

Stratemeyer Edward

**Dave Porter At Bear Camp: or,
The Wild Man of Mirror Lake**



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PREFACE

"Dave Porter at Bear Camp" is a complete story in itself, but forms the eleventh volume in a line issued under the general title of "Dave Porter Series."

As I have mentioned several times, this series was started a number of years ago by the publication of "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," in which my young readers were introduced to a typical, wide-awake American lad at an up-to-date American boarding school.

The publication of this first volume was followed by that of "Dave Porter in the South Seas," whither the lad journeyed to clear up a question concerning his parentage. Then came "Dave Porter's Return to School," telling of more doings at Oak Hall; "Dave Porter in the Far North," in which he went on a second journey looking for his father; "Dave Porter and His Classmates," relating more happenings at school; "Dave Porter at Star Ranch," in which our hero participated in many adventures in the wild West; "Dave Porter and His Rivals," showing how he outwitted some of his old-time enemies; "Dave Porter on Cave Island," giving the particulars of a remarkable voyage on the ocean and strange doings ashore; "Dave Porter and the Runaways," in which the youth taught some of his chums a much-needed lesson; and finally "Dave Porter in the Gold Fields," in which the lad and a number of his chums went in quest of a gold mine, all traces of which had been lost through a landslide.

The present volume tells the particulars of a thrilling rescue from fire at sea, and how the boys and girls, along with some of the older folks, went for a vacation in a camp on the shore of a beautiful lake. Here, most unexpectedly, Dave fell in with one of his old enemies. The youth and his chums had some strenuous times, the particulars of which are given in the pages which follow.

Once again I avail myself of the opportunity to thank my young readers for all the pleasant things they have said regarding my stories. I trust that the reading of this volume will benefit them all.

Edward Stratemeyer.

March 1, 1915.

CHAPTER I

THE BOYS ON SHIPBOARD

"Phil, your father seems to be a good deal worried this morning. I hope it isn't on account of the way we cut up on this ship last evening."

"Not at all, Dave," returned Phil Lawrence. "I don't believe he noticed our monkey-shines. He is worried over the letter he received in the mail we got at our last stopping-place."

"No bad news I hope?" said Roger Morr, another one of the group of boys seated on the forward deck of a small coastwise steamer.

"Well, I think it is rather bad news," answered the son of the vessel's owner. "Poor dad stands to lose between twenty and thirty thousand dollars."

"Twenty or thirty thousand dollars!" exclaimed Dave Porter. "Why, how can that be, Phil?"

"Did he make a bad investment?" asked Ben Basswood, another youth of the group.

"You can hardly call it a bad investment, Ben," returned Phil. "Buying the land was all right enough in the first place. It's trying to get rid of it that's the sticker."

"You are talking in riddles, Phil," said Roger Morr. "Won't you explain?"

"Maybe Phil doesn't care to explain," broke in Dave Porter, quickly. "It may be his father's private business, you know."

"Oh, I don't think he'll object to my telling you the details," responded the shipowner's son. "It isn't very much of a secret where we live, or in East Haven."

"East Haven? Is that the place across the river from where you live?" queried Dave Porter.

"Yes. It's quite a bustling little town, too, although when my father and his older brother, Lester Lawrence, bought the tract of land there it didn't amount to much, and they got the ground for a song."

"I'd like to buy some land for a song," put in another youth of the group. "Then I might sell it and make a handsome profit. Say," he continued, his face brightening up, "that puts me in mind of a story. Once there was a man who wanted to –"

"Hold on, Shadow. It isn't your turn to tell stories now," interrupted Dave. "We want to hear what Phil has to say."

"This story wouldn't take but a minute," grumbled Maurice Hamilton, otherwise known as "Shadow." "It's a dandy one, too."

"All right, we'll listen to it later," returned Roger Morr. "Let us first hear what Phil has to tell."

"It isn't so much of a story," said the shipowner's son. "You see, years ago my dad and his older brother purchased a tract of land at East Haven, along the waterfront. For some time it was idle, and then it was leased to a lumber company, who used it for a number of years as a lumber yard. At that time East Haven had no railroad, but the L. A. & H. line came through that way and wanted to cross the river at East Haven, and wanted to locate their railroad repair shops along the waterfront there. They have made my father an offer for the land, and if that tract could be sold my folks would stand to make a profit of twenty to thirty thousand dollars."

"Well, why not sell the land then – unless you think it is worth more than the railroad company is willing to pay?" asked Dave.

"My father is willing enough to sell, and has been for some time; but he can't give the railroad a clear title, and consequently the deal is at a standstill."

"Oh, I see, Phil," said Roger Morr. "That is the worst of buying land that has a flaw in the title."

"There wasn't any flaw in the title when my father and my Uncle Lester purchased the ground," returned the shipowner's son. And now his face clouded. "The trouble has all come up within the last five years – that is, it wouldn't have come up at all if it hadn't been for what happened about five years ago."

"Oh, I think I know to what you refer, Phil," cried Dave, quickly. "I remember now that you told me about your old Uncle Lester. Didn't you ever hear from him?"

"Not a word, Dave. And that is why my father can't sell the land."

"I don't understand this," said Ben Basswood.

"And neither do I," added Shadow Hamilton.

"Well, it's this way: About five years ago my folks were connected with a trust company in the town where we live. My Uncle Lester was one of several men who had charge of certain funds, and these funds were kept in a safe-deposit vault belonging to the company. One day it was found that some of these funds had disappeared. Suspicion pointed to my uncle, and although he protested his entire innocence, some of the other trust company officials were in favor of having him arrested. A warrant was sworn out, but before it could be served my uncle left home and went to another State. Then the local paper came out with an article which stated that the bank officials had evidence that Lester Lawrence was undoubtedly guilty. My uncle got a copy of this paper – it was found later in the room he had occupied at a hotel – and this evidently frightened him so much that he disappeared."

"Do you mean to say that he disappeared for good?" queried Ben.

"Yes, he took a train out of town, and that was the last seen or heard of him. My father did all he could to locate Uncle Lester. He had men searching for him, and he advertised in the newspapers. But up to the present time he hasn't heard a word from him or of him. He is half inclined to believe that my uncle is dead."

"Perhaps he went to some foreign country," suggested Dave.

"But how does that affect the title to the land?" questioned Shadow Hamilton.

"Easily enough," was the reply of the shipowner's son. "My uncle held a one-quarter interest in the tract. In order to give a clear title to the railroad company it would be necessary for Uncle Lester to sign the deed. The railroad company – nor any one else for that matter – won't buy the land without a clear title."

"I don't wonder that your father is worried," said Dave, sympathetically. "I suppose he feels just as bad over the continued absence of your uncle as he does over the fact that he can't sell the land and make a profit on it."

"That's just it, Dave," answered Phil. "We'd give a good deal to know what has become of Uncle Lester."

"I suppose he doesn't dare come back for fear of being arrested," was Shadow's comment. "Even if he is innocent they may be able to convict him."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you about that," burst out Phil. "Less than four months after my uncle disappeared, some men were arrested in Springfield, for a theft committed at one of the banks there. During the trial it came out that one of these criminals had been in our town during the time when the funds disappeared from our trust company. This rascal's movements were traced by the authorities, and then he was given what they call 'the third degree.' At that examination he broke down, and admitted that he had taken the funds which my Uncle Lester was supposed to have stolen. The affair created a great stir, and those who had proceeded against my uncle made all sorts of apologies to my father. They also did their best to locate Uncle Lester."

"And didn't they hear anything at all?" asked Ben.

"Not a word. We got what we thought were clues, but every one of them proved false."

"Maybe he is dead."

"That may be. But if we can't prove it, it leaves the matter of the land just as unsettled as before."

"If your uncle is alive he must remember about the land, and must know that the matter will give your father a lot of trouble," suggested Roger.

"That is true, Roger. But when a man is accused of a grave crime like that, he isn't apt to think about other things."

"You say he is older than your father?" queried Dave.

"Oh, yes, a good deal older – ten or twelve years, at least. If he is still alive he must be well advanced in years."

"What does your father propose to do about the land?" questioned Ben, after a pause in the conversation.

"He doesn't know what to do. He's at a complete standstill."

"Won't the railroad company lease the land?" questioned Dave.

"No. They told dad that they wanted to buy and build. They prefer his land to any other in East Haven, but at the same time, if they can't get his property, they are going to look elsewhere."

"Twenty or thirty thousand dollars is a heap of money to let slip through one's fingers," was Shadow's comment. "It's a shame you can't find out where your uncle is, or what has become of him."

"Why not advertise again?" suggested Dave. "If your uncle is still alive he must read some newspapers, and he might possibly see the notice."

"Father thinks something of doing that, Dave, but it looks like rather a hopeless case," returned Phil Lawrence. He arose from the camp-chair on which he had been sitting, and stretched himself. "But come on, fellows," he continued. "There is no use of your worrying over our troubles. We came on this little trip to enjoy ourselves, and I want all of you to have the best time possible."

"And we certainly have had a good time!" cried Dave. "Just as good a time as we had out in Yellowstone Park."

