

Goldfrap John Henry

The Boy Scouts' Mountain Camp



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Mountain Camp

CHAPTER I

A TYPICAL BOY SCOUT

“Hullo, Rob; what’s up?”

Merritt Crawford stopped on his way past the Hampton post-office, and hailed Rob Blake, the leader of the Eagle Patrol, of which Merritt was corporal. Both lads wore the natty scout uniform.

“Not a thing is up or down, either,” rejoined Rob, with a laugh; “it looks as if things had stopped happening in Hampton ever since that schooner was blown up.”

“And Jack Curtiss’s hopes of a fortune with it,” added Merritt. “Well, I’m off home. Going that way?”

“Yes, I’ll be with you in a – Hullo, what’s happening?”

From farther up the street, at one end of which lay the glistening sheet of water known as Hampton Inlet, there came excited shouts. Then, suddenly, into the field of vision there swept, with astonishing rapidity, a startling sight.

A large automobile was coming toward them at a rapid rate. On the driver's seat was a white-faced young girl, a cloud of fair hair streaming out about her frightened countenance. She was gripping the steering wheel, and seemed to be striving desperately to check the onrush of the machine. But her efforts were vain. The auto, instead of decreasing its rate of progress, appeared every minute to be gaining in speed.

It bumped and swayed wildly. A cloud of yellow dust arose about it. Behind the runaway machine could be perceived a crowd of townsfolk shouting incoherently.

“Oh, stop it! I shall be killed! Stop it, please do!”

The young girl was shrilly screaming in alarm, as the machine approached the two boys. So rapidly had events progressed since they first sighted it, that not a word had been exchanged between them. All at once, Merritt noticed that he was alone. Rob had darted to the roadway. As the auto dashed by, Merritt saw the young leader of the Hampton Boy Scouts give a sudden flying leap upon the running-board. He shot up from the road as if a steel spring had projected him.

For one instant he hung between life and death – or, at least, serious injury. The speed with which the auto was going caused the lad's legs to fly out from it, as one of his hands caught the side door of the tonneau. But in a jiffy Rob's athletic training triumphed. By a supreme effort he managed to steady himself and secure a grip with his other hand. Then he rapidly made his way forward along the running-board.

But this move proved almost disastrous. The already panic-stricken girl took her attention from the steering-wheel for an instant. In that molecule of time, the auto, like a perverse live thing, got beyond her control. It leaped wildly toward the sidewalk outside the Hampton candy store. A crowd of young folks – it was Saturday afternoon – had been indulging in ice cream and other dainties, when the shouts occasioned by the runaway machine had alarmed them.

Instantly soda and candy counters were neglected, and a rush for the sidewalk ensued. But, as they poured out to see what was the matter, they were faced by deadly peril.

The auto, like a juggernaut, was careening straight at them. Its exhausts roared like the nostrils of an excited beast.

Young girls screamed, and boys tried to drag them out of harm's way. But had it not been for the fact that at that instant Rob gained the wheel, there might have been some serious accidents.

The lad fairly wrenched it out of the hands of the girl driver, who was half fainting at the imminence of the peril. A quick, savage twist, and the car spun round and was on a straight course again. That danger, at least, was over. But another, and a deadlier, threatened.

Right ahead lay the spot where the road terminated in a long wharf, at which occasional steamers landed. Every second brought them closer to it. If Rob could not stop the machine before it reached the end of the wharf, it was bound to plunge

over and into the sea. All this flashed through the boy's mind as he strove to find some means of stopping the car. But the auto was of a type unfamiliar to him. One experiment in checking its motion resulted instead in a still more furious burst of speed.

Like objects seen in a nightmare, the stores, the white faces of the alarmed townsfolk, and the other familiar objects of the village street, streaked by in a gray blur.

"I must stop it! I must!" breathed Rob.

But how? Where had the manufacturer of the car concealed his emergency brake? The lever controlling it seemed to be mysteriously out of sight. Suddenly the motion of the car changed. It no longer bumped. It ran terribly smoothly and swiftly.

From the street it had passed out upon the even surface of the planked wharf. Only a few seconds now in which to gain control of it!

"The emergency brake!" shouted Rob aloud in his extremity.

"Your foot! It works with your foot, I think!"

The voice, faint as a whisper over a long-distance telephone, came to the ears of the striving boy. It belonged to the girl beside him. Glancing down, Rob now saw what he would have observed at first, if he had had time to look about him – a metal pedal projected through the floor of the car. With an inward prayer, he jammed his foot down upon it. Would it work?

The end of the pier was terribly close now. The water gleamed blue and intense. It seemed awaiting the fatal plunge overboard.

But that plunge was not taken. There was a grinding sound, like a harsh purr, the speed of the car decreased, and, finally, it came to a stop – just in time.

From the landward end of the pier a crowd came running. In front were two or three khaki-uniformed members of the Eagle Patrol. Behind them several of the Hawks were mingled with the crowd.

Beyond all the confusion, Rob, as he turned his head, could see another automobile coming. It had two passengers in it. As the crowd surged about the boy and the girl, who had not yet alighted, and poured out questions in a rapid fusillade, the second car came “honking” up.

A murmur of “Mr. Blake” ran through the throng, as a tall, ruddy-faced man descended, followed by a military-looking gentleman, whose face was strongly agitated. Mr. Blake was Rob’s father, and, as readers of other volumes of this series know, the banker and scout patron of the little community. It was his car in which he had just driven up with his companion.

The latter hesitated not a moment, but in a few long strides gained the side of the car which Rob’s efforts had stopped just in time.

“Bravely done, my lad; bravely done,” he cried, and then, to the girl, “good heavens, Alice, what an experience! Child, you might have been killed if it had not been for this lad’s pluck! Mr. Blake,” as the banker came up, “I congratulate you on your son.”

“And I,” rejoined the banker gravely, “feel that I am not

egotistical in accepting that congratulation. Rob, this is my friend, Major Roger Dangerfield, from up the State.”

“And this,” said the major, returning Rob’s salutation and turning to the girl who was clinging to him, “is my daughter, Alice, whose first experience with the operation of an automobile nearly came to a disastrous ending.”

Rob Blake, whose heroic action has just been described, was – as readers of *The Boy Scout Series* are aware – the leader of the Eagle Patrol, an organization of patriotic, clean-lived lads, attracted by the high ideals of the Boy Scout movement.

