

North Grace May

Rilla of the Lighthouse



Grace North

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CHAPTER I.

RILLA

“Here yo’, Shags! What yo’ got thar, ol’ dog? Haul it out! Like it’s a treasure from a ship that’s gone down. Ahoy, thar, Shagsie! Here comes a crashin’ big wave. Whoo! Wa’n’t that-un a tarnal whopper? An’ yo’ lost yer treasure, sure sartin! Sharp ahead now, ol’ dog, d’y see it anywhar?”

The wind-blown girl and the big shaggy dog stood side by side on the narrow, pebbly strip of beach and gazed intently at the whirling, seething water where a breaker of unusual size had crashed high, sending these two for a moment scrambling up the rocks.

Back of them towered an almost perpendicular cliff, on top of which stood the Windy Island Lighthouse, severe in outline, but glaring red and white in color that it might be readily observed in the daytime by pilots who were strangers in those dangerous waters.

Many a shoal there was under the tossing, turbulent waves, unsuspected by the unwary mariner, and, in the heavy fogs that often hung like wet, impenetrable blankets over that part of the New England coast, many a vessel would have crashed to its destruction had it not been for the faithful Captain Ezra Bassett, who had been keeper of the light since Rilla was a baby.

The dog’s sight must have been keener than that of the girl, for a moment later he dashed away up the narrow strip of beach and began to bark furiously at some object that was tossing on an incoming wave. The girl raced after him, her hazel eyes glowing with excitement, her long brown hair, with a glint of red in it, unfastened, flying back of her.

“Tain’t the same thing, Shagsie!” she shouted to her companion. “Tain’t what yo’ was tryin’ to fetch ashore down below by the rocks. This-un is more like a box or suthin!”

The eager expression in the girl’s big, starlike eyes changed to one of concern and anxiety.

“Shags,” she cried, “thar’s been a wreck, that’s sure sartin, but ’twa’n’t hereabouts, ’pears like.” She shaded her eyes with one hand, and gazed searchingly out toward the horizon, but in another moment her eager interest returned to the box. “Look, yo’ ol’ dog. It’s ridin’ high. We’ll get it, yo’ see if we don’t. Yi-hi! Here she comes. Heave ahead now, Shagsie!”

The dog raced around, barking wildly, but the barefooted girl plunged deep into the seething foam, caught a banded box of foreign appearance and held on with all her strength while the undertow tried to drag her treasure away, but the wave receded and the box was left high.

“We got it, ol’ Shags. We got it!” she cried triumphantly, tossing back her sun-shimmered hair, for, when she had stooped, it had fallen about her face. This hindered the freedom of her movements, and so, snatching up a wet green ribbon of seaweed, she tied her hair back with it. Another wave was rushing, roaring shoreward. One quick seaward glance told her that it was going to be the biggest one yet.

Could she get the box high enough to be out of reach of that next breaker? How she tugged! But her efforts were fruitless, for with a deafening thud the wave crashed over her, lifting the box to which she still clung and hurling them both farther up the beach.

The girl was drenched but exultant and miraculously unhurt.

“We’ve got it now, sure sartin, Shags, ol’ dog.” Flushed and breathless, she sank down on the banded box for a moment to rest, but the dog, sniffing at it, barked his excitement.

“Yo’d like to know what’s in it, would yo’?” queried the laughing girl. “Well, sir, so would I, but like as not we’d better get it into Treasure Cave ’fore we open it, like as not we’d better.”

As the girl spoke she glanced up at the lighthouse, towering above her.

“Grand-dad’s still asleep, I reckon, but ’twa’n’t be long now afore he’s wakin’, so we’d better heave to and hist her.”

Rilla had found a leather handle on one end of the box, and holding fast to this, slowly and with great effort she began dragging it up the rocks and about half an hour later, as a reward for her perseverance, she disappeared with it into a small opening in the cliff, and not a moment too soon, for a stentorian voice, high above her, called, “Rilly gal, where be yo’? Don’ yo’ know as it’s past time for mess?”

“Yeah, Grand-dad. We was just a-comin’,” Which was the truth, for having safely hidden the box in her Treasure Cave, the girl had suddenly thought that she must go at once and prepare her grandfather’s evening meal.

“Shagsie,” she confided, “ol’ dog, we’ll have to wait over till tomorrer to know what’s in it. We’ll come an’ look as soon as its sun-up. Yo-o! How I hope it’s suthin’ wonderful!”

When Muriel Storm entered the kitchen of the small house adjoining the light, her grandfather gazed at her keenly from under his shaggy grey brows. “A severe, unforgiving man,” some folks called him, but he hadn’t looked long at the darling of his heart before his expression changed, softened until those grey eyes that had often struck terror to an offending deckhand shone with a light that was infinitely tender.

“Well, Rilly gal, fust mate of the Lighthouse Craft, I cal’late ye’ve been workin’ purty hard this past hour doin’ nothin’. ’Pears like yer purty het up lookin’.”

The girl made no reply, though she laughed over her shoulder at the old man, who, with his cap pushed back, sat by the stove in his wooden armchair, smoking his corncob pipe in solid comfort.

This was the hour that he liked best, when his gal was cooking his evening meal and chattering to him of this and that – inconsequential things – telling him how the lame pelican that had been away for a week had returned, but not alone, for a beautiful pelican that wasn’t lame at all had been with him, or, when she wasn’t chattering, she was singing meeting-house songs in her sweet untrained voice while she fried the fish and potatoes, but tonight the old captain noted that the girl was unusually silent, that her cheeks were almost feverishly red, and there was a sudden clutching dread in his heart. Just so had the other Rilly, this girl’s mother, looked and acted the day before she ran away and married the young man from the city. The eyes under the shaggy grey brows were hard again, and Rilla, noting in the face of the grand-dad she so loved the expression she dreaded, ran to him, fork in hand and pressing her cheek against his forehead, she cried:

“Oh, Grand-dad, what set yo’ thinkin’ o’ that? Yo’ know I wouldn’t be leavin’ yo’. I love yo’, Grand-dad; I’ll allays, allays stay, an’ be yer fust mate.”

“Clear to the end of the v’yage? Take an oath to it, Rilly?”

It might have seemed ludicrous to an onlooker, but there was no one to see as the girl, with an earnest, almost inspired expression on her truly beautiful face, stood up and lifting her hand, seemingly unconscious that it held a fork, said in a voice ringing with sincerity, “I call God to witness that I’ll never go away from yo’, Grand-dad, without yer permittin’ it.”

Then there was one of those sudden changes that made Rilla so irresistible. “Grand-dad,” she cried, teasingly, as she stooped and looked with laughing eyes directly into the grey ones that were softening again, “I’m only sixteen, come next month, and why ’tis yo’ worry so ’bout my marryin’, sartin is puzzlin’. I don’t even know a boy ’ceptin’ Mrs. Sol Dexter’s Buddy, and he’s not as high as one of the barrels in his ma’s store.”

“Yer heavin’ oil on troubled waters, and the sea’s smoothin’ down,” the old captain said as he drew his chair up to the table and took up his knife and fork preparatory to eating the good supper that Rilla had placed before him. But, instead of beginning, he remarked: “I can’t figger out why I keep thinkin’ of city fellers this week past. They don’t any of ’em come to Tunkett at this time o’ the year. That thar summer hotel at the pint is closed as tight as a clam that can’t be opened without

smashin' it, an' so are the cottages, as the rich folks call them gray shanties they loaf around in every summer, so I figger yer ol' grand-dad must be gettin' hallucinations."

When the supper dishes had been washed and put away, Rilla found her grandfather sitting just outside the door smoking his beloved corn cob pipe and watching the sunset. She went out and sat on a wooden stool at his feet. Rilla loved to sit quietly with folded hands while the glow was fading in the west and dream dreams. Just as the last flush was paling the old man rose.

"Time to put the light on, Rilly gal," he said.

She heard his heavy steps climbing the spiral stairs. Fainter and fainter they grew, and then, a moment later, just as the first stars glimmered through the dusk, the great light flashed over the sea and began slowly turning, for the lighthouse was on an island one mile from shore, and the waters all about it were illumined.

For a moment Rilla saw a fishing boat that was nearly becalmed and would have trouble reaching port that night.

"It's ol' Cap'n Barney, like's not. He's allays late gettin' in."

The girl rose and went indoors. Shags, who had been lying silently at her feet, accompanied her. "Good-night, Grand-dad," she said, standing on tiptoe to kiss the old man, who stood erect in spite of his many years.

Then almost shyly she added: "Grand-dad, when I come sixteen yer goin' to tell me all about it, like yo' promised, aren't yo', Grand-dad?"

A grunt, which could hardly be interpreted in the affirmative, was the only reply, and yet neither had it been negative.

Kissing him again, Rilla went to her snug little room over the kitchen, and Shags followed, for he always slept just outside her closed door.

Rilla did not light the kerosene lamp that stood on the small table. The moon was rising and she liked its light best. For a moment she stood at the open window, facing the town, which in the fall and winter was so dark and quiet in the evening, but in summer, when the city people were in their cabins on the point, it was pulsing with life, color and music. Rilla never visited the town in summer. She was then practically a prisoner on the small rocky island. For a long time she stood watching the waves that lifted silvery crests in the moonlight. "I wonder who my dad was," she thought, as she had many times before. "I wonder why he never came for me, after my girl-mother died." Forgotten was the box in Treasure Cave.

Many had been the moods of Rilla that day, but when she had undressed in the moonlight she knelt, not by the bedside, but facing the window. Looking up toward the peaceful, starry sky, she whispered softly, "God in Heaven, bless my grand-dad, and – and my father – who never came for me. Amen."

Soon she was asleep, little dreaming that the next day was to bring into her hitherto quiet and uneventful life her first real adventure.