"That is, Dave, considering the girls are not along," remarked Ben, with a wink at the others.

"Well, of course that makes some difference, Ben," returned Dave, his face flushing a trifle.

"Sure it does! A whole lot of difference!" declared Roger. "Just the same, we are having a dandy time, Phil," he added hastily. "The first outing of the Oak Hall Club is a big success."

"It sure is!" broke in Shadow Hamilton. "Only I did hope we'd see a whale or some sharks or something like that," he added, regretfully.

"I suppose if you saw a shark, Shadow, you'd jump right overboard to interview him, wouldn't you?" queried Ben, and gave a snicker.

"Say, speaking of sharks puts me in mind of a story!" cried Shadow. "Once there was a sailor who had traveled all around the world. He met a lady in Boston who wanted him to tell her a shark story. Says the sailor: 'Madam, I've seen sharks in the Atlantic an' the Pacific an' the Indian Oceans, but all of them sharks wasn't a patch to the shark I once met on land.' 'On land!' cried the lady from Boston. 'Do you mean to say that you met a shark on land?' 'I did, Madam,' answered the sailor. 'I met a shark right in New York, and he did me out of every copper I had in my pockets. He was a hotel-keeper who played cards.'" And at this little yarn there was a general smile.

"Pretty good for a fish story," was Roger's comment. "Just the same, I don't want to fall in with any sharks whether on land or at sea."

"Before we land to-night, I want to settle about this outing we expect to take at Mirror Lake," said Dave. "If you fellows are going along, we'll have to make the necessary arrangements."

"Well, you can count on me, Dave," returned Roger, promptly. "I told you at the start that I'd be glad to go with you."

"And so will I be glad to go," added Phil.

"I've got to find out what my folks want me to do first," said Shadow. He looked curiously at Dave, who was gazing far out to sea. "What are you looking at, Dave?" he asked.

"I'm watching that smoke out there," was the answer.

"That's only the smoke from some incoming steamer," returned Ben. "I noticed that a few minutes ago."

"Maybe it is from a steamer," returned Dave, "but I don't think it is coming from any funnel."

"What do you think it is – a fire?" cried Phil. And at these words all the boys on the deck rushed to the rail.

"It looks that way to me. Let us get the glasses and find out."

"I'll get them!" cried Roger; and lost no time in disappearing into the cabin.

A minute later he reappeared with a pair of powerful marine glasses which he handed to Phil. The glasses were quickly adjusted, and the shipowner's son took a hasty look seaward.

"It's a small steamer, all right," he announced. "Just as sure as you're born, there's a fire on board."

"Fire!" repeated Roger.

"If she's on fire we ought to go to the rescue!" exclaimed Dave.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING ABOUT THE PAST

"What's this I hear about fire?"

The question came from a burly, pleasant-faced man, who had just appeared on deck, close to the boys. It was Mr. Lawrence, the owner of the steamer.

"Why, Dad, there's a steamer out there, and we think she's on fire," answered Phil, quickly. "Here, take a look at her." And he handed over the marine glasses.

"On fire!" exclaimed Mr. Lawrence, and raised the glasses to his eyes. "By Jove, boys, I think you're right! Phil, call Captain Bradley, and be quick about it. You'll find him in the after cabin. I just left him there."

The son darted off, and while he was gone Mr. Lawrence and the boys took turns in looking through the glasses at the distant vessel. The smoke was now increasing, and as it did not come from the funnel of the steamer, there was no doubt but that the vessel was on fire.

"You sent for me, Mr. Lawrence?" inquired the captain of the steamer, as he hurried up with Phil at his heels.

"Yes, Captain. There's another steamer out there, and we are pretty sure she's on fire," answered Mr. Lawrence. "Change your course and put on speed." And as he spoke the shipowner turned the glasses over to the captain.

Captain Bradley gave one searching look. "It's true! She's on fire, and we had better get to her as soon as possible!" he cried, and then hurried away to give the necessary directions. Soon the bow of the *Eaglet*, which was the name of the steamer, was headed in the direction of the craft that seemed to be in trouble.

"If she's really in danger, I hope we get there soon enough to help those on board," said Dave.

"Captain Bradley will do his best; you can rely on that," answered Mr. Lawrence, gravely. "But that steamer is farther off than some of you may imagine. Distances over the water are rather deceptive."

Many of my young readers are doubtless already well acquainted with Dave Porter. For the benefit of those who are now meeting the youth for the first time, something of an introduction may not be out of place.

When but a child of tender age, our hero had been found one day walking along the railroad tracks near the town of Crumville. He could tell nothing about himself or where he belonged, and was taken to the local poorhouse, where he remained for a number of years, finally being bound out to a retired college professor, named Caspar Potts, who was then running a small farm for his health. The professor did what he could for the lad, giving him a fairly good education. But Professor Potts was no farmer and soon got into financial difficulties with a mean money-lender, named Aaron Poole, and would have lost his farm had it not been for something out of the ordinary happening.

One of the main industries of Crumville was a large jewelry factory, owned by Mr. Oliver Wadsworth. Mr. Wadsworth had a beautiful young daughter, named Jessie, and one day through an explosion of an automobile gasoline tank, the young miss was in danger of being burned to death when Dave came to her rescue. This so pleased the Wadsworths that they came not only to the aid of the boy, but also assisted Caspar Potts, who was discovered to be one of Mr. Wadsworth's former instructors at college.

"The lad shall go to boarding-school and get a good education," said Oliver Wadsworth. And he accordingly sent Dave away from home, as related in the first book of this series, entitled "Dave Porter at Oak Hall." At that school our hero made many warm friends, including Phil Lawrence, the

son of a wealthy shipowner; Roger Morr, the offspring of a United States senator; Shadow Hamilton, who was known far and wide for his yarn-spinning qualities; and many others.

In those days the great cloud resting over Dave had been the question of his identity, and when some of his enemies spoke of him as "that poorhouse nobody," he resolved to find out who he really was. Getting a strange clue, he set out on a remarkable ocean voyage, as related in "Dave Porter in the South Seas," and was gratified to fall in with his uncle, Dunston Porter, a great hunter and traveler. Then the lad came back to Oak Hall, as related in "Dave Porter's Return to School." He next went in quest of his father, as told in "Dave Porter in the Far North."

"Now they can't say that I'm a 'poorhouse nobody,'" he told his chums, after having met his father. And then, with a light heart, he came back to boarding-school once again, as related in "Dave Porter and His Classmates." Here he made more friends than ever, but likewise some bitter enemies, including one Link Merwell, the son of a ranch-owner of the West. Merwell did all he could to cause Dave trouble, but in the end was exposed and had to leave Oak Hall.

"I hope I never fall in with Link Merwell again," Dave said to his school chums, but this was not to be. Dave had not only found his father and an uncle, but he had also found a sister, Laura Porter, who was very dear to him. Laura had a young lady friend, named Belle Endicott, who lived in the Far West, and through this friend Dave and his chums, and also Laura, as well as Jessie Wadsworth, received an invitation to spend some time at the Endicott place. They had a great deal of fun and not a few adventures, all of which have been set down in "Dave Porter at Star Ranch." Not far from the Endicott place was the home of Link Merwell, and that young man, as before, tried to make trouble, but his efforts were frustrated and he left home under a cloud.

From the ranch Dave and his chums returned again to Oak Hall, as recorded in "Dave Porter and His Rivals." Then came the Christmas Holidays, and Dave went back to Crumville, where he and his folks were now living with the Wadsworth family in their elegant mansion on the outskirts of the town. Directly after Christmas there was a thrilling jewelry robbery at Mr. Wadsworth's factory. It was Dave, aided by some of his chums, who got on the track of the robbers and trailed them to the South and then to sea, as related in "Dave Porter on Cave Island."

When our hero and his chums went back to Oak Hall they imagined that their adventures were at an end. But soon came in news of a strange man who was terrorizing the neighborhood. Some very unusual things happened, including an attempt to blow up a neighboring hotel. Some of the students were thought guilty, and fearing arrest, they fled in terror, as told of in "Dave Porter and the Runaways." Dave was not one of those who ran away, but he did go after the others, and made them come back to face the music, and also helped to clear up what had been a great mystery. Then all the boys graduated from Oak Hall, Dave receiving high honors.

It is needless to say that our hero at that time was one of the happiest boys in the world. His folks and Jessie Wadsworth came to the graduation, which was celebrated with big bonfires, music by a band, and refreshments in the gymnasium.

Dave had promised Roger Morr that he would pay the Senator's son a visit. He did so, along with Phil and some others, and on that occasion heard about a gold mine which had been willed to Mrs. Morr, and which had been completely swallowed up by a landslide. Numerous searches had been made for this lost mine, but up to that time without result.

"Let us go in search of the lost mine," Dave had said. And how he and Roger and some of the others made the trip to the West and went on a hunt for the mine has been told in detail in the volume entitled "Dave Porter in the Gold Fields."

