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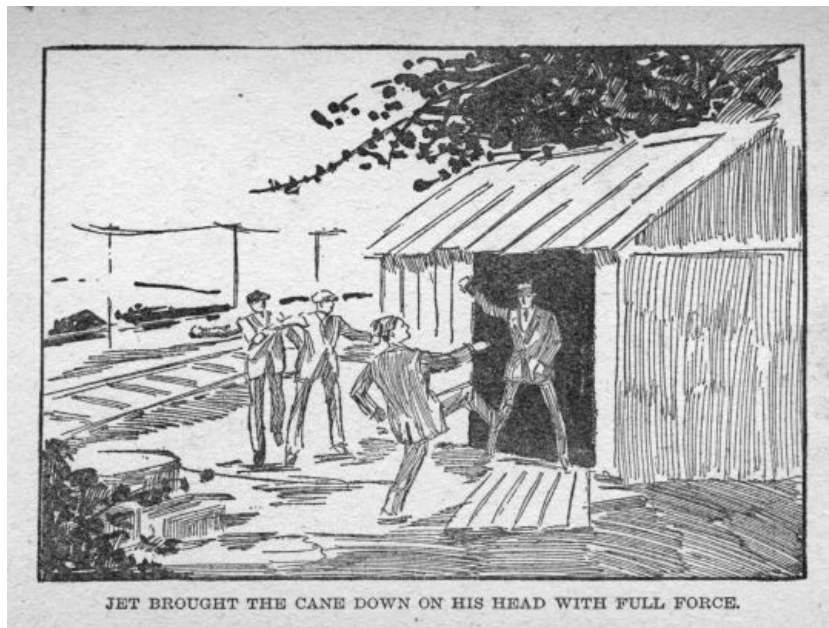
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MESSENGER NO. 48 ***



Jet brought the cane down on his head with full force.

MESSENGER No. 48

BY

JAMES OTIS

*Author of "Telegraph Tom's Venture," "Messenger No. 48",
"Toby Tyler," "The Boy Captain," "Silent Peter," etc., etc.*

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MESSENGER No. 48

CHAPTER I

JET

"What's your name?"

"Jethro Lewis."

"How old are you?"

"I don't know."

"Judging from the size I shouldn't say you were over ten."

"My size 's against me, that's a fact; but I can run a good deal faster than some fellers twice as big."

The manager of the District Messenger Station did not attempt to conceal a smile as the boy spoke thus earnestly, and continued the examination by asking:

"Where do you live?"

"Down on East Tenth Street."

"Mother and father alive?"

"Both dead. I'm boardin' with Mammy Showers."

"As a rule we do not employ boys who have no parents."

"Why not? Can't they shinney 'round, jest as well as other fellers?"

"There is no question about that, but we prefer to have some one to look out for them."

"So would I, but there's no use kickin' when a feller can't have all them luxuries," Jet said gravely. "It ain't so awful nice to hustle for yourself with a chance of bein' fired outter the house if the board ain't paid right up to the minute."

"How have you been earning a living?"

"Most any way that come handy. Sometimes I sell papers, an' then agin I black boots. I did think one spell of goin' into the theayter biz, but I couldn't git the right kind of a job. I can dance a good many of them perfessionals way out of sight, but the managers won't hire a performer what ain't got good clothes."

Jet spoke in a business-like tone which evidently pleased the manager, for the latter said, after a short pause:

"I will give you a trial, and——"

"You couldn't do better," Jet interrupted gravely, "for if I can't hump myself ahead of that fat chump over there I don't want a cent," and he pointed to a very fleshy boy who was half asleep on a bench which extended across the rear of the room.

"Here is a cap," the manager continued. "Your number is forty-eight. We'll find a coat which will answer until another is made, and you are to go to work at once. Can you read?"

"Why cert."

"Then study this book of distances so you may know how much to charge for service, and set on that bench until it is your turn to go out."

Jet took the articles and was about to turn away from the desk when a very important question came into his mind.

"How much money are you goin' to give me a week?"

"Four dollars is the regular price for beginners; but there are good chances to advance if you attend to business."

This was evidently satisfactory to new number forty-eight, for he did as directed, and was soon busily engaged studying the tariff of prices, seated beside the fat boy who was now slumbering calmly.

For a short time Jet thought more about financial matters than of his lesson. Mammy Showers charged him a dollar and a half per week for a small room hardly larger than a cupboard, and two meals each day. He would now, providing he did not indulge in too many luxuries while traveling around the city, be able to save two dollars and a half every seven days, and it seemed very much as if he had fairly started on the highway to fortune.

"Well, if they call this work I'd like to have two or three jobs of the same kind." Jet said aloud when he was tired of studying the printed instructions. "I've been here a little more'n an hour, an' haven't been called off the bench once."

This remark appeared to arouse the fat boy to the consciousness of being alive, and on making great effort to sit upright, he noticed Jet for the first time.

"Hello! You're a new feller; I s'pose," he said with a yawn.

"Do you think I look very new?"

"You've jest com here to work, haven't you?"

"The way things look now I've come to set around an' keep the flies offer them young gents as has ter sleep forenoons."

"You'll be glad to do that same thing before you've worked here a week. It's dull now, but wait awhile, an' then see how the fellers have to hump themselves."

"Say, do you ever do very much?" Jet asked gravely.

"I was out on a job yesterday that I didn't get through with till past midnight."

"Do the fellers have to work so late as that?"

"Once in a while. You have to go where the customers send you, an' some of the jobs are funny ones."

"How far have you ever been on an errand?"

"Up to Albany to bring down a dog for a man what was goin' huntin'."

"Did you get him here?"

"Of course I did."

"It must have been mighty rough on the dog."

"Why?"

"'Caus he'd be away from home so long if he wasn't allowed to walk any faster than you can."

"Think you're funny, don't you?" and the fat boy made ready to resume his interrupted nap.

Before Jet could turn his attention to the tariff again the boy at the desk called loudly: "Number forty-eight!" and he went forward quickly, well pleased that something had occurred to break the monotony.

A summons had come from one of the hotels near by, and on answering it he found nothing of more importance than to carry a letter to a certain house in the immediate vicinity, but to Jet it was particularly agreeable work, since he was given ten cents more than the regular fee.

"If all the messages turn out like this one I shall have a mighty good thing of it," he said to himself, in a tone of satisfaction as he returned to the station.

Jet was called upon only twice more during this first day of his new work, and when he went home it was with the pleasing knowledge that he had received as presents fifteen cents.

On the following morning he was at his post so early that some of the "night boys" made sport of him for appearing at such an hour, predicting that in less than a week he would have "sense enough to stay at home till he was wanted."

He was not allowed to remain idle very long, however.

"Number forty-eight!" the man at the desk called sharply, and Jet leaped to his feet.

"Go to No. — East Fourteenth Street. Here is your slip."

Jet took the bit of paper and hurried away at full speed, to find that he had been sent to a bar-room which was by no means noted for bearing a good reputation so far as the honesty of its patrons was concerned.

Seated at one of the tables were two men. The elder, tall and slim, and the other of medium height, but rather fleshy.

"Come here!" the thin man called as the messenger entered, and Jet fancied that the fellow's full beard looked suspiciously heavy and black.

"I wouldn't like to bet that all that hair grew on his face," Jet said to himself, as he approached the table, but he gave the matter no further thought, for it was his business to obey orders, and not criticize his patrons.

"How long will it take you to go to the corner of Sixth Avenue and Fifteenth Street?"

"Not more than ten minutes."

"Take this satchel and give it to a party with red hair who is standing on the northwest corner."

"Suppose there should be more than one?" Jet asked as he took the traveling-bag which was remarkably light in weight although it was apparently stuffed full to bursting.

"The right man will ask your number, and you are to tell him it is one hundred and ten."

"But he can see by my cap that I'm forty-eight."

"Do as I tell you, and never mind about your cap, do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"He will give you something to bring back, and you are not to stop on the way, no matter what happens."

"I'm not in the habit of loafing," Jet replied, just a trifle indignantly, and before he could say anything more the short man added impatiently:

"Then don't do it here. Get on about your business, for we want the answer in the ten minutes you promised."

Jet started at once, feeling decidedly hurt at the tone used by the men, and, walking as rapidly as the crowds on the sidewalk would permit, was soon at the appointed place.

A rough looking fellow with a shock of red hair which looked quite as false as the tall man's whiskers, was waiting for him.

"What is your number?" he asked nervously.

"I was told to say one hundred and ten, but that isn't right."

"Give me the bag, and take this back," the man said, as he literally tore Jet's burden from him, and thrust into the boy's hands a paper parcel so heavy that it required all his strength to hold it on one arm.

Jet was on the point of handing this odd acting fellow the slip of paper that it might be signed according to the rules of the office, but before he could so much as take it from his pocket the man had disappeared among the throng.

"I suppose it's all right," he said in a tone of perplexity, "but I wish people would let a fellow do as the boss insists upon."

There was no time for delay if he intended to return within the ten minutes as had been promised, and he hurried away, arriving at the saloon only to be told by the bartender that the gentlemen had left some time previous.

"What am I to do with this?" and Jet held up the paper parcel.

"They said you was to go to this number on the Bowery. I reckon it's one of them cheap lodging houses."

Jet took the card which was held toward him, and, stopping only long enough to read the written words and number, hurried off once more.

This last address was, as the barkeeper had suggested, a small hotel, and on ascending the stairs to the tiny apartment called by courtesy "the office," found the tall man awaiting his arrival.

"I thought you was a boy who didn't do any loafing," the gentleman said gruffly.

"I haven't stopped a minute."

"Who did you hang around chinning with?"

"Nobody."

"Haven't you been talking to that other messenger?"

"Which one?"

"The fellow you met."

"I haven't spoken to anybody except the red-haired man, and he didn't give me a chance to do much talking."

"What is your fee?"

"Twenty-five cents."

"Here's half a dollar. If anybody asks where you have been say that it was to the Stock Exchange. I don't care to have a lot of people talking about my business, and a quarter should be enough to make you hold your tongue."

"Will you sign this slip, sir? the manager wants the distance and time on there."

"Do it yourself, and put it down as I tell you."

Jet obeyed, writing as the stranger dictated, and when he presented himself at the station once more the manager had no reason to believe he had been anywhere except to the Exchange.

CHAPTER II

TROUBLE

Jet was not just certain, when he seated himself on the bench to wait for another summons, whether he had done right in obeying the tall man so implicitly, but yet he could not understand how it would make any difference to the manager, since he brought back the amount of money which was the lawful charge for such service.

"I'll ask one of the other fellows," he said to himself, and then the rush of business was so great that he almost forgot the incident of the morning.

Until two o'clock in the afternoon he was busily engaged, and at that hour returned after having been to the post-office to mail a large lot of circulars sent by a particularly testy and disagreeable old gentleman.

"You needn't sit down," the manager said sharply, as the boy laid the service slip on the desk. "Go with this man and see to it that you tell the whole truth."

Jet looked in surprise at a gentlemanly appearing person who was pointed out to him, standing near the door, and asked hesitatingly:

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Exactly what I said. Don't keep him waiting, and come back here at once if they let you go to-day."

This last remark was yet more mysterious than the first, but Jet did not have an opportunity to ask any more questions, for at this instant the stranger took him by the arm, saying as he did so:

"Now walk sharp. I've lost too much time already."

There was no other alternative but to obey, for the man literally dragged him through the crowds on the sidewalks, and continued on at a rapid pace until the two were at the entrance of Police Headquarters.

"What am I to go in there for?" Jet asked, as he tried to hold back.

"The inspector wants to see you," the man replied, and the boy ceased any show of resistance, for he began to realize that he was a prisoner, although on what charge he could not so much as guess.

Ten minutes later he was standing in front of the inspector, and that gentleman was gazing at him scrutinizingly.

"What is your name?" he asked abruptly, and when the answer had been given he continued by inquiring into all the particulars of his short life, until Jet cried in desperation:

"What do you think I have done, sir?"

"That remains to be seen," was the unsatisfactory reply, as, after writing down all the boy had said, the inspector summoned a man in the garb of an ordinary citizen, to whom he handed the paper as he said in a low tone: "Find out if this is correct, and come back at once."

Then turning to Jet:

"How long have you been a district messenger?"

"Two days."

"What time in the morning do you go on duty?"

"Seven o'clock."

"What was the first call you had to-day?"

"To No. — East Fourteenth Street."

"Tell me all that happened there, and remember if you try to lie I shall know it."

Jet, confused and bewildered by the strange position in which he found himself, did as he was bidden.

Just for an instant he believed it would be only just toward the man who had hired him, to repeat what he had been told to say, but then came the thought that he was virtually under arrest and the truth should be spoken at every hazard.

"Can you describe these men?" the inspector asked, when his short story was told.

Jet did his best, not omitting to say that the hair of one and the whiskers of another looked suspiciously false.

"Would you know them again?"

"I'm certain of it. The tall man I could spot even if the whiskers were taken off."

At this point the officer who had been sent to learn the truth of Jet's statement regarding himself, returned, nodded his head in a significant manner, and immediately disappeared through another doorway.

Over and over again did the inspector insist on Jet's telling the story of his morning's work, and when fully an hour had been spent in this manner he said decidedly more kindly than before:

"I believe you have spoken the truth, but you will be an important witness in a very serious case, and I suppose it is my duty to send you to the House of Detention."

"Does that mean I'm goin' to be locked up?" Jet asked in alarm.

"You will be deprived of your liberty, but it is very different from going to jail."

"Don't do that! Please don't do that! I've just got a job where I can earn a good deal of money, and it'll knock me out of it. Besides," Jet added as a lucky thought occurred to him, "if I keep on about my business I may see them fellers again."

"You advance a very good argument, and, in fact, I am depending on you to do that same thing, but how shall I know that you won't give us the slip?"

"I'll stay right at the office, except when I'm out with a message, an' come here every night if you say the word."

"Do you know of any one who would go bail for your appearance when wanted?"

"Mammy Showers would tell you that I'll act square up to what I say."

The inspector did not reply for several seconds, and then it was to say:

"I'll take your word for it, my boy. You are to report to me, or one of the officers here, every twenty-four hours, and, in the meanwhile, if you get a glimpse of either of those men, follow him until word can be sent to me; but do not speak of this matter to any one."

It was evident that this ended the interview, for the inspector rose to his feet, and Jet, overjoyed at the prospect of escaping imprisonment, hurried out of the gloomy-looking building.

On his return to the office the manager, who was particularly busy at that moment, motioned him to a seat on the messengers' bench, and the fat boy, unusually wide awake, asked in a blood-curdling whisper:

"Did you really have anything to do with that murder?"

"What do you mean?"

"There was a man killed an' robbed over on East Twentieth Street last night, and some of the fellers said you was down to headquarters tellin' the police all about it."

"And it was the murderers I saw this morning!" Jet repeated aloud, astounded by the knowledge that he had possibly assisted the guilty ones to hide the evidences of their crime.

"Then you was in it!" the fat boy exclaimed.

"Now don't be a fool! I carried a bag for some men this morning, but that's all I know about it. Who was the murdered man?"

"It's all in that paper Sankey left in his overcoat pocket. Get it an' you have the whole story. I wonder why they don't put you in jail?"

Before Jet could reply to this question he was ordered to the desk, and from there sent to answer a call from the Union Square Hotel.

Evidently it was not one of the regular patrons of the house who had summoned him.

