

Goldfrap John Henry

The Boy Aviators' Flight for a Fortune



John Goldfrap

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CHAPTER I. – ON BRIG ISLAND

The sharp bow of Zenas Daniels' green and red dory grazed the yellow beach on the west shore of Brig Island, a wooded patch of land lying about a mile off the Maine Shore in the vicinity of Casco Bay. His son Zeb, a lumbering, uncouth-looking lad of about eighteen, with a pronounced squint, leaped from the craft as it was beached, and seized hold of the frayed painter preparatory to dragging her farther up the beach.

In the meantime Zenas himself, brown and hatchetlike of face, and lean of figure – with a tuft of gray whisker on his sharp chin, like an old-fashioned knocker on a mahogany door – gathered up a pile of lobster pots from the stern of the dory and shouldered them. A few lay loose, and those he flung out on the beach.

These last Zeb gathered up, and as his father stepped out of the dory the pair began trudging up the steeply sloping beach, toward the woods which rimmed the islet almost to the water's edge. All this, seemingly, in defiance of a staring sign which faced them, for on it was printed in letters visible quite a distance off:

PRIVATE PROPERTY

NO TRESPASSING!

Instead, however, of checking the fisherman, it caused old Zenas to break into a harsh laugh as his deep-set, wrinkle-surrounded eyes dwelt for an instant on the inscription. His jaw seemed to set with a snap, and his thin lips formed a narrow, hairlike line as a second later he saw something else. This was a stout wire fence, clearly of recent construction, which extended along the edge of the woods. Apparently it must have encircled the island, for it ran as far as eye could see in either direction.

“Waal, I'll be dummed-gosh dummed!” snorted Zenas, his thin nostrils dilating angrily.

“Put up a fence now, have they?” he continued. “Waal, if thet ain't ther beatingest! A passel of city kids ter come hyar and think they kin run things in Casco Bay!”

“I reckon thet fence ain't goin' ter hinder us powerful much, dad.”

“Waal, I swan *not*. Come on, Zeb, look lively with them pots; we've got ter git across ther island an' back ez slippy ez we kin.”

But as father and son resumed their journey, the thick brush suddenly parted and down a narrow path a boyish figure came suddenly into view. The newcomer was a tall, muscular youth, with a face tanned to a healthy brown by constant outdoor life. His clean-cut figure and frank, open countenance formed a striking contrast to Zenas' crabbed features and the shifty look of his son.

“Where do you intend going?” demanded the boy, as he halted a few paces on the opposite side of the fence.

“You know waal enough, Frank Chester, or whatever yer name is,” growled out Zenas, “we're goin' across ther Island ter stow our lobster pots, just as we've bin a-doin' fer years.”

"I'm very sorry. I don't want to seem unfair, but, as I explained to you the other day, this island is now private property. It was rented from Mr. Dunning of Portland on the express condition that we were not to be interfered with."

"Land o' Goshen! So ye think yer kin come hyar an' run things ter suit yerselves, do yer?"

"We rented the island for that purpose. As I said before, we are all very sorry if it interferes with your convenience; but there's Woody Island half a mile below, and closer in to Motthaven, too, why won't that suit you as well?"

"Cos it won't. That's why. Brig Island's bin here a sight longer than you er I, and it's goin' ter stay hyar arter we're gone, too."

"I don't quite see what that has to do with it."

"Waal, I do. We ain't used ter bein' dictated to by a passel of kids. I've bin usin' this island fer ten years or more. It suits me first rate, and I propose ter go on using it, and ther ain't no kids kin stop me," spoke Zenas stubbornly.

"Well, we shan't keep you from it for more than a few weeks at most – at least I hope so," rejoined Frank, with perfect good nature, "after that, although we have leased it for a year, we shall be glad to have you use it in any way you like."

"I want ter use it right now, I tell yer."

"Well, you can't!"

Frank's control of himself was beginning to ooze away in the face of such mule-like obstinacy.

"Kain't, eh? We'll see. You're alone on the island ter-day, I seen ther other kids go ashore this mornin'. Come on, Zeb, climb over thet fence."

"That's right, dad," applauded Zeb, "ef he gives yer any sass jes' hit him a clip in ther jaw. Reckon that 'ull stop him fer a while."

As his son spoke Zenas made as if to lay his hand on the top wire of the fence preparatory to scaling it. Frank Chester stepped hastily forward.

"Don't try to climb that fence!" he warned. His tone was so earnest that, involuntarily, Zenas checked himself.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because if you do you are going to get hurt. I give you fair warning."

"Shucks! ez if a kid could bother me. Come on, Zeb."

As he called to his son, Zenas clapped his hand on the top wire. Zeb, with a contemptuous grimace at Frank, did the same.

"We'll show yer – " Zeb was beginning, when a singular thing happened.

Zenas, with a yell, sprang into the air and, tripping as he came down, alighted in a sprawling heap among the freshly-tarred lobster pots. His gray goatee wagged savagely as he lay there impotently clenching his fists, alternating this performance by vigorously rubbing his elbows. In the meantime his son, giving vent to a no less piercing cry, had executed a backward bound from the fence with as much velocity as if he had been a rubber ball.

"Ouch! What in ther name of time hit us!" he demanded.

"Dear land o' Goshen! What was thet?" shouted his parent.

Frank had some difficulty in steadying his voice to reply. The sight of the two lately militant figures sprawling there on the beach was too much for his gravity.

"*That*," he managed to gasp out at length, "that was a *mild* current of electricity running through those wires. You recollect I warned you not to touch them."

"You – you – you young villain!" roared Zenas, springing to his feet with great agility for one of his years, "I'll have ther law on yer!"

"Consarn you, yes!" echoed Zeb, "assault and battery!"

"No, not batteries – a dynamo," Frank could not resist saying. "If you think of going to law over it," he added, more seriously, "please recollect that I warned you not to touch those wires."

Furthermore, you were defiantly trespassing on private property, although you could see that sign from quite a distance out on the water.”

The elder Daniels' face was a study at this. But his son continued to bellow angrily.

“You may hev injured dad and me fer life!” he shouted.

“Oh, no; on the contrary, a mild shock of electricity is a fine thing for the system. But,” and Frank smiled, “don't take an overdose.”

“Oh, y'er laughin' at us, are yer? Waal, maybe ther laugh 'ull be on the other side of yer face nex' time we meet.”

All this time the elder Daniels had remained silent, gathering up his scattered lobster pots. Evidently he did not meditate a second assault on the fence. Now he turned the overboiling vials of his wrath on his son.

“Pick up them pots, consarn ye!” he rumbled throatily, “and git out 'er this.”

