

Ellis Edward Sylvester

The Launch Boys' Cruise in the Deerfoot



Edward Ellis

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CHAPTER I

Between Two Fires

I once heard the bravest officer I ever knew declare that the height of absurdity was for a person to boast that he did not know the meaning of fear. "Such a man is either a fool or the truth is not in him," was the terse expression of the gallant soldier.

Now it would have been hard to find a more courageous youth than Alvin Landon, who had just entered his seventeenth year, and yet he admits that on a certain soft moonlit night in summer he felt decidedly "creepy," and I believe you and I would have felt the same in his situation. He was walking homeward and had come to a stretch of pine forest that was no more than an eighth of a mile in length. The road was so direct that when you entered the wood you could see the opening at the farther side, where you came again upon meadows and cultivated fields. The highway was so broad that only a portion of it was shaded and there was no excuse for one losing his way even when the moon and stars failed to give light. All you had to do was to "keep in the middle of the road" and plod straight on.

But when the orb of night rode high in the sky and the course was marked as plainly as at midday, there was always the deep gloom on the right and left, into which the keenest eye could not penetrate. A boy's imagination was apt to people the obscurity with frightful creatures crouching and waiting for a chance to pounce upon him.

Alvin was a student in a preparatory school on the Hudson, where he was making ready for his admission to the United States Military Academy at West Point. The appointment had been guaranteed his father, a wealthy capitalist, by one of the Congressmen of his district, but nearly two years had to pass before the lad would be old enough to become a cadet, and pass the rigid mental and physical examination required of every one enrolled in the most admirable military institution in the world.

On this mild August night he was going home from the little cove where his motor boat nestled under the shed built for its protection. His chum Chester Haynes, about his own age, lived within a hundred yards of the shelter of the craft, so that it was always under his eye, when not dashing up the Kennebec or some of its tributaries, or cruising over the broad waters of Casco Bay. On their return from an all-day excursion, they reached Chester's home so late that Alvin stayed to supper. It was dark when he set out for his own home, a good half mile north, the last part of the walk leading through the odorous pines of which I have made mention.

The lad had no weapon, for he needed none. His father was opposed to the too free use of firearms by boys and insisted that when a lad found it necessary to carry a pistol for protection it was time for him to stay within doors where no one could harm him.

The youth was impatient because of a certain nervousness which came to him when he stepped into the pulseless gloom and saw far ahead the broad silvery door opening into the open country beyond.

"About all the Indians in this part of the world," he mused, yielding to a whimsical fancy, "are at Oldtown; the others are making baskets, bows and arrows, moccasins and trinkets to sell to summer visitors. There used to be bears and panthers and wolves and deer in Maine, but most of them are in the upper part. I shouldn't dare to shoot a buck or moose if he came plunging at me with antlers

lowered, for it is the close season and a fellow can't satisfy the wardens by saying he had to shoot in self-defence. As for other kinds of wild animals, there's no use of thinking of them.

"I should be ashamed to let Chester know I felt creepy to-night, when I have been through these woods so often without a thought of anything wrong. But it does seem to me that some sort of mischief is brooding in the air – "

"Tu-whit-tu-whoo-oo!"

Alvin must have leaped a foot from the ground. He was sure he felt his cap rise several inches above his crown, with still an upward tendency. Then he softly laughed.

"Only a screech owl, but that hoot when you are not expecting it is startling enough to make a fellow jump. It seems to me nature might have given that bird a more cheerful voice, say like the thrush or nightingale. Then it would be pleasant to listen to his music after dark. I remember when I was a little codger and was coming home late one night, near Crow's Nest, one of those things began hooting right over my head and I didn't stop running till I tumbled through the gate. I think I have a little more sense now than in those days."

It did not add to his peace of mind when he glanced behind him to see a shadowy form coming toward him from the rear and keeping so close to the line of obscurity on his right that only a flitting glimpse of him was caught. Few situations are more nerve-racking than the discovery at night of an unknown person dogging your footsteps. He may be a friend or an enemy – more likely the latter – and you see only evil intent in his stealthy pursuit.

But Alvin's good sense quieted his fears and he resumed his course, still holding the middle of the road, alert and watchful.

"He can't mean any harm," he thought, "for every one in this part of the country is a neighbor of the others. I shall be glad to have his company and will lag so that he will soon overtake me – hello!"

It was at this juncture that two ghost-like figures suddenly whisked across the road in front. They seemed to be in a hurry and acted as if they wished to escape observation – though why they should feel thus was more than Alvin could guess. It dawned upon him that he was between two fires.

"It's queer that so many strangers are abroad to-night, though they have as much right to tramp through the country as I."

At the time of learning the rather disquieting fact, young Landon had gone two-thirds of the way through the wood, so that the couple in front were near the open country. Striving to convince himself that he had no cause for misgiving, he still felt uneasy as he moved stealthily forward. He gave no thought to the one behind, for it was easy to avoid him. His interest centered upon the two in front, with whom he was quite sure to come in contact. They were no longer in sight, but whether they were walking in the broad ribbon of shadow at the side of the highway, or awaiting his approach, was impossible to tell.

He stopped and listened. The one dismal hoot of the owl seemed to have satisfied the bird, which remained silent. The straining ear failed to catch the slightest footfall. Recalling the feathery dust upon which he was stepping, Alvin knew that no one could hear his footfalls.

For the first time, he now left the band of illumination, moving into the darkness on his left. There he could be invisible to every one not less than four or five paces away.

"If they don't wish me to see them, there's no reason why they should see me," was the thought which impelled him. Gradually he slackened his pace until he stood still. Then with all his senses keyed to a high tension he did some hard thinking. Despite his ridicule of his own fears, he could not shake off the suspicion that mischief was brooding over him. The two men in front and the third at the rear belonged to the same party.

"They mean to rob me," muttered Alvin, compressing his lips.

The belief seemed reasonable, for he was worthy of the attention of one or more yeggmen. He carried a gold watch, the gift of his father, a valuable pin in his scarf, a present from his mother, and always had a generous amount of money with him. Many a youth in his situation would have

meekly surrendered his property upon the demand of a company of criminals against whom it was impossible to prevail, but our young friend was made of sterner stuff. He would not yield so long as he could fight, and his bosom burned with righteous anger at the thought that such an outrage was possible in these later days.

All the same, he was too sensible to invite a physical encounter so long as there was a good chance of avoiding it. The wisest thing to do was to step noiselessly in among the pines at his side, pick his way for a few rods, and then wait for the danger to pass; or he could continue to steal forward, shaping his course so as to reach the open country, so far to one side of the highway that no one would see him.

You will smile when I tell you why Alvin Landon did not follow this plan.

"They may suspect what I'm doing and sneak along the edge of the wood to catch me as I come out. Then I'll have to run for it, and I'll be hanged if I'll run from all the yeggmen in the State of Maine!"

He listened intensely, not stirring a muscle for several minutes. Once he fancied he heard a faint rustling a little way behind him, but it might have been a falling leaf. At the front the silence was like that of the tomb.

"They're waiting for me. Very well!"