The patrol, while of comparatively recent organization, had been through some stirring adventures. In *The Boy Scouts of The Eagle Patrol*, for instance, we read how Rob and his followers defeated the machinations of certain jealous and unworthy enemies. They repaid evil with good, as is the scout way, but several despicable tricks, and worse, were played on them. In this book was related how Joe Digby in the camp of the Eagles, was kidnaped and imprisoned on a barren island, and how smoke signaling and quick wit saved his life. The boys solved a mystery and had several exciting trials of skill, including an aeroplane contest, which was almost spoiled by the trickery of their enemy, Jack Curtiss.

In the second volume, *The Boy Scouts on the Range*, we followed our young friends to the Far West. Here they distinguished themselves, and formed a mounted patrol, known as *The Ranger Patrol*. The pony riders had some exciting

incidents befall them. These included capture by hostile Indians and a queer adventure in the haunted caves, in which Tubby almost lost his life.

In this volume, Jack Curtiss and his gang were again encountered, but although their trickery prevailed for a time, in the end they were routed. A noteworthy feature of this book was the story of the career and end of Silver Tip, a giant grizzly bear of sinister reputation in that part of the country.

The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship, brought the lads into a new and vital field of endeavor. They met an army officer, who was conducting secret tests of an aeroplane, and were enabled to aid him in many ways. In all the thrilling situations with which this book abounds, the boys are found always living up to the scout motto of "Be prepared."

How they checkmated the efforts of Stonington Hunt, an unscrupulous financier, to rob a poor boy of the fruits of his inventive genius – a work in which he was aided by his unworthy son, Freeman Hunt – must be read to be appreciated. In doing this work, however, they earned Hunt's undying hatred, and, although they thought they were through with him when he slunk disgraced out of Hampton, they had not seen the last of him.

As the present story progresses, we shall learn how Stonington Hunt and his son tried to avenge themselves for their fancied wrongs at the hands of the Boy Scouts.

CHAPTER II

TWO MYSTERIOUS MEN

“Tell us all about it, Rob!”

The Eagles and the Hawks pressed close about Rob, as, after the two machines had driven off, the scouts stood surrounded by curious townfolk on the wharf.

“Not much to tell,” rejoined Rob, with a laugh. “Major Dangerfield is, it appears, an old friend of my father. He comes from Essex County, or rather, he has a summer place up there. On an automobile trip from Albany, to take his daughter to visit some friends down on Peconic Bay, he decided to stop over at Hampton and see the governor.

“He entered the bank to give dad a surprise, leaving his daughter outside for a few minutes, in the machine. She became interested in its mechanism and pulled a lever, and – the machine darted off. And – and that’s all,” he concluded modestly.

“Except that the leader of the Eagles covered himself with laurels,” struck in Bob – or Tubby – Hopkins, another member of the Eagles.

“Better than being covered with fat,” parried Rob, who didn’t relish this open praise.

“Three cheers for Rob Blake!” yelled Fylan Fobbs, a town character.

“Hip! hip! hooray!”

The cheers rang out with vim, the voices of the young scouts sounding shrill and clear among them, giving the patrol call:

“Kree-ee-ee-e!”

Rob, coloring and looking embarrassed, made his way off while the enthusiasm was at its height. With him went Merritt Crawford, Tubby Hopkins and tall, lanky Hiram Nelson, the New England lad, who had already gained quite a reputation as a wireless operator and mechanical genius of the all-round variety.

“Reckon that was a right smart piece of work,” drawled Hiram in his nasal accents, as the four of them trudged along.

“Al-ice, where art thou?” hummed Tubby teasingly, with a sharp glance at Rob. “Say, what a romance for the newspapers: Gallant Boy Scout rescues bee-yoot-i-ful girl at risk of his life, and – ”

He got no further. The tormented Rob grabbed the rotund youth and twisted his arm till Tubby yelled for mercy. With a good-natured laugh, Rob released him.

“Bet-ter sue him for damages, if he’s broke your arm,” grinned the practical-minded Hiram, in consolatory tones.

“No, thanks; I’ve got damages enough, as the fellow said who’d been busted up in a railroad accident and was asked if he intended to sue,” laughingly rejoined Tubby; “but” – and he dodged to a safe distance – “that was a mighty pretty girl.”

As he spoke, they were passing by the railroad station. A train had just pulled out of it, depositing two passengers on the

platform. But none of the boys noticed them at the moment. Instead, their attention was attracted by the strange action of Merritt, who suddenly darted to the center of the roadway.

The next instant his action was explained, as he bent and seized a big leather wallet that lay there. Or, rather, he was just about to seize it, when one of the two men who had alighted from the train also dashed from the small depot, in front of which they had been standing.

He was a broad-shouldered, rough-looking fellow, with a coarse beard and hulking shoulders. His clothes were rather poor.

“What you got there, boy?” he demanded, as the other Boy Scouts and his own companion came up.

“A wallet,” said Merritt, examining his find; “it’s marked ‘R. D. – U. S. A.’”

A strange light came into the rough-looking man’s eyes. His comrade, too, appeared agitated, and gripped the bearded fellow’s arm, whispering something to him.

“Let’s have a look at that wallet, young chap,” quoth the bigger of the two strangers, almost simultaneously.

“I don’t know that I will,” rejoined Merritt; “it’s lost property, and may contain valuables. I had better turn it over to the proper authorities.”

But the rough stranger, without ceremony, made a snatch for it. Merritt, however, was too quick for him, and the fellow missed his grasp. He growled something, and then, apparently thinking the better of his ill-temper, said in a comparatively mild voice:

“Guess that’s my wallet, boy. I must have dropped it coming across the street. My name’s Roger Dangerfield, Major Roger Dangerfield, of the United States Army, retired.”

“Then there must be two of them,” exclaimed Rob sharply.

“How’s that? What are you interfering for?” growled the rough-looking man, while his companion – a much younger individual than himself, though quite as ill-favored – edged menacingly up.

“Because,” said Rob quietly, “I had the pleasure of talking to Major Dangerfield a few minutes ago. Moreover, there’s no doubt in my mind that the wallet is his. He probably dropped it on the way up the street.”

The bigger and elder of the two strangers looked nonplussed for an instant, but he speedily recovered himself. Making a snatch for the wallet, which Merritt for an instant had allowed to show from behind his back, he upset the lad by the sheer weight of his attack. Flat on his back fell Merritt, the bearded man toppling over on top of him.

But, as they fell, the Boy Scout’s assailant seized the wallet from him and tossed it hastily to his companion, as one might pass a football. This action was unnoticed by the Boy Scouts, and the younger man of the two strangers darted off instantly, with the pocketbook in his possession.