While the lads were on this quest, they again fell in with Link Merwell, who with Job Haskers, a former teacher at Oak Hall, was also trying to locate the lost mine. The two parties had many adventures, and when at last the missing mine was relocated, there came another landslide which nearly cost Dave and his friends their lives. When they finally reached a place of safety they were joined by a man from the other party who had suffered severely, and who told them that Link Merwell

and Job Haskers, as well as a third person of the party, had been swept away to their death. Later on Dave and his friends had looked for the missing persons, but had been unable to locate them.

The finding of the Landslide Mine, as it was called, had been of great financial benefit to the Morr family, and they had been so pleased that they had given Dave and some of the others a share in the holding. In the meanwhile our hero and his chums, along with their friends, had finished their outing in the West by a grand tour through Yellowstone Park, on which they were accompanied by Dave's sister, Jessie and Belle, and some others.

"Now you fellows have got to come on a little trip with me," Phil had said, after coming East, and had explained that a small steamer belonging to his father was then tied up at Philadelphia, getting ready for a trip to Portland, Maine, and back.

"That will be fine," Dave had answered; and a little later a party had been made up, including Phil, Dave, Roger, and Shadow, and also Ben Basswood, who, as my old readers know, was one of Dave's old friends from Crumville. With the boys went Mr. Lawrence. When embarking on this trip, none of those on board had dreamed of the strenuous time now so close at hand.

"I wonder how long it will take us to reach that vessel?" observed Roger, after Mr. Lawrence had followed the captain.

"A quarter of an hour at least," replied Dave. "It will depend somewhat on how much steam the firemen can get up. I don't believe we are running at full speed now."

"This steamer used to be a pretty good boat," said Phil, "but she is getting old now, and I heard dad say something about laying her up for repairs next Fall."

"Wonder if we'll get a chance to do any rescue work," observed Ben.

"I guess we'll do all we can," returned Shadow.

"Look! Look!" cried Dave, pointing with his hand. "The smoke is getting thicker than ever!"

"Maybe the poor people on that steamer will have to jump overboard before we can reach them," said Phil. "A fire like that must be pretty hot."

Soon the youths knew by the pounding of the engine that the *Eaglet* was running at increased speed. The course had been changed, and now the craft was headed directly for the burning boat.

"She's a rather small affair, that's certain," remarked Roger.

"Looks to me as if she might be a pleasure boat," remarked Phil, who, taking after his father, knew considerable about sea-going matters. "She's a private steam yacht, to my way of thinking." And later on this proved to be the case.

As the *Eaglet* drew closer to the burning vessel, the boys saw that there was great excitement on board the steam yacht. Sailors and others were rushing to and fro over the deck, and two streams of water from hoses were being directed to one part of the vessel, down a hatchway. The smoke was as thick as ever, and sometimes, as the wind shifted, the steam yacht was hidden entirely from view.

Fortunately the sea was comparatively calm, there being only a slight breeze from the northeast. As the *Eaglet* drew closer, the boys heard Captain Bradley giving directions to some of the sailors to get ready to launch two of the small boats.

"Dad, why can't we take another small boat and go out?" asked Phil of his father. "We know how to row. We did lots of it on the river up at Oak Hall."

"Very well," answered Mr. Lawrence. "But I want all of you to keep out of danger."

Soon they were within hailing distance of the steam yacht. They could now see the persons on deck plainly, and made out fully a score of men, and three or four women, and also one or two children. The smoke was as thick as ever, but so far no flames were visible.

"Save us, oh, save us!" screamed some one aboard the burning vessel. "We are burning up!"

The words had scarcely been uttered when there came from the interior of the steam yacht a dull explosion. Then, of a sudden, something that looked like a bunch of rockets flew up into the air. With a loud hissing and with sparks flying in all directions, the bunch of rockets described a graceful curve and then headed directly for the deck of the *Eaglet*!

CHAPTER III

THE RESCUE AT SEA

"Look out there!"

"Don't let those rockets hit you!"

"Say, this is like a Fourth of July!"

Such were some of the cries that came from the boys on the forward deck of the steamer when they saw the bunch of rockets flying swiftly toward them. They had barely time to leap to one side when, with a loud hissing, two of the rockets fell on the deck not far away. The others just grazed the rail and swept overboard.

"We've got to put them out!" yelled Phil, and started to rush forward, intending to stamp on the rockets, when Dave hauled him back.

"Look out, Phil! They may be on the point of explo – "

Bang! Bang! Dave did not have time to finish what he was saying when the rockets went off in rapid succession, hurling the bits of fire in all directions. Phil was burnt a little on one cheek, and Dave and Roger each had a hand scorched, but that was all. Then, realizing that the worst was over, all the boys rushed forward and stamped out what was left of the flames.

"Anybody hurt up there?" It was a cry from Captain Bradley, who came forward on a run, followed by Mr. Lawrence.

"No. We're all right," gasped Phil. "But we might not be if it hadn't been for Dave;" and he gave our hero a grateful look.

The explosion on the steam yacht had caused a wilder panic than ever, and in a twinkling a number of those on board leaped into the water.

"Man the boats!" was the order from Captain Bradley.

The *Eaglet* had already heaved to, and two rowboats manned by the sailors and commanded by the first mate and a boatswain were soon lowered to the water. While this was being done, the boys, led by Phil and Dave, rushed to a third rowboat.

"Now be careful, boys," warned Mr. Lawrence. "Perhaps I had better go with you."

"Just as you say, Dad," answered Phil. "We can take care of ourselves though."

"All right then, I won't go, for you may want the room for those you pick up," answered the shipowner; and a moment later the rowboat was in the water and following the other small craft to the side of the burning vessel.

Seeing those from the *Eaglet* coming to the rescue, several others leaped overboard, so that those in the rowboats had all they could do to move without hitting any one.

"Save me! Save me! Don't let me drown!" yelled an elderly man, and caught hold of one of the oars.

"All right, we'll save you. Take it easy," returned the first mate of the *Eaglet*; and soon those in the mate's rowboat had the man on board. In the meantime, the boat in command of the boatswain pulled in a woman and a little boy.

Dave and his chums had their craft headed to where they had made out the forms of a woman and a girl struggling in the water. They soon reached the first of the pair, and after considerable difficulty managed to drag her on board.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" gasped the woman, as she sank down on the stern seat. "Now save Della! save Della!" she cried, and then suddenly collapsed.

Dave had his eyes on the girl, and was on the point of reaching for her when she suddenly threw up her arms and disappeared.

"She's gone under!" gasped Roger.

"Will she come up again?" asked Shadow, anxiously.

"There she is! Over there!" yelled Phil, and pointed to a spot several yards away.

A hand and an arm had shown themselves, but that was all. In less than two seconds they disappeared again.

Dave had done some rapid thinking. Before leaving the steamer the boys had thrown off their coats. Now standing up, Dave cast his cap to the bottom of the boat, and made a quick dive overboard.

"He's gone after her!"

"Good for Dave! It's the only thing to do if that girl is to be saved."

"Row on and keep your eyes wide open," directed Phil. "I don't think they'll get very far away."

Dave had calculated the distance as closely as possible, and once under water he pushed ahead with all speed in the direction where he had seen the hand and arm. While at Oak Hall he had learned the trick of swimming under water with his eyes open, and this now stood him in good stead.

"There she is," he thought, as he caught sight of something white passing just to the left of him. He made a quick turn, and a few seconds later had the girl by the hand. Then Dave caught her under the arms, and treading water, brought both her and himself to the surface.

"There they are!" he heard Phil cry, and the next moment the rowboat came up close.

"Oh, oh! sa – sa – save m – me!" spluttered the girl; and breaking loose, she swung around and caught Dave tightly by the neck.

It was the strangle-hold of a drowning person, and our hero might have fared badly had not assistance been at hand. But as it was, Roger and Phil reached out, and while Shadow and Ben balanced the rowboat, this pair hauled the girl on board. Then they aided Dave in getting in.

"Oh, oh! Is sh – she d – dead?" gasped the girl, as she looked at the woman who had collapsed on the stern seat.

"No, she has only fainted," answered Roger. "She'll soon be over it."

"How brave you are to come to our rescue!" went on the girl, turning to Dave. "I – I thought I was going to drown!" and she shuddered.

"It was a pretty close call," answered Phil. "My friend here jumped overboard just in the nick of time."

There was just then little time to say more, for others were in the water crying for assistance. In the meantime, there was another cry from the deck of the steam yacht.

"Don't jump overboard! It isn't necessary. The fire is out!"

"Hello! Did you hear that?" queried Dave. "Somebody said the fire is out."

By this time the two other rowboats had picked up eight of those who had leaped overboard. The boys succeeded in getting on board two others, a short, fat man who was puffing like a porpoise, and a young man.

"That settles it," snorted the fat man, as he sank down on one of the seats. "No more ocean pictures for me! All the dramas I act in after this will be on dry land."

"And I sha'n't go to sea again for Mr. Appleby," answered the girl who had been rescued. She was rapidly recovering, and so was the woman on the stern seat.

"Got everybody?" yelled a man from the deck of the steam yacht. And by his cap and uniform the boys knew he must be the captain of the vessel.

"I think so," answered the first mate of the *Eaglet*.