He found a gentlemanly looking party standing just outside the clerk's desk, who appeared particularly pleased on observing the number on his cap.

"I want you to go with me to Yonkers, and bring back certain papers which must be delivered before six o'clock. Can you go so far?"

"I will run over to the office and find out. You see I haven't been on the force very long, and don't know exactly what to do when the work will keep me so long away."

"Very well, hurry as fast as possible, for I want to leave here by the next train."

Jet ran swiftly back, and in a very few moments returned with the information that he was at liberty to go wherever the gentleman desired, so long as the office received the regular price per hour for his

services.

"There won't be any difficulty about that. You are to go to pier 466 North River, and wait there until I come. Don't stop on the way, for I shall probably ride down."

"I thought we were going on the cars."

"I changed my mind while you were away. We can get there just as quickly by boat. Hurry off, for I don't want to be kept waiting."

Jet left the hotel at once, wondering why the gentleman did not give him a car fare if the business demanded so much speed, and on his way to the pier he heard the news-boys crying the particulars of the "Terrible tragedy on East Twentieth Street."

"I'll see what the story is," Jet said to himself as he bought one of the papers, but he did not stop to read then lest he should arrive at the rendezvous too late.

The gentleman was waiting for him on his arrival, but did not express any anxiety to start for Yonkers immediately.

"You can go up to my room and help me stow away some baggage," he said, glancing around as if to make certain they were not observed.

"Ain't this the Albany boat?"

"Yes; but I reckon there's nothing to prevent our getting out at Yonkers."

"I didn't know she stopped there."

"You will probably have time to learn several things before you're many years older."

"But this steamer doesn't leave till night."

"I've made another change in my plans, and it doesn't concern you since a messenger's duty is to follow as long as he is paid for his services."

This was said in such an angry tone that Jet held his peace lest he should give further offense, but at the same time the whole affair was beginning, in his mind, to assume a very mysterious aspect.

The man motioned for him to walk by his side, and led the way through the main saloon to a state-room forward, where, through the half-opened door. Jet failed to see the baggage which had been spoken of as needing "stowing."

"Go in," the stranger said impatiently, pushing Jet into the apartment, and following him.

Then the door was locked, and the man carefully fastened both the shutter and window.

Now the messenger was alarmed, and turned toward the door with upraised fist as if to pound for assistance, when a hand was placed roughly over his mouth.

"Don't try any such game as that or there'll be trouble, you young cub," the man whispered, and almost before Jet knew what was being done a hard substance had been forced into his mouth and fastened there by a towel tied around his head.

That he was a victim of foul play the young messenger could have no doubt, and he struggled with all his strength to free himself, but in vain.

The stranger took from his pocket several lengths of stout rope, bound first Jet's hands and then his feet, after which he threw him roughly into one of the berths.

"I reckon you'll lay there without making very much fuss, till I get ready to let you go," he said, as he treated himself to a long draught from a black flask. "When we do land at Yonkers, you can go back to Police Headquarters once more."

The latter remark caused Jet to associate this adventure with the one he had had in the morning, and after looking intently at the stranger his suspicions became a certainty.

"This is the short fellow who got me to carry the valise!" he said to himself. "They know about my goin' to see the inspector, and are bound to get me out of the way."

The idea that his captor was a cold-blooded murderer, who probably would not hesitate to add another to his list of crimes, was far from reassuring, and the perspiration burst out on Jet's face as he thus persuaded himself he was in immediate danger of a violent death.

CHAPTER III

THE KIDNAPPERS

Jet's captor appeared to be perfectly contented after binding the boy, and assuring himself that it was impossible an alarm could be given.

He seated himself by the side of the berth, lighted a cigar, and began to read a newspaper, although the light in the room was far from good owing to the blinds being closed.

Jet was lying in such a manner that he could see the fellow's face plainly, and was now able to understand why he had not recognized him before.

At the saloon he had a heavy moustache and rather long hair. Now his face was smooth and his head closely shaven.

His face had then been so white as to be pallid, whereas it was now bronzed deeply. In addition the man's clothing was of the most fashionable make, while in the morning Jet had seen him clad in coarse, badly fitting garments.

"There's a big difference in his looks," Jet said to himself, "but yet I don't understand why I was such a fool as not to know him when he first spoke."

Messenger number forty-eight had ample time for reflection, for fully an hour passed without any change in the relative position of affairs, and then came a low, quick tap at the door.

When it was opened the tall man, now without a beard, and wearing a pair of green spectacles, came quickly into the room, locking the door carefully behind him.

"I see you've got the cub," he said, bending over Jet to make certain of his identity.

"Yes, had him here an hour."

"Have any trouble?"

"Not a particle. He was the first to answer my call, and I took that as a sign we should get away without leaving a trail."

"We can't lug him around the country with us."

"You're right but we can drop him after he's where it'll trouble him to get back."

"There's a safer way."

"I know what you mean, Joe, but I don't like to do any more of that business than's necessary. The last one couldn't have been avoided, but this can."

"It's a big risk to carry him up the river, and he'd better be dropped."

"We'll talk about that later. Have you heard anything new?"

"Not much. After this cub came from headquarters a detective was sent down to the Bowery, and by this time it is known pretty well what we looked like. The afternoon papers say the police are following a good clew, but you know what such talk means, Bob."

"Is the stuff salted away?"

"All except what we need for a couple of months. The boys can send us more if we conclude to leave the quiet little place we're bound for."

Then the two men had recourse to the flask, and after taking a hearty drink the one who had been called Bob proposed to go outside for a moment.

"You must be a fool to think of such a thing," Joe said angrily. "You are not done up so well but that some body would be able to recognize you. We are lucky in getting under cover without trouble, and here we stop till morning."

"It's going to be mighty dull work staying in this coop all that time."

"Not half so bad as a cell in the Tombs."

The two men relapsed into silence for a time and Jet lay watching them as he tried to devise some way out of a position which was fraught with danger. It seemed impossible that he could aid himself, bound as he was, and exceedingly improbable any one would come to his assistance.

Study as he might Jet could think of no way to extricate himself and he said mentally after racking his brain in vain:

"I don't see any way out, but there's no use in giving up hope till a fellow is obliged to."

The men alternately drank and smoked during the remainder of the afternoon, but said very little more regarding their flight.

When the steamer started Jet expected to hear them decide what was to be done with him, but in this he was mistaken.

As the hours wore on he fell into an uneasy slumber, despite the painfulness of his position, and during this time of unconsciousness the matter must have been settled.

It was yet dark when the steamer arrived at Albany, and, very much to the prisoner's surprise, the two men left the room, fastening the door behind them. Then Jet heard a noise as if something was being done to the lock, after which a deep silence reigned.

"They're going to leave me here, and have put something into the lock so the door can't be opened in a hurry," he said to himself, and during the next ten minutes he struggled desperately to free himself.

The bonds had been adjusted by an expert, and he might as well have tried to fly as to hope to remove them unaided.

He was both thirsty and hungry, and every limb ached from being so long in one position.

It seemed an almost endless time before the sounds of people moving proclaimed that the passengers were leaving the steamer.

Then another long interval, during which he could hear the noises of the city, and finally some one knocked on the door of the room.

If he could have cried out then his term of imprisonment would have been speedily ended.

"Some fool has broken the key in the lock," he heard one of the servants say after trying several times to open the door. "We may as well wait till the engineer can come up."

Jet was rapidly losing heart. He counted the minutes, as if such a course would make the time pass more rapidly, and was so thoroughly exhausted when, at nearly three o'clock in the afternoon, the work of picking the lock was begun, that he could not have made himself heard even had the gag been removed.

The engineer was not a skillful locksmith, and half an hour elapsed before the door was opened.

Even then it was several moments before the bedroom stewards perceived the prisoner, and instead of unbinding him at once they ran in search of the purser. When that officer arrived Jet was released from his uncomfortable position, but his mouth was so dry and parched that he could not speak.

The boy realized that he would be questioned closely, and remembering the inspector's caution, he resolved to tell no more than was absolutely necessary. Therefore when the officers of the steamer insisted on being told how he chanced to be a prisoner, he simply related the story of the capture, without entering into particulars as to why the men should do such a thing. His account was looked upon with suspicion, and after questioning him yet more closely the purser said:

"The boy is lying for some purpose, probably to get a free passage. Why would two men want to steal a fellow like him?"

"I've told the truth," Jet replied earnestly. "Don't you suppose I could have stowed away easier than by being tied up till I couldn't wink, an' waiting for you to come an' find me?"

"That sounds reasonable enough, but at the same time I don't believe the story," the purser said severely. "Get ashore now, and if I catch you on this boat again you'll have considerable trouble."

It was with difficulty Jet could walk, owing to the cramps in his limbs, but he hobbled ashore at once, thinking that for a boy who had simply tried to do his duty he had been badly used.

It was necessary he should return home at once, but he had no money.

He was hungry, and yet had nothing with which to purchase a meal.

His entire hoardings were in a box at Mammy Showers' house, and he did not have the value of a penny about him.

"It's a mighty tight fix," he said reflectively, as he walked up from the river front, "and what makes it worse is that the inspector will be certain I've run away because I had something to do with the murder."

There could be no question but that he was in a bad scrape, and the more he thought of it the more serious did the whole affair appear.

"Hello, Johnny! Whater you doin' up here?"

Without really thinking he was the one addressed, Jet looked around, and saw a small boy in district messenger's uniform beckoning vigorously to him.

"Was you calling me?" he asked, as he crossed the street.

"Sure. Ain't that a New York cap?"

"Yes."

"Whater you doin' here?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Jet replied ruefully.

"Well say, what's crawlin' on you? Run away, eh?"

Jet was in that frame of mind when to confide in some one is a relief, and he told him the same story the purser of the steamer refused to believe.

His new acquaintance listened attentively, and when Jet had concluded, asked:

"What do you s'pose they wanted with a feller like you?"

"I don't know."

"Hadn't anybody's else money, eh?"

"Not a cent, an' I'm no richer now."

"What kind of lookin' duffers was they?"

"Dressed pretty well, the short one was."

"Did the other one wear green spectacles, an' was he tall?"

"Yes, have you seen 'em?"

"There was a couple of duffers hangin' round the other depot waitin' for the train, an' I wouldn't wonder if they was the ones. The short feller bought two tickets for Cooperstown Junction."

"How did you happen to hear all that?"

"I went after some parlor car tickets for our boss."

"Has the train gone yet?"

"It oughter left at seven this mornin'."

"An' it's most night now, so they've got off."

"Was they runnin' away from somebody?"

Just for an instant Jet was on the point of telling this brother messenger the whole story, but he checked himself in time and replied:

"I should think they'd want to after playin' such a trick on me. Say, how am I goin' back to New York?"

"I dunno 'less you walk; I don't reckon you wanter stow away on the boat?"

"You bet I don't."

At this moment the Albany messenger remembered that he had been sent on an important errand, and said as he turned to go:

"I'll be through work at six o'clock. Come around by the office an' we'll have another talk."

Food, not conversation, was what Jet most wanted just then, and as his new acquaintance departed in great haste he walked aimlessly along the streets wondering what could be done.

"The inspector thinks by this time that I lied to him, and— By gracious, why can't I follow those fellows? That's jest what he told me to do!"

This seemed like a lucky thought, and without realizing that he had no means to prosecute even the shortest search, Jet went rapidly toward the depot.

CHAPTER IV

AN ENGAGEMENT

It was necessary for Jet to inquire the way to the depot spoken of by his new acquaintance, and after arriving there his helplessness seemed more apparent than before.

Passengers coming and going paid no attention to the boy, save to push him out of their road, and he was even more alone in the hurrying throng than he had been on the street.

After wandering to and fro, trying to screw up courage enough to ask the conductor for a free ride, and failing in the effort because none of the train hands would give him an opportunity to speak with them, he sat down on a truck and mechanically plunged his hands in his pockets.

The paper purchased on the evening previous was the only thing which met his touch.

"I might as well find out about this murder," he said to himself, as he unfolded the printed sheet. "When a feller is readin' he kinder forgets how hungry he is, I reckon."

To give the printed account in all its details would require too much space, since there were no less than five columns in Jet's paper.

The substance was to the effect that a well-known merchant, residing on East Twentieth Street, had been found on the floor of his library the previous morning, his skull crushed in as if with some heavy instrument like a crow-bar, or a burglar's jimmy, and the safe, which was known to have contained money and bonds to the amount of forty-six thousand dollars, was broken open and empty.

The theory of the detectives was that thieves had entered the dwelling for the purpose of robbery; but having been surprised by the owner, killed him in order to make good their escape.

A large tuft of hair in the dead man's hand told that he had grappled with his murderers, and the overturned furniture spoke of a long and desperate struggle.

Singular as it may seem none of the other occupants of the house had heard any unusual noise, although the uproar must have been great for some moments, nor was any shock perceived when the safe door had been blown off.

It was as the paper stated, the most mysterious of the many detective-baffling crimes which had been committed in New York city, because of the fact that such a deed could have been done without alarming any one in the vicinity.

Nothing was said regarding the men for whom Jet had carried the satchel, because at the time the article had been written the police were not in possession of this very valuable clew.

Jet had finished reading the article, and was studying the matter in his mind without being able to arrive at any definite conclusion regarding the course he should pursue, except that he was eager to follow the men who had treated him so roughly, when a stranger halted directly in front of him.

"You don't seem to be very busy."

"It kinder looks that way for a fact."

"Taking a vacation?"

"A good deal more of a one than I want. I'd like to pick up some kind of a job that would pay a little money between now an' bedtime."

"Live here?"

"In New York. A couple of duffers hired me to come here, an' then skipped without payin'."

"So you're stranded?"

"You'd think so if you didn't have a blessed cent, an' was hungry enough to eat up the whole town."

"Do you want to earn money to take you back to the city?"

"I'd rather go to Cooperstown Junction."

"Then you'd be worse off than you are here, for it isn't any town."

"That's where I want to go all the same."

"I can give you a chance if you'll work your way."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I've got a minstrel company on the road, and wouldn't mind paying the traveling expenses of a smart boy who will distribute programmes and make himself generally useful."

"A show! Say, I can do a mighty good turn at dancin', and give some of these fellers what think they know it all, a few points."

"Step out and let me see what you can do."

Jet was by no means bashful; in a few seconds he was dancing as spiritedly as if such discomforts as hunger and fatigue were unknown.

"You'll do," the stranger said, approvingly, when the boy ceased his efforts. "I'll take you along, and pay a little something if you'll do a turn."

"You can bet your life I will, but I don't want to go any farther than Cooperstown Junction."

"Very well, there'll be plenty of time to talk about that part of the business, for we shall make three stands between here and there. Take this money to buy something in the way of a lunch, and in twenty minutes we'll start."

Jet was overjoyed.

By this arrangement he saw an opportunity to follow the alleged murderers, and at the same time earn money to return to New York if necessary.

Probably if he had told his new employer the whole story that gentleman would have advised him to call upon the inspector without delay, rather than try to run the criminals down himself.

As it was, however, he believed he knew exactly what course to pursue, and had little doubt as to succeeding.

Two sandwiches and three boiled eggs were the provisions he purchased to break his long fast, and when the train drew out of the depot the amateur dancer, seated by the side of his employer, thought he was very fortunate.

