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Curlie Carson Listens In

By
ROY J. SNELL



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Curlie Carson Listens In

CHAPTER I

A STRANGE MESSAGE

Behind locked and barred doors, surrounded by numberless mysterious-looking instruments, sat Curlie Carson. To the right of him was a narrow window. Through that window, a dizzy depth below, lay the city. Its square, flat roofs formed a mammoth checker-board. Between the squares criss-crossed the narrow black streets. Like a white chalk-line, drawn by a careless child, the river wound its crooked way across this checker-board.

To the left of him was a second narrow window. Through this he caught the dark gleam of the broad waters of Lake Michigan. Here and there across the surface twinkled the lamps of a vessel, or flashed the warning beacon of a lighthouse.

A boy in his late teens was Curlie. Slender, dark, with coal-black eyes, with curls of the same hue clinging tightly to his well-shaped head, he had the strong profile and the smooth tapering fingers that might belong to an artist, a pickpocket or a detective.

An artist Curlie was, an artist in his line—radio. Although still a boy, he was already an operator of the "commercial, extra first-class" type. So far as license and title were concerned, he could go no higher. A pickpocket he was not, but a detective he might be thought to be; a strange type of detective, however, a detective of the air; the kind that sits in a small room hundreds of feet in air and listens; listens to the schemes, the plots, the counterplots of men and to the wild babble of fools. His task was that of aiding in the capture of knaves and the silencing of foolish folks who used the newly-discovered radiophone as their mouthpiece.

"Foolish people," Major Whittaker, Curlie's superior, who had called him to the service, had said, "do quite as much damage to the radio service as crooks. Fools and knaves must alike be punished and your task will be to help catch them."

Wonderful ears had Curlie Carson, perhaps the most wonderful ears in the world. In catching the fine shadings of diminishing sounds which came to him through the radio compass, there was not a man who could excel him.

So Curlie sat there surrounded by wire-wrapped frames, coils, keys, buttons, switches, motors,

dry-cells, storage batteries and all the odds and ends which made up the equipment of the most perfect listening-in station in the world.

As he sat there with Joe Marion, his pal, by his side, his brow was wrinkled in thought. He was reviewing the events of the previous night. At 1:00 a.m., the witching hour when the crooked ones, the mean ones, come creeping forth like ghosts to carry on doubtful conversations by radio, a strange thing had happened. A message had gone crashing out through space. Wave lengths 1200 meters long sped it on its way. There was power enough behind it to carry it from pole to pole, but all it had said was:

12

"A slight breeze from the west."

Three times the message had been repeated, then had come silence. There had been no answer though Curlie had listened long for it on 1200 meter wave lengths and five other lengths as well.

Sudden as had come the message, fleet as had been its passing, it had not been too fleet for Curlie. He had compassed its direction; measured its distance. On a map of the city which lay before him he had made a pencil cross and said:

"It came from there." And he was right for, strange as it may seem, an expert such as Curlie can sit in a hidden tower room such as his was and detect the exact location of a station whose message has set his ear drums a quiver.

The location had puzzled him. There was not a station in the city licensed to send 1200 meter wave lengths. The spot he had marked was the location of the city's most magnificent apartment hotel. The hotel possessed a radiophone set. Its antenn[ae], hung high upon the building's roof, were capable of carrying that 1200 meter message with all that power behind it, but the radio equipment of the hotel had no such power.

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"Something crooked about that," he had mumbled to himself.

His first impulse had been to call the police. He did not act upon it. They might blunder. The thing might get out. This law-breaker might escape. Not five people in all the world knew of Curlie's detecting station. He would work out this problem alone.

Now, as he sat thinking of it, he decided to confide this new secret to his pal, Joe Marion.

"Yes," he told himself, "I'll tell him about it at chow."

At this moment his mind was recalled to other matters. New trouble was brewing.

"A slight breeze from the west," his mind went over the message automatically, "and the wind was due east. Don't mean much as it stands, but I suspect means a lot more than it seems to."

14

Just above Curlie's head there hung a receiver. To the right and left of him were two loud-speakers. Before him ranged three others. Each one of these was tuned to a certain wave length, 200, 350, 500, 600, 1200 meters. Each was modulated down until sounds came to Curlie's delicately tuned ear drums as little more than whispers. A concert was being broadcast on 350. The booming tones of a baritone had been coming in as softly and sweetly as a mother's lullaby. But now Curlie's ear detected interference.

Instantly he was all alert. The receiver was clamped down over his ears, a half dozen switches were sent, snap, snap, snap. There followed a dead silence. Then in a shrill boyish voice, together with the baritone's renewal of his song, there came:

"I want the world to know that I am a wireless operator, op-er-a-a-tor. Hoop-la! Tra-la!"

15

Curlie smiled in spite of his vexation. He acted quickly and with precision. His slender fingers guided a coil-wound frame from right to left. Backward and forward it glided, and as it moved the boyish "Hoop-la" rose and fell. Almost instantly it came to a standstill.

"There! That's it!" he breathed.

Then to Joe Marion, "It's a shame about those kids. They won't learn to play the game square. Don't know the rules and don't care. Think we can't catch 'em, I guess."

His hand went out for a telephone.

"Superior 2231," he purred.

"That you, 2231? Just a moment."

He touched a key here, another there. He twisted a knob there, then: "That you, Mulligan?" he half whispered. "Good! There's a kid on your beat got a wireless running wild. Yes. Broke in on the concert. Don't be hard on him. No license? Yes, guess that's right. Take away his sending set. Give him another chance? Let him listen in. What's that? Location? Clarendon Street, near Orton Place; about second door, I'd say. That's all right. Thanks, yourself."

16

Dropping the receiver on its hook he tossed off his headpiece, snapped at five buttons, then settled back in his chair.

"These kids'll be the death of me yet," he grumbled. "Always breaking in, not meaning any harm but doing harm all the same. I don't feel so very sore about them though. It's the fellows that go

in for long wave lengths and high power, that break in on 500, 1200 and 1800, that do the real damage. Had a queer case last night. Looks crooked, too." He was silent for a moment then he said reflectively:

"Guess that's about all till midnight. It's after midnight that the queer birds come creeping out. I'm going to tell you about that one last night, over the ham sandwich, dill pickle and coffee. No use to try now—we'd sure get broken in on."

Joe Marion, who had been taken on as an understudy by Curlie, was at the present time working without pay. At times when trouble developed on two different wave lengths at once, he took a hand and helped out. For the most part he merely looked, listened and learned.

His pal he held in the greatest admiration. And who would not? Had he not, when this great big new thing, the radiophone, came leaping right into the world from nowhere, been able to take a hand from the very beginning and become at once a valuable servant of his beloved country? Had he not at times detected meddlers who were endangering the lives of men upon the high seas? Had he not at one time received the highest of commendations from the great chief of this secret service of the air?

To Joe there was something weirdly fascinating about the whole business. Here they were, two boys in the tower of the highest building in a great city. Five people knew of their presence. These five were high up in the radio secret service. No message sent out by them could ever be traced back to its source. They did not use the air. That would be dangerous, easily traced. They did not use the telephone alone. That, too, would be dangerous. But when a radiophone had been connected to the telephone wire and tuned to a certain wave length, then they talked and not even the person they talked with would ever know whence came the message. This was a necessary precaution for, from this very tower, dangerous bands of criminals, gangs of smugglers, and all other types of law-breakers would ultimately be brought to justice. And if these but knew of the presence of this boy in his tower room, some dark night that tower would be rocked by an exploding bomb and the boy in his room would be shaken to earth like a young mud-wasp in his nest.

"I'll tell you," said Curlie, as he rose to answer a tap on the door, "I believe that affair last night was some big thing; but what it was I can't even guess."

He opened the door to let in Coles Masters, his relief, then motioning to Joe he took his cap and left the room. Down the winding stairs which led to the elevator several stories lower down they made their way in silence, at last to enter a cage and be silently dropped to the ground hundreds of feet below.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING BIG

"You see," Curlie began as he crossed his slim legs beside a small table in an all-night lunch room, buried somewhere in the deep recesses of this same skyscraper, "that fellow sent the message about the easterly breeze that blew west and I located the station at that hotel. This morning I went over to see how the place looked. It's a wonderful hotel, that one; palm garden in the middle of it, marble columns, fountain, painted sheet iron ceiling that'd make you dizzy to look at, and the finest dressed people you ever saw walking around everywhere.

"Well, I found my way to the sending room of the radiophone and right away the operator wanted to throw me out; said I was a fresh kid and all that. But when I showed him my papers, he calmed down a lot and showed me everything he had.

"I saw right away it wasn't his equipment that had sent that message—that'd be like sending a Big Bertha bomb into Paris with a twenty-two caliber rifle. He just naturally didn't have the power, that's all. So I didn't tell him anything about it; just walked out and went around back to where I could see the way his wires ran from the sending room to the antenna.

"I hadn't any more than got there and had one look-up when along strolls a man who wants to know what I'm looking at. I saw right away that he wasn't a hotel employee for he didn't wear either a bandmaster's uniform nor a cutaway coat, so I just smiled and said:

"Got a girl friend up there on the sixteenth floor. She's leaving this morning and arranged to drop her trunk down to me so's not to have to tip the porter.

"Well, sir, I hadn't more than said that than a girl did pop her head out of a sixteenth floor window and stare straight down at me.

"The fellow actually dodged. Guess he thought the trunk was due any minute.

"Funny part of it was the girl actually seemed interested in me, just as if she had met me

somewhere before. Of course she was too high up for me to tell what she was like, but it made me mighty curious. I counted the windows to right and left so I could find that room if I wanted to. The window was only the third to the right from where the lead wire to the antenna went up.

"Well, then, that fellow—"

"Mr. Carson?" a voice interrupted Curlie. "Anyone here by the name of Carson?" It came from the desk-clerk of the eating place.

"That's me," exclaimed Curlie, jumping up.

"Telephone."

"All right. Be back in a minute, Joe." Curlie was away to answer the call.

"Lo. That you, Curlie?" came through the receiver. "This is Coles Masters. Got a bad case—extra bad. Can't understand it. Fellow's sending 600 meter waves, with enough power to cross the Atlantic." 23

"Six hundred!" exclaimed Curlie in a tense whisper. "Why, that's what they use for S.O.S. at sea! It's criminal. Endangers every ship in distress. Five years in prison for it. Get him, can't you?"

"Can't. That's the trouble. Every time I think I've got him spotted he seems to move."

"To move!"

"Yes, sir."

"That's queer! I'll be up right away."

"Come on," exclaimed Curlie, grabbing his hat and dragging Joe to his feet. "It's a big one. Moves, he says. Sends 600; big power. Bet it's that same hotel fellow. Gee whiz! Supposing it turned out to be that sixteenth story girl and she caught me spying on her. I tell you it's something big!"

Impatient at the slowness of the up-shooting elevator, Curlie at last leaped out before the iron door at the top was half open, then two steps at a time sprang up a flight of stairs. Out of breath, he arrived at the final landing, sprang through the door to the secret tower room, then seizing his headpiece, sank into a chair. 24

By a single move of the hand, Coles Masters indicated the radio-compass he had been listening in on.

"That's where he was, last time he spoke," he grumbled, "but no telling where he'll be next. He's been dodging all over that stretch of country."

Curlie's fingers moved rapidly. He adjusted the coil of a radio-compass here, another there and still another here. He twisted the knob of each to the 600 mark, then, twisting the tuning knobs, lined them all up to receive on the same wave length. The winding of each was set at a slightly different angle from any other.

"That about covers him," he mumbled. "Get the distance?"

"Near as I could make out," said Coles Masters, "it was from ten to fifteen miles. He moves toward us, then away at times, just as he does to right and left." 25

"Hm," sighed Curlie, resting his chin on his hands. "That's a new dodge, this moving business. Complicates things, that does."

For a time he sat in a brown study. At last he spoke again, this time quite as much to himself as to the other:

"Folks don't move unless they have a way to move. That fellow has some means of locomotion. Anyway," he sighed, "it's not our friend of the big hotel unless—unless he or she or whoever it is has taken to locomotion, and that's not likely. Not the same side of the city. Out near the forest preserve."

"Yes, or a little beyond," said Coles.

"What do you think," asked Curlie suddenly, "has he got an automobile or an airplane?"

"Can't tell," said Coles thoughtfully. "You can't really judge distances in air accurately. There are powerful equipments which might be mounted on either automobiles or airplanes."

"The thing that puzzled me, though, was his line of chatter. All about some 'map, old French,' and a lot of stuff like that. I—" 26

Suddenly he broke off. A grinding sound had come from one of the loud speakers. There followed in a clear, strong voice:

"Map O.K. Old French is amazing. Good for a million."

Curlie's fingers were busy once more as a tense look drew his forehead into a scowl.

"About fifteen miles," he whispered.

Then the voice resumed:

"Time up the bird. When?"

A tense silence ensued. Then, faint, as if from far away, yet very distinctly there came the single word:

"Wednesday." This was followed by three letters distinctly pronounced: "L.C.W."

A second later came the strong voice in answer: "A.C.S."

"That," said Curlie as he settled back in his chair, "in my estimation ends the night's entertainment. But the nerve of the fellow!" he exploded. "Sending that kind of rot on six hundred. Why, at this very moment some disabled ship might be struggling in a storm on the Great Lakes or even on the Atlantic, and this jumble of words would muddle up their message so its meaning would be lost and the ship with it. The worst I could wish for such a fellow is that he be dropped into the sea with some means of keeping afloat but with neither food nor drink and a ship nowhere in sight." 27

If Curlie had known how exactly this wish was to be granted in the days that were to come, he might have experienced some strange sensations.

He straightened up and placed a dot on the map before him.

"That's where he was. I'll motor out in the morning and have a look at things. May discover some clew."

Curlie was a bright American boy of the very best type. Like most American boys who do not have riches thrust upon them, when he wanted a thing he made it or made a way to get it. Three years previous he had wanted an automobile—wanted it awfully. And his total capital had been \$49.63. He had been wanting that car for some time when an express train hit a powerful roadster on a crossing near his home. 28

Having flocked in with the throng to view the twisted remains of the car, he had been struck with an idea. This idea he had put into action. The railroad had settled with the owner for the car. They had the wreck of it on their hands. Curlie bought it for twenty-five dollars.

To his great delight he had found the powerful motor practically uninjured. The driving gear too, with the exception of one cog wheel, was in workable order. The remainder of the car he sold to a junk dealer for five dollars. It was twisted and broken beyond redemption.

He had next searched about for a discarded chassis on which to mount his gears and motor. This search rewarded, he had proceeded to assemble his car. And one fine day he sailed out upon the street with the "Humming Bird," as he had named her. 29

"Better call her 'Gravel Car,'" Joe had said when he saw that she had no body at all and that he must ride with his feet thrust straight out before him in a homemade seat bolted to a buckboard-like platform.

But when, on a level stretch of road, Curlie had "let her out," Joe had at once acquired an immense respect for the Humming Bird. "For," he said later, "she can hum and she can go like a streak of light, and that's about all any humming bird can do."

No further messages of importance having drifted in to him from the outer air, Curlie, an hour before dinner, made his way down to the street and, having warmed up the Humming Bird's motor, muttered as he sprang into the seat: "I'll just run out there and see what I see."

A half hour later, just as the first gray streak of dawn was appearing, he curved off onto a gravel road. Here he threw his car over to one side and, switching on a flashlight, steered with one hand while he bent over the side to examine the left-hand track. 30

There had been a light rain at ten that night. Since that time a heavy car with diamond-tread tires had passed along the road, leaving its tracks in certain soft, sandy spots.

"Maybe that's him," Curlie murmured.

A little farther on, stopping his machine, he got out and walked along the road. Examining the surface closely, he walked on for five rods, then wheeled about and made his way back to the car.

"He was over this road three times last night. That looks like a warm scent. Can't tell, though. My friend might not have been in a car at all; might have been in a plane.

"We'll have a look at the very spot." He twirled the wheel and was away.

A half mile farther down the road, he paused to look at a map. "Not quite here," he murmured. "About a quarter mile farther."

The car crept over another quarter of a mile. When he again came to a halt he found himself on a stretch of paved road. "This is the spot from which the last message was sent. Tough luck!" he muttered. "Can't tell a thing here." 31

Glancing to his right, he sat up with a start. He had suddenly become aware of the fact that he was just before the gate of the estate of J. Anson Ardmore, reputed to be the richest man of the

city.

"Huh!" Curlie grunted. "Car must have stood about here when that last message was sent. Maybe it went up that lane. Maybe it didn't, too. J. Anson's got a son, about my age I guess. Vincent they call him. He might be up to something. There's a girl, too, sixteen or so. Can't tell what these rich folks will do."

He stepped down the rich man's private drive, but here the surface of crushed stone was so perfectly kept that no telltale mark was to be seen.

He did not venture far, as he had no relish for being caught trespassing on such an estate without some good explanation for his conduct. Just at that moment he had no desire to explain.

32

As he turned to go back, he caught the thud-thud of hoof beats along the private drive.

Fortunately the abundant shrubbery hid him from view. Hardly had he reached the machine and assumed the attitude of one hunting trouble in his engine when a girl rounded a corner at full gallop.

Dressed in full riding costume and mounted on a blooded horse, she swung along as graceful as a lark. As she came into the public highway she flashed Curlie a look and a smile. Then she was gone.

Curlie liked the smile even if it did come from one of the "four hundred."

"Gee! Old Humming Bird," he exclaimed as he patted his car, "did she mean that smile for you or for me? So there might be a girl in the case, same as there seems to be in that one over at the hotel? Girl in most every case. What if she sent those messages and I found her out? That would sure be tough.

"But business is business!" He set his mouth grimly. "You can't fool with old Uncle Sam, not when you're endangering the lives of some of his bravest sons at sea."

33

He threw in the clutch and drove slowly along the road. Twice he paused to examine the tracks made the night before. Each time he discovered marks of the diamond tread.

"That radiophone was mounted on a car," he decided; "I'll stake my life on that. Now if he keeps it up, how am I to catch him?"

CHAPTER III

A WHISPER IN THE NIGHT

34

The next night found Curlie in the secret tower room alone. Joe Marion was away helping to run down a case of "malicious interference."

It was curious business, this work of the radio secret service. Though he had been at it for months, Curlie had never quite got used to it. A detective he was in the truest sense of the word, yet how different from the kind one reads about in books.

He laughed as he thought of it now. Then as his tapering fingers adjusted a screw, his brow became suddenly wrinkled in thought. He was troubled by the two cases which had lately developed: the one at the hotel and that other, the station that moved. How was he to locate that powerful secret station in the hotel? How was he to discover the owner of that mysterious moving radio? He could not answer these questions. And yet somehow they must be answered. He knew that.

35

The operator in the hotel was sending on 1200 meter wave lengths. State messages were constantly being sent across the Atlantic on 1200; messages of the greatest importance. There was a conference of nations at that moment going on in Europe. America's representative must be kept in constant touch with the government officials at Washington. If this person at the hotel persisted in sending messages on 1200 meter wave lengths an important message might at any moment be blurred or lost.

Not less important was the breaking in of this moving operator on 600. This was the wave length used by ships and by harbor stations. Great steamships sometimes waited for hours to get a message ashore on 600. If this person were to be allowed to break in upon them they might wait hours longer. Thousands of dollars would be lost. And then, as we have said before, the message of some ship in distress might be lost because of this person's interference.

36

"When, oh, when," sighed Curlie, "will people become used to this new thing, the radiophone? When will they learn that it is a great, new servant of mankind and not a toy? When will they take time to instruct themselves regarding the rights of others? When will they develop a conscience which will compel them to consider those rights?"

The answer which came to his mind was, "Perhaps never. But little by little they will learn some things. It is my duty not alone to detect but to teach."

He shifted uneasily in his chair, then held his ear close to the loud speaker tuned to 200. A message came floating in to him across the air, a mysterious whispered message.

"Hello, Curlie," it said. "You don't know me, but you have seen me—"

Automatically Curlie's fingers moved the radio-compass backward and forward while his mind gauged the distance. His right hand scrawled some figures on a pad, and all the time his ears were strained to catch the whisper. 37

"I have seen you," it went on, "and I like your looks. That's why I'm talking now."