"It was foolish of them to jump overboard," grumbled the captain of the steam yacht. "I told all of them there was no danger."

"No danger!" snorted the mate of the *Eaglet*. "How do you make that out, with all that fire?"

"It wasn't fire – that is, not much of it," was the answer. "It was mostly smoke. We have a moving picture company on board, and they had a lot of fireworks, some of 'em tied up in old sail cloth. The fireworks started to go off – why I don't know – and they set fire to the cloth, and when we wet that down it made an awful smoke. But all the stuff was in a zinc-lined compartment, so

there wasn't much real danger. The worst was when those rockets went off and shot up right out of the hatchway."

"And are you sure the fire is entirely out?" asked the mate of Mr. Lawrence's vessel.

"Just about. We'll have the men make a search, so that there won't be any further danger."

After a little more conversation the three rowboats were brought close to the steam yacht, from the side of which a ladder had been lowered.

"O dear! Are we to go back to that boat?" queried the girl Dave had saved from drowning.

She was a miss of perhaps eighteen years, tall and slender, with brown hair and big brown eyes. She appealed to our hero as she spoke.

"I don't see what else there is to do," he answered, "unless you want to be taken to our steamer."

"What place is your steamer bound for?"

"We hope to make Portland some time this afternoon."

"Oh indeed! Then I think I would rather go aboard that steamer than back on the yacht," answered the young lady. "What do you think, Aunt Bess?" she went on, appealing to the woman in the rowboat, who by this time had recovered from her plunge into the sea.

"I think I would like to get ashore as soon as possible, Della," returned the aunt. "I just hate the water, anyway, and I don't think I'll take another sea trip in a hurry."

"Oh, say, Miss Ford, you might as well go back on the steam yacht. I guess the danger is all over," put in the fourth person who had been picked up – a young man about Dave's age. "Didn't you hear the captain say that the fire was out?"

"Yes, I know," answered Della Ford. "But I'm so afraid, Mr. Porton," and the girl looked rather helplessly at those around her.

"Where is that steam yacht bound for?" questioned Phil.

"We were going somewhere outside of Cape Cod," answered the stout man who had been rescued. "But I guess Mr. Appleby will have to give the trip up for the present. He's the manager of our company, you know," he added, by way of explanation.

"What sort of a company is that – a theatrical company?" asked Shadow.

"Oh, no. This is a moving-picture company – one belonging to the Appleby Film Corporation."

"Oh, then you are all moving-picture actors!" cried Ben, with interest.

"Yes," answered the young man. "But we didn't come out to get into any such scene as this," he added, with a short laugh.

By this time a number of those in the rowboats had been assisted to the deck of the steam yacht, and those above were calling down to those in the rowboat manned by Dave and his chums.

"Say, young men, I'm very much obliged to you for what you did for me," cried the stout man, heartily, as he prepared to ascend the ladder. "I guess I was foolish to jump overboard when there was no great danger."

"It's too bad Case didn't get a picture of that scene," said the young man named Porton. "It would have been a dandy to work into one of the sea dramas."

"I guess that's right," returned Dave, with a grim smile.

"Much obliged to all of you," went on Ward Porton. "If there are any charges, send the bill to Mr. Thomas Appleby, the manager. He ought to reward you handsomely for saving a part of his company." And with these words he followed the stout man to the deck of the steam yacht.

"Aren't you folks coming up?" came a call from the manager of the moving-picture company, as he leaned over the rail.

"Oh, Mr. Appleby, I don't want to stay out here!" cried Della Ford, "and neither does my Aunt Bess! The young men here say their boat is going to Portland. Maybe we had better go there and take the train to Boston."

"Oh, there is no use in doing that, Miss Ford," answered the manager. "The fire is out, and it is perfectly safe on board now. You had better come up here. I will help you," and he reached down with his hand.

"I don't suppose it will be just the right thing to do, to desert the company," said Mrs. Ford, the girl's aunt. "We still have to act in several scenes on the ship, you must remember."

"Very well, Aunty, just as you say," returned the girl. "But oh! I must thank this young man for what he did for me!" she went on. And at the danger of causing the rowboat to tip, she bent over and caught Dave's hand in both of her own. "Won't you please tell me your name?"

"It's Dave Porter," was the answer. "Come, let me help you up the ladder."

"My name is Della Ford, and I belong in Boston. You are a very brave young man, and I shall never forget you. Some time when you are in Boston you must come to see me."

"Thank you, Miss Ford, perhaps I will," answered Dave. And after a word or two more, he assisted the young lady up the ladder. Then the boys helped Mrs. Ford, who was still so weak that she could hardly stand.

The first mate of the *Eaglet* was on the deck of the steam yacht, talking to the captain. In the meantime several sailors were at work putting out the last sparks of the fire. Quite a quantity of fireworks had gone off, and the burnt portions were thrown overboard. The moving-picture manager explained that the fireworks had been brought along to be used in one of the film dramas.

"Might as well get back to the steamer," suggested Roger, after several minutes had passed, during which time the boys had been calling to those on the deck of the steam yacht. "We can't do anything more here."

"All right," returned Phil, and gave orders to pull away.

"Good-bye, Mr. Porter!" called out Della Ford, waving her hand. "Thank you ever so much for what you did. And don't forget to call and see me when you come to Boston."

"Good-bye," returned Dave; and a moment later the rowboat shot out of hearing and was headed toward the *Eaglet*.

CHAPTER IV

BACK TO CRUMVILLE

"I think those on board that steam yacht can congratulate themselves because the fire was no worse," remarked Roger, when the boys had returned to the *Eaglet*.

"Yes indeed," answered Dave. "Some fires at sea are terrible things, and cause a great loss of life."

"Seems to me Dave was the hero of the occasion!" burst out Ben. "He did the really-and-truly rescue act."

"Come now, don't start anything like that!" interrupted Dave, hastily. "I only did what any of you might have done."

"I know one thing," remarked Phil, closing one eye suggestively. "Dave made some hit with the young lady he pulled out of the water."

"That's right!" agreed Shadow. "Why, do you know I thought Miss Ford was going to throw her arms right around his neck."

"Oh, cut it! cut it!" said Dave, growing red in the face. "Shadow, your imagination will be the death of you."

"Oh, I don't know," replied the former story-teller of Oak Hall, coolly. "She certainly was smitten, Dave."

"Not at all. She was grateful, that's all."

"Just the same, Dave, if we get to Boston you'll have to call on her," remarked Roger, with a grin.

"We can all call if you feel that way about it," answered our hero. "I rather think some of you were smitten pretty badly." And at this sally there was a general laugh.

It was some time before the last of the rowboats returned to the steamer. The first mate brought a report to Captain Bradley and Mr. Lawrence, to which the boys listened with interest. The mate said that it was thought on board the steam yacht that the fire had started from a cigarette thrown away by one of the moving-picture actors, a young man named Ward Porton, but that this could not be proved. The mate stated that the captain of the steam yacht was quite upset over the occurrence, as he considered that the fire was due to carelessness, and nothing else. He had told the mate privately that it would be a long time before he would take out another moving-picture company on his vessel.

"He says they are doing all sorts of stunts on the ship, and taking pictures of 'em," went on the mate. "He says some of the actors and actresses are pretty good people, but the rest of the bunch act like wild Indians."

"Ward Porton!" exclaimed Dave, turning to his chums. "Why, that is the young fellow we hauled out of the water!"

"That's right," returned Phil. "Maybe he got scared when he found out that his cigarette had started the fire and that was one reason why he jumped overboard."

"I didn't like the manner of that fellow at all," was Shadow's comment. "He looked like a pretty loose sort of a character."

"Well, I don't know. I thought he looked like –" began Ben, and then stopped suddenly, in some confusion.

"Looked like what, Ben?" asked Dave, curiously.

"Oh, it doesn't matter, Dave," answered his Crumville chum. "Just the same, I can't help but think that – Oh well, never mind, let it go."

"But what did you think he looked like, Ben?" put in Phil. "Come, what are you so mysterious about?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter, I tell you," answered Ben, and now looked more confused than ever.

"Hello! Ben is trying to hide some deep and dark mystery," put in Shadow. "Come now, little boy, unlimber your mind and let us know what it is."

"Well; if you've got to know, I'll tell you. I was thinking that in some way that Ward Porton looked something like Dave."

"Say, that's right!" burst out Phil, and then added quickly to our hero: "No offense, old man, but he did resemble you – only of course he was not so good-looking."

"Yes, there was some resemblance," said Roger, "but I don't think it was enough to count; so Dave needn't worry."

"I guess Mr. Ward Porton has a perfect right to his looks," remarked Dave calmly. "And if he and I resemble each other, that is nobody's fault. I don't suppose I'll ever see that fellow again." But in this surmise our hero was very much mistaken; in the weeks to come he was to see a great deal of Ward Porton.

It was not long after this when the *Eaglet* resumed her run for Portland. As the other vessel was headed in the opposite direction, they soon passed out of sight of the craft. Then Portland Light came into view, and before long the *Eaglet* was passing the numerous islands of Casco Bay.

