crew; of their constant demand to have the hoard divided equally among the officers and men, and of the captain's refusal to accede to their requests. Finally the entries

began to grow short and disconnected, as if whoever was writing up the log was on constant watch and had little time to spare. Indeed, one entry read:

"Mutiny threatens constantly. The men mean to seize the ivory and take to the boats."

Following that no entries were made for several days. Then came a startling announcement, both in its brevity and suggestiveness of tragedy.

CHAPTER V. A MESSAGE FROM THE PAST

"What I dreaded has come to pass," read out the ensign; "the men mutinied, but thanks be to Providence, we are safe. But a fearful catastrophe overtook the misguided fellows. Short handed as we were, having lost ten hands by scurvy and drowning in the South Seas, the crew mustered but eight men. Thus, with my two officers, we were three against them. The attack came at midnight on July 27th, 1883. Luckily we were on the watch, and as the men came aft we met them with firearms. Four went down at the first volley. Three died shortly, the other the next day.

"The remainder fled, but before I could stop them my officers had shot down three, leaving only the cook alive. I saved his life. But as we were examining the injured, one of them whipped out a knife and killed my first officer. The next day we buried the dead and worked the ship as best we could with three hands. Luckily the breeze was light, for in a brisk blow we could not have handled the ship.

"Finding ourselves off the coast of the Carolinas, and despairing of navigating the ship to port, we ran in and anchored off a small desolate island. On it grew a few scrub trees, but not much else. After a consultation we decided to abandon the ship; but first we agreed, while the weather was fair, to bury the ivory on one of the islands. It was a long, tedious task, but at last it was done, and the spot where it had been secreted, marked.

"This done, we rowed back to the ship to obtain my chronometers, papers, and so forth. I should have explained that we had but one boat, heavy seas off the Horn having smashed four of them, and a fifth was broken in a fight with a whale. I was some time below, getting papers, when suddenly I heard a splash of oars. By some inspiration, I guessed what had happened. Rushing on deck I was in time to behold my rascally second mate and the cook rowing from the ship with might and main.

"I shouted, entreated, and raged. But it was all in vain. All the rascals did was to laugh at me. I might have guessed their terrible purpose to maroon me on my own ship, but I had paid no heed to some whispering I had observed between them while on the island working at the burial of the ivory. All this has been written since they abandoned me in so cowardly a fashion for the sake of the ivory. Their intent, I readily guessed. They would reach the shore ahead of me. Find some capital, get a ship and seize the whole cache. I count myself lucky that they did not kill me outright."

By this time the boys were leaning forward, all else forgotten in the thrilling interest of the extraordinary narrative.

The ensign read on.

"I find no more entries till several days later," he said, "then comes this one:

"Since last I wrote I have encountered a fearful experience. The night succeeding the occasion on which the two villains left the ship, a terrific gale came up off shore. Unable to reef sail single-handed, I was compelled to cut the cable and head out for sea. For three days we scudded before the gale. The canvas was torn to ribbons, and one after another my masts went. I managed to cut the wreckage free with an axe.

...

"Some days later. What is happening to the ship? She is being drawn by some strong but invisible current. There is no wind, but she is moving fairly fast. What can be going to happen to me? One thing is sure, I am out of the track of ocean vessels. Heaven help me, for I fear I am beyond human aid!"

"The poor fellow's mind evidently gave way soon after this," said the ensign; "the entries grow disjointed and wild. He declares the cabin is haunted. That the ghosts of the dead mutineers haunt the ship. At last they cease abruptly with the words, 'God be merciful to me, I am going mad.'"

A silence fell over the party in the dead mariner's cabin. The mystery, the spell of the horror of it all, was strong upon them. In each lad's mind was a vivid picture of the unfortunate captain held in the grip of a strange current, being driven day by day further from the track of ships, while his fevered mind pictured ghostly forms all about him.

"How do you suppose his death came?" asked Rob, after the silence had endured some moments.

"I have an ugly suspicion which I shall soon verify," said the ensign; "you boys wait here for a time."

Alone he reëntered the deck-house, where sat the dead seaman. When he returned his face was very grave.