Instead of keeping within the darkness, he stepped back into the middle of the road and strode forward with his usual pace. He did not carry so much as a cane or broken limb with which to defend himself. All at once he began whistling that popular college air, "When I saw Sweet Nellie Home." He would not admit to himself that it was because he felt the slightest fear, but somehow or other, the music seemed to take the place of a companion. He began to suspect that it might not be so bad after all for a frightened lad thus to cheer himself when picking his course through a dark reach of woods.

"At any rate it can't tell them where I am, for all of them already know it," was his conclusion.

CHAPTER II

Lively Times

As Alvin Landon drew near the open country he gave his thoughts wholly to the two strangers in front, ceasing to look back or listen for the one at the rear. The keen eyes strove to penetrate the silent gloom on his right and left, but they saw nothing. Probably fifty feet intervened between him and the full flood of moonlight, when, with more startling effect than that caused by the hooting of the owl, a sepulchral voice sounded through the stillness:

"Hold on there, pard!"

It was purely instinctive on the part of the youth that he made a bound forward and dashed off on a dead run. Not until he burst into the bright illumination did he awaken to the fact that he was doing the very opposite of what he intended and actually playing the coward. The fact that his natural courage had come back was proved at the same moment of his abrupt stoppage, for the sharp report of a pistol rang out from directly behind him. The space was so short that it was evident the shot had been fired not to harm him, but to check his flight.

At the moment of halting, he whirled around and saw a youth who could have been no older than himself charging impetuously upon him. Alvin's halt was so instant and so unexpected on the part of his pursuer that they would have collided but for the fugitive's fist, which shot out and landed with full force upon the face of the other. Alvin knew how to strike hard, and the energy which he threw into the effort was intensified by the swift approach of his assailant.

No blow could have been more effective. With a grunt, his foe tumbled headlong, flapped over on his back and lay as if dead. Had he been the only enemy, the combat would have ended then and there, for never was an antagonist knocked out more emphatically, but his companion now dashed into the fray.

He was somewhat older than the one who had come to grief, but still lacked full maturity. Too cautious to make the mistake of the other, he checked himself while just beyond the fist that had done such admirable work. With an oath he shouted:

"I'll teach you how to kill my pal."

"I don't need any teaching; come on and I'll serve you the same way," replied Alvin, eager for the attack to be made.

His opponent came on. He had learned from the rashness of his partner, for after putting up his hands, like a professional pugilist, he began feinting and circling about Alvin, in the search for an inviting opening. The latter did not forget the instruction he had received from Professor Donovan and stood on his guard, equally vigilant for an advantage.

The elder had made a complete circle about Alvin, who turned as on a pivot to meet his attack, and was just quick enough to parry the vicious blow launched at him, but not quick enough to counter effectively. The next instant the fist of the taller fellow came in contact with the chest of Alvin, who was driven back several paces. His foe attempted to follow it up, but was staggered by a facer delivered straight and true. Then our young friend in turn pressed the other, who, bewildered by the rapidity and fierceness of the assault, made a rush to clinch.

Nothing could have suited Alvin better and he met the effort with a storm of furious blows. The chief one was aimed at the chin, and had it landed the result would have been a knockout, but it was a trifle short. Determined not to be denied, Alvin pressed on with all the power at his command. "Keep cool and strike straight," was the motto of his instructor at the gymnasium, and though he was enraged he heeded the wise advice.

Nearly a score of blows were exchanged with such rapidity that a spectator could not have kept track of them, and then Alvin "got there." The thud was followed by an almost complete somersault of

the victim. The master was prompted to push his success by attacking his enemy before he could rise, but another law flashed upon Alvin. "Never strike a man when he is down," a chivalrous policy when the rules of the game govern both contestants. It was doubtful whether Alvin would have received similar consideration had the situation been reversed, but he could not feel sure of that until the proof was given. He therefore calmly waited for the other to rise, when he would be upon him like a tiger.

A minute or two passed before the fallen one recovered enough to begin climbing to his feet. He could have risen sooner, but deceived his conqueror by feigning weakness and fumbled aimlessly about as if too groggy to get his bearings. But he was helping in a treacherous trick.

As Alvin stood, his back was toward the first miscreant, who recovered from his stupor while his companion still lay on the ground. Our young friend gave no thought to the one, whom he believed to be out of the affair altogether.

The same young man, however, gave quick thought to him. Bounding to his feet he sneaked up unseen and struck a blow that drove Alvin forward so violently that he had to make a leap over the second assailant to avoid falling upon him. It was a wonder that he was not struck down senseless. As it was, he was partially stunned, but rallied in a flash.

Now it would have been sensible and no disgrace to the heroic lad, when he found himself confronted by two muscular and enraged youths, to dash at full speed for home. But he did nothing of the kind.

"Come on, both of you!" he called out. "I'm not afraid and you haven't got me yet!"

It would be a pleasure to record that our young friend defeated the couple, but such a triumph in the nature of things was impossible. Either of them would have given him all he could do, and the two united were sure to overcome him. With his stubborn resolve to have it out with them he must have suffered but for an unexpected turn of events.

You remember that a third stranger was approaching from the other direction. In the hurricane rush of the fight, Alvin forgot about him, but he now arrived and threw himself with a vengeance into the affray. His bursting upon the scene convinced the lone defender that the time had come to show his ability as a sprinter. While quite ready to oppose two, he knew he could not stand up against three. Before he started, however, he saw with a thrill that the new arrival had attacked with unrestrainable fierceness the one who had just struck Alvin. In other words, instead of being an enemy he was a much-needed ally.

This stranger did not utter a word at first, but attended strictly to business, and that he was a master of it was proved by his first blow, which sent the fellow staggering backward finally falling with his heels kicking toward the orb of night. There was no thought of chivalry on the part of the conquerer, who landed again as he was climbing to his feet.

"Let up!" protested the victim. "Do you want to kill a fellow?"

"Begorra, ye guessed it right the fust time!" was the reply of the friend, who turned to Alvin:

"If ye'll smash that spalpeen I'll be attending to the same wid this one."

The slight diversion was enough to give the dazed victim on the ground time to come to his feet, when he turned and was off like a deer in the direction whence had come his conqueror. Determined not to be despoiled of his victory, the Irish lad – as his accent showed him to be – pursued at the highest bent of speed. But his short legs were not equal to the task, and the terrified assailant made such excellent time that a few minutes sufficed to carry him beyond all danger. The "broth of a boy" would not give up at first. The two held their places in the middle of the highway, so that both were in plain sight, with the fugitive steadily drawing away.

"Howld on, ye spalpeen!" shouted the pursuer. "I'm not through wid ye!"

But he who fled was glad enough to be through with the business, and kept up his desperate flight until the other ceased and turned back to learn how matters were going with the friend to whose aid he had rushed.

A somewhat similar story was to be told of the second miscreant, who had seized the chance to take to flight in the opposite direction. In this case, the fleet footed Alvin proved the superior in speed and within a hundred yards overtook him. The moment he was within reach he let drive and his fist landed in the back of the other's neck. Inasmuch as he was going at his highest speed and the blow sent his head and shoulders forward with additional swiftness, the inevitable result was that he fell, his face plowing the dirt and his hat flying a dozen feet from him.

Before he could rise, Alvin was upon him. The fellow threw up his hands to protect his countenance and whined:

"Please don't hit me again! I'm half killed now!"

The cringing appeal changed Alvin's indignation to disgusted pity. He unclenched his fingers and dropped his hands.