Zeb obeyed, and then, with what dignity they could muster, the two shuffled back down the beach to their dory. Then they shoved off and began pulling for Woody Island. Frank Chester watched them in silence. But they did not look his way once during the swift row. When they landed on the distant islet, he saw Zeb turn and shake his fist in the direction of Brig Island with vicious emphasis. The elder fisherman, however, simply strode off along the beach of the adjacent island without turning.

“Well, the fence certainly served its purpose,” said Frank to himself, as he turned away; “it proved as effectual as it did that night we used the same sort of contrivance to put to rout the rascals who wanted to wreck the old Golden Eagle. Sorry I had to give those fellows such a severe lesson, though. They liked us little enough before. They'll have still less use for us now.”

He was about to retrace his steps up the path when his attention was arrested by a sudden sound – the sharp “put-put-put!” of a motor boat.

“I'll bet that's Harry, Billy and Pudge coming now!” he exclaimed. “I'll go round to the hulk and meet them.”

So saying, he started off along the beach. In a few seconds he rounded a wooded promontory and passed out of sight. Right here, perhaps, is a good place to give those readers who have not already formed their acquaintance, some further idea of who Frank Chester and his companions are, and how the quartet came to be on Brig Island, off the coast of Maine, in the island-dotted Casco Bay region.

The first volume of this series related the adventures of Frank and Harry Chester, two bright, inventive New York lads of seventeen and sixteen, in the turbulent Central American Republic of Nicaragua. In this book was set down the part that their aëroplane, *The Golden Eagle*, played in the drama of revolution, and followed also the tempestuous career of their chum Billy Barnes, a young reporter whom they met in the tropics. Mr. Chester, a New York man of affairs, owned a plantation in Nicaragua, and the boys and their aëroplane were the means of saving this from the depredations of the revolutionaries. But in an electric storm in which she was driven out to sea the *Golden Eagle* was lost. By means of the wireless apparatus with which she was equipped, the lads, however, managed to communicate with a steamer which picked them up and saved their lives.

In *The Boy Aviators on Secret Service*, the second volume of the Boy Aviators' series, we find them in the mysterious region of the Everglades. Once again they demonstrated – this time for Uncle Sam – the almost limitless possibilities of the two greatest inventions of modern times – the aëroplane and wireless telegraphy. In this book we related how the secret explosive factory was located and put out of commission, and what dangers and difficulties surrounded the boys during the process.

Not long after this a strange combination of circumstances resulted in the boys taking a voyage to Africa. In *The Boy Aviators In Africa* you may read how they discovered the ivory hoard in the Moon Mountains, and how the Arab slave trader, who had cause to fear them, made all sorts of trouble for them. The first aëroplane to soar above the trackless forests of the Dark Continent conveyed

them safely out of their dilemmas, and indirectly was the cause of their being able to voyage back to America on a fine yacht.

The boys had figured on resting up after this, but the love of adventure that stirred in their blood, as well as their warm friendship for Billy Barnes, prompted them to take part in a cross-continent flight against great odds. The story of the contest, *The Boy Aviators in Record Flight*, related stirring incidents from coast to coast. Readers of that volume will readily summon to mind the ruse by which the lads escaped the cowboys and baffled some renegade Indians and, finally, their fearful battle in midair with the sand storm.

The story of an old Spanish galleon enthralled in the deadly grip of the Sargasso Sea furnished the inspiration for the tale of the Boy Aviators' *Treasure Quest*. But they were not alone on their hunt for the long-lost treasure trove. Luther Barr, a bad old man who had caused them much trouble before, fitted out a rival expedition. High above the vast ocean of Sargasso weed the boys had to fight for their lives with a crew of desperate men in a powerful dirigible craft. How they won out, and through what other adventures they passed – including the surprising one of the “rat ship,” – you must read the volume to discover, as we have not space to detail all that befell them on that voyage.

Then came what was, in many respects, their queerest voyage of all – the flight above the Antarctic fields of eternal ice, in search of the goal of discoverers of half a dozen nationalities, the South Pole. *The Boy Aviators' Polar Dash* was a volume full of swift action and enterprise. Many hardships were endured and dangers faced, but the boys did not flinch when duty required their best of them. They emerged from the frozen regions having achieved a signal triumph, but one which would not have been possible of accomplishment without their aëroplane.

Having thus briefly sketched the previous careers of the Boy Aviators, we shall give a short account of how they came to be on Brig Island, and then press on with our story. About a month before the present story opens then, a scientific friend of Mr. Chester's, Dr. Maxim Perkins, had called on the Boy Aviators' father and requested the aid of the young aërial inventors in some problems that were bothering him. Dr. Perkins was already an aviator of some note, but his achievements had not found their way into the newspapers as, like most scientific men, he did not care for publicity in connection with his experiments.

In common with the rest of the civilized world Dr. Perkins – horrified at a mid-ocean tragedy in which hundreds of lives were sacrificed – had set his wits to work to devise some means of life saving – in addition to the regular boat equipment – which might be easily carried by ocean liners. He was convinced that it would be feasible for vessels of that description to carry an auxiliary fleet of what he termed “dirigible-hydro-aëroplanes.” By this rather clumsy name he meant a combination of the hydroplane, dirigible and aëroplane. But although his ideas on the subject were clear enough in theory, he was rather hazy about the practical side of the matter, and this was the object of his call on Mr. Chester – to ask the aid of the Boy Aviators in carrying out his experiments.

To make a long story short, arrangements were finally completed by which the doctor had leased Brig Island, and had set up on it such sheds and appliances as would be needed by the boys in their work. These included a wireless, by means of which communication with the mainland might be kept up – via Portland – and also a unique piece of apparatus (if such it could be called) of which we shall learn in the next chapter.

The boys had now spent two busy weeks on the island, and the work that they had mapped out for themselves was so nearly completed that they had felt justified that morning in wirelessly Dr. Perkins to come and see how things were going on. As we have seen, their stay on the island had not been altogether tranquil. The spot had been used for years by the fishermen as a sort of stowage place for their apparatus, and also, sometimes, as a summer residence. With the coming of the boys and their necessarily private work, all this had been changed, and the resentment of the fishermen had been bitter. Of all the complainers, Zenas and his son were the most aggressive, however, and had openly threatened to drive the boys off the island.

To avoid being taken by surprise the lads had rigged up the electric fence, which device, as readers of *The Boy Aviators on Secret Service* will recall, had been used by them before with success to repel unwelcome visitors.

Let us now rejoin Frank Chester as he goes to meet the approaching motor boat on which his brother Harry, Billy Barnes and Pudge Perkins, the doctor's son, had visited the mainland for provisions and mail that morning.