Cobleskill was the town where Jet was to make his first bow before the public, and with a costume which was rather "off color" because of having been contributed in fragments by the different members of the company, he stepped on the stage feeling just a trifle nervous.

To the surprise of his professional companions Jet gave a really presentable performance.

It is true some of his steps were not exactly artistic, but he made up in quantity what might have been lacking in quality, and the applause received was enough to make him proud.

"Say, my boy, you'll make a success of this thing if you do a little studying," the manager exclaimed when Jet finished his turn. "I'll give you ten dollars a week and pay all your expenses if you want to keep on the road with us."

"I don't reckon I'll stay more than the three nights we talked about, 'cause you see I've got some work to do when we strike Cooperstown Junction."

"You'll be glad enough to drop it when you see what kind of a place it is."

During the remainder of the evening Jet had nothing to do save watch the other performers from the wings, and but for the fear that the inspector might send an officer to arrest him, he would have enjoyed himself hugely.

On the following day he took part in the street parade at the next stopping place, and during the afternoon read everything concerning the tragedy he could find in the hotel reading-room papers.

He did not gain any great amount of information, however.

The particulars of the murder were related at greater length, and it was said that several promising clues were being followed, but no details were given concerning the work of the detectives.

"Jest as likely as not I'll surprise people before this thing is over. If I can get on the track of them men Something is goin' to happen for a fact."

He had already begun to speculate on the anticipated triumph when he should, unaided, bring the guilty men to justice, as his gaze fell on an advertisement displayed in large type:

INFORMATION WANTED.

A suitable reward will be paid for information as to the whereabouts of Jethro Lewis. The said boy is fourteen years of age, medium size, curly hair, and when last seen wore a suit of grey clothes with a district messenger's cap, on which were the figures 48.

"The inspector is after me," Jet whispered as the paper fell from his grasp. "Now my jig is up, an' I reckon there's no chance but that I'll have to go to jail."

Jet tore the advertisement from the sheet lest it should be seen by some member of the company, and then went at once to the theater, where he could remain screened from view of the townspeople.

The one thought in his mind was that all would be well if he could get on the track of those who had kidnapped him, and he blamed himself severely for not having gone straight on to Cooperstown Junction, instead of remaining with the company, but how that might have been done while he was penniless was something he did not attempt to solve.

"I won't stay any longer than to-night," he said to himself as the curtain was raised for the evening's performance, and the stage manager warned him to be ready for his cue. "There must be some way of getting over to that place without waiting for the company."

On this night he felt more confidence in himself, having had two rehearsals with the leader of the orchestra, and at the signal went before the audience confidently.

On the previous performance he had not dared to look at the people, but kept his eyes on the stage. Now, however, he glanced around, and the dance was hardly begun before he brought it to a close, the musicians gazing at him in surprise.

The cause of his sudden stopping was startling enough to have disconcerted a much older performer.

Facing him, and not more than two rows of seats from the stage, sat the two men he was so anxious to meet.

"Go on!" the leader of the orchestra whispered hoarsely, and from the wings he heard the angry command of the stage manager:

"Get to work, boy! Do you want to queer the whole show?"

Jet nerved himself to begin the dance, but he was so exceedingly awkward that several of the audience guyed him, a fact which deprived him of the small remnant of self-possession remaining.

Without stopping to consider what the result might be, he ran at full speed from the stage, and the spectators hooted and yelled derisively.

"What is the matter with you?" the manager asked fiercely, as he shook Jet until his teeth chattered.

"Them men are there!" the boy cried brokenly. "I must go right out an' get hold of them."

"You'll go and stay, you little villain! If you couldn't dance I wouldn't say a word, but I know what you are able to do. Where are you off to now?"

"I want to change these clothes so's I can go around to the front of the house."

"What for?"

"Them men are there, an' I've got to find out where they're stopping."

"What are they to you?"

"Don't stop to ask questions now, but let me go!" Jet cried, impatiently, as he tore himself from the angry man's grasp, threw off the stage costume and ran from the building.

With no idea his enemies had recognized him, he continued on without fear until reaching the corner of the building, where one of the men was standing half hidden by the shadow.

The fellow's hand was raised, and as Jet came up he struck the boy a crashing blow on the head with a stout stick, felling him to the ground like one suddenly deprived of life.

CHAPTER V

BAFFLED

When Jet regained consciousness he was lying on the ground alone, feeling dizzy and suffering from a most severe pain in his head.

He raised his hand as if to relieve the anguish, and found that his hair was matted together with a certain sticky substance, which, by aid of a light from a near-by lamp, he discovered to be blood.

From the theater music could be heard, thus telling that the performance had not yet been brought to a close.

It was only after the greatest difficulty that Jet rose to his feet, looked around for an instant as if expecting another attack, and then staggered toward the stage entrance.

He spent ten minutes covering a distance of twenty yards, and, on opening the door, was greeted by one of the company, who had evidently come out for a breath of fresh air.

"You had better not let the manager see you until after he cools off a little more, for— What is the matter, lad?"

This last question after the boy's pale and blood-stained face could be seen.

"Somebody struck me."

"Struck you? It looks more as if they had been trying to kill you."

"Perhaps that was what they did want to do," and Jet half-seated himself, half-fell on a trunk.

However aggrieved the members of the company may have felt because of Jet's failure, none of them were so hard-hearted as to ignore the fact of his suffering. Those not on the stage were immediately summoned by the boy's questioner, and in a very few seconds a messenger had been sent in search of a surgeon.

"Don't bother about me; I'll be all right in a little while," Jet managed to say, and then he fainted.

It was soon found that the boy's injuries, while severe, were not dangerous.

The scalp had been laid open to such an extent that half a dozen stitches were necessary to close the wound, and the surgeon said, reassuringly, as he bandaged the cut:

"He has lost considerable blood, which accounts for his weak condition. It will be some time before he feels all right again; but he'll come around in good shape."

"Will it do him any harm to keep on traveling with us?" the manager asked.

"Let him be quiet, and I don't anticipate any evil results. Do you know how it happened?"

"No. He was very anxious to see some one in the audience, and I fancy he went out immediately after breaking down in his act."

"Then send around at once and learn if anybody left the hall just before the assault."

This suggestion was acted upon immediately, and the doorkeeper stated that two men, one tall and the other of medium height, went out very soon after Jet ran off the stage.

"It must have been some fellow who had a grudge against him, and he broke down from fright at seeing the man; but I don't fancy it will do much good to attempt to trace the matter. Show people can't afford to fool around a town waiting for the delays of the law when they are billed to play in other places, therefore the whole thing had better be dropped."

The surgeon received his fee and left the invalid after advising that he be kept perfectly quiet.

The performers continued their efforts to amuse, and Jet, lying on a pile of wardrobe stuff, with the music of the orchestra and the applause of the audience ringing in his ears, tried to decide upon his course of action.

"I'll have to leave the show here an' find them fellers," he thought to himself, and then the pain of his wound prevented any further study of the detective work he hoped to perform.

It so chanced, however, that he did not carry out this resolution.

When morning came he was too sick to have much choice in the matter, and the kind-hearted manager said as he wrapped the boy in an old overcoat:

"We'll take him along in the hope of his getting better. If he don't improve in a day or two he can be left in some other town, for it's certain his life isn't safe in this place. Those fellows hit to kill last night, and on a second attempt might be more successful."

It was forty-eight hours before Jet fully realized the condition of affairs, and then the show was nearly a hundred miles from the scene of the attack.

"Have we passed Cooperstown Junction?" he asked of the manager as the performers boarded a train.

"Bless your heart, lad, we left that desolate place behind us the morning after you were hurt."

"How can I get back there?"

"I shan't allow you to try it yet awhile. In your present condition it would be as much as your life is worth to make the attempt."

"But I must go."

"See here, Jet, why not tell me what is on your mind? I might be able to help you."

"Some time you shall know all about it; but not now."

"Just as you please," was the impatient reply. "Will you be able to do a turn to-night?"

"I must get off the train at the next station."

"Not much."

"That's what I've got to do. You've been mighty good to me, but I can't go any farther from New York."

"How will you get back without money?"

"Walk, if there isn't any other way."

It was useless for the manager to make any protest. He was eager to keep Jet with the company, for he had seen that he could please the public; but after quite a lengthy conversation the boy's determination was so strong that it would have been useless to oppose him further.

"Well, if I can't help myself, I suppose you must go. Here are a couple of dollars to help out on the trip, and I hope you'll win, whatever's in the wind."

"When does the train stop?"

"In less than ten minutes."

Jet made his preparations for leaving by removing the coat which one of the company had contributed for his comfort, but the manager insisted that he keep it, and when he stepped upon the platform of a small station while the train continued on, it was with a very decided sense of loneliness.

His first care was to buy a new hat.

His messenger's cap was too conspicuous, and afforded positive means of identification in case he met with any one who had read the advertisement.

Then came the question as to whether he should return by the train at the expense of his small capital, or walk at the expense of time.

"It ain't certain they stayed in that town after knockin' me down, an' I stand as good a chance of meetin' 'em on the road as anywhere else, so I'll tramp it."

After investing twenty cents in crackers and cheese, and consulting with the station master as to whether it would be advisable for him to follow the track or the carriage road, Jet set out on his journey.

"Counting ties" was not as easy a job as he had fancied, and after an hour's steady walking he sat down to rest a short distance from the road, in the shelter of a shanty which looked as if it might originally have been intended for a tool-house when that portion of the road was being built.

He had not yet fully recovered from the effects of the murderous blow, and the steady traveling tired him to such an extent that it became necessary to lie down.

The natural result of this indulgence was that he soon fell asleep, and even the rumbling of the trains as they passed failed to awaken him, until after some time, when he became aware of a tugging and pulling at his coat.

Opening his eyes, he saw crouching by his side about as villainous a looking tramp as one would care to meet.

"What are you up to?" Jet cried angrily, as he attempted to rise to his feet, but was prevented by the man, who threw one arm around the boy's body.

"Lay still, sonny, an' nobody shan't hurt you."

"Take your hand out of my pocket!" and Jet cautiously drew up his legs ready for a sudden dash.

"Now don't get into a fidget; I'm only tryin' to find out if you've got a license to travel over this 'ere road."

The fellow was now doing his utmost to get at the contents of his prisoner's pockets, and although the special one on which he was working contained nothing of value, Jet did not intend to submit to the indignity.

He had drawn his feet up as far as possible, and was ready for the struggle.

Striking the man a blow in the eye with his disengaged hand, he kicked upward an instant later, hitting the tramp fairly on the back of the head as he involuntarily sprang backwards from the effects of the pain.

This vigorous treatment sufficed to break the hold, and Jet sprang to his feet just in time to avoid a vicious blow.

"Try to get the best of me will you?" the man cried, savagely, as he picked up a heavy cane which lay near by, keeping his eye meanwhile on the boy.

Jet knew he must do his best, or suffer for what had been done.

He could see nothing which would serve as a weapon, and was thinking it might be best to make a break for freedom, when the man sprang upon him.

Luckily he succeeded in avoiding a blow from the cane, by seizing with both hands the tramp's right arm, and then came a desperate struggle.

Not for a moment did he dare to release his hold lest the fellow should be able to use his weapon, and in the meanwhile he was pummeled soundly.

The man's left hand was at liberty, and with it he showered blow after blow on the boy's body.

Jet managed to screen his face by using the tramp's arm as a shield, and, finding that he was getting the worst of it darted forward at the same time he kicked with all his strength.

This sudden attack sent the man to the ground, and as he fell Jet wrested the cane from his grasp.

"It's my turn now!" he cried, as the fellow scrambled to his feet in a rage. "Make tracks out of this mighty fast or I'll break every bone in your body!"

The man glared at him fiercely for an instant, and then, stepping back a few paces, shouted loudly in a peculiar tone.

"Stop that!" and Jet ran forward with the stick uplifted. "Don't you dare to bring your friends here."

"You spoke a leetle too late, sonny, for they're coming."

Jet glanced quickly down the track, where could be seen two others of the same sort as his adversary, running at full speed.

"I reckon we won't have any trouble about huntin' for your license now," the fellow said with a grin as he retreated to a safe distance.

Jet hesitated an instant.

He knew that it would be useless to make a stand-up fight against all three, but yet at the same time flight was impossible, because of his exhaustion, caused by the struggle with the tramp.

Looking quickly around, he observed that the door of the shanty was open, hanging by one hinge.

The hut might serve as a place of refuge until some of the section hands should come that way and he leaped into the building.

Wrenching the door from its fastening, he pulled it inside, and set it up lengthwise as a sort of a barrier.

"They'll have to come within reach of this cane before getting at me, an' it'll be hard luck if I don't give a good account of myself for a little while," he said, as with compressed lips, he waited for the battle which he knew must soon begin.

CHAPTER VI

THE BATTLE

The two tramps who were coming down the track halted on reaching the one who had attacked Jet, and all had a brief conversation, which evidently concerned the occupant of the shanty.

Jet watched every movement, but while they were talking he had an opportunity to gaze around the hut in the hope of seeing other means of defense.

It was empty, with the exception of a pile of straw in one corner, which most likely had served as a bed for these or other tramps.

"There's nothing for it but to stand up here as long as possible, and perhaps somebody will come along before they can get the best of me," he said grimly. "If things are going on at this rate, it would have been better for me if I'd stayed with the show, for this isn't doin' very much toward findin' the murderers."

The men had finished their conversation, and were now approaching the shanty.

Jet raised the heavy cane, and stood ready for the battle.

It was not to begin as quickly as he thought, for the three men halted a few yards away, and one of them said, in a wheedling tone, as he stepped several paces nearer:

"See here, sonny, we're poor, hard-workin' carpenters out of a job. There's no need of havin' trouble with you; but we're that hungry as to make a fight seem pleasant alongside of suckin' our thumbs an' eatin' wind-puddin' all the time."

"What do you mean by all that?"

"Nothin' more'n to let you know how we're fixed."

"It doesn't concern me."

"There's where you're makin' a big mistake, sonny. You've got money an' we're broke, so it's nothin' more'n fair you should whack up."

"I'm no better off than you are, or I wouldn't be walking instead of riding on the cars."

"Then come out like a man an' show us what you have got."

"I'd be a fool to do that, for it's none of your business."

"Now you're makin' another mistake. We've been put here to find out sich things."

"There's no use of all this chinning, for I'm not a fool," Jet cried, angrily. "I shan't come out, nor will you have a chance to rob me."

"I'm sorry you won't listen to reason, for we may have to treat you mighty rough before this job is finished."

"Do the best you know how, but remember that I'm going to have something to say first," and Jet swung the cane threateningly.

"Better take him right out; we'll have visitors before long, an' it won't do to have sich a cub around," the leader of the party said, as he advanced, after having armed himself with several huge rocks.

Now the battle began in downright earnest.

Almost before Jet understood that the men were ready to make the attack a shower of stones were hurled against the shanty, and two came unpleasantly near his head as they were flung through the door.

"If one of them hits me the jig is up," Jet muttered, dodging his head barely in time to escape a huge fragment which would have crushed his skull like an eggshell.

"We'll give you one more chance to come out peaceable like," the leader cried, as he motioned for his companions to cease firing.

If it had not been for the ignominy of backing down from the bold stand he had taken, Jet would have accepted the invitation.

The small amount of money in his possession did not warrant a risk of life, and then again he was but delaying the real purpose of his life by remaining.

His pride prevented him from surrendering, and he made no reply.

