

Smith Ruel Perley

The Rival Campers: or, The Adventures of Henry Burns



Ruel Smith

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Adventures of Henry Burns**

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CHAPTER I. THE CAMP

On a certain afternoon in the latter part of the month of June, the little fishing village of Southport, on Grand Island in Samoset Bay, was awakened from its customary nap by the familiar whistle of the steamboat from up the river. Southport, opening a sleepy eye at the sound, made deliberate preparation to receive its daily visitor, knowing that the steamer was as yet some distance up the island, and not even in sight, for behind the bluff around which the steamer must eventually come the town lay straggling irregularly along the shore of a deeply indented cove.

A few loungers about the village grocery-store seemed roused to a renewed interest in life, removed their pipes, and, with evident satisfaction at this relief from island monotony, sauntered lazily down to the wharf. The storekeeper and the freight-agent, as became men burdened with the present responsibility of seeing that the steamer was offered all possible assistance in making its landing, bustled about with importance.

Soon a wagon or two from down the island came rattling into the village, while from the hotel, a quarter of a mile distant, a number of guests appeared on the veranda, curious to scrutinize such new arrivals as might appear. From the summer cottages here and there flags were hastily run up, and from one a salute was fired; all of which might be taken to indicate that the coming of the steamer was the event of the day at Southport – as, indeed, it was.

Now another whistle sounded shrilly from just behind the bluff, and the next moment the little steamer shoved its bow from out a jagged screen of rock, while the chorused exclamation, “Thar she is!” from the assembled villagers announced that they were fully awake to the situation.

Among the crowd gathered on the wharf, three boys, between whom there existed sufficient family resemblance to indicate that they were brothers, scanned eagerly the faces of the passengers as the steamer came slowly to the landing. The eldest of the three, a boy of about sixteen years, turned at length to the other two, and remarked, in a tone of disappointment:

“They are not aboard. I can’t see a sign of them. Something must have kept them.”

“Unless,” said one of the others, “they are hiding somewhere to surprise us.”

“It’s impossible,” said the first boy, “for any one to hide away when he gets in sight of this island. No, if they were aboard we should have seen them the minute the steamer turned the bluff, waving to us and yelling at the top of their lungs. There’s something in the air here that makes one feel like tearing around and making a noise.”

“Especially at night, when the cottagers are asleep,” said the third boy.

“Besides,” continued the eldest, “their canoe is not aboard, and you would not catch Tom Harris and Bob White coming down here for the summer without it, when they spend half their time in it on the river at home and are as expert at handling it as Indians, – and yet, they wrote that they would be here to-day.”

It was evident the boys they were looking for were not aboard. The little steamer, after a violent demonstration of puffing and snorting, during which it made apparently several desperate attempts to rush headlong on the rocks, but was checked with a hasty scrambling of paddle-wheels, and was bawled at by captain and mates, was finally subdued and made fast to the wharf by the deck-hands. The passengers disembarked, and the same lusty, brown-armed crew, with a series of rushes, as

though they feared their captive might at any moment break its bonds and make a dash for liberty, proceeded to unload the freight and baggage. Trucks laden with leaning towers of baggage were trundled noisily ashore and overturned upon the wharf.

In the midst of the bustle and commotion the group of three boys was joined by another boy, who had just come from the hotel.

“Hulloa, there!” said the new boy. “Where’s Tom and Bob?”

“They are not aboard, Henry,” said the eldest boy of the group.

The new arrival gave a whistle of surprise.

“How do you feel this afternoon, Henry?” asked the second of the brothers.

“Oh, very poorly – very miserable. In fact, I don’t seem to get any better.”

This lugubrious reply, strange to say, did not evoke the sympathy which a listener might have expected. The boys burst into roars of laughter.

“Poor Henry Burns!” exclaimed the eldest boy, giving the self-declared invalid a blow on the chest that would have meant the annihilation of weak lungs. “He will never be any better.”

“And he may be a great deal worse,” said the second boy, slapping the other on the back so hard that the dust flew under the blow.

“Won’t the boys like him, though?” asked the third and youngest boy, – “that is, if they ever come.”

Henry Burns received these sallies with the utmost unconcern. If he enjoyed the effect which his remarks had produced, it was denoted only by a twinkle in his eyes. He was rather a slender, pale-complexioned youth, of fourteen years. A physiognomist might have found in his features an unusual degree of coolness and self-control, united with an abnormal fondness for mischief; but Henry Burns would have passed with the ordinary person as a frail boy, fonder of books than of sports.

Just then the captain of the steamer put his head out of the pilot-house and called to the eldest of the brothers:

“I’ve got a note for you, George Warren. A young chap who said he was on his way here in a canoe came aboard at Millville and asked me to give it to you; and there was another young chap in a canoe alongside who asked me to say they’d be here to-night.”

“Hooray!” cried George Warren, opening and reading the note. “It’s the boys, sure enough. They started at four o’clock this morning in the canoe, and will be here to-night. Much obliged, Captain Chase.”

“Not a bit,” responded the captain. “But let me tell you boys something. You needn’t look for these ’ere young chaps to-night, because they won’t get here. What’s more,” added the captain, as he surveyed the water and sky with the air of one defying the elements to withhold a secret from him, “if they try to cross the bay to-night you needn’t look for them at all. The bay is nothing too smooth now; but wait till the tide turns and the wind in those clouds off to the east is let loose! There’s going to be fun out there, and that before many hours, too.”

With this dismally prophetic remark the captain gave orders to cast off the lines, and the steamer was soon on its way down the bay.

The three brothers, George, Arthur, and Joe Warren, and Henry Burns left the wharf and were walking in the direction of the hotel, when a remark from the latter stopped them short.

“Did it occur to any of you,” asked Henry Burns, speaking in a slightly drawling tone, “that we shall never have a better opportunity to play a practical joke on your friends than we have to-day – ?”

“What friends?” exclaimed George Warren, indignantly.

“I thought you said Tom Harris and Bob White were coming down the river to-day in a canoe,” said Henry Burns, in the most innocent manner.

“And so they are. And you think we would play a joke on them the first day they arrive, do you? I believe you would get up in the night, Henry Burns, to play a joke on your own grandmother.

No, sirree, count me out of that,” said George Warren. “It will be time enough to play jokes on them after they get here. I don’t believe in treating friends in that way.”

“Rather a mean thing to do, I think,” said Arthur Warren.

“I’m out of it,” said Joe.

“It doesn’t occur to any of you to ask what the joke is, does it?” asked Henry Burns, dryly.

“Don’t want to know,” replied George.

“Nor I, either,” said Arthur.

“Keep it to play on Witham,” said Joe.

“Then I’ll enlighten you without your asking,” continued Henry Burns, nothing abashed. “You did not notice, perhaps, that though your friends, Tom and Bob, did not come ashore to-day, their baggage did, and it is back there on the wharf. Now I propose that we get John Briggs to let us take his wheelbarrow, wheel their traps over to the point, pitch their tent for them, and have everything ready by the time they get here. It’s rather a mean thing to do, I know, and not the kind of a trick I’d play on old Witham; but there’s nothing particular on hand in that line for to-day.”

Henry Burns paused, with a sly twinkle in his eyes, to note the effect of his words.

“Capital!” roared George Warren, slapping Henry Burns again on the back, regardless of the delicate state of that young gentleman’s health. “We might have known better than to take Henry Burns seriously.”

“Same old Henry Burns,” said Arthur. “Take notice, boys, that he never is beaten in anything he sets his heart on, and that his delicate health will never, never be any better;” and he was about to imitate his elder brother’s example in the matter of a punch at Henry Burns, but the latter, though of slighter build, grappled with him, and after a moment’s friendly wrestling laid him on his back on the greensward, thereby illustrating the force of his remark as to Henry Burns’s invincibility.

The suggestion was at once followed. Within an hour the boys had wheeled the baggage of the campers to a point of land overlooking the bay.

“It’s all here,” said Henry Burns, finally, as two of the boys deposited a big canvas bag, containing the tent, upon the grass, “except that one box on the wharf, which looks as though it contained food.”

“We can let that stay there till we get things shipshape here, or get Briggs to put it in the storehouse by and by,” suggested young Joe.

But if they could have foreseen then that the leaving of the box there upon the wharf, seemingly such an inconsequential thing, was to be the means of creating no end of trouble, it is quite possible that even young Joe himself, though rather fond of his ease, would have brought it away on his own shoulders; but it seemed of no consequence whether it should be removed then or later, and so the box remained where it was.

It required but a brief time to pitch the tent. It was a large, square-shaped canvas, with high walls on two sides, so that a person of medium height could stand erect there, and running to a peak at the top in the usual “A” shape. Putting the frame, of two poles and a cross-piece, together, and drawing the canvas over it as it lay on the ground, the two larger boys raised it into position while the others drove the pegs and stretched the guy-ropes.

“Now, then,” drawled Henry Burns, “if you care to, we can carry the joke still further by cutting some poles and putting up the bunks.”

This proposition also meeting with approval, Henry Burns and the eldest of the Warrens started for the woods, about a mile distant, to cut some spruce poles, leaving the younger brothers to complete the pegging of the tent, ditching it, and getting things in order.

The spot which had been selected for the camping-ground was one of the most beautiful on the island. It was a small point of land projecting into the bay, with a sandy beach on either side. Its outermost extremity, however, ended in a wall of ledge, which went down abruptly, so that the water

at high tide came up to within a few feet of the greensward, and at low tide dropped down, rather than receded, leaving no bare rocks exposed.

A few spruce-trees grew on the point, sufficient to give shade, and in the midst of a clump of them was a clear spring of water that was cool to iciness during the hottest days. The point commanded a view of the entire bay on the eastern side of the island, so that when the breeze came up from the south, as it did almost daily through the summer, blowing fresh and steadily, the billows over all its broad surface seemed to be aiming their blows directly at it, while every breath of wind was laden with a salt odour that was health-giving and inspiring.

It was a choice bit of land that Bob's uncle had purchased several years ago, when a few speculators had thought the island might be "boomed" as a summer resort. The little fishing village of Southport, which numbered then some twenty odd houses, had, indeed, been augmented by the "boom" by about the same number of cottages; and adjoining the old tavern there had been built a more imposing structure, the new and the old composing the summer hotel.

But the village had not "boomed." It remained the same peaceful, quiet, quaint, and interesting village as of yore. Those cottagers who remained after the boom died out were rather glad than otherwise that the picturesque place had not been transformed into a fashionable resort. They liked it for its tranquillity and quaintness, and soon came into sympathy and friendliness with the villagers, who had parted with their lands only with the greatest reluctance, and who viewed the new order of things with a suspicion born of years of conservativeness.

The gaiety of the place centred about the hotel, where, too, the greater number of the guests were those who came year after year, and who would as soon have thought of going to Jericho as to any other place than the island.

The leading citizen of the village was Squire James Brackett, and its moving spirit one Captain Curtis, or "Cap'n Sam," as he was familiarly known. The former owned the best house in the village, a big, rambling, two-story farmhouse, perched on the hill overlooking the harbour. He was a vessel-owner and a man of importance. He was the only man in the town who had persistently refused to associate with the summer residents, which some attributed to the fact that he feared lest their coming might disturb his sway over town affairs.

Captain Sam was a man of altogether different stamp. It is safe to say he was on good terms with everybody on the island. He was for ever busy; the first man to arise in the town, and the last to retire at night. In fact, it is a fair assumption that, had Captain Sam deserted the island at an early date in its history, the town might have eventually fallen so sound asleep that it would not have awakened to this day.

Captain Sam united in his activities the duties of storekeeper, coal and ice merchant, musician, constable, and schoolmaster, the latter vocation occupying his winter months. The energy of the village was concentrated in this one man, who seemed tireless. He was on intimate terms with everybody, and knew everybody's business. That he was rather good-looking was the cause of some pangs of jealousy on the part of young Mrs. Curtis, when business called her husband away among the housewives and maids of the village. Finally, Captain Sam had a voice which defied walls and distance. It was even told by some of the village humourists that he had once stood at the head of the island and hailed a vessel sailing around the extreme southern end, thirteen miles distant.

Grand Island, lying in the middle of the bay, almost divides the upper part of it into two big bodies of water, so that there are two great thoroughfares for vessels, leading out to sea, the western being the more generally used, for it is a more direct passage. The eastern bay is filled with islands at the entrance to the sea.

In the course of an hour, the boys who had gone to the woods returned to the camp, bringing with them four spruce poles. These were quickly trimmed of their branches, and cut to an even length of about seven feet. Then, four stakes being driven into the ground on each side of the tent under the walls, to form the legs of the bunks, the poles were mounted on these and made fast. Then pieces

of board were nailed across from pole to pole, and on these were placed mattresses stuffed with dry hay from Captain Sam's stable.

"There," said young Joe, throwing himself on one of them, "is a spring bed that can't be beaten anywhere. I know some think spruce boughs are better, but they dry, and the needles fall off, and the bed gets hard. These will last all summer."

The pliant spruce poles were as good, indeed, as springs.

In the meantime the younger boys had dug a trench completely around the tent, extending to the edge of the bank on one side of the point, so that a heavy rain could not flood the floor. In the rear of the tent they had set a huge box belonging to the campers, made of a packing-case and provided with a cover that lifted on leather hinges, and a padlock. It was, presumably, filled with the camp outfit. In one corner of the tent, on a box, they placed a large oil-stove and oven. The bedding was taken inside, and everything made shipshape. The comfort of the prospective campers seemed assured.

Over the top of the tent they had also stretched a big piece of stout cloth, made for the purpose, which was fastened to the ground at the ends with guy-ropes and pegs, and which was to protect the tent against leaking water in any long rainy period, and also serve as additional shade in hot weather.