"Get up! I won't hit you, though you deserve it."

His victim seemed to be in doubt and slowly came to his feet still whining:

"We didn't know it was you; it was a mistake."

"It does look that way," was the grim comment of Alvin. "Get up, I say; you have nothing to fear from me."

The fellow was in doubt. He slowly rose, but the instant he stood erect, he was off again as if propelled from a catapult. Alvin, instead of pursuing and overtaking him, stood still and laughed.

"Come back and get your hat!" he shouted, but the fugitive did not abate his speed and made the dust fly until he vanished in the moonlight.

Yielding to an impulse, Alvin walked to where the headgear lay and picked it up. It was a valuable chip hat, such as is fashionable in summer in all parts of the country. The captor was wondering whether it contained the fellow's name. The moonlight was not strong enough for him to see distinctly, and, bringing out his rubber safe from his hip pocket, he struck a match to aid in the scrutiny.

CHAPTER III

Mike Murphy

Holding the tiny flicker of flame in the hollow of the hat, Alvin saw in fancy gilt letters, pasted on the silk lining, the following:

"NOXON O"

"That's a queer name," he reflected. "I never heard anything like it."

"Do ye know ye're holding the same upside down?"

The Irish lad, panting from his exertion in running, stood grinning at Alvin's elbow. "'Spouse ye turns the hat round so as to revarse the same."

Alvin did so and then read "O NOXON."

"It's the oddest name I ever saw, for 'NOXON' reads the same upside down and backwards – Ugh!"

Seized with a sudden loathing, he sent the hat skimming a dozen feet away. His feeling was as if he had grasped a serpent. Then he turned and impulsively offered his hand to the Irish lad.

"Shake! You were a friend in need."

"It's mesilf that's under deep obligations to yersilf."

"How do you make that out?"

"Didn't ye give me the finest chance for a shindy that I've had since I lift Tipperary? I haven't had so much fun since Pat Geoghaghan almost whaled the life out of me at home."

"Who are you?"

"Mike Murphy, at your sarvice."

And the grinning lad lifted his straw hat and bowed with the grace of a crusader.

"Where do you live?"

"Up the road a wee bit, wid me father and mither."

"Are you the son of Pat Murphy?" asked the astonished Alvin.

"He has the honor, according to his own story, of being me dad."

"Why, he's father's caretaker. I remember he told me some time ago that he had a boy seventeen years old that he had sent word to in Ireland to come over and join him. And you are he! Why, I'm so glad I should like to shake hands with you again."

"I'm nothing loath, but I say that hat ye threw away is more of the fashion in this part of the wurruld than in Tipperary, and if ye have no objections I'll make a trade."

And the Irish lad walked to where the headgear lay, picked it up and pulled it on his crown.

"It's a parfect fit – as the tramp said when he bounced around the kind leddy's yard – don't I look swaat in the same?"

Alvin could not help laughing outright, for the hat was at least a size too small for the proud new owner, and perched on his crown made his appearance more comical than it had been formed by nature.

"I knew ye would be plased, as me uncle said when the dochter towld him he would be able to handle his shillaleh inside of a waak and meet his engagement with Dennis O'Shaugnessey at Donnybrook fair. Me dad tached me always to be honest."

To prove which Mike laid down his battered straw hat beside the road, where the seeker of the better headgear would have no trouble in finding it. "And if it's all the same, Alvin, we'll adjourn to our home, for I'm so hungry I could ate me own grandmither."

"How did you know my name?" asked the surprised Alvin.

"Arrah, now, hasn't me dad and mither been writing me since they moved into this part of the wurruld and spaking of yersilf? It was yer telling me that me dad was your dad's caretaker that towld the rist. Ef I had known it was yersilf I would have hit that spalpeen harder."

"You did well as it was. But I say, Mike, when did you arrive in Maine?"

"Only three days since. Having had directions from me dad, as soon as I got ashore in New York I made fur the railway station, where I went to slaap in the cars and woke up in Portland. Thar I had time to ate breakfast and ride in the train to Bath, where I meant to board the steamboat *Gardiner*. I had half a minute to sprint down the hill to the wharf, but the time was up before I got there and the men pulled in the plank when I was twinty faat away. I'm told the Captain niver taries ten seconds for anybody."

"That's true," replied Alvin, "for I have seen him steam away when by waiting half a minute he would have gained five or six passengers."

"So I had to tarry for the other steamer, which lift me off at Southport, and I walked the rist of the way to the home of me parents. I mind dad towld me the same was four or five miles, but I think it was six hundred full. I found me parents yesterday."

"I remember now that your father said he expected you about this time, but it had slipped my mind, and having been away all day I had no chance to learn of your coming. But I can tell you, Mike, I'm mighty glad to know you."

"The same to yersilf," was the hearty response of the Irish lad. In fact, considering the circumstances in which the two met, to say nothing of their congenial dispositions, nothing was more natural than that they should form a strong liking for each other. They walked side by side, sometimes in the dusty road or over the well-marked path on the right or left, and talking of everything that came into their minds.

"How was it you happened to be passing over this road to-night when I found myself in so great need of you?" asked Alvin.

"Me dad sint me this noon down to Cape Newagen to inquire for some letters he didn't ixpect, and then to keep on to Squirrel Island and buy him a pound of 'bacca and to be sure to walk all the way and be back in time for supper, which I much fear me I sha'n't be able to do."

"How did you make out?" asked the amused Alvin.

"As well as might be ixpected," gravely replied Mike, "being there ain't any store at Cape Newagen and I should have to walk under water for near two miles or swim to Squirrel Island, barring the fact that I can't swim a stroke to save me life."

"What did your father mean by sending you on such a fool errand?"

Mike chuckled.

"It was a joke on me. I've tried to break him of the habit, but he can't help indulging in the same whin he gits the chance. He was so glad to have me wid him that he found an excuse for whaling me afore last night and then played this trick on me."

"Didn't your mother tell you better?"

"Arrah, but she's worse nor him; she said I would enj'y the walk and I may say I did though I couldn't extind the same as far as they had planned for me. Can you suggist something I kin do, Alvin, by the which I can git aven wid the owld folks fur the fun they've had wid me?"

"I am not able to think of anything just now."

"Ah, I have it!" broke in the Irish youth, snapping his fingers. "It has been the rule all me life that whin I got into a fight I must report the whole sarcumstances of the same to dad. If I licked the other chap, it was all right and he or mither give me an extra pratie at dinner, but if I was bested, then dad made himself tired using his strap over me back and legs. He's in high favor of me exercising my fists on others, but never will agraa that I don't do a hanus wrong when I git licked. 'It's such a bad habit,' he explains, that it's his dooty to whale it out of me."

"What has your fight to-night to do with playing a joke on him?"

"Why, don't you see that I'll make him think fur a time that it was meself that was knocked skyhigh, and after he's lambasted me till he can't do so any more, and I kin hardly stand, you and me will tell him the truth."

"Where will be the joke in that? It seems to me it will be wholly on you."

"Don't ye observe that he and mither will feel so bad whin they find how they have aboosed me that they'll give me two praties instid of one and then I'll have the laugh on them."