CHAPTER II. A GIFT FROM THE SEA

Sunrise and the memory of the treasure box came at the same time. Rilla was dressed in a twinkling. She did not even stop to peer into the bit of broken mirror which Mrs. Sol Dexter had given her, hoping that with it would go the proverbial seven years of bad luck. Mrs. Sol Dexter kept the general store and postoffice in the fishing village of Tunkett.

She was absolutely honest, was Mrs. Sol, but not inclined to be generous. If the scales tipped one cranberry too many, out came that cranberry! She had never before been known to give anything away, but something which might bring bad luck she had been willing to part with.

It had been a happy day for Rilla, that one, when for the first time she had acquired a real mirror.

It was, of course, after the summer season, or she would not have been in town at all. And on that same day her grand-dad had given her a whole quarter to spend just as she wished and she had asked Mrs. Sol Dexter for two hair ribbons, one to match the sunrise and one like the green in the hollow of a wave just before it turns over when the sun is shining on it.

“Queerest gal, that!” Mrs. Dexter confided to her husband, Cap’n Sol, the next time he came in from one of his sea “v’yages.”

“She must get all them sunset notions from her pa’s side. I recollect hearin’ he was an artist fellow.”

“Wall,” the good-natured man had replied, “if that pore gal gets any comfort out’n ’em, I’m sure sartin glad. She’s little more’n a prisoner most o’ the year over thar on Windy Island. Jest because her ma ran off ’n’ married up wi’ that city feller, ol’ Ezry Bassett is tarnal sartin the same thing’ll happen to Rilly. But I cal’late them thar city fellars, on the whole, ain’t hankerin’ to splice up with lighthouse keepers’ gals nor grand-gals, neither.”

When Rilla had reached home that never-to-be-forgotten day when she had purchased something all by herself and for the very first time, she had slipped up to her room with the broken mirror and she had tied on both of the new hair ribbons, one red and one green. They weren’t the shades that she had really wanted, but they were the prettiest that Mrs. Sol Dexter had in stock. Then she gazed long at her reflection in the mirror. Once – just once – her grand-dad had told her that she was the “splittin’ image” of her mother, who had died when she was only seventeen.

“I’ve allays wished as I had a photygraf of her,” Rilla had thought. “Now I can be lookin’ in the mirror an’ pretendin’ it’s a picture of my mother, only *she’d* be lots sweeter lookin’. Mrs. Sol Dexter said as how the summer folks called *her* beautiful.”

There was always a wistful, yearning expression in the hazel eyes of the girl when she thought of her mother.

But all this had happened the autumn before. Bad luck had *not* befallen Rilla – she didn’t even know that a broken mirror was supposed to bring bad luck – and that is probably why it had not done so; for we get, in this world, what we expect very often, and this little lass, who lived so close to nature, was always expecting something wonderful to happen and she found real joy in the simplest things.

The dog, lying just outside the door, lifted a listening ear the moment his little mistress had stepped out of bed and he was eagerly waiting when she softly opened the door.

“Sh! Shagsie, ol’ dog, don’ be barkin’,” the girl cautioned. “Grand-dad’s put the light out an’ he’s gone back to his bunk for ’nother forty winks. You’n I’ll have time to see what’s in the box. Sh-h! Soft now!”

The dog’s intelligent brown eyes were watching the face of his mistress and he seemed to understand that he must be very quiet. If Muriel tiptoed as she went down the curving flight of steps

to the kitchen, so too did Shags. As she passed the door of her grand-dad's bedroom she could hear his even breathing.

It was not unusual for Rilla and Shags to climb to the top of the crags to watch the sunrise, and so, even if her grandfather had awakened, he would have thought nothing of it, but it was not to the highest point of the cliff that the girl went.

Instead, she clambered down what appeared to be a perilous descent, but both she and the dog were as sure-footed as mountain goats, and they were soon standing on the out-jutting ledge in front of a small opening which was the entrance to her Treasure Cave.

Eager as the girl was to learn the secret that the box contained, she did not go in at once, but paused, turning toward the sea. The waves, lifting snowy crests, caught the dawning glory of the sky. Impulsively she stretched her arms out to the sun.

There was something sacred to this untaught girl about the rebirth of each day, and the glory of the sky and sea was reflected in her radiant upturned face. Only for a brief while did the pageantry last, and the world – Rilla's world, all that she knew – was again attired in its everyday garb, sky-blue, sea-green, rock-grey, while over all was the shining sun-gold.

Stooping, for the cave door was too small to be entered by so tall a girl were she standing erect, Rilla disappeared from the ledge and Shags followed her. The cave within was larger than one might suppose, and was lighted by wide crevices here and there in its wall of rocks through which rays of sunlight slanted. The continuous roar of the surf, crashing on the rocks below, was somewhat dulled.

Rilla leaped forward with a little cry of joy.

"Shags," she called gleefully, "it's still here! 'Twa'n't a dream-box arter all. I sort o' got to thinkin' in the night it might be." She clapped her hands, for there were moments when Rilla was a very little girl at heart, much younger than her years, and yet at other times, when she was comforting her old grand-dad and soothing away his imaginary fears, she was far older than fifteen.

Shags was now permitted to bark his excitement, which he did, capering in puppy fashion about the banded box of foreign appearance.

The girl looked at it with her head on one side. "How in time are we to get into it, ol' dog?" she inquired as she stooped to examine the box. "'Pears like we'll have to smash it. Here yo', Shags, what's that tag-end yer tuggin' on? Yo-o! It's the answer to the riddle, like's not! That strap's got a buckle on it, an' it's mate's the same. Heave ho! Open she comes. Easy as sailin' down stream." As the girl spoke she lifted the cover of the box and uttered a cry of mingled joy and amazement.

"Thunder sakes! Tarnell!" she ejaculated, unconsciously using both of her grandfather's favorite exclamations at once.

"Shagsie, ol' dog, will you be lookin'! There's a mirror inside the cover as hasn't a crack in it. Yo-o! It comes out. There now, stood up it's as tall as I am." As the girl talked to her interested companion she lifted the mirror-lined cover and placed it against the wall of the cave. Meanwhile the curious dog was dragging something from the box. Rilla leaped forward to rescue whatever it might be. "Lie down, sir, and mind orders," she commanded. "I'm skipper o' this craft." After rescuing the mysterious something which the dog had evidently considered his rightful share of the booty, the girl knelt and examined the contents of the box. She then turned glowing eyes toward her comrade, who had minded her and was watching her intently, his head low on his outstretched paws. "Land a Goshen!" she ejaculated. "Shagsie, ol' dog, what'd yo' think? This here box is full o' riggin's for a fine lady such as comes from the city for the summer, 'pears like, though I've never seen 'em close to."

Awed, and hardly able to believe her eyes, Rilla lifted a truly wonderful garment from the trunk – it was silk – and green, sea-green like the heart of a wave just before its foamy crest curls over in the sun.

It was trimmed with silvery, spangly lace.

"It's a dress to wear, 'pears like, though thar's not much to it as yo' could call sleeves, an', yo-o! Shagsie, will yo' look? Here's slipper things! Soft as the moss on the nor'east side o' a rock an'

green, wi' silver buckles." Then the girl's excited, merry laughter rang out as she drew forth another treasure. "Don' tell me yo' don' know what this here is, Shagsie," she chuckled. "Maybe yo' think it's a green spider-web, but 't isn't; no, sir, it's got a heel and a toe to it! That's a stockin', ol' dog. Now, who'd – " She paused and listened intently. Ringing clear above the booming crash of the surf she heard her grand-dad calling. Quickly she ran to the opening.

"Rilly gal, tarnation sakes, whar be you? Never seem to be around mess time lately. The kettle's singin' like a tipsy sailor and 'bout to dance its cap off."

"Comin', Grand-dad," the girl thrust her head out to reply, in a quieter moment, when a wave was receding; then hastily, but with infinite care, she knelt and smoothed the silken folds of the shimmering green gown, replaced the mirror-lined top, strapped it down and then covered the whole with an old sail cloth which had been one of Rilla's former stowed-away treasures.

If the girl had been excited the night before, she was much more so this early morning. However, her grand-dad was preoccupied and did not notice the flushed cheeks and eager, glowing eyes of his "fust mate." Silently he ate his quarter of apple pie, gulped down a huge cup of steaming coffee. It was plain to the girl who watched him that he was thinking of something intently.

Rilla was counting the minutes that would have to elapse before she revisited the cave, when her grand-dad pushed his armchair back from the table and arose.

"Rilly gal," he peered over his spectacles at the girl, "I've got to navigate to town this mornin'. Oil and supplies are gettin' tarnicky low, 'pears like. Equinoxial storms are due in port mos' any day now, so we'll not put the v'yage off any longer. Fust mate, be gettin' into yer sea-goin' togs."

Muriel's heart sank. "Oh, Grand-daddy, do I *have* to go?" The piercing grey eyes under shaggy brows turned toward the girl questioningly. Had he heard aright? Could it be *his* "gal" begging *not* to be taken to town, when usually it was right the other way.

Then he laughed. "What a suspicious ol' sea-dog I am," he ruminated. "Mabbe the gal's rigged up some new fancy notion down in that cave o' her'n." Aloud he said heartily. "All right, fust mate, stay anchored if ye want to. I'm thinkin' thar's nothin' on Windy Island to molest ye. Thar's the gun in the corner if yer needin' it, but Shags, here, will protect ye, won't ye, ol' skipper?"

The dog leaped alongside as the old man went down the steep, wet stairs that led to the wharf, near which a dory was floating.

The girl stood in the open door, and with shaded eyes watched the scudding sailboat until, as was his custom, her grand-dad turned to wave to her as he passed the first buoy.