The boys had done a hard afternoon's work. Pinning back the flaps of the tent, they sat at the entrance and looked out across the bay. The wind, which blew from the southeast, had not grown idle during the afternoon, but had increased steadily, and now came strong and damp from off the bay, rushing in at the opening of the tent and bulging it out so that it tugged violently at the ropes.

"It won't do to leave the tent-door unpinned," said Henry Burns. "It's going to blow great guns to-night." So, closing the entrance and making it fast, they went to the edge of the bank and sat there.

"It's rough out there now," said George Warren, pointing to the bay, which was one mass of foaming waves; "but it will be worse from now till midnight. The wind is going to blow harder and the tide is just beginning to run out."

The tide indeed set strongly down the island shore, so that when it met the wind and waves blown up from oceanward it made a rough and turbulent chop sea.

All at once as they sat there a sailboat rushed out from behind the headland across the cove and thrashed its way through the white-capped waves, heading down the island and throwing the spray at every plunge into the seas. Those aboard had evidently a reckless disregard for their own safety, for, although such few coasters as could be seen in the distance were scudding for harbour, fearful of the approaching storm, this craft carried not only full mainsail and forestaysail, – sail, too, that was large for the boat at all times, – but a topsail and a jib. The boat was hauled well into the wind and heeled over, so that the water again and again came over the board into the cockpit.

Perched upon the windward rail were three boys. A fourth, a boy evidently near George Warren's age, stood at the wheel, seemingly the most unconcerned of all. He was large of his age and powerfully built, and his sleeves, rolled above the elbow, showed two brown and brawny arms. A fifth boy, somewhat younger in appearance, lying in the bottom of the boat, with feet braced against the side, held the main-sheet.

The boat was a white sloop, about thirty feet in length over all, and clearly fast and able.

"I'll say one thing for Jack Harvey and his crew," exclaimed George Warren, as the yacht rushed by the point, "although I think they're a mean lot. They can handle a boat as well as any skipper on the island. And as for fear, they don't know what it means."

"Look!" he cried. "Do you see what they are doing?" as the yacht was suddenly brought, quivering, into the wind and headed away from the island on the other tack. "There's nothing in the world Jack Harvey's doing that for except to frighten the hotel guests. He sees the crowd on the piazza watching him, and is just making game of their fright. He'll sail out there as long as he dares, or until his topmast goes, just to keep them watching him."

And so indeed it proved. An anxious crowd of summer guests at the hotel had no sooner begun to rejoice at the boat's apparent safety, than they saw it go about and head out into the bay once more.

Then they breathed easier as it headed about again, and came rushing in. Then as it once more headed for the bay, they realized that what they were witnessing was a sheer bit of folly and recklessness. Angry as they were, they could but stand there and watch the yacht manoeuvre, the women crying out whenever a flaw threw the yacht over so that the mainsail was wet by the waves; the men angry at the bravado of the youthful yachtsmen, and vowing that the yacht might sink and the crew go with it before they would lift a hand to save one of them. All of which they knew they did not mean, – a fact which only increased their irritation.

“Ah!” said George Warren, as a big drop of rain suddenly splashed on his cheek. “Perhaps this will drive them in, if the wind won’t.” It had, indeed, begun to rain hard, and, although the crew of the yacht must have been drenched through and through with the flying spray, the water from the sky had, evidently, a more dampening effect on their spirits, for the yacht was headed inshore, and soon ran into a cove about three-quarters of a mile down the island, behind a point of land where, through the trees, the indistinct outlines of a tent could be seen.

And so, as it was now the time when the sun would have set upon the bay, if it had not been shut out from sight by a heavy mass of clouds, and as the wind came laden with rain, which dashed in the faces of those who were out-of-doors to encounter it, the boys turned from the spot where they had gathered and hurried for shelter, the brothers to their cottage, and Henry Burns to the hotel.

The tent, swayed by the fierce gusts of wind, tugged at its ropes; the reckless crew of the white sloop had found shelter, and those vessels that were out upon the bay eagerly sought the same.

But in that part of the bay which rolled between the northern end of the island and the mouth of the river, fifteen miles away, a greater piece of recklessness was being enacted than was ever dared by Harvey and his careless crew. There was none on shore there to witness it, for the island at that extreme end was bare of settlement.

A mile from the nearest land, seemingly at the mercy of a wild sea which threatened every moment to engulf it, a small canoe slowly and stubbornly fought its way toward the island shore. At a distance one would have thought it a mere log, tossed about at random by the waves; and yet, one watching it would have seen it slowly draw ahead, glide from under the spray that broke constantly over its bow, and still make progress; sometimes beaten back by billows that tumbled fast one upon another, but gaining something through it all.

There were two occupants of the craft, and, though but mere youths, none could have handled the paddles more skilfully. Yet it was a question of the great sea’s strength against their endurance. What would happen should they find that there came a time when they made no gain? If they turned about, even supposing that were possible, the storm might drive them across the bay once more, but their strength and courage would be gone, and they could hardly hope to reach the shore. It was either the island goal or nothing.

One standing on the shore would scarce have seen them now. Darkness began to hide them. But the island loomed up, dim and shadowy, before them, and they struggled on against the storm.

CHAPTER II. TO THE RESCUE

A person leaving the wharf at Southport would ordinarily take one of three roads: the one directly ahead leading up through the village and past the hotel; the one to the left passing by, though at some distance from, the cottages that were scattered irregularly along the south shore of the bay; the road to the right leading similarly to the cottages on that shore. The shore there, however, made a deep sweep, bordering on a cove of some considerable extent.

From the shore in all directions the land sloped back, with a gradual rise for about a mile. Cottages dotted the slope here and there.

To the right of the wharf and the farthest away from it of any dwelling was the Warren cottage. Somewhat hidden in a grove of spruce-trees, its broad piazza commanded a fine view of the bay and the islands in the distance.

On this particular evening, however, there was little inducement of wind or weather for one to linger there. The rain, driven by the wind through fluttering tree-branches, dashed itself against the cottage windows as though the drops were drawn, like moths, to the light which shone from within; then fell in pools and was swept away by driving gusts. Nought to be seen there now but sea and sky in wild commotion; darkness in all the air, blackness over all the bay.

But, despite the dreariness of the storm outside, there was pleasing comfort within the cottage. The increasing darkness of the night, the dashing rain and the noisy wind, like unwelcome guests, came only to the threshold and gained no admittance. A fire of driftwood blazed in the big stone fireplace, and the soft rays shed by a lamp suspended from the ceiling further lighted up the cosy room.

There were four occupants of the room. Mrs. Warren, a sweet-faced, cheery little woman, and the three brothers, were seated about the fire. They were conversing earnestly, and, as the talk progressed, it seemed as though the influence of the storm was getting into the room.

"It's no use, mother," said George Warren, who stood in front of the fireplace, facing the others, "trying to make us think that Tom and Bob did not start to cross the bay. Ever since the boys were out in the big storm on Moosehead Lake they've been afraid of nothing. Tom Harris declares his canoe will stand as rough a sea as a dory, – and, what's more, the storm hadn't begun by the time they must have left the mouth of the river."

"Yes, but Captain Chase would warn them not to cross."

"I've no doubt he did, mother; and, if he did, that might make it so much the worse. If the boys had been in a sailboat they probably would have listened to him; but the captain would sneer at that canoe, and would like as not tell them it wasn't fit to cross the bay in at any time, much less in rough water. And that would be just enough to put them on their mettle. They'd make the attempt, even if they had to put back."

"Yes, and Tom said in the note that they would be here to-night," broke in young Joe. "And when he gave that to Captain Chase to bring, it showed he meant to start, anyway."

"But when the storm increased they would put back," urged Mrs. Warren.

"No," answered George, "they must have gotten two-thirds of the way across the bay before the worst of the storm broke. The storm seemed to hold up for an hour or two during the latter part of the afternoon, and then increased all of a sudden with the turn of the tide. The boys would have gotten so far across that it would be too late to turn back, and they would have to keep on."

"And yet you boys want to imitate their recklessness!" cried Mrs. Warren, impatiently. "Come, Arthur," and she turned to the boy who had remained silent thus far during the discussion. "Help me convince your brothers of their mistake. You don't agree with them, I am sure."

The boy thus addressed, though a year younger than his elder brother, was the one on whose judgment the mother more often relied. He was fully as active as the other two, but his was a calmer temperament than theirs. This confidence in him really extended to his brothers, though they joked him on his moderate, studious ways, and called him the “professor,” because he was a little near-sighted and sometimes wore glasses. He came forward now and stood by his mother’s chair.

“I can’t help thinking, mother, that George and Joe are right,” he said, deliberately, while poor Mrs. Warren gasped with dismay. “You wouldn’t have us play the parts of cowards while the boys may be in danger, and when we can perhaps save them. There isn’t half the danger you imagine, either. The wind is blowing now squarely from the east, and once we have beaten out of the cove we can sail alongshore without heading out to sea.

“Then, too,” he continued, “the yacht is nearly new, and was fitted with new rigging this year. We’ll promise to sail only a little past the head of the island and return, or run into Bryant’s Cove and walk back. It’s no more than we ought to do for the best friends we’ve got. There’s not another sailboat in the harbour to-night that is as stiff as ours, except Jack Harvey’s, and it’s out of the question to ask him. The other boats went out to the races at Seal Harbour, or we would get Captain Sam to go in his yacht. We can’t ask Jack Harvey to go – that’s certain.”

“Wouldn’t he laugh at us, though!” said George. “He would offer to tow our boat along, too, or something of that sort, just to be mean, and then there’d be a nice row.”

Besieged on all sides, Mrs. Warren could but yield a partial consent.

“You and George can go,” she said, turning to Arthur, “but Joe must stay with me. I can’t spare you all to take such an awful risk.”

“I won’t stay!” cried young Joe, hotly. “That is to say, I – I don’t want to,” he hastened to add, as Mrs. Warren looked reproachfully at him. “They need me to help sail the *Spray*, – don’t you, fellows?”

“There ought to be three to manage the boat in this wind,” said George, somewhat reluctantly. “I guess you’ll have to let him go, mother – ”

But at this moment there was the sound of footsteps upon the piazza. Some one walked around the house, gave a premonitory knock at the door, and let himself in.

It was Henry Burns. He was equipped for the storm, in oilskins, rubber boots, and a tarpaulin hat. The water ran from his clothing in little streams and made a series of pools on the polished wood floor. Declining Mrs. Warren’s offer of a seat, on the ground that he was too wet, Henry Burns stood by the mantel near the fireplace, and, with tarpaulin removed, still looked the pale and delicate student, despite his rough garments.

“Ahoy there, shipmates,” he said, with great gravity, waving the tarpaulin at the group. “You weren’t thinking of cruising for your health this evening, were you? Because, if you were, my health isn’t as good as it might be, and I think a little salt air would do it good.”

“Bravo!” cried George Warren. “You might know Henry Burns would be on hand if there was any excitement going on. Never knew him to fail, – Joe, you’ll have to stay at home now and keep mother company. We don’t need more than three. Come, Arthur, hurry! We mustn’t lose a minute longer.”

And while young Joe turned away, almost in tears at the verdict, the other two boys scrambled about, hastily donning reefers, oilskins, and heavy boots. Then they were gone with a rush and a bang of the door, and Mrs. Warren and Joe composed themselves as best they could to await their return.

And could any of them have imagined then, looking forth through the darkness and the storm, an overturned canoe pounding helplessly upon the beach of that island shore, it surely would not have comforted the watchers nor have given courage to those who went forth to rescue.

Descending the bank to the shore of the cove, the boys quickly launched a rowboat, the tender to the yacht, and, with Henry Burns seated in the stern, tiller-ropes in hand, the brothers, about equal in strength, pulled vigorously across the cove, where the sloop lay at anchor under the lee of the bluff. It was no easy task to cross the cove in that sea; and often Henry Burns turned the boat from its course

and headed out toward the entrance, to meet some enormous wave that, had it broken over the side of the boat, would have filled and swamped it.

The yacht *Spray*, sheltered as it was from the brunt of the storm, was tossing about uneasily as the boys climbed aboard and made the tender fast astern. It was a small craft, about twenty-five feet over all, with the hull painted black. It was trim and was able for its size, but, safe to say, not a fisherman in the village would have cared to put out in it this night. Still, the boat had been built on an outer island of the bay for fishing in heavy weather, and was seaworthy.

There were three sets of reefing-points in the mainsail, and, after some discussion, it was decided to reef the sail down to its smallest size. While Henry Burns hoisted the sail slightly, the brothers hastily tied in the reefs, and the halyards were then drawn taut at throat and peak and made fast. The tender was tied to the buoy. There was no use trying to tow it in that sea. Then, with George Warren at the tiller, Arthur and Henry Burns cast off, and the voyage was begun.

When Mr. Warren purchased the boat for his boys, he had it rigged with especial care for an emergency. The main-sheet was rigged to run through a double set of pulleys, so that the mainsail could be hauled with comparative ease in a heavy gale. The sail he had cut down smaller than the boat had been carrying, so there was less danger of her capsizing. That very precaution was, however, to prove a source of trouble on this particular night.

Arthur Warren and Henry Burns now came aft, the iron centreboard was dropped, and the yacht was almost instantly under headway, standing out by the bluff and heading almost directly across the cove. Arthur Warren held the main-sheet, while Henry Burns seated himself, with feet braced against the centreboard-box, ready for any emergency.