In the meantime, Merritt, by a wrestling trick, had glided from under the bearded fellow, and, despite his struggles, the man found himself held in the firm grip of four determined

pairs of young arms. He was remarkably strong, however, and the situation speedily assumed the likeness of an uneven contest, when another detachment of the Eagles, headed by little Andy Bowles, the bugler of the Patrol, came up the street on their way from the exciting scene on the wharf.

Aided by these reënforcements, the man was compelled, despite his strength, to give in. All about him surged his excited young captors. At this moment an individual came hurrying up. He wore a semi-official sort of dress, adorned with a tin badge as big and shiny as a new tin pie-plate. It was Si Ketchum, the village constable.

“Hoppin’ watermillions!” he gasped, “what’s all this here?”

It took only a few words to tell him. Si assumed his most terrific official look, which consisted of partially closing his little reddish eyes and screwing up his mouth till his gray goatee pointed outward horizontally.

“Ef so be as you’ve got that thar contraption uv a wallet, in ther name uv ther law I commands yer to surrender said property,” he ordered ponderously.

The bearded man, still panting from his struggle, rejoined with a grin.

“Surely you’re not going to believe a pack of irresponsible boys, constable. I know nothing about the wallet, except that I saw that lad there pick it up.”

“Um – hah,” said Si, wagging his head sagely, “go on.”

“Naturally, I was anxious to see what it was. I demanded to

have a look at it, thinking it might be some of my property that I had dropped. What was my astonishment, when this young ruffian attacked me. In self-defense, I resisted, and then they all set on me.”

“That story is a fabrication from start to finish,” cried Merritt, while the others shouted their angry confirmation of his denial. “Let me – ”

For the second time he was about to relate the true circumstances. But Si interrupted him.

“Only one way ter settle this,” he said.

“Any way you like, officer,” said the bearded man suavely, “anything that you say, I’ll agree to.”

“Air yer willin’ ter be searched?”

“Certainly. But not here in the public street.”

“All right, then; at the calaboose, ef that’ll suit yer better.”

“It will. Let’s proceed there,” said the man, with a sidelong look at the boys, who began to wonder at his assurance.

Followed by a small crowd, Si and his prisoner led the way to the “calaboose,” a small, red-brick structure on a side street not far from the station. The boys waited eagerly outside, while within the walls of Si’s fortress the search went on. Before long, the constable emerged with an angry face, and very red. The stranger, cool and smiling, was beside him.

“What kind uv an April fool joke is this?” demanded Si loudly, while the boys, and the townspeople, who had been attracted by curiosity, looked at him in astonishment.

“You boys ain’t tole me the truth,” he went on, waxing more furious.

“You – you haven’t found the wallet?” demanded Merritt. “Why, I distinctly felt him snatch it from my hand.”

“Wall, it ain’t on him.”

“The other man!” cried Rob, suddenly recalling the bearded man’s companion, and perceiving, likewise, for the first time since Merritt’s adventure, that the fellow had vanished.

“He’s gone!” cried half a dozen voices.

In the same instant, they became aware that the bearded man had also vanished in the excitement. Almost simultaneously, Major Dangerfield put in an unexpected appearance. He was out of breath, as if from running.

“Is this the police station?” he demanded of Si, and, receiving a nod from that stupefied official, he hastened on:

“I wish to report the loss of a pocketbook. I must have dropped it on Main Street. Has it been found?”

“It wuz found all right,” grunted Si, “but – it’s bin lost agin.”

“Corporal Crawford here, found it, sir,” struck in Rob, seeing the major’s evident agitation at Si’s not over-lucid explanation, “but while he still had it in his hand, a man – a rough-looking customer – demanded to see it. As soon as Merritt told him of the initials on it, he – ”

“Tried to seize it,” exclaimed the major excitedly.

“Why, yes,” rejoined Rob, wondering inwardly how the major guessed so accurately what had occurred, “there was a scuffle,

and in it the man who had attacked Merritt must, in some way, have found a chance to pass the pocketbook to his companion.”

“Was the man who first inquired about the book a big, bearded man, with sun-burned face and rather shabby clothes?” inquired the major.

Rob’s astonishment increased. Evidently this was no ordinary case of ruffianism. It would seem now that the men were known to the major, and had some strong object in taking the book.

The boy nodded in reply to the major’s question.

“Do you mind stepping aside with me a few minutes, my lad? I’d like to ask you some questions,” continued the retired officer.

He and Rob conversed privately for some moments. Then the major strode off, after authorizing Si to offer a reward of five hundred dollars for the return of the wallet.

“He asked me to thank all you fellows for the aid you gave in trying to hold the man,” said Rob when he rejoined his comrades, “he added that it would not be forgotten.”

Nor was it, for it may be said here, that a few days later a fine launch, named *Eagle*, was delivered at Hampton harbor with a card from the major, begging the Eagle Patrol to accept it as their official craft. But we are anticipating a little.

As Rob walked away with Merritt, Tubby and Hiram, the lanky youth spoke up:

“It beats creation what there could have been in that wallet to upset him so,” he commented; “he doesn’t look like a man who’s easily excited, either.”

“Well, whatever it was,” rejoined Rob, “we are likely to learn this evening. I rather think the major has some work on hand for us.”

“Hooray! some action at last,” cried Merritt enthusiastically.

“Haven’t had enough to-day, eh?” inquired Tubby sarcastically. “I should think that seeing a runaway auto stopped, being knocked down and plunged into a mystery, would – ”

“Never mind him, Merritt; the heat’s sent the fat to his head,” laughed Rob.

“I was going to say,” he continued, “that Major Dangerfield has invited us to the house this evening to hear something interesting.”

“All four of us?”

“Yes. I rather think then we shall learn some more about that wallet.”

Soon after, the boys, following some talk concerning patrol matters, separated. Each went to his home to await, with what patience he might, the coming of evening, when it appeared likely that some light would be shed on what, to them, seemed an interesting puzzle. Rob, on his return home, found that the major had motored on to his friend’s with his daughter, but he had promised to return in time to keep his appointment.

CHAPTER III

THE MAJOR EXPLAINS

“Well,” began the major, “I suppose you are all naturally curious concerning that wallet of mine.”

The four lads nodded attentively.

“I must admit we are,” volunteered Rob.

They were gathered in the library of Mr. Blake’s home. The banker was seated in his own pet chair, while the major stood with his back to a bookcase, a group of eager-eyed Boy Scouts surrounding him.

“In the first place,” continued the major, “I think you would better all sit down. The story is a somewhat lengthy one.”