"It takes an Irishman or Irish boy to think up such a joke as that," was the comment of Alvin, as the two just then came in sight of the small log structure in which Pat Murphy and his wife made their home, while a light twinkled beyond from the windows of the larger building, where Alvin lived with his parents during the summer. A half mile to the south toward Cape Newagen was the more moderate dwelling, during the sultry season, of Chester Haynes, his chum from whom he had parted an hour or two previous to making the acquaintance of Mike Murphy. As they drew near the structure, Mike stepped in front and opened the door, with Alvin at his heels. Within, sat the father calmly smoking his pipe, while his tall, muscular but pleasant-faced wife by the table in the middle of the room with spectacles on her nose was busily sewing. The light was acetylene, furnished from the same source that supplied the large bungalow only a few paces distant.

"Good evening, Pat, and the top of the evening to you, Mrs. Murphy. You see I have brought Mike safely home to you."

Alvin was a favorite with the couple, who warmly greeted him. The boy was fond of calling at the humble dwelling and chatting with the two. Sometimes he took a meal with them, insisting that the food was much better than was provided by the professional chef in his own home. No surer means of reaching the heart of the honest woman could have been thought of, and though she insisted that the lad had kissed the blarney stone, she was none the less pleased by his kind words.

"Mither, I'm that near starved," said Mike, dropping into the nearest chair, "that I should perish if I had a dozen more paces to walk."

"Yer supper has been waiting for more than an hour, and if ye'll pass into the kitchen ye may eat your fill."

Mike took a step in the direction, but was halted by his father.

"Where is the 'bacca I ordered ye to bring from Squirrel Island?"

"They're out of the kind ye smoke, dad, and that which the storekeeper showed me was that poor I wouldn't have anything to do wid the same."

"And the litters at Cape Newagen?"

"They're expicting the one from King George that ye were looking fur, but it won't be in until the next steamer."

CHAPTER IV

A Loan to Captain Landon

The elder Murphy looked at his son with a quizzical expression and then glanced at the hat which had been hung on a peg behind the door.

"And where did ye get that?"

"Traded me owld one for it, but I had to go through a foight before the ither chap would give his consint."

The father's face brightened.

"So ye've been in anither foight, have ye, and only well landed in Ameriky."

"I niver had a foiner one," replied the son, still standing in the open door which led to the kitchen; "it makes me heart glad when I think of the same."

"And which licked?"

Mike was quick to seize the opportunity for which he was waiting. With a downcast expression, he humbly asked:

"Do ye expict me to win *ivery* time, dad?"

"Av coorse I do; haven't I trained ye up to that shtyle of fightin'?"

"Suppose, dad, the ither chap is bigger and stronger – what do ye ixpict of me?"

"Ye know yoursilf what to expict when ye disgraces the name of Murphy."

Laying his pipe on the table beside which his wife was sitting, the parent grimly rose and moved toward the door on the other side of the room that opened into the small apartment where the firewood was stored from wetting by rain. The three knew the meaning of the movement: he was seeking the heavy strap that was looped over a big spike. He had brought it from Tipperary two years before and must have kept it against the coming of his heir, knowing he would have use for it.

"Have done wid yer supper," he said to Mike, "and after the same, I'll do me dooty by ye."

The grinning lad was still standing in the kitchen door. The action of his father turned his back toward the youth, who winked at Alvin, stepped across the threshold and sat down at the end of the table where he was in sight, but the greater portion of the table itself was hidden.

Although the moonlight had given the visitor a good view of his young friend, the glow of the lamp now showed his face and features with the distinctness of midday. Alvin was sure he had never seen so homely a youth. The countenance was broad and covered with so many freckles that they showed on the tips of his large ears. The nose was an emphatic pug, and the mouth wide and filled with large white teeth, upon which no dentist could have found a pin speck. His short hair was the color of a well burned brick, stood straight up from the crown and projected like quills from the sides of his head, his complexion being of the same hue as the hair.

Although of stocky build, being hardly as tall as Alvin, the frame of the Irish youth was a model of strength and grace. There were few of his age who in a rough and tumble bout could hold their own with him. The night being sultry, he wore no coat or waistcoat, but the shirt, guiltless of tie, was clean, as were the trousers supported by a belt encircling the sturdy waist. His dusty tan shoes were neatly tied and the yellow socks which matched them could not have been less soiled.

The best "feature" about Mike Murphy was his good nature. His spirits were irrepressible, and he was always ready with quip and wit. Looking into the broad shining face one was reminded of the remark made about Abraham Lincoln: he was so homely that he crossed the line and became handsome.

Alvin's chair being near the front door with Mike in plain sight, he kept his eyes upon him for a minute or two. He saw him reach his fork across the table and bring a huge baked potato to his plate.

He twisted it apart in the middle so as to expose the flaky whiteness and then snapped the fingers of both hands at his sides. With a grin he looked at Alvin and asked:

"Do ye know what's the hottest thing in the wurruld?"

"How about a live coal of fire?"

"Arrah, now, it's the inside of a baked pratie; a coal of fire is a cooling breeze alongside the same. Be the same towken, can ye tell me the cowldest thing on airth?"

"A piece of ice will do very well."

"Ye're off: it's the handle of a pitchfork on a frosty mornin'; if ye don't belave it try the expirimint for yersilf. But I must attind to plaisure, as me cousin said whin he grabbed his shillaleh and attacked his loved brother."

Mike now gave his whole attention to the meal. When it is remembered that he was ravenously hungry and the provision bountiful, enough is said. His father came back into the sitting room, tossed the heavy strap on the stand, beside which his wife was still serenely sewing, picked up his pipe and by sucking vigorously upon it renewed the fire that had nearly gone out. He crossed his legs and slowly rocked to and fro, glancing hospitably at Alvin.

While the latter was greatly amused by what he had seen and heard, he was also distressed for his friend Mike, whose idea of a joke was unique. There could be no mistaking the meaning of his father's actions. The son was due for a sharp castigation and was certain to receive it unless the caller interposed with a truthful statement of the recent occurrence.

Alvin rose from his chair and stepping to the kitchen door, gently closed it. Mrs. Murphy looked up through her spectacles.

"I don't wonder that ye wants to shet out the noise Mike makes whin aiting, fur the same is scand'lous."

"It isn't that, but I don't wish him to hear what I say to you."

"Shall I tell him to hold a finger of aich hand in his ears while he's aiting?" asked the mother without a smile.

"He might find that inconvenient. Mike told you the truth when he said he was in a fight to-night."

"I don't doubt the same, but I demands to know why he 'lowed himself to git licked?" said the father, with no little heat.

"He wasn't licked: it was the other fellow who got the worst of it."

"Why, thin, did the spalpeen say it was himself that was bested?"

"Begging your pardon, Pat, he did not. He stated a general truth, which no one can deny, to the effect that a fellow like him takes a chance of being defeated now and then. Listen to my story."

Thereupon Alvin related the incidents with which you are familiar, adding:

"If it hadn't been for Mike's arrival and his brave fight in my behalf, I should have been badly beaten and robbed. The first wretch even fired a pistol during the rumpus."

"Did he kill aither of ye?" asked the startled father.

"The shot was not aimed at me or him, but was meant to scare me into stopping and giving up. If I had thought of it I should have taken the weapon from him and given it to Mike. Let me tell you," added Alvin impressively, "both of you ought to be proud of such a son as Mike."