For a moment they were in comparatively smooth water, and then, as they emerged from the lee of the headland, it seemed as though they had been suddenly transported into another sea. The wind that struck them careened the boat over violently, as they were as yet under but little headway. Easing the yacht for a moment with the sheet, they righted somewhat, but the prospect was not pleasing. The *Spray* did not head into the wind well, and they soon found they could not make even a straight course across the harbour, with the slant of wind they had.

"We may make something on the next tack," said George, "but it doesn't look very encouraging."

"Supposing you see how she comes about before we run in near shore," suggested Arthur, after some minutes.

In answer, George put the tiller hard down, after giving the little boat a good headway. The yacht went sluggishly in stays, hung almost in the eye of the wind for a moment, and then, failing to make headway against the heavy seas, fell off once more and would not come about.

"There's only one thing we can do, boys," said George. "We must run in under the shelter of the wharf and shake out that last reef. The sail is too small to reef down so close. I'm sure she will beat under a double reef. It's the only thing left to do."

It was the work of but a few minutes to carry out this plan. The third reef was shaken out and the sail hoisted. Once more the yacht emerged from shelter. The change for the better in its working was at once apparent. It pointed higher into the wind, though careening over so that the water came unpleasantly near the top of the high wash-boards. But the yacht would stand this. The question now to be tested was, would she act and come about under the still small sail she was carrying against the force of such a sea.

"Now, then," said George, as they neared the bluff again, "we will try her once more. If she fails now we are beaten. We cannot carry more sail. That's sure."

He put the tiller down as he spoke, and the *Spray*, responding bravely, headed into the seas. They strove angrily to overwhelm the little craft, and dashed furiously against her bows, while the wind worried the flapping sails as though it would tear them from boom and mast; but the *Spray* held on and came about nobly, and they were away again on the other tack, standing across the harbour.

It seemed an hour before they had beaten out where they dared to stand past the bluff and head alongshore. They had left all shelter hopelessly behind; on one side of them a wilderness of foaming waves rushed upon them from the darkness; on the other side lay the lee shore, high and rock-bound for the most part, but now and then broken by small stretches of beach. Against the former, the seas broke with heavy crashings; upon the other, with an ominous booming.

But they headed off the wind a trifle, eased the sheet, made by the point, and stood along the shore as near as they dared to run. It was well for them that the little yacht was a good sea boat. Again and again, as some wave, lifting its white crest above the others, threatened to overwhelm them, the yacht was headed out to sea, and then the wave, lifting the boat high on its crest and rolling rapidly from beneath it till half the length of the yacht seemed poised in air, left it to fall heavily upon the next oncoming wave, or, worse still, to plunge into a watery gulf, there to be half-buried by the next big sea.

But the yacht lived through it all and kept bravely on its course. Henry Burns's arms ached with bailing out the cockpit, where the seas broke in over the quarter, or came aboard in clouds of spray as they headed into the wind.

They dared not sail near the shore, and could see it but indistinctly, save when some larger wave broke upon the beach and carved out a white line of foam, which vanished as quickly as it appeared. So against the cliffs that they passed they could see a sudden blur of white as a big wave hurled itself to destruction. Beyond this all was bleary and indistinct.

They were now within half a mile of the head of the island, and, looking ahead into the darkness, which, with the rain, had greatly increased within the last hour, like the beginning of a fog, they realized how useless was the search they had begun. They could see but the merest distance in any direction. The storm was steadily increasing, and already a new condition confronted them. The wind was shifting to the southeast, from east, so that their return was rendered impossible. It was worse than folly to think of beating back in such a head sea. The wind on their quarter was driving them along furiously. It was madness to dream of keeping on past the head of the island.

"We can't make Bryant's Cove any too soon to suit me," said George. "The *Spray* has got more wind now than she knows what to do with."

The little boat was, indeed, burying her bows under at every plunge, and trembled in all her timbers at the fearful strain. It was plain that she had reached the limit of her seaworthiness. Bryant's Cove was a short distance around the head of the island. Once there, they would be sheltered from the storm.

The boys had ceased to speak of a possible rescue of their friends. It was a question of their own salvation now, and the instinct of self-preservation asserted itself. Henry Burns peered eagerly ahead, but looked only for the point of land behind which lay their safety. Suddenly he turned and uttered a shrill cry of fright, such as no one had ever heard from him before.

"Luff her, George! Luff quick – quick, for your life!" he cried, and, springing for the tiller, threw his weight against it ere the startled helmsman could find strength to act.

The yacht, with sails slatting, came into the wind amid a cloud of spray. The boom, striking a wave, had nearly snapped in two. But it was not an instant too soon.

A black object that looked enormous rose suddenly out of the sea in front of the *Spray*. The next wave lifted it high in the air, and hurled it down upon them. It was a ship's yawl-boat, of immense size, fully as large as the yacht itself. Down the watery declivity it shot, swift and straight, like some sea-monster in pursuit of its quarry.

But the little yacht had answered her helm well. There was a crash and a splintering of wood, and the yawl drifted rapidly past and was lost in the darkness. The yacht *Spray*, her bowsprit and fore-rigging torn away, once more fell off the wind and was driven on by the storm. It was an escape so narrow that a moment more and they had been dashed to pieces.

Henry Burns was the first to regain his courage.

“It’s better the bowsprit than the rudder,” he said, coolly. And his courage gave them strength. A few minutes later they had passed the head of the island and gained the lee of the land, and in fifteen minutes more they had cast anchor in Bryant’s Cove.

“I am willing to do whatever you boys think is best,” said George Warren, as they lowered and furled the sail and made the yacht snug for the night. “But I think it’s of no use for us to make any search for the boys along this shore. If they capsized in the bay to-night, neither they nor their canoe would come ashore here. The canoe would be blown across the bay; and they – Well, we’re bound to believe that they didn’t start, or, if they did, that they put back.”

“I don’t see but what we have done all we can to-night,” responded his brother; “and, as we have got five miles of muddy road to travel, the sooner we start the better. We could stay in the boat to-night, but we must get back on mother’s account. Depend upon it, she has worried every single minute we have been gone, and I don’t blame her, either. Now it’s all over, I don’t mind saying I think we were fools to come out. But we meant well, so perhaps the less said the better. We’ll have to leave the *Spray* to herself till the storm goes down. Nobody will harm her.”

“I don’t mind staying here to-night and looking after her,” said Henry Burns. “To be sure, old Witham doesn’t know I have left the hotel, but I tumbled my bed up before I came away, and he will only think I got up early in the morning, if he wonders where I am.”

“No, no, old fellow. We won’t let you stay. We won’t hear of it,” said both brothers. “The sooner we all get home and get dry clothes on, the better. There’s no need of any of us staying. The *Spray* won’t sail out of the cove of herself, and every one on the island knows her.”

So, as they had left the tender behind, they removed their clothing, tied it into bundles, slung them around their necks, and, slipping overboard, swam to shore.

“If I ever was more glad to get on land alive than I am at present,” said Henry Burns, his teeth chattering with the cold, as he hastily scrambled into his clothes, “I don’t happen to remember it just at this instant. I wonder if my aunt would send me down here again for my health if she could see me now.”

There was something so ludicrous in the idea that the boys could not help bursting into roars of laughter, – though they felt little enough like merriment.

“The more I think of it,” said Henry Burns, “the more I believe the boys are snug ashore at Millville, and that they haven’t been within ten miles of Grand Island to-night.”

“I think you are right, Henry,” responded Arthur.

“It must be so,” said George.

And yet not one of them dared to believe absolutely that what he said was true.

They started off across lots now, walking as rapidly as their wet and heavy clothing would allow, to strike the road which led to the harbour. Coming at length into this road, they had walked but a short distance, and were at the top of a hill at a turn of the road where it left the shore, when Henry Burns, pointing down along the shore, said:

“We ought to remember that part of the bay as long as we live, for we shall never be much nearer to death than we were right there.”

“Sure enough,” responded Arthur, “it was just about off there that the big yawl smashed our bowsprit off.”

“The yawl must have been driven ashore by this time,” said George. “Wait a minute and I will take a look.” And he disappeared over the bank and was lost in the bushes. The two boys seated themselves by the side of the road to await his return, but started up with a horror in their hearts as a shrill cry came up to them from the shore. There was that in the cry that told them that George Warren had found other than the ship’s long-boat. They scarcely dared to think what. Then they, too, dashed down the slope to the shore.

When they reached his side, George Warren could scarcely speak from emotion.

“Look! Look!” he cried, in a trembling, choking voice, and pointed out upon the beach where the tide had gone down.

There were two strange objects there that the sea had buffeted in its wild play that night, and then, as though grown tired of them, had cast upon the shore, among the rocks and seaweed.

One was the long-boat, no longer an object of danger, for the sea had hurled it against a rock and stove its side in. The other was a canoe. The sea had overturned it and tossed it upon the shore. Two of its thwarts were smashed where it had been dropped down and pinioned upon a rock – and the rock held it fast.

CHAPTER III. A SURPRISE

With hearts beating quick and hard, they lifted the canoe from the rock, fearful of what they might find beneath it; but there was nothing there. Then they searched along the beach in the darkness as best they could, peering anxiously into clumps of seaweed, and standing now and again fixed with horror as some dim object, cast up by the sea, assumed in shadowy outline the semblance of a human form. The shore was heaped here and there with piles of driftwood and ends of logs that had come down through countless tides and currents from the lumber-mills miles up the river, and this stuff had lodged among the ledges and boulders at various points along the beach. Here and there among these they hunted, groping amid the seaweed, cold and chill to the touch, and suggesting to their minds, already alert with dread, the most gruesome of discoveries which they feared to make.

That the boys had crossed the bay in the frail craft which they had just found there seemed to be no possible doubt. Furthermore, they were now led to believe that Tom and Bob, having once reached a point where they could have found shelter, had chosen to keep on past the head of the island in an effort to make the harbour of Southport. They must at least, as the wind had blown, have reached a point opposite where the boys had found the canoe, and have, perhaps, paddled some distance beyond.

But it was clearly useless to continue the search further in the darkness and storm. They lifted the canoe and carried it up from the beach, and hid it in the bushes upon the bank. Then they went slowly back to the road.

"I tell you what we can do," said Arthur Warren. "I hate to go back to the cottage without making one more search. Let's get a lantern and come back. We shall not have to go far for one, – and we shall have done all we can, then, though it is a bad night to see anything."

The rain was, indeed, pouring in torrents and driving in sheets against their faces.

"Yes, we must do that much," said George. "And then – then we can come back in the morning –" His voice choked, and he could not say more. They went on down the muddy road in silence.

Shortly below the hill, upon the road, was a big farmhouse, arriving at which they turned into the yard. The house was in darkness, save one dim light in a chamber; but they pounded at the door with the heavy brass knocker till they heard the shuffling of feet in the entry, and a voice inquired roughly what was wanted. They answered, and the door was opened cautiously a few inches, where it was held fast by a heavy chain. An old man's face peered out at them. The sight of the boys was evidently reassuring, for, in a moment more, the man threw open the door and invited them to walk in.

"There be rough sailors come by some nights," he said, in a manner apologizing for his suspicion. "I'm here alone, and" – he lowered his voice to a husky whisper – "they do say that I have a bit of money hid away in the old house. But it's a lie. It's a lie. It's the sea and the garden I live on. There's not a bit of money in the old house. But what brings you out in such a storm? You haven't lost your way, have you?"

They told their story, while the old man sat in a chair, shaking his head dubiously. When they told him of the finding of the canoe, and their certainty that the boys had crossed in it, he declared that it could never have lived to get to the island.

"It must have come from down below," he said. "It could never have been paddled across the bay against this sea. Two boys, d'ye say, paddled it? No. No, my lads, never – upon my life, never. Two stout men in a dory, and used to these waters, might have done it; but two lads in a cockle-shell like that would never have reached the Head, let alone getting beyond it."

He seemed to regard them almost with suspicion, when they told him of how they had sailed up along shore in search of their comrades, and was perhaps inclined to believe their whole story as some

kind of a hoax. Certain it was he gave them little comfort, except to say he would look alongshore in the morning. If any one had drowned offshore in the evening, they might not come ashore till the next day, he said.

But he got a battered lantern for them and handed it over with a trembling hand, cautioning them to be careful of it, and to leave it by the door on their way back. They heard him bolt the heavy door behind them as they turned out of the yard into the road. A clock in the kitchen had struck the hour of ten as they left the house.

"Isn't it very probable, after all," said George, as they walked along, "that the man may be right, and that this canoe we have found is one that has been lost off some steamer?"

"It seems to me perhaps as probable," answered Henry Burns, "as that the boys should have attempted to keep on in the storm, having once reached a place of safety."

"I wish I could think so," said Arthur. "But I can't help fearing the worst, – and if the boys are lost," he exclaimed bitterly, "I've seen all I want to of this island for one summer. I'd never enjoy another day here."

"I won't believe it's their canoe until I have to," said George. "They are not such reckless chaps as we have been making them out."

And he tried to say this bravely, as though he really meant it.

They tramped along the rest of the way to the shore in silence, for none of them dared to admit to another that which he could not but believe.

By the lantern's dim and flickering light they searched the beach again for a half-mile along in the vicinity of where the canoe had come ashore. But nothing rewarded their hunt.

"The old man must be right," said George Warren. "The canoe must have come ashore from some steamer. Let's go home, anyway. We've done all we can."

Heart-sick and weary, they began the tramp back to the cottage. At about a mile from the old farmhouse, where they left the lantern, they turned off from the road and made a cut across fields, till they came at length to the shore of the cove opposite the Warren cottage. They could see across the water the gleam of a large lantern which young Joe had hung on the piazza for them; but the boat they had expected to find drawn up on shore was gone.