The boys obeyed, and the major began:

“I shall have to take you back more than a century,” he said, “to the days when the first settlers located adjacent to the south banks of Lake Champlain. Among the colonists were my ancestors, Chisholm Dangerfield and his family. Chisholm Dangerfield was the eldest son of the Dangerfield family, of Chester, England. He had been left an ample fortune, but having squandered it, decided, like many others in a similar case, to emigrate to the new country.

“On arrival here, he and his family went up the river to Albany, and there, hearing of new settlements along the lake, decided

to take up land there. They went most of the way by water, being much harassed by Indians on the journey. But without any serious mishaps, they finally arrived at their destination, and, in course of time, established a flourishing farm. But Chisholm Dangerfield had a younger brother, a harum-scarum sort of youth, to whom, nevertheless, he was much attached. When quite young, this lad had run away to sea, and little had been heard of him since that time.

“But while his family had remained in ignorance of his whereabouts, he had joined a band of West Indian pirates, and in course of time amassed a considerable fortune. Then a desire to reform came over him, and he sought his English relatives. They would have nothing to do with him, despite his wealth, and in a fit of rage he left England to seek his brother – the only being who ever really cared for him. In due time he arrived at the farm with quite a retinue of friendly Indians and carriers.

“He was warmly welcomed. Possibly his money and wealth had something to do with it. I don’t know anything about that, however. At any rate, for some years, he lived there, till one day he fell ill. His constitution was undermined by the reckless, wild life he had led, and he died not long after. He left all his gold and jewels to his brother.

“Indians were many and hostile in those days, so in order to be secure in case of an attack, the elder brother had no sooner buried his kin with due reverence, and received his legacy, than he decided to secrete the entire amount of the old pirate’s treasure

in a cave in a remote part of the Adirondacks.”

“Gee!” exclaimed Tubby, who was hugging his knees, while his eyes showed round as saucers in his fat cheeks.

“Did the Indians get it?” asked Hiram.

“Wait a minute, and you shall hear,” continued the major. “Well, as I said, the treasure was buried in a cave so securely hidden that nobody would be able to find it again, except by a miracle, or by aid of the chart of the spot, which Chisholm Dangerfield carefully made. A few nights after that, a tribe went on the warpath, landed in canoes near to the Dangerfield farm, and massacred every soul on the place but one – a young boy named Roger Dangerfield, who escaped.

“This Roger Dangerfield was my great-great-grandfather. With him, when he fled from the burning ruins, he took a paper his father had thrust into his hands just before the Indian attack came. All this he wrote in his diary, which did not come into my hands till recently. Well, Roger Dangerfield, left to his own resources, proved so able a youth that he was, before very long, a prosperous merchant in Albany. But in the meantime he made several expeditions to the mountains to try to find the hidden wealth.

“I should have told you that the paper was in cipher, and a very elaborate one, so that it had never been completely worked out. This, no doubt, accounts for Roger Dangerfield’s failure.

“Well, in course of time, the cipher became a family relic along with Roger Dangerfield’s diary. His descendants moved

to Virginia, where I was born. I recollect, as a youngster, being enthralled by the story of the old piratical Dangerfield's hidden gold, and resolving that when I grew up I would find it. We had, in our employ at that time, a butler named Jarley. I was an only child, and he was my confidant. I naturally told him about the cipher and what its unraveling would mean.

“This happened when I was about eighteen and home on a vacation. Jarley seemed much interested, but after both he and I had puzzled in vain over the cipher, we gave it up. When I came home on my next vacation, I learned that Jarley had left. His mother and father had died, he declared, and he was required at his home in Maine. Well, I thought no more of the matter, and forming new acquaintances in our neighborhood, which was rapidly settling, I soon forgot Jarley. But one day a notion seized me to look at the cipher and the diary again.

“But when I came to look for them, they had gone. Nor did any search result in my finding them. It at once flashed across my mind that Jarley might have taken them. So fixed an idea did this become, that I visited the place in Maine to which he said he had gone, only to find that he had removed soon after his return from Virginia. However, pursuing the trail, I found that he – or a man resembling him – had visited the spot on the lake where the old-time house had stood, and had made a mysterious expedition into the mountains. The spot was at that time known as Dangerfield, and was quite a flourishing little town, with a pulp mill and a few other local industries. In that quiet community they recollected

the mysterious visitor well.

“However, as I learned, Jarley had left the town without paying his guides or the man from whom he had hired the horses, I concluded that the expedition had not been successful. Then I advertised for the man, but without success. Then I was appointed to West Point, and for a long time I thought no more of the matter. In fact, for years it lay dormant in my mind, with occasional flashes of memory; then I would advertise for Jarley or his heirs, but without success.

“The last time I advertised was about a year ago. After six months’ silence I received a letter, asking me to call at an address near the Erie Basin in Brooklyn, if I was interested in the long-lost Jarley. All my enthusiasm once more at fever heat, I set out for the place. The address at which I was to call I found to be a squalid sailors’ boarding-house. On inquiring there for James Jarley, the name signed to the letter, I was conducted into a dirty room, where lay a rough-looking sailor, evidently just recovering from the effects of a debauch.

“So dulled was his mind, that it was some time before I could explain my errand, but finally he understood. He frankly told me he was out for money, and wanted to know how much I would give him for some papers he had which his father – our old butler, it transpired – had left him. His father, he said, had told him that if ever he wanted to make money with them he was to seek out a Major Dangerfield, who would be likely to pay him well for them.

“But it appeared that his father had also told him that he stood a chance of arrest if he did so, and that it might be a dangerous step. However, he told me that he had at length decided to take that chance, and on a return from a long voyage, during which he had encountered my advertisement in an old newspaper in a foreign port, he had made up his mind to find me on his return.

“His father, it appeared, had always kept track of me, but fear and shame had kept him from trying to arrange a meeting. The son, I gathered, both from his conversation and the situation in which I found him, had always been a ne'er-do-well. Well, the matter ended with my paying him a sum of money for the papers, which as I suspected, proved to be the yellow-paged old diary and the well-thumbed, tattered cipher. Then I had him removed to a hospital, where a few days later he died in an attack of delirium.”

CHAPTER IV

THE NARRATIVE CONTINUED

“But it appeared that even while on his deathbed the man had been playing a dishonest game. Before he had made his bargain with me, he had revealed the secret and tried to sell it to a certain money-lender at a seaport in Maine. This man had refused to have anything to do with what he thought was a chimerical scheme, but later confided the whole thing to a friend of his by name Stonington Hunt – a former Wall Street man, who had been compelled to quit in disgrace the scene of his financial operations.”