Again the men advanced with a shower of stones, and now they were so near that Jet could only find shelter by hugging the side of the hut nearest the door.

"Can't some of you hit him?" the leader asked, angrily. "We mustn't keep the fun up very long, for the boss is bound to come mighty soon, an' there'll be a row that amounts to something if he finds us foolin' like this."

These words caused the men to renew their efforts, and twice did Jet receive a severe blow on the body before he found an opportunity to return the compliment.

Then one of the fellows, leaning over the barricade in order to take better aim, presented a fair target.

Jet brought the cane down on his head with full force, and the fellow fell to the ground like one dead.

A roar of rage went up from the others, but they prudently fell back a short distance, dragging their companion with them.

"You see it isn't going to be so one-sided as you fancied," Jet cried. "Now haul off an' I'll leave without saying another word."

"You won't have much more chance to talk," the leader cried, savagely, as he gathered another armful of rocks; but before he could renew the attack a shout from the distance caused him to drop his weapons very suddenly.

"The boss has come, an' now we shall get a tongue-lashing!" one of the fellows said, as if in alarm.

"I reckon that won't hurt us very much," the leader replied, but at the same time he dropped the rocks, and stood ready to receive the new-comer.

Jet could not see the track from where he was standing, but he heard what sounded like a familiar voice ask, sharply:

"Now what kind of deviltry are you fellers into?"

"Trying to drive out a rat we've got cornered in here."

"Same old tricks, eh? Well, some of these days you'll bite off more than can be chewed easily, an' then the jig will be up for all hands. Can't you act decent one day in a month?"

"That depends. When we're left alone three or four weeks on mighty short allowance, it stands us in hand to look out for ourselves," the leader of the party replied, insolently.

"Take care of your tongue, my friend, or there'll be something else needin' care precious soon. Let me see your game."

Jet heard the sound of rapid footsteps, and an instant later the tall man whom he had such good cause to remember was standing at a safe distance trying to peer into the shanty.

"Hello!" he cried, in surprise, as he recognized the boy. "It seems that you've been doin' a lucky stroke of business without knowing it. Don't let him give you the slip, an' bring him over to the house as soon as possible."

"Somebody you know?" one of the fellows asked.

"Yes, a boy who has found out too much for his own good, and he must be kept mighty close."

"It wouldn't take long to fix that for you," was the significant reply.

"We may have to do it; but Bob is agin that kind of business, an' to humor him we must keep the cub awhile."

"Has Bob come back?"

"He must be at the house by this time."

"Have you brought grub?"

"Of course not. Do you think we travel around the country loaded down like pack horses?"

"Better do that than go hungry."

"Is everything used up?"

"Yes, or we shouldn't be down here."

"I'll see to layin' in a stock, an' there shall be plenty to drink. When you can get hold of the boy, come along; I'll start now."

The man disappeared from view, and the sound of his footsteps told that he was walking rapidly away in the direction from which he had approached.

"What a fool I was to stay here fightin' for less than two dollars, when by giving it up I might have been half a mile from here before that villain came!" Jet said, bitterly, as he nerved himself for what he knew must be the final struggle.

He had good cause for fear.

After the instructions which had been given there was little chance the men would let him slip through their fingers, and, with such an incentive on their part, there was no hope the struggle could be prolonged.

The man whom he had stricken down was now on his feet, vowing vengeance, and ready to continue the fight.

"Close right in on him," the leader said as he seized a stout rail from a near-by fence. "He can only hit one blow, and the job is ended."

"I'll give them a chance to remember me," Jet said, as he stood ready for the attack, and the words had hardly come into his mind before the men were in front of him.

Striking out with all his strength, his cane came in contact with the leader's weapon, shattering the former, and the fight was over.

Two of the men seized him by the arms, and the third amused himself by slapping the helpless boy in the face until tired of the sport.

"Tie his hands, an' we'll mosey along. Joe is after something to drink, an' we must be there in time to get our share."

One of the party had rope enough in his pocket to obey the order, and in a twinkling Jet's arms were bound so tightly to his sides as to cause great pain.

During all this time he had not spoken a word, but he did a "power of thinking."

In the first place he scrutinized his captors carefully, in order to be able to give a perfect description of them in case he succeeded in making his escape, and then took a good survey of the surrounding country, that he might find his way back again.

"Now get along, an' walk sharp, or what I have given you will seem no more than a flea-bite alongside of the whalin' you'll get," the leader said as one of the party started off, and he pushed Jet behind him.

The prisoner could do no less than obey, and despite the disadvantage of walking with his hands tied, he managed to keep pace with the others. During nearly half an hour the party continued on at a rapid pace, turning out of the railroad track about a quarter of a mile from the shanty, and striking directly through the woods.

At the end of this time they had arrived at what appeared to be little more than a clearing in the woods, where was situated a rude log house of two stories, around which was piled a complete circle of cordwood not less than six feet high.

It may have been cut for fuel, but it would serve admirably as breast-works if the place was attacked by officers.

A small outbuilding, which was evidently used as a stable, stood fifteen or twenty feet in the rear of the main building, inside the circle of wood, and near the door were tied two savage looking dogs, who tugged and pulled at their chains, while they barked loudly as the party approached.

"If we had left them loose, I don't reckon either the boss or Bob would have cared to come very near while we were away," the leader of the party said grimly, as he went toward the stable, leaving the others in charge of the prisoner.

"There ain't much chance I'll ever be able to tell the inspector what I've been doing," Jet thought as he entered the enclosure formed by the fuel, and was led toward the single door of which the house boasted. "Those dogs would be worse than a hundred men if a fellow was trying to sneak off."

He had no further opportunity for speculation just then, for the men pushed him roughly into the house, and he stood in front of the short man who had so successfully acted the part of a gentleman at the Union Square Hotel.

CHAPTER VII

A BOLD ATTEMPT

"It seems to be pretty hard to get rid of you," the man said, with a grin as Jet stood in front of him.

"I can't say it's my fault."

"Perhaps not, and it shan't be ours in the future. Where have you been?"

"Trying to earn money enough to pay my way back home."

"We'll provide you a job here. If you behave yourself things won't go so very bad; but there'll be the very devil to pay if we find you trying to give us the slip."

"I shan't stay any longer'n I can help," Jet replied, stoutly.

"We'll take good care that you can't help it for some time. Sam, take him up stairs where the small press was; I reckon he'll be safe enough there; and when Joe comes back turn the dogs loose."

"Then you an' he'll have to be mighty careful about goin' into the yard, for they'll tackle either of you as quick as they would this boy."

"So much the better. We'll look out for ourselves. There must be work done to-night, so get ready for it while you are up stairs."

The fellow waited an instant as if to learn whether there were any more directions to be given, and then dragged Jet out through a door which led to the apartments above.

There were no stairs connecting the first with the second story. A stout ladder afforded the only means of ascent, and since Jet could not make his way up this while his hands were tied, his jailor was forced to remove the rope.

"Now get along; but look out how you try to play any tricks, for this is a mighty unhealthy place for anything of the kind."

Jet had no idea of attempting to escape while the odds were so decidedly against him, and he obeyed meekly.

The man conducted him to a small room at the rear of the building, which looked as if it had lately been used as a workshop, and there left him, after locking and barring the door from the outside.

The prisoner gazed around him curiously.

The apartment did not contain a single article of furniture. One small window admitted the light, and this was so heavily barred with wooden uprights that even with a sharp saw considerable time would have been required for the prisoner to cut through.

In one corner was a heap of dirt and fragments of paper; the floor was stained as if with ink, as were the walls of hewn boards.

From the window the stable was all with the exception of trees, to be seen. A more desolate spot could not well be imagined, and to add to its loneliness was the fact that it must be many miles from the nearest habitation.

Jet had no time to speculate upon his own condition; the only thought in his mind just then was why these men chose to live in such a forsaken place.

In an adjoining room he could hear some person walking around briskly, evidently moving heavy articles from one spot to another, and from below came the hum of conversation.

Having nothing better to do, and still intent on trying to learn the purpose for which this house was intended, Jet began kicking away the pile of dirt.

A bit of bright green attracted his attention.

Picking it up he found to his great surprise and delight that it was a new ten dollar bill. The fact, that it was unsigned escaped his notice.

"Well, this isn't so bad," he said, in a tone of satisfaction. "If I ever do get away from this place I'll have money enough to pay my fare to New York. I s'pose it belongs to them fellers; but I'm going to keep it, all the same, to even up for what they've done."

Now the dirt pile had great attractions.

He examined it closely, and had the satisfaction of finding a second bill exactly like the first.

"These people must have plenty of money if they can afford to leave it around loose like this," he said, as he placed the newly found wealth in his stocking directly beneath his foot.

Quite a large quantity of plain paper in small strips was all that rewarded his further search among the dirt; but he did not think there was any cause for complaint on his part.

"Twenty dollars will come pretty nigh settlin' for all them fellers have done to me. Now let's try to study up a plan for gettin' out of this place. There must be some way."

A second examination of the window gave no encouragement, for his strength was not sufficient to force aside the bars.

The boards of the floor, while not nailed with any remarkable care, defied all his attempts to remove them.

Then he looked at the ceiling, which was composed only of the rafters with beams, poles, and boards laid across the top, but, so far as he could judge, unfastened.

"I don't know as I should be any better off if I was up there; but it won't do much harm to make a try in that direction after dark. A fellow ought to be able to shin up the window bars."

The more he thought of this possibility for escape the more simple did it seem, and he resolved on putting the plan into execution.

That the dogs were outside ready to try conclusions with any stranger he understood very well; but it was useless to borrow trouble on this score until learning whether there was a chance for him to descend to their level.

"I don't s'pose it'll amount to anything more than gettin' into the loft, an' then coming down again; but it's better than laying still," he said, and from that time until sunset he remained at the window gazing out at the trees and the deep-mouthed guardians of the place.

When, as nearly as he could judge, two hours had passed from the time of his arrival, the tall man drove up in a springless wagon which was apparently filled with food and liquor.

The load was taken into the house, the horse stabled, and then the dogs were let loose.

That they would be very disagreeable customers with whom to have any dispute could be well understood as they ran to and fro growling and snarling, and despite his resolve not to borrow trouble until he knew there was a possibility it could come, Jet could not prevent himself from speculating upon what would happen if he suddenly appeared before them.

It was nearly sunset before the door of his room was opened, and then the short man entered, bringing several slices of raw bacon, half a loaf of bread, and a bottle of water.

"I don't count on havin' you starve to death," he said, as he placed the articles on the floor; "but you won't get enough to injure your health, I reckon."

"Why don't you let me go to New York? I haven't done anything to harm you."

"That is because you haven't had much of a chance as yet, except to talk with the inspector, my boy, and we don't intend to give you one. There isn't—"

"Here, Bob! What's the use of chinnin' with that cub when the grub is ready. Come down, or I won't answer that your share will be left."

This threat had the desired effect, for Bob went out of the room very quickly, taking good care, however, to lock and bolt the door behind him.

The night came; Jet could no longer distinguish objects from the window, and the room was so dark that it was impossible to see his way around.

Crouching close by the window Jet heard the heavy tramp as the men came upstairs, and by the noises he knew they had entered the apartment adjoining his prison.

The hum of conversation came through the rough partition quite distinctly, and in a short time this was followed by a heavy thumping sound at regular intervals.

It was as if the men were pounding with a wooden mallet, except that the blows were fully thirty seconds apart.

Jet tried to guess what they were doing; but the effort was in vain.

"What's the use bothering about them," he said, finally, to himself. "So long as they stay where they are, and don't trouble me, I haven't much right to complain, though a fellow would find it mighty hard work to sleep in such a racket."

It was time to make his explorations if he proposed doing so before morning, and he arose to his feet.

By the aid of the window bars it was not a difficult matter for one as agile as he to clamber to the rafters above, and once there the remainder of the task was comparatively simple.

Hanging by one arm to the beams, with his disengaged hand he pulled away the loose timbers and boards from above until a passage was made for his body.

Then raising himself by both hands he was soon standing where he could touch the roof of the building; but unable to see his surroundings because of the intense darkness.

"I don't see that I am much better off up here," he muttered, grimly, as he walked cautiously along without any very good idea of what he expected to find.

Just then a twinkling star was seen, and he discovered that one of the roof-boards was badly rotted.

Now, there was something tangible in the way of escape, and he eagerly began to tear away the decayed wood, laying the pieces gently on the flooring, until there was an aperture sufficiently large to admit of his passing through.

An instant later he was seated astride the ridge-pole, looking down into the yard where the ferocious dogs were running wildly to and fro as if having already scented their prey.

Now indeed was Jet at a loss to know what to do.

Even if the animals had not been below he would have hesitated to leap from the roof of the building lest he should strike upon the barricade of cord-wood with which the house was surrounded.

He must go down regardless of the many dangers, or return to the room where the men could murder him whenever they felt so disposed, and after a few second's reflection he chose the former course.

"There is one chance of getting away from the dogs, an' no show whatever that I'll ever leave here alive unless I go now," he said, to himself.

Clutching at the rough boards literally with his finger-nails, he slid slowly down toward the edge of the roof at a point farthest from the stable.

He could see the wall of wood directly beneath him, and hear the low growling of the dogs as they sniffed the air to discover the cause of the sounds which had aroused their suspicions.

To remain very long deliberating would be to run the risk of the animals giving an alarm, and Jet gathered himself for a spring.

Putting forth all his strength in order to clear the obstacle, he leaped.

The ends of the cord-wood just grazed his clothing as he passed over them, and Jet struck the soft ground, which gave forth no warning sound to those who were in the building, on that side of the clearing where the trees were nearest.

He was unhurt, although badly shaken up, and would have started at full speed to gain the partial shelter of the forest, but for the fact that just then a heavy body leaped over the barricade.

It was one of the dogs, and Jet knew he must now fight desperately if he would live.

A stick of wood about as thick as his wrist was the first weapon which came to his hand as he clutched at the top of the pile to draw himself up, and with this he awaited in silence the onset.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ARREST

Jet understood only too well that even if he should come off victorious in this battle with the dog, and in so doing make sufficient noise to be heard by the inmates of the house, all his efforts would have been in vain.

Although the moon had not yet risen, the light of the stars permitted the boy to see his antagonist, who, on first striking the ground on the outside of the barricade, stood for an instant as if at a loss to locate the intruder.

Jet thought it possible he might yet escape, and started toward the shelter of the trees; but the sound of his footsteps soon told the brute where to look for his prey.

With a low, angry yelp he turned, standing motionless a few seconds, during which time Jet continued to back farther away from the house in order that there might be less chance the noise of the conflict would be overheard.

Then the dog crouched for a spring, and Jet, every muscle strained to its utmost tension, stood ready to receive him.

The battle was short.

While the dog was yet in the air Jet struck out with the heavy stick, and his aim was perfect.

The club fell squarely on the brute's head, crushing the skull as if it had been an egg-shell, and without so much as a moan the dog dropped dead.

There was yet another to be met, but so far he had not made his presence known save by angry barks, and Jet ran for the woods with all speed.

He gained the shelter of the trees and paused for an instant to look back.

If he must meet the companion of the animal he had killed it would be better to do so at the edge of the undergrowth where he could have a fair view of his antagonist, rather than fight in the darkness where the branches would obstruct his movements.

No sound came from the inmates of the house to show that they had been alarmed.