For a second the whisper ceased. There was something awe-inspiring about that whisper. As he sat in his secret chamber away up there against the sky, Curlie felt as if some spirit-being was floating about out there in the sky on a fleecy cloud and pausing now and then to whisper to him.

"I saw you," the whisper repeated. "You are in very grave danger. He is a bold and treacherous man. It's big, Curlie, *big!*" The whisper rose shrilly. "But you must be careful. You must not let him know the place where you listen in. I don't know where it is. But I do know you listen in. Be careful—careful—careful, c-a-r-e-f-u-l—" The whisper trailed off into space, to be lost in thin air.

Wiping the beads of perspiration from his face, Curlie sat up. "Well, now," he whispered softly to himself, "what do you know about that?" 38

"One thing I do know," he told himself. "I'd swear it was a girl's whisper, though how you can tell a girl's whisper is more than I know. Question is: Which one is it—hotel station or the one that moves?"

For a moment his brow wrinkled in thought. Then with an exclamation of disgust he exclaimed:

"That's easy! I've got their location!"

He figured for a few seconds, then put a pencil point on a certain spot on his map.

"There!" he muttered. "It's the hotel, the exact spot."

Suddenly he started. There came the rattle of a key in the door.

"Oh!" he exclaimed as Coles Masters shoved the door open, "it's you. I'm glad you're here. Got something I want to look into. Want to bad. Mind if I take an extra hour?"

"Nope."

"All right. See you later." With a bound he was out of the door and down the stairs. 39

"That boy," muttered Coles Masters, with a grin, "will either die young or become famous. Only Providence knows which it will be."

Curlie did not leave the elevator at the first floor. Dropping down to the sub-basement, he wound his way in and out through a labyrinth of dimly lighted halls, at last to climb a stair to the first basement. Then, having passed into his accustomed eating place, he paused long enough to purchase a Swiss cheese sandwich, after which, with cap pulled well down over his eyes, he made his way up a second flight of stairs into the outer air.

He shivered as he emerged into the open street. Whether this chill came from the damp cool of the night or from nervous excitement, he could not tell. The memory of the whispered warning bore heavily upon his mind.

Turning his face resolutely in the direction of the hotel, he walked three blocks, then hailed a passing taxi. When the taxi dropped him, a few minutes later, he was still four blocks from the point of his destination. Covering this distance with rapid strides, he came to the rear of the hotel. There, dodging past a line of waiting taxis, he came at length to a dark corner where a stone bench made an angle with the wall of a building directly behind the hotel. 40

Crouching in this corner, he glanced rapidly from right to left to learn whether or not his arrival had been detected. Satisfied that for the moment he was safe, he cast a glance upward to where the aerials of the radiophone glistened in the moonlight. From that point he allowed his gaze to drop steadily downward until it reached the windows of the sixteenth floor. There it remained fixed for a full moment.

There came from between his teeth a sudden intake of breath.

Had he seen some movement at the window to the right of the wires that led to the aerials? He must see, no matter how great the risk.

Drawing a small pair of binoculars from his pocket, he fixed them on the spot. He then turned a screw at the side of the binocular and suddenly there appeared upon the wall of the building a round spot of brilliant light. The size of a plate, this mysterious spot moved rapidly backward and forward until it at last rested upon the wires by the window. 41

"Ah!" came in an involuntary whisper from the boy's lips.

A hand, the slender, graceful hand of a girl had been clearly outlined against the wall. Quickly as it had been withdrawn, Curlie had seen that between the thumb and finger of that hand was the end of a wire.

"Been tapping the aerial. A girl!" he muttered incredulously. "And it was she who whispered to me out of the night."

He had been crouching low. Now he rose, stretched himself, pocketed his instrument and was about to make his way out of the yard when, with the suddenness of a tiger, a body launched itself upon his back.

So unexpected was the assault that the boy's body closed up like a jack knife. He fell, face down, completely doubled up, with his face between his knees. 42

"Now I got yuh!" was snarled into his ear. The weight on his back was crushing. He could scarcely breathe.

"You—you have," he managed to groan.

"You'll come along," said the voice.

Curlie did not speak nor stir. The weight was partly lifted from his back. The man had dropped one foot to the ground.

Now Curlie, had he been properly exercised for it when he was a child, might have turned out a fair contortionist. He was exceedingly slim and limber and had learned many of the tricks of the contortionist. He had done this merely to amuse his friends. Now the tricks stood him in good stead.

He did not attempt to rise by straightening up, as most persons would have done. When the pressure grew less, he lay still doubled up, face down upon the ground.

This gave him two advantages. It led his assailant to believe him injured in some way and at the same time left him in position for the next move. 43

When the pressure had been sufficiently removed for his purpose, he took a quick, strong breath, then with a rush which set every muscle in action, he thrust his head between his knees, gripped his own ankles and did a double turn over which resembled nothing so much as a boulder rolling down hill.

The next instant, finding himself free, he sprang to his feet, dodged behind a taxi, shot past three moving cars, leaped to the pavement, skirted a wall, then dodged into an alley.

Down this alley there was a doorway. Into the shadow of this doorway he threw himself. There was a hole in the wooden door. A hook could be reached through the hole. The hook quickly lifted, he found himself inside a narrow court at the back of a large apartment building. There was a driveway from this court into the street beyond.

Assuming a natural pace, he made his way down this driveway and out into the street where, with a low whistled tune, he made his way back toward the heart of the city. Five blocks farther down he paused to adjust his clothing. 44

"Wow! but that was a close one," he muttered. "Don't know who my heavy friend was but he sure wanted to detain me for some reason or other. But say!" he mused; "how about that girl? Hope I didn't get her in bad by flashing that light on her hand."

"But then," he thought more soberly, "perhaps she is the principal bad one. Perhaps she is whispering on 200 just to mislead me. Who knows? You've got to be wise as a serpent when you play this game, that's what you've got to be. There's just two kinds of radio detectives, the quick and the dead." He chuckled dryly.

"Well, I guess Coles Masters will think I'm one of the dead ones if I don't rush on."

Hurrying to the next street, he boarded a car to make his way back to the secret lower room. 45

During his absence things had been happening in the mysterious radio world that hangs like a filmy ghost-land above the sleeping world.

CHAPTER IV

A GAME FOR TWO

As Curlie slipped noiselessly through the door into the secret tower room, he was seized by the arm and dragged into his chair. 46

"Man! where have you been?" It was Coles Masters. He spoke in an excited whisper. "Listen to that! It's the second message. He'll repeat it again. They always do."

As Curlie listened, his face grew grave with concern. The message came from the head station of the radiophone secret service bureau. That station was located in New York. The message was a reprimand. Kindly, friendly but firmly, it told Curlie that for two nights now someone in his area had been breaking in on 600. Coast-to-ship messages had been disturbed. Once an S. O. S. from a disabled fishing schooner had barely escaped being lost. Something must be done about it at once! By Curlie! In Chicago!

47

With parted lips and bated breath Curlie listened to the message as it came to him in code. Then, with trembling fingers, he adjusted a lever, touched a button, turned a screw and dictated to a station in another part of the city his answering O.K. to the message.

"Of course," he said to Coles, as he lifted the receiver from his head, "that means that this fellow that races all over the map has been at it again to-night."

"About an hour ago," said Coles, wrinkling his brow.

"What did you do about it?"

"What was there to do? I tried to locate him. He danced about, first here, then there. I marked his locations. They were never the same. See," he pointed to the map. "I numbered them. He spoke from five different points."

"What did he say?"

"It's all written down there," Coles motioned to a pad. "Can't make head nor tail to it. Something about a map, an airplane, a boat and a lot of gold."

48

"What kind of voice?"

"Sounded young. Some boy in late teens, I'd say. Though it might have been a girl. She might have changed her voice to disguise it. You can't tell. Had two cases like that in the last three weeks. You never can tell about voices."

"No," said Curlie, thoughtfully, "you never can tell. That's about the only thing you can be sure of in this strange old world. You can always be sure that you never can tell. Thing that looks like one thing always turns out to be something else."

"Point is," he continued after a moment's deep thought, "somebody's getting past our guard. Slamming us right in the nose and we're not doing a thing about it. Don't look like we could. I've got a theory but you can't go searching the estate of the richest man in your city just on theory; you've got to have facts to back you up, and mighty definite facts, too."

49

"Yes, that's right," agreed Coles. "But what do you make out of all that babble about airplane, map, ship and much gold? Do you suppose it's some smuggling scheme, some plan to get a lot of Russian or Austrian jewels into the country without paying duty or something like that?"

"I don't make anything out of that," said Curlie rather sharply, "and for the time, I don't jolly much care. The thing I'm interested in is the fact that we're being beaten; that the air about us is being torn to shreds every night by some careless or criminal person; that we're getting a black eye and a reprimand from the department; that sea traffic is being interrupted; that lives are being imperiled and we can't seem to do anything about it. That's what's turning my liver dark black!" He pounded the desk before him until instruments rattled and wires sang.

"But how you are going to catch a fellow when he goes tearing all over the map," said Curlie, more calmly, "is exactly what I don't know. You go down and get a bite of chow. No, go on home and go to bed. I'll take the rest of the shift. I want to think. I think best when I'm alone; when the wires sing me a song; when the air whispers to me out of the night; when the ghosts of dead radio-men, ghosts of operators who joked with death when the sea was reaching up mighty arms to drag them down, come back to talk to me. That's when I think best. These whispering ghosts tell me things. When I sit here all, asleep but my ears, things seem to come to me."

50

"Bah!" said Coles Masters, shivering, "you give me the creeps."

Drawing on his coat, he slipped out of the door, leaving Curlie slumped down in his chair already all asleep but his wonderful ears.

For a full hour he sat lumped up there. Seeming scarcely to breathe, stirring now and then as in sleep, he continued to listen and to dream.

51

Then suddenly he sat up with a start to exclaim out loud:

"Yes! That's it. Catch a thief with a thief. Catch a radiophone with a radiophone. A radiophone on wheels? That's a game two can play at. I'll do it! To-morrow night."

Snapping up a telephone receiver he murmured:

"Central 662."

A moment later he tuned an instrument and threw on a switch; "Weightman there?" he inquired. "Asleep? Wake him up. This is Curlie Carson. Yes, it's important. No, I'll tell you. Don't bother to

wake him now—have him over at the Coffee Shop at five bells. The Coffee Shop. He'll know. Don't fail! It's important!"

He snapped down the receiver. Weightman was the radio mechanic assigned to his station. He would have unusual and important work to do that day.

He slumped down again in his chair but did not remain in that position many minutes.

From one of the loud speakers came a persistent whisper:

"Hello. Hello, Curlie, you there?" the girlish voice purred, the one that had whispered to him before. "I saw you to-night. That was dangerous. Why did you do it? Nearly got me in bad. Not quite. He almost got you."

The whisper ceased. Adjusting the campus coil Curlie sat at strained attention.

"I wish I knew you were listening," came again. "It's hard to be whispering into the night and not knowing you're being heard."

Curlie's fingers moved nervously over a tuner knob. He was sorely tempted to tune in and flash an answering "O.K.," if nothing more.

But, no, he drew his hands resolutely back. It was not wise. There was danger in it. This might be a trap. They might locate his secret tower room by that single O.K. Then disaster would follow.

The whisper came again: "You're clever, Curlie, awfully clever. The way you doubled over and turned yourself wrong side out was great! But please do be careful. It's big, Curlie, big!" again the whisper rose almost to speaking tone. "And he is a terribly determined man; wouldn't stop at anything."

The whisper ceased.

For a moment Curlie sat there lost in reflection, then he muttered savagely: "Oh! get off the air, you little whispering mystery, you're spoiling my technique. Your very terrible friend didn't send any message to-night and the one he sent before hasn't got us into any trouble. I've got to forget you and go after this moving fellow who sends 600."

As if in answer to his challenge the loud speaker to his right, the one tuned to 1200, began to rattle. Then, in the full, determined tones of a man accustomed to speak with authority there came:

"Calm night."

Three times, over five thousand miles of air, this great voice bellowed its message.

The silence which followed was ghostly. Cold perspiration stood out on Curlie's brow.

It was not necessary for him to calculate the location from which this message was sent. He knew that it had come from the hotel. And it had.

"Next thing," he told himself with a groan, "the International Service will be on my back for letting that lion roar. I ought to turn that over to the police; but I won't, not just yet."

CHAPTER V

IN THE DARK

As the clock in a distant college tower struck the hour of eleven the following night, a flat looking car with a powerful engine stole out into the road that ran by the Forest Preserve. It was the Humming Bird. Joe Marion was at the wheel. Curlie sat beside him.

On the back of the car was a miscellaneous pile of instruments all securely clamped down. Above there hung suspended between two vertical bars a square frame from which there gleamed the copper wires of a coil.

To catch a radiophone on wheels, Curlie had reasoned, one must mount his radio compass on wheels and pursue the offender. How well it would work, he could not even guess, but anything was better than sitting there helpless in the secret tower room listening to this person tearing up the air in a manner both unwise and unlawful.

So here they were, prepared to make the test.

"Of course," Curlie grumbled, "now we've got the trap set, the ghost may decide not to walk on this particular night. That'll be part of our rotten luck."

"Most ghosts, I'm told," chuckled Joe, "prefer to walk when there's someone about, for what's the

good of a ghost-walk when there's no one to see. So our radio ghost may show up after all."

Curlie lapsed into silence. He was reviewing the events which led up to this thrilling moment. When the message on 600 came banging to his ears with great power on that first night, he had carefully platted the various locations of the person who had sent the messages. There had been some criss-crosses shown but, in the main, a line drawn through these points had formed an oblong which on the actual surface of the ground must have been some ten miles in length by six in width. One interesting point was that the first and last messages of that night had been sent at points not a quarter of a mile apart.

57

"Which goes to show," he reasoned, "that this fellow started from a certain point and made his way back to that point, just as a rabbit will do when chased by a hound. And those two points, the start and the finish, are close to the driveway into the million dollar estate. But of course that doesn't prove that the car came from there. Any person could drive to that point, begin operations, race over the square and return to the point."

Coles Masters had platted the points for the second night. A line drawn through these points made a figure quite irregular in form, which was, however, composed of rectangles.

"Which proves," he told himself, "that our friend, the lawless radio fan, drives an auto and not an airplane. An auto follows roads, which for the most part in this section form squares. He passed along two or three sides of these squares and this makes up the figure."

58

"There's only one thing in common in the two night journeys," he continued. "The start and finish are at almost exactly the same spot, near the entrance of that great estate."

He tried not to allow these facts to cause him to hold undue suspicion against the inhabitants of that mansion, but in this he experienced some difficulty.

"The thing for us to do," he had said to Joe, "is to run out there and back our car into an unfrequented, wooded road running into the forest preserve. We don't dare go too near the original starting place. If we're seen with this load of junk it will give us dead away. Thing is to be ready to move quickly when he lets loose with his message. Ought not to be more than a mile away, I'd say. He's got a powerful car. You can tell that by the fact that he sent a message at this corner, then raced over here, four miles distant, and got another message off in eleven minutes, which is quick action."

59

They backed into the grass-grown road of the Forest Preserve, then settled down in their places to wait.

The night was dark. There was no moon. Clouds were scurrying overhead. Only the rustle of leaves and the startled tweet-tweet of some bird surprised in his sleep disturbed the utter silence of the woods.

"Ghostly," whispered Joe, then he lapsed into silence.

With his slim legs stretched out before him, Curlie was soon asleep, all but his ears. Joe insisted that those ears never slept.

A half hour, an hour, an hour and a half dragged by. Joe had gone quite to sleep when Curlie suddenly dug him in the ribs and uttered the shrilly whispered warning:

"Hist! There she blows!"

A flashlight was snapped on. Curlie's fingers flew from instrument to instrument. The voice of the mysterious operator could be heard. Now rising, now falling, it filled the woods with echoes, yet the speaker was more than a mile away, as near as the boys could guess.

60

The words spoken by him were now of no importance. Location was everything.

"Same place," exclaimed Curlie, "exactly the same! You know where! Drive like mad!"

Instantly the car lurched forward. Coming out of the bush on two wheels, she sent a shower of gravel flying as she rushed madly down the road.

Quick as they were, the quarry had been quicker. As they rounded a corner, they caught the red gleam of a tail-light disappearing at the next turn.

"Heck!" said Curlie, then, "Let her out! Show him some speed."

The motor of the Humming Bird sang joyously. Fairly eating up the road, she took the corner with a wide swing. But when they looked down the long stretch of highway there was no red tail-light to be seen.

"Heck!" said Curlie again, "he's reached the next crossroad and turned the corner. Can't tell which way he went. It's a hard, dry gravel roadbed—won't tell a thing. Best we can do is to rattle along up there, then sit it out for another listen-in."

61

Disappointed but not disheartened, Curlie adjusted his instruments, then sat in breathless expectation.

He did not have long to wait, for again the voice in the loud speaker boomed out into the night.

"Huh," he grumbled a few seconds later, "he's got three miles lead on us. To the right. Quick, give her the gas."

Again they were off. For two miles and a half straight ahead they raced. The Humming Bird quivered like a leaf, instruments jingling in spite of their lashings.

"Make it all the way," said Curlie, as Joe slowed up. "He's not there. Given us the slip again."

Six times this program was gone through with. Not once in all that time did they catch sight of that tail-light.

"Some car he's got!" said Curlie when the farce was ended. "Bet he never even guessed he was being chased. But you wait; we'll get him yet."

When they were once more in the secret tower room Curlie plotted the route of the mysterious operator.

"Only significant thing about that," he commented, when he had finished, "is that he starts and finishes within a quarter of a mile of the same place as on the other two nights."

"And that place—" suggested Joe.

"Is near old J. Anson's driveway."

"Looks mighty suspicious to me," said Joe.

"Does to me, too; but, as I have said before, you can't raid a man's private castle on any such flimsy proof as that. You've got to have the goods.

"Tell you what," he said after a moment's silence, "sometimes our natural ears and eyes are better than all these instruments and wires. I'm going out there to-morrow night alone and on foot."

"Might work," said Joe thoughtfully, "but whatever you do, you must be careful."

"Careful?" said Curlie scornfully. "There are times when a fellow can't afford to be careful. This thing's getting serious." He glanced over a second message from the head office of his bureau. It was couched in no gentle terms. He was told that this intruder must be caught and that at once if he, Curlie Carson, wished to hold his position as chief of the secret tower room station.

CHAPTER VI

A REAL DISCOVERY

Darkness found Curlie again on the edge of the Forest Preserve. This time he was on foot and alone. Apparently he carried nothing. His right hip pocket bulged, the handle of a flashlight protruded from his coat pocket, that was all.

He did not pause at the spot where they had hid their car the night before, but continued down the main road for a half mile farther. There he plunged into the forest, to continue his journey under cover. Eleven o'clock found him concealed in a clump of bushes in the woods that lay opposite the millionaire's driveway.

"If they come to-night," he whispered to himself, "I'll know whether they belong on that estate or not, and if they do I'll know who it is. Anyway, I'll know it's one of J. Anson's folks. And we'll see if it is a boy or the girl?"

The question interested him. He had no relish for getting a girl into trouble, especially that frank-faced, smiling girl he had seen on horseback.

"But the thing must stop," he told himself sternly, taking a tight grip on something in his hip pocket.

The night was clear. He could see objects quite plainly. The trees, the shrubbery, the stone pillars at the entrance to the driveway, stood out in bold relief. For a time he sat staring at them in silence. At last he closed his eyes and slept, as was his custom, all but his ears.

He was startled from this stupor by a sudden flash of light which made its presence felt even through his eyelids.

As his eyes flew open, he found himself staring at two glowing headlights. The next instant he had flattened himself in the grass.

"Wow! Hope they didn't see me!" he whispered.

A low-built, powerful car had come purring so quietly down the driveway of the estate that it had

rounded a sudden curve before he had been aware of its presence.

Now, with undiminished speed, it turned to the right, entered the public highway and sped straight on.

As Curlie rose from the grass to stare after it, a low exclamation escaped his lips. Supported by high parallel bars, which were doubtless in turn supported by strong guy wires, were the aerials of a radiophone. The whole of this rose from, and rested upon, the body of the powerful roadster.