“Stonington Hunt!” gasped Rob, leaning forward in his chair, while the others looked equally amazed.

“Yes, that was the name. Why, do you know him?”

“Know him, Major!” echoed Mr. Blake. “He was concerned in some rascally operations in this village not so long ago. That he left here under a cloud, was mainly due to activities of the Boy Scouts, whose enemy he was. We heard he had gone to Maine. Is he engaged in new rascality?”

“You shall hear,” pursued the major. “Well, as I said, this seaport money-lender told Stonington Hunt of the chart and cipher and the old diary recording the burial of the treasure. Hunt, it would seem, placed more importance on the information

than had the money-lender, for he agreed, provided the latter would help to finance an expedition, to try to solve the cipher, or else have some expert translate it. He set out at once for Brooklyn, arriving there, as I subsequently learned, just after I had departed with the diary and the papers which young Jarley had carried in his sea-chest for some years.

“He lost no time in tracing me, and offered me a large sum for the papers. But my interest had been aroused. For the sake of the adventure of the thing, and also to clear up the mystery, I had resolved to go treasure hunting myself. With this object in view, I rented a bungalow on a lake not far from the range in which I suspected the treasure cave lay, and devoted days and nights trying to solve the cipher. At this time a college professor, an old chum of mine, wrote me that his health was broken down, and that he needed a rest. I invited him to come and visit me in Essex County, at the same time suggesting that I had a hard nut for him to crack. Professor Jeremiah Jorum arrived soon after, and his health picked up amazingly in the mountain air. One day he asked about ‘the hard nut.’ I produced the cipher, and told him something of its history. Perhaps I should have told you that Professor Jorum has devoted a good deal of his life to what is known as cryptology – or the solving of seemingly unsolvable puzzles. He had translated Egyptian cryptograms and inscriptions left by vanished tribes on ruins in Yucatan and Old Mexico.

“He worked for several days on the cipher, and one day came

to me with a radiant face. He told me he had solved it. No wonder I had failed. It was a simple enough cipher – one of the least complex, in fact – but the language used had been Latin, in which my ancestor, as a well-bred Englishman of that day, was proficient. As he was telling me this, I noticed a man I had hired some days before, hanging about the open windows. I ordered him away, and he went at once. But I had grave suspicions that he had overheard a good deal more than I should have wished him to. However, there was no help for it. I dismissed the matter from my mind, and we – the professor and I – spent the rest of the day discussing the cipher and the best means for recovering the treasure. We agreed it would be dangerous to take men we could not absolutely trust, and yet, we should require several people to organize a proper expedition.

“But, as it so happened, all our plans had to be changed that night. I was awakened soon after midnight by a noise in my room. In the dim light I saw a figure that I recognized as our gardener, moving about. The lamp beside my bed had, for some reason, not gone out when I turned it down on retiring, and I soon had the room in a blaze of light. The intruder sprang toward me, a big club in his hand. I dodged the blow and grappled with him. In the struggle his beard fell off, and I recognized, to my amazement, that our ‘gardener’ was Stonington Hunt himself.

“The shock of this surprise had hardly been borne in upon me when the fellow, who possessed considerable strength, forced me back against the table. In the scuffle the lamp was upset. In a

flash the place was in a blaze. Hunt was out of the room in two bounds. He seized the key, as he went, and locked the door on the outside, thus leaving me to burn to death, or chance injury by a leap from the window, which overhung a cliff above the lake. I had just time to throw on a few clothes and grab the papers, which I had luckily placed under my pillow, before the flames drove me out. The wood of the door was flimsy, and without bothering to try to force the lock, I smashed out a panel. Crawling through, I aroused my friend Jorum and my old negro servant, Jumbo.

“We saved nothing but the precious papers, but as the bungalow was roughly furnished, I did not much care. We made our way to a distant house and stayed there the night. The next day we took a wagon to the shore of the lake and went by boat to Whitehall. There we embarked on a train for Albany, where my daughter was at the home of friends. I, too, have a residence there, but, having received an invitation from friends to visit them on Long Island, I decided to give my little girl a motor trip.

“But while in Albany I perceived I was being followed, and by the two men whom you have described to me as taking part in the filching of the wallet. I thought I had thrown them off, however, but your adventure to-day proves that I have not been as successful as I hoped. The most unfortunate part of it is that the cipher was in that wallet.”

“And it’s gone,” groaned Tubby dolorously.

“I’m not so sure of that. I am hopeful that we may recover

it,” said the retired officer. “I have wired my friend Jorum, who, with Jumbo, is now in New York, and I am in hopes that he can recollect something of his translation of the cipher. If not – well, there’s no use crossing bridges till we come to them.”

“If you do recover it?” asked Rob.

“If I do, I am going to ask your parents to let me borrow a patrol of Boy Scouts to aid in the treasure hunt,” smiled the major.

“My dear Major,” cried Mr. Blake, holding up his hands, “Mrs. Blake would never consent to – ”

“But there would be such a lot of fun, dad,” urged Rob. “Think of a camp in the mountains. We’d have to camp, wouldn’t we, Major?”

“Certainly. It would be a fine opportunity for you to perfect yourselves in – ”

“Woodcraft,” said Tubby.

“Signaling,” put in Merritt.

“I’ve got a field wireless apparatus I’d like to try out,” put in Hiram, his voice a-quiver with eagerness.

“Well, the first thing to be done is to recover that cipher,” said the major; “at present all we know of it is that it is in the hands of two rascals.”

“In the employ of another rascal, Stonington Hunt,” put in Rob.

“Well, we can do nothing more to-night,” said the major.

“No. We were so interested in your story that I think none

of us noticed how the time flew by,” said Mr. Blake, and Mrs. Blake, entering just then, announced that there was supper ready for the party in the dining-room. Tubby’s eyes glittered at this news.

Soon after the sandwiches, cakes and lemonade had been disposed of, the Boy Scouts set out for home, agreeing to meet the major next morning after breakfast.

They had not gone many steps from the house when Tubby stopped as suddenly as if he had been shot.

“Gingersnaps!” he exclaimed. “I’ve just thought of something.”

“Goodness! Must hurt,” jeered Merritt unsympathetically.

“No – that is, yes – no, I mean,” sputtered the fat boy. “Say, fellows, I heard this afternoon that Sam Phelps from Aquebogue told a fellow in the village that he had seen Freeman Hunt over there this morning.”