CHAPTER II. – THE WIRELESS

As Frank rounded the point, the waves almost lapping his feet as he edged along the rocky promontory, he came into full view of the adjunct to the little settlement which was mentioned in the preceding chapter. This was nothing more nor less than the hulk of what had once been a fair-sized schooner. But her masts had vanished, and on her decks nothing now rose above the bulwarks but a towering structure of sufficiently odd form to have set the wits of every man in Motthaven who had seen it at their keenest edge.

This structure began about amidships, where it attained a height of some thirty feet. From thence its skeleton form sloped sharply down toward the stern of the dismantled hulk, much in the manner of the “Chute the Chutes” familiar to most lads throughout the land from their having seen them at amusement resorts. The old schooner – formerly rejoicing in the name of *Betsy Jane*– had been picked up for a song in Portland by the Boy Aviators, who saw in it exactly what they needed for a bit of experimental apparatus. At their orders the inclined “slide” had been built, and when this was accomplished the craft had been towed into the cove, where it now lay anchored by a stout line, about 200 yards off shore.

As Frank came into view of the black old hull, swinging on her mooring line on the turning tide, a “Hampton” motor boat came chugging round the *Betsy Jane*'s stern. In it were three lads. The one in the bow handling the wheel is already familiar to our readers, who will at once recognize the cherubic, smiling features of the spectacled Billy Barnes. In the stern, tending to the engine – a five horse power one of the make-and-break type – was Harry Chester, Frank's younger brother, and standing amidships, waving cheerfully to Frank, was a youth best described as being “tubby” of build, with round rosy cheeks and a most good-natured expression of countenance.

This last lad was Ulysses – otherwise “Pudge” Perkins, the son of the aerial scientist who had sent the lads on their strange mission.

“Batter and butterflies!” he shouted, as the boat drew closer and he spied Frank, “how are you, Frank? Get lonely without your chums?”

“No; I rather enjoyed myself,” laughed back Frank, shouting his words across the water; “you see, while you were away I had some quiet, and a chance to work out a few problems.”

“Mumps and mathematics!” sputtered Pudge amiably, “you don't mean to say I worry you, Frank?”

By this time the motor boat had approached close to her mooring, at which swung a small boat of the dory type. The motor boat was speedily made fast, and the boyish occupants tumbled into the small boat and Harry rapidly sculled them ashore. Before leaving the motor boat some sacks of supplies had been thrown in, and the small craft was so heavily laden that Pudge had to be sternly warned to keep still on peril of swamping it.

“Dories and dingbats! as if my sylphlike form could bother this staunch craft! Yo-ho! my lads, yo-ho! pull for the shore and don't bother about me.”

The beach was reached without catastrophe, and while Frank helped the others unload the supplies he told them of what had occurred during their absence.

“After you left,” he said, “I got busy figuring on that plane problem. All at once I heard voices, and by listening I soon recognized them as Zenas Daniels and that precious son of his. As I knew what ugly customers they were I turned the current into the fence and sauntered down toward the shore. Sure enough it was Zenas and Zeb and they tried to rush the fence.”

Frank then went on to tell of what had happened. Shouts of laughter greeted his narrative.

“Sugar and somersaults! But I'd have liked to see those chaps do a flip-flap,” chuckled the rotund Pudge, hugging himself in his joy.

“I guess Zenas must have learned that electricity is good for the rheumatiz,” laughed Billy Barnes gleefully; “I’d like to have had a picture of them when they hit the wire,” he added, swinging his inevitable camera at the end of its carrying straps.

“It would have been worth while,” laughed Harry; “but come on, boys, let’s get this stuff up to the hut. Anything to eat, Frank? I’m hungry enough to swallow one of old Zenas’ lobster pots.”

“Sandwiches and sauerkraut! So am I,” chimed in Pudge.

“Great Scott!” cried Billy Barnes, “as if we didn’t know that. If you told us you *weren’t* hungry it would be something new.”

“Well, I don’t see where I’ve got anything on you when it comes to meal times,” retorted the fat youth.

“Only about six inches more around the waist line,” grinned Billy, dodging a blow from the fleshy youth’s fat but muscular arm.

Shouldering the supplies, which consisted of such staples as bacon, flour, sugar, rice and so forth, the lads made their way up the beach, having first carried the dory’s anchor far up above highwater mark. They took their way along the electrically-charged fence till they came to a spot where there was a gate and a switch to break the connection. Frank turned off the switch, grounded the current, and opened the gate, through which they passed, and entered on a narrow path winding up among the rocks. When they had all gone through, Frank closed the gate, snapped on the switch again and the fence became as mischievous as before.

In single file, headed by Harry, for Frank had now taken a rear place, they toiled up the steep path until, at the summit of the rocky little cliff, it plunged into the woods. Traversing these for a short distance, and always climbing upward, for the island converged to a point in the middle, they at length emerged on a clearing, evidently of nature’s workmanship, for there was no trace of recently felled trees or other human work.

The floor of this clearing was of rock, and off at one side a clear spring bubbled cheerfully over into a barrel set so as to catch the overflow. In the center of the open space stood a small but substantially-built portable house – one of the sectional kind. This formed the living quarters of the young island dwellers. Above it rose, like gaunt, leafless trees, two iron poles set thirty feet apart and stayed by stout guy wires. Between those two poles were suspended, by block and tackle, the aërials, or antennæ, by which messages were caught and sent. Within the hut was the rest of the wireless apparatus, which, with the exception of some improvements of Frank’s devising, was of the portable kind – the same in fact that they had used in Florida. Outside the hut was a small shelter covering a four horse-power gasoline engine, which generated the power for the station.

As most boys are familiar nowadays with the rudiments of wireless telegraphy we are not going into technical details concerning the plant. Suffice it to say that the boys were able to converse with Portland, under favorable conditions, and judged that, in suitable weather, they had a radius of some two hundred and fifty miles.

But it was off to one side of the clearing, the side nearest to the cove, that the most interesting structure on the island was situated. This was more of a covering than a shed, for it consisted merely of a roof supported with uprights; but in bad weather canvas curtains could be drawn so as to make its interior stormproof.

This shed was now open, and under the roof could be seen what was perhaps at the moment the most unique machine of its kind in the world. Looking into that shed you would have said at first that it housed a boat. For the first object that struck your eye was a double-ended, flat-bottomed craft of shimmering aluminum metal, about thirty feet in length and built on the general lines of one of our life-saving craft. That is to say, with “whalebacks” at each end containing air chambers, and plenty of beam and room within the cockpit. A peculiar feature, however, was the addition of four wheels.