"Old Slade must be over in town," said Henry Burns; "and he won't be back to-night, probably. So it's either walk two miles more around the cove or swim out to the tender. We're all of us tired out. Shall we draw lots to see who swims?"

"I'll go, myself," volunteered George. "I'd rather swim that short distance than do any more walking. I'm about done up, but I am good for that much." And he threw off his clothing once more, and swam pluckily out to the tender and brought it ashore. They pulled across the cove to the shore back of the cottage, and, springing out, carried the boat high up on land.

They were at the cottage then in a twinkling; but, even before they had reached the door, dear Mrs. Warren, who had heard their steps upon the walk, was outside in the rain, hugging her boys who had braved the storm and who had come back safe. She was altogether too much overcome at the sight of them, it seemed, to inquire if they had found those in search of whom they had set out.

And then the dear little woman, having embraced and kissed them as though they had been shipwrecked mariners, long given up for lost, – not forgetting Henry Burns, who wasn't used to it, but who took it calmly all the same, as he did everything else, – hurried them into the kitchen, where young Joe had the big cook-stove all of a red heat, and where dry clothing for the three from the extensive Warren wardrobe was warming by the fire.

A comical welcome they got from young Joe, who had been just as much worried as Mrs. Warren, but who hadn't admitted it to his mother for a moment, and had scornfully denied the existence of danger, and yet who was every bit as relieved as she to see the boys safe. He tried not to appear as though a great weight had been removed from his mind by their return, but made altogether a most commendable failure.

The big, roomy, old-fashioned kitchen – for the Warren cottage had originally been a rambling old farmhouse, which they had remodelled and modernized – had never seemed so cosy before. And the fire had never seemed more cheery than it did now. And when they had scrambled into dry, warm clothing, and Mrs. Warren had taken the teakettle from the hob, and poured them each a steaming cup of tea, to “draw out the chill,” they forgot for the moment what they had been through and their sad discovery.

In fact, it seemed as though Mrs. Warren and young Joe were strangely indifferent to what had sent them forth, and were easily satisfied with the opinions expressed by the boys, who had agreed not to mention the finding of the canoe until something more definite was learned, that Tom and Bob had in all probability not left the river.

So easily satisfied, indeed, and so little affected by the fruitless errand they had been on, that all at once Henry Burns, who had been eying Mrs. Warren sharply for some moments, suddenly rose up from where he was sitting, and rushed out of the kitchen, through the dining-room, into the front part of the house. Wondering what had come over him, the others followed.

What they saw was a tableau, with Henry Burns as exhibitor. He had drawn aside the heavy portière with one hand, and stood pointing into the room with the other.

There, seated before the fireplace, were two boys so much like Tom and Bob, whom they had given up for lost, that their own mothers, had they been there, would have wept for joy at the sight of them. And then, what with the Warren boys pounding them and hugging them, like young bears, to make sure they were flesh and blood, and not the ghosts of Tom and Bob, and with the cheers that fairly made the old rafters ring, and the happiness of Mrs. Warren, who was always willing to adopt every boy from far and near who was a friend of one of her boys, – what with all this, there was altogether a scene that would have done any one’s heart good, and might have shamed the storm outside, if it had been any other kind of a storm than a pitiless southeaster.

Then, though the hour was getting late, they all sat about the big fireplace, and Tom narrated the story of the shipwreck.

But, just as he began, young Joe said, with mock gravity:

“We haven’t introduced Henry Burns to the boys yet. Henry, this is Tom Harris, and this is Bob White.”

“I don’t think we need an introduction to one who has risked his life for us,” said Tom Harris, heartily, as he and Bob sprang up to shake hands with Henry Burns. But Henry Burns, carrying out the joke, bowed very formally, and politely said he was extremely happy to make their acquaintance. At which Tom and Bob, unfamiliar with the ways of Henry Burns, stared in astonishment, which sent the Warren boys into roars of laughter.

The boys thus introduced to Henry Burns were handsome young fellows, evidently about the same age, – in fact, each lacked but a few months of fifteen, – thick-set and strongly built. The sons of well-to-do parents, and neighbours, they had been inseparable companions ever since they could remember. Tom Harris’s father was the owner of extensive tracts in the Maine woods, from which lumber was cut yearly and rafted down the streams to his lumber-mills. In company with him on several surveying and exploring expeditions, the boys had hunted and fished together, and had paddled for weeks along the streams and on the lakes of the great Maine wilderness.

They had hunted and fished in the Parmachenee and the Rangeley Lake region, and knew a great deal more of real camp life than most boys of double their age. Further than this, they were schoolmates, and were so equally matched in athletic sports, in which they both excelled, that neither had ever been able to gain a decided victory over the other. Tom was of rather light complexion, while Bob was dark, with curly, black hair.

It was through their friendship with the Warren boys, who lived not far from them, in the same town, that they had decided to spend the summer camping on Grand Island.

As they all gathered around the cheerful blaze of the fire, Tom told the story of the day's adventures.

With so much of their camp kit as they needed for cooking along the river, they had started from the town of Benton at about four o'clock that morning, just as the tide began to ebb. Hardened as they were to the use of the paddle, by the time the tide had ceased to ebb and slack water ensued, they had left the city miles behind and were well down the river.

Then the flood tide began to set strong against them, and a wind arose that furrowed the river with waves that were not big enough to be noticeable to larger craft, but which seriously impeded the progress of the frail canoe. They kept steadily on, but made slow headway.

At Millville, a few miles above the mouth of the river, where it broadened out into the bay, they had met the steamer, and had hastily scrawled the note which Captain Chase had brought to the Warren boys.

Sure enough, Captain Chase had warned them of the impending storm, and, furthermore, had offered to transport them and their canoe across the bay; but they had declined his offer, wishing to paddle the entire distance to the island. They had set their hearts on making the trip of forty miles in one day; and partly for this reason, and partly because Captain Chase had looked askance at their canoe, and had assured them that it was not a fit craft for bay work in any weather, let alone in a heavy sea, they had set out, toward the latter part of the afternoon, to cross the fifteen miles of bay which lay between them and Grand Island.

The storm which had threatened gradually closed in around them, but they held on stubbornly, until, when too far across the bay to put back, it rapidly gathered strength, and soon turned what had been a comparatively safe pathway across the sea into a wilderness of waves, that at one moment rose high above the bow of the canoe, dashing them with spray as the sharp canoe cleaved them, and the next dropped down beneath them, opening a watery trench, into which they plunged.

They had seen storms like this, that came quick and sharp upon the lakes, heaving up a sea almost in a moment, with squalls that swept down from the hills. They had been safely through them before; but at those times it had been a short, sharp battle for a half-hour at most, before they could reach a friendly shore. But here it was different. Here were miles of intervening water between them and the nearest land. This was no lake, to be quickly within the shelter of some protecting point of land.

But they had never for a moment lost courage nor despaired of coming through all right. They struggled pluckily on, and might have gotten safely to land without mishap, if they had been familiar with the shore of the island. To a stranger, the shore about the head of the island presented a sheer front of forbidding cliffs, rising abruptly from the water, and against which, in a storm, the sea dashed furiously.

There was apparently no place at which a boat could be landed; and yet, hidden behind the very barrier of ledge that sheltered it, lay Bryant's Cove, as quiet and sequestered a pool as any fugitive craft could wish to find. Had the boys known of its existence, they would have landed there, and have been at the Warren cottage before the *Spray* had left the harbour.

As it was, there seemed to them to be no alternative but to keep on to a point about half a mile farther along the shore, where they hoped to be able to make a landing upon the beach.

They had accomplished the distance, and were fast nearing a place where they could land in safety, when a most unexpected and disastrous accident happened. Suddenly, and without the slightest warning of its weakness, the paddle which Bob was using snapped in two in his hands. At the same moment a wave hit the canoe, and, with nothing with which to keep his balance, Bob was thrown bodily from the canoe into the sea, upsetting the canoe and spilling Tom out at the same time.

The boys were able to grasp the canoe and cling on for a few minutes. They were both good swimmers, and often, in smooth water, had practised swimming, with the canoe upset, and were able to accomplish the feat of righting it, bailing it with a dipper, which they always carried attached to

one of the thwarts by a cord, and then climbing aboard over the ends. But it was useless to attempt such a thing in this boisterous sea.

Indeed, it was more than they could do, even, to cling to the overturned craft, for soon an enormous wave struck it a blow broadside and tore it from their grasp. Then ensued a fight for life that seemed almost hopeless. They were near to shore, but the sea seemed to delight in mocking them; tossing them in at one moment, so that they could grasp at seaweed that lay above the ledges, and then clutching at them and drawing them relentlessly back.

It was then that their athletic training stood them in good stead. Less hardy constitutions and weaker muscles than theirs would have quickly tired under the strain. Refraining from useless struggles to gain the shore, they waited their opportunity, and strove merely for the moment to keep themselves afloat. In this manner they were, several times, almost cast up on shore.

All at once Tom Harris felt a sharp pain in his right hand. Then he realized, with a thrill of hope, that he had struck it upon a rock. It was, indeed, a narrow reef that made out some distance from shore. They had narrowly escaped being dashed upon it head-foremost. Tom waited and gathered his strength as the next wave hurled him on its crest in the direction of the ledge. Then, as the wave bore him with great force against it, he broke the force of the shock with his hands, was thrown roughly up against it, and managed to cling fast, with his fingers in a niche of the rock, as the wave, receding, strove to drag him back again.

Then, holding on with one hand, he managed somehow to grasp at Bob as he was drifting by, and hold him fast and draw him in. Clinging to the ledge as each succeeding wave broke over them, they waited till they had regained their strength and recovered their wind, and then slowly worked their way along the ledge to shore, and at length were safe, out of the sea's fury.

Then they had rested awhile, before setting out on foot. Their canoe they could see at some distance out from shore, tossing about at the mercy of the waves. It must of necessity come ashore in due time, but it might not be for an hour, and they resolved not to wait for it, but to push on to their destination, returning on the morrow to look for it. They followed the shore for about a mile down the island, till they met a fisherman, who told them how to get to the Warren cottage by the same route the Warren boys and Henry Burns had taken a few hours later.

They had crossed the cove in old Slade's boat, and, expecting to astonish the Warren boys by their appearance, in the midst of the storm, had found, to their dismay, that those whom they had expected to find safe at home were imperilling their lives for them out in the bay.

"Well, I must be up and moving," said Henry Burns, when Tom had concluded his narrative. "I don't mind saying I'm a bit tired with this night's work – and I guess you are, by the looks. I can sleep, too, now that I know that you are not down among the mermaids at the bottom of Samoset Bay."

"Why don't you stay here with the boys to-night, Henry?" said Mrs. Warren. "You cannot get into the hotel at this hour of the night, without waking everybody up. Colonel Witham closes up early, you know."

"No one but Henry Burns can, mother," said Joe Warren. "Henry has a private staircase of his own."

"It's a lightning-rod staircase, Mrs. Warren," explained Henry Burns. "I use it sometimes after ten o'clock, for that is my bedtime, you know. Mrs. Carlin – good soul – sends me off to bed regularly at that hour, no matter what is going on; and so I have to make use of it occasionally."

Mrs. Warren shook her head doubtfully.

"You shouldn't do it, Henry," she said. "Although I know it is hard for a strong, healthy boy to go off to bed every night at ten o'clock. Well, that comes of being too strict, I suppose, – but do look out and don't break your neck. It's a bad night to be climbing around."

"Don't worry about Henry Burns, mother," said Arthur. "He wouldn't do it, if he wasn't forced to it, – and he knows how to take care of himself, if anybody does."

“Well, good night,” said Henry Burns. “And don’t forget, I hold my reception to-morrow night; and I extend to Tom and Bob a special invitation to be present.” And, with a knowing glance at George Warren, Henry Burns took his departure.

As the boys went off to bed that night, George Warren explained to them that on the next night, the occasion being an entertainment in place of the regular Wednesday night hop at the hotel, he and Henry Burns had planned a joke on Colonel Witham, in which they were all to take part, and, with this prospect in view, they dropped asleep.

In the meantime Henry Burns, arriving at the hotel, and having learned by previous experience that a lock on a rear door of the old part of the hotel, which was not connected with the new by any door, could be manipulated with the aid of a thin blade of a jack-knife, crept up to the garret by way of a rickety pair of back stairs, and from thence emerged upon the roof through a scuttle. Then, carefully making his way along the ridge-pole to where the new part joined the old, he climbed a short distance up a lightning-rod, to the roof of the new part.

This was a large roof, nearly flat. He walked across, about midway of the building, to where another rod, fastened at the top to a chimney, came up. Clinging to this, Henry Burns disappeared over the edge of the roof, found a resting-place for his foot on a projection which was directly over his own window, and then lowered himself, like an acrobat, down the rod to a veranda. Raising the window directly beside the rod, he slipped inside, closed it softly, and in a few minutes more was abed and sound asleep.

While all Southport slept, the storm spent its force, and toward morning gradually subsided. In the place of the beating rain there stole up through the islands, in the early morning hours, great detached banks of fog, – themselves like strange, white islands, – which shut out the bay from the shore. They lay heavy over the water, and, as the boisterous seas gradually gave way to the long, smooth waves that rolled in without breaking, one might have fancied that the fog, itself, had a depressing and tranquillizing influence upon the sea.

Yet old fishermen would have ventured out then, without fear, for there were signs, that might be read by the weather-wise, that a light west wind was soon to be stirring that would scatter the fog at its first advance, and sweep it back out to sea.