"Boys, my suspicions were correct," he said; "by the man's side I found a pistol. Undoubtedly, crazed by despair, he ended his life."

"After writing this strange paper?" asked Rob.

"Evidently. To judge from the jumble of figures, it was the product of his poor, demented brain."

"If you don't mind, I'll keep it, though," said Rob. "I've an idea about it."

"In what way?"

"Why, that it may not be what you think, after all. It bears the earmarks of an orderly cipher and is not scrawled at all as are the final entries in the log book."

"That's right," agreed the ensign admiringly, "you Boy Scouts have mighty keen minds. Well, my boy, keep it and study it at your leisure, although I am free to confess that I cannot think of it otherwise than in the way mentioned."

"Perhaps you are right," said Rob, "but I'll have a try at puzzling it out, when I get time."

CHAPTER VI.

A STARTLING ADVENTURE

During the conversation recorded none of the party had given much thought to conditions outside. Now, when he stepped to the door of the cabin, the ensign uttered a sharp cry of consternation.

"What's the matter?" asked Rob, as he approached.

"Matter enough. Look there!" was the rejoinder.

A dense white fog had come softly rolling up, and now the derelict *Good Hope* lay enwrapped in fleecy white clouds, thick and impenetrable.

"Well, we'll have to wait here in the boat till this clears off," declared Bob; "we could never find the *Seneca* in this mess."

"That's the worst of it," rejoined the lieutenant, "there is no boat."

"No boat," echoed Rob uncomprehendingly; "but we came in one. It will be waiting for us."

"No. I gave orders for the men to return to the *Seneca* and bring over a destructive mine, for I had determined to blow up this dangerous menace to navigation. They have not returned, that is evident, or I would have been notified. Boys, we are in a bad fix. I don't know how fast this old hulk is drifting; but I imagine that if this keeps up much longer, we shall fetch up a long way from the *Seneca's* whereabouts."

"Can't they cruise about and find us?" asked Merritt rather piteously. He was not a lad to underestimate the real seriousness of their position on board the old hulk in the impenetrable fog that hung in blanket-like wreaths everywhere about them.

In reply to the boy's question the ensign declared that it would be impossible for the *Seneca* to pick them up until the weather cleared, if then.

"It would be risking the vessel to cruise about in this smother," he said; "why, she'd be as likely to strike the *Good Hope* as not!"

Rob's face grew long, though he did his best to make light of the situation.

"Then we've got to picnic here till the fog clears off," he said.

"That's the case exactly, Rob," was the officer's rejoinder.

"But what are we going to picnic on?" inquired Tubby anxiously. "There's no food or water on board, and we haven't brought any."

"There you go again. Always thinking of that precious tummy of yours," cried Hiram. "A little starving won't hurt you."

"Huh, just because you look like a human bean pole, you don't think anyone has a right to be fat. You're jealous, that's what you are," was the indignant reply of the fat youth.

Under other conditions there might have ensued a rough and tumble battle; but just at this instant, through the fog, there came the booming sound of a vessel's whistle.

"Waugh-gh-gh-gh!"

The long bellow sounded through the white, all-enveloping mist surrounding the old hulk and its young company of castaways.

"That's the *Seneca's* whistle," exclaimed the ensign anxiously. "She's calling for us."

"Gee! She must know that we can't come to her," exclaimed Paul Perkins.

"I guess she's 'standing by' till the fog lifts," rejoined the officer. "We'll release the bell. That may help to locate us."

But instead of standing by, it became apparent, before long, that the *Seneca* was cruising about. The reason for supposing this was that the next time they heard the hoot of the siren it sounded much further off.

The boys exchanged glances.

"How long do these fogs last, as a rule?" enquired Merritt.

"Impossible to say!" was the quick reply, with an anxious look about. "If only we could get a slant of wind!"

But there was not a breath stirring. Only the *Good Hope* swung to the soft swells, lifting and falling with a hopeless, helpless sort of motion. In fact, an experienced seaman could have told her waterlogged condition by the very "heft and heave" of her, which was sluggish to a degree.

"Well, I suppose we must make up our minds to spend some time here," said Rob, with another attempt to treat the matter lightly. "Goodness, our adventures are surely beginning early this trip!"