"And I missed them!" he exploded, then:

"No, I didn't. They're stopping."

It was true. Some eighty rods down the road the car had slowed up. He had no means of telling what they were doing but felt quite warranted in supposing they were sending a message.

Like a flash he was away through the brush. Speed and the utmost caution were necessary. If a limb cracked, if he fell over a hidden ditch, the quarry would be frightened away. He must see what was going on, see it with his own eyes.

Fairly holding his breath, he struggled forward. Now he had covered a third of the distance, now half, now three-quarters and now—

His lips parted in an unuttered groan. He leaped out of the bush. Something flashed in his hand. For a second that thing was pointed down the road where the speedy car had suddenly resumed its journey. Then his hand dropped to his side.

"No," he said slowly, "it won't do. Too risky. Guess they haven't seen me. If not, they will be back. And next time," he shook his fist at the vanishing car, "next time my fair lad or lady, you won't escape me."

Turning back, he again disappeared into the brush.

In the meantime things were happening in the air. Coles Masters, who was in charge of the secret tower room, had his hands full. He switched on this loud-speaker and lowered that one to a whisper. He tuned in this one and cut that one out.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, mopping his brow, "what a night! Wish Curlie were here."

To start the night's entertainment a boy had broken in on the radio concert. Then a crank had come shouting right into the middle of a speech by a politician. A few moments later a message on 1200 had fairly burst his ear-drums. The message had been short, composed of just three words:

"Dark, cloudy night."

"Regular thunderbolt behind that!" he muttered as he measured the location and found it to come from the city's great hotel. "Enough there to send it round the world. Shouldn't be surprised to get the echo of it in a few seconds myself. The nerve of the man!"

In strange contrast to this was the whisper which followed within five minutes. It was sent on 200.

"Hello, Curlie. Did you get that? Terrible, wasn't it?" came the whisper. "But, Curlie, I don't think you need to bother about him. He's leaving in a day or two. He's going, far, far away. He's going north; out of your territory entirely. I know you'd love to catch him, Curlie, but it would be dangerous, awfully dangerous! So don't you try, for he is going far, far away."

Coles Masters' fingers had worked rapidly during this whispered message. Not only had he measured the distance and taken the location, but he had written down the message word for word.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he muttered. "That was a girl, a young girl and a pretty one too, or I miss my guess. Anyway she has an interesting whisper. She's at that same hotel and seems to know Curlie. She must have broken in on my 1200 friend. So he's going north? Can't go any too soon for me. Mighty queer case. Have to turn it over to Curlie. It's all Greek to me."

"Hello, there! What—"

He wheeled about to snap a button. A message was being shouted out on 600.

"That's the chap Curlie's after. So he hasn't got him yet? Well, here's hoping he hurries." His pencil began rapidly writing the message.

Meanwhile Curlie in his woods retreat had moved silently over to the other side of the driveway.

"Probably will come back the other way," he concluded.

He did not remain behind the fence this time but threw himself into the shallow depths of a dry ravine. He remained keenly alert. His eyes were constantly on the road, which lay like a brown ribbon a full mile straight before him.

He was thinking of his various cases. Equal in interest to the one which he was now hunting down was that big hotel case. He was thinking of the girl. Why had she whispered those

messages to him? Was she merely a tool of the man behind the powerful radio machine? Was she simply leading him on? He could not feel that she was. Somehow her whisper had an accent of genuine interest in it.

"Wonder what she's like," he asked himself. Then, with a smile playing about his lips, he tried to guess. 71

"Small, very active, has dark brown hair and snappy black eyes." After a moment's thought he chuckled: "Probably really a heavy blonde; something like two hundred pounds. You can't tell anything by a voice. You—"

Suddenly he braced himself up on his elbows. His keen ears had caught a distant purring sound. Two yellow balls of fire were rapidly approaching—the headlights of a fast-moving automobile.

"He comes! Now for it!" He prepared to spring.

In an amazingly short time the car was all but upon him. Leaping to his feet, he let out a wild whoop and, brandishing his automatic threateningly, stood squarely in the middle of the road.

His heart beat wildly. There could be no mistake. He saw the wires and rods swaying above the car.

For a second the car slowed up, then, with a snort it leaped right at him. Nimble as he was, he barely escaped being run down. 72

As the car flashed past him, he wheeled about and almost instantly his automatic barked three times. Simultaneous with the last shot there came a louder explosion.

"Tire! Got you," he muttered.

Instantly the car swerved to the side of the road. A tire had gone flat. The car had skidded.

The rods which carried the aerials caught in a tree top. The car, jerked back like a mad horse caught by a lariat, reared up on its hind wheels, threatened to turn turtle, then crashed over on its side with its engine still racing wildly.

Sudden as had been the catastrophe, it had not been too quick for the driver. Just as the car crashed over, Curlie caught sight of a figure in long linen duster and with closely wrapped head, dashing up the bank, over the fence and into the brush.

"Go it," he exclaimed, making no attempt to catch the fugitive, "you know the country better than I do. I'd never catch you in that labyrinth of trees. Besides, I don't need to. Your equipment is pretty well smashed up and you've left me enough evidence to make out a beautiful case." 73

Walking over to the machine, he reached over and shut off the engine. After that, in a very leisurely manner he collected various odds and ends from the radiophone equipment. Having stuffed these into his pockets, he wrenched the back number plate from the machine and tucked it under his arm.

"Guess that's enough," he murmured. "Now I can take my own time in springing the thing. He probably thinks I was a hold-up man, but even if he guessed the truth he couldn't escape me and couldn't get his equipment back in shape short of a week, so that's that."

Turning, he started toward the nearest interurban line a good five miles away.

When he had walked a mile, he stopped suddenly in his track. 74

"Say!" he exclaimed. "Was that the son or the daughter? All muffled up that way I couldn't tell."

"Ho, well," he resumed his march, "that'll come out in time. Only I hope it wasn't the girl. I sort of liked her looks."

CHAPTER VII

CURLIE RECEIVES A SHOCK

Having boarded an interurban car, Curlie slept his way into the city. Once there he hurried over to the secret tower room, where the news of his night's adventure was received with great joy.

"So you got him!" exclaimed Coles Masters. "Smashed him up right? Bully for you. That's great!" He slapped Curlie on the back.

Dropping into his chair, Curlie dictated a message by secret wire to headquarters in New York. The message stated in modest, concise terms that the nuisance on 600 in the secret tower region was at an end; that the station had been effectively broken up and that the offender would no doubt soon be in the hands of the law. 75

A half hour later he received a highly commendatory message, congratulating him on his achievement and bidding him keep up the good work.

After glancing over Coles' reports for the evening and making mental notes from them, Curlie prepared to seek his bed and indulge in a good, long sleep, the first in several days.

"There isn't a bit of hurry in going after that rich young fellow or girl, if it is a girl," he said to Coles. "That'll keep. We've got plenty of proof." He jerked a thumb toward the corner where was a box into which he had tossed the various small parts of a sending set and the number plate of the car. "All we need to do now is to saunter out there some fine morning and have a heart-to-heart talk with J. Anson himself."

Had Curlie but known it, there was to be a great deal more than that to it. There was to be an adventure in it for him such as he had never before experienced, an adventure which was destined to take him thousands of miles from the secret tower room and which was to throw him into such dangers as would cause the bravest to shrink back in terror.

Since he was blissfully ignorant of all this he was also blissfully happy in the consciousness of having achieved success in the thing he had undertaken.

"This," he laughed as he said it, "is going to bring me face to face with one of America's greatest millionaires. It's like going before a king in some ways. In others I fancy it's more like meeting a lion in the street. Anyway, I've always wanted to meet a king, a lion and a millionaire and here's where I meet one of them. Ever meet one?" He turned to Coles.

"Meet which?" Coles smiled. "King, lion or millionaire?"

"Millionaire."

"No, can't say that I have, though I doubt if we'd either of us recognize one if we should meet him on the street. Someone has said that humanity is everywhere much the same and I fancy that's true even of very rich folks. They may try to bluff you with their power but if they find they can't do that, I guess they'll turn out to have the same dreams, the same hopes and fears, the same joys and sorrows as the rest of us."

"Do you think so?" said Curlie thoughtfully. "I hope that's true. It would be a good thing for the world if it were true and if all the people in the world knew it."

"Well, good night." He drew on his cap. "See you in about sixteen hours. Guess it'll take me that long to catch up my sleep. After that I'm going after that fellow who's breaking in on 1200, that fellow over at the hotel with the whispering friend, or enemy, whichever she may turn out to be."

Had he but known it, it was to be many days before he was to go after that offender on the 1200 meter wave lengths and then it was to be in ways of which he had not yet dreamed. And so he slept.

When he awoke after fourteen hours of refreshing sleep, it was to hear the newsies crying their evening papers. For some time he lay there listening to their shrill shouts and attempting to catch what they were saying.

"Ex-tree! All about—" He could get that far, probably because he had heard it so often before, but no further could he go. The remainder was a jumble of meaningless sounds.

Suddenly, as he listened, a shrill urchin shouted the words out directly beneath his very window:

"Wul—ex-tree! All about the mur-der-ed millionaire's son!"

"Here! Here!" exclaimed Curlie, thrusting his head out of the window. "What millionaire's son? Give me one of those papers." He tossed the boy a nickel and received a tightly wrapped paper. Sent through the window as if shot from a catapult, it landed with a bump on the floor.

His hand trembled so he could scarcely unroll the paper. His head whirled.

"Murdered?" he said to himself. "Millionaire's son murdered? Can it be Vincent Ardmore? Did a bullet from my automatic, glancing from the wheel, inflict a mortal wound?"

He saw himself behind prison bars in murderer's row.

Cold perspiration stood out on his brow as he read in staring headlines:

"J. ANSON ARDMORE'S SON BELIEVED MURDERED."

"Believed?" He caught at that single word as a camel in a desert snaps at a straw. So they were not sure.

Hastily he read the column through, then dropped limply into a chair.

"Oh! What a shock!" he breathed.

He was vastly relieved. The article stated that the car belonging to the millionaire's son had been found by a laborer employed on the estate as he came to his work very early in the morning. The car, which was badly smashed up, bore the mark of a bullet in a rear tire and one in the lower part of the body. It was believed that the young man, being pursued by bandits and having attempted to escape, had had his car riddled by bullets and had been thrown into the ditch.

"There are grave reasons for supposing," the article went on to state, "since no trace of the young man has yet been found, that he has been either kidnapped for ransom or, having been killed by a stray bullet, has been buried somewhere in the forest preserve."

"Bands of armed men are searching the woods and every available police officer and detective has been put on the case. A reward of \$5,000 has been offered by the father for any information which may lead to the discovery of the whereabouts of his son."

"Whew!" exclaimed Curlie, mopping his brow. "What a rumpus!"

Suddenly he sat up straight. "Doesn't say one word about that wireless apparatus in the car. How about that?"

He sat with wrinkled brow for a moment.

"Ah!" he slapped his knee, "I have it! The laborer of course came directly to his master. The shrewd old millionaire, guessing that his son had been breaking radio laws, had all of that equipment removed before the public was let in on the deal. He bribed the laborer to secrecy on that point and there you are."

Again his brow wrinkled. "Five thousand dollars!" he whispered. "That's a lot of money. I could supply some valuable information which might entitle me to the five thousand. Question is, do I want to risk it? The thing that's happened is about this, far as I can figure it out: Our young amateur radio friend, when his auto turned turtle, hiked off into the woods. For a time he stayed there. Then, when nothing happened for some time, he came sneaking back. When he found I'd taken his number plate and some parts of his radio equipment, he guessed right away that I was connected with the radio secret service. He's hiding right now, unless I miss my guess, with some of his rich young friends."

"I might tell all that and I might get the reward, but supposing something really had happened? Oh, boy, what a mess!"

"And yet," he mused, after a moment, "I've done nothing to be ashamed of. I'm an officer of the law. I did what I did because a fellow was resisting arrest. Ho, well, I'll just let things stand and simmer. Something may come to the top yet."

CHAPTER VIII

CURLIE MEETS A MILLIONAIRE

It was a tense situation for Curlie. He spent an uneasy night and that in spite of the fact that the air was particularly free from trouble.

"Hang it all," he exclaimed once as, dashing the receiver from his head, he sprang from his chair to pace the floor of the secret tower room, "I'd welcome something in the line of trouble. This eternal thinking—thinking—thinking, drives me wild. What to do, that's the question. Suppose I'd ought to go out and tell Ardmore what I know. If a millionaire father's like any other father, I guess he's pretty well wrought up by now. But if I go, and if I tell him the whole truth, I'm as sure as I am of anything that it will get me into a mess and that's the sort of thing I don't like."

Glancing down, his eye was caught by Coles' report of the night before. Dropping once more into his chair, he began going through the messages written there. When he came to the one sent out by the boy whose car he had wrecked, he pondered over it for a long time.

"Island, airplane, map, much gold; airplane, map, island, gold," he repeated. "What does one make out of that? It might be that this boy has been planning a secret voyage with some other chap. Certainly sounds like it. Other messages were the same kind. By Jove! Perhaps he's skipped out and gone on that trip and is not hiding out at all! Let's see."

Taking down a file he drew forth a bunch of message records clipped together. They were those sent by the moving operator on 600, the millionaire's son.

A long time he studied over these.

"Seems to sort of prove my theory," he muttered once. "Can't be sure though."

Then, suddenly he sat up straight. "That's the idea." He slapped his knee. "The very thing! Why didn't I think of that before? If he doesn't shew up by morning I'll do it. I'll just take these records over to Ardmore and suggest to him that they may shed some light on the subject. Don't need to tell him I was in on the wrecking of the car at all. That wouldn't help any. These records might. And if I can help to find him and bring him back, then, oh, boy! Oh you baby fortune! Five thousand big, red, round dollars!"

He sat back trying to measure the meaning of the possession of five thousand dollars which did

not have to be spent for bed, board and clothing. At last he gave it up in despair.

The morning papers assured the interested city that the son of their money king was still missing. To make sure that this report was correct, Curlie called up the mansion and inquired about it. When he learned that it was indeed true, he requested the servant who answered the telephone to inform the millionaire that a representative of the Secret Service of the Air would arrive at his residence with copies of certain radiophone messages sent out by his son previous to his mysterious disappearance, which might shed some light on the subject.

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Shortly after that he leaped into the driver's seat on the Humming Bird and motored away to the west.

Arrived at the Forest Preserve, he backed the car into the deserted roadway in the forest at the very spot where he and Joe had concealed themselves the night of the race.

"Have to leave you here, old thing," he whispered. "If a fellow were to pull up that driveway in such a rakish craft as you are, they might think him crazy and throw him out.

"Well here goes," he whispered to himself, as, having rounded the last clump of decorative shrubbery, he came in sight of the red stone mansion.

"Whew! What a stunner!" whispered Curlie to himself.

The sun was tipping the parapets of that mansion with gold; the dew sparkled on the perfectly kept green. It was indeed a beautiful picture.

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Tiptoeing up the steps, he was about to lift the heavy bronze knocker when a porter opened the door and motioned him to enter.

"Are you the man?" he asked in a low tone.

"I'm the boy who wired about the messages."

"Step right this way. He's waiting."

Curlie's heart beat fast. Was he to be ushered at once into the august presence of the magnate? He had pictured to himself hours of waiting, interviews by private secretaries and all that.

And yet here he was. In a large room furnished in rich mahogany, seemingly the rich man's home office, he was being greeted by a stout, broad-shouldered, brisk and healthy-looking man who was assuring him that he was speaking to J. Anson Ardmore himself and inviting him to sit down.

With his head in a whirl, he managed to get himself into a chair. And all this while he was telling himself things; things like this: "Curlie, old boy, this is going to be strenuous. This man is powerful, magnetic, almost hypnotizing. He will find out as much as he can from you. He will tell as little as is necessary to attain his end. To him all life is a game, a game in which he conceals much and discovers all that lies in his opponent's hand. He probably knows you have the goods on his son. Perhaps he is merely playing a game about this vanishing son. He may know where he is all the time. If so, he'll want to know what you know, and what you are going to do. You must be wise—wise as a serpent."

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"Well?" the magnate spoke in a brisk way. "My butler tells me you have some messages."

"Yes, sir."

"Sent by my missing son?"

"Yes, sir."

"And may I ask," the magnate's face was a mask, not a muscle moved, "how you happened to be in possession of these messages?"

Curlie could hear his own heart beat, but he held his ground. "Since I am attached to the government radiophone staff, it is my duty to catch and record all unfair and illegally sent messages, to record them as evidence and for future reference."

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Curlie fancied he saw the man start. The words that followed were spoken still in a cold, collected tone.

"These messages you say were unfair?"

"Unfair and illegally sent."

"How illegal?"

"They were sent with exceedingly high power and on 600 meter wave lengths. Such high power is unlawful for all amateurs and the use of 600 is granted to ships and ship stations alone.

"Ah!"

For a second the man appeared to reflect. Then suddenly:

"We are wasting time. My son has mysteriously disappeared. I have reason to fear foul play. Let me assure you that I know nothing about his whereabouts and, previous to this moment, that I have known nothing regarding these illegally sent messages."

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"But—" began Curlie.

"You doubt my word," his voice grew stern and hard as he read the incredulity in Curlie's eyes. "Young man," he fairly thundered, "fix this in your mind: No man ever has risen or ever will rise to my present position through treachery or deceit. When I say a thing is so, by thunder it *is* so!"

He struck his desk a terrific blow.

"But a—"

Curlie caught himself just in time. He had been about to reveal the fact that he was aware of the presence of the wireless set in the auto the night the millionaire's son disappeared.

"I can't see just how your messages could aid us in finding my son." The magnate spoke more calmly. "However, all things are possible. May I see the copies?"

"Of course," said Curlie, hesitatingly, "this is a private matter. Few persons know of our service. It is the desire of the government that they should not know. These are not for publication. Do you understand that?"

"You have my word."

Curlie passed the sheath of papers over the desk.

Slowly, one by one, the great man read them. His movement was not hurried. He digested every word. Like many another great man he had formed the habit of gathering, as far as possible, the full meaning of any set of facts by his own careful research, before allowing his opinion to be influenced by others.

He had gone half through the pack when a door over at the right opened and a girl, dressed in some filmy stuff which brought out the smoothness of her neck and arms and the beauty of her complexion, entered the room.

Curlie caught his breath. It was the girl he had seen on the horse that morning, the magnate's daughter.

She had advanced halfway to her father's desk before she became aware of Curlie's presence. Then she started back with a stammered: "I—I beg your pardon."

"It's all right." The first smile Curlie had seen on the great man's face now curved about his mouth. "You may remain. This is no secret chamber."

"Fa—father," she faltered, gripping at her throat, "does he know—know anything—about—about Vincent?"

"I can't tell yet. I am going over the messages. Please be seated."

The girl sank into a deep leather-cushioned chair. Without looking at her Curlie was aware of the fact that she was studying him, perhaps trying to make up her mind where she had seen him before. This made him exceedingly uncomfortable. He was greatly relieved when at last the magnate spoke.

"Gladys," he addressed the girl, "did you say you found some sort of map in Vincent's room?"

"Oh, yes," she sprang to her feet. "A photograph of a very strange looking map and also one of some queer foreign writing."

"Will you run and get those photographs?"

"Yes, father."

"It's strange," the older man mused after she had gone. "I don't understand it at all. These messages, they are—"

"If you please—" Curlie broke in.

"Wait!" commanded the other, holding up his hand for silence. "Let us have no opinions before all of the evidence is in. That map may aid us in forming correct conclusions."

CHAPTER IX

A MYSTERIOUS MAP

It was indeed a curious map which had been reproduced on the large photographic print which Gladys Ardmore placed on the desk before her father.

Motioning Curlie to come forward and examine it with them, the magnate rose from his chair to

bend over the map. As Curlie stood there looking down at it, the girl in her eagerness bent down so close to him that he felt her warm breath on his cheek.

Nothing, however, could have drawn his gaze from that map. Wrinkled, torn in places, patched, browned with age, smirched by many finger marks, all of which were faithfully reproduced by the freshly printed photograph, it still gave promise of revealing many a mystery if one could but read it correctly.