But the boat theory would have had to be abandoned the next moment, for above the hull of the whaleboat-shaped craft was what appeared to be the understructure of an aëroplane. But the planes

– the broad wings – themselves were lacking. The twin propellers connected to a motor within the boat were, however, in place. Apparently they were driven by chains, similar to, but stouter than, the ordinary bicycle variety.

All about was a litter of tools and implements of all kinds. Several large frames leaning against one side of the shed appeared to be the skeleton forms of the wings which were soon to be added to the superstructure.

“Tamales and terrapins!” cried Pudge admiringly, as he gazed at the uncompleted craft, “but she begins to look like something, eh, Frank?”

“Yes,” nodded the young aviator, “but until your father arrives we cannot adjust the wings. There is a lot of theoretical work connected with them that he will have to do. By the way, I wonder if Portland’s got any answer to our message yet?”

Followed by the others, Frank entered the living hut, which proved to be a snug, neat compartment about fifteen feet in length, by ten in width. It had four windows, two on a side, and a door at one end. At the other end was the wireless apparatus, with its glittering bright metal parts, and businesslike-looking condensers and tuning coils. Along the walls were four bunks, two on a side, one above the other. In the center were a table and camp chairs, and from the ceiling hung a large oil lamp.

A shelf held a good collection of books on aëro and wireless subjects, and at one side of the door was a blue-flame kerosene stove. On the other side of the door was a cupboard containing crockery, knives, forks and cooking utensils. Altogether, if the boys had not been there for a more serious purpose, the place might have been said to form an almost ideal camp for four healthy, active lads.

“Start up the motor, Harry,” said Frank, as soon as they had deposited their burdens, “and we’ll try and get some track of Dr. Perkins. His answer to our message ought to be in Portland by now.”

The younger Chester lad hastened outside, and soon the popping of the motor announced that it was running. Frank sat down at the key and, depressing it, sent a blue-white flame crackling across the spark gap. Out into space, from the aërials stretched above, the message went volleying. It was the call of the Portland station that Frank was sending. He flashed it out three times, as is customary, and then signed it F-C., the latter being Brigg Island’s agreed-upon signature. Then, while the others gathered round, Frank adjusted the “phones,” the delicate receivers that clamp over the ear and through which, by way of the detector, any message vibrating in the air may be caught as it encounters the antenna.

Frank listened some time but – save for the conversation of two wireless operators far out at sea – he could hear nothing. With a gesture of impatience Frank began adjusting his tuning coil. All at once he broke into a smile of satisfaction. At last Portland was answering:

“F – C! F – C! F – C!”

“All right,” rejoined Frank, sending a volley of sparks crashing and flashing across the gap as soon as he could break in, “is there any answer to my message?”

“Yes. Perkins will be at Motthaven to-morrow night. He wants you to meet him,” came back the answer, winging its way over the intervening miles of space.

“Is that all?”

“That’s all.”

Frank removed the “phones,” grounded his key and told Harry he could stop the motor.

“I’ll be glad when the doctor does get here,” he confided to the others, after he had communicated the message, “for I’m beginning to think that we are in for some sort of trouble. Those two Daniels are pretty influential in the village, and it only needs a word from them to turn the whole crowd against us.”

“We could stand ’em off,” bragged Pudge grandiloquently, “lassoes and lobsters, we could stand ’em off. I half wish they would come – buttons and buttercakes, but I do!” and Pudge doubled up his fists and looked fierce.

“You forget, Pudge,” said Frank, “that we are here in positions of responsibility. All this property is your father’s. It is our duty to see that no harm comes to it. A bunch of those fishermen

inflamed by anger might be able to do more harm here in an hour than could be repaired in months, not to mention the cost.”

“Surely you don’t think they’d come down to actual violence, Frank?” inquired Harry.

“I don’t know. The two Daniels looked mighty savage to-day, I can tell you. If it hadn’t been for the electric fence they might have made trouble. At all events I’ll be glad to have some advice.”

CHAPTER III. – A NIGHT ALARM

After supper that night, a meal consisting of fried salt pork, boiled potatoes and some fresh fish which Frank had caught earlier in the day, the elder of the Chester lads called what he termed “a conference,” although Billy Barnes declared it was more in the nature of a “council of war.”

We are not going to detail here all that was said as it would make wearisome reading; but, after an hour or more of talk, Frank spoke his mind.

“It may be all foolishness, of course,” he said, “but I think that we ought not to leave the island unguarded to-night. Daniels and his son have had a taste of that wire fence and they may have figured out some way to get around it – it would be a simple enough matter to do, after all.”

“Well, what’s your proposal?” inquired Billy Barnes.

“To patrol the island all night, taking turns on watch. It’s not more than a mile or so all round it, and it ought to be an easy matter to keep the ground thoroughly covered.”

“Rifles and rattlesnakes!” burst out Pudge, “I thought this was to be a sort of working vacation and not a civil war.”

Frank smiled, and then assumed a graver expression as he went on:

“There is so much valuable property here which it would be easy for malicious people to injure that I wouldn’t feel justified in leaving the island unguarded all night. What do the rest of you think?”

“Just as you do, Frank,” rejoined Harry heartily, while Billy and Pudge nodded vigorously; “we’ve got to keep a sharp lookout. I nominate myself and Pudge for the first watch – say from eight to twelve. You and Billy can go on duty from midnight till daylight.”

After some discussion this order of procedure was adopted. Promptly at eight o’clock Harry and Pudge Perkins went “on duty,” while Frank and Billy turned in to get what sleep they could. As a matter of precaution, when they came to the island, the boys had brought along a revolver, and Harry was armed with this when he went on duty. He was not, of course, to use it as a weapon of offence, but it was agreed that, in case there was any alarm during his watch, he was to fire it three times, when the others would come to his assistance.

Harry and Pudge accompanied each other as far as the gate, and then threaded their way down the path among the rocks toward the beach. A mild current had been turned on in the fence, enough to give an uncomfortable shock to any one tampering with it, but not enough to exhaust the storage batteries which supplied it.

When they reached the beach, Harry paused.

“We’d better start this patrol in opposite directions,” he said, “and then we can meet each other once on every circuit.”

“All right,” agreed Pudge, “but – pirates and parachutes – keep a good eye open.”

“Don’t worry about me,” rejoined Harry; “so long!”

As he spoke each boy stepped off into the darkness to begin the patrol. As Harry trudged along the beach his mind was full of the events of which Frank had spoken that afternoon. Up in the lighted hut, with his companions around him, it had seemed a very remote possibility to the boy that any attack should be made on the island. But pacing along under the stars, with only the sound of his own footsteps for company, placed a very different light on the matter. What if the disgruntled fishermen should make a night descent on the island?