There were many buoys, painted in varying bright colors, that the skipper of each incoming fishing smack might have no trouble in locating his own particular mooring place. On a moonlighted night, when the sailing boats were all in, it was indeed a pretty sight to see the flotilla, some newly painted and others weather-stained, bobbing on the choppy waters of the bay.

Windy Island, though only a quarter of a mile wide, was nearly a mile long, and protected one of the snuggest little harbors to be found along that wild, rugged coast.

As soon as the kitchen was shipshape, Muriel raced toward the outer edge of the cliff, calling "Yo-o, come on, Shagsie, ol' dog. We'll cruise back to the cave."

But Rilla did not enter her Treasure Cave again that day, for in another moment, and quite unexpectedly, she was launched upon her very first real adventure.

CHAPTER III. A FIRST ADVENTURE

Muriel did not have to call a second time to her shaggy friend, for up the steep, wet steps from the wharf the dog leaped and lifted intelligent, inquiring eyes. "Don' let's go to the cave fust off, Shagsie." The girl always talked to her four-footed companion as though she were sure that he could understand. "Let's go to that pebbly beach war yo' found suthin' yesterday an' lost it. Mabbe it got washed up shore agin, whatever 'twas. Mabbe now! What say, ol' Shags?"

Knowing that a reply was expected when his mistress stooped and stroked his head, the dog yapped eagerly, then raced alongside of the barefooted girl, who followed an infrequently used trail which ambled along toward the north end of the island, where the beach was wildest.

The shore, however, could not be seen until one was nearly upon it. When it came within the vision of the girl she stood still so suddenly that Shags, having kept on, was several lengths ahead before he was conscious that he was alone.

He turned back inquiringly. "Sh! Keep still!" the girl whispered, her hazel eyes growing darker and wider as she gazed, almost as though she were frightened at something just below on the rocky beach.

What she saw was not really fear-inspiring. A youth, dressed in white flannels, who appeared to be but little older than Rilla, was standing with his hands in his pockets gazing at a flat-bottomed, weather-stained sailboat, in which he had evidently just landed and which he had drawn as high as he could up on the shore.

He turned with a start when an angry voice called, "Clear out! Go away! We don' want any landlubbers here!"

The lad, however, did not seem to be in the least intimidated by this outburst from the rocks above him.

Looking up, he actually smiled. A barefooted girl with red-brown hair blowing in the wind and with a shaggy yellow and white dog at her side was, to his thought, a picture more to be admired than feared.

And, for that matter, Eugene Beavers, himself, was not fear-inspiring. He had clear grey eyes, a keen, thin face, and a firmly rounded chin. Indeed, Gene, as his best friends called him, was not only a good looking lad but one whom young and old trusted unquestioningly.

But with Rilla one thought was uppermost. One of those terrible creatures so dreaded by her grand-dad had dared to land on her very own island. There could be no mistake that he was "city folks," for no boy living on the coast would have such a pale face nor would he be dressed in white flannels.

"If yo' don' board yer boat an' ship off instanter I'll send Shags at yo', I will!" Rilla was wrathful because her first command had not been obeyed. At this the lad laughed, not rudely, but with merry good nature. It seemed to him truly humorous that this barefooted, wind-blown girl should be ordering him out to sea. Rilla, however, believed that he was laughing at her. Stamping her foot and pointing at the boy, her eyes flashing, she cried, "Shags, at him, ol' dog."

The faithful creature plunged down the rocky trail, growling as fiercely as he could, but as he approached the youth toward whom his mistress was pointing he paused uncertainly. The smiling lad, unafraid, was holding out a welcoming hand. "Come here, good dog," he said coaxingly.

Shags, being friendly by nature, and not in the least understanding the present need for ferocity, actually wagged his tail and permitted the strange boy to stroke his head. This was too much for Rilla.

Her grand-dad had said that the dog would protect her, but he hadn't done it. With an angry half sob, she turned and scrambled up the rocks. A second later, when the boy looked up, the girl

was not to be seen. Shrugging his shoulders, he turned back to converse with his newly acquired companion. Gene dearly loved dogs and Shags had instinctively recognized in him a friend, but not so Rilla. She was convinced that all boys from the city were enemies, for had not her grand-dad said so time and again?

Running to the lighthouse, the girl seized the gun that stood in the corner and raced back again. The next time that Gene Beavers looked up, there she stood with a gun pointed directly at him.

“Now’ll yo’ take orders?” her voice rang out angrily, her eyes dark with excitement. “Now’ll yo’ put out to sea?”

The lad looked puzzled and then troubled. For the first time he was conscious that this stormy girl really feared him, and yet he could not get near enough to explain to her why he had landed on Windy Island.

What should he do? What could he do? Rilla said no more, but, while he was hesitating, there was a sudden report and a bullet whizzed over his head. It was evidently merely a choice between which kind of an end to his life he preferred. Pushing the boat into the water in a quiet, rock-sheltered spot, he leaped in and shoved off.

However, he had not gone two lengths from shore when he heard the girl shouting lustily: “Come back here, yo’ landlubber! Don’ yo’ know yer boat’s sinkin’? Tarnation sakes, what kind o’ an old hulk yo’ got thar?”

The gun had been thrown down and the girl scrambled down to the edge of the beach. The boat, having left the shelter of the rocks, was caught in the surf. Seizing the oars, Gene let the sail flap as he tried to regain the land. The leak which had driven him to shore in the beginning was causing the boat to rapidly fill with water. Then, to complete his feeling of helplessness, an unusually large breaker was thundering toward him.

“Jump the gunnel, quick, or yo’ll flounder!” the girl commanded.

The lad obeyed. Leaping into the swirling water, which was nearly chin deep, he swam toward the shore, and not a moment too soon, for the breaker lifted the boat high and crashed it to splinters on the rocky point.

The boy and the girl stood near each other watching the annihilation of the craft and the angry after-swirl of dark green waters.

Then, turning to his companion, he smiled. “Well, little Miss Storm Maiden,” he said, “you have saved my life, I guess, by your quick command, although you really wanted to shoot me, since your dog wouldn’t eat me up.”

“How’d yo’ know my name was Storm?” the truly amazed girl inquired. “I hadn’t tol’ yo’ nothin’.”

“I didn’t know it. Is that your name?”

The girl nodded. “Ye-ah! Muriel Storm, though Grand-dad calls me Rilly.”

“My name,” the boy told her, “is Eugene Beavers, and my friends call me Gene. My home is in New York, but I am visiting your Doctor Winslow in Tunkett. He and my dad are old friends. I’ve been sick and had to leave college right at the beginning of the term, so dad shipped me off down here to – ”

Before he could finish his sentence, Muriel, who had been looking at him steadily, exclaimed: “Yer shiverin’ wi’ the cold. The surf’s like ice. Yo’ be gathering driftwood for a fire; make a ternal whopper, while I get some matches.”

Again the girl scrambled up the trail among the rocks and the dog went with her. For a moment the lad stood gazing out at sea, as he ruminated, an amused twinkle in his eyes:

“And here I thought that Tunkett at this time of the year would be stupid, the summer colony being closed, but I never had an adventure more interesting than this one.”

Gene had a goodly pile of driftwood collected when Rilla reappeared on the rocky cliff. Instead of the gun, she was carrying a covered bucket and a thick china cup.

Although her manner of approaching him could not really be called friendly, yet it was not as hostile as her former attitude had been. She held up the cup toward him and filled it with steaming hot tea. “Drink that!” she commanded; then added, “Though likely ’twill mos’ scald yo’.”

How the lad wanted to laugh. Just before he had left the city his sister Helen had dragged him to an afternoon tea (or was it a bazaar?) and there some prettily dressed girls had surrounded him, offering him dainty porcelain cups half filled with fragrant orange pekoe. He was expected to purchase one of them for the sake of the cause. Not wishing to offend any of the fair friends of Helen Beavers, he had purchased them all, and then, when unobserved, he had slipped away to freedom.

Again a maiden – a storm maiden, at that – was offering him tea. The cup wasn’t porcelain and the girl was not effusively gracious to him as those others, who all greatly admired him, had been. This wild island girl was merely trying to warm him up that he need not freeze from his unexpected plunge into the icy surf. There was another point of difference between the two tea parties, Gene thought as he drank the hot, and almost bitter, beverage. His one desire at the other had been to escape, but at this tea party he found himself more interested than he had been in a long time.

Gene had several moments alone in which to meditate, for Rilla, having glanced at the sun, had suddenly scrambled up the rocks, and, shading her eyes, had looked long toward the town. Being satisfied that her grand-dad had not left Tunkett, she returned and lighted the dry wood, which soon snapped and crackled. Then, rising, she put her hands on her hips and unsmilingly gazed at the boy with dark, expressive eyes. After a moment’s solemn scrutiny she inquired: “How come yo’ to be cruisin’ ’round in that ol’ leaky hulk? Even a water rat’d had better sense.”

There seemed to the lad to be a note of scorn in the girl’s voice, and yet she had brought him tea.

Gene lowered the cup and smiled at her. Usually his smile was contagious, it was so genuinely good natured. “I don’t blame you in the least for calling me names,” he told her. “I just landed in Tunkett yesterday, and not knowing how to pass the time away, I went down to the wharf and asked a small freckle-faced boy if I could hire a boat. He said I could have my pick for a dollar an hour. He was going with me to where his boats were tied, I suppose, but just then some woman in the store called and away he ran. So I took the first boat I came to. I didn’t notice that it leaked until I was rounding the island.”

“That was little Sol – Mis’ Dexter’s boy – he rents boats to summer folks. He asks a tarnal whoppin’ price for ’em, ’pears like.”