The others could not help but agree with the young leader of the Eagles, although they could hardly foresee the still more thrilling experiences that lay just ahead of them.

"I would suggest," began the ensign presently, "I would suggest that we search for some trace of food."

"Humph; mouldy ship's biscuits!" grunted Tubby half under his breath. "Even if there are any on board, they must be rotten by this time. This is a fine fix! Maybe we won't get any supper at all," and the fat boy looked positively tragic over the dire prospect.

But although Tubby had spoken in a low tone, more to himself than to anybody else, the ensign's sharp ears had overheard him.

"Young man," he said somewhat sternly, "if you want to be a good Boy Scout you must learn to take hardships as they come."

"Even missing meals?" asked Tubby, in an injured voice.

"Yes, even that," repeated the young officer with a smile, which in the Eagles' case was a perfect roar of laughter at Tubby's keen distress. The fat boy strode off sullenly by himself, gazing at the fog as he went in a very knowing way.

They searched the ship over for something that it would be possible to eat; but not so much as a crumb of edible supplies did they find. In one hold was discovered a number of barrels of "salt horse and pork," but they were all dried up and unfit for human food. The same thing applied to the biscuit kegs, and all the other supplies. It was out of the question to think of touching any of them.

"Whatever are we going to do?" gasped Rob, a note of real alarm in his voice for the first time.

The ensign's calmness served to steady all the boys a bit.

"Don't worry; everything will come out all right," he said; "we are in the track of ships, and –"

"But in this dense fog, that fact make it all the more dangerous," declared Rob, and the young officer could not but answer him with a nod in the affirmative.

"I can't help admitting that, my boy," was his further rejoinder; "all we can do is to trust to Providence and hope that the fog will disappear before long."

"Let's whistle for a wind," suggested Rob, who had heard of sailors doing such a thing.

"Better than doing nothing. It will fill the time in, anyway," agreed the ensign.

The boys squatted in a circle.

"What will we whistle?" asked Merritt.

"Wait Till the Clouds Roll By," of course," rejoined Rob.

As the plaintive notes came from the whistlers' puckered lips, Tubby sauntered up, his hands in his tunic pockets.

"What are you doing?" he asked, staring at them, "gone crazy with the heat, or what?"

"We're whistling for a wind," answered Merritt.

"Huh; why don't you whistle for grub?" demanded Tubby, turning on his heel, and striding gloomily off once more.

CHAPTER VII. TRAPPED BY FLAMES

Night fell and found them still in the same plight. The fog had shut in closer if anything. Since the last time they had caught the diminishing sound of the *Seneca's* siren, they had heard no sound from any vessel. Others besides Tubby were hungry on board the *Good Hope* that night. Then, too, the thought of the tragedy that had been consummated on board the derelict, and the gloom-inspiring presence of the silent figure in the forward deck house, were not calculated to inspire cheerful thoughts.

One thing they did have, and that was light. For in the course of their investigation of the old hulk they had stumbled across several old candle lanterns, the candles in which were still capable of burning. One of these lanterns was lashed to the stump of the forward mast, but the other was hung up in the cabin below. For it was in this latter place that the little party of castaways gathered and tried, by telling stories and cracking jokes, to keep their spirits in the ascendent.

But their efforts were not very successful. As the Scotch say, "It's ill jesting on an empty stomach," and that is the malady from which they all were suffering. Thirst did not as yet trouble them much, but they knew that if they were not speedily picked up by some vessel, that would also be added to their ordeal.

So the night passed away, with the castaways watching in turn for some ray of hope of the fog lifting. It was soon after midnight, and in Rob's watch, that a startling thing happened – something that brought his heart into his mouths, and set his every nerve on vibrant edge.

The boy was sitting up forward, pondering the strangeness of the day's happenings, when suddenly, right ahead of him, as it seemed, the fog was split by the hoarse shriek of a steamer's whistle.

Rob's scalp tightened from alarm as he leaped for the lantern.

"Look out!" he shouted at the top of his voice; "look out!"

But for reply there only came back out of the dense smother ahead another raucous call of the big steam whistle.

"Gracious! We'll be run down! We'll be sunk!" cried the boy, half wild with alarm.