“This won’t do,” exclaimed Harry to himself, coming to a sudden halt in the cove opposite to which the motor boat was moored, and where a blacker patch on the dark sand showed him the beached dinghy, “it’s no use getting shivery and scared just because a couple of cranky fishermen are so sore at us. I’ve got to brace up, that’s all there is to it.”

His surroundings, however, were not calculated to soothe the nervous suspense of the lad. Except for the stars glittering like steel points in the night sky there was no light. The night was so

pitchy dark, on the beach under the shadow of the trees, that he could hardly see with certainty a yard ahead of him. The surf roared hoarsely against the rocks at the point – for the tide was full, and the night wind moaned in the trees like a note of warning.

With an idea of carrying out his patrol properly, Harry went toward the darker patch amid the gloom which showed him where the beached dinghy lay. He examined it as well as he could, and made sure that it was well above tide water. Having completed this, he paced on, and in due time heard footsteps approaching him which he knew must be those of Pudge Perkins. A minute later the two young sentinels met and exchanged greetings. Pudge had nothing to report, except that it was what he called a “creepy” job. However, he pluckily averred: “Ghosts and gibberish, Harry, I’m going to stick it out.”

“That’s right,” approved Harry, and after a few words both boys once more started out on their lonesome tours of duty.

In due course Harry again reached the cove opposite the schooner hulk, and this time, being rather tired, he decided to sit down on the beached dinghy and take a rest. But, to his astonishment, it didn’t seem to be in the place where it should have been.

“I could have sworn it was right here,” said Harry to himself, as he trudged about on his quest, “it must be close at hand. Guess I’ll fall over it and hurt my shins in a minute.”

But although he reassured himself, the boy felt far from secure in his belief. After a further painstaking search he was fain to confess – what he really believed from the first – that the dinghy which had lain there a short time before had mysteriously vanished!

“Can it be those miserable Daniels?” gasped Harry to himself. “Yes, it must be,” he went on, answering his own questions, “who else would have done it, unless it drifted off.”

He was moving about as he spoke, and as he uttered the last words he stumbled across something that showed him very plainly that the dinghy could not have drifted away from the beach. What he had fallen over was the anchor firmly embedded in the sand, with a length of rope still attached to it.

Harry felt along the bit of rope in the darkness till he reached the end of it. Then he struck a match. In the flicker of light which followed he saw plainly enough what had occurred – the rope had been slashed through. The boy had just made this discovery when from the water he heard something that caused him to listen acutely, bending every sense to the operation.

What he had heard was the splash of an oar, and a quick exclamation of impatience, as if the rower, whoever he was, had blamed his involuntary misstroke.

“Some one’s out there, and they’re aboard the schooner, too; or I’m very much mistaken,” exclaimed Harry to himself, as, listening acutely, he caught the sound of footsteps proceeding, seemingly, by their hollow ring, from the decks of the dismantled hulk; “what will I do? If I fire the pistol I’ll scare them off, and if I don’t – ”

He stopped short. A sudden daring idea had flashed into his mind. The boy hastily slipped off his shoes and divested himself of all but his undergarments. Then, leaving his pistol on the beach, he slipped noiselessly into the bay and struck out in the direction of the schooner. The water was bitterly cold, as it always is off the Maine coast, even in the height of summer, but Harry kept dauntlessly on, determined to brave anything in the execution of his purpose.

The hulk lay only about a hundred yards off the shore, and before long he could see her dark outlines looming up against the lighter darkness of the sky on the horizon. He fancied, but could not be certain that it was not an illusion, that for an instant he could see two forms creeping along the decks. The next moment something showed up ahead of him with which he almost collided.

Harry, with a gasp of gratitude, for the water had chilled him to the bone, recognized it as the motor boat. As silently as he could he drew himself up into it, and then, casting himself flat in the cockpit, he listened with all his might for further sounds from the schooner.

CHAPTER IV. – CUT ADRIFT

He did not have long to wait. Seemingly, whoever the marauders were – and as to their identity the lad could hazard a pretty good guess – they did not bother much about lowering their voices.

“By the jumping crickey!” he heard coming over the water from the schooner, “jiggered if I kin make out what they cal’kelated ter use this hulk fer.”

“Hush! Not so loud, pop. Ther sound carries tur’rble fur over ther water.”

“As if I didn’t know thet, Zeb, but what do we care? Them kids is fast asleep, and anyhow, we cut the dinghy adrift so they couldn’t do us any harm ef they wanted to.”

“Thet’s right, too; but some of ’em might be prowling about. They’re up ter all sorts uv tricks. I ain’t forgot thet thar fence, I kin tell yer. My arm’s a-tingling yet whar thet electricity hit me.”

Soaked through as he was, and chilly into the bargain, Harry couldn’t help smiling as he heard this eloquent testimonial to the efficacy of the “charged” fence. He had caught the name of “Zeb,” too, which speedily removed all doubt from his mind as to the identity of the marauders.

“The precious rascals,” he thought, while his teeth chattered with cold, “I’m mighty glad I did swim out here, even if I am almost frozen to death. If they aren’t under arrest to-morrow it won’t be my fault.”

Little more was heard from the schooner, but from what he could catch he surmised that the two fishers were completely mystified by the craft. Presently he heard their footsteps descending the gangway and then came the splash of oars. They were dipped silently no longer, a pretty sure sign that the two rascals didn’t much care if they were heard or not. After a moment the splashing sound grew more remote, and Harry knew that the two prowlers had taken their departure.

There was a scull in the motor boat and as soon as he was sure that the Daniels were out of earshot, Harry up anchored and began sculling the motor boat toward the hulk. The distance was so short that he did not want to bother to start the engine, and in a few seconds he was alongside the dark hulk. He shoved along the side till the motor boat grated against the gangway, and then, not forgetting to make the motor craft fast, he leaped up the steps, with the purpose of discovering what harm, if any, had been wrought aboard the *Betsy Jane*.

Harry knew where a lantern was kept, and descending into what had once been the cabin he began rummaging about for it. In the pitchy blackness the task took him longer than he had anticipated, but at last he found the lantern and the matches which lay beside it. Hastily striking a light he soon had the bare cabin filled with the yellow rays of the lamp. As has been explained, the *Betsy Jane* had been purchased as a sort of “trying-out” appliance for the inventions of Dr. Perkins, and therefore the cabin contained nothing in the way of furniture. The lamp, in fact, had only been placed on board as a precaution in case a riding light was ever needed on the anchored hulk. But as she had remained at her moorings in the isolated cove this was not, of course, necessary.