"This would be a dandy place to pass the rest of the summer," was Roger's comment, as he and Dave stood by the rail, watching the beautiful scene as it was unfolded before them. The bay was very calm, and the numerous islands dotting it in all directions made the spot one of unsurpassed beauty.

"From all accounts, Roger, I think we'll find the vicinity of Mirror Lake just as beautiful as this," answered Dave. "I have never been there, but they tell me the scenery is simply grand."

"We certainly ought to have a good time, scenery or no scenery," answered the senator's son, "with such a fine bunch of people as are going."

"Right you are!" broke in Phil. "We ought to have the best times ever at the lake."

It had been arranged by Mr. Lawrence that they should stop for three days at Portland, the owner of the steamer having a number of business matters to transact. During that time the boys continued to sleep on board, but spent the days in visiting Old Orchard Beach, Cape Elizabeth, Peak's Island, Orr's Island, and various other nearby resorts.

"It certainly is a great place," remarked Dave, on the evening of the second day. "I think a fellow could spend his whole summer here, and have a dandy time."

It had been a question whether they would stop at Boston on the return trip, but at the last minute Mr. Lawrence decided to go direct to New York City, as he had been informed that a cargo was waiting there for the steamer.

"That cuts Dave out of his visit to Miss Ford," remarked Roger, after this announcement was made.

"I think it cuts you out just as much as it does me, Roger," returned our hero, with a smile. "I think, behind it all, you would like first-rate to call on her."

"I'll tell you what I would like," answered the senator's son. "I'd like to see how they take moving pictures – I mean the kind indoors."

"We may get a chance at that some day," said Phil. "I know one or two men who are in that business."

The run to New York City occurred without special incident, and soon the boys found themselves saying good-bye to Mr. Lawrence and Captain Bradley. It had been decided that Phil should accompany Dave and Ben to Crumville, he to remain with our hero at the Wadsworth mansion.

"Take care of my boy," said the shipowner, as he shook hands with Dave.

"Oh, we'll take care of him, Mr. Lawrence, don't fear," answered our hero. And then, leaving Mr. Lawrence to look after matters concerning his various vessels, the boys hurried to the Grand Central Terminal, and were soon on a train which was to take them to their various destinations.

As my old readers know, Crumville was rather a small town; the only industry of importance being Mr. Wadsworth's jewelry works. The Wadsworth mansion stood on the outskirts, a large and well-constructed building, set among a number of trees and bushes. When Dave, Phil, and Ben alighted at the railroad depot, they found the Wadsworth touring-car awaiting them. Dunston Porter, Dave's uncle, was driving the car, and he had with him Dave's sister Laura, and Jessie Wadsworth.

"Oh, here they are!" cried Laura, and leaped out to embrace her brother and to shake hands with the others. Then Jessie shook hands, giving Dave an extra bright smile as she did so.

"Back from the salt, salt sea!" cried Laura, merrily. "I'll wager you were all dreadfully seasick."

"Nothing doing on that score, Laura," answered her brother. "We didn't have time to get seasick; we had too much fun."

"And too many adventures," added Phil. "Oh, I can tell you, girls, we are heroes!" and he stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, and began to strut around.

"Adventures, eh?" queried Dunston Porter. "What sort of adventures – a shipwreck?"

"Oh, Mr. Porter, please don't talk about a shipwreck!" pleaded Jessie, agitatedly. "Why, you don't want anybody to be drowned, do you?"

"They don't look very much as if they had been in a shipwreck," responded Dave's uncle, dryly. "I was only fooling."

"We weren't in any shipwreck. But we saw a fire at sea, and we helped to pull some folks out of the water," said Ben.

"You did!" burst from both of the girls.

"Do tell us all about it," added Laura.

"Was anybody lost?" asked Jessie. And now even Dunston Porter looked much interested.

"Nobody was lost, and not even hurt, so far as I could find out," answered Dave; and then he and the others gave a few details concerning the conflagration aboard the steam yacht.

"And to think those poor people had to jump overboard!" came from Jessie, sympathetically. "Oh, Dave, wasn't that dreadful!"

"Jessie, you ought to have seen Dave playing the really-and-truly hero act!" burst out Ben.

"Now, Ben, quit it!" interrupted Dave.

"Not much, Dave! You deserve some credit, and I want the girls to know what a real, genuine, dyed-in-the-wool hero you are."

"What did he do, Ben?" asked Laura.

"He jumped into the briny deep, and rescued the beautiful heroine of the moving-picture company," was the answer. "Oh, you just ought to have seen it, Jessie. The poor girl was going down for the last time when Dave, with a do-or-die look on his handsome face, leaped into the flying spume, and struck out boldly –"

"Ben, will you please stop?" pleaded Dave. "I never heard such foolish talk before in my life!"

"But he did jump overboard, and he did save the girl," broke in Phil. "If he hadn't gone after her she might have drowned."

"Who was she?" asked Laura; while Jessie, wide-eyed, showed her interest.

"The leading lady of the film company – a Miss Della Ford," answered the shipowner's son. "A mighty nice young lady, too – real stylish – golden-brown hair, dreamy brown eyes, and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Oh, Dave, that was splendid of you to save her from drowning!" said Jessie.

"Indeed it was!" added Ben. "And she was mighty grateful, too," he went on. "She grabbed Dave's hands for all she was worth, and, at one time, I thought she was going to throw her arms right around his neck."

"Oh, Ben!"

"Well, it seemed that way to me, anyway – and she was a stunning looking girl, too, I can tell you!"

"She was not going to do anything of the kind, Jessie! Don't pay any attention to him," broke in Dave, and now his face was decidedly red. "Come on! Let's get into the auto and get to the house; I'm hungry," and he started to help the two girls into the tonneau of the automobile.

"We'll have to hear more of this later on," said Dunston Porter, as he started the car.

"Yes, I'd like to hear more about Miss Ford," added Jessie, in a somewhat uncertain tone.

CHAPTER V

DAVE AT HOME

Mirror Lake was a beautiful sheet of water nestling among the mountains of the Upper Adirondacks of New York State. At the lower end of the lake, where there was a well-defined trail running to several fashionable summer resorts some miles away, were located two beautiful bungalows, one of six rooms and the other of eight rooms. They were built on a plot of ground bordering on a small cove of the lake, and extending about a thousand feet back into the woods of the mountain-side.

As my old readers will remember, Ben Basswood's father was interested in real estate, and, a year or two before, he and Mr. Wadsworth had gone into a land deal of considerable proportions. Several important transactions had resulted, and in making one of the deals Mr. Wadsworth and Mr. Basswood had become possessed of the two bungalows on Mirror Lake, the two gentlemen owning both jointly.

At first, on acquiring the property, the jewelry manufacturer had been in favor of selling it at public auction; but to this Mr. Basswood had demurred.

"I think, Mr. Wadsworth," he had said, "if we hold that property for a few years it will be far more valuable than it is now. The State road has been built to within a few miles, and there is strong talk of its being carried directly past Mirror Lake. Not only that; there is also talk of the railroad putting in a spur through that district, and of course that will help a great deal."

"Very well, Mr. Basswood. If you think we ought to hold the land, we'll do it," had been Mr. Wadsworth's reply. "But what are we going to do with the bungalows in the meantime?"

"We can either use them or rent them," had been the answer.

For the past season, and also during the early part of the present summer, the two bungalows had been leased to some people from Rochester. But now both bungalows were unoccupied.

It had been Dunston Porter's suggestion that they go up to Mirror Lake on the return from the trip to Yellowstone Park, and this idea had been quickly seconded by the young folks, especially by Laura and Jessie, who had never as yet spent any time in the Adirondacks.

"They tell me the mountains are lovely, especially during the autumn," said the daughter of the jewelry manufacturer. "Oh, let us go, by all means!"

"I am sure I would like it," Laura had answered. "But who will go with us?"

The matter had been talked over while the young folks were returning from Yellowstone Park, and also while Dave and Ben were at home, as well as during the voyage on the *Eaglet*. As a result it had been arranged that Mr. and Mrs. Basswood were to go up for part of the time, and also Mr. and Mrs. Wadsworth. Laura and Jessie, as well as Belle Endicott, who was coming East, were to go, along with Dave and Ben and a number of their chums. Mr. Dunston Porter and Dave's father said they would make several trips back and forth during the time the others were up there. It may be said here that the bungalows were fully furnished, so our friends had no anxiety on that score.

"We'll have the best time ever, Jessie," said Dave, in talking the matter over the day after his arrival home. "I am sure you will like it."

"Have you your things packed, Dave?" questioned his sister, who was present. "You don't want to leave that until the last minute."

"Oh, packing is getting easy to me, Laura. I feel like a regular traveler since I took those trips to Cave Island, and after the runaways, and to the Landslide Mine and Yellowstone Park."

"Oh, it was splendid, the way you relocated that gold mine, Dave!" cried Jessie. "How glad Roger and his folks must have been."

"They surely were glad," answered the youth. "I never saw Roger look so happy in my life. It took a big weight off his shoulders."