"So we are," quietly remarked the mother, without looking up or checking her flying needle.

"There isn't a pluckier lad in the world. He came to my help like a whirlwind, and the way he sailed into the fellow who struck me from behind showed Mike to be a hero."

The father reached out and grasped the loop of leather lying on the stand. Rising to his feet he passed into the small room where the stove wood was piled and hung the strap again upon the metal peg. As he came back and resumed his seat he sighed. It looked as if he was disappointed.

"What do you intend to do with him, Pat?"

"Train him up in the way he should go. Whin the school opens at Southport he will attend there, and whin he's at home I'll find enough to keep him out of mischief."

"School will not open until September, which is several weeks away. I want you to lend Mike to me until then."

Mrs. Murphy stopped her sewing for the moment and looked at their visitor. Her husband removed the pipe from his mouth and also stared at him.

"Lend him to ye!" he repeated. "And phwat would you do wid him?"

"You know father bought me a motor boat, which arrived a few days ago. Chester Haynes and I have had great fun cruising up the Kennebec and different bays and streams, and we are going to keep at it until we have to go home. We want Mike to join us and share our sport, just as long as Chester and I are in this part of the world. You won't refuse me the favor?"

It was evident that the parents were pleased with the request. The proud mother said:

"Mike is so gintle that he'll be a good companion for anyone."

"Yis; because of his gintleness," repeated the father grimly. "But it saams to me ye're too kind, Alvin; he won't be able to airn his kaap and the indulgence ye'll give him."

"Won't earn them! Why, we don't intend to hire him; it's the pleasure we shall have in the company of such a good fellow as Mike. Besides," added Alvin, lowering his voice, "I have a feeling that we're not through with those two fellows who attacked me to-night. Mike won't be satisfied until he has paid the one who ran away from him and left his hat behind."

"Ye're wilcome to the lad," assented his father, "and I take it as very good on yer part, which is what ivery one has a right to expect from yersilf and father."

"No blarneying, Pat," protested their caller. "I am obliged to you for granting my request, for the favor will be wholly given to us."

"Now it's yersilf that's blarneying," said Pat.

The kitchen door softly opened and the grinning, red-faced Mike came into the room and sat down near his young friend.

"I overheard ivery word that was said, Captain, and it's Mike Murphy that's thankful for yer kindness. I'm wid ye to the ind."

The others laughed at the use of the title by the Irish youth, who explained:

"Av coorse it's 'Captain Landon,' being that ye're the owner of the motor boat, as ye calls the same."

"And you shall be my first mate," said Alvin.

"Won't Chister, as ye name him, be jealous and indulge in mootiny?"

"No fear of that; we'll satisfy him by making him second mate, while all three will form the crew. And now I must bid you good night. I shall call for you as soon as we are through breakfast to-morrow morning."

With which our young friend went to his own home.

CHAPTER V

A Motor Boat

The first time you stepped aboard a motor boat you were impressed by the looks of the engine and the numerous appliances which when rightly handled drive the craft through the water at the rate of ten, fifteen, twenty and sometimes more miles an hour. You thought it would be hard to learn to manage the boat and know how to overcome the different kinds of trouble that are almost certain to arise. But the task, after all, is simple and with patience you can soon master it.

In the first place let us find out the principle which governs the smooth, swift progress of the structure. I shall be as brief and pointed as possible.

As a foundation, we need a good supply of clean, strained gasoline in the tank. Unless the fluid is free from all impurities it is likely to clog and interfere with the working of the machinery. The tank is so placed that its elevation is sufficient to cause the gasoline to flow by gravity through the pipe, which is connected by an automatic valve with the carburettor, admitting just enough to answer the purpose desired. As the gasoline is sprayed into the carburettor a quantity of air is drawn in from the outside. The two mingle and form a highly explosive gas. To start, you give the fly-wheel a rapid swing, which causes the piston to move downward. This action sucks the gaseous mixture into the cylinder through the inlet valve. The further movement of the fly-wheel causes the piston to move upward, compressing the gas into small volume. While the gas is thus compressed it is exploded by means of an electric spark. The violent expansion of the burning gas drives the piston downward with great force. The movement opens the exhaust valve, the burnt gases escape through the exhaust pipe and the fresh mixture is drawn in again to be compressed and exploded as before. If the engine has more than one cylinder the same process is repeated in each one. This is the operation which is continued so long as the supply of gasoline holds out.

In the steam engine the vapor acts alternately on each side of the piston head, but in motor boats and automobiles it acts only on one side. The speed with which this is done is amazing and the same may be said of the steam engine.

The swift rise and fall of the piston acting through the connecting rod turns the shaft directly below, which whirls the screw around at the stern. The electric spark that explodes the vapor is generated by a dry battery or by a magneto-electric machine driven by the motor itself. There is also the "make and break" spark, to which we need give no attention. The two ends of the wires in the spark plug which is screwed into the cylinder are separated by a space barely the twentieth part of an inch, across which the spark leaps, giving out an intensely hot flash.

You understand, of course, that I have given simply the principle and method of operation of the engine belonging to a motor boat. There are many parts that must operate smoothly and with the minimum of friction. Lubricating oil is as essential as gasoline; the ignition battery must be kept dry; you must know how to operate the reversing lever, to shut off, to start and to hold the desired speed. Except when racing or under some pressing necessity, the swiftest progress is rarely attained, for it is trying to all parts of the engine and consumes a good deal of fuel, which cannot be bought for a trifling price.

You would be confused by any attempt on my part to give a technical description of all the motor appliances, nor is there need to do so. If you have just bought a motor boat, you will be taught how to control and manage it by a practical instructor, and such instruction is better than pages of directions. To show the truth of what I have just said, I will quote a single paragraph from the description of the boat concerning which I shall have a good deal to say in the course of my story.

"The keel is of white oak, with specially bent elm frames. Planking of selected Laguna mahogany, finished thickness one-half inch, in narrow strakes and uniform seams, secured to frames

by copper boat nails, riveted over copper washers, all fastenings being of bronze or copper to withstand salt water. Seams of hull caulked with special cotton payed and puttied. Outside of mahogany planking, finished in natural wood with spar varnish. Watertight bulkheads fore and aft which assist in floating the launch in case of accident. Decks and interior woodwork finished in selected Laguna mahogany. Steam bent quartered oak or mahogany coaming extending around cockpit."

Alvin Landon's launch was thirty-five feet long, with six-cylinder, sixty-horse power motor and a guaranteed speed of twenty-four miles an hour. The motor was placed under the forward deck, where it was fully protected by a hinged metal deck. To become somewhat technical again let me proceed:

All the valves were placed on the same side, the camshaft (operating the valves) as well as the pump shaft being mounted on ball bearings. The crankcase was of tough aluminum alloy, and lubrication was well provided for, being kept at a constant level in the crankcase by a geared oil pump. A gear-driven pump circulated the necessary cooling water for the cylinders, which passed out through the copper exhaust pipe at the stern. Only one operating lever was employed and that was placed directly at the helmsman's left hand. The gasoline tank contained fifty gallons and was under the after deck with a pan below it for safety's sake, draining overboard. The propeller wheel and shaft were of bronze.