“Well, his sail will cost me more than one dollar,” the lad told her, his eyes twinkling, “for I’ll have to pay for the wreck, I suppose.” Then he added: “Miss Storm Maiden, why don’t you smile? I’ve been here an hour, I do believe, and although you have looked at me angrily and scornfully and solemnly, you have not as yet smiled at me.

“I can’t be smilin’ when I know I’m doin’ what’s agin my grand-dad’s orders, but I *tried* to mind him. I tried to ship yo’ off’n Windy Island. I sure did.” The lad was puzzled. “I’ll testify that you tried hard enough, but *why* did you, Storm Maiden? Surely you weren’t afraid of me. I don’t understand.”

Then, in a few words, the girl told of her grand-dad’s dislike for “city folks,” though she did not tell him what caused that dislike.

“Am I the very first boy you have ever talked with?” the lad asked in amazement.

Rilla, still solemn, nodded. “Ye-ah,” she said, “an’ I’m tarnal sartin I don’ know what to do with yo’, bein’ as yer boat’s wrecked. Grand-dad’ll be back by noon and it’s most that now.” A swift glance at the sun had told Rilla the time. “Yo’ll have to hide in Treasure Cave, that’s what! I can’t come to see yo’ thar; ’twouldn’t be honest to Grand-dad; but I’ll let down a basket of grub on a rope. Then, when Cap’n Barney comes in from the fishin’ shoals where he goes every day I’ll hail him an’ tell him to take yo’ to town. He don’ mind city folks the way Grand-dad does.”

As she talked, Rilla led the way along the shore and paused at the foot of the perilous cliff above which towered the lighthouse.

“Thar’s a sail cloth in the cave as yo’ can wrap up in and keep warm,” she said. Then she pointed out the steep trail.

The lad looked at it and secretly wondered if he could make it. Then, turning, he held out his right hand, his cap in the other, as he said earnestly: “Miss Muriel Storm, I thank you for everything.” Then he started to climb. The girl watched him anxiously. “Steady there!” she cautioned. “Keep an even keel.”

The lad reached the ledge in safety and turned to wave his cap; then, stooping, he entered the cave, and none too soon, for, right at that very moment, a stentorian voice from the top of the cliff called, “Rilly gal, where be ye?”

“Comin’, Grand-dad!” the girl replied. Then she raced along the strip of pebbly beach, the dog at her heels.

Rilla’s heart was pounding with tumultuous excitement. How she wished that she could go to her grandfather and tell him the whole truth, but she did not dare.

CHAPTER IV. A SHIPWRECKED MARINER

Cap'n Ezra Bassett was removing his rubber boots when Rilla entered the room. The tea kettle was singing cheerily on the stove. She had refilled it when she had made tea for Gene.

Again the old man noticed the flushed, excited appearance of the girl. "Rilla gal," he said as he tugged at one boot, "what in tarnation have you got stowed away in that cave o' yourn that you're so plumb interested in? I swan I can't figger it out. Maybe I'd better take a cruise down that way and be inspectin' below decks."

Luckily Rilla's back was turned as she hurriedly pared potatoes for the frying. If her grand-dad had seen her face at that moment his suspicions would indeed have been aroused. When she did turn with the black iron spider to put upon the stove, she was greatly relieved to see that the old captain was removing his second boot and that he did not mean to carry out his threat to visit the cave.

"Grand-dad," she began, hoping to lead his thoughts into other channels, "was thar anythin' new as yo' heard of in town?"

One might have supposed by his sudden explosive ejaculation that the new channel into which his thoughts had turned was not a pleasant one.

"Ye-ah, by thunder!" he said. "One of those good-for-nothin' city fellars landed in Tunkett last night, so Mis' Sol was sayin', though what he's doin' 'round here at this time o' the year nobody knows. I sure sartin was plaguey glad yo'd stayed anchored here on Windy Island. I don't want yo' to run afoul of any city folks – gals neither – with hifalutin' notions; they're all a parcel o' –" The old man's speech was interrupted by a crash. Rilla had dropped a dish, an unheard-of proceeding, for she was as sure-fingered as she was sure-footed usually. Luckily the china was thick and apparently unbreakable.

"The grub's ready, Grand-dad," she said, as she poured into his cup the strong, steaming tea. The old man was pleased to note how little interest his "gal" took in the despised city folks, and he beamed across the table at her as he continued: "Sho now, Rilly, here's some news on a dif'rent tack. Cap'n Barney's laid up in drydock with rheumatics. Like's not he won't be able to navigate that craft o' his for a week or two."

The girl's face paled. "Oh, Grand-dad, I'm that sorry," she said, but her thought was inquired: "How can that city chap get to the mainland if Cap'n Barney don' take him?"

Rilla had no other intimate friends among the fishermen who would be passing that evening on their homeward way from the Outer Ledge where they went at dawn each day after cod.

Captain Barney she loved next to her grand-dad, for had he not helped bring her up? One of her earliest recollections was of that kindly Irishman holding her on his knee and telling her wonderful tales of fairy folk who lived on that far away and dearly loved Emerald Isle where his boyhood had been spent. Never had the girl wearied of listening to tales of the mermaids who dwelt in caves under the cliffs and of the "Little Folk" who went about among the peat cabins helping the peasants.

"But thar's nothin' the loike of thim over here," old Cap'n Barney would end, with a sigh, "lest be it's you, Rilly lass."

When the noon meal was over, Captain Ezra pushed back his chair. "Wall, fust mate, I reckon I'll cruise down to the shanty for a spell an' overhaul the kit. Holler if ye need me." Rilla, with rapidly beating heart, stood in the open door and watched her grand-dad as he slowly descended the steep stairs leading to the little wharf near which bobbed the anchored dory. About twenty feet up the beach was the shanty in which Cap'n Ezra kept his fishing tackle and the supplies for the lighthouse.

It was hard indeed for the girl, who was as honest as old Cap'n Ezra himself, to be doing something of which her grand-dad would disapprove, and yet she couldn't let a boy starve even if he had come from the city.

Quickly she filled a basket with food and tied it firmly to one end of a long rope. Going to the edge of the cliff, back of the lighthouse, she called “Yo-o!”

The boy appeared and stood on the ledge looking up. He waved his cap in greeting and then, catching the swinging basket, he untied it.

Rilla drew up the rope and let down a pail of tea; then she knelt and leaning over as far as she could with safety she called: “Like’s not you’ll have to bunk thar all night. Cap’n Barney didn’t go fishin’ today.”

Then, before Gene could question her concerning some other manner of reaching the mainland, the girl disappeared.

The boy laughed as he re-entered the cave. “Robinson Crusoe’s island was not half as interesting as this one,” he thought as he ate with a relish the homely fare which the basket contained. He had not realized that he was ravenously hungry. When the feast was over, the lad rose and looked long out at sea, trying to discover the approach of a boat that might be signaled.

He knew that if he did not soon return to Tunkett his host, Doctor Winslow, would become alarmed. Too, he was constantly on the alert for the possible approach of Rilla’s grandfather. “What an old ogre he must be,” the lad thought, “if his grand-daughter is afraid to tell him of the near presence of a shipwrecked mariner.”

As the hours slipped by and no boat came within signaling distance, Gene was tempted to walk boldly out from his hiding place and tell the keeper of the light that he wished to be taken to town, but the “storm maiden” had seemed so truly distressed at the mere thought that her grandfather might learn of the presence of a “city boy” on Windy Island that, out of chivalry, he decided to heed her wishes.

Muriel had just replaced the rope in the toolhouse when she heard her grandfather’s voice booming from the foot of the steep stairway.

“Ye-ah, Grand-dad, I’m comin’,” the girl replied, wondering what was wanted of her. Could he have seen her taking the basket of food to the cave, she questioned. But, since he was still on the lower shore farthest from the cliff, this was not possible. She found the old man busily mending a net which was stretched out on the sand in front of the shanty.

“Rilly gal,” he said, smiling up at her, “thar’s a tarnation lot o’ tears in this ol’ net. Have you time, fust mate, to be helpin’ with the mendin’ of it?”

“Indeed I have, Grand-dad. All the time there is till sundown,” Muriel replied, almost eagerly. The girl’s conscience had been making her very unhappy. It was the first time in the fifteen years they had spent together that Muriel had kept anything from her grandfather. Every little, unimportant thing which had occurred during the almost uneventful days had been talked over with him and the old man would not have believed it possible for his “gal” to have been secretive, and yet, during the three hours that followed while these two sat on low stools mending the many tears in the net, Cap’n Ezra glanced often across at the girl, who, with bent head and flushed cheeks, was working industriously. Never before had he known his “gal” to be so silent. Usually her happy chatter was constant when they were working together. The shaggy grey brows were almost unconsciously contracted and the heart of the old man was troubled. At last, rising, he went around and stood beside his grand-daughter. Placing a hand upon her bent head, he asked kindly, “Fust mate, tell me all about it. Tell your ol’ grand-dad what’s troublin’ yo’. Have yo’ run afoul, Rilly gal, of anything that’s hurt yo’?”

The hazel eyes that were lifted were clear in their gaze. “No, Grand-dad, not that,” she replied. Then, as she said no more, but bent again over her task, the old man, with folded arms, stood, gazing long across the shimmering waters and toward the town. When he spoke there was almost a wistful note in his voice. “Barney’s been tellin’ me that I’m not doin’ right by yo’, Rilly gal,” the old man began. “He was sayin’ that I should be sendin’ yo’ away to school to educate yo’, like other gals. Is that what’s a-troublin’ yo’, fust mate? Are yo’ hankerin’ to leave yer ol’ grand-dad and – ”

He could say no more, for the girl, having leaped to her feet, clasped her hands over his mouth. “Grand-dad,” she lovingly rebuked him, “how can yo’ be askin’ that? Didn’t I promise I’d never be leavin’ yo’? I don’t want to go. I’d be skeered, like’s not, all alone in the big world. I want to allays stay anchored here in the safe harbor of yer love, Grand-dad.”