“You double-dyed chump,” exclaimed Rob, who was walking a way with them, “and you never said anything about it. If Freeman was there, I’ll bet his father was, too, and that’s where those two men have gone.”

“Gee whiz, if they have they must be there yet, then!” exclaimed Merritt, excitedly, “unless they left by automobile.”

“How’s that?” demanded Rob.

“It’s this way. There was no train after those chaps took the wallet, till almost eight o’clock. They must have hidden in the woods and caught it some place below, unless Si arrested them.”

“He’d have been at the house to get the reward if he had,” rejoined Rob.

“Very well, then. He didn’t catch them, and if the Hunts are at Aquebogue, that’s where they’ve gone.”

“Yes, but what’s to prevent them leaving there?”

“No train after nine-thirty till to-morrow morning, and the eight o’clock from here doesn’t get to Aquebogue till after that time; so they must be stranded there, unless they have a car.”

“Cookies and cream cakes! That’s right!” cried Tubby, “let’s phone the police at Aquebogue to look out for them.”

But the lads found that the wire between Hampton and Aquebogue wasn’t working. The telegraph office was closed. They exchanged blank glances.

“What are we going to do?” demanded Tubby.

“What all good scouts ought to do – the best we can,” – rejoined Rob.

“And that is, under the present circumstances?” questioned Merritt.

“To go to our garage – Blenkinsop’s – on Main Street, and get out the car.”

“It’ll be closed,” rejoined Tubby.

“I’ve got a key,” replied Rob; “I’ll ’phone the house that I’m going for a night spin. We can get there, notify the police, and be back in two hours.”

“Forward, scouts!” ordered Merritt, in sharp, “parade-ground” tones, “and ‘Be Prepared’ for whatever comes along.”

Rob found that the telephone to his home was also out of order, owing to repairs which were being rushed through by night. So ten minutes later, when the car glided out of the garage on Main Street and slipped silently through the sleeping town, there was nobody in Hampton who knew the Boy Scouts' night mission.

CHAPTER V

A MIDNIGHT AUTO DASH

The auto, a fast and heavy machine, plunged along through the night at a great rate. Its bright searchlight cast a brilliant circle of radiance far ahead into the darkness. Occasionally frightened birds could be seen flying out of the inky hedges, falling bewildered in the path of the white glare.

It was exhilarating, blood-stirring work, all the more keenly delightful from the sense of adventure with which it was spiced.

Rob was at the wheel, steering straight and steady. He knew the road well. Part of it had been the scene of that thrilling night ride described in *The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship*, when the boys had overtaken the two thieves who had stolen the aeroplane documents. On that occasion, it will be recalled, an accident had been narrowly averted by a soul-stirring hair's breadth, as a train dashed across the tracks.

Rob's three companions sat back in the tonneau and conversed in low tones. Only the irrepressible Tubby was not duly impressed with the momentousness of the occasion. From time to time a snicker of laughter showed that he was cracking jokes in the same old way.

"Say," he remarked, as they bumped across the railroad tracks, "even if we do find out where these fellows are, I don't

know just what we're going to do with them at this time of night.
Reminds me – ”

“Oh, for goodness' sake, Tubby,” groaned Merritt.

“Let him go ahead,” struck in Hiram, “the sooner he blows off all his steam the sooner he'll shut up for good.”

“Reminds me,” went on the unruffled Tubby, “of what a little girl said to her mother when the kid asked her what sardines were. The mother explained that they were small fish that big ones ate. Then the little girl wanted to know how the big fish got them out of the tins.”

There was a deathly silence, broken only by a low groan from Merritt.

“Call that a joke?” he moaned.

“Don't spring any more. My life ain't insured, by heck,” put in Yankee Hiram.

“Well, that got a laugh in the minstrel show where I heard it,” responded the aggrieved joke-smith.

Before long, lights flashed ahead of them, and, descending a steepish hill, they chugged into the town of Aquebogue. It was a fairly large town, and here and there lighted windows showed that some of the low resorts were still open for business. Far down the street shone two green lights, which marked the police station. The auto glided up to this, and Rob jumped out, accompanied by Merritt, leaving Tubby and Hiram in the car.

“Let's get out and stretch our legs a bit,” said Tubby presently. It was taking some time for Rob to explain his errand to a sleepy

police official.

“All right, my boy,” drawled Hiram. “I’m not averse to a bit of leg-stretching.”

The two lads got out and strolled as far as the street corner.

“H’s’h!” exclaimed Tubby suddenly, as they reached it. He seized Hiram’s arm with every appearance of excitement.

“Wa-al, what is it now?” asked the down-east boy; “more jokes and didoes?”

“No. See that chap just sneaking down the street from the opposite corner?”

“Yes; what of it? Are you seeing things?”

“No. But it’s Freeman Hunt – I’m sure of it.”

“By ginger, I believe you are right! It does look like him, for a fact. But what can he be doing here?”

“I’ve no more idea than you. But he must be up to some mischief.”

“Reckon that’s right.”

“I tell you that where Freeman Hunt is, his father is not far off, and the rest of the gang must be about here, too. I guess it was a good thing we came out here.”

“Well, what shall we do? Go back and tell the police?”

“No. While we were gone he’d sneak away, and we might miss him altogether. I’ve got a better plan.”

“Do tell!”

“We’ll follow him at a distance and see where he goes. Then we can come back and report.”

“Sa-ay, that’s a good idea. Come on.”

Freeman Hunt was almost out of sight now. But as the two scouts took up the trail, they saw him pause where a flood of light streamed from the window of a drinking-place. He paused here for an instant and gave a low whistle; presently the boys’ hearts gave a bound. From the doors of the resort issued three figures, one of which they recognized, even at that distance, as Stonington Hunt. With him were the two men who had played such a prominent part in the filching of the wallet belonging to Major Dangerfield.

“Keep in the shadow,” whispered Tubby, crouching in a convenient doorway; “they haven’t seen us. Hullo, there they go. Keep a good distance behind – as far back as we can, without losing them.”

The men the scouts were trailing struck into a lively pace. They seemed to be conversing earnestly. Through the shadows the two boys crept along behind them. Presently they were traversing a residence street, edged with elms and lawns and white picket fences. It was deserted and silent. The occupants of the houses were wrapped in sleep.

“Maybe they’re going to turn into one of these houses,” whispered Hiram.

But the men didn’t. Instead, they kept right on, and before long the last electric light had been passed and they were in the open country.

“Hadn’t we better turn back?” murmured Hiram. “It looks as

if we were going too far for safety.”