It showed both land and water. Here on the land was a picture of a castle and there on the water a ship. The shore of the land was not drawn as are maps with which we are in these days familiar, but was cut up in curious geometric forms which surely could not faithfully represent the true lines of the shore. Towns were shown, but only on the shoreline, their names printed in by hand in such small letters as would require a magnifying glass to read them. Crossing and recrossing the water in every conceivable direction were innumerable straight lines. About the edge of the map were eight faces of children. Their cheeks puffed out as if blowing, they appeared to represent the wind that blew from certain quarters.

All the writing was in some foreign language. In the lower left-hand corner was what appeared to be the name of the maker but this was so blotted out as to be unreadable.

"Huh!" The magnate straightened up. "That's a strange map and appears to be very ancient, but I can hardly see how it is going to help us with our present problem."

"There is still the writing," suggested Gladys, turning over the other photograph.

"That," said Mr. Ardmore, after a moment's study of it, "is written in some strange tongue and is, I take it, unintelligible to us all."

"It's a photograph of the back of the map," suggested Curlie, pointing out certain spots where the wrinkles and tears were the same.

"My French teacher will be here at ten o'clock. He knows several languages. Perhaps he could help us," suggested Gladys.

"We will leave that to him," said her father. "Now about these messages," he went on, turning to Curlie. "What is your theory?"

Stammeringly Curlie proceeded to explain the idea which had come to him, the notion that Vincent Ardmore and some pal of his had been planning a secret trip of some sort.

"That is entirely possible," said Ardmore. "Vincent is daring, even rash at times. If some wild fancy leaped into his head, he would attempt anything. Now that you speak of it, I do think there might be something in your theory. Perhaps after all we may get some light from that map and the writing on the back of it. I shall await the coming of the professor with much anxiety."

"Father," exclaimed Gladys, "I have seen some such maps as this one at some other place."

"Where?"

"It was over at that big library, the one you are a director of."

"The Newtonian?"

"Yes. I was over there once and they showed me a great number of ancient maps. Oh, a very great number, and such strange affairs as they were! There were some similar to this one. I know there were!"

"Young man," said the magnate, turning to Curlie, "may I command your services on this matter for the day?"

Curlie bowed.

"Good! You will not be unrewarded. I am of the opinion that something may be learned by a study of the maps my daughter speaks of. Unfortunately I am engaged; I cannot go to the library. Would it be asking too much were I to request that you accompany her?"

Curlie assured him it would not. In his heart of hearts he assured himself that it would be a great privilege.

"Very well then, Gladys," the magnate bowed to his daughter, "I suggest that you plan on being back here at eleven. By that time your French teacher may have something to tell us."

Bowing to them both, he dismissed them with a wave of his hand.

As the neat little town car, which was apparently Gladys Ardmore's exclusive property, hurried them away toward the north side library, Curlie had time to think and to steal a look now and then at his fair hostess.

Matters had been going rather rapidly of late. He found it difficult to keep up with the march of events. What should be his next move? He was torn between two conflicting interests: his loyalty to the radio secret service bureau and his desire to be of service to this girl and her father. The girl, as he stole a glance at her, appeared disturbed and troubled. There was a tenseness about the lines of her mouth, a droop to her eyelids. "For all the world as if she were in some way to

blame for what has happened," he told himself.

Instantly the question popped into his mind: "Does she know more than she cares to tell?" He thought of the wireless equipment which had been removed from the wrecked car before the reporters had arrived. The laborer would hardly do that without orders from someone. Who had that someone been? The millionaire had denied all knowledge of the radiophone messages. Curlie believed that he had told the truth. Here was an added mystery. He was revolving this in his mind when the girl spoke:

"It must be very interesting listening in."

"Listening in?" Curlie feigned ignorance of her meaning.

"Yes, isn't that what you do? Listen in on radio all the time?"

Curlie started. How did she know?

"Why, yes, since you've asked, that is my work."

"Where—where—" she hesitated, "is your station?"

"That," smiled Curlie, "is a state secret; very few know where it is."

"Oh!" she breathed. "A mystery?"

Curlie nodded.

"Something like that."

"I love mysteries," she whispered. "I love to unravel them. Some day I shall surprise you. I shall come walking into that secret room of yours." There was a look on her face that he had not seen there before. It was disturbing. It spoke of a quality which, he concluded, she had inherited from her father, the quality of firmness and determination, which had made him great.

"I—I'd rather you wouldn't try," he almost stammered.

"Oh! here we are," she exclaimed, "at the library."

Leaping out of the car she led the way up the broad steps of an imposing gray stone structure.

"Down this way," she whispered, as if awed by the vast fund of knowledge stowed away between those walls. Without further words they made their way within.

Ten minutes later they were together bending over a great pile of ancient maps. Done on sheepskin and vellum, gray and brown with age, yet with colors as bright as on the day they were drawn, these maps spoke of an age that was gone and of a map-making art that is lost forever.

"Look at this one!" exclaimed the girl. "The date's on it—1450. Made before the days of Columbus. And look! It is like the one Vincent had the photograph of; the most like of any."

"Yes, but not the same," said Curlie. "See, those strangely shaped islands in the lower, right-hand corner are not on it; neither are the cherubs blowing to imitate the wind."

"That's true," said the girl in a disappointed tone, "I had hoped it might be the same map. It might have told us something."

Suddenly Curlie was struck with an idea. Leaving the girl's side, he approached the librarian.

"Have any of these maps been photographed recently?" he asked in a low tone.

"Not for several years," she answered. "But there are reproductions of these and others. They're in a bound volume in the next room. There the maps are reproduced on a large scale and a description of each is given. The lady in charge will show you."

Curlie tiptoed into that room. He was soon turning the pages of a large book which resembled an atlas.

After studying each successive page for some time, he came to a halt with a suppressed exclamation.

There, staring up at him, was a reproduction of the very map which had been photographed for Vincent Ardmore and, if further proof were lacking, there on the opposite page was a reproduction of the writing on the back of it, with a translation in fine print below.

Hurriedly he read this translation through. Twice he paused in utter astonishment. Three times he wrote down a brief note on a scrap of paper. When he had finished, he looked at the lower left-hand corner of the map, then copied some figures reproduced there.

Closing the book quickly, as if afraid the girl would find him looking at it, he paused for a second to banish all sign of excitement from his face, then walked leisurely from the room.

"Find anything?" he asked in as quiet a tone as he could command.

"No," there was a tired and worried look in her eyes. "I'm afraid the map is not here."

"By the way," he said in a casual way, "does your brother happen to have a pal living at

Landensport on the coast?"

"Why, yes," she said quickly, "that's Alfred Brightwood. They were chums in Brimward Academy."

"I thought that might be so."

"And you think—think—" she faltered.

"What we think," he smiled a disarming smile, "doesn't count for much. It's facts which really matter. Excuse me; I'll be back in a moment," he said hurriedly. "Want to telephone."

In the booth of the library he conversed long and earnestly with his chief.

"Why, yes," came over the phone at last, "I don't see but that you had better finish the thing up. We can't let rich young offenders off easily. It would destroy the service entirely. Go ahead. Coles Masters can handle the station while you are away."

The interview ended, he got Joe Marion on the wire.

"Joe," he said hurriedly, "throw some of my things into a bag and some of your own with them. Be down at the Lake Shore station at one-fifteen prepared for a short trip. Where to? Oh, New York and then some. It's important and interesting. Be there! Good. Good-bye till then." He snapped down the receiver and hurriedly left the booth.

"Shall we go back?" he asked the girl.

"I suppose we might as well," she said dejectedly. Then brightening suddenly, "Yes, let's hurry back. Perhaps the professor has found out something from that queer old writing."

CHAPTER X

THE FIRST LAP OF A LONG JOURNEY

On the way back to the Ardmore home both the girl and her escort were silent for some time. Then, turning to her, Curlie asked:

"Has this friend of your brother's—Brightwood, did you say his name was?—has he a seaplane?"

"Is that an airplane which flies up from the ocean and lights upon it when one wishes it to?"

"Yes."

"He has one of those. Yes, I'm sure of it. He wanted to take me for a ride out over the sea last summer."

"And is he what you would call a daring chap, ready to attempt anything?"

"Why, yes, he is; but—but how do you know so many things?"

"It is my duty to know."

Again he lapsed into silence. On arriving at the estate they found Gladys' father in a strange state of agitation.

"Just received a telegram from an old and trusted friend who is on the coast of Maine. He says Vincent has been seen there within the last twenty-four hours. What that can mean I haven't the faintest notion. I should go there at once but business makes it entirely impossible."

"Under one condition," said Curlie soberly, "I will go East and attempt to bring your son home. Indeed, I shall go anyway; have already arranged transportation, in fact, and leave in two hours; but it would please me if I might go with your approval."

"You have arranged to go?" The older man's face expressed his astonishment. "For what purpose?"

"On a commission for the government."

"And you wish my permission for what?"

"To bring your son back with a warrant, under arrest."

The older man looked at Curlie for a moment as if to discover whether or not he was joking.

"Young man," he said slowly, "do you know who I am?"

"You are J. Anson Ardmore, one of the richest men of the Middle West."

"And do you know that I could crush you with my influence?"

"No, sir, I do not." Curlie drew himself up to his full height. "Those days are gone forever. I am part of the United States government, the government which has made it possible for you to gain your wealth. Her laws must be obeyed. You could not crush me and, what is still more important, you have no notion of doing so."

"What?" The magnate's face became a study, then it broke into a smile. "I like your spirit," he said seizing Curlie's hand in a viselike grip. "You have the power of the law behind you; you need no consent of mine. But so be it; if my son has broken the law, he shall suffer the penalty."

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"There is one other matter," said Curlie soberly. "At the present moment it is merely a theory. I am unable to offer any worth-while proof for it, but it is my belief that your son and his chum, Alfred Brightwood, are considering a very perilous seaplane journey. Indeed, they may even at this moment be on their way. If that is true they should be followed at once in some swift traveling vessel, for they are almost certain to meet with disaster."

"That Brightwood boy will be the death of us all yet," exploded the father. "For sheer foolhardy daring I have never known his equal. Time and again I have attempted to persuade Vincent to give up associating with him, but it has been of no avail. Alfred appears to hold some strange hypnotic power over him."

For a moment he stood there in silence. When he spoke he was again the sober, thoughtful business man.

"If what you say is true, and you find that they have already departed on this supposed journey, my private yacht is at your disposal. It lies in the mouth of the river at Landensport. The captain and engineer are on board. You will need no further crew. She is the fastest private engine-driven yacht afloat. If necessity demands, do not hesitate risking her destruction, but you will not, of course, endanger your own life."

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"All right; then I guess everything is settled. You will wire instructions to the captain of the yacht. I must hurry to my train." Curlie hastened from the room.

Joe was awaiting Curlie at the depot. Filled with an eager desire to know what was to be the nature of this new adventure, he could wait scarcely long enough to buy tickets, reserve sleeper berths, and to board the train before demanding full details.

The train was a trifle slow in pulling out. As he outlined the situation to Joe, Curlie kept an eye out of the window. Once he caught sight of a slight girlish figure which seemed familiar. He could not be sure, so heavily veiled was her face.

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He had quite forgotten the incident when, a few hours later, he entered the diner for his evening lunch. What then was his surprise, on entering, to see Gladys Ardmore calmly seated at a table and nibbling at a bun.

She motioned him to a seat opposite her.

"You didn't expect to have me for a fellow-passenger, did you?" she smiled.

Curlie shook his head.

"Well, I didn't expect to go until the last moment. Then the professor came with the translation of the writing on the map all written out. Father thought you should have it, so he sent me with it. I arrived just in time and decided all at once that I ought to—Oh, that I wanted—that I *must* go with you." There was a pathetic catch in her voice that went straight to Curlie's heart.

"After all," he told himself, "he's her brother and that means a lot."

When he looked at her the next moment he discovered there the strangely determined look which was so like her father's, and which he had seen once before on her face.

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"Here is the translation," she said simply as she passed over a roll of paper. "Order your dinner; we will have plenty of time to look over the papers later."

"She's a most determined and composed little piece of humanity," was Curlie's mental comment. "I don't like her following me, but since she's here I suppose I better make the best of it!"

Had he known how far she would follow him and what adventures she was destined to share with him, he might have been tempted to wire her father to call her back. Since he did not know, he ordered meat-pie, French fried potatoes, English tea biscuits, cocoa and apple pie, then settled himself down to talk of trivial matters until the meal was over.

When at last he saw the waiter remove the girl's finger bowl, Curlie put out his hand for the paper. The hand trembled a trifle. Truth was, he was more eager than he was willing to admit to read the French teacher's translation of the writing on the back of the map.

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Now as he held it in his hand one question came to the forefront in his mind: Was this photograph a reproduction of the map that had looked so much like it, the one in the great volume at the library? The translation would clear up that point.

But then it might not be, he reasoned. The book said that the original of this map had belonged to an English lord something like a hundred years ago; that it had disappeared and nothing had been heard of it since.

"The professor said," smiled the girl, a trifle anxiously, "that the writing was in very, very old Spanish and for that reason he might not have understood every word of it correctly but that taking it all in all he thought he had made the meaning clear."

"We'll have a look," said Curlie, unfolding the paper.

"He said it was the photograph of a very unusual manuscript, rare and valuable." There was something about the way the girl said this which led Curlie to guess that she might know who was in possession of the original. He was, however, too much excited over the first lines of the translation to ask her any questions.

"The Island of Lagos." He read the title to himself. Beneath this in brackets were the words:

"Being the account of how the good ship Torence was cast ashore on an unknown island in the midst of the great sea; an island whereon there are many barbarians having much gold."

Curlie caught his breath. Save for one word the translation was the same as that he had read in the book. That word was of no consequence.

"It's the same map!" he told himself. "The very same!"

The girl, leaning over the table, watched him eagerly. She was both excited and elated over the find.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she exclaimed, clasping her hands. "I think it's great! And to think that my brother and his chum were the ones who found it!"

"Haven't read it all," Curlie mumbled.

"Then read on. Read it all. Please do."

CHAPTER XI

"MANY BARBARIANS AND MUCH GOLD"

Curlie, obeying her instructions, read on and with every line his conviction grew stronger that the conclusions he had come to were well formed.

This is what he read:

"Having spent Good Friday with his family, our captain, deeming further delay but loss of time, determined to cast anchor and sail for the coast of Ireland. Here he hoped to do a brisk business at barter with the peasants and fisher-folk who inhabit the shores.

"But Providence had determined otherwise. Hardly had we been from shore a half day's journey, when, without warning, from out the night there rose a great tumult. This tumult, coming as it did from the shore, grasped us in its mighty arms and hurled us league by league in directions that we would not go. And being exceedingly tossed with the tempest we lightened the ship. On the fourth day we, with our own hand, cast out the tackle of the ship. And when not sun nor moon nor stars had appeared for many days, we counted ourselves for lost; for, having been carried straight away these many days, we expected nothing but that we would come soon to that dark and dreadful place which is the end of all land and all seas."

"Isn't it wonderful?" whispered the girl.

Curlie was too much absorbed to answer her.

"When we had given up all hope," he read on, "Markus Laplone, a very old seaman, said we were nearing some land.

"We took soundings and found it forty fathoms. Then again it was thirty. Then with hopeful hearts we looked for that land. But when at last it broke through the fog it was no land that any of the men had seen, no, not the oldest seaman.

"But fearing to be cast upon rocks, we kept a good watch that we might find some harbor. At last we were rewarded, for to the right of us there was a river flowing into the sea.

"The storm having somewhat abated, we took oars, such as had not been broken by the storm, and some with two men to the oar and some with but one, we made shift to enter this river; having accomplished which, we dropped anchor and gave thanks to God for the preservation of our lives.

"Now, on coming on shore we found this to be indeed a strange land. Not alone were the trees and all vegetation of a sort unknown to us, but the barbarians who came about us were of a complexion such as not one man of us had ever before beheld.

"And, what was more astounding, as we made a fire to cook us food, there passed by us bearing on their backs strangely woven baskets, a caravan of these half-naked barbarians. And, when we motioned to show them we would see within his basket, one of these lowered his basket.

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"What we saw astounded us much, for it was all filled with finely-beaten gold. The fellow had as much of it as a stout sailor would be able to carry. And there were many such baskets.

"When I made as though I would take the gold, he became very angry, and would have struck me down with an ugly spear which he bore.

"But when I laughed, making as though it were a joke, he gave me a small piece, the which is at this time in my possession, as proof that what I have written here is truth and no lie.

"Now this island I have shown on the map, the nether side upon which I am writing, as a star with six points to it; though the shore marking nor the extent of the island is as yet unknown to any but those barbarians who live upon it."

There ended the main portion of the story, but in a bracket at the bottom was written:

"In some other place will be found the account of our miraculous return from this strange and mysterious island of many barbarians and much gold."

121

As Curlie finished, he glanced up with a sigh.

The girl was staring at him so intently that he could not but think she was attempting to read his thoughts.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she breathed at last.

"Yes," said Curlie quickly, "you expressed it even better before. It's great!"

He looked away. His head was in a whirl. It was the long-lost map; he was sure of that now. He remembered the figures he had copied from that other reproduction. They were blurred and unreadable on this one. Should he tell her?

His lips opened but no sound came out. No, he would not tell her, not at this time. There might be some other way.

"Your brother and his chum," he said evenly, "have gone in search of that island of gold."

She stared at him in silence.

122

"If they haven't gone already, they may be gone before we reach the coast," he continued. "They will probably go in Alfred Brightwood's seaplane."

"Yes, yes," she broke her spell of silence. "That is the way they would go. It's—it's a wonderful plane! You—you don't think anything could happen to them, do you?"

"Supposing they do not find the island?"

"But they will."

"It is to be hoped that they will find an island—some island."

"It's a wonderful plane. It would cross the Atlantic!" She clasped and unclasped her hands.

"But supposing," he rose from his chair in his excitement, "supposing they don't find the island exactly where they expect to find it? Supposing, in their eagerness to find that gold, they circle and circle and circle in search of the island until there is no longer any gas in the tank to bring them home."

"Oh, you don't think that!" She sprang to her feet and, gripping his arm to steady herself, looked up into his eyes. There was a heartbreaking appeal in those blue eyes of hers.

123

"I think," said Curlie steadily, "that my pal, Joe Marion, and I, if we find them gone when we get there, will take your father's speedy yacht and go for a little pleasure trip in the general direction they have taken. Then if they chance to get into trouble, we can give them a lift. Besides," there came a twinkle in his eye, which was wholly lost on the girl, "they might need the yacht to carry home the gold."

"Oh, will you?" she exclaimed, gripping his arm until it hurt. "That will be grand of you. For you know," she faltered, "I—I feel a little bit responsible for what they have done and if anything should happen I could never forgive myself. I—I'll tell you about it some time."

For a moment they stood there in silence, she steadying herself from the rock of the train by clinging to his arm.

"I think," she said soberly, "if you go in father's yacht, that I shall go along with you."

124

"And I think," said Curlie in a decided tone, "that you won't."

She said not another word but had he taken a look at her face just then he would have found there the expression that he had seen there before, the expression which she had inherited from her father, the self-made millionaire.

That night in his berth, as the train rushed along on its eastward journey, Curlie narrated to Joe Marion all the events which had led up to the present moment, and as much of his conclusions as he had told to Gladys Ardmore.

"So you see, Joe, old boy," he concluded, "if those young millionaires are away before we arrive we're destined to take a little trip which may have an adventure or two in it; that is, at least I will."

"Count me in," said Joe soberly. "I go anywhere you do."

"Good!" exclaimed Curlie, gripping his hand. "And in the end," he concluded, "I think we shall have told the world in a rather effective way that the air must be free for the important messages; that Uncle Sam has the right of way in the air as well as on land or sea and that he has ways of defending those rights."

At that they turned over, to lie there listening to the click-click of wheels over rails until sleep claimed them.

125

CHAPTER XII

OUT TO SEA IN A COCKLESHELL

126

Darkness was falling when at last Curlie and Joe reached the station at Landensport. In spite of the fact that they had had no supper and were weary from travel, Curlie insisted on going at once to the hangar where the *Stormy Petrel*, Alfred Brightwood's seaplane, was kept.