The girl had slipped around and nestled in the arms of the old man, lifting eyes that were brimmed with unshed tears.

There she was held so close, so sheltered, and when at last Cap’n Ezra spoke he said, “I don’t know what set me to thinkin’ of all this, lest ’twas that Barney said that gals had a natural hankerin’ for young folks, an’ I s’pose maybe they have. It’s like pairin’ off a gay little pleasure yacht with an ol’ weather-stained hulk that’s most ready to sink, an’ – ”

“Oh, Grand-dad, don’t be talkin’ that way,” the girl implored. “Yo’re goin’ to live as long as I do. I couldn’t be livin’ without yo.”

The old man tried to laugh naturally. “What a pair of loons we be,” he said, “trying to sink a ship afore it strikes a shoal, seems like.” He was rebuking himself for having made his “gal” cry.

They were soon busy again at the mending, but, although Rilla tried to chatter as was her wont, the old man often found his thoughts wandering. At last he said, “Most sundown, fust mate. Time for mess, I’m thinkin’.”

All that evening Rilla’s thoughts were with Gene Beavers. She had not found another opportunity to slip away to take food to him and yet the basket she had taken at noon had contained enough for the day.

That night, when she knelt by her open window, her prayer was not only for her grand-dad, and for the father who never came, but also for her old friend, Cap’n Barney, and for her new friend, Gene Beavers.

Her last waking thought was that in the morning she would go to her grand-dad and tell him all that had happened and that never, just never again, would she deceive him. Then with a happier heart she fell asleep.

CHAPTER V. A SWIM IN THE NIGHT

Meanwhile Gene Beavers had seated himself upon the ledge of rocks below the cave and had waited, now and then glancing up, hoping that the “storm maiden” might appear with a message for him, but the afternoon hours dragged away and she did not come. Then, at last, to his joy, he saw that the fishing boats were, one by one, leaving the Outer Ledge and sailing toward home. Scrambling down the steep cliff trail, the lad ran along the beach and went far out on the rocky point. There he stood eagerly awaiting the approach of the boats, ready, when he believed that he was observed, to signal to them. But, because of the direction of the wind and the lowness of the tide, the fishing boats gave Windy Island a wide berth. One boat did turn on a tack and for a moment seemed to be bearing directly toward the point. Taking off his white coat, Gene waved it frantically, but the lone fisherman was busy with the ropes just then and did not look up. A second later the boat swung about on another tack and Gene realized, with a sinking heart, that he could depend no longer upon the fishermen to take him to the mainland.

Walking slowly around the island, he stopped suddenly, for he had heard voices not far ahead of him. Quickly he stepped behind a sheltering boulder, and none too soon, for it was at that moment that Cap’n Ezra had risen and had announced that it was nearly sundown and time for the evening meal. From his hiding place Gene observed all that happened. He noted how troubled was the truly beautiful face of his “storm maiden.” Perhaps she was anxious about him. He almost hoped that she was.

The net was put away in the shanty and the old man followed the girl up the steep steps. Some time elapsed before Gene stepped out from his hiding place. Walking out upon the small wharf, the lad stood looking at the dory which was anchored nearby. If only he could borrow that boat, he thought. He could row to town and hire someone to tow it back. But even this he could not do without appealing to Captain Ezra, who, a few moments before, had shouldered the oars and carried them up to the lighthouse.

As the lad stood gazing out over the water of the harbor the afterglow of the sunset faded, the first stars came out and dusk gathered about him. He shivered, for the night air seemed suddenly chill and damp.

Until then Gene had not been greatly concerned about his mishap, considering it rather in the light of an interesting and novel adventure. His host, Doctor Winslow, luckily, had planned being away all of that day. “When he returns his housekeeper, Miss Brazilla Mullet, will inform him that I did not appear for the mid-day meal, as I had assured her that I would,” Gene thought, “and he will probably be greatly alarmed. It will be easy enough to trace me to the dock where I hired the boat at so early an hour this morning, and as I did not return it, he will naturally think that I have met with disaster. If only I could make the mainland within the next hour I might be able to save mine host much unnecessary anxiety.”

Suddenly a daring plan suggested itself.

The summer before, Gene had won the championship of his athletic club in a two-mile handicap swimming race. It was only one mile to Tunkett, and, moreover, the wind, blowing gently in from sea, would aid him greatly. Surely he could make it, for, if he wearied, he could float on his back until he was rested. Then another thought came to remind him of his recent illness. Was it not to regain his strength that he had come to Tunkett, having left college at the beginning of the fall term? When he had won that championship he had been in the best of trim. Shrugging his shoulders, Gene Beavers argued no more with himself. There seemed to be no other alternative, and so, pulling off his shoes and socks and throwing them to the beach with his white flannel coat, he went to the end

of the small wharf and plunged in. As Rilla had said, the water was icy cold, and the lad struck out vigorously to keep warm. It never would do for him to have a chill.

On and on he swam, now and then lifting his head to assure himself that he was keeping a straight course toward the town wharf, on the end of which were three lights, two red and one white. How glad he was to see them. The long, glimmering reflections stretched toward him and yet they seemed farther away than they had appeared from Windy Island.

Gene was nearing the silent, shadowy anchored fleet of fishing boats when he suddenly realized that his strength was failing rapidly. If only he could reach an unoccupied buoy which he saw bobbing not far ahead of him.

For a moment he rested upon his back, but when he tried to turn again that he might swim, he felt too weak to make the effort. Then he was terrorized with the sudden realization that the tide had changed and that he was drifting slowly away from the little fleet and out toward the open sea.

Gene made another herculean effort to turn over and swim, and so great was his determination, he did succeed. Luckily the rising night wind aided him and just then a wave, larger than the others lifted him on its rolling crest and hurled him up on the cask-like buoy, and there he clung. He had little hope of being able to long retain his hold, as his fingers were numb with cold and his arms ached. Too, he felt drowsy, or was it faint?

It was at that moment that his “storm maiden” knelt in her open window, and looking toward the starry heavens, asked God to care for her new friend, Gene Beavers.

Meanwhile, as the lad had surmised, Doctor Winslow was searching for his guest.

CHAPTER VI. A SEARCHING PARTY

It was nearing midnight and the huge lamp in the tower above the cliff was mechanically swinging in its great iron frame, hurling its beacon rays far out to sea, slowly, rhythmically turning. For a brief moment the Outer Ledge was revealed, deserted and surf washed, then the almost even roll of waves were illumined, their white crests flashing in the dazzle of light, to be again engulfed in darkness. Slowly the lamp turned toward the town, where the three lanterns, two red and one white, still burned on the end of the wharf to guide a homeward belated fisherman, then the little fleet of fishing boats and the cask-like buoy were for a moment revealed. The summer colony of boarded-up cabins was next illumined; too the low, rambling inn that would not be opened for many months; then again the wide path of light swung out to sea and started once more on its circling sweep that would continue until dawn.

It was the custom of Captain Ezra to waken at midnight to be sure that the mechanism of the lamp was in perfect order. He was just descending the spiral stairway after a visit of inspection when there came an imperative pounding without.

Shags, sleeping outside of Rilla's door, heard it and leaped to his feet with an ominous growl.

The girl, startled from slumber, sprang from her bed and dressed quickly. She had often done this before when a crashing thunder storm had awakened her, and she wanted to be on watch with her grand-dad. Her first conscious thought had been that the expected equinoctial storms had come, but when the knocking continued and a man's voice called, "Cap'n Ezra, quick! Open the hatch," a new fear clutched at the heart of the girl.

Perhaps the summons had something to do with Gene Beavers, the lad from the city. She had not been able the evening before to hail him from the top of the cliff, but surely he could have kept warm if he wrapped well in the sail cloth, and there had been food enough in the basket for two days at least.

Muriel was soon hurrying down the short flight of stairs that led from her small room above the kitchen. Her grand-dad had already flung the door wide open and there Rilla saw several longshoremen in slickers and sou'westers, who were carrying lanterns. Doctor Winslow was in the lead, and his white, drawn face plainly told how great his anxiety had been.

"Lem, ol' pal, what's gone wrong?" Captain Ezra inquired. He drew the physician, who had been a friend of his boyhood, into the kitchen, which was still warm, as the fire in the stove had but recently died down and a few embers were burning.

"Ez," Doctor Winslow began, when the men had entered and closed the door, "have you seen a young boy, a chap about eighteen, sailing anywhere near Windy Island today? You've heard me speak of Dan Beavers, who was a college mate of mine. Well, this is his son. He came to Tunkett to try to regain his strength after a serious illness. Truth is, he ought not to have attempted to sail a boat alone. I wouldn't have permitted it if I had been at home, but I had several calls to make across the marshes, and when I go there I make a day of it."

The old sea captain was shaking his grizzled head as his friend talked. "No, Lem," he replied when the other paused. "I reckon yer off'n yer bearin's, I ain't sighted a city chap cruisin' 'round in these waters, not since the colony closed, but, for onct, I wish I had, bein' as it's some-un b'longin' to yo', mate."

A cry from Rilla caused them all to turn and look at her as she stood in the open stair door. Running to Doctor Winslow, she caught his hand. "Uncle Lem," she said, "I know where he is, if it's a lad named Gene Beavers that yo're wantin'."

Then, seeing the inquiring expression on the face of Captain Ezra, she hurried on to explain: “His boat was wrecked, Grand-dad, that’s how he come to be here, but I didn’t dare to tell yo’, yo’re that sot agin city chaps. I didn’t do anythin’ that yo’ wouldn’t want me to, Grand-dad. I didn’t go near the cave where he was, not once in all the afternoon. Yo’ know I didn’t, for I stayed right with yo’ a-mendin’ the net.”