From the window of the room where Jet had heard them moving about a bright light could be seen, and what seemed very strange, considering the fact that the night was far from cold, the men had built such a roaring fire that the sparks were coming from the chimney in wreaths.

Even where he stood Jet could hear those dull, heavy blows at regular intervals, which, since it proved their work had not been interrupted, showed that the men had no idea their prisoner was making his escape.

The remaining dog was rushing to and fro barking furiously; but, contrary to Jet's expectations, he did not leap over the barrier.

"I don't reckon there's any use waiting longer for him. It will be better to take my chances of fighting among the trees than to stay until those fellows come out."

With this thought in his mind Jet started at a rapid pace through the woods, exerting himself to the utmost to keep ever before him the direction of the morning's journey.

The bread and bacon he had put in his pocket before attempting the escape, and now as he made his way through the underbrush he ate leisurely, for strength was the one thing needful for the successful completion of the task, and to retain this, food was essential.

More than once he fell over the trunk of a tree, or was thrown by the vines which caught his feet as in a snare; but each time he arose to his feet undismayed, and the weary tramp was continued without a halt until considerably past midnight, when he had arrived at the railroad track.

With plenty of money in his pocket there was no thought of walking any farther than necessary, and Jet's only desire was to find a depot.

By continuing on half an hour longer in a direction opposite the one taken by him when he met the three apparent tramps, the boy found that for which he sought.

The night train would be along in ten minutes, so the station-agent said, and Jet bought a ticket for Albany.

He had been tempted to change one of the ten-dollar bills for this purpose; but decided not to do so after realizing that it might be imprudent to display so much money.

Of the amount given him by the manager of the minstrel company he had enough left to pay for a passage and purchase something to eat in the morning, consequently there was no necessity of using that which he had found.

Of the journey to Albany he knew absolutely nothing.

The long tramp had given him an overpowering desire for sleep, and the soft seat was rest-inviting, therefore in less than five minutes from the time he boarded the train his eyes were closed in slumber.

On arriving at his destination one of the brakemen awakened him with a vigorous shaking, which would have done credit to a giant's strength, and he went out in the early morning air decidedly refreshed.

His plans had all been laid during the tramp through the woods, and he knew exactly what to do.

First breakfast was necessary, and this important duty he attended to without delay, spending therefor the last of his change.

It was six o'clock when he arrived at the Hudson River depot, and learned that a train for New York would leave in a short time.

"Give me a ticket," he said, producing one of the bills found in the house from which he escaped.

The ticket-seller took the money, looked at it scrutinizingly for an instant, and then at the boy.

"Where did you get this?" he asked.

"Out on the road a piece. Don't think I stole it, do you?"

"Tell me where you got it."

"I don't know. It wasn't any town, an' I ain't acquainted 'round this way."

"Who gave it to you?"

"A man."

"Did you earn it?"

"Say, mister, what's the matter?" and now Jet began to be alarmed, for the ticket-agent looked very stern.

Instead of replying the man beckoned to an officer who was standing near by, and said, in a low tone:

"Take this boy on a charge of passing counterfeit money. I will be up to make a complaint as soon as I can get away."

"Come with me," and the officer laid his hand heavily on Jet's shoulder.

"What's the matter?" Jet asked, as he tried to release himself, but succeeded only in getting such a choking as nearly deprived him of breath.

"You'd better come along without any trouble, for I don't want to club a little shaver like you."

"But I'm going to New York, an' that man has got my money."

"I reckon you won't need it yet awhile."

"Tell me what business you've got to haul me off like this?"

"You'll find out soon enough."

By this time quite a crowd had began to gather, and realizing that it would be useless to make any further objections, Jet added:

"Let up on my collar a little so's I can breathe, an' I'll go along peaceable."

The officer did as he had been requested, but not to such an extent that there was any danger his prisoner would have an opportunity to escape, and the two walked rapidly along the street followed by a throng of boys.

At the police station Jet was led in front of a high desk, and the officer said in reply to a question from the sergeant:

"Charged by the ticket-seller at the depot with passing counterfeit money."

The small prisoner was asked his name, age, and place of residence, to all of which he made truthful answers, and then he was searched thoroughly.

As a matter of course this could only result in the finding of the second bill, and the sergeant said, severely:

"I reckon this isn't his first offense of the same kind. Who sent you out to pass that money, my boy?"

Jet hesitated.

He had believed it would be possible for him to give such information to the inspector as would result in the arrest of the murderers, and was not willing to tell these officers the whole story.

"I didn't know the money was bad," he said, after a brief time of reflection. "Is that the only reason why you are going to keep me here?"

"Before the business is ended you'll find that to be serious enough."

"But is it all?"

"Yes."

"Then will you send word to the inspector in New York that District Messenger No. 48 is here, and wants to see him right away?"

"So? You're the boy who is wanted so badly in New York, eh?"

"I don't know anything about that; but I must see the inspector mighty soon or it'll be too late."

"Too late for what?"

"That's jest what I can't tell you."

"It may be possible I shall make you."

"You can try; but it won't be any use, for I won't say a word to anybody but him."

"He has nothing to do with this case of passing counterfeit money."

"I know it; but there's somethin' else of a good deal more importance that he's got a finger in. It don't make any difference to me, about the money, for I've done nothin' wrong, however you try to fix it."

Jet spoke in such a tone of independence that the sergeant would have made him feel the weight of his authority but for the fact that word had been sent out from the New York Police Headquarters in such a peculiar manner as to leave no doubt of the boy's being an important prisoner or witness, and he could not well decline to grant the request.

"You may think to get out of the scrape by playing this game, but I promise you'll be in a worse box than ever if the inspector don't like your message."

"I'll run the risk," Jet replied, calmly, feeling that his arrest would be a matter of but little moment if through it he should be able to communicate with the inspector before the men in the woods would have time to get away.

"It would be much better if you confided in me, for just at present you are in a disagreeable position, and I could do considerable toward helping you."

"We'll let things go as they are, providin' you let the inspector know I've got to see him right away," Jet replied, and the sergeant could not well continue the conversation.

The small prisoner was confined in one of the cells; but due care was taken in regard to his comfort, for by this time all in the station had begun to look upon him as a very important person.

Jet was not disturbed because of the fact that he had been arrested on a charge of passing counterfeit money; already he had a shrewd suspicion as to the value of his discoveries, and felt quite certain he would receive a warm and friendly reception from the inspector.

CHAPTER IX

THE DETECTIVE

The only thing which troubled Jet as he sat alone in the narrow cell was the possibility that the inspector might not get his message in time to bag the suspected men before they left the house in the woods, for now that he had made his escape, it was reasonable to suppose they would be alarmed.

On this score, however, he need have had little fear. Before sunset a gentleman was ushered into his cell and the door locked behind him.

"You wanted to see the inspector," the stranger began, as he seated himself on the narrow bench which served as a bed.

"Well, s'posin' I did?" Jet asked, thinking this man was some one attached to the station.

"He has sent me to know where you have been."

"Did you come from New York?"

"Yes, on the last train."

"Why didn't the inspector come?"

"He never leaves the city; there are plenty of officers at headquarters to do such work. Now, what do you know?"

"More'n I'll tell to anybody but him."

"In that case I shall have to take you back to the city."

"But then it will be too late; them fellers are bound to skip when they find out I've got away."

"What fellows?"

Jet looked up suspiciously.

"I don't want to say a word to anybody but the inspector."

"I told you he sent me to do the business. You can talk as freely as to him."

"Who are you?"

"Detective Harvey."

"From New York?"

"See here, my boy, I don't blame you for having doubts, and to set them at rest I'll prove that what I say is true," and the detective pounded on the bars of the cell door until the turnkey appeared.

"I wish you would ask the sergeant to step this way a moment."

That officer obeyed the summons at once, and when he stood at the door the detective said to him:

"Will you kindly tell this boy who I am? He is afraid I am sailing under false colors."

"You are Detective Harvey, sent by the inspector at New York in answer to a telegram I wired this morning. To give him perfect confidence in you I will say further that at present he is confined for passing counterfeit money, but if you should ask to have him released I guarantee that the charge will be withdrawn. Are you satisfied now, my boy?"

"Yes, I reckon it's all right. I'll take the chances; but if you fellers are playin' any game, the inspector is bound to raise a terrible row when I see him."

"That part of it is all right. Tell Harvey what you know, and I answer for it that it will be the same as if the inspector himself was here."

With this remark the sergeant walked away, and Jet said in a low tone:

"Now I'll tell the whole story; but first I want to know why that advertisement about me was put in the papers?"

"We thought those two men might have gotten hold of you, more especially since the manager at the district messenger station reported that you spoke of being hired to go to Yonkers."

Jet now gave, with careful attention to detail, the story of his misadventures from the time of leaving the Union Square Hotel, and Detective Harvey received the information with no slight degree of excitement.

"I suppose the bills you found in the pile of dirt are in the sergeant's hands," he said, half to himself, when Jet concluded.

"I reckon so; anyway, they took both away from me."

"We will go up stairs and look at them. If I'm not mistaken, my boy, we shall run to earth the gang who are flooding the country with the most dangerous counterfeit known, at the same time that we bag the murderers. Do you think you could lead me to the house in the woods?"

"I'm certain of it; but we shall have to walk a long distance."

"I wouldn't grumble if it was fifty miles, providing we finally succeeded. Come with me."

Again he summoned the turnkey, ordered him to open the door, and said to Jet:

"Follow me."

"Ain't they goin' to keep me here any longer?"

"I should say not. You heard what the sergeant said, and we must be out of this town within an hour."

Jet followed his conductor up stairs, and in a few moments the two were in earnest consultation with the Albany Chief of Police.

The counterfeits were found to be the same which had given the authorities so much trouble. They were so well executed as to pass without suspicion in the majority of cases, and the fact that the two discovered by Jet were imperfect impressions, which had been thrown aside by the makers, was, probably, the only cause of their having been refused by the ticket-seller.

"It is lucky you were arrested," Harvey said in a tone of satisfaction.

"Why?" Jet asked in surprise. "It wasn't any fun to stay in that little cell all day."

"I can fancy not; but if you had come to New York a great deal of time would have been wasted, and as it is we can start in search of those fellows at once."

"But you an' I can't handle the crowd if they show fight."

"We don't intend to try. When we leave this town our party will be large enough."

"How many men do you want?" the chief asked the detective.

"Two, providing they are ready at once."

"I suppose you will go a certain portion of the way on the train?"

"Certainly."

"On that road the next one leaves in about an hour. I will have the best men I know of waiting at the depot. Is there anything else to be done?"

"Not now. Jet and I will go for dinner, and meet you at the station. Can you lend the boy a revolver; one more weapon may come in handy in case of a fight, and unless those fellows have already made a change of base I reckon we shall have a lively time."

The chief gave Jet a weapon and plenty of cartridges, and District Messenger No. 48 felt exceedingly proud as he walked out of the station with the revolver in the inside pocket of his coat.

Harvey was no niggard so far as caring for the comfort of his small assistant was concerned.

A dinner at the Delavan House such as Jet had never set down to before was indulged in, and when the messenger arose from the table it was with the sensation of being full almost to bursting.

To the boy's relief Harvey informed him that the inspector never for a moment believed he had run away; but attributed his absence to exactly the true cause, and all which had been done toward finding him was with this view of the case.

"It will be a mighty big thing for you if we succeed to-night," the detective added, "for the rewards which have been offered, both for the counterfeiter and the murderers, amount to no small sum, a portion of which will, of course, belong to you."

"I'm satisfied if I make wages out of the thing; but it's too bad that money I found wasn't good, for I allowed to put the most of it away so's to pay my board till I got another job."

"You needn't hunt very far for work if this thing turns, out all right. I'll take care of that part of it."

Since Jet was to be the guide on the expedition his advice was asked for when the tickets were purchased, and in order to be certain of his bearings he thought best to return to the town where he boarded the cars during his flight.

Two officers, dressed in citizens' clothes, reported to Harvey at the depot, and one would say, judging from their personal appearance, that they were well able to cope with twice the number of desperate characters who might be found in the house in the woods.

It was late in the evening when the party alighted from the train, and Jet set out up the track leading the way, until he arrived at the point where he emerged from the woods.

"This is the place," he said, pointing to the trunk of a dead tree. "I took especial notice of that so's I'd be able to know where to strike in again."

"In what direction is the house situated?" Harvey asked.

"About there," and Jet pointed toward the north.

"Do you think you could find it in the night?"

"I'm certain I could when it was light; but there is a long distance to walk, so what's to hinder our goin' as far as I traveled, an' then waiting for morning."

"It's a good idea. Go ahead, and when you think we are far enough, call a halt."

"I don't fancy camping in the woods all night, and that is about what you are preparing to do," one of the Albany officers said, grumblingly.

"This is a case where we must put up with considerable discomfort for the sake of bagging our game. Let the boy do as he chooses; I'll answer for it that he's got brains enough to lead us right."

Harvey was ready to undergo any discomfort in order to gain the desired end; but his companions were not as enthusiastic. They complained at being under the guidance of a boy in whom they did not feel the most perfect confidence, and Harvey was obliged to speak very harshly before they would

consent to follow.

Jet led the way with no slight degree of mental disquietude.

If he failed to conduct the party correctly it might be said he was playing the traitor, and the task set for him was a difficult one, considering the fact that he had only been over the ground once before.

Nevertheless he was willing to do all in his power, trusting for success to the chapter of accidents rather than any especial skill of his own, and the men followed close at his heels.

During his flight he had noted carefully all the prominent landmarks, and the fact that he had seen them only in the night aided him now.

During at least four hours he advanced at a rapid pace, stopping now and then to take counsel with Harvey, and at the expiration of that time he said, as he pointed toward a clump of alder bushes:

"There is where I first began the tramp after the fight with the dog."

"Are you certain of that?"

"You can make sure by crawling through the bushes three or four hundred yards, when the house should be in sight."

"I'll go ahead now. If I get off the course, stop me," and Harvey took command of the party.

That Jet had made no mistake was shown ten minutes later when the outlines of the building with its barricade of cord-wood could be seen against the gray sky.

The house was wrapped in darkness, presenting a striking contrast with the scene as viewed by Jet a few hours previous, and the latter said mournfully:

"I reckon all hands have skipped."

"It won't take us long to find out, for we'll overhaul the place at once."

CHAPTER X

ONE PRISONER.

The brute guardian of the house was at his post, as was soon learned when the new-comers drew nearer.

The deep baying of the dog was heard before the party had gained the edge of the woods where an unobstructed view of the house could be had, and Jet whispered to Harvey in a tone of satisfaction:

"It's a good thing I killed the other, for now there can't be much of a fight with only one to be taken care of."

"Does that wood-pile run all around the house?" the detective asked.

"It does, so far as I could see, except at the gate."

"Where is that?"

"To the right."

"How high is it?"

"About the same as the wood-pile, and made of planks."

It was evident the place had been built with especial reference to sustaining an attack, and there seemed little chance but that it would be stoutly defended.

"Three men inside could snap their fingers at a hundred," Harvey said, half to himself; "but at the same time four on the outside could keep a dozen of them prisoners."

"You are bound to have a fight," Jet whispered.

"There's little doubt about that, my boy. You are to stay under cover of the barricade near the gate while we rush in."

"Why don't I go with you?"

"Because there's too much danger. It will be enough if you prevent any of the crowd from giving us the slip."

"But I want to do my share; it was through me that you found out where they were, and it isn't fair to make me stay behind?"