“Let’s keep on,” urged Tubby. “There’s no danger. If we gave up the chase now we’d have had all our work for nothing.”

Hiram made no reply, and the two boys, taking advantage of every bit of cover – as the game of “Hare and Hounds” had taught them – kept right on dogging the footsteps of their quarry. All at once Tubby began sniffing the air.

“We’re getting near the sea,” he proclaimed. “I can smell the salt meadows.”

Aquebogue lay some distance back from the open waters of the ocean. It was situated, like Hampton itself, on an inlet. In the dim light of the stars, the two boys presently perceived that they were traversing a sort of dyke or raised road leading across the marshes.

“Where can they be going?” wondered Hiram.

“Don’t know. But there are lots of fishermen’s huts and shacks dotted about in the marshes. Maybe they are making for one of them.”

“Maybe,” opined Hiram, “but if you weren’t so all-sot on following them, I’d be in a good mind to turn back.”

“Not yet,” persisted Tubby, and the chase continued.

But it was soon to end. All at once the faint glimmer of a watercourse, or inlet from the sea, shone dimly in front of them. Upreared, too, against the star-spangled sky, they could see the inky outlines of a structure of some kind.

“Crouch down here,” said Tubby suddenly, as the men ahead

of them came to a halt.

A bunch of marsh grass offered a convenient hiding place, and behind it the two boys lay flat. Pretty soon they heard the scratch of a match, and then the grating of a lock, as the door of the dark building they had remarked was opened. The men entered the place and slammed the door to. A few instants later, from the solitary window of the shack, a light shone out. The window was toward the creek, and the glare from it showed the two watching boys the mast and rigging of a large sloop. At least, from her spars, they judged her to be of considerable size.

“Gee whiz!” exclaimed Tubby, “we’ve found the place, all right. They must have come in that sloop. Maybe that’s the way the two men who took the wallet got out of Hampton unobserved.”

“But the wind’s against the sloop, and she couldn’t have beaten her way down here in that time,” objected Hiram.

“She might have an engine, mightn’t she?” whispered Tubby in scornful tones.

“That’s so. Lots of boats do have gasoline motors. I guess you’re right, Tubby. What are you going to do now? Go back?”

“Not much,” rejoined the fat boy. “We’ll just have a look into that hut and see what’s going on. We might even get a chance to get that wallet back.”

“Say, you’re not going to take such a chance! If you looked through that window – ”

“Did I say I was going to look through the window, stupid?”

Don't you see that chimney on the roof? Now, the roof comes down low, almost to the ground. I'm going to climb up on it, and, by leaning over the chimney, I can hear what is said."

"But they'll hear your feet on the roof," objected the practical Hiram.

"I'm going to take my shoes off."

"It's awfully risky, Tubby."

"Say, look here, Hiram," sputtered the fat boy, "if this country was to go to war, you'd want to go to the front and fight for Old Glory as a Boy Scout, wouldn't you?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, don't you suppose that if you were scouting after an enemy you'd have to take bigger chances than this?"

Hiram said no more. Kicking their shoes off, and leaving them by the grass hummock, the two boys crept forward as silently as two cats. In the yielding sand their feet made no noise.

As Tubby had surmised, at the rear of the house the roof came almost to the ground, for the sand was heaped up against that particular wall, being driven in big dunes by the winds off the ocean.

"Up with you," whispered Tubby, giving Hiram a "boost." The Yankee boy's long legs carried him onto the roof in a jiffy. Then came Tubby. Already the two boys could hear below them the low hum of voices, Freeman Hunt's sharp, boyish tones mingling with the bass drone of the elder men's conversation.

The roof was formed of driftwood and old timbers, and was as

easy to climb as a staircase. Before many seconds, the boys were at the chimney. With beating pulses and a heart that throbbed faster than was altogether comfortable, in spite of his easy-going disposition, Tubby raised himself and peered down the flue. It was of brick. But to his astonishment, as he peered over the edge, he found he had a clear view of the room below.

The chimney, as is often the case in rough dwellings, did not go all the way down to the floor. Instead, it was supported on two beams, so that, peering down it, the boy could command a view of the room below, just as if he had been looking down a telescope.

Round a table were seated Stonington Hunt, the two rough-looking men who had stolen the wallet, and Freeman Hunt. A smoky glass lamp stood on the rough box which served for a table. Spread out on the table, too, was something that almost made Tubby let go his hold of the chimney and go sliding down the roof. It was the wallet, and beside it lay the paper covered with figures and markings, which, the boy had no doubt, was the precious document of the major.

“We’ll have to get out of here early in the morning,” Stonington Hunt was saying. “I don’t fancy having the police on my heels.”

“No. And Jim here says that those pesky Boy Scouts are mixed up in the search for the wallet,” struck in Freeman Hunt.

“Well, this is the time we give those brats the slip,” growled his father. “Come on, let’s turn in. We’ll get the motor going and

drop down the creek before daylight.”

“Better leave the light burning then,” said one of the men who had been in Hampton that afternoon.

This was done, and presently snores and heavy breathing showed the men were asleep. Tubby could not see what resting places they had found, but assumed that there must be bunks around the edge of the hut, as is usual in such fishermen’s shelters.

Before retiring, the men had shoved the paper into the wallet, but for some reason, probably they didn’t think of it during their preparations for sleep, the wallet had been left on the table. It was almost directly below the chimney. As Tubby looked at it, he had a sudden idea.

“Got a bit of wire, Hiram?” he asked, knowing that the mechanical genius of the Eagle Patrol usually carried such odds and ends with him.

“Guess I’ve got a bit of brass wire right here,” rejoined Hiram, “but it isn’t very long.”

“Long enough,” commented Tubby, scrutinizing the bit handed to him, “now, if you had some string – ”

“Got a bit of fish line.”

“Couldn’t be better. Give it to me.”

Much mystified, Hiram watched the fat boy bend the bit of wire and tie it to the string.

“Going fishing?” he asked in a sarcastic tone.

“Yes,” replied Tubby quite seriously.

His quick eye had noted that the straps that closed the wallet had not been placed round it but lay in a loose loop on the table. If only he could entangle his improvised line in the loop, it would be an easy matter to fish up the wallet. If only he could do it!

Very cautiously, for he knew the risk he was running, Tubby lowered his line. Then he waited. But the breathing below continued steady and stentorian. Swinging his hook, which was quite heavy, the stout boy grappled cautiously for the wallet. It was tantalizing and delicate work. But after taking an infinity of pains, he finally succeeded in getting it fast.