“I figger yo’ did the best yo’ could, fust mate,” the old man replied; “I cal’late it’s me that’s bungled matters, makin’ yo’ skeered to come and tell things straight out. But like’s not we’ll find the boy sleepin’ in the cave. Don’t let’s hang out distress signals till we’re sure we’re goin’ to sink.” As he talked he put on his slicker and cap, as the night wind was cold. Then, taking a lighted lantern, Cap’n Ezra, after bidding Rilla to liven up the fire and put the kettle on, opened the door and led the way to the top of the cliff. Making a trumpet of his hands, he shouted: “Ho, there, down below! Yo’re wanted up on deck.”

Then they waited, listening, but the crashing of the surf was all that they heard. One of the younger men who was used to scaling cliffs, however steep, climbed down to the ledge and held his lantern so that the small cave was illumined. After a moment’s scrutiny he called up to the anxious group: “Empty as an ol’ clam shell. Nothin’ in there but a box an’ a sail cloth that’s spread out flat an’ concealin’ nobody.”

When Muriel heard the men returning, she threw open the door and her eager glance scanned the group, hoping to find among them her new friend, Gene Beavers. “He wa’n’t thar, fust mate,” the old sea captain said gloomily, “an’ I figger it’s all my fault for bein’ so tarnal sot agin city chaps. I reckoned, one bein’ a scoundrel, they all was, like’s not.” Then, turning to Doctor Winslow, he added with spirit: “Lem, we won’t give up yit. We’ll throw out a drag net if need be. I’m goin’ along, wherever yo’ cruise to. Rilly gal can tend to the light for a spell. I couldn’t rest easy if I wa’n’t tryin’ to help locate the lad. The heft of this trouble comes from me being so tarnal sot about things.”

The physician placed a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “Look here, Ez,” he said, “neither you nor Rilla are to blame. The lad has not used good judgment, but older men than he is have failed in that, now and then. You mustn’t come with us. A heavy fog is rolling in and you might be needed any moment right here at the light. Some ship may send in a distress signal and Rilla is only a little girl, after all, only fifteen, and we mustn’t ask her to assume so serious a responsibility.”

While the physician was talking, the girl whom he had called “little” was pouring the tea she had made into four heavy cups and one of these she took to Doctor Winslow, saying, “Uncle Lem, drink this, please do, ’fore you go out agin into the wet fog, an’, too, thar’s a cup for each of you.”

The men seemed glad for the warmth of the beverage and then, when the cups had been drained, they started out, calling back that they would swing the red lanterns in a circle three times from the end of the town wharf if Gene Beavers was found that night.

When they were gone, Rilla removed her grandfather’s slicker and he sank down in his armchair and buried his face in his hands.

Muriel stood at his side, her arm about his neck, not knowing what to say.

Reaching up, the old man clasped the girl’s hand in his big brown one as he said: “Rilly gal, I figger yer ma was right, arter all. ‘Dad,’ says she, many’s the time, ‘it’s hate that brings the sorrow an’ trouble to the world an’ it’s love that brings in the happiness.’ Like’s not my little gal’d be livin’ now if I’d tried seein’ things *her* way; if I’d welcomed the man she wanted to marry, ’stead of hatin’ him an’ turnin’ him out. He went, when I tol’ him to, an’ he took my gal. I reckon it’s that same sort o’ hate that’s fetched this trouble to my ol’ messmate, Lem Winslow. I’m done wi’ it, Rilly gal, done wi’ hate, though I figger mos’ likely it’s too late.”

Muriel felt a hot tear splash on her hand. Pressing her fresh young cheek against the leathery one, she implored, “Don’ be talkin’ that way! How’s it too late, Grand-dad? We’ll begin all over, shall we, yo’ an’ me; we’ll begin lovin’ and not hate anyone at all, shall we, Grand-dad?”

The old man did not reply, but he held the girl's hand in a tighter clasp. Then rising and going to the window, he stood for a moment looking out into the darkness, waiting until the circling light would reveal the dory containing the three men.

“That fog is so tarnal thick, they're like to lose their bearin's an' thar'd be no savin' 'em if they got drug into the surf at the pint.”

Then, after a moment of intense thought, the old man whirled, his face set with a new determination. “Rilly gal, I'm goin' to do it,” he cried. “I'd oughtn't to, but I'll take the chance.” Then, noting the inquiring expression of the girl's face, the old man explained: “I'm a-goin' to hold the big lamp so 'twill shine steady toward town till they get into port. The Outer Ledge'll have to stay dark for a spell. It's a big chance. I'd ought not to take it, but, by giggers, I'm goin' to!”

CHAPTER VII. THE HEART OF CAP'N EZRA

Meanwhile the three men in the dory had pushed away from the small wharf on Windy Island and had started rowing into the thick, almost impenetrable blanket of fog, which, having swept in from the sea, had settled down over the inner harbor.

They could hear the melancholy drawn-out wail of the foghorn which was beyond the Outer Ledge. The two longshoremen who were with the doctor rowed toward the faint glimmer of red light, which could hardly be distinguished. In fact, there were times when the lights on the town wharf could not be seen at all, and once, when the roaring of the surf seemed nearer than it should be, they realized with sinking hearts that they had lost their bearings. Then it was that one of them uttered an exclamation of astonishment and alarm. "The big light!" he cried. "What'd ye s'pose has happened to it? Look ye! 'Tisn't swingin' like it should be. It's hittin' a course straight toward town."

Doctor Winslow, at the rudder, turned and looked over his shoulder at the looming black mass that was Windy Island. "Ezra is doing it to guide us," he said, "but he's taking a big chance." Then a sudden cry of warning: "Starboard, hard! We almost ran head-on into that old buoy that hasn't anchored a fishing smack since Jerry Mullet's boat went to the bottom."

"The big light came jest in the nick o' time, I swan if it didn't," Lute, in the bow, declared, as with a powerful stroke, he turned the dory so that it slipped past the buoy, barely scraping it.

"Straight ahead now. Give the fleet a wide berth," the doctor called. The men were pulling hard when one of them stopped rowing and listened. "Doc Winslow," he said, "tarnation take it, if I didn't hear a ghost right then a-moanin' in that old hulk of Sam Peters'. Like's not it's a warning for us of some kind."

Being superstitious, the longshoreman was about to pull away harder than before, when the doctor commanded: "Belay there! Hold your oars! That's not a ghost. There's someone in that boat. More than likely it's old Sam himself having one of his periodical spells. He won't need help if it is, but I can't pass by without finding out what is wrong. Thank heaven the light is steady, if all's well on the outer shoals."

It took but a moment, the fog being illumined, for the dory to draw up alongside of the boat that belonged to the frequently intoxicated fisherman Sam Peters. Not a sound did they hear as they made fast.

"I reckon 'twa'n't nothin', arter all." Hank Walley was eager to return to shore. "Like as not 'twa'n't."

Doctor Winslow listened intently. He, too, was anxious to reach the home port, knowing that, not until then, would his friend Captain Ezra start the big light swinging on its seaward course; but he lingered one moment. "What ho! Sam there?" he called. But there was no reply. The good doctor was about to give the command "Shove off. Get under way," when the sharp eyes of the youngest man, Lute, noted a movement of some dark object he had supposed was furled sail. Instantly he had leaped aboard the smack. Holding his lantern high, he uttered a cry that brought the doctor to his side. "By time!" Lute shouted. "It's the boy himself, but if he ain't dead, he's durn close to it."

It was indeed Gene Beavers, who, after resting a while on the cask-like buoy, had managed, with almost superhuman effort, to climb aboard the old fishing boat. Then he had lost consciousness; in fact, his breathing was so slight that the words of the longshoreman seemed about to be fulfilled.

The doctor did what he could to revive the lad; then wrapped him in an old sail cloth.

Ten minutes later, Rilla, standing by the side of Captain Ezra at a window in the tower, uttered a glad cry. "They're swingin' 'em, Grand-dad. They're swinging the two red lights! They've found him. They've found Gene Beavers."

“God be thanked!” the old man said, as he started the big lamp turning on its usual course. The fog had lifted out at sea and he scanned the dark waters anxiously, eagerly. It had been a tremendous chance that he had taken, and none but his Creator knew how constantly he had been praying to the One who rules the sea that all might be well. It was a strange thing for Captain Ezra to pray, but it seemed easier since hate had been banished from his heart. Muriel noticed a new expression in the face of the old man when, the next morning after breakfast, he said to her, beaming over his spectacles: “Put on yer Sunday riggin’s, Rilly gal. You’n me air goin’ to cruise over to Tunkett an’ find out if that city fellar is shipshape an’ sailin’ on even keel.”

The girl went around the table, and stooping, she pressed her warm young cheek against the wrinkled, leathery forehead.

The old man reached for her hand and held it in a firm clasp. Neither spoke, but both knew that, at last, the hatred of many years had left the heart of Captain Ezra.

CHAPTER VIII. A SECRET TOLD

Doctor Winslow was just leaving the room of his patient when he heard a familiar voice in the lower hall. Hurrying down the wide stairway, he saw standing near the door Cap'n Ezra with Muriel at his side.

"How's the lad comin'?" the keeper of the light asked eagerly, when greetings had been exchanged and the story of the finding of Gene had been told briefly.

"He'll pull through, I hope and believe," the doctor replied. "He is sleeping now and since he is so thoroughly exhausted he may sleep for a long time, but when he has recovered enough to sit up, I'll send over to the island for you, Rilla, if your grand-dad will permit you to come. Sometimes pleasant companionship does more than medicine to help young people to recuperate."