"Yes," said the keeper of the hangar, "they hopped off six hours ago. Seemed to be preparing for somethin' of a journey; they filled the tanks with gas and loaded her cabin full of things to eat. Some sort of a picnic, I reckon. Strange part of it was," he said reflectively, "I watched 'em as they went and sure's I'm standin' here they shot out to sea, straight as an arrow, and far as you could see 'em they was going right on. Couldn't be tryin' to cross the Atlantic, but you can never tell what'll get into that Brightwood boy's head. He's darin', he is. Jest some picnic, though, I reckon."

127

"Some picnic all right!" said Curlie emphatically. "Some picnic for all of us!"

"Eh? What?" the keeper turned on him quickly.

Curlie did not answer.

"Vincent Ardmore went with him, I suppose," Curlie said after a moment's silence.

"Of course. Just them two."

"Was the plane equipped with wireless?"

"Yes. They spent two days tending to that; seemed to be mighty particular about it."

"Yes, of course they would."

"Eh? What?" the man turned sharply about.

Curlie was silent again.

"It's funny about them wireless rigs for a plane," said the keeper at last. "You git your ground by hanging a wire seventy-five er a hundred feet down from the plane, then you get ground just the same as if the wire was dragging through the sea, don't matter whether you're up a hundred miles or five thousand. Strange stuff, this radio."

128

"Yes," said Curlie, "it is. By the way," he exclaimed suddenly, "do you know about this new Packard-Prentiss equipment?"

"Yes, sir; was tryin' one out only yesterday. Fine thing."

"Reliable?"

"Absolutely."

"Know where I can get one?"

"Over at Dorrotey's sea-goods store on the dock. He's got one er two for sale."

"Thanks." He and Joe started away.

"Next place is Dock No. 3. The *Kittlewake*, the Ardmore yacht, is tied up over there. Unless I miss my guess we'll be off to sea in less than two hours," said Curlie to Joe. "Speed's the word now. Those two young dreamers have gotten away by plane. We've got to stand by in the *Kittlewake* or

they'll never be seen again. I don't propose to allow the sea to rob me of my first important offender against the laws of the air."

129

"By the way," said Joe, "where is Gladys Ardmore? I haven't seen her since we left New York."

"I don't know and I'm glad I don't," said Curlie. "She let fall a remark in the dining car that I didn't like. She said she thought she'd go along with us on this trip. A five hundred mile trip straight out to sea in a fifty-foot pleasure yacht with a fifteen-foot beam, is no sort of trip for a girl. I was afraid she'd try to insist. That would have caused a scene, for unless I miss my guess she's the determined sort like her father."

"It's queer she gave us up so quickly."

"Yes, but I'm glad she did."

Suddenly Curlie started. As they rounded a corner he caught sight of a trim, slender figure. This girl had been standing in the light of a shop window. Now she dodged inside.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Thought that looked like her, but of course it couldn't be. Some ship captain's daughter probably."

They arrived on board the *Kittlewake* just as the captain, a red-faced old British salt, and the engineer, a silent man who was fully as slim and wiry of build as Curlie himself, were finishing lunch.

130

"Pardon me," said Curlie, "but did you get Mr. Ardmore's wire?"

"You're this wireless man, Curlie Carson?" asked the captain.

"Yes."

"Is message is 'ere; came this morning."

"Then you're ready to put off at once."

"At once!" The captain stared his amazement. "'Ere it is night. At once, 'e says!"

"It's very necessary that we go at once," said Curlie firmly, "and I believe you have your orders."

"To be hat your service in hevery particular."

"All right then, we must be on our way in an hour."

"Wot course?" The skipper rose to his feet.

"This is the point we must reach with all speed," said Curlie, drawing the photograph of the mysterious old map from his pocket and pointing to the star near the center. "Compare that with your own chart, locate it as well as you can and then mark out your own course."

131

The skipper stared at him as though he thought Curlie crazy.

"That! Why that—"

Turning quickly, he disappeared up the hatch, to return presently with a chart. This he placed upon the table, beside the photograph.

After five minutes of close study he turned an astonished face upon the boy.

"That, as I 'ave thought, is five 'undred miles hout to sea. Five 'undred miles in a cockleshell. Man, you're daft."

"All right," said Curlie; "the trip's got to be made. I thought you might be afraid to undertake it; that's why I wanted to know at once. I'll go out and hunt another skipper. There's surely plenty of them idle these dull times."

"Hafraid, did 'e say! Me! Hafraid!" The skipper was purple with rage. "Hafraid 'e says. 'E says it, a bloomin' Yankee kid, an' me as 'as 'ad ships sunk under me twice by the bloody German submarines! Me, Captain Jarvis, hafraid."

132

He turned suddenly upon Curlie. "Go git yer togs an' shake a leg er the bloomin' *Kittlewake*'ll be off without you on board."

"That's the talk!" smiled Curlie. "Never fear! We'll be here."

He turned to Joe. "You go ashore and buy us each a suit of roughing-it things, a so'-wester and the like. We'll need 'em. I'll be back in less than an hour."

When Curlie returned from his mission ashore he carried but one bundle. That resembled a fencepost in size and shape. It was carefully wrapped and sealed in sticky black tar cloth.

"Going to throw a message overboard in case we're lost, I suppose," laughed Joe.

"Something like that," Curlie laughed back. Nevertheless, he carried the thing with great care to his stateroom and deposited it beneath his berth in the cabin forward on the main deck.

133

An hour later the two boys were standing on deck watching the shore lights fade. Each was busy

with his own thoughts and wondering, no doubt, in his own way how much of adventure this trip held for him.

134

CHAPTER XIII

A GHOST WALKS

"Ever take much interest in gasoline engines?" Curlie suddenly inquired of Joe.

"Yes, quite a bit; had a shift on one of those marine kinds last summer on the Great Lakes."

"Good! You'll have to take a shift here on the *Kittlewake*. This trip can't be made without sleep. I'll spell the captain at the wheel and you can relieve that lanky engineer."

Again they lapsed into silence. Half unconsciously each boy was taking stock of the craft they had requisitioned, trying to judge whether or not she was equal to the task she had been put to. Speed she had in plenty. "Do forty knots a 'our," the skipper put it, "an' never 'eat a bearin'."

She was a trim craft. Narrow of beam, a two-master with a steel hull that stood well out of the water forward, she rode the water with the repose and high glee of the bird she was named after.

135

"Yes, she's a beauty, and a go-getter," Curlie was thinking to himself, "but in a storm, now, four or five hundred miles from land, what then?"

Had he known how soon his question was to be answered he might well have shuddered.

"Better go down and have a look at the engines before you turn in for a wink of sleep," he told Joe.

When Joe had gone below, Curlie still sat there on the rail aft. The throb of the engines beneath him, the rapid rush of air that fanned his cheek, was medicine to his weary brain. He had been caught in a whirlwind of events and here, for a time, he had been cast down in a quiet place where his mind might clear itself of the wreckage of thought that had been torn up and strewn about within it.

It had been a wild race. He had lost thus far; would he lose in the end? Had he, after all, trusted too much to theory? Had these two sons of rich men really only gone for some picnic trip to a well-known island farther south along the coast? Or had they, as he had assumed, guided by their ancient map, gone in search of the island of "many barbarians and much gold," an island which he was convinced existed only in name?

136

The girl, too; what had she meant when she said she was in some ways responsible for her brother's actions? There was something queer about the whole affair. Who had taken the wireless equipment from the wrecked car out there by the Forest Preserve? Did young Ardmore have the ancient original of that interesting map or only the photograph? If he did not have it, who was in possession of it? Strange thing that it would be lost for a hundred years only to have a brand-new photograph of it show up all at once. Rather ghostly, he thought. He had meant to ask Gladys Ardmore about that. He'd ask her now if she were here. But he was more than glad she was not here.

137

"No trip for a girl," he told himself, "and she said she'd go. Strange she gave it up so easily. Strange that—"

His thoughts broke off suddenly as he stared forward. The *Kittlewake* was equipped with three cabins; a forecabin and aftercabin, both below the main deck, built largely for stormy weather, and a fair-weather cabin in the center of the main deck. The night was dark, the moon not having come up. It was difficult to distinguish objects at a distance, but, unless his eyes deceived him, Curlie saw some object, all white and ghostly, rising slowly from the hatchway leading to the forecabin. Cold perspiration sprang out upon his brow, his heart beat madly, his knees trembled as he involuntarily moved forward. That was the way he had of treating ghosts; he walked straight at them.

In the meantime, had one been on some craft three hundred miles farther on in the direct course of the *Kittlewake*, he might have caught the thunderous drumming of two powerful Liberty motors. He might also have seen a spot of light playing constantly upon the black waters. While this light was constant, it moved rapidly forward in a wide circle. The circle was never the same in size or location, yet the spot of light did not move more than twenty miles in any direction from a certain given center. The spot of illumination came from a powerful searchlight mounted upon a seaplane. It was manipulated by a boy in the rear seat. A second boy drove the plane. These boys, as you have no doubt long since guessed, were Vincent Ardmore and his reckless pal, Alfred Brightwood.

138

This light had been playing upon the water since darkness had fallen, some three hours before.

They had been circling for four hours. Their hopes of completing their search before dark had been thwarted by a defective engine which had compelled them to make a landing upon the sea when the journey was only half completed.

139

At this particular moment the plane was climbing steadily. It was a perfect "man-bird" of the air, was this *Stormy Petrel*. With broad spreading planes and powerful motors, it was the type of plane that now and again hops off from some point in England during the dewy morning hours and carries her crew safely to Cuba without a single stop.

Yet these boys were not planning a trip across to Europe. They were, as Curlie had supposed they might be, hunting for the island of "many barbarians and much gold."

When they had mounted to a considerable height, Alfred shut off the engines and allowed her to volplane toward the sea.

"Aw, let's give it up and get back," said Vincent downheartedly. "It's not here. Probably that old map-maker made a mistake of a trifling hundred miles or so."

"That's a grand idea!" exclaimed Brightwood, grasping at a straw. "Not a hundred miles but perhaps thirty or forty miles. Old boy, we'll be cooking lunch on a stove of pure gold in half an hour. You'll see! Just get your light fixed right and I'll take a wider circle. That'll get it."

140

"But if we use up much more gas we won't get back to land," hesitated Vincent.

"Land! Who wants to get back to land!" the other exploded. "If worst comes to worst we've got the wireless, haven't we? We can light on the water and send out an S. O. S., can't we? I must say you're a mighty bum sailor."

"Oh, all right," said Vincent, stung into silence, "go ahead and try it."

Again the motors thundered. Again the spot light traced a circular path across the dark waters, which to the boy who held the light, appeared to be reaching up black, fiendish hands to drag them down. This time the circle they cut was many miles in circumference, miles which drew deeply from the supply of gasoline in their tanks.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COMING STORM

141

As Curlie's feet carried him forward on the deck of the *Kittlewake*, his eyes beheld the ghost which rose from the hatch taking on a familiar form. A white middy blouse, short white skirt and a white tarn, worn by a slender girl, moved forward to meet him. As the form came into the square of light cast by a cabin window, his lips framed her name:

"Gladys Ardmores!"

"Why, yes," she smiled, "didn't you expect me? I told you I thought I'd go."

"And I said you should not." Her coolness angered him.

"You forget that this is my father's boat. A man's daughter should always be a welcome guest on his boat."

"But—but that's not it," he hesitated. "This is not a pleasure trip. We are going five hundred miles straight to sea in a boat intended for shore travel. It's likely to storm." He sniffed the air and held his cheek to the breeze that was already breaking the water into little choppy waves. "It is going to be dangerous."

142

"But you are going," she said soberly, "to the assistance of my brother. I have a better right than you to risk my life to save my own brother. I can be of assistance to you. Truly, I can. I can be the galley cook."

"You a cook?" He looked his surprise.

"Certainly. Do you think a rich man's daughter can do nothing but play tennis and pour tea? Those times are gone, if indeed they ever existed. I am as able to do things as is your sister, if you have one."

"But," said Curlie suddenly, "I am going from a sense of duty. Having set out to have your brother arrested I mean to do it."

For a full moment she stared at him stupefied. Then she said slowly, through set, white lips: "You wouldn't do that?"

143

"Why shouldn't I?" His tone was more gentle. "He has broken the laws of the air. Time and again

he sent messages on 600, a radio wave length reserved to coast and ship service alone. He has hindered sea traffic and once narrowly escaped being the death of brave men at sea."

"Oh," she breathed, sinking down upon a coil of cable, "I—didn't know it was as bad as that. And I—I—knew all about it. I—I—"

She did not finish but sat there staring at him. At last she spoke again. Her tone was strained and husky with emotion.

"You—you'll want to arrest me too when you know the truth."

"You'll not be dragged into it unless you insist."

"But I do insist!" She sprang to her feet. Her nails digging into her clenched fists, she faced him. Her eyes were bright and terrible.

"Do you think," she fairly screamed, "that I would be part of a thing that was wrong, whether I knew it or not at the time, and then when trouble came from it, do you think that I would sneak out of it and allow someone else to suffer for it? Do you think I'd sneak out of it because anyone would let me—because I am a girl?"

144

Completely at a loss to know what to do upon this turn of events, Curlie stood there staring back at the girl.

She at last sank back upon her seat. Curlie took three turns around the deck. At last he approached her with a steady step.

"Miss Ardmore," he said, taking off his cap, "I apologize. I—I really didn't know that a girl could be that kind of a real sport."

Before she could answer he hurried on: "For the time being we can let the matter we were just speaking of rest. Matters far more important than the vindicating of the law, important as that always is, are before us. Your brother and his friend, unless I am mistaken, are in grave danger. We may be able to save them; we may not. We can but try and this trial requires all our wisdom and strength."

145

"More than that," he again held his face to the stiffening gale, "we ourselves are in considerable danger. Whether this 'cockleshell,' as the skipper calls her, can weather a severe storm on the open sea, is a question. That question is to be answered within a few hours. We're in for a blow. We're too far on our way to retreat if we wished to. We must weather it. You can be of assistance to us as you suggest, and more than that, you can help us by being brave, fearless and hopeful. May we count on you?"

There was a cold, brave smile on the girl's face as she answered:

"You know my father. He has never yet been beaten. I am his child."

Then suddenly, casting all reserve aside, she gripped his arm and bestowing a warm smile upon him said almost in a whisper:

"Curlie Carson, I like you. You're real, the realest person I ever knew." Then turning swiftly about, she danced along the deck, to disappear down the hatch to the forecabin.

146

"Huh!" said Curlie, after a moment's thought, "I never could make out what girls are like. But one thing I'm sure of: that one will drown or starve or freeze when necessity demands it, without a murmur. You can count on her!"

Throwing a swift glance to where a thick bank of clouds was painting the night sky the color of blue-black ink, he hurried below to consult with the skipper about the weather. They were, he concluded, some three hundred and fifty miles out to sea. If this storm meant grave dangers to them, what must it mean to two boys in a seaplane skimming through the air over the sea? He shivered at the thought.

Fifteen minutes later, Curlie was in the small wireless cabin of the *Kittlewake*. With a receiver clamped over his head, with a motor purring at his feet and with the hum of wires and coils all about him, he felt more at ease and at home than he had been for many hours.

His talk with the skipper had confirmed his fears; they were in for a blow.

147

"A nor'-easter, sir," he had affirmed, "an' one you'll remember for many a day. Oh! we'll weather 'er, sir; somehow we'll 'ave to weather 'er. With the millionaire heiress aboard we'll 'ave to, worse luck for it. We'll 'ammer down the 'atches an' let 'er ride if we 'ave to but it's a jolly 'ard shaking habout we'll get, sir. But she's a 'arty, clean-hulled little boat, she is, an' she'll ride 'er some'ow."

After receiving this information, Curlie had gone directly to the wireless cabin. He was more anxious than he was willing to admit for the safety of his two charges, the millionaire's children; for Curlie did think of them as his charges. He was used to taking burdens on his own shoulders. It had always been his way.

Just now he was listening in on 600, ready to pick up any message which might come from the boys on the seaplane. That the *Stormy Petrel* was a doomed aircraft he had not the least doubt. The only question which remained in his mind was whether the *Kittlewake* or some other craft would reach her in time to save the two reckless boys.

148

Now and again as he listened he picked up a message from shore. The center of the storm, which was fast approaching, was to the east, off shore. Messages coming from the storm's direction would be greatly disturbed by static. But to the west the air was still clear.

Now he heard a ship off Long Island Sound speaking for a pilot; now some shore station at Boston assigned to some ship a harbor space; and now some powerful broadcasting station sent out to all the world a warning against the rising storm.

Tiring of all this, for a time he tuned his instrument to 200.

"Be interesting to see how far short wave lengths and high power will carry," was his mental comment.

Now he caught a faint echo of a song; now a note of laughter; and now the serious tones of some man speaking with his homefolks.

But what was this? He fancied he caught a familiar whisper. Adjusting his wires, adding all the amplifying power his instruments possessed, he listened eagerly; then, to his astonishment heard his own nickname spoken.

"Hello, Curlie," came to him distinctly. Then, "Are you there? You remember that big bad man, the one who used heaps of power on 1200? Well, he's gone north—very far north. You'd want to follow him, Curlie, if you knew what I know. The radiophone is going to do great things for the north, Curlie. But men like him will spoil it all. Remember this, Curlie: If you do go, be careful. Careful. He's a bad man and the stakes are big!" The whisper ceased. The silence that followed it was ghostly.

"And that," Curlie whispered softly, "came all the way from my dear old home town. She thought I was still in the secret tower room. Fine chance of my following that fellow up north. But when I get back I'll investigate. There may be something big there, just as she says there is. Yes, I'll look into it when I get back—if I do get back."

He shivered as he caught the howl of the wind in the rigging. Then, tuning his instrument back to 600, he listened once more for some message from the seaplane, the *Stormy Petrel*.

CHAPTER XV

S. O. S.

The spot of light which raced across the waters of the sea where no land was to be seen, where the black surface of the swiftly changing waters shone always beneath the occupants of the seaplane, took on an ever widening circle. There appeared to be no end to Alfred Brightwood's belief that somewhere in the midst of all this waste of waters there was an island.

Vincent Ardmore had long since given up hope of becoming rich by this mad adventure. His only hope, the one that gave strength to his arms benumbed by long clinging to the flashlight and new sight to his eyes, weary with watching, was that they might discover some bit of land, a coral island, perhaps, where they might find refuge from the sea until a craft, called to their aid, might rescue them.

The thought of returning to the mainland he had all but abandoned. The gas in the tank was too low for that; at least he was quite certain it must be.

There was a chance, of course, that if they alighted upon the water and sent out an S. O. S., the international call for aid, they would be answered by some near-by ship. But this seemed only a remote possibility. He dared not hope it would happen. They were far from any regular course of trans-Atlantic vessels and too far from shore to be picked up by a coast vessel or a fishing smack. The very fact that this island, marked so plainly on the ancient map, had been in this particular spot, so remote from the main sea-roads, had strengthened their belief that during all the centuries of travel it had been lost from man's memory and hidden from his view. Now this very isolation, since they were unable to locate this island, if indeed it existed at all, threatened to be their undoing.

Still they circled and circled with great, untiring sweeps. At last, releasing the searchlight, Vincent put his lips to a speaking tube.

"Let's light," he grumbled. "I'm dead. What's the use?"

"What else can we do but keep looking?" Alfred answered.

"Take a look at the gas. Maybe it will carry us back."

Even as he spoke, a strange thing happened. The air appeared suddenly to have dropped from beneath the plane. Straight down for fifty feet she dropped.

With the utmost difficulty Alfred succeeded in preventing her from taking a nose dive into the sea.

"She—she bumped," he managed to pant at last. "Something the matter with the air."

And indeed there was something about the atmospheric conditions which they had not sensed. Busy as they had been they had not seen the black bank of clouds to the northeast of them. With the wild rush of air from sheer speed, they had not felt the increasing strength of the gale. Once Vincent had fancied that the sea, far beneath them, seemed disturbed, but so far beneath them was it that he could not tell.

154

Now in surprise and consternation, as if to steady his reeling brain, he gripped the fuselage beside him while he shrilled into the tube:

"Look! Look over there! Lightning!"