Tubby at this moment had difficulty in suppressing a shout of "hooray!" But he mastered his emotions, and slowly and delicately began to haul in his "catch." Hiram, fascinated, crept close to his side. Perhaps it was this fact that was responsible for the disaster that occurred the next instant.

Without the slightest warning, save a sharp, cracking sound, the roof caved in under their feet. In a flash, both boys were projected in a heap into the room below. As they hurtled through the rotten covering of the hut, shouts and cries resounded from the aroused occupants.

CHAPTER VI

IN DIREST PERIL

The wildest confusion ensued. Fortunately, the drop was a short one, and beyond a few scratches and bruises, neither boy was hurt. The lamp, by some strange fatality, was not put out, but rolled off the table. As Stonington Hunt sprang at him, Tubby seized it. He brandished it threateningly.

“The Boy Scouts!” shouted Stonington Hunt, the first to recover from his stupefaction at the sudden interruption to their slumbers.

He dashed at Tubby, who swung the lamp for an instant – it was his only weapon – and then dashed it, like a smoky meteor, full at the advancing man’s head.

It missed him by the fraction of an inch, or he would have been turned into a living torch.

Crash!

The lamp struck the opposite wall, and was shattered into a thousand fragments. Instantly the place was plunged in darkness, total and absolute. At the same instant a sharp report sounded. It seemed doubly loud in the tiny place. The fumes of the powder filled it reekingly.

“Don’t shoot!” roared Stonington Hunt. “Guard the door and window. Don’t let them get away.”

“All right, dad,” the boys heard Freeman Hunt cry loudly, as he scuffled across the room.

“Keep the doorway and the window,” shouted Stonington Hunt. “I’ll have a light in a jiffy. We’ve got them like two rats in a cage.”

As he struck a match and lit a boat lantern that stood on a shelf, a low groan came from one corner of the room. Hiram was horrified to perceive that it was Tubby who uttered it. The shot must have wounded him, fired at haphazard, as it had been. The man who had aimed it, the bearded member of the gang, stood grimly by the doorway.

Almost beside himself at the hopelessness of their situation, Hiram gazed about him. All at once he noticed that on Tubby’s chest a crimson stain was slowly spreading. The stout boy lay quite still except for an occasional quiver and groan. Without a thought as to his danger, Hiram disregarded Stonington Hunt’s next injunction: “Don’t move a step.”

Swiftly he crossed to his wounded comrade. He sank on his knees beside him.

“T-T-T-Tubby,” he exclaimed, “are you badly hurt, old man?”

To his amazement, the recumbent Tubby gave him a swift but knowing wink, and then, rolling over on his side again, resumed his groaning once more. Mystified, but comforted, Hiram was rising, when a rough hand seized him and sent him spinning to an opposite corner. It was the burly form of the bearded man that had propelled him.

“Not so rough, Jim Dale,” warned Stonington Hunt. “We’ve got them where they can’t escape. Lots of time to get what we want out of them.”

“The pesky young spies,” snorted Jim Dale, “I wonder how much they overheard of what we said.”

“It don’t matter, anyhow,” put in his beardless companion of the afternoon. “They won’t have no chance to tell it.”

“Guess that’s right, Pete Bumpus,” struck in the bearded man. Suddenly Hiram felt a stinging slap across the face. He turned and faced young Freeman Hunt.

“How do you like that, eh?” snarled the youth viciously. “Here is where I pay you out for what you Scout kids did to me when we lived in Hampton.”

He was stepping forward to deliver another blow, when Hiram ducked swiftly, and put into execution a maneuver Rob had shown him. As Freeman, a bigger and heavier lad, rushed forward, Hiram’s long leg and his long left arm shot out simultaneously. The leg engaged Freeman’s ankle, and the Yankee lad’s fist encountered the other’s chin with a sharp crack. Freeman Hunt fell in a heap on the floor. Hiram braced himself for an attack by the whole four. But it didn’t come. Instead, they seemed to think it a good joke.

“That will teach you to keep your temper,” laughed the boy’s father roughly; “plenty of time to punch him and pummel him when we have them tied up.”

“Maybe I won’t do it, too,” promised Freeman, gathering

himself up, with a crestfallen look.

Stonington Hunt stepped up to Hiram.

“Tell me the truth, you young brat,” he snarled; “are the police after us?”

Hiram pondered an instant before answering. Then he decided on a course of action. Possibly it was a bad one, judging by the immediate results.

“Yes, they are,” he said boldly, “and if you don’t let us loose, you’ll get in trouble.”

Stonington Hunt paused irresolutely. Then he said:

“Get the sloop ready, boys. We’ll get out of here on the jump.”

A few moments later Hiram’s hands were bound and he was led on board the craft the boys had noticed lying in the creek. A plank connected it with the shore. Tubby, still groaning, was carried on board and thrown down in the bow beside Hiram.

“We’ll attend to him after a while,” said Hunt brutally; “if he’s badly wounded it’s his own fault, for meddling in other folks’ affairs.”

One of the men went below. Presently there came a sharp chug-chug, and the anchor being taken in, the sloop began to move off down the creek. As Tubby Hopkins had surmised, she had an engine. Hunt, Jim Dale and Peter Bumpus stood in the bow. Hiram leaned disconsolately against a stay, and Tubby lay at his feet on a coil of rope.

The shores slipped rapidly by, and pretty soon the creek began to widen.

Freeman Hunt was at the wheel, and from time to time Jim Dale shouted directions back at him.

“Port – port! Hard over!” or again, “Hard over! Starboard! There’s a shoal right ahead!”

A moon had risen now, and in the silvery light the darker water of the shoals, of which the creek seemed full, showed plainly.

“This crik’s as full of sand-bars as a hound dorg is uv fleas,” grunted Jim Dale. “It won’t be full tide for two hours or more, either. If – ”

There came a sudden, grinding jar.

“Hard over! Hard over!” bellowed Jim Dale.

Freeman Hunt spun the wheel like a squirrel in its cage. But it was too late. The sloop had grounded hard and fast. Leaving Peter Bumpus to guard the boys, Jim Dale and the elder Hunt leaped swiftly aft. They backed the motor, but it was no use. The sloop was too hard aground to be gotten off till the water rose.

“Two hours to wait till the tide rises,” grumbled Jim Dale; “just like the luck.”

Slowly the time passed. But never for an instant was the watch over the boys relaxed. Tubby lay still, and Hiram, almost carried out of himself by the rapid rush of recent events, leaned miserably against the stay.

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