A brief look about the cabin showed Harry that nothing had been molested there. In fact, as has been said, there was nothing to molest. A door in the forward bulkhead led into the empty hold, and the boy next made his way there, the lamp casting weird shadows on the timbers as he went. His steps rang hollowly through the deserted ship, and he could hardly repress a shudder as he threaded his way among the stanchions, which, like the pillars in a church, upheld the deck above his head.

Reaching what had been the forecastle of the *Betsy Jane*, Harry came to the conclusion that nothing had been damaged below. His next task was to go up on deck. His examination below decks had been painstaking, and had occupied him some time, but he was determined to make it a thorough one. The fact is that an ugly suspicion had crept into Harry’s mind as he lay in the bottom of the motor boat listening to the two Daniels on board the schooner. This was nothing more nor less than a dread that they might have “scuttled” the craft. From what he knew of them the two were capable of anything, and he thought that in their rage at finding nothing on board that they could damage they

might have bored holes in the schooner in order to sink her. His investigation of the hold, however, had shown him – to his great relief – that nothing of the sort had occurred.

Coming on deck Harry made as careful a search for damage as he had done in the hold. But the inclined superstructure remained intact, and nothing indicated that the Daniels had done anything more than stroll about, trying to discover what the object of the schooner was.

So intent had Harry been on his task that he had, for the time being, completely forgotten that Pudge must be anxiously looking for him. Going into the eyes of the craft he sent a hearty hail ashore:

“Pudge ahoy! Oh-h-h-h, Pu-d-g-e!”

Then he stopped to listen intently. But no reply came to his hail. He tried it again and again, without success. Then he determined as a last resort to fire the agreed-upon three shots. He did not want to alarm his companions unnecessarily, but surely, he thought, it would be a good idea to arouse them and communicate what had occurred since he left the hut.

Up to that moment the boy had completely forgotten that he had left the pistol on the beach. He felt compelled to laugh at himself for his absentmindedness, but while the laugh was still on his lips something happened that caused it to freeze there.

A mass of cold spray was suddenly projected over the bow. At the same instant the old hulk quivered at the smart “slap” of a wave.

“Gracious!” thought Harry to himself, “the sea must be getting up. I reckon I’d best be going back ashore.”

As he made his way aft toward the gangway he found that the sea must indeed have risen since he came on board. The old hulk was rolling about like a bottle, and he had to hold on to the rail as he made his way along the decks. Getting into the motor boat under these conditions was no easy task. But it was accomplished at last.

“I guess I’ll start the engine before I cut adrift,” said Harry to himself.

Later on he was to be very thankful he did. Turning on the switch and gasolene he began to “spin” the fly wheel; but beyond a wheezy cough the motor gave no sign of responding. For more than half an hour the boy worked with might and main over the refractory bit of machinery, but to no effect. The engine was absolutely “dead.”

“What can be the matter with it?” thought Harry to himself. “It’s never acted this way before.”

He stood up, too engrossed in his problem to realize what a sea was running. Before he could recover his balance the pitching craft almost bucked him overboard.

“Gracious! the waves are getting up with a vengeance,” exclaimed the boy to himself; “I can never scull ashore in this sea. Queer, too, there, doesn’t seem to be any more wind than when I left shore. Certainly I’ve never seen the sea as rough as this in the inlet before.”

With the object of finding out what ailed the obstinate motor, he returned to the deck of the schooner where he had left the lamp. Getting into the motor boat with it once more, by dint of much balancing and holding on he cast its rays on the single cylinder. Almost simultaneously he saw what had happened. Somebody, he had no difficulty in guessing who, had removed the sparking points. No wonder that no explosion had followed his efforts to get the craft under way.

“Well, here’s a fine fix,” thought Harry; “even if I could attract their attention ashore I’ve got no means of getting there. Oh, if I won’t get even with those Daniels as soon as I get a chance! Wonder what I’d better do?”

His first move was to clamber back on board the schooner, for the wild rolling of the motor boat, as she plunged about at the foot of the gangway, was not helpful to thought. Gaining the deck once more Harry sought out the cabin and seated himself on the edge of one of the empty bunks which ranged its sides.

Suddenly it occurred to him that he was uncommonly sleepy, and at the same time he thought that possibly it would be a good idea to pass the rest of the night in slumber. He had no watch, but he imagined that it could not be so very far to daylight. With this object in view he cast himself down in

the bunk and, despite the hardness of the bed and the chilliness of his scantily clad limbs, he rapidly slipped away from his surroundings into a dreamless sleep.

When he awoke the sun was shining through the stern ports. That is, it was for one instant, and then in the next it was obscured again. Harry was enough of a sailor to know that this meant a cloudy day, with possibly a piping wind scurrying the clouds across the sky.

“Thank goodness it’s daylight anyhow!” he exclaimed, jumping from his uncomfortable couch, with an ache in every limb in his body; “now to go on deck and attract their attention ashore.”

Utterly unprepared for the shock that was to greet him, Harry bounded up the companionway stairs and on to the deck.

Had a bomb exploded at his feet he could not have been more thunderstruck than he was at the sight which greeted him.

There was no island, no distant mainland. Nothing but miles upon miles of tumbling blue water in which the *Betsy Jane* was wallowing about, casting showers of spray over her bow every time she nosed into a billow.

Harry’s heart stood still for an instant. His senses swam dizzily. Then, with a sudden return of his faculties, he realized what had occurred.

The mooring rope of the *Betsy Jane* had been cut or had broken, and he was miles out on the Atlantic without a prospect of succor.

CHAPTER V. – ADVENTURES ON THE HULK

A sudden sharp puff of wind, followed by a heavier dip than usual on the part of the dismantled hulk, apprised the boy that both breeze and sea were increasing. Putting aside, for the moment, by a brave effort, his heart sickness, Harry ran to the rail and peered over the side. The motor boat was careering gallantly along by the side of her big consort, and the boy was glad to note that the painter still held, despite the strain.

But Harry knew, from his examination the previous night, that it would be useless to try to escape by the motor craft. She was disabled beyond hope of repair, unless he could get another spark plug. Having made sure the motor craft was all right, Harry returned to the bow and sat down to think the situation over.

It would have been a trying one for a man to face, let alone a lad; but Harry's numerous adventures had given him a power of calm thought beyond his years, and he managed to marshal his ideas into some sort of shape as he crouched under the bow bulwarks.

"Evidently the *Betsy Jane* was caught by the tide, when it turned, and carried out to sea," he thought, "and then, when the wind got up, she drifted still faster. I wonder if her mooring rope broke or if it was cut – guess I'll take a look."