"I'd like to come," Muriel replied almost shyly, and yet eagerly. Then her hazel eyes were lifted inquiringly. "May I, Grand-dad?"

It was a hard moment for the old man who had been hating city folks for many years, but he hesitated only a second, then he said: "Lem, I sort o' feel as all this has been my fault and if yo' think the boy'll get on even keel quicker if fust mate here is on deck, now and then, yo' can count on it, Rilly gal will come."

Doctor Winslow held out his hand. "Thanks, Ezra," he said hastily. "You're more like what you used to be long ago and I'm mighty glad to see it." Then in an earnest tone, he added: "Gene will take the place to Muriel of the older brother that every girl in this world ought to have, some one near her own age to fight her battles, to protect her when the need arises. That's the sort of a friend Gene will be to your little girl, Ezra. I'll give you my word on it, because I know him, as I knew his father before him. A finer man never lived, and like the father is the son."

When Cap'n Ezra and Muriel were again on the main road, the girl said, "Grand-dad, bein' as we're in Tunkett, let's go over and s'prise Uncle Barney."

When Rilla had been a very little girl, at Doctor Winslow's suggestion, she had adopted that good man as an uncle, but when Captain Barney heard her prattling "Uncle Lem" he declared that he wasn't going to be left out of the family circle as far as she was concerned, and from that day the kindly old Irishman had been proud indeed to be called "Uncle Barney" by the little maid who was the idol of his heart.

They found the fisherman sitting in the sun in front of his cabin. He was whittling out a mast for a toy schooner that he was making for Zoeth Wixon, a little crippled boy who lived in the shack about an eighth of a mile farther along on the sand dunes.

Captain Barney looked up with a welcoming smile. Indeed his kindly Irish face fairly beamed when he saw who his visitors were. Rising, he limped indoors and brought out his one best chair, a wooden rocker with a gay silk patchwork tidy upon it.

All of the fisherfolk in the neighborhood had put together the Christmas before and had purchased the gift for the old bachelor, who was always doing some little thing to add to their good cheer.

"His house is that empty lookin', with nothin' to set on but boxes and casks," the mother of little Zoeth had said, "an' he's allays whittlin' suthin' to help pass the time away for my little Zo, or tellin' him yarns as gives him suthin' to think about fo' days. I'd like to be gettin' Cap'n Barney a present as would make his place look more homelike."

"So, too, would I," Mrs. Sam Peters had chimed in. "When my ol' man was laid up for two months las' winter, like's not we would have starved if it hadn't been for the fine cod that Cap'n Barney left at our door every day, an' fish bringin' a fancy price then, it bein' none too plenty."

When these women told their plan, it was found that all the families scattered about on the meadows near the sea had some kindness of Cap'n Barney's to tell about, and when the donated nickles and dimes and even quarters were counted, the total sum was sufficient to purchase a rocker in Mis' Sol Dexter's store. True, it had been broken a little, but Sam Peters, having once been ship carpenter, soon repaired it until it looked like new.

As for the patchwork tidy, the little crippled boy himself had been taught by his mother how to make that. Where to get the pretty silk pieces had indeed been a problem, for not one of the fishermen's wives had a bit of silk in her possession. It was then that Mrs. Sol Dexter did an almost unprecedented thing. She told how, the year before, her store would have burned up had it not been that "Cap'n Barney," being there at the time, had leaped right in and had thrown his slicker over the blaze that had started near where the gasoline was kept. "He knew how it might explode any minute," she said when recounting the tale, "but he took the chance." While she talked, Mrs. Sol was actually cutting a piece off the end of each roll of ribbon that she had in stock, and then she cut off lace enough to edge the tidy.

Captain Barney had been greatly pleased with the gift, and although he never sat on it himself, he never ceased admiring the chair and often wished his old mother in Ireland might have it in her cabin.

The visitors had not been there long, however, when Captain Ezra said, "Rilly gal, why don't yo' cruise around a spell? Yo'd sort o' like to go over to Wixon's, wouldn't yo' now, and see Lindy and Zoeth?"

The girl was indeed glad to go, for Lindy Wixon was near her own age. As soon as she was out of hearing, Captain Barney looked up from his whittling. "Well, skipper," he inquired, "what's the cargo that yo're wantin' to unload?"

Cap'n Ezra Bassett puffed on his favorite corncob pipe for several thoughtful moments before he answered his friend's question. Then, looking up to be sure that his "gal" was not returning, he uncrossed his legs and leaned forward.

"Barney, mate," he solemnly announced, "I've writ that letter I tol' you I was goin' to, some day. I reckon I've put in, shipshape, all I know about Rilly's father, but I don' want her to have it till arter yo've buried me out at sea. I cal'late that'll be time enough for Rilly to look him up. He's like to take better care of her, when I'm gone, than any one else, bein' as he is her own folks."

Captain Barney bristled. "I dunno as to that," he declared. "'Pears to me that Lem Winslow or meself ought to be her guardeen if yo' go to cruisin' the unknown sea ahead of us. How'r we to know her own pa cares a tarnal whoop for her. He hasn't been cruisin' 'round these waters huntin' her up, has he? Never's been known to navigate this way, sence – sence – " He paused. Something in the face of his friend caused him to leave his sentence unfinished. Ezra Bassett arose and looked around both corners of the shack. All that he saw was a stretch of rolling white sand with here and there a clump of coarse, wiry grass or a dwarfed plum bush.

Evidently satisfied that there was no one near enough to hear, he returned and, drawing his old armchair nearer the one occupied by Captain Barney, he said in a low tone: "I reckon 'twa'n't his fault, so to speak. I reckon 'twa'n't." Then, noting the surprised expression in the face of his friend, he continued: "Truth is, he doesn't even know there *is* a little gal; fact was, he never did know it." Then he hurried on to explain. "He'd gone West on business that couldn't wait, 'pears like, an' my gal reckoned as how that would be a mighty good time to come to Windy Island and get me to forgive her and him. They was livin' in New York, but she didn't get farther'n Boston when the little one came. I got a message to go to her at once. I went, but when I got there the doctor said as they both had died. *That* was the message they'd sent on to him, but; arter all, a miracle happened. The baby showed signs of life an' – an' what's more, she lived. I tol' the doctor he needn't send another message to the father. I said as I was the grand-dad, I'd tend to it and take care of the baby till he came."

While the old man talked, he had been studying a clump of wire grass in the sand at his feet. Pausing, he cast a quick glance at his listener, and then, as quickly looked away and out to sea. For the first time in the many years of their long friendship there was an accusing expression in the clear blue eyes of the Irishman.

“D’y think yo’ve acted honest, Ez?” Captain Barney inquired. “Wa’n’t it the same as stealin’ his gal?”

At that Captain Ezra flared. “Didn’t *he* steal *my* gal fust, if it comes to that? Turn about’s fair play, ain’t it?”

The old Irishman shook his head. “Dunno as ’tis, Ez,” he said slowly. “I reckon a person’s a heap happier doin’ the right thing himself, whether the other fellar does it or not.”

Captain Ezra Bassett felt none too comfortable. “Wall,” he said, “that’s why I wanted to have this talk with yo’. I got to thinkin’ lately of what would become of Rilly if I should get a sudden call across the bar, as the meeting-house hymn puts it, without havin’ left any word, or made any provisions; so I reckoned I’d tell yo’ as how I’ve writ that letter. I put it in the iron box on the shelf way up top o’ the tower where I keep the tools for regulatin’ the light.”

Captain Barney nodded. He knew the shelf well, for he had often helped clean the big lamp or aided in some needed adjustment.

“Where’d yo’ reckon he is now – Rilla’s dad?” he asked after they had puffed awhile in thoughtful silence.

“Dunno,” was the reply. “Never heard sense. I allays suspicioned as how he might have stayed anchored out West, but I *do* know where Rilly gal can go to find out, if need be, an’ I’ve put the address in the letter.” Then the old man rose, looking the picture of rugged health. “Not that I’m expectin’ to start in a hurry on the long v’yage for which no charts have been made,” he said, “but I sort o’ got to thinkin’ it’s well to be beforehand, an’ – ”

He did not finish the sentence, for a breeze, sweeping over the dunes, brought to them, not only the soft, salt tang of the sea, but also the notes of a girlish song. Both men turned to see a picture which rejoiced their hearts. Rilla, swinging her Sunday best hat by its ribbon strings, was skipping toward them over the hard sand, her long red-brown hair blowing about her shoulders, her face radiant as she sang.

Captain Ezra beckoned to her. “Yo-ho, Rilly gal!” he called. “It’s mid-morning by the sun and the big lamp’s to have a fine polishin’ today. I reckon the storms’ll come most any time now and the light needs to be its brightest then.” Turning to Captain Barney, he said in a low voice: “Keep it dark, mate, ’bout the letter in the box – till I’m gone – then tell her.”

When his two best friends had departed, Captain Barney sat long in front of his shack. He wondered what was to come of it all, but only the future could reveal that.

CHAPTER IX. A FIRST LETTER

Muriel had almost forgotten the banded box of foreign appearance which she had in her Treasure Cave. So many things of unusual interest had occurred of late that even so wonderful a box had taken a secondary place in her thoughts.

That afternoon Captain Ezra devoted to polishing the lamp, a task he would not permit Rilla to share, saying that peeling potatoes and the like was her part of the drudgery, and, as he never helped her with that, neither should she help with the lamp.

Muriel did not insist, for she believed that her grand-dad took a great deal of pride in tending to the big light all by himself. "I reckon he'd think he was gettin' old if he had to be helped," the girl soliloquized as she walked along the top of the bluff, the dog at her side.

They descended the trail toward that part of the beach where she had first seen the lad. For a time she stood silently gazing down at the spot where he had been on that never to be forgotten day. Suddenly she laughed aloud. Stooping, she patted the head of her long-haired companion.