"Watch out, I'm going down," warned the other boy. "Going to light."

To do this was no easy task. Three times they swooped low, to skim along just over the crest of the waves, only to tilt upward again.

"Looks bad," grumbled the young pilot.

The fourth time, he dared it. With the spray spattering his goggles, he sent the plane right into the midst of it. For a second it seemed that nothing could save them, that the wave they had nose-dived into would throw their plane end for end and land her on her back, with her two occupants hopeless prisoners strapped head down to drown beneath her.

But at last the powerful motors conquered and, tossed by the ever increasing swells, the plane rode the sea like the stormy petrel after which she had been named.

155

"Quick!" exclaimed Alfred as the motors ceased to throb. "Strip off your harness and get back to the tank."

A moment later Vincent was making a perilous journey to the gas tank. Twice the wind all but swept him into the sea; once a wave drenched him with its chilling waters. When at last he reached his destination it was only to utter a groan; more gas had been used than he had dared think.

"Can't—can't make it," he mumbled as he struggled back to his place.

"Have to send out an S. O. S. then. What wave length do you use?"

"You ought to know," exclaimed Vincent almost savagely. "You were the one who insisted on using it when we were making up our plans."

"Six hundred? Oh, yes," Alfred said indifferently. "Well, what of it?"

"Just this much of it," said Vincent thoughtfully. "I've been going over and over it in my mind the last little while. What if we send out our S. O. S. now and some selfish landlubber such as we were is talking about matters of little importance and muddles our message? We might be left to drown."

156

"Aw, can that sob stuff," grumbled Alfred angrily. "Are you going to send that S. O. S. or am I?"

"I will," said Vincent, preparing to climb to a position on the plane above him where the radiophone was located. "But"—he suddenly began to sway dizzily—"but where are we?"

He sank back into his seat. For a full moment, with the waves tossing the plane about and the black clouds mounting higher and higher, the two boys stared at one another in silence. Yes, where were they? Who could tell? They were not trained mariners. They could not have taken a reckoning even had they been in possession of the needed instruments.

"Why," said Alfred hesitatingly, "we must be somewhere near that spot where the island was supposed to be located. That's as near as we can come to it. Send out that latitude and longitude; then we'll climb back into the air. We'll be safer there than on the water and we can keep the searchlight shooting out flashes in all directions. A ship coming to our aid will see the light."

157

"If they come," Vincent whispered.

"Hurry!" exclaimed Alfred, as a giant wave, rising above its mates, threatened to tear their plane into shreds.

With benumbed and trembling fingers the boy unwrapped his instruments, adjusted a coil, twisted a knob and threw in his switch. Then his heart stood still. The motor did not start. Had it been dampened and short-circuited? Would it refuse to go? Were they already lost?

Just as he was giving up in despair, there came a humming sound and a moment later the well-known signal of distress had been flashed out across the waves. Three times he repeated it. Three times in a few sharp words he told their general location and their plight. Then with wildly beating heart, he pressed the receivers to his ears and awaited a reply.

158

A moment passed, two, three, four; but there came no answering call. Only the buzz and snap of the ever-increasing static greeted his straining ears.

Once more he sent out the message; again he listened. Still no response.

"C'm'on," came from the boy below. "It's getting dangerous. You can get a message off in the air. Gotta get out o' here. Gotta climb. May not be able to make it even now."

As the other boy glanced down at the white-capped waves all about them he realized that his companion spoke the truth.

Hurriedly rewrapping his instruments, all but the receivers, which by the aid of an extension he brought down with him, he made his way to his seat and strapped on his harness.

"All right," he breathed.

Once more the motors thundered. For a long distance they raced through blinding spray. Little by little this diminished until with a swoop, like a sea gull, the magnificent plane shot upward. The next instant they felt a dash of cold rain upon their cheeks. Was the storm upon them? Or was this merely a warning dash which had reached them far in advance of the deluge? For the moment they could not tell.

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CHAPTER XVI

A CONFESSION

For an hour Curlie Carson had been seated in the radiophone cabin of the *Kittlewake*. During that time his delicately adjusted amplifier and his wonderful ears had enabled him to pick up many weird and unusual messages. Listening in at sea before a great storm is like wandering on the beach after that same storm; you never can tell what you may pick up. But though fragments of many messages had come to him, not one of any importance to the *Kittlewake* had reached his ears. If during that time any message from the *Stormy Petrel* had been sent out, it had been lost in the crash and snap of static which now kept up a constant din in his ears.

Again doubt assailed him. He had no positive knowledge that the boys in the plane had gone in search of that mysterious island of the old chart. They might, for all he knew, be at this moment enjoying a rich feast on some island off the coast of America.

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"Cuba, for instance," he told himself. "Not at all impossible. Short trip for such a seaplane."

"And here," he grumbled angrily to himself, "here I am risking my own life and the life of my companions and crew, inviting death to all these, and this on a mere conjecture. Guess I'm a fool."

The gale was rising every moment. Even as he spoke the prow of the boat reared in air, to come down with such an impact as made one believe she had stepped on something solid.

Just when Curlie's patience with himself and all the rest of the world was exhausted, Joe Marion opened the door. The wind, boosting him across the threshold, slammed the door after him.

"Whew!" he sputtered. "Going to be rotten. Tell you what, I don't like it. Dangerous, I'd say!"

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"Nothing's dangerous," smiled Curlie, greatly pleased to see that someone at least was more disturbed than himself. "Nothing's really dangerous since the invention of the radiophone. Ocean, desert, Arctic wilderness; it's all the same. Sick, lost, shipwrecked? All you've got to do is keep your head clear and your radiophone dry and tuned up. It'll find you a way out."

"Yes, but," hesitated Joe, "how the deuce you going to pack a radiophone outfit, all those coils, batteries and boxes, when you're shipwrecked? How you going to keep 'em dry with the rain pelting you from above and the salt water beating at you from below? Lot of sense to that! Huh!" he grunted contemptuously. "That for your radiophone!" He snapped his finger. "And that for your old sloppy ocean! Give me a square yard of good old terra firma and I'll get along without all your modern inventions."

"It can be done, though," said Curlie thoughtfully.

"What can?"

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"Radiophone kept dry after a wreck at sea."

"How?"

Curlie did not answer the question. Instead, he snapped the receiver from his head and handed it to Joe.

"Take this and listen in." He rose stiffly. "This business is getting on my nerves. I've got to get out for a breath of splendid fresh sea breeze."

"Nerves?" said Joe incredulously. "You got nerves?"

"Sometimes. Just now I have."

On the deck Curlie experienced difficulty in walking. As he worked his way forward he found that one moment his legs were far too long and his foot came down with a suddenness that set his teeth chattering; the next moment his legs had grown suddenly short. It was like stepping down stairs in the dark and taking two steps at a time when you expected to take but one.

"Never saw such a rumpus on the sea," he grumbled. "Going to be worse," he told himself as a chain of lightning, leaping across the sky, illumined the bank of black clouds that lay before them. "Going to be lots worse." 164

Poking his head into the wheel-house, he bellowed above the storm: "How's she go?"

"Seen worse'n 'er," the skipper shouted back.

"Ought to be at the spot we started for in half an hour—that island on the old chart."

"Never was no island," the skipper roared.

"Maybe not."

"Supposin' we get there, what then?"

"Don't know yet."

The skipper stared at Curlie for a full moment as if attempting to determine whether he were insane, then turned in silence to his wheel.

The wind blew the door shut and Curlie resumed his long-legged, short-legged march.

He had done three turns around the deck when his eyes caught a small figure crumpled up on the pile of ropes forward.

"Hello," he cried, "you out here?"

Gladys did not answer at once. She was straining her eyes as if to see some object which might be hovering above the jagged, sea-swept skyline. 165

"No," said Curlie, as if in answer to a question, "you couldn't see the plane. You couldn't see it fifty fathoms away and then it would flash by you like a carrier pigeon. No use if you did see it. Couldn't do anything. But there's one chance in a million of their coming into our line of vision, so it's no use watching. Only chance is a radiophone message giving their location."

"But I—I want to. I—I ought to do something." For the first time he noticed how white and drawn her face was.

"All right," he said in a quiet voice, "you just sit where you are and I'll sit here beside you and you tell me one or two things. That will help."

"Tell—tell what?"

"Tell me this: Did your brother have the original of that old map?"

"Yes," her tone was already quieting down, "yes, he did, or Alfred Brightwood did. His father is very rich and he has a hobby of collecting very old editions of books. He pays terrible prices for them. He bought an old, old copy of 'Marco Polo's Travels'; paid fifteen thousand dollars for it. And inside its cover Alfred found that old map with the curious writing on the back of it. 166

"He thought right away that it might hide some great secret, so he had it photographed and sent the photo to Vincent. Vincent got a great scholar to read the writing for him. He never told me what the writing was; said that no one but he and Alfred should know; that it was a great secret and that girls couldn't keep secrets, so I was not to know.

"But they can keep secrets!" she exploded, breaking off from her narrative. "They do keep secrets—more secrets than boys do. Wonderful and terrible secrets sometimes!"

"All right," smiled Curlie, "I agree with you, absolutely, but what did they do then?"

"Well," the girl pressed her temples as if to drive the thoughts of the present from her. "They—why then Alfred called Vincent by radiophone on 600. Vincent was terribly afraid to answer on 600, but he did. And then, because he thought the discovery of the map was so awfully important, he rigged up a radiophone on his auto and I—I—she buried her face in her hands—"I helped him. I was with him in the car; drove while he sent the messages, all but that last night, when the car was wrecked. 167

"I—I know I shouldn't have done it. I knew all the time it was wrong, but Alfred was stubborn and wouldn't talk on anything but 600—said he had as much right on 600 as anyone else—so we did it."

"And then the car was wrecked?" suggested Curlie. He felt a trifle mean about making the girl tell, but he knew she would be more comfortable once she got it out of her system. People are that way.

"Yes," she said, "someone shot his tire and wrecked his machine. I found the car, first thing in the morning, and when I saw Vincent wasn't there I got two big packing baskets that we once used in the Rockies and put them on my horse. Then I went back and got all that radio stuff and took it home and hid it. Do you think I did wrong?" The eyes she turned to his were appealing ones.

"Maybe you did," said Curlie huskily, "but that doesn't matter now; you're paying for it all right—going to pay for it in full before this voyage is over. The thing you must try to think of now is the present, the little round present that is right here now. And you must try to be brave."

"And—and"—she said in a faltering voice—"do you think Vincent is paying for what he did?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Then you won't have to arrest him if he's already punished?" The appealing eyes were again upon him.

At that moment Curlie did a strange thing, so strange that the words sounded preposterous to his own ears:

"No," he said slowly, "I won't, unless—unless he asks me to."

"Oh!" she breathed, "thank you." She placed her icy-cold hand on his for a second.

"You're freezing!" he exclaimed suddenly. "You'll be making yourself sick. You must get inside!"

"I'll go to the lounging cabin in mid-deck. The fore-castle is so—so lonesome," she stammered. "If you need me, you'll find me there."

Feeling her way along the rail, she disappeared into the darkness.

At almost the same moment there came the bellowing sound of a voice that could be heard above the roar of the storm:

"Curlie! Curlie! Come here! Something coming in. Can't make it out!"

It was Joe Marion. Stumbling aft, now banging his feet down hard and now treading on empty air, Curlie made his way to the radiophone cabin.

CHAPTER XVII

A BLINDING FLASH OF LIGHT

"It's an S. O. S.," screamed Joe at the top of his voice, as Curlie came hurrying up. "They sent that much in code and I got it all right. Then they tried to tell me their troubles and all I got was a mumble and grumble mixed with static, which meant nothing at all to me. Repeated it three times. Very little space in between. Should have called you, I guess, but there really wasn't time; besides I kept thinking I'd start getting what he sent."

"Where'd it come from?" Curlie asked as he snapped the receiver over his head.

"Straight out of the storm. Fifty or sixty miles northeast."

Curlie groaned. "That's what I get for being impatient. Ought to have stayed right here. It's those boys all right and we've missed them; may never pick them up again."

For a time there was silence in the wireless cabin, such a silence as one experiences in the midst of a rising storm. The flap of ropes, the creak of yard-arms, the rush of waves which were already washing the deck, the chug-chug-chug of the prow of the brave little craft as she leaped from wave-crest to wave-crest; all this made such music as an orchestra might, had every man musician of them gone mad. And this was the "silence" Curlie did not for a long time break.

"Well!" he shouted at last, "that settles one thing. I was right. They did go in search of that mythical island."

"You can't be sure," said Joe. "Might have been a fishing boat led off her course by a chase after a whale. You never can tell."

"No, that's right," Curlie agreed.

"What makes you so sure the island on that map is mythical?" asked Joe.

"Doesn't sound reasonable."

"Lots of things don't. Take the radiophone; it wouldn't have sounded reasonable a few years ago. Lot of new things wouldn't. A new island is discovered somewhere about every year. Why not around here?"

"Anyway, I don't believe it," shouted Curlie.

Yet, after all, as he thought of it now he found himself hoping against hope that there was some such island. It wasn't the gold he was thinking of, but a haven of refuge. This storm was going to be a bad one. He fancied it was going to be one of the worst experienced on the Atlantic for years. If only there were somewhere a sheltered nook into which this cockleshell of a craft they were riding on might be driven, it would bring him great relief. He thought a little of Joe, of the skipper and the engineer, but he thought a great deal about the girl.

"No place for a girl," he mumbled. "Perhaps," he tried to tell himself, "there is an island, a very small island overlooked for centuries by navigators; perhaps those boys have found it. Perhaps they were merely sending out an S. O. S. to get someone to bring them gas to carry them home. But rat!" he exploded, "I don't believe it. Don't—"

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He cut himself short to press the receivers tight against his ears. He was getting something. Quickly he manipulated the coil of his radio compass. Yes, it was an S. O. S.! And, yes, it was coming directly out of the storm. But what was this they were saying? "Two boys—" He got that much, but what was that? Strain his ears as he might, he could not catch another word.

But now—now he believed he was about to get it. Moving the coil backward and forward he strained every muscle in his face in a mad effort to understand. Yes, yes, that was it! Then, just as he was getting it a terrible thing happened. There came a blinding flash of light, accompanied by a rending, tearing, deafening crash. He felt himself seized by some invisible power which wrenched every muscle, twisted every joint in his body, then flung him limp and motionless to the floor.

When he came to himself, Joe and the girl were bending over him. Joe was tearing at the buttons of his shirt. The girl was rocking backward and forward. All but overcome with excitement, she was still attempting to chafe his right hand. When she saw him open his eyes she uttered a little cry, then toppled over in a dead faint.

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"Wha—what happened?" Curlie's lips framed the words.

"Lightning," shouted Joe. "Protectors must have got damp. Short-circuited. Raised hob. Burned out about everything, I guess."

"Can't be as bad as that. Tend to the girl," Curlie nodded toward the corner.

Joe ducked out of the cabin, to appear a moment later with a cold, damp cloth. This he spread over the girl's forehead. A moment later she sat up and looked about her.

Curlie was sitting up also. He was rubbing his head. When he saw the girl looking at him he laughed and sang:

"Oh, a sailor's life is a merry life,
And it's a sailor's life for me.

"But say!" he exclaimed suddenly, "what was I doing when things went to pieces?"

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Joe nodded toward the radiophone desk where coils and instruments lay piled in tangled confusion.

"You were getting a message from out the storm."

"Oh yes, and they gave me their location. It was—no, I haven't it. Lightning drove it right out of my head. Let me think. Let me concentrate."

For a full moment there was silence, the silence of the raging sea. Then Curlie shook his head sadly.

"No, I can't remember," his lips framed the words. It was unnecessary that he shout them aloud.

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl, and for a moment it seemed that she would faint again. But she controlled herself bravely.

"We'll find them yet," she forced a brave smile. "It's a comfort just to know they're still alive, that they're near us, at least not too far away for us to save them if we can only find them."

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Again there was silence. Then Curlie rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Give us a hand here, Joe, old scout," he said. "We'll get this thing back in shape. There are extra vacuum tubes, tuning-coils and the like, and plenty of all kinds of wire. We'll manage it somehow—got to."

The girl rose, to sink upon a seat in the corner.

"That's right," shouted Curlie. "You stay right here. We'll be company for each other. Fellow needs company on a night like this. Besides, I've got something to say, a lot to say, to you and Joe as soon as the radiophone is tuned up again. Got to say it before I get killed again," he chuckled.

THE STORMY PETREL GETS AN ANSWER

The dash of rain which beat like a volley of lead upon the fuselage of the seaplane as she rose above the spray lasted but a moment.

"Just a warning of what's to come," Vincent called through the tube. "Think we could run away from the storm?"

"We'd just get lost on the ocean and not know what location to radiophone," grumbled his companion. "Better keep circling. We can get above the storm if we must."

Once more the weary circle was commenced. With little hope of sighting land, Vincent still fixed his gaze upon the black waters below, while he sent the flash of light, now far to the right, now to the left, and now straight beneath them.

"Someone must have caught our S. O. S." he told himself. "We ought to get sight of their lights pretty soon. But then," his hopes grew faint, "not many ships in these seas. Might not have heard us. Might not be able to reach us. Might—"

He broke off abruptly. A blinding flash of lightning had illumined the waters for miles in every direction. In that flash his eyes had seen something; at least, he thought they had; some craft away to the left of them; a craft which reminded him of one he had sailed upon many a time; his father's yacht, the *Kittlewake*.

"But of course it couldn't be," he told himself. "Nobody'd be crazy enough to—"

A second flash illumined the water, but this time, strain his eyes as he might, he caught no glimpse of craft of any sort.

"Must have dreamed it," he muttered. He closed his eyes for a second and in that second saw his sister Gladys clearly mirrored on his mind's vision. She was staggering down a pitching deck.

"Huh!" he muttered, shaking himself violently, "this business is getting my goat. I'll be delirious if I don't watch out."

Again he fixed his gaze upon the spot of light as it traveled over the water.

He had kept steadily at the task for fifteen minutes, was wondering how much longer the gas would hold out, wondering, too, whether the storm was ever going to break, when he caught the pilot's signal in the tube.

"How about trying another message?" his companion called.

"Up here?" he asked in dismay.

"I know—awful dangerous. But we've got to risk something. Lost if we don't."

"All right, I'll try." He began cautiously to unbuckle his harness.

Scarcely had he loosened two of the three straps which held him in place when the plane gave a sudden lurch. Having struck a pocket, it dropped like an elevator cage released from its cable, straight down.

"Oh—ah!" he exclaimed as he caught at a rod just in time to escape being hurled away.

"Got to be careful," he told himself, "awful careful! Have to hold on with one hand while I work with the other. Feet'll help too."

When the plane had settled again, he loosened the last strap, then began with the utmost caution to drag himself to the surface of the plane above him.

Once a vivid flash of lightning showed him the dizzy depths beneath him. He was at that moment clinging to a rod with both hands. His legs were twined about a second. Thus he hung suspended out over two thousand feet of air and as many fathoms of water.

For a moment a dizzy sickness overcame him, but this passed away. Again he struggled to gain the platform above. This time he was successful.

Even here he did not abandon caution. The straps were still about his waist. One of these he fastened to a rod. Then with one hand he clung to the framework before him, while with the other he worked at the task of adjusting instruments.

"Slow business," he murmured. "Maybe it won't work when I get through. Maybe too damp. Maybe it—"

Suddenly he found himself floating in air, like the tail of a kite. Only the strap and his viselike grip saved him. The plane had struck another pocket.

He was at last thrown back upon the platform with such force as dashed the air from his lungs and a large part of his senses from his brain.

After a moment of mental struggle he resumed his task. He worked feverishly now. The fear that he might be seriously injured before he had completed it had seized him.

"Now," he breathed at last, "now we'll see!"

His hand touched a switch. The motor buzzed.

"Ah! She works! She works!" he exulted.

Then with trembling fingers he sent out the signal of distress. He followed this with their location, also in code. Three times he repeated the message. Then snapping on his receiver, he strained his ear to listen.