Alvin's motor boat, thus partially described, included the necessary deck hardware, "such as brass chocks and cleats, flag pole sockets and flag poles, ventilators to engine compartment, rubber matting for floor, cushions and upholstered backs for seats, three sailing lights, oars, rowlocks and sockets, compressed air whistle with tank, two pairs of cork fenders, bell, foghorn, boat hook and portable bilge pump, six life preservers (as required by the U. S. Government), a twenty-pound folding anchor and a hundred feet of strong manila rope."

We must not forget the glass wind-shield. Passengers and crew were always guarded against flying spray and sweep of wind and rain. Nothing that forethought could provide for the safety and comfort of all was forgotten.

Suppose young Captain Landon stepped on board the *Deerfoot* with the intention of starting out on a cruise. He would first turn on the switch which controls the electric current for the jump spark, open the valve that allows the gasoline to flow from the tank into the carburettor, swing around the fly-wheel and then assume charge of the lever and steering gear. But lo! the engine refuses to respond. There is no motion. What is the cause?

There may be a dozen of them. In the first place, the battery may be worn out; there may be a lack of compression due to leaky valves; perhaps, after all, he forgot to place the switch key in position; the spark plugs may be fouled or cracked, the gasoline shut off, the gas mixture imperfect, no gasoline in the tank, water in the cylinder caused by a leak from the water jacket, or water in the gasoline.

It may be that when the launch has covered a good many miles the engine suddenly stops. The cause may be faulty ignition, because of a disconnected wire or a loose terminal, exhaustion of the gasoline, or derangement of the magneto, or poor carburettor adjustment.

But I have said enough to give you an idea of what the expert handler of a motor boat must understand. It may seem almost a hopeless task, but, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, patience and application will enable you to overcome all difficulties and make the handling of the craft an unalloyed pleasure.

CHAPTER VI

Captain and Crew

When the elder Landon received a report from the principal of the military school on the Hudson to the effect that Alvin led all his classmates in their studies and had not once been brought under discipline, he was glad to fulfil the promise made months before, and bought him a handsome motor launch, the selection of which was left to the youth himself. The craft was shipped to Portland, Maine, there set afloat in the capacious bay and sped northeastward for forty miles or so, to the bungalow which the banker had erected a year before on Southport Island. The retreat was to be used by him and his family as a restful refuge from the feverish work which kept him in New York most of the year, with occasional flying trips to the great cities in the West or as far as the Pacific coast.

One condition the parent insisted upon: Alvin was not to run the launch alone until an expert pronounced him qualified to do so. Thus it was that when the boat headed up Casco Bay, Captain Abe Daboll, from the factory, was aboard and directed things. He had overseen the construction of the launch and knew all about it from stem to stern. He was there under engagement to deliver it to the bungalow, or rather as near as he could approach the building, and to remain and instruct Alvin in every point necessary for him to know.

Several facts joined to make the youth an apt pupil. He was naturally bright and was intensely interested in all that related to motor boats. While awaiting the completion of his launch, he read and studied many catalogues, circulars and books relating to such craft, and rode in a number. He asked questions and studied the working of the machinery and handling of the launch until his instructor looked at him in wonderment.

"I never saw your equal," he said admiringly; "by and by you will be answering *my* questions and telling *me* how to run things."

The smiling youth knew this was exaggeration, for something new seemed to be turning up continually, and there were turns where he thought he knew the way, only to find when put to the test that he was totally ignorant. But as I said, he learned fast and after a week's stay at the home of Mr. Landon, during every day of which – excepting Sunday – the two went on a cruise with Alvin at the helm, the man said that nothing more remained for him to show his pupil. This remark followed a stormy day when the launch went far south beyond Damariscove Island and was caught in a rough sea.

"It was the real test," said the expert to the banker. "I never raised my hand or made a suggestion when we were plunging through the big seas, for neither was necessary. You needn't be afraid to trust yourself with him anywhere and in any weather."

Now that I am through with my rather lengthy, but perhaps necessary introduction, let us proceed with the story I have set out to tell.

On the morning following the battle of Alvin with his assailants, and his pleasing meeting with Mike Murphy, the youth called at the home of the Irish lad, carrying in his hand a yachting cap in addition to the one he wore on his own head. Across the front were the gilt letters *Deerfoot*.

"I bought an extra one when I had my suit made," he explained, "and it looks to me as if it will fit you. A straw hat isn't handy to wear when sailing, even though you may loop the string around its band into your button hole. If the season was not so far along, I should order a yachting suit for you, Mike. You know a mate ought to be in uniform. But we shall have to wait till next summer."

The grinning lad gingerly took the white cap in hand, turned it about and then pulled it over his crown. He was in front of his own home, and his father as he smoked his pipe looked on, the mother being out of sight within the house. The headgear fitted perfectly.

"It's a pity to waste such fine wear on the hid of so ugly looking a spalpeen," remarked the father; "in trooth it ill becomes him."

"How can ye have the heart to blame me, dad, that I was born wid such a close resimblance to yersilf that if we was the same age mither couldn't till us apart?"

The parent was about to reply to this personal remark, but ignored his offspring and spoke to Alvin.

"Ye have a foine day for a sail, Captain."

"It is perfect."

"And Chister Haynes goes wid yes?"

"We are partners all the way through and he's expecting me."

"The sicond mate hasn't the honor of an acquaintance with the first mate, but it won't take us long to larn aich ither's ways," said Mike, bubbling over with high spirits and the promise of a day of rare enjoyment. "The mate hasn't the right to make suggistions to the captain, but if he had he would venture to obsarve that he is wasting vallyble time talking wid a gentleman who can't tell a gasoline launch from a lobster pot – "

"Be the same token he can till a lobster when he sees him," exclaimed the parent in pretended wrath, making a dive for his son, who eluded him by darting into the highway. Alvin waved a good-by to Pat and the youths hurried away, anxious to be out on the water.

While following the road toward the home of Chester Haynes, Mike took off his cap and admiringly surveyed it. He noted the patent leather visor, the gilt buttons to which the chin strap was attached, and then spelled out the name on the front.

"I 'spose that is what your boat is called, Captain?" he remarked inquiringly.

"Yes; you know it's the fashion for sailors on a man-of-war thus to show the name of the ship to which they belong."

"But why didn't the sign painter git the word roight?"

"What do you mean, Mike? Isn't that the correct way to spell '*Deerfoot*'?"

"I 'spose the first part might go, as me uncle obsarved whin the front of his shanty fell down, but the rear is wrong."

"You mean 'foot.' What is wrong about it?"

"The same should be 'fut': that's the way we spell it in Ireland."

"We have a different method here," gravely remarked Alvin.

"And if I may ask, Captain, where did you git the name from?"

"Have you ever read about Deerfoot the Shawanoe? He was such a wonderful young Indian that I guess he never lived. But Chester and I became fond of him, and when Chester thought it would be a good idea to name the boat for him I was glad to do so."

"Deerfut the Shenanigan," repeated Mike. "Where can I maat the gintleman?"

"Oh, he's been dead these many years, – long before you or I was born."

"Wurrah, wurrah, what a pity!" and Mike sighed as if from regret. "Are you sure that isn't him that's coming up the road?"

A youth of about the age of Alvin, but of lighter build, and dressed like him in yachting costume, came into sight around a slight bend in the highway.