But, brief as was the visitation of the fog, it sufficed to hide all things from sight. And if a boat, in which one boy rowed vigorously, had put forth from the camp of Jack Harvey, down in the woods, and had come up along the shore to the wharf, and the box, which was a part of the belongings of Tom Harris and Bob White, had been lowered from the wharf into the boat and conveyed back to the camp and hidden away there, – if all this had happened, it is safe to say that no one would have seen what was done, nor would any one have been the wiser.

Perhaps some such a thing might, indeed, have occurred, for when Tom and Bob, Henry Burns, and the Warren boys met at the wharf the next fore-noon, they found the box gone. They hunted everywhere, ransacked the storehouse from one end to the other, but it was nowhere to be found.

“And to think that it’s all my fault,” groaned young Joe, as they stood at the edge of the wharf, after the unsuccessful search. “I might have known John Briggs would forget to lock it up! It was left in the open shed there, boys, protected from the rain, and he promised to look out for it; but he must have forgotten. I spoke to him about it the last thing last night, on our way home to the cottage.”

“Was it very valuable?” asked Henry Burns.

“Ask Tom what he thinks,” laughed Bob, while Tom tried to look unconscious, but blushed furiously.

“There’s a pretty sister of mine,” continued Bob, “that thinks so much of us that she spent a week cooking up a lot of things for us to start our camping with. There’s a box full of the best stuff to eat you ever tasted, that somebody will gobble up, I suppose, without once thinking or caring about the one that made them. Pretty tough, isn’t it, Tom?”

Tom turned redder still, and felt of his biceps, as though he was speculating what he would do to a certain person, if that person could only be discovered and come up with.

"I tell you what it is, boys," said George Warren; "things have had a strange way of disappearing here this summer, as they never did before; and, what's more, if Jack Harvey and his crew haven't stolen them, they have at least got the credit for taking the most of it, – and you may depend upon it, that box is down there in the woods, somewhere about that camp."

"Then what's to hinder our raiding the camp and getting it?" Tom broke in, angrily. "Bob and I, with two of you, could make a good fight against all of them."

"No doubt of that, Tom," answered George Warren; "but there are two things to be considered. First, we want to get the box back; and, second, we are not absolutely certain that they have it. If they have it, you may be certain that it is carefully hidden away, and we shouldn't recover it by making an attack on them. We must find out where it is hidden first, and then, if we cannot get it away otherwise, we will fight for it."

"So it seems that we have two scores to settle now," said Henry Burns, dryly. "We owe a debt now to Jack Harvey and his crew, and there's a long-standing account with Colonel Witham, part of which we must pay to-night. Be on hand early. The latch-string will be out at number twenty-one." So saying, Henry Burns left them.

Late that afternoon Tom and Bob, looking from the door of their tent across the cove, saw a sight that was at once familiar and strange. It was a canoe, in which were two occupants, and it was being paddled toward their camp. The long seas, smooth though they were, still rolled in heavily, and the light canoe tossed about on their crests like a mere toy. Still, it did not take long for them to discover that the canoe was their own. They had supposed it lost, though they had intended to set out in search of it on the following morning.

In the bow and stern, propelling the craft with paddles roughly improvised from broken oars, were George and Arthur Warren.

"Tom, old fellow," said Bob, as the canoe came dancing toward them, "we've lost the box, but we've got the luck with us, after all. Not only are we proof against drowning, but we own a canoe that refuses to be wrecked."

And then the bow of the canoe grated on the sandy shore.

CHAPTER IV. A NIGHT WITH HENRY BURNS

Henry Burns, having neither father nor mother living, had been taken in charge several years before this by an elderly maiden aunt, whose home was in the city of Medford, Massachusetts. She was fairly well-to-do, and, as there had been a moderate inheritance left in trust for the boy by his parents, they were in comfortable circumstances.

But Henry Burns was made, unfortunately, to realize that this does not necessarily mean a home, with the happiness that the word implies. Good Miss Matilda Burns, a sister of Henry's late father, never having known the care of a family of her own, had devoted her life to the interests of a half a score of missions and ladies' societies of different kinds, until at length she had become so wrapped up in these that there was really no room in her life left for the personality of a boy to enter.

Henry Burns was a problem which she failed utterly to solve. Perhaps she might have succeeded, if she had seen fit to devote less of her time to her various societies, and more to the boy. But she deemed the former of far more importance, and felt her duty for the day well performed, in the matter of his upbringing, if she kept him out of mischief, saw that he went off to school at the proper hour, and that he did not fall ill.

To achieve two of these ends the most conveniently to her, Miss Matilda exercised a restraint over Henry Burns which was entirely unnecessary and altogether too severe. Henry Burns was naturally of a studious turn of mind, and cared more for a quiet evening with a book than he did for playing pranks about the neighbourhood at night. At the same time, he had a healthy fondness for sports, and excelled in them.

He was captain of his ball team, until Miss Matilda found it out and ordered him to stop playing the game. She considered it too rough for boys, having had no experience with boys of her own. And so on, with swimming and several other of his healthful sports. They were altogether too risky for Miss Matilda's piece of mind. It came about that Henry Burns, in order to take part with his companions in their out-of-door sports, found it necessary to play "hookey" and indulge in them without her knowing it. He won a medal in a swimming-match, but never dared to show it to Miss Matilda.

Withal a healthy and athletic youth, he had a pale complexion, which deceived Miss Matilda into the impression that he was sickly. He was slight of build, too, which confirmed in her that impression. When once her mind was made up, there was no convincing Miss Matilda. The family doctor, called in by her for an examination, found nothing the matter with him; but that did not avail to alter her opinion. The boy was delicate, she said, and must not be allowed to overdo.

Accordingly, she made life miserable for Henry Burns. She kept a watchful eye over him, so far as her other duties would admit of, sent him off to bed at nine o'clock, tried to dose him with home remedies, which Henry Burns found it availed him best to carry submissively to his room and then pitch out of the window, and, in short, so worried over, meddled with, and nagged at Henry Burns, that, if he had been other than exactly what he was, she would have succeeded in utterly spoiling him, or have made him run away in sheer despair.

Henry Burns never got excited about things. He had a coolness that defied annoyances and disappointments, and a calm persistence that set him to studying the best way out of a difficulty, instead of flying into a passion over it. He had, in fact, without fully appreciating it, the qualities of success.

If, as was true, he was a problem to Miss Matilda, which she did not succeed in solving, it was not so in the case of his dealings with her. He made a study of her and of the situation in which he found himself, and proceeded deliberately to take advantage of what he discovered. He knew all her weaknesses and little vanities to a degree that would have amazed her, and cleverly used them to his

advantage, in whatever he wanted to do. Fortunately for her, he had no inclination to bad habits, and, if he succeeded in outwitting her, the worst use he made of it was to indulge in some harmless joke, for he had, underlying his quiet demeanour, an unusual fondness for mischief.

What to do with Henry Burns summers had been a puzzle for some time to Miss Matilda. She was accustomed, through these months, to visit an encampment, or summer home, composed of several ladies' societies, and the presence of a boy was a decided inconvenience. When, one day, she learned that an old friend, one Mrs. Carlin, a fussy old soul after her own heart, was engaged as housekeeper at the Hotel Bayview, at Southport, on Grand Island, in Samoset Bay, she conceived the idea of sending Henry Burns there in charge of Mrs. Carlin.

So it came about that Henry Burns was duly despatched to Maine for the summer, as a guest of Colonel Witham. He had a room on the second floor, next to that occupied by the colonel, who was supposed also to exercise a guardianship over him. As Colonel Witham's disposition was such that he disliked nearly everybody, with the exception of Squire Brackett, and as he had a particular aversion to boys of all ages and sizes, he did not take pains to make life agreeable to Henry Burns. He was suspicious of him, as he was of all boys.

Boys, according to Colonel Witham's view of life, were born for the purpose, or, at least, with the sole mission in life, of annoying older people. Accordingly, the worthy colonel lost no opportunity of thwarting them and opposing them, – "showing them where they belonged," he called it.

But this disagreeable ambition on the part of the colonel was not, unfortunately, confined to his attitude toward boys. He exercised it toward every one with whom he came in contact. Despite the fact that he had a three years' lease of the hotel, he took absolutely no pains to make himself agreeable to any of his guests. He looked upon them secretly as his natural enemies, men and women and children whom he hoped to get as much out of as was possible, and to give as little as he could in return.

He was noted for his meanness and for his surly disposition toward all. Then why did he come there to keep a hotel? Because he had discovered that guests would come, whether they were treated well or not. The place had too many attractions of boating, swimming, sailing, and excellent fishing, winding wood-roads, and a thousand and one natural beauties, to be denied. Guests left in the fall, vowing they would not put up with the colonel's niggardliness and petty impositions another year; but the following season found them registered there again, with the same cordial antipathy existing as before between them and their landlord.

In person, Colonel Witham was decidedly corpulent, with a fiery red face, which turned purple when he became angry – which was upon the slightest occasion.

"Here's another boy come to annoy me with his noise and tomfoolery," was the colonel's inward comment, when Mrs. Carlin, the housekeeper, informed him that Henry Burns was coming, and was to be under her charge.

So the colonel gave him the room next to his, where he could keep an eye on him, and see that he was in his room every night not later than ten o'clock, for that was the hour Mrs. Carlin had set for that young gentleman's bedtime.

Henry Burns, having in due time made the acquaintance of the Warren boys, as well as a few other youths of his age, had no idea of ending up his evenings' entertainments at ten o'clock each and every night; so he set about to discover some means of evading the espionage of the colonel and Mrs. Carlin. It did not take him more than one evening of experimenting to find that, by stepping out on to the veranda that ran past his own and Colonel Witham's windows, he could gain the ascent to the roof by a clever bit of acrobatics up a lightning-rod. Once there, he found he could reach the ground by way of the old part of the hotel, in the manner before described. It is only fair to Henry Burns to state that he did not take undue advantage of this discovery, but kept on the whole as good hours as most boys of his age. Still, if there was a clambake, or some other moonlight jollification, at the extreme end of the island, where Henry Burns had made friends among a little fishing community, he was now and then to be seen, sometimes as the village clock was proclaiming a much later hour than

that prescribed by Mrs. Carlin, spinning along on his bicycle like a ghost awheel. He was generally known and well liked throughout the entire island.

On the night following the arrival of Tom and Bob, the sounds of a violin, a clarinet, and a piano, coming from the big parlour of the Hotel Bayview, told that a dance was in progress. These dances, withal the music was provided by the guests themselves, were extremely irritating to Colonel Witham. They meant late hours for everybody, more lights to be furnished, more guests late to breakfast on the following morning, and, on the whole, an evening of noise and excitement, which interfered more or less with his invariable habit of going to bed at a quarter after ten o'clock every night of his life.

They brought, moreover, a crowd of cottagers to the hotel, who were given anything but a cordial welcome by Colonel Witham. He argued that they spent no money at his hotel, and were, therefore, only in the way, besides adding to the noise.

The guests at the Bayview were, on the whole, accustomed to the ways of Colonel Witham by experience, and really paid but little attention to him. They went ahead, planned their own dances and card-parties, and left him to make the best of it.

This particular evening's entertainment was rather out of the ordinary, inasmuch as it was given by a Mr. and Mrs. Wellington, of New York, in honour of their daughter's birthday, and, on her account, invitations to the spread, which was to be served after the dancing, were extended to the young people of the hotel. In these invitations Henry Burns had, of course, been included; but Mrs. Carlin and Colonel Witham were obdurate. It was too late an hour for him; his eating of rich salads and ices was not to be thought of; in short, he must decline, or they must decline for him, and that was the end of it.

"Never you mind, Henry," said good-hearted Bridget Carrington, who was Mrs. Carlin's assistant, and with whom Henry Burns had made friendship. "It's not you that'll be going without some of the salad and the ice-cream, not if I know it. Sure, and Mrs. Wellington says you're to have some, too. So just breathe easy, and there'll be a bit for you and a little more, too, a-waitin' just outside the kitchen window about nine o'clock. So go on now and say never a word."

So Henry Burns, with the connivance of Bridget, and by the judicious outlay of a part of his own pocket-money, in the matter of sweet things and other delicacies dear to youthful appetites, had prepared and planned for a small banquet of his own in his room, next to that of Colonel Witham.

"But how will you manage so that Colonel Witham won't hear us, as he will be right alongside of us?" George Warren, who was a partner in Henry Burns's enterprise, had asked.

"Leave that to me," said Henry Burns.

The evening wore on; the strains of the music sounded merrily along the halls; dancing was in full swing, – everybody seemed to be enjoying the occasion, save Colonel Witham. He had at least conceded to the occasion the courtesy of a black frock coat and an immaculate white tie, but he was plainly ill at ease. He stood in the office, the door of which was open into the parlour, his hands twisting nervously behind his back, while he glanced, with no good humour in his expression, now at the blaze of lights in the parlour, and now at the clock, which, however, even under his impatient gaze, only ticked along in its most provokingly methodical fashion.

The outer door opened and in walked young Joe Warren, recognized by Colonel Witham as one of the plagues of his summer existence.

"Good evening, Colonel Witham," said young Joe, with studied politeness, and in a tone that ostensibly anticipated an equally cordial response.

"Good evening!" snapped the colonel.

"Good evening, Colonel Witham," chimed Arthur Warren, close at his brother's heels.

The colonel responded gruffly.

"Good evening, colonel," came an equally cordial greeting from Tom and Bob, and from George Warren, smiling at Colonel Witham, as though he had extended them a hearty invitation to be present.

The colonel snorted impatiently, while the colour in his red face deepened. He did not respond to their salutations.