The boy dragged inboard the end of the mooring line that still hung over the bow. One look at it was enough. The clean cut strands showed conclusively that it had been severed, just above the water line, by a sharp knife. The fact that the Daniels could not know that any one would come on board after they slashed the line did not make their act any less heinous in Harry's eyes. It had been their deliberate intention to set the schooner adrift, and they had succeeded only too well in their act of spite.

"Whatever will they be thinking on the island when they discover all this?" thought Harry with a low groan. "They'll imagine that I'm dead, or at least that some fatal accident has befallen me, and, worst of all, they have no boat to use to reach the mainland. They are just as much prisoners as I am."

Sharp pangs of hunger now began to assail the lad, and he recollected, with a thankful heart, that on board the motor boat there were the remains of a lunch they had taken ashore with them on their expedition the previous day. There was also a keg of water. Harry lost no time in descending the gangway and making his way to the locker where the food had been stored. First, however, he made a foray on the water keg. Taking out the stopper he found that it was only half full, but he slaked his thirst gratefully, taking care to use as small a quantity of the fluid as possible. He knew that before long the water might be precious indeed.

In the locker he found the remnants of the lunch. As he consumed the scraps of bread and cheese, and a small hunk of corned beef, he recalled with what light hearts they had fallen to the meal of which he was now devouring the remains. The recollection almost overcame him. With a strong effort the boy choked back a sob and formed a grim determination not to dwell upon his miserable situation more than was possible. He felt that the main thing was to keep a clear head.

There was some spare rope on board the hulk, and with this Harry made the fastenings of the launch more secure, leading one end of the rope on board the schooner itself, and making it fast to a cleat. He felt that the craft would be more safe if attached thus than would have been the case had he depended on the gangway alone.

This done, he took a look about him. He had had a vague hope that he might sight a ship of some sort, but the ocean was empty as a desert. Not a sail or a smudge of smoke marred the horizon. All this time the wind had been steadily freshening, and Harry judged that the schooner must be drifting before it quite fast. The inclined superstructure naturally added to her "windage" and made her go before the gale more rapidly. The sea, too, was piling up in great, glistening, green water rows,

which looked formidable indeed. But so far the *Betsy Jane* had wallowed along right gallantly, only shipping a shower of spray occasionally when a big sea struck her obliquely on the bow.

“If only I had plenty of food and water,” thought Harry, “this would be nothing more than a good bit of adventure, but –”

In accordance with his resolution not to dwell on the more serious aspects of his predicament he dismissed this side of the case from his mind. But as the day wore on, and he grew intolerably thirsty, the thought of what might be his fate, if he did not fall in with some vessel, beset his mind more and more, to the exclusion of all else. In the afternoon, as closely as he could judge the time, he took another drink from the fast-diminishing supply in the keg. He noticed, with an unpleasant shock, that the fluid was growing alarmingly lower. Before he took the draught he had cleaned up the remaining crumbs left in the locker, and was now absolutely without food.

The rest of that afternoon he passed watching the empty sea for some sign of a ship, but not a trace of one could he discover. Utterly disheartened he watched the sun set in a blaze of crimson and gold. The sunset lay behind him, and Harry knew by this that he was drifting east at a rapid rate. Just how rapid he had, of course, no means of calculating. Of one thing he was thankful – the sea had not increased, and the wind appeared to have fallen considerably with the departure of daylight.

“Surely,” thought the boy, “I must have drifted on the track of ocean vessels by this time. I know there’s a line to Halifax, and another to Portland, besides the coasters.”

With this thought came another. What if he should be run down during the night? The idea sent a shudder through his scantily clothed form. He knew that derelicts are often the cause of marine disasters, and during the dark hours the hulk might invite such a fate if he did not take steps to guard against it.

Accordingly he lit his lantern and hung it in the underpinning of the inclined superstructure.

“At least they can see that,” he thought, as he completed the hanging of his warning light.

Then, having done all he well could under the circumstances, Harry cast himself down in the lee of the weather bulwarks and tried to sleep. But in his scanty attire he was far too cold to do aught but lie and shiver till his teeth chattered. He determined to pass the rest of the night below, and once more sought a couch in the empty bunk. But sleep was a long time coming. Tired, excited and hungry as the boy was, he could not compose himself to slumber. Ten or a dozen times he started up and ran to the deck, thinking that he had heard the distant beat of some vessel’s engines. But each time it proved a false alarm.

At length tired nature asserted herself, and he sank to sleep in good earnest. When he awakened it was daylight, and there was an odd feeling about the motion of the *Betsy Jane*. She seemed to have ceased her rolling and pitching, and was almost steady in the water. Suddenly there came a jarring crash that almost threw Harry out of the bunk.

Much startled, he ran on deck, and found, to his astonishment, that the vessel lay right off an island. Seemingly she had grounded on a reef of rocks stretching out from the island itself. At any rate, as the waves rocked her she gave a jarring, crunching bump with each pitch of her hull. The island appeared to be a small one, and in general appearance was not unlike Brig Island. In fact, at first Harry had thought that in some magical way the *Betsy Jane* had drifted back to that small speck of land. But a second glance showed him that the island off which the dismantled hull had grounded differed in many essentials from the one he had left. Far to the westward, about twenty miles as well as the boy could judge, lay a dim streak of dark blue that Harry guessed was the mainland. But for all the good it did him it might have been a hundred miles removed.

Harry was still gazing at the island and wondering how he could reach it before the *Betsy Jane* pounded herself to pieces on the rocks, when he started violently. The island was not, as he had supposed, uninhabited – at least, he had caught sight of a swirl of blue smoke rising from among the trees on its highest part. This meant help, companionship and food. An involuntary cry of joy rose to the boy’s lips, which the next instant turned to a groan as he looked over the side of the schooner

and saw that the reef on which she had struck was much too far out from the shore for him to try to swim the distance, even if a roaring, racing tide would not have made it suicidal to attempt the feat.

“Unless I can attract the attention of whoever lives there by shouting, I’m as badly off as I was before,” exclaimed Harry, in a voice made quavery by panic.

CHAPTER VI. – HARRY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND

All at once, while he was still gazing at the column of smoke shoreward, Harry became aware of a figure coming out of the woods toward the beach. He shouted with all his might, and the man who had appeared from the undergrowth waved a reply.

Then his voice came over the water.

“What’s up?”

The tone somehow was strangely familiar to Harry, and, for that matter, when he had first seen the figure of the newcomer it had struck him with an odd sense of familiarity. Suddenly he realized why this was.