"You're a brick, my boy," Harvey exclaimed as he grasped Jet's hand warmly. "If we finish this work all right I'll show you a chance to earn a living, for you shall be my partner."

"Do you mean it?" Jet cried, speaking incautiously loud in his excitement.

"Every word; but we'll drop the matter now and attend to business. I've got a general idea of the lay of the land, and there must be no more time wasted. Keep close behind me."

Harvey then held a whispered conversation with his companions, during which it was decided that the barricade should be scaled near the gate, and the dog silenced, if possible, in the manner Jet settled the other one.

"Don't shoot unless it is absolutely necessary," Harvey said in conclusion, "for we must take those fellows by surprise."

"It isn't likely they've been obliging enough to leave the door open so we can walk in," one of the party suggested.

"By attacking that with the heaviest sticks of cordwood after the brute is killed, we should be able to pound our way through in a very few seconds. Now come on, and work lively after we are in the yard."

Harvey led the way, and on arriving at the gate it was found to be an extremely difficult point at which to effect an entrance, because of its height, therefore the plan was so far changed as to move farther toward the rear of the building, where the party began clambering the wood.

During all this time the dog had kept up a furious barking, and when Harvey stood on the top of the barricade ready to leap down, the animal was directly beneath him ready for a spring.

It would have been an easy matter to shoot him then and there; but the detective was not willing to discharge his weapon, and, armed with a heavy stick, he leaped upon him.

Unfortunately, just as he jumped some of the wood rolled from beneath his feet, and he was turned in such a manner that he fell prostrate before the enraged brute.

In another instant, and before he could have scrambled to his feet, the dog would have had him by the throat but for Jet, who was on the alert for just such an accident.

In a twinkling he was inside the enclosure, and the remainder of the party hardly had time to understand what had happened before his club descended on the animal's head.

One such blow was sufficient to put an end to this portion of the battle, and when Harvey stood erect once more the dog was still in death, save for the muscular twitching of his body.

Again Harvey clasped the boy by the hand, for the latter's timely action had saved the man from severe wounds, if nothing more serious, and then all advanced cautiously toward the house.

Listening at the door an instant, not a sound could be heard.

From the silence all believed the men had made their escape, but yet it would not be wise to take that for granted.

Harvey raised his weapon, looked around to make certain his companions were ready to join in the assault, and then whispered:

"Now! Strike together, and keep it up till something gives way."

The words had hardly been spoken when the heavy sticks of wood were launched against the door, and before a second blow could be given the report of a revolver rang out sharp and angry on the night air.

"We have got them!" the detective shouted triumphantly, for there was no reason why they should remain silent. "Work quickly, boys!"

Again and again were the blows delivered, causing the barrier to splinter and creak on its hinges, and the fusillade of shots was kept up during this portion of the task.

The assaulting party were so near within the shadow of the building that those inside, who appeared to be in the upper story, could not take good aim without exposing themselves, and the bullets fled wide of their mark.

Crash! Crash!

With each blow portions of the door were splintered off, until, before one hardly had time to count twelve from the beginning of the assault, the besiegers had free access to the building.

"Let one stay here and the others follow me!" Harvey cried, as he drew his revolver and rushed at full speed up the ladder.

Jet was close at his heels. He intended to take a man's part in the capture, and for the time being all thought of danger was forgotten.

The firing had come from the front room, and there Harvey ran after gaining the upper floor.

"Stand back, Jet, they're bound to shoot when the door is opened," he said as he halted before the second barrier.

"I'll take my share of it," the boy replied, and he pressed forward for the honor of entering first, but Harvey pushed him back quickly as he laid his hand on the wooden latch.

To the surprise of both the door yielded readily to the hand, instead of being locked, as was supposed.

Harvey sprang in and Jet stepped so close behind as almost to tread on his leader's heels.

One man stood in the center of the apartment brandishing a revolver, which he discharged full at the detective.

The latter had stooped suddenly on entering, and the bullet buried itself in the woodwork above his head.

Quick as thought Harvey threw himself forward, overturning the defender of the house and causing him to lose his weapon.

"Stand guard over this fellow, and shoot him as you would a dog if he so much as makes the least motion to get up," the detective shouted to Jet. Then he sprang back to the ladder. "They have given us the slip. Get into the yard while I search the other rooms."

The Albany detectives had not yet had time to ascend, and they obeyed at once, while Harvey ran quickly through the other rooms.

A search of five minutes was sufficient to show that the building had no other occupant than the prisoner whom Jet was guarding, and Harvey returned to the front room.

"When did your pals leave?" he asked as he slipped a pair of handcuffs on the fellow's wrists.

"They went away this morning. What right have you to break into innocent men's houses?"

"We will explain that matter later. Tell me where the others went."

"Don't you wish you may find out?"

"It will be better for you to give all the information possible if you want to save your own skin."

"I've heard roosters like you before, so there's no use in crowing to me."

"Can you find a light, Jet? I want to see what the scoundrel looks like."

"You'll see enough of me before this thing is ended," the man said with a growl, and Harvey looked around suspiciously, so confident was the fellow's tone.

Jet soon found a candle on the rude affair which answered as a table, but its light revealed nothing of importance.

The room had no other furniture than a cot bed on which were a pile of coarse blankets, two stools and a sort of shelf that served as a table.

By this time the detectives had come in from the yard with the report that nothing could be found to show when the others left.

The stable was empty, and had evidently been so for several hours.

"One of you stand guard over this fellow, and we will search the house. Come on, Jet, and show me where you were imprisoned," Harvey said as he took up the candle and left the room.

The boy obeyed and a thorough search was made of the premises.

To the surprise of all nothing of importance was found.

If the men had had machinery for making counterfeit money, everything had been taken away.

The building contained nothing more than might have been found in any honest dwelling, and

Harvey said in a tone of disappointment:

"They must have worked like beavers from the time it was learned the boy had made his escape, and that fellow in the other room was pretty near right when he made his threats, for we have broken into a building without legal right to do anything of the kind."

"If they had presses here we should be able to find them in the morning, for the whole plant must be buried near by; it couldn't have been carried away in this short time," the men from Albany suggested.

This seemed reasonable, and Harvey decided to make a thorough search before returning.

The prisoner was secured to the heavy table in the back room on the lower floor, and until daylight the party discussed the matter in all its bearings.

Then Harvey said as he went toward the door:

"Now, let's get to work, and finish this job by night-fall if possible."

At that instant he stepped outside, and at the same moment the reports of two weapons were heard from the direction of the woods, the bullets striking within an inch of the detective's head.

He leaped back under cover, saying bitterly as he did so:

"The villains are sharper than I gave them credit for, and have got us like rats in a trap. We were allowed to come in, and now they propose to shoot us down at their leisure, for the gang can't afford to let us leave here alive!"

CHAPTER XI

CLOSE QUARTERS

If either of the party had looked at the prisoner when the shots were heard it would have been possible to understand that he was expecting something of the kind.

His face lighted up with an expression of joy, and one could readily fancy he believed the time near at hand when the tables would be turned with a vengeance.

Harvey was more chagrined than frightened.

The fact that he had not suspected something of the kind when it was learned the house had been virtually abandoned, cut deep into his professional pride, and he blamed himself more severely than any other member of the party could have done.

"A child would have had more sense than to fancy they had given us the slip and taken all their stuff with them," he said, angrily. "I have simply done what they allowed a fool would do, and now we must pay the piper."

"But they'll make a mighty poor fist of trying to take us out of here," one of the detectives said, consolingly.

"That goes without saying; but how about our leaving when we get ready? They have us where we can't show our noses outside, and in this desolate spot we needn't expect any help for it would take a month of steady work for a person to find us, and I don't reckon the house is provisioned to stand such a siege."

"I haven't seen anything in the way of food, and I've been into every room."

"Most likely you'll find that the stock of water is quite as low. We're penned up here without a chance of helping ourselves unless we're willing to stand a regular battle."

"Well, I don't see why we shouldn't be able to do, that. According to the boy's story there are only three, without counting this man, therefore the forces are equal in numbers."

"That is true; but they have the advantage of position by being hidden in the woods, and we can't show our noses out of doors without the certainty of acting as targets while they are under cover."

It was not necessary to discuss the matter at any very great length in order to understand that they had voluntarily entered a trap, and the entire party gazed at each other in silence while the prisoner appeared to enjoy the situation hugely.

"I can't see why they want to pen us up here?" Jet said in a low tone to Harvey when the two were

in one of the rear rooms gazing from the window, and the remainder of the party were with the prisoner.

"It is plain enough," was the petulant reply. "When they found that you had escaped it was quite natural to suppose you would lead officers here. Those fellows wanted to get their precious bodies out of the way; but yet were not willing to leave all their belongings behind. The work was done systematically. Everything was first carried a short distance into the woods, and a man left here on guard so we should be certain to come into the trap."

"Well?"

"Well, while we are here those fellows are carting off their stuff, and when that has been safely done we shall be allowed to go free, or they may possibly try to rescue the prisoner, although that would be needless, since we have no evidence against him."

"Wouldn't things be all right if you could know where the things were hidden?"

"Of course; why do you ask?"

"Because it seems to me that I might slip out of here after dark and watch them."

"There would be too much danger in such a job. They had rather get hold of you than succeed in carrying the stuff away, for you are an important witness against them, and once in their hands your lease of life would be cut mighty short."

"I'll run the risk of their getting hold of me."

"But I won't, so there is no need of discussing the matter. I am going to post the men at the windows in the hope we shall get a shot at one of the crowd, and while that is being done you must make another search of the house to find out what we have got in the way of water and provisions."

Jet obeyed at once, and the detective placed his assistants at different points where a view of the woods could be had, impressing upon them the importance of trying to shoot down one or more of the besiegers.

A search of the building failed to reveal anything which would aid in "holding the fort."

Not so much as a cracker could be found, and the supply of water was hardly more than a quart, which had been left in a pail on the kitchen table.

Harvey had nothing to say when Jet made his report. He had joined his assistants in trying to get a shot at the men, and seemed to think of nothing else.

Left to himself, Jet wandered around the building trying to devise some means of helping his companions, and before noon he fancied he had a plan which promised success.

At the rear of the house next to the barn was a pile of fuel prepared for the stove, and near by were two water barrels.

"There is enough around to prevent them from seeing me if I crawled out to the barn, and I'm going to do it to-night, whether Mr. Harvey is willing or not," he said to himself as he ascended the stairs.

All the men were on guard; but nothing suspicious had been seen.

"There is no need of their showing themselves, and I question if more than one is on guard," Harvey said in reply to the boy's question.

"I want to do something," Jet said, and then he explained the plan he had formed. "There must be an outlet from the barn at the back, and even if there isn't I can get through all right in the darkness."

"We can't stay idle while those fellows are carrying off their goods," the detective said after some thought, "and I believe I will go with you. We'll leave the others here a while, and see what it is possible to do."

Jet would have preferred to make the attempt alone, but he could say nothing against the officer's decision, and the latter at once began to make his plans.

The two men from Albany were told what was to be tried, and cautioned to keep the house well guarded during the absence of the others.

"Above all things have your eyes open for the prisoner," Harvey said warningly. "It is of the utmost importance that we hold him, and you must shoot the fellow rather than let him give you the slip."

A series of signals were decided upon so that the defenders might know when their comrades were coming back; the weapons were carefully examined to make certain they were in good working order, and then there was nothing to be done but await the coming of night.

All hands were both hungry and thirsty; but since nothing could be done to relieve their wants no one complained.

When the night had fully settled down Harvey laid his hand on Jet's shoulder to signify that he was ready, for the prisoner was to be kept in ignorance concerning their movements, and the two, followed by one of the other detectives, descended to the kitchen.

"Barricade the door as soon as we go out," the leader whispered, "for it isn't impossible that the men have crept nearer the building since sunset."

"Suppose you should meet them before getting out of the house?"

"Then we must fight alone, unless you can aid us from the upper window, for I would rather get the worst of it than to let that fellow escape. Follow me, Jet, and don't attempt to go ahead."

Harvey opened the door softly, dropped to his hands and knees, and crawled into the yard.

Jet copied every movement, and the two worked their way toward the barn, stopping every few feet to listen for some sound from the enemy.

All was quiet as the grave, and not even so much as the rustling of the leaves broke the stillness.

The barn door was not fastened, and Harvey pulled it open a short distance, rising to his feet as he gained the entrance.

A moment later the two were in the building groping their way from one point to another in the hope of finding a place of exit.

Now Harvey stopped for a final word.

"If it should happen that those fellows on the outside get the best of me, make every effort to escape."

"Not at the cost of leaving you alone."

"At any price, so that you can telegraph in my name for more men to be sent up."

"Do you want the inspector to know it?"

"No; wire the chief of police at Albany, and wait at the first station you reach for them to come. Here is money."

He handed Jet what seemed like quite a large roll of bills, and then advanced in the darkness once more.

By good fortune rather than skill he found, a moment later, that for which he was seeking.

A small window, used for throwing out offal, was before him, and through this he crawled, turning, as he gained the outside, to assist Jet.

They were now in the shadow of the building with a cleared space of about twenty yards to be traversed before they could gain the shelter of the trees.

Again the detective dropped to his hands and knees, Jet following his example.

Silently and cautiously they crept across the opening; but just as they were half way it seemed to Jet as if a solid sheet of fire lighted up the clearing, and the reports which followed were almost deafening.

The enemy had expected exactly the move which was being made, and were counting on killing their foes.

Fortunately the bullets had passed over the heads of the two reclining figures, and Jet was about to leap to his feet when Harvey said sternly:

"Stay where you are, and give them a dose!"

At the same instant he began firing his revolver, aiming at the place from which the flash of weapons had been seen.

Jet did as he was bidden until his weapon was emptied, and then he saw Harvey leap to his feet and run at full speed diagonally across the opening.

He did the same, loading the weapon as he went, and just as both reached the fringe of foliage the detective fell before the fire of those in the woods.

"Are you hurt?" Jet whispered as he knelt by the side of his friend regardless of the danger.

"They have put a bullet through my leg, and I reckon that does me up."

"Let me try to get you back."

"It can't be done, my boy. Remember what I told you, and start at once."

"But I don't want to leave you here?"

"You must; our only hope is that you can reach a telegraph station. Run the best you know how while I give them something to occupy their attention."

Jet hesitated no longer.

It seemed cruel to desert a wounded friend; but the order had been given, and he could not refuse to obey it.

Harvey discharged his weapon rapidly, and the boy ran at full speed in the opposite direction fearing he would never again see in life the man who had promised to befriend him.

CHAPTER XII

THE ENCOUNTER

Jet was now traveling over a country with which he was not familiar, and to continue on would be to take great chances of losing his way, at least during the hours of darkness.

It was necessary, therefore, or at least he thought so, to get into that section of the woods over which he had previously journeyed.

To do this he was forced to make a half circle around the building, and as he ran, keeping at about the same distance from the house as he and Harvey had gained, the sounds of the conflict could be distinctly heard.

Judging from the noise, one would say at least half a dozen men were engaged, and Jet said to himself:

"The men from Albany are taking a hand in the row, probably firing from the windows. If they could wipe the whole gang out there wouldn't be any need for me to try to strike a telegraph office."

He could not afford to await the result of the contest, however, for if his friends were worsted just so much valuable time would be lost, and he pressed on at full speed until, when he was near the spot where he began his first journey, there was a rustling of the foliage in front of him as a voice cried:

"Hold up or I'll fire!"