"And, just to think that they are going to give you and Phil an interest in that mine!" remarked Laura. "Why, Dave, if you keep on, you'll be a rich man some day."

"Well, I sha'n't complain if I am," answered the brother, coolly.

It had been arranged that the start for Mirror Lake should be made on the following Monday morning. Some of the folks were to go as far as they could by train, but the young people had demurred, stating that they wanted if possible to make the trip by automobile.

"We can take our machine and the Basswood car," said Dave. "It won't take us more than two or three days, and it will be lots of fun."

"But what are we going to do with the automobiles after we reach Carpen Falls?" asked Dunston Porter. "You can't go any farther in an auto than that."

"Isn't there some sort of garage at Carpen Falls?" questioned Ben, who was present.

"Probably there is. Anyway, I know there is a livery stable there."

"Then we could leave the machines there until we were ready to bring them back," replied Dave.

"We'll see about this later," said Dave's father, with a shake of his head. Automobiling did not appeal to him quite as strongly as it did to his son and his brother.

It was a beautiful afternoon, and Dave and Ben had arranged for a little run in the automobile, taking Laura and Jessie along. Dave ran the car, with Jessie on the seat beside him. Their course was out of Crumville, and then over the distant hills to a winding road which ran beside the river.

"It seems so strange, Dave, to think you are not going back to Oak Hall this fall," remarked Jessie, when the automobile was bowling along over the smooth highway.

"It does seem strange," was Dave's somewhat grave reply. "Do you know, sometimes I wish I were going back again."

"Why?"

"Well, if I had to do that I wouldn't have to bother about anything else just now, Jessie. As it is, I've got to make up my mind what I am going to do. One minute I think I want to go to college, and the next I have a notion of going into some sort of business."

"What does your father say, Dave?"

"He is leaving it entirely to me. He says if I want to go to college I can do so."

"What would you like to do best of all?"

"Oh, as for that, I'd like to travel, just as Uncle Dunston does. I'd like to see the world."

"I suppose that would be nice, Dave. But still a person can't be traveling all the time," and Jessie's face clouded a trifle.

"I shouldn't want to be traveling all the time, Jessie. Some day I'll want to settle down." He gave her an earnest look. "I thought that was all settled."

"Settled? What?" And the girl gave him a quick look in return.

"Why, that I was going to settle down some day, and that you were going to settle down with me."

"Oh, indeed! That's the first I ever heard of it."

"Oh, but you know, Jessie –"

"Dave, do you know that Laura and Ben are sitting right behind us?"

"Yes, but they are busy with their own talk."

"Maybe you only think so."

"All right. But it's settled; isn't it, Jessie?"

"I don't know that anything is settled." Jessie was gazing straight ahead at the road. "How about that beautiful young lady you rescued from drowning?"

"Oh, say! Please don't bring that up," pleaded Dave, hastily. "That was all some of Ben's nonsense."

"But you did pull her out of the water; didn't you, Dave?"

"What if I did? You wouldn't have me let her drown; would you?"

"Oh, of course not. But still Ben said –"

"Oh, there you go again! Didn't I tell you that was only some of Ben's nonsense? You mustn't believe a word he says."

"Indeed! I always thought Ben was a very truthful boy."

"Oh, well, if you're going to make a mountain out of a molehill –"

"I haven't made a mountain out of anything, Dave."

"Say, who's talking about mountains on the front seat?" interrupted Ben. "I thought we were going down on the river road."

"So we are," declared Dave, somewhat sharply.

"I hope we can go up to the Adirondacks in the autos," said Laura, eagerly. "It will surely make a splendid trip."

"If we go in the autos who is going to drive?" questioned Jessie.

"I'll run our car, and I suppose Dave will run this one," answered Ben. "But we can change off with the other fellows if we want to."

The top of a small hill had been reached, and now the automobile glided down the other side in the direction of the river road. Here the way narrowed a trifle, and Dave had to give all his attention to the running of the car. As the automobile turned in toward the stream, they passed several other touring-cars, and then came in sight of a horse attached to a buggy, the two wheels of which were deep in a ditch.

"Hello! That's Mr. Aaron Poole's buggy!" exclaimed Dave.

"Yes. But it is Nat who is driving," returned Ben.

Mr. Aaron Poole was a rich money-lender, who lived not far from Crumville, and who had a son Nat, who had gone to Oak Hall with Dave and Ben. Mr. Poole was a very grasping man, and in the past he and the Porters had had a number of differences. Nat had been almost as overbearing as his father, but during the early part of the summer he had told Dave that he was going to turn over a new leaf. And since that time our hero had heard that the money-lender's son was quite a different sort of a boy, and growing better every day.

"Hello, Nat! What's the trouble?" questioned Dave, as he brought the automobile to a standstill beside the buggy.

"Trouble enough!" grumbled the money-lender's son. "Did you notice those automobiles that just went by?"

"I certainly did. They were going at some speed."

"They were racing, that's what they were doing!" explained Nat Poole. "They were racing, and they made such a racket that it scared my horse and he landed me here in this ditch."

"It's a good thing they didn't upset you, Nat," said Ben.

"If they upset me, I would make them pay for the damages," retorted the youth in the buggy.

"Did you know them, Nat?" asked Laura, kindly.

"I know one of them. He's a high-flyer from Pittstown. The next time I see him I'll give him a piece of my mind. They've got no right to use this road for a race-track."

"Did they hurt you at all?" queried Jessie.

"I don't know as they did. But this mud in the ditch is mighty sticky, and I don't see how I am going to get out of it," grumbled the money-lender's son.

"Maybe we can give you a lift, Nat," said Dave, and got out of the automobile, followed by Ben. "Here, I'll hold the horse while you get out."

"Be careful. He's mighty skittish," warned the other. "If he gets to kicking he'll smash the buggy into kindling-wood."

"I'm not afraid of him," answered Dave, and took a firm hold on the horse's bridle. Then Nat leaped from the buggy, and he and Ben took hold of the wheels and pushed, while Dave led the horse forward. By this means, in a minute more, the turnout was safe in the middle of the roadway.

"Much obliged to you fellows for this," remarked the money-lender's son, when all danger seemed past.

"Don't mention it, Nat. I am glad to help you," returned Dave, quickly.

"And so am I," added Ben.

"Funny thing," went on the money-lender's son. "I was coming around to your house to see you," and he glanced quickly at our hero.

"Well, you'll have to come, Nat, some time when I am home," answered Dave. "We are going off on another trip next Monday."

"Is that so? Then I'm glad I met you as I did, because I wanted to see you before you went away. I've got some strange news to tell you."

"What is it?"

"Link Merwell is alive. He wasn't killed in that landslide at all," was Nat Poole's astonishing reply.

CHAPTER VI

NEWS OF IMPORTANCE

"Link Merwell!"

"Nat, you must be fooling!" put in Ben.

"Why, we couldn't find a single trace of him after that awful landslide!" went on Dave. "We made a thorough search, too."

"I don't know anything about that," returned the money-lender's son. "But I know Link Merwell is alive. I got a letter from him yesterday."

"Are you sure that it was not an old letter delayed in delivery?" queried Ben.

"No, it was not an old letter. It was dated only a few days ago. It was sent to me from Boston."

"Boston!" cried Laura. "Then he must not only be alive, but he must have followed us East."

"Did he say anything about Job Haskers?" queried our hero.

"He said he didn't know what had become of Haskers. He said they had separated a short while before the big landslide struck them. He was pretty well bruised up, and had to rest in a little mining camp up in the mountains for two weeks."

"This is certainly the strangest news yet," was Dave's comment. "I thought sure that he and Haskers had been swallowed up in that landslide, along with that miner who was with them. Nat, what caused him to write to you? I thought you told me that you had destroyed his last letter without answering it."

"So I did destroy it, Dave, without answering it," returned the money-lender's son. "I was as surprised to hear from him as you would have been. I thought he would know enough to let me alone."

"What did he have to say, Nat?" questioned Ben. "Of course you haven't got to tell us if you don't want to," he added, hastily.

"That's all right. Didn't I tell you I was coming to see Dave? I was going to show him the letter. I've got it in my pocket. Here it is," and Nat brought forth the communication.

The letter was a long and rambling one which need not be reproduced here. In it Link Merwell told something of how he had been caught in the landslide, and how he had escaped and had been carried by some miners to their camp. A search had been made for Job Haskers and the man named Blugg, but without results. Then Merwell had obtained some money (probably from his father), and had come East, where he expected to obtain a position. He added that he was still as bitter as ever against Dave and his chums, and would do his best some day to "square accounts." As in his previous communication to Nat, he wanted to know if the money-lender's son would not aid him in making trouble for our hero.

"The same old Link Merwell!" remarked Dave, after he had read the letter, with Ben looking over his shoulder.

"Wouldn't you think a fellow who had been so close to death would want to reform?" said his chum. "But I suppose Link doesn't know what the word, 'reform,' means."

"Oh, Dave, aren't you afraid he will make you a lot of trouble?" cried Jessie, and her face showed her deep concern.

"I never was afraid of Link Merwell, and I don't believe I ever shall be," returned Dave, quickly. "At heart I think that fellow is a big coward."