“Ben Stubbs!” he yelled at the top of his lungs.

“Ahoy, mate!” came back after a pause; “who are you?”

“Harry Chester!”

“By the great horn spoon! What the dickens are you doing out there?”

Cupping his hands to make his voice carry the better, Harry hailed back once more.

“I drifted here on this hulk. Can you take me off?”

“Can I? Wait a jiffy.”

Ben Stubbs – for it was actually the “maroon” whom the boys had rescued from a miserable fate in the Nicaraguan treasure valley – began running along the shore as fast as his short legs would carry him. Presently he vanished around a wooded promontory, leaving Harry in a strange jumble of feelings. What could the good-hearted old companion of several of their adventures be doing on this desolate island off the Maine coast? When they had last heard from him he had been running a tug boat line in New York harbor, having purchased the business with the profits made out of the discovery of the treasure trove in the Sargasso Sea.

Before a great while the man who had so opportunely appeared came into view once more. This time he was in a skiff, rowing with strong strokes toward the stranded hulk of the *Betsy Jane*. Harry watched him with eager eyes. Fast as Ben Stubbs rowed, it seemed an eternity to the anxious boy before his strangely rediscovered friend reached the side of the grounded schooner.

When he did so he hastily made fast, and was up the gangway ladder three steps at a time. Fortunately for his haste, the sea had diminished in roughness considerably, and the *Betsy Jane* lay almost motionless on the reef. Otherwise he would have stood a strong chance of being thrown from his footing. Harry was at the gangway as Ben Stubbs’ weather-beaten countenance came into view at the top of the steps.

Ben seized the boy’s hand in a grip that made Harry flinch, but he returned it with as strong a clench as he could. For a moment both of them were too much overcome with emotion at the strange meeting to utter a word. It was Ben who spoke first.

“Waal, what under the revolving universe are you doing here?” he demanded.

“I was about to ask the same question of you.”

“It’s a long story, boy, and you look just about played out. What has happened? I never dreamed that you were even in this neighborhood.”

“I guess the same thing applies to me, so far as you are concerned, Ben,” rejoined Harry, between a laugh and a sob. “As for myself, I’ve been adrift all night on this old hulk. Some rascals cut her loose from her moorings at Brig Island.”

“Wow! you’ve drifted all the way from there. Why, it’s fifty miles or more away.”

“I know it. It seemed a million to me. What worries me is what the others must be thinking. They won’t know if I’m dead or alive.”

“We’ll find a way to let ’em know, never fear,” struck in Ben in his deep, rumbling voice; “but I reckon you’re hungry and thirsty?”

“Am I? Why, I could eat a horse without sauce or salt, as you used to say.”

“Then get in the skiff and come ashore. I’ve got a sort of a hut there. It ain’t much of a place, but I’ve got enough to eat and a good spring of clear water, and I can give you a suit of slops.”

“But the schooner?” demanded Harry.

“She’ll be all right, I reckon. She’s lying on a sort of sandy ridge that runs out here. The sea’s gone down so that she won’t do herself any harm, and we can’t do her any good right now. You see, the tide is falling. When it rises we’ll try to get her off and anchor her in a snugger berth.”

Harry might have argued the point, but the prospect of food and drink made so strong an appeal to him that he did not stop to waste words. Five minutes later they were rowing ashore, and, while Ben bent to the oars with a will, Harry told him in detail all that happened since they came to Brig Island, and the reason of their presence there. He knew that he was safe in confiding in old Ben.

The relation of his story occupied the entire trip to the shore, and when Ben had beached his skiff he seized Harry by the arm and began hurrying him up the beach toward a small hut, half canvas, half lumber, which stood back under the shelter of a low bluff. The boy was desperately anxious to learn the reason of Ben’s presence on the island, for he knew it could have no ordinary cause. But the weather-beaten old adventurer would not allow the boy to say another word till he had clothed himself and eaten all he could put away of a rabbit stew washed down with strong coffee.

“Now, then,” remarked Ben, as soon as Harry had finished, “I suppose you’re a-dyin’ to hear what I’m doin’ on Barren Island, which is the name of this bit of land?”

“I am, indeed,” declared Harry, shoving back the cracker box which had served him as a chair; “the last person in the world I would have expected to see when the *Betsy Jane* grounded was Ben Stubbs.”

Ben chuckled.

“Allers turnin’ up, like a bad penny, ain’t I?” he said, shoving some very black tobacco into his old pipe. “Member ther time I dropped out of the sky in thet dirigible balloon?”

“Well, I should say I did,” laughed Harry; “but how you got here is past my comprehension. What became of the tug boat line?”

Ben snapped his fingers.

“All gone, my lad! Gone just like that! I reckon I’m not a good hand at business, or the crooked tricks that answers for that same. Anyhow, to make a long yarn a short one, I went on a friend’s note and he dug out. That was blow number one. To meet that note I had to mortgage some of my boats, and in some way – blow me if I rightly understand it yet – I got myself in a hole whar’ the lawyer fellers bled me till I was mighty near dry. I tried to struggle along, but it wasn’t no go. Then came a strike of tug boat hands and that finished me. I couldn’t stand the long lay off without anything to do, so I sold out for what I could get, and – and here I am.”

“I’m mighty sorry to hear that you failed, Ben,” said Harry with real sympathy in his tones, “but you haven’t said yet what you are doing here on Barren Island, as you call it.”

“I’m a-gettin’ to that, lad,” said Ben, emitting a cloud of blue smoke; “give me time. As I told you, that feller on whose note I went, skedaddled. You see, I’d trusted him as my own brother, bein’ as I knew his father when I was a miner. He – that’s this chap’s father, I mean – was a Frenchman, Raoul Duval was his name, and his son’s name the same. Old man Duval made his pile in Lower Californy and was makin’ fer his home in New Orleans when ther steamer he was travelin’ on blew up, and he and all his gold dust – a whalin’ big lot of it – went to the bottom.

“I never calculated to hear anything more of Duval arter this, but one day this young feller I’ve been tellin’ you about shows up in New York and hunts me up. He tells me that he’s old Raoul’s son, and that he’d had a run of hard luck and so on, and wants to go into business, and if, for his father’s sake, I’ll help him out. I asks him how he found me out, and he says that in his father’s letters home I had often been mentioned, and that when he heard of the Stubbs Towing Line he made inquiries and found that I was in all probability the same man.

“As I told you, I let him have the money. It don’t matter just how much, but it was quite a bit. You see, I did it for the old man’s sake. I was sorry afterward. Young Duval wasn’t a chip of the old block at all. He was idle and dissipated. His business went under and he skipped out.”

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