The boys seated themselves comfortably in the office chairs, and listened to the music.

“You needn’t think you’re going to get Henry Burns to go off with you,” the colonel said, finally. “It’s half-past nine now, and his bedtime is ten o’clock. I wonder where he is.”

Arthur Warren chuckled quietly to himself. He could have told the colonel just where Henry Burns was at that moment; that he was busily engaged in conveying a certain basket of supplies from outside the kitchen window, up a pair of back stairs, to his room on the second floor above.

“You go and keep an eye on Colonel Witham,” he had said to Arthur Warren, “and if he starts to look for me, you go to the door and whistle.”

Which accounted for the sudden appearance of all the Warrens and Tom and Bob in the presence of Colonel Witham.

Fifteen minutes elapsed, and one by one they had all disappeared.

“Good riddance,” was the colonel’s mental ejaculation when he found them gone.

Great would have been his amazement and indignation could he have but seen them, a few minutes later, seated comfortably on the bed in Henry Burns’s room. It was approaching ten o’clock.

“Where’s Bob?” asked Henry Burns, as the boys quietly entered, and he made the door fast behind them.

“Hm!” said Tom, shaking his head regretfully. “It’s a sad thing about Bob. It’s too bad, but I don’t think he will be here, after all.”

“Why, what’s the matter?” exclaimed Henry Burns, with surprise. “He isn’t hurt, is he? I saw him a few hours ago, and he seemed all right.”

“No, he isn’t hurt, – at least, not the way you mean, Henry. The fact is, he was dancing out on the piazza about half an hour ago with pretty little Miss Wilson, – you know, the one in the cottage down on the shore, – and the last I saw of Bob he was escorting her home. I’m afraid we shall have to give him up for to-night.”

“That’s too bad,” said Henry Burns, solemnly, as though some grievous misfortune had come upon Tom’s chum. “And the worst of it is, it may last all summer. Well, Bob will miss a very pleasant surprise-party to Colonel Witham, to say nothing of the spread. That, by the way, is stowed away in those baskets over behind the bed and the wash-stand, – but, first, we’ve got to clear the coast of Colonel Witham.”

“We’re yours to command, Henry,” replied George Warren. “Tell us what to do.”

“Well, in the first place,” said Henry Burns, opening one of his windows that led out on to the veranda, as he spoke, “the rest of you just listen as hard as ever you can at my door, while George and I make a brief visit to the colonel’s room. If you hear footsteps, just pound on the wall, so we can get back in time. It’s pretty certain he won’t be here, though, until we are ready for him. He hasn’t missed a night in weeks in getting to bed exactly at a quarter past ten o’clock. He’s as regular as a steamboat; always on time. And he’s a good deal like a steamboat, too, for he snores like a fog-horn all night long.”

Henry Burns and George Warren disappeared through the window and were gone but a moment, when they reappeared, each bearing in one hand a lamp from the colonel’s room.

“The colonel is always talking about economy,” explained Henry Burns, “so I am not going to let him burn any oil to-night, if I can help it. My lamps happen to need filling, – I’ve borrowed an extra one for this occasion, and so, you see, I don’t intend to waste any of the colonel’s oil by throwing it away. I’ll see that not a drop of the colonel’s oil is wasted.”

Henry Burns carefully proceeded to pour the oil from each lamp which he and George Warren had brought from the colonel’s room into those in his own room.

“There,” he said, “there’s enough oil in each of those wicks to burn for several minutes, so the colonel will have a little light to start in on. But we don’t want to return his lamps empty, and so I’ll just fill them up again. I’m sure the colonel would approve of this economy.”

And Henry Burns carefully refilled the colonel’s lamps from his water-pitcher.

“It won’t burn very well,” he said. “But I’m sure it looks better.”

“Now, we’ll just take these back again,” he continued, addressing George Warren. “And there’s another little matter we want to arrange while we are in there. The colonel is always finding fault with the housemaids. Now we’ll see if we can’t improve on their work.”

Again the two boys disappeared, while the remaining three stood watch against the colonel’s sudden appearance.

Once in the colonel’s room, Henry Burns seized hold of the bedclothes and threw them over the foot-board. Then he snatched out three of the slats from the middle of the bed, replacing them with three slender sticks, which he had brought from his own room.

“Those will do to support the bedclothes and the mattress,” he explained, “though I’m really afraid they would break if any one who was kind of heavy should put his weight on them.” Then he carefully replaced the mattress and the bedclothes, making up the colonel’s bed again in the most approved style, with his friend’s assistance.

“You take notice,” he said to George Warren, as he opened a closet door in the colonel’s room, “that I am careful to destroy nothing of the colonel’s property. I might have sawed these slats in two, and left them just hanging so they would support the bedclothes, and would not have been any more trouble; but, being of a highly conscientious nature, I carefully put the colonel’s property away, where it can be found later and restored.”

“I’m afraid the colonel wouldn’t appreciate your thoughtfulness,” said George Warren.

“Alas, I’m afraid not,” said Henry Burns. “But that’s often the reward of those who try to look after another’s interests. However, I’ll put these slats in this closet, shut and lock the door, and put the key here on the mantelpiece, just behind this picture. It would be just as easy to hide the key, but I don’t think that would be right, do you?”

“Certainly not,” laughed George Warren.

“There,” said Henry Burns, taking a final survey of everything. “We’ve done all we can, I’m sure, to provide for the colonel’s comfort. If he chooses to find fault with it, it will surely be from force of habit.” They took their departure by way of the colonel’s window, closing it after them, and quickly rejoined their companions in the next room.

“I deeply regret,” said Henry Burns to his guests, “that this banquet cannot begin at once. But we should surely be interrupted by the colonel, and, on the whole, I think it is best to wait until the colonel has taken his departure for the night from that room, – which I feel sure he will do, when the situation dawns fully upon him.

“It also pains me,” he added, “to be obliged to invite you all to make yourselves uncomfortable in that closet for a short time. At least, you will hear all that is going on in the colonel’s room, for the partition is thin between that and his room. So you will have to be careful and make no noise. I feel quite certain that the colonel will make me a sudden call soon after he retires, if not before, and he really wouldn’t approve of your being here. He’s likely to have a decidedly unpleasant way of showing his disapproval, too.”

“I think we can assure our kind and thoughtful host that we fully appreciate the situation,” said Arthur Warren, gravely, “and will be pleased to comply with his suggestion to withdraw. Come on, boys, let’s get in. It’s after ten now, and time is getting short.”

“You take the key with you,” said Henry Burns, “and lock the door on the inside. It’s just an extra precaution; but I can say I don’t know who has the key, if anything happens. I won’t know which one of you takes it.”

The four boys stowed themselves away in the stuffy closet, turned the key in the lock, and waited. Henry Burns quickly divested himself of his clothing, put a bowl of water beside his bed, placed a clean white handkerchief near it, set a lamp near by on a chair, turned it down so that it burned dim, unlocked his door so that it could be opened readily, and jumped into bed.

He did not have long to wait. Promptly at a quarter past ten o'clock the heavy, lumbering steps of the corpulent colonel were heard, as he came up the hallway. The colonel was puffing with the exertion which it always cost him to climb the stairs, and muttering, as was his custom when anything displeased him.

"Suppose they'll bang away on that old piano half the night," he exclaimed, as he passed Henry Burns's door. "And every light burning till midnight. How do they expect me to make any money, if they go on this way?"

He opened the door to his room and went inside, locking it after him. Henry Burns pressed his ear close to the wall and listened.

The colonel, still talking angrily to himself, scratched a match and lighted one of the lamps. Then he divested himself of his collar and tie, threw his coat and waistcoat on a chair, and reseated himself, to take off his boots.

All at once they heard him utter a loud exclamation of disgust.

"What on earth is the matter with that lamp?" he cried. "That comes of having hired help from the city. Never look after things, unless you keep right after them. How many times have I spoken about having these lamps filled every day!"

The colonel scratched a match. "Hulloa," he exclaimed, "it's full, after all. Well, I see, the wick hasn't been trimmed. There's always something wrong." The colonel proceeded to scrape the wick. Then he scratched another match. The wick sputtered as he held the match to it.

"Confound the thing!" yelled the colonel, now utterly out of temper. "The thing's bewitched. Where's that other lamp? Oh, there it is. We'll see if that will burn. I'll discharge that housemaid to-morrow."

He scratched still another match, held it to the wick of the other lamp, and was evidently satisfied with that, for they heard him replace the lamp-chimney and go on with his undressing.

In a few minutes more there came another eruption from the colonel.

"There goes the other one," he yelled. "I know what's the matter. Somebody's been fooling with those lamps. I'll make 'em smart for it." The colonel unscrewed the part of the lamp containing the wick, took the bowls of the lamps, one by one, over to his window, opened them, and poured the contents of the lamps out upon the veranda.

"Water!" he yelled. "Water! That's what's the matter. Oh, but I'd just like to know whether it's that pale-faced Burns boy, or some of those other young imps in the house. I'll find out. I'll make somebody smart for this. Wasting my oil, too. I'll make 'em pay for it."

The colonel set down the lamps, rushed out of his room into the hall for the lamp that usually occupied a standard there. He did not find it, because Henry Burns had taken the pains to remove it. The colonel made a sudden dash for Henry Burns's door, rattled the door-knob and pounded, and then, finding that in his confusion he had failed to discover that it was unlocked, hurled it open and burst into the room.

What the colonel saw was the pale, calm face of Henry Burns, peering out at him from the bed, as that young gentleman lifted himself up on one elbow. Around his forehead was bound the handkerchief, which he had wetted in the bowl of water. The lamp burning dimly completed the picture of his distress.

"Hi, you there! You young – " The colonel checked himself abruptly, as Henry Burns slowly raised himself up in bed and pressed one hand to his forehead. "What's the matter with you?" roared the colonel, completely taken aback by Henry Burns's appearance.

"Oh, nothing," said Henry Burns, resignedly. "It's nothing."

The colonel little realized how much of truthfulness there was in this answer.

“Did you want me for anything?” asked Henry Burns, in his softest voice.

“No, I didn’t,” said the colonel, sullenly. “Somebody has been fooling with my lamps, and I – I thought I would use yours, if you didn’t mind.”

“Certainly,” replied Henry Burns. “I may not need mine again for the rest of the night.” Again he pressed his hand dismally to his forehead.

“I won’t take it!” snapped the colonel. “You may need it again. Why don’t you tell Mrs. Carlin you’ve got a headache? She’ll look after you. It’s eating too much – eating too much, that does it. I’ve always said it. Stop stuffing two pieces of pie every day at dinner, and you won’t have any headache.”

With this parting injunction, the irate colonel abruptly took his departure, slamming the door behind him.

Henry Burns dived beneath the bedclothes and smothered his roars of laughter. The colonel, disappointed in his quest for a lamp, and not caring to search further in his present condition of undress, returned once more to his room and finished undressing in the dark.

“I’ll make somebody smart for this to-morrow,” he kept repeating. “Like as not that little white-faced scamp in the next room had some hand in it. I can’t quite make him out. Well, I’ll go to bed and sleep over it.”

The colonel rolled into bed.

There was a crash and a howl of rage from the colonel. He floundered about in a tangle of bedclothes for a moment, filling the room with his angry ejaculations, and endeavouring, helplessly, for a moment, to extricate himself from his uncomfortable position on the floor. Then he arose, raging like a tempest, stumbling over a chair in his confusion, and nearly sprawling on the floor again.

He rang the electric button in his room till the clerk in the office thought the house was on fire, and came running up, breathless, to see what was the matter.

“Fire! Who said there was any fire, you idiot!” shrieked the colonel, as his clerk dashed into the room and ran plump into him. “There isn’t any fire,” he cried. “Somebody’s been breaking the furniture in here; tearing down the beds, ruining the lamps. Get that room on the next floor, down at the end of the hall, ready for me. I can’t stay here to-night. Don’t stand there, gaping like a frog. Hurry up. Get Mrs. Carlin to fix that bed up for me. She’s gone to bed, do you say? Well, then, get somebody else. Don’t stand there. Go along!”

The clerk hurried away, as much to prevent the colonel seeing the broad grin on his face as to obey orders. The colonel, stumbling around in the darkness, managed to partly dress himself; and, five minutes later, the boys heard him go storming along the hall to the stairway, which he mounted, and was seen no more that night.

The closet door in Henry Burns’s room swung softly open, and there rolled out helplessly on the floor four boys, choking with suppressed laughter, the tears fairly running down their cheeks.

Henry Burns, calm as ever, quietly arose from bed, removed the bandage from his brow, slid into his clothes, and remarked, softly, “I feel better now.”

“Oh, don’t, Henry,” begged George Warren. “If you say any more I shall die. I can’t laugh now without its hurting me.”

“You need something to eat,” said Henry Burns. Pinning a blanket up over the transom to hide the light, and stopping his keyhole, to prevent any ray of light from penetrating into the hallway, and throwing down a blanket at the door-sill for the same purpose, Henry Burns lighted both his lamps, carefully locked his door, and made ready to entertain his guests.

“It’s not just according to the rules of etiquette,” he said, producing a package from the basket, “but we’ll have to start on the ice-cream first before it melts. Then we’ll work back along the line, to salad and ginger ale.”

He drew forth from the package, which proved to be a box filled with chopped ice, a small brick of ice-cream. It was beginning to melt about the edges, but they made short work of it.

“Now,” said Henry Burns, “if you please, we’ll start all over again. Here are the sandwiches.”

“It’s the finest spread I ever had,” said young Joe, appreciatively, as he stowed away his fourth sandwich and helped himself to an orange.