"That's Chester; he's so anxious to take advantage of this beautiful day that he has come to meet us, though he might have used the boat for part of the way since he is well able to handle it."

A few minutes later Chester and Mike were introduced. No one could help being pleased with the good-natured Irish youth, and the two warmly shook hands.

"Mike did me such a fine service last night that I must tell you about it," remarked Alvin as the three walked southward.

"Arrah, now, ye make me blush," protested Mike, "as I said whin they crowned me Queen of May in the owld counthry."

Alvin, however, related the whole story and you may be sure it lost none in the narration. Mike insisted that the Captain had done a great deal more than he to bring about a glorious victory.

"I believe every word Alvin has told me," was the comment of Chester; "and I am proud to have you with us as a friend."

"Such being the case," added Alvin, "I have as a slight token of my appreciation, made Mike my first mate, with you as second, and all three as the crew of the *Deerfoot*."

"There couldn't be a finer appointment," assented Chester. "I suppose, Mate Murphy, you know all about sailing a boat?"

"I larned the trade in the owld counthry, by sailing me mither's old shoe in a tub of water; I 'spose the same is all that is necessary."

"That is sufficient, but," and the manner of Chester was grave, "you two make light of what is a pretty serious matter. That attack upon you was a crime that ought to be punished."

"I'm thinking it *has* been," said Mike; "I belave the rapscallions are of the same mind."

"No doubt they meant to rob you."

"And would have succeeded but for Mike. We never saw them before, have no idea who they are, or how they came to be in this part of Maine, nor where they have gone."

"Would you know either if you met him by day?"

"I am not sure, though the moonlight gave me a pretty fair view. It wasn't a time for a calm inspection."

"I'm sure I would know the chap that I had the run in wid," said Mike.

"How?"

"By his black eye and smashed nose."

"They might help. They were dressed well, but I can't understand what caused them to visit Southport and to lie in wait for me."

"Have there been any burglaries or robberies in the neighborhood?"

"None, so far as I have heard. You know there have been a number of post office robberies among the towns to the north, but it can't be that those two fellows have had anything to do with them."

"Probably not, and yet it is not impossible. I often wonder why there are not more crimes of that kind at the seaside and mountain resorts, where there are so many opportunities offered. The couple you ran against may belong to some gang who have decided to change their field of operations."

"If so we shall soon hear of them again."

"Arrah, now, if we could only maat them agin!" sighed the wistful Mike. "It would make me young once more."

CHAPTER VII

One August Day

"Well, here we are!"

It was Captain Alvin Landon who uttered the exclamation as the three came to a halt on the shore at the point nearest the moorings of the gasoline launch *Deerfoot*, left there the night before.

She made a pretty picture, with her graceful lines, shining varnish, polished brass work and cleanliness everywhere. The steersman in the cockpit was guarded by a wind-shield of thick glass. At the stern floated a flag displaying an anchor surrounded by a circle of stars with the stripes as shown in our national emblem. At the bow flew a burgee or small swallow-tailed flag of blue upon which was the word *Deerfoot* in gold. The bunting was always taken in when the boat lay up for the night, but in daytime and in clear weather it was displayed on the launch.

Not only could one sleep with some comfort on such a craft by using the convertible seats, but food could be prepared on an oil stove. In cruising, however, among the numerous islands and bays, it was so easy to go ashore for an excellent meal that Captain Landon followed the rule.

The water was so deep close to land that the three easily sprang aboard, the Captain being last in order to cast off the line that held the boat in place. It was the first time that Mike Murphy had ever placed foot on a craft of that nature. While Chester hustled about, Alvin quickly joining him, he gaped around in silent amazement. He felt that in his ignorance of everything the best course for him was to do nothing without the advice of his young friends. He sank down gingerly on one of the seats and watched them.

He saw the Captain thrust the switch plug into place, though with no idea of what he meant by doing so, while Chester took a peep into the gasoline tank in the stern. Then Alvin opened the hinged deck which covered the big six cylinder motor, climbed forward to the fly-wheel, and swung it back and forth until it circled over. Instantly there followed a smooth whirr, and he closed the forward deck over the motor and took his seat behind the wind-shield where he grasped the wheel which, as on an automobile, controlled the steering gear. The control lever, as has been stated, was on his left. Alvin pushed this forward until the clutch took hold, and with a churning of the screw at the stern the boat moved ahead and quickly attained a good degree of speed. The wind was so slight that the surface of the water was scarcely rippled, and no motion could be felt except the vibration of the powerful engine.

The bow and stern lines having been neatly coiled down and everything being adjusted, with Captain Alvin seated and loosely grasping the steering wheel, the two mates took their places behind him, prepared to enjoy the outing to the full. Youth, high health, with every surrounding circumstance favorable – what can bring more happiness to a human being? They come to us only once and let us make the most of them.

"Is it permitted to spake to the man at the wheel?" called Mike to the Captain, who, looking over his shoulder, nodded his head.

"So long as you speak good sense."

"Which the same is what I does always; why couldn't ye take a run over to Ireland this morning, now that ye are headed that way?"

"It's worth thinking about, but we shall have to wait till another time. Better become acquainted with a part of the Maine coast first."

The launch was speeding to the northeast in the direction of Squirrel Island, which has long been one of the most popular of summer resorts. This beautiful spot is not quite a mile long and has a varied scenery that surprises every one who visits the place. The deep water around the wharf is as clear as crystal, so that at high tide one can look down and see clearly the rocky bottom twenty feet

below. The coast abounds with prodigious rocks tumbled together by some stupendous convulsion of nature and against which the waves dash with amazing power during a storm, and throw the spray high in air and far inland. There are shady woods of balsam and fir where one may stroll in the cool twilight over the velvet carpet, meandering along the bewitching "Lover's Walk," with which nearly every section is provided, or threading his way through the dense bushes which brush him lovingly as he follows the faintly marked paths. Overhead, when the crow sentinels catch sight of him, they caw their warnings to their comrades. There are shadowy glens, gaping fissures, whose corresponding faces show that at some remote age they were split apart by a terrific upheaval, a gray barn with its threshing machine and air of quiet country life, rows of neat cottages, a little white wooden church, perched like a rooster gathering himself and about to crow and flap his wings, the Casino, smooth, grassy slopes, and at the northern end of the island, the roomy Squirrel Inn, crowded with visitors attracted by the cool and bracing air, from the opening to the close of summer.

Our young friends had no intention of calling there, but, circling to the westward of the island, headed for Boothbay Harbor nestling three miles to the northward. A number of girls loitering on the broad porch of the hotel and a group playing tennis waved their handkerchiefs; the young Captain answered with a tooting of his whistle, and Mike Murphy rising to his feet swung his cap over his head.

To the right stretched Linekin Bay, to the head of Linekin Neck, beyond which courses the Damariscotta River, bristling with islets, picturesque and beautiful beyond compare. Captain Landon turned slightly to the left, still heading with unabated speed for Boothbay Harbor. He saw coming toward him a little steamer from whose bow the water spread in a foaming wake. It was the craft which makes regular trips between Boothbay Harbor and Squirrel Island through the summer season, stopping at other places when passengers wish it. One of these is Spruce Point, where little parties often go ashore over the rickety dock, and, striking into the shady woods, follow the winding path along the rocky coast known as the "Indian Trail," for more than two miles, when, after passing Mount Pisgah and crossing a long bridge, they find themselves in the town of which I have spoken.