He shouted to his companions to come on deck; but before they could obey, a huge, black bulk loomed up right above the derelict. Rob shouted at the top of his voice. It seemed as if the *Good Hope* would be cut in two and that the steamer was also doomed to disaster if she struck.

Through the blackness flashed a green side-light, and then came the rushing by of the great hull, with its rows of illuminated portholes. Rob stood stock still. He was fairly rooted to the spot with panic. But the big steamer raced by in the blackness and fog without anyone on board her ever dreaming that she had been in such close proximity to the drifting derelict.

As her stern lights flashed for an instant and then were shut out in the fog, Rob's companions came rushing on deck.

"What is it? What has happened?" demanded the ensign, readily perceiving that something very serious had occurred.

Rob, still shaky from his experience, related, as briefly as possible, just what had caused his cry of alarm.

"Well, those liners take desperate chances," commented the officer; "had they struck us, not only we, but they, would have been seriously injured."

"Gee! I wish you could have found time to ask 'em to throw us some sandwiches," said Tubby, rubbing his stomach; "I'm as empty as a dry gourd."

"I reckon we could all do with something to eat," chorused the other young "Eagles".

The ensign bade them cheer up.

"By daylight we may have a wind, and then, with the fog gone, it won't take long for some vessel to pick us up."

He spoke with a cheerfulness he was actually far from feeling. In fact, his boyish listeners were not inclined to look hopefully on the situation. By this time every one of them would have given almost all he possessed for a big pitcher of cool ice water.

"I will take the remainder of your watch, Rob," said the ensign, with a glance at his watch. "You only had a few minutes to serve anyway, and the next round of duty is mine."

"Very well," said Rob; "to tell the truth, a nap would feel pretty good. I hope things will have cleared by the time I wake up."

The boys went below, leaving the officer on the fog-circled deck. The mist gleamed on everything, the rays of the candle-lamp making them glisten as if water had been newly poured on them. Far off the hoarse hooting of the ship that had so nearly run them down was to be heard.

"Narrow escape, that! Narrower than I quite care to admit, even to myself," mused the young officer. "I wonder if those lads realize how bad a fix we are in. I must confess I don't like the look of things at all."

He fell to pacing the deck, and then decided to have a cigar. For this purpose he produced a perfecto from his pocket and lighted it. Then he fell to pacing the deck once more, thinking deeply. His cigar finished, he tossed it aside. Possibly it was his worry over their predicament that made him absent-minded in this regard, but instead of observing the rule of the sea to cast all such things overboard, he threw it to the deck. A lurch of the *Good Hope* caused the glowing butt of the cigar to go rolling across the deck and to drop into the hold below.

It was some time later that Paul Perkins came on deck to take his turn at the night vigil.

As he came forward he was startled to see what appeared to be a ghostly figure, slightly darker than the fog, slip from the forward hold and glide across the deck toward the ensign, who was pacing up and down. Much startled, Paul called out aloud, and at the same instant a peculiar acrid odor came to his nostrils.

"Something's burning!" he cried.

Simultaneously he had come up to the side of the hatch and saw that smoke was pouring from it. What he had taken for a ghostly figure was a whirl of smoke.

"Fire! Something's on fire below!" cried the boy, dashing forward.

The ensign reached the edge of the hold as quickly. Together they peered over into the great open space below. Both involuntarily recoiled with a cry of horror and alarm at what they saw.

The *Good Hope's* hold was a mass of flames! To gaze into them was like looking into a red hot furnace.

Adrift in a blinding fog, on a burning ship, and without boats, was a predicament the like of which their adventurous lives had never before encountered!

The cigar so carelessly cast aside by the ensign had fallen upon a pile of sacking, grease-soaked and inflammable, lying in the former whaler's hold. Like all whale ships the timbers of the *Good Hope* were literally soaked with grease, the result of whale oil and blubber. Such timbers burn like matchwood.

Small wonder that, brave man as he was, and schooled against emotional display in the stern school of the Navy, the ensign should yet cry out:

"If help does not arrive, we are doomed to die like rats!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A BOY SCOUT SIGNAL

It was five minutes later that the whole company of castaways was gathered around the hatchway. A red glare from below shone on their faces, illuminating expressions of dismay and apprehension.