"Shagsie, ol' dog," she chuckled gleefully, "yo' wouldn't be eatin' Gene Beavers up even when I tol' yo' to, would yo' now?" Then merrily she added: "I'll tell yo' a secret, ol' dog, if yo' won't be tellin' it." Then she whispered into the long shaggy ear: "I reckon I'm *glad* now that yo' wouldn't." Then, springing up, she scrambled down the rocks and ran along the narrow pebbly beach, the dog racing and barking at her heels. When they were just below the lighthouse Rilla paused and looked up at the small entrance to her cave.

"Shags," she suggested, "let's take another look at the treasure." Together they slowly ascended the perilously steep cliff where one unused to climbing could barely have found a foothold.

When the cave was reached Rilla uttered a little cry of eagerness, for under one of the straps on the box was a folded bit of paper.

Opening it, she looked at it, her cheeks flushed, her eyes glowing.

Doctor Winslow had tried to teach the girl to read, but, since he was the resident physician in a New York hospital most of the year, he had been able to make but little headway. Each autumn he took from one to two months' vacation, returning to the home of his boyhood for what he called an absolute rest, but the fisherfolk, who loved him, flocked to him for advice and help, and the kind, elderly man welcomed them gladly. Too, he gave to every one who came a bit of optimistic philosophy which did much toward keeping them well and happy during the months of his absence.

Muriel had seated herself upon the closed box and studied the note. Luckily the words were simple and plainly printed. She picked out one here and there that she knew, then suddenly rising she went to a crevice in the rocks and brought forth a Second Reader which the doctor had given her. She knew every word in it, but she could not always recognize the same words if they were out of the book. After an hour's diligent search, comparing the printed words with those in the note, she looked up, her expression joyous, exultant.

"Shagsie, ol' dog, I can read it! I can read every word. It's the fust letter as I ever had, an' Gene Beavers, 'twas, as left it for me." Then, as the faithful dog seemed to be interested, the girl slowly read aloud:

"Dear Storm Maiden: – I am going to try to reach town tonight. I hope to see you again, but if I do not I want you to know how much I like you. I wish girls were all as brave and kind as you are. Thank you and goodbye.

"Your friend,
"Gene Beavers."

When the reading was finished the girl sat for a long time looking out of the small opening at the gleaming blue waters beyond the cliff and her expression grew wistful and almost pensive. For the first time in her fifteen years she was wishing she had “learnin’.” Suddenly she sprang up, her face brightening. “Shags,” she said, “many’s the time Uncle Lem has said ‘regrettin’ doesn’t get you anywhere. It’s what you’re doin’ *now* that counts.’ We’ll learn to read, Shags, ol’ dog! I dunno how, but we’re goin’ to!”

That evening as Rilla sat close to her grand-dad she wanted to ask him if she might attend the Tunkett school, but he seemed hardly to know that she was there so occupied was he with his own thoughts, and so she decided to await a more opportune time.

The truth was that Captain Ezra could not forget the accusing expression in the Irish blue eyes of his old mate, nor the question, “D’y reckon yo’re actin’ honest, Ez? Hasn’t it been the same as stealin’ his little gal?”

That night, long after Muriel was asleep in her loft room, Captain Ezra sat at the kitchen table trying to compose a letter to the father of Rilla, but each attempt was torn to shreds and many times the old man stealthily crossed the kitchen floor and placed the bits in the stove.

At last he thought, “I reckon Barney’s right, but thar’s no tarnation hurry. I’ve signed articles to tend to this light till I’m a long ways older’n I am tonight.”

So thinking, he went to his bed, meaning soon to send the letter to Muriel’s father, but one thing and another occupied his time and the letter remained unwritten.

CHAPTER X. THE HOPED FOR MESSAGE

Each morning when Rilla had finished her task of “swabbing decks,” as Captain Ezra called it, and had put the kitchen and small bedrooms into shipshape (there were no other rooms in the lean-to adjoining the light), she would stand in the open door gazing out across the harbor, waiting, watching for what she barely confessed to herself. But on the third day her anxiety concerning her new friend’s condition overcame her timidity at broaching the subject and after breakfast she ventured: “Grand-dad, will yo’ be cruisin’ to town today?”

The old man shook his head. “No, Rilly gal,” he replied, “I wasn’t plannin’ to. Yo’ don’ need ’nother hair ribbon, do yo’, or – ” He had been filling a lantern as he spoke, but suddenly he paused and looked up. “Sho, now, fust mate, are yo’ prognosticatin’ ’bout that city chap?”

He arose and looked out across the water, shading his eyes with his big leathery hand.

“I reckon ’tis mos’ time for Lem to be lettin’ us know how things are comin’. I sartin do hope the young fellar is navigatin’ that frail craft of his into smoother waters. ’Pears like Doctor Lem ought to – ”

He said no more, for the girl had suddenly clutched his arm as she cried excitedly: “Look yo’, Grand-dad! I’m sure sartin there’s little Sol puttin’ out from the wharf in that Water Rat boat o’ his. Now he’s dippin’ along and scuddin’ right this way.”

“Yo-o! I reckon he has a message for us. More’n like, Uncle Lem is sendin’ him.”

The two gazed intently at the small boat, which did indeed seem to be headed directly for Windy Island. Rilla, her heart tripping, unconsciously held tighter to the arm of the old man.

“Pore little girl,” he thought, “was she that lonesome for young company?” He sighed and placed a big hand over the slender brown one. He felt the tenseness of the girl’s arm. “Grand-dad,” she said tremulously, “what if the message is that Gene Beavers has died. I reckon ’twould be all my fault. I’d ought to have brought him right up to the house an’ tol’ you straight out just what had happened.”

Anxiously they watched the oncoming boat. The wind, which had been fitful all the morning, dwindled to the softest breeze, then a calm settled over the harbor and the sail of the Water Rat flapped idly.

“Why don’t little Sol row?” Muriel exclaimed impatiently. Then, eagerly, “Grand-dad, may I go out in the dory an’ meet him? May I?”

“No use to, Rilly gal. The wind’s veered an’ thar goes Sol now on a tack. Yo’ can’t be rowin’ zigzag all over the harbor.” Then, as the boy seemed to be leisurely sailing away from the island, the old man stooped and picked up his lantern.

“Sho, fust mate,” he said, “I reckon we’re ’way off our bearin’s. Little Sol wa’n’t headin’ this way, ’pears like. Just cruisin’ about aimless, like he often does.”

The girl also decided that this was the truth, and so she went indoors to procure the week’s mending. When she returned to the armchair outside the lighthouse she saw that the Water Rat was scudding over the dancing waves in quite the opposite direction.

Captain Ezra had climbed the tower. Rilla seated herself and soon her fingers flew as she sewed a patch upon a blue denim garment, while her thoughts returned to Gene Beavers. She recalled that he had looked frail, but she had supposed his paleness was due to the fact that he lived in the city. Too, she realized that she had been hoping for days that Doctor Winslow would send a message telling her that Gene Beavers was sitting up and that she might visit him, for, wonder of wonders, her grand-dad had said that she might go.

Looking up from the garment a few moments later, her glance again swept over the gleaming waters of the harbor. The Water Rat was nowhere to be seen. Alarmed, the girl sprang to her feet

and ran to the top of the steep flight of steps leading down to the shore. Her anxiety was quickly changed to joy, for clattering up toward her was the freckle-faced boy, and a grin of delight spread over his homely features when he saw her.

“Rilly, look’t that, will yo’?” he sang out as he held up a silver dollar. “Made it as easy as sailin’. Yo’ couldn’t guess how, I bet. Could yo’ now?”

The girl shook her head and then listened eagerly, breathlessly, hoping that in reality she did know. Nor was she wrong.

“Well,” the boy confided, “that city guy that’s up to Doc Winslow’s, he ’twas guv it to me, if I’d fetch a note over to Windy Island and hand it to Cap’n Ezra and to no one else, says he.”

Rilla’s eyes shone like stars. Running to the door at the foot of the spiral stairs that led up to the light, she shouted: “Grand-dad! Yo-o! Are yo’ a-comin’ down or shall we come up? Little Sol’s here an’ he’s got a message for yo’.”

“Sho now, is that so? I snum yo’ was right, arter all, in yer calcalations, Rilly gal,” the beaming old man said as he descended the circling flight of stairs. “What’s in the message that Lem sent? Is the city fellar – ”

“We dunno,” Muriel interrupted. “’Twas Gene Beavers himself as sent the note and he said as it was to be given to no one but just yo’.”

The old sea captain was pleased. The boy was square and aboveboard, that was evident. “Wall,” he said as he reached the ground, “little Sol, hist up the message.”

The small boy thrust his hand in one of his pockets, but drew it empty. “Jumpin’ frogs!” he ejaculated. “If I didn’t go an’ change my jacket arter the city guy give me that letter. I reckon as how I’ll have to go back arter it.” But suddenly his expression changed and he beamed up at them. “By time, I rec’lect now! I stowed it in here for safe keepin’.” As he spoke he removed his cap and took the note from the ragged lining. He handed the envelope to the captain and then started running toward the steps leading to the beach, but the old man recalled him. “Ho, thar, little Sol, lay to a spell. I reckon there may be an answer to go ashore with you.”

The boy returned slowly and the girl eagerly watched the captain as he read the message which the note contained. Muriel knew by the expression in her grandfather’s face that the old-time struggle was going on in his heart, but it didn’t last long.

“Is Gene Beavers a-sittin’ up?” the girl asked.

“Pears like he is,” Captain Ezra said as he folded the note and placed it in his pocket. “Lem’s writ for you to cruise over to town with little Sol and stay a spell.”

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