“Joe always goes on the principle that he may be cast away on a desert island before he has another square meal,” said Arthur, “so he always fills up accordingly.”

“It’s a good principle to go on,” responded Henry Burns. “George, you open the ginger ale.”

So they dined most sumptuously, and had gotten down to nuts and raisins, when Henry Burns, whose ears were always on the alert, suddenly sprang up, with a warning “Sh-h-h,” and, quickly stepping across the room, turned the lamps down, signalling at the same time for the boys to be silent.

Not one of the others had heard a sound; but now they were aware that soft footsteps were pattering along the hallway.

Presently some one came to Henry Burns’s door, turned the knob, and rapped very gently.

Not a sound came from the room.

Then a voice said: “Henry, Henry.”

There was no reply.

“Strange,” said the person outside; “I could have sworn that I heard his voice as I came up. Well, I must have been mistaken. He seems to be sound asleep. I guess his headache is better.”

They heard the footsteps die away again along the hallway.

“Whew!” said Henry Burns; “that was a narrow escape. That was Mrs. Carlin. Somebody must have told her I was sick. She sleeps all night with one eye and one ear open, they say.”

“Well,” said George Warren, “I reckon we’d better take it as a warning that it’s time to be going, anyway. It’s eleven o’clock, I should say, and we have got to get up early and overhaul the *Spray*. She’s up at Bryant’s Cove yet, and we have got to bring her down and have a new bowsprit put in, and reeve some new rigging. We’ve had a great time, Henry. Count us in on the next feed, and give our regards to Colonel Witham. Come on, boys.”

“Sorry to have to show you out the back way,” said Henry Burns, “but the front way would be dangerous now, and my lightning-rod staircase seems to be the only way. It’s a very nice way when one is used to it; but look out and don’t slip.”

By the time the last boy was on the roof, Henry Burns was half-undressed; and by the time the last one had reached the ground, his light was out and he was half-asleep. That was Henry Burns’s way. When he did a thing, he did it and wasted no time – whether it was working or playing or sleeping.

CHAPTER V. A HIDDEN CAVE

It was a little after eleven o'clock when Tom left the hotel. His mind was so occupied with the events of the evening that he started at once toward his camp, forgetting an intention he had earlier in the night of visiting the locality of Jack Harvey's camp in search of the missing box. He stopped every few minutes to laugh long and heartily, as, one by one, the mishaps of Colonel Witham came to his mind.

All at once he remembered the missing box. He had nearly reached his tent by this time, but he stopped short. He called to mind the contents of the box; among other things, a certain big cake, with frosting on it, and, although he and Bob, as young athletes, were bound to hold such food in little regard, there was one thing about it which particularly impressed him just now, and that was the remembrance of how he had watched Bob's sister, with her dainty little fingers, mould the frosting on the top, and how she had slyly wondered – as if there could be any doubt of it – whether they, meaning Tom, would think of her while they were eating it.

The thought of that cake falling into the hands of Jack Harvey and of Tim Reardon and the others of Harvey's crew, and of the jokes they would crack at Tom's expense, made his blood boil. He started in the direction of Harvey's camp, then turned back to get Bob to accompany him, – and then paused and went on again, saying to himself that he would not awaken his chum at that hour of the night. He started off through the woods alone.

The night was warm and pleasant, though it was quite dark, as there was no moon. He passed by the cottages, and then turned into a foot-path that followed the windings of the shore. The path led for some distance through a thicket of alders and underbrush, from which at length it emerged into an open field. Crossing this, Tom again entered a growth of wood, the path winding among the roots of some old hemlocks and cedars.

All at once he saw a light shining indistinctly through the trees, and knew that it must be in the immediate vicinity of Harvey's camp.

"So much the better, if they are up," muttered Tom. "If they're sitting around that fire they are sure to be talking." He hurried on in the direction of the light, still following the path.

The fire soon became plainly visible. At a point where the path divided he could see the white tent, lit up by a big fire of driftwood that blazed in front of it. He could hear the sound of voices, and distinguished that of Harvey above the others. There seemed to be some insubordination in camp, for Harvey's tones were loud and angry.

Tom concluded not to take the path to the left, which was the one leading direct to the camp, but continued on for a distance along the main path. It was well he did so, for presently he heard some one coming toward him. The paths were at this point so near together that he could not distinguish which one the person was taking; so he drew aside and crouched in the bushes, which were very dense between the two paths. A boy, whom he recognized as Tim Reardon, soon came in sight, and passed close by the spot where Tom was concealed. He carried a pail in his hand, and was evidently going to a spring near by for water. He was grumbling to himself as he passed along.

"I'm always the one!" he said. "Why don't he make some one else lug the water part of the time? I'm not going to be bullied by any Jack Harvey, and he needn't think I am."

He kept on to the spring, however. Tom remained where he was, and Tim soon returned, carrying the pail filled with water. Tom waited till he saw Tim arrive at the camp and deposit the pail of water near the fire, before he again emerged from the clump of bushes into the path that led past the camp. He followed this cautiously. He could not as yet see whether all the members of the crew were present about the camp-fire, and he knew that to encounter any one of them at that hour near

the camp would not only put an end to all hopes of recovering the box, by revealing to Harvey and his crew that he suspected them of having stolen it, but that, once an alarm being given, he should have the whole crew at his heels in a twinkling.

Tom was sufficiently acquainted with the reputation of Harvey's crew to know that it would go hard with him if they found him there. He stole quietly along past the camp some little distance, and then, turning from the path, got down on his hands and knees and crept toward the camp through the bushes.

Near the camp was a hemlock-tree, with large, broad, heavy branches, that grew so low down on the trunk that some of them rested on the ground. It offered a place of concealment, and Tom, at the imminent risk of being discovered, reached it and crawled in between the branches. If the campers had been expecting any one, and had been on the watch, he must surely have been discovered, for several times branches cracked under him, and once so loudly that he thought it was all up with him, expecting them to come and see what had made the noise. But they took no notice of it, either because they were accustomed to hearing noises in the woods, of cattle or dogs, or thought nothing at all about it.

From where he now lay, Tom could see the entire camp, and hear everything the boys said. It was a picturesque spot which Harvey had chosen. The land here ran out in one of those irregular points which was characteristic of the shores of the island, and ended in a little, low-lying bluff, that overlooked the bay. On the side nearer the village, the shore curved in with a graceful sweep, making a perfect bow, and the land for some distance back sloped gradually down to the beach. The beach here was composed of a fine white sand, making an ideal landing-place for rowboats. On the side farther from the village, the waterfront was of a different character. It rounded out, instead of curving in, and the shore was bold, instead of sloping. It was not easily approached, even by small boats, as the water, for some distance out, was choked up with reefs and ledges, which were barely covered at high tide, and at low water were exposed here and there.

This apparently unapproachable shore had been taken advantage of by Harvey in a way which no one in the village had ever suspected. There was a channel among the reefs, which a small sailboat could pursue, if one were accurately acquainted with its windings. With this channel, which they had discovered by chance, the campers had become thoroughly familiar, at both low and high water.

The point had been cleared of undergrowth, and most of the larger trees had been cut down for some little distance back from the water. In the rear of this clearing there were thick woods, extending into the island for a mile or more.

The campers had pitched a big canvas tent at the edge of the clearing, where they lived in free and easy fashion, cooking mostly out-of-doors. They scorned the idea of making bunks, as smacking too much of civilization, and at night slept on boughs covered with blankets. They lived out-of-doors in front of the tent when the weather was pleasant, and, when it was stormy, they went aboard the yacht and did their cooking in the cabin, over a small sheet-iron stove.

It was altogether a romantic and picturesque sight that Tom saw as he looked out from his hiding-place. At a little distance from the tent the fire was blazing, while the members of the crew either sat around it or lay, stretched out at full length, upon the ground. A pot of coffee was placed on a flat stone by the side of the fire, near enough to get the heat from it, and the delicious odour of it as it steamed made Tom hungry.

The members of Harvey's crew were utterly without restraint, saving that which was imposed capriciously by Harvey himself. Harvey was not naturally vicious. His mind had been perverted by the books he had read, so that he failed to see that his acts of petty thievery were meannesses and acts of cowardice of which he would some day be ashamed.

He fashioned his conduct as much according to the books he read as possible, and, if he had been but trained rightly, would have been proud to do courageous things, instead of playing mean jokes, for he had at heart much bravery. He rarely wore a hat, and was as bronzed as any sailor. The

sleeves of his flannel blouse were usually rolled up to the elbows, showing on his forearms several tattooed designs in red and blue ink. He was large and strong.

The boys around the fire were telling stories and relating in turn incidents of adventure that had taken place since their arrival on the island. At the close of their story-telling, they arose and began making preparations for a meal. Near by the fireplace they had built a rough table, of stakes driven into the ground, and boards, with benches on either side of it, fashioned in the same way. Two of the boys went to the tent and brought out some tin dishes, and the steaming pot of coffee was taken from the stone and set on the table.

Then Joe Hinman, taking a long pole in his hand, went to the fire and proceeded to scatter the brands about, while a shower of sparks rose up and floated off into the forest. Presently Joe raked from among the embers a dozen or more black, shapeless objects. These he placed one by one on a block of wood and broke the clay – for such it was – with a hatchet. The odour of cooked fish pervaded the camp and saluted Tom's nostrils most temptingly. Inside of the lumps of clay were fish of some kind, which Tom took to be cunners. As fast as they were ready, Tim Reardon carried them to the table, where they were heaped up on a big earthen platter.

The boys then fell to and ate as though they were starving. Tom wondered for some time if this could be their usual hour for supper; but remembered that he had seen the *Surprise* several miles off in the bay that evening, and concluded that the evening meal had been long delayed. The *Surprise* now lay a few rods offshore, with a lantern hanging at her mast.

The boys continued to talk, as they ate, of tricks they had played and of raids they had taken part in, down the island. In fact, the good citizens of Southport would have given a good deal for the secrets Tom learned from his hiding-place that night. Tom waited impatiently, however, for some mention of the missing box. Could he be mistaken in suspecting them of having taken it? No, he was sure not. That they were capable of doing so, their own conversation left no room for doubt. Tom felt certain the box was in their possession.

But he began to feel that his errand of discovery to-night would be fruitless. They must, he argued, have some sort of storehouse, where they hid such plunder as this, but no one had as yet made the slightest mention of it. It was clearly useless for him to grope about in the vicinity of the camp at night, and he began to think it would be better after all to wait until day and select a time for his search, if possible, when all the members of the crew were off on the yacht. But that might come too late, and Tom wondered what to do.

All at once Joe Hinman made a remark that caused Tom to raise himself upon his elbow and listen intently.

"Boys," said Joe, "I've got a little surprise for you."

The crew, one and all, stopped eating, rested their elbows on the table, and looked at Joe curiously.

"I'll bet it's a salmon from old Slade's nets," said George Baker. "Joe's sworn for a week that he'd have one."

"He's all right, is Joe," remarked Harvey, patronizingly. "There isn't one of you that can touch Joe for smartness."

Thus encouraged, Joe told how he had seen the box that had been a part of Tom's and Bob's luggage left on the wharf the night it arrived; how he had ascertained that it contained food, by prying up the cover; and how, early on the following morning, he had rowed up under cover of the fog, and had brought back the box to the camp.

"It's down in the cave now," said Joe. Tom gave a start. "There's a meat-pie in it that is good for a dinner to-morrow, and a big frosted cake, if you fellows want it to-night."

"Hooray!" cried Jack Harvey. "You and I will go and get it." Whereupon he and Joe sprang up and made directly for the spot where Tom lay, passing by so close that he could have reached out and touched them, and hurried along the bank, down to the shore.

Tom allowed them to get well in advance before he ventured to crawl from his hiding-place and follow them. He saw them at length disappear over the bank at a point where there grew a thick clump of cedars. He turned from the path into the woods, made his way cautiously past the place where he had seen them disappear, turned into the path again, and then climbed down the bank, which was there very steep, holding on to the bushes, and looked for the boys, but they were nowhere to be seen.

Tom knew they could not have passed him. They had not reappeared over the edge of the bank, and they were nowhere in sight along the shore. There could be but one conclusion. The entrance to the cave must be located in the clump of cedars.

It seemed to Tom that he had waited at least a quarter of an hour, though, in fact, it was not more than five minutes, when he saw the boys reappear. Tom groaned as he saw the big cake in Joe's hand. Joe laid it down on the ground, while he and Jack picked up several armfuls of loose boughs lying about, and threw them up carelessly against the bank. Then Joe took up the cake again, and they emerged from the cedars, climbed up over the bank, and disappeared in the direction of their camp.

Tom lost no time in scrambling to the spot. The hiding-place was cunningly concealed. It was an awkward place to crawl to from any part of the bank, and no one would have thought of trying to land there in a boat. The entrance to the cave might have been left open, with little chance of its ever being discovered. Tom threw aside the boughs sufficiently to discover that beneath them was a sort of trap-door, made of pieces of board carelessly nailed together. Then he replaced the boughs and, without even attempting to lift the board door, regained the path at the top of the bank.

"There'll be time enough to explore that later," he muttered. "I'm not the only one that will have lost something out of that cave before morning, though." He made his way cautiously past the camp once more, and then started on a run for his own camp. His hare and hounds practice at school stood him in good stead, and he did not stop running till he had come to the door of his tent. He unfastened the flap and entered, panting for breath. Bob was sleeping soundly. He shook him, but Bob was loath to awake, and resented being so roughly disturbed.

"Wake up, Bob! Wake!" cried Tom, shaking him again.

Bob opened his eyes. "Why, is it morning, Tom?" he asked.