That this threat was made by one of the gang from whom he was trying to escape there could be no question, and Jet darted aside quickly as he cocked his revolver.

This had hardly been done when he saw a long tongue of flame leap out of the bushes at the right, not more than ten feet away, and a bullet whistled so near his ear that he could hear it shrieking like a minnie ball.

If he could wound one of these fellows matters would be just so much better for his friends, and jumping behind the trunk of a tree he fired every chamber of his revolver as rapidly as possible.

Not until the weapon was emptied did he start on his course again, shoving cartridges in the chambers as he ran, and followed by a volley of shots.

It was evident he had not done any damage, and once more he wheeled and fired.

There was no reply to this last fusillade, and he continued the flight, straining every muscle to outdistance the enemy in case an attempt should be made to follow him.

At the expiration of ten minutes he was forced to halt in order to regain his breath, and while standing panting and blowing behind a tree he listened for some token of the enemy.

Not a sound, save those made by himself, broke the silence of the forest, and there was every reason to believe he had for the second time given the fellows the slip.

But what about Harvey?

In fancy he saw him lying dead or dying within the shelter of the bushes, while the gang were making a desperate attack upon the house, and this thought nerved him to continue the flight before he had fairly recovered his wind.

The journey was a succession of brief halts and mad races, for every moment might be precious

now, and he took no heed of fatigue, save when exhausted nature literally forced him so to do.

In less than half the time it had cost him to traverse the same distance when no one but himself was in danger, he accomplished the task, and stood on the platform of the station at which Harvey's party stopped the night previous.

The building was closed.

While he was rattling at the door in the vain hope that there might be a watchman inside, a resident of the town passed.

"What's going on?" he asked in an unsteady voice which told quite plainly why he was away from home at such an hour.

"I want to send a very important telegram."

"Well send—hic—her if you want'er."

"Where is the operator?"

"At home, I reckon, if he ain't, that's where he oughter be this time in the morning."

"Do you know when he will be here?"

"'Bout midnight, if he counts on lookin' out for the express."

"Can you tell me what time it is now?"

It was rather a difficult matter for the tipsy party to get at his watch; but he was in an obliging mood, and after some trouble succeeded in clutching the timepiece.

"Come here an' see for yourself," he said, after trying in vain to make out the position of the hands. "I reckon I must have bought four or five watches by the looks of these, though I'm blest if I remember anything about it."

"You've only got one there," Jet said, as he gazed over the stranger's shoulder. "It lacks only ten minutes of being twelve o'clock; I shan't have long to wait."

"I'd stay with you if I didn't have to call upon a sick friend," the man replied after some difficulty, and then he staggered on, while Jet paced to and fro as if only by exercise could he control his impatience.

In less than five minutes he was joined by two men, or at least they came on the platform; but seemingly took care to prevent him from seeing their faces.

He could hear them talking in low, earnest tones; but was so engrossed by his own thoughts that he made no attempt to distinguish the words.

Finally the station agent, who was also the telegraph operator, arrived, and as he unlocked the door Jet asked eagerly, and sufficiently loud for the strangers to hear:

"Can I send a message to Albany?"

"Not now. Come to-morrow morning after eight o'clock."

"But this is very important and must go as soon as possible."

"I'll attend to you in the morning."

"It will be too late then," Jet cried, excitedly. "The chief of police must have the news at once!"

The operator looked at Jet scrutinizingly, and the two men stepped a few paces nearer.

"What's the matter?" the official asked.

"It is necessary detectives be sent here at once."

"Murder, or something of that kind, eh?"

"All I know is that I was sent by a man who said the telegram must go at the earliest possible moment."

"Very well, come in and write it. I'll see if the Albany office will answer my call."

Jet walked into the waiting-room so excited that he failed to notice the strangers, who crowded behind him; but stood where their faces would be in the shadow.

After a moment's reflection he wrote the following:

"TO THE CHIEF OF POLICE,
"Albany, N.Y.

"Send more men at once; they have us foul. My messenger will wait at the station until assistance arrives.

HARVEY."

It was a simple matter for the strangers to read this by looking over Jet's shoulder, and as soon as they had done so they slipped quietly out of the building where the following conversation might have been heard:

"That's the boy Joe and Bob brought up from New York."

"I thought so, and now he is working for Harvey."

"Who has gone to the house in the woods to pull the boys, and has got the worst of it."

"I don't reckon we could prevent the operator from sending that message?"

"Not without putting ourselves in the hole."

"We can make sure though that the boy isn't here to show them the place when the officers arrive."

"Which forces us to stay here another day, and according to the looks of things I don't think it safe. What made the fools come after agreeing to lay over in the city till we showed up?"

"That's what I can't say. It's enough to know we've got to bear a hand, for if one of the crowd is caught all hands stand a good chance of being sent up."

"Shall we nab the boy as soon as the train passes?"

"No; I've got a better plan than that. We'll wait till the western express arrives, and make him think we're the officers who have come in reply to his telegram."

"Then we must keep out of sight. Let's take a turn around the town where he won't be likely to see us."

The men walked quietly away, and in the depot Jet was congratulating himself upon having been able to give the alarm so quickly.

The operator had been very eager to learn why officers should be summoned from the city; but Jet professed entire ignorance of the matter, repeating again and again that he had only brought the message from a stranger a short distance up the road, and the questioner finally ceased trying to extract information.

There was no difficulty about getting a telegram through, and in a few moments Jet rejoiced at hearing the man say:

"It's done, and now you'll only have to wait until the parties arrive."

"How long before they can come?"

"There's a morning express which leaves Albany in an hour; but it doesn't stop here, so they'll have to wait for the five o'clock train."

Jet was not troubled as to where he should spend the time.

He was so tired that he could sleep anywhere, and walked across the track to the waiting shed, where he laid down on one of the benches, glad of an opportunity to rest his weary limbs.

While paying for the telegram he noticed with surprise that Harvey had intrusted him with twenty dollars, and he said to himself as his eyes were closing in sleep:

"I wonder why he gave me so much? It can't be possible he thought the message would cost all that."

Then he was unconscious of everything around him.

The midnight express arrived, stopped, and with a loud snort from the engine went on again; but the noise barely sufficed to make Jet aware that something unusual had happened.

During the next hour he slept peacefully, and then the two strangers came up the track talking in low tones.

By the glare of the station lamp they saw the sleeping boy.

"What is the use of waiting for the train, when it may be possible the officers will come?"

"The morning express doesn't stop here."

"What of that? The conductor would let the officers off if the chief should ask him as an especial favor."

"Well, how can we hurry matters?"

"He is asleep, and all we have to do is to swear the train has just passed. He probably hasn't got a watch, and can't tell whether one hour or four has passed since he closed his eyes."

"But if he should be suspicious, he might make trouble."

"Say, you're getting to be a regular coward. We've got to take some chances if we want to prevent Joe and Bob from being pulled, and it will be rough if you and I can't handle a boy like that."

"Do as you please; of course I'm bound to stand at your back all the time."

The first speaker looked around once to make certain no one was near, and then stepping quickly into the shed shook Jet roughly.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SNARE

"What's the matter?" Jet cried, as he arose to a sitting posture, and rubbed his eyes.

"Are you the fellow who sent a message to the Albany chief of police?" one of the men asked.

"Yes; has there been an answer?"

"I should say so. Don't we look like a pretty substantial reply to almost any kind of a telegram?"

"But how did you get here?"

"On the morning express. It wasn't much of a job to persuade the conductor to slow up about here when he knew what our business was."

"The morning express?" Jet repeated. "Why, it hasn't been more than ten minutes since I fell asleep."

"You are not awake yet. It's twenty minutes past three," and the man looked at his watch, as if to assure himself that he had made no mistake. "Now, what is the matter, and where did you leave Harvey?"

Jet gazed around him in bewilderment at the thought that he had been sleeping so long; but as the man asked these last questions it seemed certain everything was all right, and he replied, without hesitation:

"I left Mr. Harvey wounded near a house about five miles from here."

Then he told the entire story, the men glancing triumphantly at each other as he proceeded.

"Can you lead us to the place?" one of them asked, when he concluded.

"Of course, that's what I waited for."

"How many men has Harvey with him?"

"Didn't you know he brought two from Albany?"

"So he did; I remember now. And they are shut up in the house?"

"I suppose so."

"Then the sooner we leave the better, for it stands us in hand to arrive about daybreak."

"Are you well armed?"

"Don't worry about us, my son. We know what we are about when we start on a job like this."

"I only spoke because they have been shooting pretty lively."

"Things will be changed when we get there," was the reply in a significant tone.

"If you are ready, we'll tramp along."

Jet leaped to his feet, feeling woefully stiff and sore; but the thought that he was guiding those who would aid Harvey served to make him forget, in a measure, his weariness.

He led the way down the track to that portion of the woods with which he was familiar, and then struck across the country, walking so rapidly that more than once his companions insisted on less speed.

"We must get there as soon as possible," he said, slackening his speed unwillingly.

"A few minutes more or less can't make any difference, and we were mighty nigh used up before we started. The next time Harvey undertakes a job I hope he'll have sense enough to carry it through without calling on all the men in the country."

Jet was about to make an angry protest against this criticism of his friend, but he reflected that it would not be well to get into a controversy, and more especially when he could better employ his breath.

He continued on as rapidly as his companions would permit, stopping to rest only when they insisted upon it, and succeeded in making such good headway that the sun had not yet shown himself when they arrived at a point near the house.

"Here we are," Jet said, as he halted and listened for some sound which would give him an inkling of the position of affairs.

"Where is the building?"

"About a hundred yards in that direction," and Jet pointed toward the east.

"Are you certain Harvey and his men are there?"

"I know the men are inside, if they obeyed orders; but I'm afraid the villains have got Mr. Harvey. Say, we must have walked mighty quick, if it was past three o'clock when you wakened me, for it isn't daylight yet."

"I said you was rushing too fast. Now, how are we to get inside?"

"Go over the wood-pile on this side."

"They'll shoot, not knowing who we are."

"Whistle twice while you are in the woods, and wait for an answer before coming out of cover. That was the signal agreed upon."

"Then, you young cub, I reckon we are through with you," and as the man spoke, he clasped Jet tightly around the waist, while his companion clapped his hand over the boy's mouth.

Jet was taken so completely by surprise that he did not struggle for an instant, and then the humiliating truth began to dawn upon him.

"Where is the rope you brought to tie him with?" the man who was holding Jet asked, and after a moment's pause the other said with a curse:

"It has slipped out of my pocket while we were coming through the woods. Now, what shall we do?"

"You can manage to spoil a good thing quicker than any fellow I ever knew. Why didn't you look out for it?"

"Because I didn't," was the surly reply. "If I'd had my way, these fools would have been left to take care of themselves."

"Don't turn rusty now when our work is about done. Use a stick of wood for a gag, and tie it in with your handkerchief."

When this had been done, and it required several moments, owing to the shortness of the impromptu rope, Jet's hands were secured with another handkerchief, and his body lashed to a tree with a pair of suspenders. In this position he was unable to make any outcry; but he felt positive he could release himself from the bonds after two or three attempts.

"Now, listen to me," one of the men said, in a low tone, as he shook his fist unpleasantly near Jet's nose. "I reckon you're made fast here; but if by chance you should find anybody fool enough to untie you, and undertake to run away, it will be a case of shooting you on sight. You've been too fresh altogether, and both Joe and Bob are to blame for not having taken the wind out of your body long ago."

Jet made no reply, for the very good reason that it was impossible for him to speak, and the men walked hurriedly away in the direction of the house.

That he had suffered himself to be thus fooled caused the boy more distress of mind than did the

fact of his being powerless at the very time when he was most needed.

The real officers would soon arrive from Albany; but if no one met them at the depot they could do nothing, since they had no idea of the location of the house.

His whole night's work had resulted only in bringing aid to the enemy, and what made the situation worse was the fact that he had explained how the villains could gain access to the house without a struggle.

"If Mr. Harvey knew what I had done he'd give over trying to help me along, in case we ever do get out of this scrape," he said to himself. "I ain't fit even to carry a message, let alone trying to help a regular detective."

Then came the thought that Mr. Harvey might no longer be alive, and this caused Jet such mental distress that several moments passed before he was sufficiently composed to make any attempt at effecting his own rescue.

He began by stiffening his muscles and throwing his body forward, with the idea of stretching the suspenders to such an extent that he could crawl out of them; but was suddenly stopped by hearing sounds as of some one coming through the underbrush.

The only thought in his mind was that one of the enemy was coming to kill him, and he redoubled his efforts until a familiar voice whispered:

"Jet, Jet! Is it you?"

He could not reply in words; but he managed to give vent to a faint moan, at the same time moving his feet over the dead leaves to make a yet louder noise.

"It's me, Harvey," the voice continued. "I heard a couple of men talking about having left some one tied up, and thought it must be you."

While he spoke the detective continued to advance, drawing himself along the ground by the hands, as if his lower limbs were useless, and on reaching Jet raised his body with an effort until he could feel the bonds which held the boy.

It was but the work of an instant to remove the gag, and untie his hands, after which he could finish the work without assistance.

"Did you send the message?" Harvey asked, eagerly.

"Yes, and made a fool of myself afterward," Jet replied, quickly.

"Tell me what you mean, and speak quickly, for there is no knowing how long we may be able to talk with each other."

In the fewest words possible the boy related the events of the night, sparing himself not one whit, and when he had finished the detective said, soothingly:

"An older hand than you might have been taken in. They probably got a glimpse of your telegram, and were thus able to deceive you, so don't feel badly."

"But they will now be able to get into the house."

"I'm not so sure of that. Those there must fancy that one or both of us were hurt in the scrimmage, and would look mighty close before letting two enter without a struggle."

"Are you wounded badly?" Jet asked.

"My leg is useless, and I lost considerable blood before I had time to get a bandage around it."

"How did you give them the slip?"

"After you left I fired two rounds, and then crawled into the bushes. They didn't dare to hunt me out while it was dark, because I could have killed the first who came near, so I had a chance to circle around the clearing. I wanted to be here when you came up with the reinforcements."

"Have the fellows in the woods done much firing?"

"No; they have kept mighty quiet, and I'm hoping that some of our bullets hit the mark by chance. We must get out of here as soon as possible. Can't you find something that would answer as a crutch? Thus far I've hunted in vain."

"I'll do better than that, Mr. Harvey, if you'll get on my back."

"You can't carry me."

"Indeed I can for a while, and at a good pace."

At that instant a shrill whistle sounded twice, and Jet said, in a mournful tone:

"Now they are trying to get into the house."

"There's the answer," the detective said, a moment later. "We shall hear some firing soon, whether they are successful or not."

He had hardly ceased speaking when the sound of firearms rang out on the still air, and Harvey exclaimed, as he pointed toward the sky:

"We'll hope they tried their plan too late. Day is breaking, and in the clearing it should be possible to distinguish the forms of men quite distinctly. If our fellows are fooled, I fancy we shall never see them again."

"Are we to leave without making one try to give them warning?"

"It is too late now, and was when I first found you. I'll see if you can carry me a short distance, and then we must find a hiding-place, for whether they are successful in this scheme or not, the counterfeiter will soon be on the hunt for me."