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"Ah!—" his lips parted. He was getting something. Was it an answer? He could scarcely believe his ears. Yet it came distinctly:

"Yacht *Kittliewake*, Curlie—"

Just at that moment the plane gave a sickening swerve. Caught off his balance, the boy was thrown clear off the platform. The receiver connection snapped. He hung suspended by the single strap. Madly his hands flew out to grasp at the pitching rods. Just in time he seized them; the strap had broken.

With the agility of a squirrel he let himself down to his old place behind his companion. To buckle on the remaining straps was the work of a moment. Then, in utter exhaustion and despair, he allowed his head to sink upon his chest.

"And I was getting—getting an answer," he gasped.

His companion had seen nothing of his fall. Glancing behind him for a second, he saw Vincent in his seat in the fuselage.

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"What'd you come down for?"

"Got shaken down."

"Get anything?"

"Was getting. Queer thing that! Got the name of my father's yacht and the word 'Curly.' Then the plane lurched and spilled me off. Jerked the receiver off too. Queer about that message! Thought I saw the *Kittliewake* on the sea a while ago, but then I thought it couldn't be—thought I was getting delirious or something."

"Going back up?"

"I—I'll—In a moment or two I'll try."

A few moments later he did try, but it was no use. His nerve was gone. His knees trembled so he could scarcely stand. His hands shook as with the palsy. It is a terrible thing for a climber to lose his nerve while in the air.

"No use," he told himself. "I'd only get shaken off again and next time I'd be out of luck. Shame too, just when I was getting things."

Again he caught his companion's call.

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"Storm's almost here! Guess we'll have to climb."

Even as he spoke, there came a flash of lightning which revealed a solid black bank of clouds which seemed a wall of ebony. It was moving rapidly toward them; was all but upon them.

"Better climb; climb quick," he breathed through the tube.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE MAP'S SECRET

While all these things were happening to the boys on the seaplane, Curlie Carson and Joe Marion were working hard to repair the damage done to their radiophone set by the lightning. With the boat pitching about as it was, and with the wind and waves keeping up a constant din, it was a difficult task.

Just what coils and instruments had been burned out it was difficult to tell. All these must be tested out by the aid of a storage battery. When the defective parts had been discarded, it was necessary to piece together, out of the remaining parts and the extra equipment, an entirely new set.

"Have to use a two-stage amplifier," shouted Curlie, making himself heard above the storm.

"Lower voltage on the grid, too," Joe shouted back.

"Guess it'll be fairly good, though," said Curlie, working feverishly. "Only hope it didn't burn out the insulation on our aerials. Want to get her going again quick. Want to bad. Lot may depend on that."

The insulation on the aerials was not burned out. After many minutes of nerve-racking labor they had the equipment together again and were ready to listen in.

Curlie flashed a short message in code, giving the name of their boat and its present location, then, with the receiver tightly clamped over his ears, he settled back in his chair.

For some time they sat there in silence, the two boys and Gladys Ardmore.

The beat of the waves was increasing. The wind was still rising, but as yet no rain was falling.

"Queer storm," shouted Joe. "Haven't gotten into it yet. Will though and it's going to be bad. Skipper says the only thing we can do is to fasten down all the hatches and hold her nose to the storm."

"Better see about the hatches," shouted Curlie.

Throwing open the door, letting in a dash of salt spray and a cold rush of wind as he did so, Joe disappeared into the dark.

Curlie and the girl were alone. The seat the girl occupied was clamped solidly to the wall. It had broad, strong arms and to these she clung. She was staring at the floor and seemed half asleep.

When Joe disappeared, Curlie once more became conscious of her presence and at once he was disturbed. Who would not have been disturbed at the thought of a delicate girl, accustomed to every luxury, being thrown into such desperate circumstances as they were in at the present moment.

"Not my fault," he grumbled to himself. "I didn't want her to go. Wouldn't have allowed her, either, had I known about it."

"Not your fault?" his inner self chided him. "Suppose you didn't plan this trip?"

"Well, anyway," he grumbled, "she needn't have come along, and, besides, circumstances have justified my theories. They are out here somewhere, those two boys, and since they are it's up to someone to try to save them."

Then suddenly he remembered that he had something to say to the girl. He opened his mouth to shout to her, but closed it again.

"Better wait till Joe comes," he told himself. "The more people there are to hear it, the more chances there are of its getting back to shore."

Joe blew back into the cabin a few moments later.

"Everything all right?" Curlie shouted.

At the sound of his voice, the girl started, looked up, then smiled; Joe nodded his head.

"Say, Joe, I'm hungry," shouted Curlie. "There's bread in the forward cabin and some milk in a thermos bottle. Couldn't manage coffee, but toast and milk'd be fine."

The girl sprang to her feet as if to go for the required articles, but Joe pushed her back into her chair.

"Not for you," he shouted. "It's gettin' dangerous."

"Joe," said Curlie, "there's a small electric toaster there in the cabin. Disconnect it and bring it in here. We'll connect it up and make the toast right here."

When the toaster had been connected, the girl, happy in the knowledge that she was able to be of service, toasted the bread to a brown quite as delicate as that to be found on a landlubber's table.

"Now," said Curlie as they sat enjoying this meager repast, "I've got something to tell you, something that I want someone else beside me to know. It's going to be an ugly storm and the *Kittlewake* is no trans-Atlantic liner. We may all get back to shore. We may not. If one of you do and I don't, I want you to tell this. It—it will sort of justify my apparent rashness in dragging you off on this wild trip."

He moved his chair close to the stationary seat of the girl and, gripping one of the arms of the seat, motioned Joe to move up beside them. It was only thus that he might be heard unless he were to shout at the top of his voice.

"You know," he said, a strange smile playing over his thin lips, "you folks probably have thought it strange that I should go rushing off on a trip like this without any positive knowledge that those two boys had started for that mysterious island shown on the map and spoken of in the writing on the back of the map, but you see I had more information than you thought. This I know for an almost positive fact," he leaned forward impressively: "The mysterious island of the chart does

not exist."

"Oh!" the girl started back.

"It's a fact," said Curlie, "and I'll give you my proof."

He paused for a second. The girl leaned forward eagerly. Joe was all attention.

"When I went into that big library," he continued, "I was determined to find all the truth regarding that map that was to be had there. While you were looking at those ancient maps," he turned to Gladys, "I went into a back room and there the lady in charge gave me some bound reproductions of ancient maps to look at and some things to read, among them a volume of the 'Scottish Geographic Magazine.' I read them through carefully and—"

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Suddenly he started violently, then clasped the receivers close to his ears.

"Just a moment. Getting something," he muttered.

A second later he seized a pencil and marked down upon a pad a series of dots and dashes.

Then, wheeling about, he put his fingers on a key to flash back an answer.

"It's the boys," he shouted. "Got their location. Joe, decode what I wrote there, then go ask the skipper how much we're off it."

He turned once more to click off his message, a repetition of the first one; then he shouted a second message into his transmitter.

Joe Marion studied the pad for a moment, then rushed out of the cabin.

All alert, Curlie sat listening for any further message which might reach him. Presently Joe returned. There was a puzzled look upon his face.

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"Skipper says," he shouted, "that the point you gave me is the exact location of the island shown on that ancient map and that we must be about ten knots to the north of it. When I told him that the boys were in a seaplane at that point, he suddenly became convinced that there must be an island out there somewhere and refused to change his course.

"'For,' he says, 'if they've been sending messages from a plane in a gale like this they must be on the ground to do it and if on the ground, where but on an island? And if there's an island, how are we going to get up to her in the storm that's about to hit us. We'll be piled on the rocks and smashed in pieces.' That's what he said; said we'd be much safer in the open sea."

Curlie stared at the floor. His mind was in a whirl. Here he had been about to furnish proof that the mysterious island did not exist and just at that instant there came floating in from the air proof of the island's actual existence, proof so strong that even a seasoned old salt believed it and refused to change his course. What was he to say to that!

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Fortunately, or unfortunately, he was to be given time enough to think about it, for at that moment, with an unbelievable violence the storm broke.

As they felt the impact of it, it was as if the staunch little craft had run head on into one of those steel nets used during the war for trapping submarines. She struck it and from the very force of the blow, recoiled. The thing she had struck, however, was not a steel net but a mountain of waters flanked by such a volume of wind as is seldom seen on the Atlantic.

"It's the end of the *Kittliewake*," thought Curlie. "You take care of her," he shouted in Joe's ear, at the same time jerking his thumb at Gladys. The next second he disappeared into the storm.

CHAPTER XX

A SEA ABOVE A SEA

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When Alfred Brightwood had tilted the nose of the *Stormy Petrel* upward and away from the threatening bank of clouds she rose rapidly. A thousand, two thousand, three, four, five thousand feet she mounted to dizzy heights above the sea.

As they mounted, the stars, swinging about in the sky, like incandescent bulbs strung on a wire, made their appearance here and there. They came out rapidly, by twos and threes, by scores and hundreds. In clusters and fantastic figures they swam about in the purple night.

Almost instantly the sea disappeared from beneath them and in its place came a new sea; a sea of dark rushing clouds. Rising two thousand feet above the level of the ocean, this mass of moisture hanging there in the sky took on the appearance of a second sea. As Vincent looked down upon it he found it easy to believe that were they to drop slowly down upon it, they would be seized upon

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and torn this way, then that by the violence of the storm that was even now raging beneath them, and that their plane would be cast at last, a shapeless mass, upon the real sea which was roaring and raging beneath it.

"How wonderful nature is!" he breathed. "It would be magnificent were it not so terrible."

He was thinking of the gasoline in their tank and he shuddered. Would it last until the storm had passed, or would they be obliged to volplane down into that seething tempest?

He put his lips to the tube. "You better use just enough gas to keep us afloat," he suggested.

Alfred muttered something like, "Think I'm a fool?" Then for a long time, with the black sea of clouds rising and falling, billowing up like the walls of a mammoth tent, then sagging down to rise again, they circled and circled. They were not circling now in search of adventure, to find some island which might bring them great wealth, but to preserve life. How long that circling could last, neither could tell.

196

When Curlie Carson left the wireless cabin of the *Kittlewake*, he grasped a rail which ran along the cabin, just in time to prevent himself from being washed overboard by a giant wave. As it was, the water lifted his feet from the deck and, having lifted him as the wind lifts a flag, it waved him up and down three times, at last to send him crashing, knees down, on the deck. The wind was half knocked out of him, but he was still game. He did not attempt to regain the wireless cabin but fought his way along the side of that cabin toward his own stateroom door.

Now a vivid flash of light revealed the water-washed deck. A coil of rope, all uncoiled by the waves, was wriggling like a serpent in the black sea.

197

"No use to try to save it," he mumbled. "No good here, anyhow."

A yellow light, hanging above his stateroom door, dancing dizzily, appeared at one moment to take a plunge into the sea and at the next to dash away into the ink-black sky.

Curlie was drenched to the skin. He was benumbed with the cold and shocked into half insensibility at the tremendous proportions of the storm. He wondered vaguely about the engineer below. Was the water getting at the engines? He still felt the throb of them beneath his feet. Well, that much was good anyway. And the skipper? Was he still at the wheel? Must be, for the yacht continued to take the waves head-on.

Short and light as she was, the craft appeared to leap from wave-crest to wave-crest. Now she missed the leap by a foot and the water drenched her deck anew. And now she overstepped and came down with a solid impact that set her shuddering from stern to keel.

"Good old *Kittlewake*," he murmured, "you sure were built for rough service!"

198

But now he had reached his stateroom door. With a lurch he threw open the door, with a second he fell through, a third slammed it shut.

One second his eyes roved about the place; the next his lips parted as something bumped against his foot.

Stooping, he lifted up a long affair the size and shape of a round cedar fencepost. It was this he had brought aboard just before sailing. It had been shaken down and had been rolling about the floor.

Having examined its wrapping carefully, he shook it once or twice.

"Guess you're all right," he muttered. "And you had better be! A whole lot depends on you in a pinch."

His eyes roved about the room. At length, snatching a blanket from his berth, he tore it into strips. Then, throwing back his mattress, he placed the postlike affair beneath it and lashed it firmly to the springs.

"There!" he exclaimed with much satisfaction, "you'll be safe until needed, if you *are* needed, and—and you never can tell."

199

The end of the seaplane's last flirt with death and destruction came suddenly and without warning. Overcome as he was by constant watching, dead for sleep and famished for food, Vincent Ardmore had all but fallen asleep in his seat on the fuselage when a hoarse snort from one of the motors, followed quickly by a rattling grate from the other, startled him into complete wakefulness.

The silence which followed these strange noises was appalling. It was like the lull before a hurricane.

"Gas is gone," said Alfred. There was fear and defiance in his tone, defiance of Nature which he believed had treated him badly "Have to go down now."

"Go down!" Vincent shivered at the thought. Go down to what?

He glanced below, then a ray of hope lighted his face. The storm was passing—had all but passed. The clouds beneath them were no longer densely black. A mere mist, they hung like a veil

200

over the sea.

"But the water?" His heart sank. "It will still be raging."

The storm had not so far passed as he at first thought. The plane cut a circling path as she descended. Her wings were broad; her drop was gradual. As they entered the first layer of clouds, she gave a lurch forward, but with wonderful control the young pilot righted her. Seconds passed, then again she tipped, this time more perilously. But again she was righted. Now she was caught in a little flurry of wind that set her spinning. A nose-dive seemed inevitable, but once more she came to position. Now, as they neared the surface of the sea, a wild, racing wind, the tail of the storm, seized them and hurled them headlong before it. In its grasp, there was no longer thought of control. The only question now was how they would strike the water and when. The very rush of the wind tore the breath from Vincent's lungs. Crushed back against the fuselage, he awaited the end. Once, twice, three times they turned over in a mad whirl. Then, with a sudden rending crash and a wild burst of spray, they struck.

201

The plane had gone down on one wing. For a second she hung suspended there. Vincent caught his breath. If she went one way there was a chance; if the other, there was none. He thought of loosening his straps, but did not. So he hung there. Came a sudden crash. The right motor had torn from its lashings and plunged into the sea.

The next second the plane settled to the left. Saved for a moment, the boy drew a deep breath. A second crash and the remaining motor was gone. During this crash the boy was completely submerged, but the buoyant plane brought him up again. Then, for a moment, he was free to think, to look about him. Instinctively his eyes sought the place where his companion had been seated. It was empty. Alfred was gone.

202

Covering his eyes with his hands, he tried to tell himself it was not true. Then, suddenly uncovering them, he searched the surface of the troubled sea. Once he fancied he caught a glimpse of a white hand above a wave. He could not be sure; it might have been a speck of foam. Only one thing he could be sure of; his throbbing brain told it to him over and over: Alfred Brightwood, his friend, was gone—gone forever. The sea had swallowed him up.

203

CHAPTER XXI

THE BOATS ARE GONE

When Curlie Carson had fastened the mysterious post-shaped affair to the springs of his berth, he fought his way against wind, waves and darkness back to the radiophone cabin.

"Anything come in?" he asked as he shook the dampness from his clothing.

"Nothing I could make out," shouted Joe. "Got something all jumbled up with static once but couldn't make it out." Rising, he took the receiver from his head and handed it to Curlie. Then, as the craft took a sudden plunge, he leaped for a seat. Missing it, he went sprawling upon the floor.

In spite of the seriousness of their dilemma, the girl let forth a joyous peal of laughter. Joe's antics as he attempted to rise were too ridiculous for words.

204

There was tonic for all of them in that laugh. They felt better because of it.

Some moments after that, save for the wild beat of the storm, there was silence. Then, clapping the receivers to his ears, Curlie uttered an exclamation. He was getting something, or at least thought he was. Yes, now he did get it, a whisper. Faint, indistinct, mingled with static, yet audible enough, there came the four words:

"Hello there, Curlie! Hello!"

At that moment the currents of electricity playing from cloud to cloud set up such a rattle and jangle of static that he heard no more.

"It's that girl in my old home town, in that big hotel," he told himself. "To think that her whisper would carry over all those miles in such a gale! She's sending on 600. Wonder why?"

"Ah, well," he breathed, when nothing further had come in, "I'll unravel that mystery in good time, providing we get out of this mess and get back to that home burg of ours. But now—"

205

Suddenly he started and stared. There had come a loud bump against the cabin; then another and another.

"It's the boats!" he shouted. "They've torn loose. Should have known they would. Should have thought of that. Here!" He handed the receiver to Joe and once more dashed out into the storm.

The *Kittlewake* carried two lifeboats. As he struggled toward where they should have been, some

object swinging past him barely missed his head.

Instantly he dropped to the deck, at the same time gripping at the rail to save himself from being washed overboard.

"That," he told himself, "was a block swinging from a rope. The boat on this side is gone. Worse luck for that! We—we might need 'em before we're through with this."

Slowly he worked his way along the rail toward the stern. Now and again the waves that washed the deck lifted him up to slam him down again.

206

"Quit that!" he muttered hoarsely. "Can't you let a fellow alone."

Arrived at last on the other side, he rose to his knees and tried to peer above him to the place where the second lifeboat should be swinging. A flash of lightning aided his vision. A groan escaped his lips.

"Gone!" he muttered. "Should have thought of that! But," he told himself, "there's still the raft!"

The raft, built of boards and gas-filled tubes, was lashed to the deck forward. Thither he made his difficult way.

To his great relief, he found the raft still safe. Since it was thrashing about, he uncoiled a rope closely lashed to the side of a cabin and with tremendous effort succeeded in making the raft snug.

"There, now, you'll remain with us for a spell," he muttered.

Clinging there for a moment, he appeared to debate some important question.

"Guess I ought to do it," he told himself at last. "And I'd better do it now. You never can tell what will happen next and if worst comes to worst it's our only chance."

207

Fighting his way back to his cabin, he returned presently with the post-shaped affair which he had lashed to the springs of his berth.

This he now lashed to the stout slats of wood and crossbars of metal on the raft. When he had finished it appeared to be part of the raft.

"There, my sweet baby," he murmured, "sleep here, rocked on the cradle of the deep, until your papa wants you. You're a beautiful and wonderful child!"

Then, weary, water-soaked, chilled to the bone, stupefied by the wild beat of the storm, aching in every muscle but not downhearted, he fought his way back to the radio cabin.

Nature has been kind to man. She has so made him that he is incapable of feeling all the tragedy and sorrow of a terrible situation at the time when it bursts upon him. Vincent Ardmore, as he clung to the wrecked plane, with his companion gone from him forever, did not sense the full horror of his position. He realized little more than the fact that he was chilled to the bone, and that the wind and waves were beating upon him unmercifully.

208

Then, gradually there stole into his benumbed mind the thought that he might improve his position. The platform above him still stood clear of the waves. Could he but loosen the straps which bound him to the fuselage, could he but climb to that platform, he would at least be free for a time from the rude beating of the black waters which rolled over him incessantly.

With the numbed, trembling fingers of one hand he struggled with the stubborn, water-soaked straps while with the other he clung to the rods of the rigging. To loosen his grip for an instant, once the straps were unfastened, meant almost certain death.

After what seemed an eternity of time the last strap gave way and, with a wild pounding of his heart, he gripped the rods and began to climb.

209

As he tumbled upon the platform, new hope set the blood racing through his veins.

"There might yet be a chance," he murmured, almost joyfully; "the storm is breaking." His eyes wandered to the fleeting clouds. "Dawn's coming, too. I—I—why, I might send a message. The motor's gone dead, of course, but there are still storage batteries. If only the insulations are good. If water has not soaked in anywhere!"

With trembling fingers he tested the batteries. A bright flash of fire told him they were still alive. Then with infinite care he adjusted the instruments. At last he tapped a wire and a grating rattle went forth.

"She's still good," he exulted.

Then slowly, distinctly, he talked into the transmitter, talked as he might had he been surrounded by the cozy comforts of home. He gave his name, the name of his aircraft; told of his perilous position; gave his approximate location and asked for aid. Only once his voice broke and fell to a whisper. That was when he tried to tell of the sad fate of his companion.

210

Having come to the end, he adjusted the receiver to his ears and sat there listening.

Suddenly his face grew tense with expectation. He was getting something, an answer to his message.