"No, it isn't, Bob, but it soon will be. I've found the box, Bob. Harvey's got it, and I know where it is hidden, – down near his camp in a cave."

Bob shivered, for Tom had pulled the blanket off the bed, and the moist sea air penetrated the tent. He dressed, stupidly, for he was not fully rid of his drowsiness.

The boys went down to the beach, and Bob washed his face in the salt water.

"I'm all right now, Tom, old fellow," he said, "but, honest, Tom, I feel ugly enough at being waked up, not at you, though, to just enjoy a fight with those fellows."

"There's little prospect of that, if we are careful," answered Tom. "What we want to do is to show them we are smart enough to get the box back, and, perhaps, play them a trick of our own."

Then they carried the canoe down to the shore, launched it, and set off. It was about one o'clock in the morning. They paddled away from the tent and down along the shore, noiselessly as Indians. Past the village and past the cottages, and not a sign of life anywhere, not even a wisp of smoke from a chimney. The canoe glided swiftly along, making the only ripples there were on the glassy surface of the bay.

As they came to the beach near Harvey's camp, they landed, and Tom crept up over the bank to reconnoitre. He came back presently, reporting that the crew were all sound asleep, and everything quiet around the camp. Then they paddled quickly by the end of the bluff and along the bold shore beyond, picking their way carefully among the reefs, as they could not have done in these unknown waters with any other craft than the buoyant canoe.

They disembarked at the clump of cedars, and made the canoe fast to the trunk of one that overhung the water. Tom took from the bow of the canoe a lantern, and they scrambled up the bank.

Throwing aside the boughs, they disclosed the trap-door, which they lifted up. Tom lit the lantern and they entered the cave.

They found it much larger than the opening indicated. It was excavated from the hard clay of which the bank was composed, and, though not high enough for them to stand quite erect, it was about eight feet long and five feet wide.

It was filled with stuff of all sorts. There were spare topsails and staysails, – possibly from coasters that had anchored in the harbour, – sets of oars from ships' boats, several boxes of canned goods, that the grocer of the village had hunted for far and wide, coils of rope, two shotguns, carefully wrapped in pieces of flannel and well oiled, to prevent the rust from eating them, four lanterns, two axes and a hatchet, and odds and ends of all descriptions useful in and about a camp or a yacht.

The roof of the cave was shored up with boards, supported by joists. In one corner of the cave was the box for which they sought, broken into, and with the gorgeous cake gone; but that was all. The rest of the contents were untouched.

They took the box, carried it down to the shore and placed it in the canoe. Tom started to return to the cave.

"What are you going to do now, Tom?" queried Bob. "We don't want to take anything of theirs, of course."

"Not a thing," answered Tom. "We don't go in for that sort of business, but I just want to show them that we have been here and had the opportunity to destroy anything that we were of a mind to. Perhaps it will teach them a good lesson. It will show them that we are as smart as they are, anyway."

So saying, Tom began to gather up the guns, the good sails, the boxes of provisions, and other things of value, and carry them outside the cave, setting them down on the bank at some distance from the mouth of it.

"We won't destroy anything of value," said Tom. "But here are some odds and ends of old stuff, some of these pieces of oars, empty crates, bagging, and that sort of thing, which will make a good blaze, and which would have to be thrown away some day. They are of no use to anybody. I propose to make a bonfire of these in the cave, just to show Jack Harvey that we have been here. He'll find all his stuff that's good for anything put carefully outside the cave, and no harm come to it. But he'll be just as furious to find his cave discovered and on fire, for all that."

"All right," said Bob, "here goes."

Bob was thinking of that cake.

Tom took one of the axes and chopped a small hole in the top of the cave, some distance above the door.

"That will make a draught," he said, in answer to Bob's inquiry.

Then he blew out the lantern and poured the oil with which it was filled over the pile of rubbish. There was still a small heap of stuff in one corner of the cave, some old boards, and a few pieces of sail, thrown carelessly in a pile, as though of no value. They did not stop to bother with these, as they seemed of no consequence, and they were in a hurry.

Tom struck a match and set fire to the heap that he had accumulated.

"We can't get away from here any too soon, now, Bob," he said. "There'll be some furious chaps out here, when that fire gets to crackling and smoking. We don't care to be about here at that time. They are too many for us."

The boys scrambled down the bank, got into the canoe, and pushed off. As they paddled away, the light of the fire gleamed in the mouth of the cave. As soon as they had gotten clear of the reefs, they did not stop to reconnoitre the camp, but pushed by at full speed. It was a race against fire – and they little dreamed of its swiftness, nor of the hidden force which they had let loose.

Along the shore they sped, speaking not a word till they had got the village in sight and their arms were cracking in the joints. Then they paused a moment for breath, for their little craft was out of sight of the camp now, in the dull morning light.

Tom, who had the stern paddle, had looked back from time to time, but if there was any light to be seen through the bushes it was very slight. The spot was hidden now, too, by the intervening point of land.

"I don't know whether I see a light or not," he said. "There's a lot of smoke, though, and I can imagine, anyway, that I see a gleam of fire in the midst of it."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before he swung the canoe around with one quick sweep of his paddle.

"Look, Bob! Look!" he cried. "What have we done?"

The sight that met their eyes was amazing.

A sheet of flame shot suddenly into the sky. It looked like a tiny volcano, belching up fire and debris and pushing up through the midst of it a great black canopy of smoke. This was followed by the report of an explosion that echoed and reëchoed through the village, reverberating on the rocks across the harbour, and filling the whole country around with its noise – at once startling and terrifying. Then the light as suddenly went out, a shower of burning sticks and shreds of blazing canvas drifted lazily down through the air, and a cloud of smoke hung over the spot.

Tom and Bob trembled like rushes. It seemed as though every particle of strength had left them. There could be but one conclusion. They had blown up the camp. Harvey and all his crew were, perhaps, killed.

Bob was the first to speak.

"Come, Tom," he said. "We must get to camp before we are seen. Brace up and try to paddle."

Somehow or other they got to camp and dragged the canoe ashore. They carried the box up to the tent and locked it up in the big chest. Bob's hand trembled so he could hardly put the key into the lock.

Tom seated himself, dejectedly, on the edge of one of the bunks, the picture of despair.

"I guess I may as well go and give myself up first as last," he said. "I suppose I'll have to go to jail, if they're killed. What can there have been in the cave? I didn't see anything to explode, did you?"

"No," answered Bob, "unless it was something over in that pile of stuff in one corner. I didn't examine it, but they must have had something stored or hidden underneath there, either kerosene or gunpowder. By Jove! Tom, I remember now hearing Captain Sam Curtis say he had missed a keg of blasting-powder that he had bought for the Fourth of July, and he said he thought some of the sailors down the island had stolen it. That's where it went to; it was hidden in that corner."

"That doesn't help matters much, if they're all dead," said Tom. "I'll be to blame, just the same. Oh, Bob, what shall I do?"

"Whatever you do," answered Bob, "I stand my share of it, just as much as you. I'm just as guilty as you are. But don't go to pieces that way, Tom. We don't know yet whether they are hurt or not. The best thing we can do is to get down there as quick as ever we can. Shall we take the canoe and make a race for it?"

"I can't do it," answered Tom. "I haven't got the strength, – and, to be honest, Bob, the courage. It's taken every bit of strength and nerve out of me. Bob, I tell you, I'm afraid we've killed them, – and I, for one, don't dare to go and look."

And Tom hid his face in his hands, while the tears trickled through his fingers.

"I don't believe they're killed," said Bob, stoutly. "They were some distance away from the cave, you know. Come, we'll go with the crowd, for the whole town must be out by this time."

And so he half-persuaded, half-dragged Tom away from the tent, and they started for the hotel.

The explosion had, indeed, aroused every one. Men were running to and fro, and the greatest excitement prevailed. The news quickly spread that some frightful accident had happened at Harvey's camp, and Tom and Bob heard expressions of sympathy for them on all sides, from many who had been the victims of their tricks, and who had time and again wished the island rid of them. A rumour spread among the crowd of villagers – no one knew where it originated – that a keg of powder,

which the campers had left to dry near the fire, had exploded, and blown them all to pieces. This was only one of a number of wild rumours that were noised about that morning in the confusion and uncertainty. It was generally believed that the crew must have been killed.

Tom and Bob hung on to the edge of the excited crowd, which had assembled in front of the hotel, and listened to these various expressions with horror. Then, when the crowd moved on for the camp, they followed, with sinking hearts.

It was a strange procession that went down along the shore that morning. There were cottage-owners, who had grievances against the crew; villagers, who had been tormented and tricked by them time and again; and fishermen, who had lost many a tide's fishing, because their dories had been found sunk alongside the wharf, with heaping loads of stones aboard. Yet, now that disaster had befallen the crew, they were one and all willing to condone the offences, and anxious to render what help they could.

They went on rapidly. Tom and Bob soon heard a cry from those in advance that the tent was still standing. Then hope rose in Tom's heart, that spurred him forward.

He dashed ahead, rushed past the leaders, cutting through the woods where the path made a circuit. There was the tent still standing, and apparently uninjured by the storm of stones and débris that had rained down about it. But the crew! Not the sound of a voice was to be heard. Not a soul was stirring anywhere in the locality.

CHAPTER VI.

JACK HARVEY INVESTIGATES

Tom's heart sank as he approached the tent, stepping over stones and fragments of wood that lay all about. Pulling open the flap of the tent, he looked anxiously inside. There lay the crew, to a man, stretched upon the ground, motionless. A sudden fear seized on Tom that the shock had killed them as they lay sleeping, and he reeled and clutched one of the guy-ropes to keep from falling.

The next minute the crowd of villagers had arrived, and several heads were thrust inside the tent. Just at that moment one of the crew slowly raised himself on an elbow and said, angrily:

"What's all this fuss about? Aren't you people satisfied with trying to blow us up, without coming around and making such a rumpus and keeping us awake?"

It was Jack Harvey. The others of the crew, taking their cue from him, made a pretence of rousing themselves up from sleep, yawned and rubbed their eyes, and asked what was wanted.

Then, perceiving for the first time that there were several stalwart fishermen in the party, and not daring to go too far, Harvey added, in a sneering tone:

"Oh, we're obliged to you all for coming down here. It wasn't curiosity on your part – of course not. You came down because you thought we were hurt, and we're much obliged to you. Of course we are. We're glad to see you, moreover, now we're awake. Wait a minute, and we will stir up the fire and boil a pot of coffee."

This was maddening to the rescuers. Some of the fishermen suggested pitching in and giving the crew a sound thrashing; but, so Squire Brackett said, "there was really no ground for such a proceeding, though he, for one, would be more than glad to do it." They could blame themselves for trying to help a pack of young hyenas like these. For his part, he was going back home to bed. "They'll drown themselves out in the bay if let alone," he commented. However, he ventured the query to Harvey: "Guess you boys had a little powder stored around here, didn't you?"

"Guess again, squire," answered Harvey, roughly. "Maybe we had a fort with cannon mounted on it, – and maybe we'd like to go to sleep again, if you people would let us. We're not trespassing. We've got permission to camp here, so don't try to go bullying us, squire."

This was the satisfaction, then, that the rescuers got at the hands of the crew. They had come, burying their grievances, and with hearts full of sympathy and kindness for the unfortunate boys, and they had encountered only the same reckless crew, that mocked them for their pains. So they turned away again, angry and disappointed, and nursing their wrath for a day to come.

And then, as the sound of the last of their footsteps died away through the woods, Jack Harvey, chuckling with vast satisfaction to himself, said: "Wasn't that fine, though? Wasn't old Brackett and the others furious?"

"Wild!" exclaimed Joe Hinman. "But I don't think, after all, Jack, that it paid. We ought to have treated them better, after they had come all the way down here to help us."

"Pshaw!" answered Harvey. "Don't you go getting squeamish, Joe. For my part, I'm mad enough at somebody to fight the whole village. There's our cave that it took us weeks to dig, and hidden in the only spot around here that couldn't be discovered, gone to smash, with everything we had in it. Those two guns that the governor bought me were worth a pretty price, let me tell you. They must have gone clear into the bay, for I can't even find a piece of the stock of either one of them."

"It looks to me as though somebody did discover the cave, after all," said Joe Hinman. "You can't make me believe that it blew itself up."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Harvey – and then he paused abruptly; for, of a sudden, there came sharply to his mind the white face of Tom Harris, peering in at the tent door, with a haggard, ghastly expression. He recalled how Tom had started back and nearly fallen at the sight of the crew lying still.

“He was the first one at the tent, too,” muttered Harvey to himself.

“What’s that?” asked Joe Hinman.

“Nothing,” said Harvey. “But you may be right, Joe. You may be right, after all. Come, let’s all go out and look over the ground once more. There may be a few things yet, to save from the wreck.”

The explosion, strangely enough, had not injured a single member of the crew. Not a piece of the wreckage had struck the tent. Pieces of rock and bits of branches and boards lay on every hand about the camp, and a stone, torn from the bank, had crashed down on the bowsprit of the *Surprise*, breaking it short off, carrying away rigging and sails. There was also a hole broken in the yacht’s deck by a falling piece of ledge.

The crew, awakened from sound slumber by the awful crash and by the shower of earth and stones, had rushed out, frightened half out of their wits, and at an utter loss at first to know what had happened. The full discovery of what had occurred only served to deepen the mystery. How it had happened no one could tell. To be sure, they knew what had escaped the notice of Tom and Bob, that four lanterns in a corner of the cave were filled with kerosene oil, and that in another corner, in a hole under the floor, covered with a few pieces of board and a thin sprinkling of earth, were two kegs of blasting-powder.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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