"What can we do?" gasped out Rob. "There are no boats, no means of escape!"

"We'll be burned to death," shuddered Paul Perkins.

All looked to the ensign for some suggestion. His tightly compressed lips and drawn features suggested that he was thinking deeply, thinking as men think whose very lives depend upon quick decision.

"We must put on the hatches," he said decisively; "there they lie yonder. That will deprive the fire of oxygen and give us at least a few hours before we have to vacate."

The coverings of the hatch, big, thick planks, lay not far away. Evidently they lay just as they did on the day that the cargo of mammoth tusks had been taken from the *Good Hope* and hidden. Working with feverish energy, the boys soon had the hatch covered tightly. But the work had almost exhausted their strength. The fumes of the blazing hold and the suffocating black smoke that rolled out, had almost caused them to succumb.

Their desperate task accomplished, they lay panting on the deck, incapable, for the time being, of further effort. However, with the hatch in place and tightly dovetailed, there was a gleam of hope that the flames might be smothered, or at least held in check till the fog cleared and they could sight a vessel.

The first faint glimmering of dawn, shown by an increasing transparency in the fog, found the derelict still lying inert. But a second later the boys were on their feet with a cheer. A light breeze had sprung up and the fog was agitated by it like drifting steam. Little by little the breeze increased and the fog thinned out to mere wisps. The sun shone through and disclosed a glimmering expanse of sea stretched all about. But, to their bitter disappointment, the great heaving expanse was empty of life. Not a sail or a sign of a steamer marred its lonely surface.

They exchanged dismayed looks. There was no knowing at what moment the fiery, seething furnace beneath their very feet might break through and force them to fight for their existence.

Already the decks were hot. Aside from this, however, so well did the hatch fit that not even a wisp of smoke escaped. Except the extreme heat, there was nothing to indicate that the interior of the *Good Hope's* hull was a fiery furnace.

The hours wore on, the little company of castaways dreading every moment that what they feared might happen. Still no indication that the fire was about to break through occurred. But their sufferings from thirst were terrible. One after another the Boy Scouts sank to the decks in a sort of coma. Rob, Merritt, and the ensign himself alone retained their strength.

"If some vessel doesn't appear before long we are doomed."

It was Rob who spoke, and the mere fact that the others were silent indicated plainly that they shared his opinion.

Despite their sufferings and anxiety a bright lookout was kept. It was Rob who electrified them by a sudden shout:

"Look! Look out there to the north!"

"A sail!" shouted the ensign, springing to his feet.

"Yes. A steam yacht, rather! She's coming this way, too!"

"That's what. But how can we signal her? If she doesn't hurry she may be too late!"

"We can wave and shout!"

The ensign shook his head.

"She is too far off to see or hear us. Is there no other way to attract her?"

A dozen plans were thought of and discarded. Then Rob spoke:

"I've thought of a way, but it's a desperate one."

"Never mind, what is it?"

"We will signal her in Boy Scout fashion. Maybe there is someone on board who understands it."

The others looked puzzled. Rob hastened to explain.

"You all know the smoke column system of signalling?"

"I see what you mean!" shouted Merritt. "You mean to send up two columns of smoke meaning 'Help! We are lost!'"

Rob nodded.

"But how is that possible?" demanded the ensign, with a puzzled inflection in his tones. "We've got a whole ship full of smoke under us, of course, but I don't see how we are going to utilize it in the way you suggest."

"I've thought it out," declared Rob modestly.

He produced his heavy-bladed scouting knife.

"Merritt, you take your knife and we'll cut two holes in the top of the hatch. That will make two smoke columns, and if anyone on that yacht is a Scout, they will come rushing at top speed toward us!"

"Jove! You boys are resourceful, indeed!" cried the ensign admiringly.

Without more ado the boys fell to work on their task. They cut the holes about ten feet apart. It was hard work, but they stuck to it perseveringly, and at last, from the two holes, two columns of black smoke spouted up. Luckily for their plans the wind had, by this time, moderated so much as to have fallen almost flat.

High into the heavens soared the two black columns of smoke like two pillars of inky vapor.

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