For a full moment he sat there tense, motionless. Then, suddenly, without warning, a new catastrophe assailed him. A giant wave, leaping high, came crashing down upon the wreckage of the plane. There followed a snapping and crashing of braces. When the wave had passed, the platform to which he clung floated upon the sea. His radiophone equipment was water-soaked, submerged. His storage batteries had toppled over to plunge into the sea.

So there he clung, a single individual on a mass of wreckage, helpless and well-nigh hopeless in the midst of a vast ocean whose waves were even now subsiding after a terrific storm.

211

CHAPTER XXII

THE WRECK OF THE *KITTLEWAKE*

"I'm getting a message!" exclaimed Curlie excitedly. "Getting it distinct and plain, and it's—it's from them."

"Oh, is it?" the girl sprang from the seat.

"From your brother. They've been wrecked. They're not on an island but on the sea. Safe, though, only—" he paused to listen closely again—"I can't just make out what he says about his companion."

"Oh! Please, please let me listen!" Gladys Ardmore gripped his arm.

Quickly Curlie snatched the receiver from his head and pressed it down over her tangled mass of brown hair.

She caught but a few words, then the voice broke suddenly off, but such words as they were; such words of comfort. The voice of her only brother had come stealing across the storm to her, assuring her that he was still alive; that there was still a chance that he might be saved. She pressed the receivers to her ears in the hopes of hearing more.

212

In the meantime Curlie was answering the message. In quiet, reassuring tones he gave their location and told of their purpose in those waters and ended with the assurance that if it were humanly possible the rescue should be accomplished.

"And we will save them," he exclaimed. "At least we'll save your brother."

"You don't think—" Gladys did not finish.

"I hardly know what to think about your brother's chum," Curlie said thoughtfully. "But this we do know: Your brother is clinging to the wreckage of a seaplane out there somewhere. And we will save him. See! the storm is about at an end and morning is near!" He pointed to the window, where the first faint glow of dawn was showing.

For a moment all were silent. Then suddenly, without warning, there came a grinding crash that sent a shudder through the *Kittlewake* from stem to stern.

213

"What was that?" exclaimed Joe Marion, springing to his feet from the floor where he had been thrown.

"We struck something!" Curlie was out upon the deck like a shot.

He all but collided with the skipper, who had deserted his wheel.

"We 'it somethin'," shouted the skipper, "an' she's sinkin' by the larboard bow. Gotta' git off 'er quick. Boats are gone! Everythin's gone."

"No," said Curlie calmly, "the raft forward is safely lashed on."

The engineer appeared from below. The engine had already ceased its throbbing.

"She's fillin' fast," he commented in a slow drawl.

"You two get the raft loose," said Curlie. "I'll get the girl."

Dashing to his stateroom he seized two blankets and a large section of oiled cloth. With these he dashed to the radio room.

214

"Got to get out quick!" he exclaimed.

Before she could realize what he was doing, he had seized the girl and had wrapped her round and round with the blankets, then with the oiled cloth. Joe had rushed out to help with the raft.

Curlie carried the girl outside and, when the raft with the others aboard was afloat, handed her down to the skipper.

"Try and keep her dry," he said calmly. "We'll all get soaked, but we can stand it for a long time; a girl can't."

"Now push off!" he commanded. "Get good and clear so that the wreck will not draw you down."

"You'll come with us," said the skipper sternly. Curlie had not intended going with them. He had meant to remain behind and send a call for aid, then to swim for the raft. But now, as he saw the water gaining on the stricken craft, he realized how dangerous and futile it would be. He was needed on the raft to help get her away. Having seen all this at a flash he said:

215

"All right; I'll go." Having dropped to the raft, and seized a short paddle, he joined Joe and the engineer in forcing the unwieldy raft away from the side of the doomed *Kittlewake*.

They were none too soon, for scarcely two minutes could have elapsed when with a rush that nearly engulfed them the boat keeled up on end and sank from sight.

"And now," said Joe addressing Curlie as he settled back to a seat on one of the gas-filled tubes, "you can test out what you said once about keeping your radiophone dry and tuned up under any and every circumstance. Suppose you tune her up now and get off an S.O.S."

There was a smile on the lips of the undaunted young operator as he said with a drawl:

"Give me time, Joe, old scout, give me time."

The girl, staring out from her wrappings, appeared to fear that the two boys had gone delirious over this new catastrophe.

But only brave and hardy spirits can joke in the midst of disaster, and as for Curlie, he really did have one more trick up his sleeve.

216

As the old skipper sat staring away at the point where his craft had disappeared beneath the dark waters, he murmured:

"'Twasn't much we 'it; fragment from an iceberg 'er somethin', but 'twas enough. An' a good little craft she was too."

The storm had passed, but the waves were still rolling high. The raft tilted to such an angle that now they were all in danger of being pitched headforemost into the sea, and now in danger of falling backward into the trough of the waves.

Soaked to the skin, shivering, miserable, the boys and men clung to the raft, while the girl bewailed the fact that she was not permitted to suffer with them. Wrapped as she was, and carefully guarded from the on-rush of the waves, she escaped all the miserable damp and chill of it.

"Shows you're a real sport," Curlie's lips, blue with cold, attempted a smile, "but you've got to let us play the gentleman, even out here."

217

When the waves had receded somewhat, Curlie began digging at one of the tubes beneath his feet. Having at length unfastened it, he stood it on end to unscrew some fastenings and lift off the top.

"Canisters of water and some emergency rations!" exclaimed Joe, as he peered inside. "Great stuff!"

They had taken a swallow of water apiece and were preparing to munch some hardtack and chocolate when Gladys exclaimed:

"Look over there. What's that?"

"There's nothing," said the engineer after studying the waves for a moment.

"Oh, yes there was!" the girl insisted emphatically. "Something showed up on the crest of a wave. It's in the trough of the wave now. It'll come up again."

"Bit of wreckage from our yacht," suggested Joe.

"Not much wreckage on 'er," said the skipper. "All washed off 'er long before she sank."

218

"What could it be then?" The girl was fairly holding her breath. "It couldn't be—"

"Don't get your hopes up too high," cautioned Curlie. "Of course miracles do happen, but not so very often."

219

THE MIRACLE

They were all straining their eyes when at last the thing appeared once more on the crest of the wave.

"Wreckage! A mass of it!" came from the skipper.

"And—and there's a hand!" exclaimed Curlie.

"The paddles, boys! The paddles! Every 'and of you, hup an' at it," shouted the skipper.

The wildest excitement prevailed, yet out of it all there came quick and concerted action. Three paddles flashed as, straining every muscle, they strove to bring the clumsy raft nearer the wreck. With tears in her eyes, the girl begged and implored them to unwrap her and allow her to have a hand in the struggle.

A minute passed. No longer chilled but steaming from violent exertion, they strained eager eyes to catch another glimpse of the wreck. 220

"There—there it is!" exclaimed the girl, overcome with joy. "You're gaining! You're gaining!"

Five minutes passed. They gained half the distance. Eight minutes more; the hand on the wreckage rose again. They were getting nearer.

Suddenly the girl uttered a piercing cry of joy:

"It is Vincent! It is! It is!"

And she was right. A moment later, as they dragged the all but senseless form from the seaplane, they recognized him at once as the millionaire's son.

He had drifted in the benumbing water so long that had they been delayed for another hour they would have found nothing more than a corpse awaiting them.

As Curlie tore Vincent's sodden outer garments from him he saw the girl carefully unrolling the blankets and oiled covering from about her. He did not protest. To him the thought of seeing this girl half drowned and chilled through by the spray which even now at times dashed over the raft, was heartbreaking, but he knew it was necessary if the life of her brother was to be saved. 221

"Brave girl!" he murmured as he wrapped Vincent in the coverings and passed him on to the skipper.

"And now," he said, "the time has come to think of other things. I believe the waves have sufficiently subsided to enable us to dare it."

He fumbled once more at the raft, at last to bring up a long, post-shaped affair.

"More rations," murmured Joe, swallowing his last bite of hardtack; "a regular commissary. But why get them out at this time?"

"You wait," smiled Curlie.

He was standing up. After telling Joe to steady him, he began tearing away at the upper end of the mysterious package. In a moment, he took out some limp, rubber affairs. 222

"Toy balloons," jeered Joe.

"Something like that," Curlie smiled.

He next brought out a small brass retort and a tiny spirit lamp.

"Lucky our matches are dry," he murmured, after unwrapping some oiled cloth and lighting the spirit lamp with one of the matches inclosed.

After firmly tying the end of a toy balloon over the mouth of the retort he held the spirit lamp beneath the bowl of the retort. At once the balloon began to expand.

"Chemicals already in the retort," he explained.

When the balloon was sufficiently inflated, he quickly tied it at the mouth, then began inflating another.

"The gas is very buoyant," he explained. "Hold that," he said as he passed the string to the engineer.

"There's enough," he said quietly when the third had been filled.

He next drew forth some shiny fine copper wire coiled about some round, insulated bars. 223

When he had fastened the balloons to one end of the bars, he attached a strong cord to the balloons, then allowed them to rise, at the same time paying out the strands of copper wire.

"Not very heavy wire for an aerial," he remarked, "but heavy enough. We'll have a perpendicular aerial, which is better than horizontal, and it'll hang pretty high. All that's in our favor."

When the balloons had risen to a height which allowed the aerial, to which was attached a heavier insulated wire, to float free, he gave the cord to the engineer and began busying himself at putting together what appeared to be a small windmill with curved, brass fans.

"A windmill," he explained, "is the surest method of obtaining a little power. Always a little breeze floating round. Enough to turn a wheel. This one is connected direct with a small generator. Gives power enough for a radiophone. Might use batteries but they might go dead on you. Windmill and generator is as good after ten years as ten days.

224

"There you are," he heaved a sigh of relief, as he struck the transmitter which he had taken from his apparently inexhaustible "bag of tricks."

"Unless I miss my guess, we have a perfectly good radiophone outfit of fair power. All the rest of it is stowed down there in the bottom. We should be heard distinctly at from a hundred to five hundred miles. In the future," he smiled, "every lifeboat and raft will be equipped with one of these handy little radiophone outfits, which are really not very expensive."

Then, with all eyes fixed upon him, he began to converse with the unseen and unknown, who, sailing somewhere on that vast sweep of water, were, they hoped, to become their rescuers.

In perfectly natural tones he spoke of their catastrophe and their present predicament. He gave their approximate location and the names of their party. This after an interval of two minutes, he repeated.

Then, suddenly his lips parted in a smile. The others watched him with strained attention. After a minute had elapsed, he said with apparent satisfaction:

225

"We'll await your arrival with unmixed pleasure.

"The Steamship Torrence," he explained, "in crossing the Atlantic was driven two hundred miles off her course. She is now only about seventy-five miles from us. Being a fast boat, she should reach us in three or four hours.

"And now," he said with a smile, "since we have no checker-board on deck and are entirely deprived of musical instruments of any kind, perhaps you would like to hear me tell why I was sure the mysterious island which has caused us so much grief, did not exist."

"By the way," he said turning to Vincent, "do you chance to have the original of that old map with you?"

The boy pointed to his aviator's sodden leather coat. Although he had gained much strength from the warm blankets, he had found himself unable to speak of the tragedy which had befallen his companion on the *Stormy Petrel*. Now as he saw Curlie draw the water-soaked map from the pocket of his coat, a look of horror overspread his face and he muttered hoarsely:

226

"Throw it into the sea. It brings nothing but bad luck."

"No, no," said Curlie, "we won't do that."

"Then you must keep it," the other boy exclaimed. "I don't want ever to see it again. Alfred made me a present of it just before we hopped off."

"All right," said Curlie, "but you are parting with a thing of some value."

"Value!" exclaimed Vincent. Then he sat staring at Curlie in silence as much as to say: "You too must have been bitten by the gold-bug." But that Curlie had not been bitten by that dangerous and poisonous insect will be proved, I think, by the pages which follow.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE STORY OF THE MAP

"You see," said Curlie, tapping the soggy bit of vellum which he held in his hand, "the trouble with this map is, not that it is not genuine, but that it's too old. This map," he paused for emphasis, "this map was made in fourteen hundred and forty-six."

Gladys Ardmore gasped. Her brother stared in astonishment.

"It's a fact!" declared Curlie emphatically.

"You see," he went on, "the day I was in the library with Miss Gladys I saw an exact reproduction of this map in a large volume. At the same time I read a description of it and a brief account of its history. It seems it was lost sight of about a century ago. There were copies, but the original was gone.

"I concluded at once that the map had somehow come into the hands of Alfred Brightwood. Since I was convinced that this was the truth, and since I had read the writing about the gold discovered on the mysterious island charted there, I decided that it would be wise to find out whether or not it were possible that this strange story might be true. I found my answer in a bound volume of Scottish Geographic Magazines in a series of articles entitled 'The So-Called Mythical Islands of the Atlantic.'

"It seems that there is fairly good proof that a number of vessels landed on the North American continent before Columbus did. Driven out of their course or lured on by hopes of gold and adventure, these ships from time to time discovered and rediscovered lands to the west of Ireland. They thought of the land as islands and gave them names. The island of Brazil was one of them. If you were to consult this map I have here you would find the island of Brazil indicated by a circle which is nearly as large as Ireland, yet if you were to cruise all over the waters in the vicinity of this supposed island you would find only the restless old ocean.

"What's the answer then?" he smiled. "Just this: These ancient sea rovers didn't have any accurate way of telling where they were at a given time on the sea, so they had to guess at it. Carried on by winds and currents, they often traveled much farther than they thought. They landed on the continent of North America and thought it an island. When they came back to Europe they tried to locate the land they had discovered on a map, and missed it by only a thousand miles or so.

"Our ancient friend who wrote of his experiences on the back of this map had doubtless been carried to some point in Central or South America, for there was, even in those days, plenty of gold to be found in those regions."

"So you see," he turned to Vincent with a smile, "you went five hundred miles out to sea for the purpose of rediscovering America. Not much chance of success. Anyway that's what I thought, and that is why I dashed off on a wild race in the *Kittlewake*. And that's why we're here."

Silence followed the ending of Curlie's narrative. There seemed to be nothing more to say.

So they sat there staring at the sea for a long time.

The silence was at last broken by the skipper's announcement:

"Smoke on the larboard bow."

It was true. Their relief was at hand.

Almost immediately afterward Curlie received a second reassuring message from the captain of the liner. A short time after that he had the pleasure of escorting the dripping daughter of a millionaire up the gangway.

The next day as they were moving in toward the dock, Vincent Ardmore approached Curlie.

"My sister," there was a strange smile on his lips, "says you set out on this trip for the purpose of having me arrested?"

"I did."

"Well—" the other boy choked up and could not continue.

"The law, punishment, prisons and all that, as I understand it," said Curlie thoughtfully, "have but one purpose: to teach people what other folks' rights are and to encourage them in respecting them. It's my business to see that there is fair play in the air."

He paused and looked away at the sea. When he resumed there was a suspicious huskiness in his voice. "Seems to me that as far as you are concerned, nature has punished you about enough. You ought to know by this time what interfering with the radio wave lengths belonging to sea traffic might mean to shipwrecked men; and—well—Oh, what's the use!" he broke off abruptly. "I'm a chicken-hearted fool. You're out on parole and must report to your sister every week. She's—she's what I'd call a brick!"

Turning hastily he walked away.

Almost before he knew it, he all but ran over Gladys Ardmore, coming to meet him.

"Oh, Mister—Mister—" she hesitated.

"Just plain Curlie," he smiled.

"You—you're coming to see me when you get home? Won't you?"

Curlie thought a moment, then of a sudden the spacious walls of the Ardmore mansion flashed into his mind. To go there as an officer of the law was one thing; to go as a guest was quite another.

"Why—why—" he drew back in confusion—"you'll have to excuse me but—but—"

"Oh! I know!" she exclaimed. "It's the house and everything. Tell you what," she seized him by the arm; "there's a little old-fashioned farmhouse down in one corner of our estate. It was there when we bought it and has been kept just the same ever since. Even the furniture, red plush chairs,

kitchen stove and everything, are there. We'll go down there and have a regular frolic sometime, popcorn, molasses candy, checkers and everything. We've a wonderful cook who once lived on a farm. We'll take her along as a chaperon. Now will you come? Will you?" she urged eagerly.

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"Why—why—"

"If you don't," she held up a warning finger, "I'll come up and visit you in that secret wireless room of yours just as I once said I would."

"In that case," said Curlie, "I suppose I'll have to surrender. And," he added happily, "here we are, back to dear old North America, without any gold but with a lot to be thankful for."

The boat was bumping against the dock. Giving his arm a squeeze the girl dashed away.

CHAPTER XXV

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OFF ON ANOTHER WILD CHASE

A few nights later Curlie was back in the secret tower room. He was busy as ever running down trouble.

Joe Marion, entering the room noiselessly, dropped a letter into his hand. The letter bore the insignia of the Ardmore family in one corner.

"From Gladys Ardmore!" he told himself.

But he was mistaken. It was a typewritten letter signed in a bold business hand. It ran:

"It is with great pleasure that I inclose a check for the sum of the reward offered for the safe return of my son.

"(Signed) J. Anson Ardmore."

Curlie looked at the check, then uttered a low whistle.

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"Pay to the order of C. Carson, \$10,000.00," he whispered. Then out loud:

"Joe, what would a fellow do with ten thousand dollars?"

"Search me," Joe grinned back. "You got the fever or something?" he asked a second later.

Curlie showed him the check.

"Why," said Joe, "you might buy a car."

"Not much. The Humming Bird's quite good enough."

"Tell you what," he said after a moment's thought, "just get that cashed for me, will you? Then find out where our old skipper and the engineer live and send them a thousand apiece. After that pocket a thousand for yourself. Then—then—Oh, well, hire me a safety deposit box and buy me a lot of Liberty bonds. Might want 'em some day.

"And, say, that reminds me," he pointed to a square of vellum which hung on a stretcher in the corner. "Take that over to the big library on the North Side and tell 'em it's a present from us. It's that map Vincent Ardmore gave me. It's worth a thousand dollars, but such maps are not safe outside a library. Tell 'em to put it on ice," he laughed.

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Scarcely had Joe departed than a keen-eyed, gray-haired man entered the tower room. He was Colonel Edward Marshall, Curlie's superior.

"Curlie," he wrinkled his brow, as he took a seat, "there's somebody raising hob with the radio service in Alaska."

Curlie nodded his head. "I thought there might be. Sends on 1200, doesn't he?" He was thinking of the hotel mystery and of the strange girl who had whispered to him so often out of the night.

"Yes, how did you know so much?"

"Part of my job."

"But you've been away."

"Radiophone whispers travel far."

"Well," said the colonel, settling down to business, "Alaska's in a bad way. This fellow doesn't confine himself to 1200 up there. He uses all sorts of wave lengths; seems to take pleasure in musing up important government communications and even more in breaking in on Munson."

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"Munson, the Arctic explorer."

"Yes. He's making a try for the Pole. Much depends upon his keeping in touch with the outside world and this crank or crook seems determined that he shall not."

"Why don't they catch him?"

"Well, you see," he wrinkled his brow again, "the boys up there are rather new at it. Don't understand the radio compass very well. The fellow moves about and all that, so it's difficult."

"I thought," he said slowly after a moment, "that you might like to tackle the case."

"Would I?" exclaimed Curlie, jumping to his feet. "Try me! Can I take Joe along?"

"As you like. Better get off pretty promptly; say day after to-morrow."

"Never fear. We'll be off on time."

The colonel bowed and left the room.

"Alaska! Alaska!" Curlie murmured after a time, "Alaska and the Yukon trail, for of course it will be that. It's too late for the boats. And that reminds me, I made a promise to Gladys Ardmore. Only one night left."

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A short time after that he put in an out-of-town telephone call. It was a girlish voice that answered.

Late the next night Curlie made his way home along the well-remembered Forest Preserve road. He was riding in the Humming Bird. He had been to Gladys Ardmore's party for two and a chaperon down in the little farmhouse. The party had been a grand success and he was carrying away pleasant memories which would serve him well on the long, long Yukon trail and the weary and eventful miles which lay beyond its further terminal.

If you wish to learn of Curlie's adventures up there and of the secret of the whisperer, you must read the next volume, entitled "On the Yukon Trail."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CURLIE CARSON LISTENS IN ***

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