"Yes, but you must be careful," warned his sister. "Even cowards know how to strike in the dark, and that would be Link Merwell's way of attacking you."

"I don't know how he is going to hurt Dave when he is away off in Boston," was Ben's comment. "The chances are he has got to go to work and earn his living. Probably his father is sick of putting up money for him."

"Merwell mustn't forget one thing," said Dave. "He is still responsible for his part in that jewelry robbery. If the authorities get hold of him, they will certainly send him to prison. So far as that affair is concerned, he was no better than Jasniff."

"What makes me mad is his trying to connect-up with me," burst out Nat. "I've told him twice now that I was done with him, and I want him to leave me alone."

"Were you going to answer this letter, Nat?" questioned Ben.

"No. I was going to tear it up, the same as the other. It's only got 'Boston' for an address, anyway."

"It seems to me, Nat, it might be a good thing for you to write to Link and tell him exactly what you think of him," said Dave. "Tell him you are done with him forever, and that you don't want to get any more letters. Perhaps that will settle him. Send the letter to the General Delivery."

"That's what I was going to ask you about, Dave. I don't want to have that fellow bothering me. I told you I was going to turn over a new leaf." And now for once in his life, Nat Poole looked Dave and then Ben squarely in the face.

"Then, by all means, write to him and tell him exactly where you stand," went on our hero. "Make the letter good and strong, Nat, so that there won't be any mistake about it."

"I'll do it," answered the money-lender's son. And then after a few words more, he replaced the letter in his pocket and drove on, and Dave and his party resumed their automobile trip.

"That certainly is news," was Ben's comment, as they rolled along the river road. "I thought from what you said, Dave, he must have been buried alive."

"So we all thought. His escape must have been nothing short of a miracle."

"I don't begrudge him his life, but I don't want him to bother Dave any more," said Laura. "He is such a wicked fellow."

"Dave, didn't you say, after you came from Cave Island, that Link said something about reforming?" asked Jessie.

"Yes, he did talk that way. He was very humble, and sorry that he had gone into the robbery with Jasniff. But I guess now that what made him humble was the fact that he was in danger of going to prison. As soon as he got away, his ideas changed."

"I hope he doesn't come here to bother you, Dave," sighed Laura.

"Oh, please don't think of such a dreadful thing!" cried Jessie. "If he is in Boston, I hope he stays there." But this wish was not to be fulfilled, as we shall see later.

The ride along the river road and over the hills beyond was much enjoyed by the young folks, and it was after dark when they returned to Crumville. All told, Jessie made it very pleasant for Dave, but she could not forget the fact that the youth had rescued Della Ford from the sea, and she asked several times about the young lady and the moving-picture company to which she belonged.

"I don't know much about the picture company," Dave had answered. "I think there were about a dozen people in it, including Miss Ford's aunt and the young fellow and the fat man we picked up."

"But you said you would call on her in Boston; didn't you?" queried Jessie.

"I said I might call if I was in the city," Dave replied.

"And I suppose you'll go up there the first chance you get," pouted Jessie.

"Maybe," he answered, not altogether liking her tone. And then before anything more could be said the automobile swept up in front of Ben Basswood's home, and the conversation became general.

Ben had been on the back seat with Laura, and now as he left the party, Jessie came into the tonneau to keep Dave's sister company, so that on the journey to the Wadsworth mansion the talk between Jessie and Dave could not be renewed.

The next two days were busy ones for our hero. He had several matters of business to attend to for his father and his uncle. Added to this, old Caspar Potts asked the youth if he would not accompany him to the old farm where the pair had spent so long a time together.

"Why, certainly, I'll go to the farm with you, Professor," replied Dave. "But what are you going to do there, if I may ask?"

"I want to get a box of books that was left in the garret there when we came away," answered the old, white-haired gentleman. "I would have brought them here before, but it slipped my mind entirely. Perhaps you remember the box?"

"Do you mean that old blue box that stood in the back of the garret?" questioned Dave.

"That's the one, David. I don't think the books in it are of very great value, but they might as well be added to the library here," went on the old professor. The Wadsworth library comprised many hundreds of volumes, and was a source of great pride to Professor Potts, who had spent many days in classifying the books and getting out a private catalogue. To please the old gentleman, Mr. Wadsworth had, from time to time, added various books and pamphlets which he might not otherwise have purchased.

Since Dave and Caspar Potts had left the old farm, the place had been leased to another party, but now it was unoccupied, and the cottage and stable were locked up.

"Looks natural," remarked Dave, as he stood on the tiny piazza of the cottage and looked around on the familiar scene. Then his thoughts went back to the past. What tremendous changes had taken place since he had left that home! He had found a father, a sister, and an uncle, and had made a host of friends. Not only that; he was rich, and had received a good education, and was on the fair road to success.

"David!" It was Caspar Potts who spoke, and his voice trembled. "How different it is from what it used to be! Certainly your folks and Mr. Wadsworth have been great friends of mine," and the old gentleman blinked away the tears that stood in his mild eyes.

Unlocking the door of the little cottage, Dave went inside and lost no time in throwing open a number of windows, so that the fresh summer air from outside might dispel the dampness within. Then Caspar Potts entered, and both ascended the narrow stairway to the upper floor. Here was a tiny garret, which in the past had been given over mostly to the storage of old furniture and other articles not in use.

"I trust none of the tenants have disturbed that box," remarked Caspar Potts, when Dave had lit a candle which he had thoughtfully brought along.

"I see the box, Professor," answered the youth. "Here, if you will hold the candle I will get it out." And then Dave worked his way over to a corner under the eaves, and from behind a broken rocking-chair and a dilapidated couch, dragged forth a small wooden box, painted blue. He threw back the cover, exposing to view thirty or forty books, covered with dust and yellow with age.

"Good! good!" murmured the old professor, as he brushed one of the volumes off with his coat sleeve. "Some of these books are not very valuable, David, but a few of them will add quite a little to our library. I had those volumes when I was a student at college," he added proudly.

"I'll carry the box downstairs," said Dave.

Caspar Potts, candle in hand, led the way to the floor below. As he came out into the kitchen of the cottage, he was somewhat surprised to find two persons on the porch, talking earnestly.

"Hello, you've got visitors!" said Dave, as he set the box of books down on a bare table. "Some one out for a look around, I suppose," he added.

"Maybe it is some one who would like to lease the farm," returned Caspar Potts. "Let us go out and see," and he extinguished the candle.

Brushing the dust and cobwebs from his coat, Dave followed the old professor to the porch of the cottage. The two visitors were so busy talking that, for the instant, they did not notice the others.

"Hello there!" exclaimed Dave, in some surprise, as his eyes rested on the face of one of the visitors. "How in the world did you get here?"

"I – er – I – er – It's Mr. Porter!" stammered the fellow addressed, and he leaped quickly to his feet.

It was Ward Porton, the young man Dave and his chums had rescued from the sea when the steam yacht was on fire.

"Dave Porter! Here!" came from the other fellow who had been seated on the stoop, and now he too leaped up. " – I guess we had better leave," he stammered.

"Link Merwell!" ejaculated our hero. It must be confessed that now he was all but dumfounded. He had thought that Link Merwell must be in Boston, and to find him here on the outskirts of Crumville, and in company with Ward Porton, the fellow he had rescued, was almost beyond belief.

CHAPTER VII

LINK MERWELL AGAIN

Link Merwell showed signs of both suffering and dissipation. His face was thin and careworn, and his eyes had an uncertain, restless look in them. He had on a business suit much the worse for wear, and his tan shoes were worn down at the heels. Evidently he had not fared well since Dave had met him in the West.

"I once thought you were dead, Link," went on Dave, after a pause, during which Link Merwell had taken several steps away from the cottage. "I thought you had been buried by that landslide."

"I know it," was the bitter reply. "It would have pleased you immensely if I had been buried alive."

"That isn't true. I wouldn't like to see anybody lose his life in that fashion," declared Dave. And then he went on quickly: "Did Job Haskers escape?"

"I don't know anything about him – and I don't want to know," returned Link Merwell, and his tone was as bitter as before. "Haskers didn't treat me right, and we separated before we got caught in the sliding rocks and dirt."

"I didn't know that you knew Merwell," said Dave, turning to Ward Porton.

"Oh, yes. I have known him for some time," was the reply of the young moving-picture actor.

"I think we had better be going," broke out Link Merwell, who had retreated a step or two further. He showed very plainly that he was afraid Dave might lay hands on him.

"Oh, don't be in a hurry," answered Ward Porton. "Now we've got the chance, I'd like to talk to Porter."

"I don't think I'll stay," and Link Merwell moved still farther away. "I'll meet you later, you know where."

"See here, Link! Don't be in such a hurry," cried Dave, advancing toward the youth. "I want to talk to you."

"I know your game, Dave Porter! You want to catch me and hand me over to the authorities!" exclaimed Link, and showed more fear than ever.

"What makes you think that?"