As the two boats rapidly approached, passing within a short distance of each other, the head and shoulders of the captain of the *Nellie G.* showed in the pilot-house. He was a tall, handsome man with dark whiskers, who, when saluted by the *Deerfoot*, reached up and pulled the whistle cord of his own craft. Every one knows Captain Williams of Bowdoinham and is glad to see him turn an honest penny each summer. His boat, one of the prettiest in those waters, had been built wholly by himself, and the name painted in big letters on the front of the wheelhouse is that of his wife.

To the left and almost touching Southport is Capitol Island, a little nearer, Burnt, and then Mouse, all as picturesque as they can be. The pathway arched with trees completely shades the sloping walk that leads to the hotel on Mouse Island. A government light on Burnt Island throws out its warning rays at momentary intervals through the night. When fog settles down, the light gives place to a tolling bell.

Entering the broad harbor, our friends saw a score or more of vessels grouped around at anchor, or moored at the wharves. There was a magnificent yacht, the property of a multimillionaire of national reputation; another luxurious craft, the representative of a Boston club, a five-masted schooner, veteran ships, two of which had voyaged from the other side of the world, a decayed and rotting hull near the long bridge, where it tipped a little to one side in the mud, and was wholly under water when the tide was in, as it had been for years. An excursion steamer from Bath was just arriving, while others were taking on passengers for some of the towns not far off.

Alvin, having slowed down by lessening the amount of gas admitted to the cylinders with the throttle lever on the wheel, rounded to at one of the floats, where a man who had noted his approach caught the loop of rope tossed to him and slipped it over the mooring pile set in place for that purpose. The steersman pulled the control lever back to the vertical position, releasing the propeller shaft from connection with the motor. A further pull backward threw in the reverse gear, and the launch came to rest beside the float and the lever was returned to the vertical position.

"I'll look after it while you are gone," he said and Alvin nodded. Captain and crew then attended to stopping the motor by turning the switch to the "off" position, putting out fenders to avoid scratching, making bow and stern lines fast to deck cleats and putting everything in shipshape order.

The three then climbed the steps to the upper level, passed the storehouses and ascended the moderate hill to the principal street of the well-known town of Boothbay Harbor. There was little that was noteworthy in the rather long avenue, lined with the usual stores, a bank and amusement hall and a number of pretty residences, and I should make no reference to it except for an incident that befell the visitors.

Having gone to the end of the street, that is, until the eastern terminal gave way to the open country, they turned about to retrace their steps to the boat, for it was much more pleasant to be skimming over the water. The temperature at Boothbay Harbor is generally five or ten degrees higher than at Squirrel Island.

The three sauntered along, pausing now and then to look into the store windows, admiring the displays of Indian trinkets offered for sale, and approached the corner where they were to turn down the hill to the wharf. At that moment they saw a man of dark complexion, with a big mustache, and accompanied by a large lad, both in yachting costume, come out of Hodgdon's store, which is devoted to the sale of hats, caps, boots, shoes, clothing and other necessities. The two took the opposite course, following the main street in the direction of the ball grounds.

Neither Alvin nor Chester did more than glance at the couple, for there was nothing unusual in their appearance, but Mike started.

"Did ye obsarve thim?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"Yes; but there are plenty others on the street that are as interesting."

"Come wid me," whispered Mike, "say nothing."

He whisked into the store, his wondering companions at his heels. They left the situation to him.

"Will ye oblige me by saying whither the two that has just passed out bought anything of ye?" asked Mike of the rotund, smiling clerk, who, hesitating a moment, answered:

"The younger one bought a yachting cap, or rather traded one for his old straw hat, for which I allowed him a nickel, which is all it's worth and more too, I'm beginning to think."

He held up the dilapidated headgear which he caught up from under the counter.

"Do ye recognize the same?" asked Mike, in a whisper of Alvin.

"Can it be possible!" exclaimed the young Captain.

"It's the identycal hat I wore last night whin we had our ilegant shindy!"

CHAPTER VIII

A Passing Glimpse

Mike Murphy, even in the flurry of the moment, could not forget his innate courtesy. He handed back the old hat to the puzzled clerk and bowed.

"I thank ye very much for yer kindness, and now, lads, come wid me."

He hurried out of the door, the two following closely.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Alvin.

"Folly the chap and finish the shindy I started wid him," replied the Irish lad, staring in the direction taken by the couple. "Ye can luk on and kaap back the man, so that I'll git fair play wid the ither."

"You are not on the Southport road, Mike," warned Alvin, "and you will be arrested before you can land a blow and probably locked up."

"It'll be worth it," replied the other, scenting the battle like a war horse. "Bad luck to it! where is the spalpeen?"

The three were looking keenly up the street, but, brief as was the interval, the couple had vanished.

There are a number of lesser streets which lead inland at right angles to the main avenue of Boothbay Harbor, and almost as many that are mere alleys on the other side, through which one may pass to the different wharves. It will be seen, therefore, that there was nothing strange in the disappearance of the strangers in whom our friends were so much interested.

"They can't have gone fur," exclaimed the impatient Mike, hesitating for the moment as to what was best to do, and feeling the value of every passing minute and fearing lest the opportunity be lost.

"They must have come in a boat," suggested Chester, "and have turned down one of the by-streets to the water. But what is the purpose of chasing them?"

"So we may catch 'em," was the reply of Mike, who feeling there was a possibility that they might have turned the other way, addressed Chester:

"Cross to the ither side of the main street and hurry by the corners, looking up aich as ye do so; if they've turned that way, they're still in sight."

There was sense in the plan. Chester ran across the avenue and walked rapidly, glancing up each opening as he came to it. He meant merely to keep the couple in sight until he could learn something more of them. At the same time he was wise enough to avoid drawing attention to himself. He passed well beyond the hotel without catching sight of the man and boy and finally stopped, convinced that it was useless to go farther.

Alvin Landon was of the same mind with him. As matters stood, nothing was to be gained by accusing the youth of assault and attempted robbery, for no proof could be brought forward. Moreover, his companion at that time was absent, the man now with him having been seen for the first time by Alvin and Mike a few minutes before.

"It will be well to learn something of the two," the Captain thought to himself, "but it will be a mistake to make them suspect us, as they are sure to do if they find we are dogging them. As for Mike pitching in and starting another fight, it will be the height of folly. I won't allow it."

The two were walking side by side and going so fast that several persons looked curiously at them.

"Take it easy," advised Alvin.

"The same is what I'll do whin I comes up wid the spalpeen, that stole me hat where I'd flung it in the road."

"Keep cool and if you get sight of them, don't go nearer, but watch –"

"There they be now!" exclaimed Mike at the first glance down one of the alleys on their left, and, before Alvin could check him, he dashed off at his best speed. His progress might have been satisfactory, but when half way down the hill some one pushed the front of a wheelbarrow through a door and across the way. Its appearance was so unexpected and close that Mike could not check himself nor had he time in which to gather for the leap that would clear it. He struck the obstacle fairly and went over, landing on his hands and knees, while the barrow in turn toppled upon him. The urchin who had caused the mischief turned and fled in a panic, before the indignant Mike could chastise him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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