"Never mind, you're not going to catch me this way! Don't forget, Porton. I'll see you later," and thus speaking, Link Merwell turned and started away on a swift walk. Then, as Dave went after him, he broke into a run, and reaching the roadway, dived into the woods beyond.

"My, my!" came from old Professor Potts. "David, why did he run away?"

"He's afraid of being arrested; that's why, Professor," explained our hero. "Don't you remember, he is one of the villainous fellows who robbed Mr. Wadsworth's jewelry works a year or so ago?"

"Oh, yes, to be sure!" murmured the old gentleman. "I remember now. What an awful thing for a young man like that to be such a criminal!"

"You say he is a criminal?" asked Ward Porton, curiously.

"He certainly is," answered Dave.

"Hum! I didn't know that," returned the young moving-picture actor, and for the moment looked quite thoughtful.

"May I ask what brought you to Crumville?" queried our hero. "I thought you and your company were bound for Boston."

"We did go to Boston, and the company is there now, unless it has gone up into the woods. I had a little business in this vicinity, and so I came here before going on the next trip with them."

"Did you come to Crumville with Merwell?"

"I did, but I didn't know he was a criminal."

"Then you must have met Merwell in Boston?"

"No, I met him on the steam yacht."

"The steam yacht! Do you mean the one that caught fire?"

"Of course."

"Then Link Merwell was on board that vessel?" cried Dave, in added wonder.

"Yes."

"Was he a member of your company?"

"He was. Mr. Appleby, our manager, took him on the day before we went on the trip. I don't know where Mr. Appleby met him."

"That certainly beats the Dutch! Of course, Merwell must have seen me and my friends in the rowboat."

"He said he did."

"He took good pains to keep out of sight!"

"I don't know anything about that, Porter. But he was on the boat, you can take my word for that."

"And is he a regular member of your company?"

"He is to be, provided he can make good at the business. I think he came to Mr. Appleby with some sort of a hard-luck story, and the manager said he would give him a chance. Privately, though, I don't think he's very much of an actor. But then you know, a fellow has got to do something for a living."

"He can probably act as well as the majority," answered Dave. "But I am surprised to learn that he was on the steam yacht and didn't show himself to us. Still, he was probably afraid to do so, and glad enough to keep out of sight. I suppose he brought you to this farm?"

"Oh, we just took a walk up this way," returned Ward Porton, with some hesitation. He gave Dave a keen look. "You see, I was on my way to the Crumville poorhouse. By the way, Merwell told me that you had once been connected with that institution," and he gave Dave another keen look.

Our hero's face flushed, and for the instant he did not know what to say. Caspar Potts, too, showed confusion.

"David was not – er – connected with that institution, sir," said the old gentleman, hurriedly. "He was placed there when he was a child by those who found him wandering along the railroad tracks here. They did not know who he was, and –"

"I don't think Mr. Porton will be interested in that story, Professor," interrupted our hero.

"Well, to tell the truth I am interested," answered Ward Porton. "I once lived in a poorhouse myself."

"Indeed! Is that so?" murmured Caspar Potts. "How interesting!"

"It wasn't anywhere around here, though," went on the young moving-picture actor. "It was 'way down East. And believe me, it was a hard life! I don't really see how I pulled through," and he smiled, grimly.

"I can't say that I had such a very hard time of it," said Dave. "They treated me fairly well, and as soon as I got old enough to work, Mr. Potts here took me and not only gave me a good home, but also the beginning of a good education. Then, after that, I found my folks – I had been stolen away from them you see when a baby – and since that time I have had an easy time of it."

"You're the lucky one then," answered Ward Porton. He seemed on the point of saying something more, but evidently changed his mind. "Well, if it's all the same to you, I'll be going," he concluded.

"Better take my advice, and drop Link Merwell," said Dave, as the young man moved away. "If you don't, sooner or later he'll get you into hot water. The authorities want him, even though they got back the things he stole."

"I'll remember what you say," was the answer, and then the young moving-picture actor walked away, and soon disappeared around a bend of the road.

"It is very strange that they should have come here," remarked Caspar Potts, when he and Dave re-entered the cottage to get the box of books.

"I should say it was!" answered our hero. "I don't understand it at all. I believe Link Merwell is up to another one of his tricks. I'm going to keep my eyes open for him."

When Dave returned home he told the others there of having met Link Merwell and Ward Porton. Mr. Wadsworth was, of course, particularly interested in Merwell, and he at once telephoned to the authorities to be on the lookout for that individual. But Link Merwell had probably taken warning, and did not show himself again. Nor, for the time being, did Dave see anything further of Ward Porton.

On Friday Belle Endicott, Laura's friend from the West, arrived, and was followed on Saturday morning by Roger and Phil. Ben brought word that he had written to Luke Watson and Shadow Hamilton, and that those two former pupils of Oak Hall had also signified their willingness to accompany the party to Mirror Lake.

"And say, Dave, what do you think!" cried Ben. "This place that we are to go to at Mirror Lake is known as Bear Camp. They tell me the bears just love that vicinity."

"Bear Camp!" shrieked Jessie, who was present. "Oh, Ben, you are fooling!"

"Not a bit of it, Jessie. My father got a letter from Tad Rason, an old hunter and guide who lives in the vicinity of Mirror Lake. He says that that place has been known as Bear Camp for years. He told about shooting a big black bear there only a year or so ago."

"O dear, if there are bears up there I don't know that I want to go!" said Laura. "Just think of having a big bear chase you!"

"Oh, you mustn't mind that, Laura!" cried Dave, gaily. "Just think of the nice hug he could give you," and then he dodged, as Laura threw a fancy pillow at him.

"I think those bears will spoil everything," came from Jessie, her face clouding. "I didn't know any wild animals were left in the Adirondacks."

"Bear Camp," mused Laura. "What a queer name that is!"

"I think it's a fine name," answered Ben. "It suits me, anyway."

The boys were glad to see Belle Endicott, who was a large, well-built girl, with a bright, breezy, western air about her. Belle had much to tell concerning matters at Star Ranch; and Dave asked her about many of the friends he had made among the cowboys at the place.

"Oh, I'll just love to see bears," said Belle, when told about the camp. "They are such funny, clumsy creatures. Why, I once saw a little cinnamon bear climbing up a tree, and he was the funniest fellow I ever looked at."

"Oh, Belle! Weren't you frightened?" asked Jessie.

"Frightened? What, with Sid Todd with me? No, indeed! We just watched him until we got tired of it, and then Todd up with his rifle, and that was the end of Mr. Cinnamon Bear."

"Good for Sid!" cried Dave. "He was always on hand when wanted. I'd like to see him again."

"Well, he sent his regards to you, Dave," was Belle's rejoinder.

Shadow Hamilton and Luke Watson, the latter carrying a case containing his guitar and his banjo, arrived on Saturday afternoon. They came to Ben's house, and, having been notified by telephone, Dave hurried over to see them.

"Dave, you're a sight for sore eyes!" said Luke Watson, as he gave our hero's hand a grasp that made him wince. "My gracious, it seems to me that I haven't seen you in a year of Sundays!"

"One thing's sure, Luke," answered Dave, with a twinkle in his eyes. "You haven't seen me since I've seen you," and at this remark both laughed.

"Luke has brought his instruments along," said Ben, "so we'll be sure to have plenty of music up at the camp."

"It suits me, and will surely suit the girls," returned Dave. "We can sit out in the moonlight nights, and have fine times singing," he added.

"Say! talking about singing in the moonlight, puts me in mind of a story," burst out Shadow. "Once on a time a young fellow went to serenade his girl, and – "

"Never mind the yarn now, Shadow," said Ben. "I've got something to tell you that is more interesting than a story. It's about Nat Poole's uncle."

"Nat Poole's uncle?" queried Dave. "You don't mean Wilbur Poole, the wild man we caught in the woods back of Oakdale?"

"That is the man."

"What of him? I thought they had taken him to a sanitarium, and that he was getting better."

"So he was getting better – in fact he was almost well, so Nat said. But now what do you think has happened?"

"What?" came from all of the other boys.

"He has disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"That's it. He has run away, and nobody knows where he went to."

CHAPTER VIII

OFF FOR BEAR CAMP

"Who told you this, Ben?" asked Dave.

"I just got the story from Nat. He and his family are very much worried. They had an idea that Wilbur Poole was practically well again, and that is the reason why they did not watch him very closely."

"Of course they are searching for him?"

"Sure! Nat said the authorities and also several other people were after him. Nat himself was going to look for him to-morrow."

"Maybe we'll run across him," said Luke Watson.

"I hope we don't, Luke!" exclaimed Dave. "That man gave us trouble enough up at Oak Hall."

"Right you are there!" burst out Shadow. And then he added: "I wonder if he'll call himself the King of Sumatra, as he did before?"

"A man who is out of his mind is apt to call himself anything," said Dave. "I feel sorry for Nat. This must worry him and his family a good deal."

It was not long after this when all the boys went over to the Wadsworth mansion, there to complete their preparations for the trip to Mirror Lake. Ben had had the Basswood automobile thoroughly overhauled, and Dave had likewise had the Wadsworth touring-car put into the best possible running shape.

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