CHAPTER XIV

A CAPTURE

For Harvey to attempt to walk, however good a crutch might be found, would have been foolhardy, for it was only with the greatest difficulty he could stand upright.

Jet understood this quite as well as did the detective and he also knew there was no time to be lost, if they expected to find a hiding-place before the day had fairly dawned.

"I am going to take you on my back," he said in a decided tone, "and we mustn't fool around here talking about it. Will you climb up without making a row, or must I use force?"

"I will obey," Harvey replied with a smile, as Jet backed toward him, and a few seconds later the boy was making his way through the underbrush.

Jet's burden was heavier than he had anticipated, and he staggered from side to side before twenty yards had been traversed, causing Harvey to say firmly:

"It is no use for you to try anything of the kind, Jet. This will only result in both of us being overhauled."

"Here's a place where we can stop for a rest," and Jet halted in front of a thick clump of fir bushes. "By crawling in there we shall soon be out of sight, and I'll start back for the depot as soon as you think it is safe."

He lowered the detective gently to the ground, aided him in making his way through the tangled underbrush to the center of the clump, and then returned to the outside of the little thicket, in order to replace the branches and foliage generally to their ordinary position, that those who should come in search might not be able to see the trail.

This done he skirted around to the opposite side, and entered in a manner which would have done credit to an Indian.

"Now you've got a chance to tie up your leg as it ought to be," he said. "Shall I take that handkerchief off?"

"I don't think it will pay to disturb it, my boy. The flow of blood has been stopped, and might start again if the compress was removed. Besides there is no water with which to wash it."

"How long are you counting on staying around here?"

"Until you can get to the town, and send some one back to help me in. I couldn't crawl that far in a month."

"Then the sooner I go the better," and Jet rose to his feet, despite the fatigue which almost overpowered him.

"Wait a while. In the first place, you need rest, and secondly, those men will soon come back to find you, after which a hunt is certain to be made for both of us. Hold on until we see what they are going to do, in order to the better decide upon our own course of action."

Jet was not sorry to sit down again, although, in view of the desperate situation, he knew he could afford to halt but a short time.

"Do you think you can make another round trip to-day?" Harvey asked after a short pause.

"It has got to be done, so there's no use in thinking anything about it. What troubles me is how you are going to get along without food or water while I am gone."

"Probably in the same way you will keep on your feet after having walked nearly all night—by sheer force of will."

"But suppose——"

Jet ceased speaking very suddenly, for at that instant the sound as of some one coming through the underbrush was heard.

Harvey drew his revolver, and Jet followed his example.

Both weapons were fully loaded, and those in hiding knew it must be a fight to the death, if they were discovered.

By parting the bushes in front of him slightly, Jet could see through to where the foliage was less dense, and, as he did so, Joe, the tall man who had been the cause of all his trouble, came in view, walking slowly, and peering from side to side.

That he was searching for Harvey there could be no doubt, and, seeing him alone, a bold plan came into Jet's mind.

Without making any sign to his companion he began to move noiselessly toward the new-comer on his hands and knees, arriving at the edge of the bushes just as Joe had passed.

Harvey laid his hand on Jet's leg as a signal for him to come back; but the boy paid no attention to the mute command.

Joe had halted about three feet from the edge of the bushes, and was evidently trying to decide in which direction he should go, when Jet rose up behind him so noiselessly that not even the rustling of a leaf could have been heard.

By reaching up, he could just touch the back of the man's head, and, suddenly pressing the muzzle of the revolver against the fellow's neck, he said quickly:

"Throw up your hands or I'll fire!"

Under such circumstances there was but one thing for Joe to do.

He raised both hands, not daring to so much as turn his head, and Jet continued, sternly:

"Stay where you are, or a bullet goes into your head. I ain't sure, anyway, but what it would be better to shoot first and talk afterward."

Harvey understood from the words exactly what had been done, and Jet heard him crawling out from the bushes, in order to assist at the capture.

"Take your time, sir," the boy said, calmly. "I've got this fellow where he won't care to run the chances of wiggling very much."

"I'll kill you some day," the man growled, hoarsely.

"You won't try it for quite a while yet. Look out. Hold your hands higher!"

This last remark was called forth as Joe lowered his arms ever so slightly, probably for the purpose of learning if his captor was on the alert.

By this time Harvey had managed to crawl from his place of concealment, and, at the expense of severe pain, raised himself to his feet directly in front of the prisoner.

"Keep your revolver where it is, and fire at the least show of resistance," he said to Jet, as he proceeded to search Joe's pockets.

"Now, lower your hands, but don't take a step forward," he said when the man's weapons and money had been thrown on the ground.

Joe obeyed sullenly, and Jet heard the click of a pair of handcuffs as they were fastened on the former's wrists, with his arms behind his back.

"Now sit down," the detective said, as he gathered up two revolvers, an ugly looking dirk-knife and a well-filled pocket-book.

Joe obeyed in silence, but if a glance could have killed, his captors would soon have been lying

lifeless before him.

"Hadn't we better take him into the thicket?" Jet asked.

"No. Stand in front of him while I write a note. Now, you must start for the town without delay."

"And take this fellow along?"

"Certainly; we can't afford to run the chances of a rescue."

It was such a job as Jet did not fancy, but he made no protest.

When Harvey had ceased writing on a leaf of his note-book, he handed it to Jet as he said:

"March your prisoner into the first town you come to, and demand to be shown to a magistrate. Give him the letter, which will explain the outlines of who this fellow is, and tell him all of the story save such as is connected with the murder. That we will keep secret for a while. Then telegraph to the inspector to send an officer without delay to carry him to the city."

"Is that all, sir?"

"Except as to the manner of traveling. Keep your prisoner in advance, and do not hesitate to shoot if he fails to obey every reasonable order. Above all, do not allow him to face you."

"Suppose some of the gang should overtake us?"

"Put this fellow in front and let them shoot through him if they choose. Aim to kill or seriously disable if you are attacked, and in order that there be no lack of ammunition, take one of his revolvers in addition to your own. By dividing his cartridges we shall each have enough to stand quite a siege."

"What about sending help to you?"

"I hope the officers from Albany will wait around the depot until you arrive, when they can decide what is best to be done; but don't make another mistake as to the identity of those you want to see."

"I reckon I shan't fall into the same kind of a trap for a long while to come."

"Get something to eat while you are in town, and take a short rest. Matters won't be very serious here until nightfall."

"I shan't stop long, for it would be a pretty poor sort of a fellow who couldn't walk twenty miles under these circumstances."

"Do as you choose; you have money enough for all expenses, and it may be as well to hire a saddle horse to carry me back."

"I'll attend to everything," Jet replied, "and the sooner I leave the better."

"You are right. Remember what I said about shooting the prisoner if he shows a disposition to turn rusty, and keep him in front of you."

"I won't forget, sir."

"Then good luck to you."

Harvey held out his hand, Jet grasped it for an instant, and said to his prisoner:

"Get up now, and go ahead at your best pace. You have heard the advice given me, and I shall act upon it without hesitation."

Joe looked sullenly around and then obeyed, asking as he set out:

"Which way shall I walk?"

"Straight ahead. I reckon you know the road better than I do."

"That's a fact. There is a short cut after we get down here a bit, which will save nearly two miles of distance."

"Don't let him guide you," Harvey shouted, he having heard the remark. "Keep on the course you are familiar with."

"Never fear I'll let him show me anything," Jet replied cheerily, and he ordered the man to step out more briskly.

During the next ten minutes the two walked at a rapid pace in silence, and then Joe said without turning his head:

"I suppose you count on making a big pile by taking me to prison?"

"That's where you are mistaken. I'm only trying to square things after the scrape you got me into."

"Would you like to make five thousand dollars?"

"Of course I would."

"Then unfasten these handcuffs, and I'll guarantee to give you that amount within the next three days."

"More likely you'd give me a clip over the head. But even if I was certain of having the money, you couldn't get away, so walk on briskly and don't let me hear you speak again."

Joe glanced savagely around at the boy, and there was that in his face which told what desperate chances he would take in order to effect his escape.

"He's studying mischief," Jet said to himself, "and I've got to look sharp, or find myself in the soup as I was this morning."

At the best it was a difficult task to walk at any degree of speed through the woods; but the labor was more than doubled by having a prisoner over whom it was necessary to keep the strictest watch.

CHAPTER XV

ASSISTANCE

During the first hour Jet thought it would be impossible for him to hold out to reach the town; but the knowledge of what the result would be, not only to himself, but to those whom he had left behind, enabled him to battle against the fatigue which threatened to overpower him.

Not a word had been spoken since Joe made the proposition to purchase his liberty, until fully an hour passed, and then he said in a meek tone:

"Don't you think it is about time to take a rest? I'm pretty nigh played out."

Jet was only too willing to do so, and said:

"Sit down at the foot of that tree; I'll stay in the rear as Mr. Harvey advised."

"What damage do you think I could do with my arms handcuffed behind me?"

"That is exactly what I don't know, and shall take good care you haven't a chance to show me."

"I don't deny that I would run a good many risks rather than be taken to jail; but at the same time I'm not such a fool as to kick when there isn't the least show of getting the upper hands."

"You are wasting your breath talking to me in that manner, for I intend to follow Mr. Harvey's advice to the letter."

Joe's face was contorted with a grimace of rage as Jet thus showed that it would be impossible to wheedle him into carelessness, and, suddenly changing his tone, he said, angrily:

"You don't have any idea of the trap you're running into. There's more belonging to our gang than that fool detective fancies, and the minute we show up in town you'll be marked."

"That won't hurt I reckon."

"It will be enough to cause your death."

"Then I'm to be murdered, eh?"

"That is exactly what will happen when any of our crowd get the chance, and you may make sure they won't lay down till you're out of the way."

"Well?"

"That's all, unless you're willing to make a trade with me. There'll be more in it than by sticking to Harvey, who'll throw you over as soon as this job is finished."

"Get up and make another start," Jet said, abruptly. "If you have rested enough to talk, I reckon you can push ahead."

"You'll regret not having listened to me while there is a chance."

"Get up!"

The man obeyed with a very bad grace, and once more the two were traveling at a fair rate of speed toward the village.

Twice again during the journey did Joe attempt to bribe or frighten his captor, and desisted from his efforts only when they were within sight of the town.

This walking through a settlement behind a man at whose head a cocked revolver is held, naturally created considerable excitement, and Jet found himself surrounded by a curious throng before he had reached the main street.

The thought occurred to him that among these people might be friends of his prisoner, and his anxiety became even greater than while they were in the woods.

He was overwhelmed with questions; but refused to make any explanations, asking simply that some one would show him the nearest magistrate's office, and his silence served to anger the crowd.

"Are we going to let a boy walk through this town with his revolver at a man's head?" one of the party shouted, angrily, and Joe's face lighted up wonderfully.

"I'm an innocent man whom a party of villains are trying to down," he cried. "If there are any here who like fair play, take me along decently, rather than in this style. I can explain who and what I am."

"Shove that boy out of the way!" another member of the crowd shouted, and Jet believed his prisoner was about to be rescued.

Drawing his second revolver, he held it in his left hand, as he said firmly:

"This fellow has nearly killed a detective who was sent to arrest him, and I have the proof of that in my pocket, which I will show to the magistrate. My orders were to deliver him up to justice, and make sure he didn't give me the slip. If any one interferes, I shall fire first at the prisoner, and then at him who dares try to help him."

Just for an instant the crowd fell back, and then the man who had first spoken, cried angrily:

"Hasn't somebody got the nerve to knock that cub down? I'll see to it that the prisoner is taken before the magistrate in a proper manner."

"That's a fair offer," Joe said, eagerly. "I'm willing to go along peaceably; but I don't want to walk with a revolver at my head, as if I was too dangerous to be in a town with my hands behind my back."

"Knock the boy down!"

"Shoot him!"

"Don't let such an outrage be committed in our town!"

"Will you let a cub like that play the part of desperado in a quiet village?"

These and similar shouts were heard as the throng drew nearer Jet, who now understood that Joe's friends must be making the row for the purpose of releasing the prisoner, and he looked around in vain for a friendly face.

"Will no one help me do my duty?" he cried.

"We'll take the man to the magistrate decently," some one replied.

"That simply means that a few of you are determined on a rescue."

He would have said more; but Joe's pals, fearing the influence his words might have upon the crowd, drowned his voice by angry shouts.

Jet realized that the crisis was at hand.

He and his prisoner had just turned down the main street, and the plot must be carried out at once.

Half a dozen men had crowded so near that they could easily have thrown him to the ground before he would have an opportunity to use his weapons.

It was high time to carry his threat into execution; but he knew that the instant he fired for the purpose of keeping the nearest back, his prisoner would be torn from him.

"I have failed at the moment when I thought the work was done," he said to himself, despairingly, and at that instant two men ranged themselves either side of him.

"Have you been sent here by Harvey?" one of them asked, and Jet could have shouted for very joy, for he understood these must be the officers who had come from Albany.

"Yes, and this is one of the men he was so anxious to arrest."

"Where is he now?"

"Hiding in the woods, wounded so badly that he can't walk."

"And the others?"

"Pinned up in the building with a prisoner."

During this short conversation the crowd had grown more unruly, and were now clustered around Joe so closely as to impede his progress.

The officer who had been speaking to Jet motioned to his companion, and the two sprang in front of the prisoner, as the former shouted:

"Make way, or I shall do more than the boy promised," and he drew a revolver.

"Who are you?"

"Officers from Albany who have come to assist in the arrest of this man. The first who interferes shall be taken in custody, and I warn you that it is a serious matter to try to rescue a prisoner."

This short speech had a decidedly good effect upon the majority of the crowd, who fell back at once; but Joe's friends had not yet despaired of success.

They faced the officers boldly, trying to force their way between the prisoner and Jet, and in a twinkling two of them were seized by the strangers, who clasped bracelets on their wrists without delay.

"If there are any more who want to try the same, we've got plenty of time to attend to them, for all we ask is a chance to pick out this fellow's pals."

The street was now cleared, each member of the throng endeavoring to be the first to escape suspicion, and the officers called to Jet:

"Start your man along lively. We'll lead you to a magistrate, and then come back for a few of those who were shouting the loudest."

Ten minutes later Jet's work was accomplished. The prisoners were confined in the village lock-up, and a message sent to the inspector, detailing what had been done.

Before Jet had finished the meal he was so much in need of, an answer came.

It read as follows:

"Have sent for the tall man by train which is just leaving. Report the result of Harvey's injuries as soon as possible."

"That will be when we come back from the woods," one of the officers said, as he read the telegram which Jet handed him. "You had better lie down an hour or so, and then we'll start."

"I'd rather go now. If we can hire a horse with which to bring Mr. Harvey here, I'll be able to ride part of the way."

One of the officers went out to attend to this portion of the work, and when he returned it was with the information that he had secured just the kind of an animal they required.

"He's too old to be afraid of anything, and there's no danger of his running away after Harvey mounts."

Both the men insisted that Jet should ride the entire distance, and when he objected they reminded him that by so doing it would be possible to arrive at the desired place just so much sooner.

The strain of caring for his prisoner had fatigued him quite as much as the tramp, and it is doubtful if he could have covered the distance again in less than three or four hours.

The officers walked on either side of the horse, and during the journey he had ample opportunity to explain why he had not met them at the arrival of the train.

"We knew from the station agent that a boy had sent the telegram, and intended to wait for us, therefore it was only natural to suppose some of the crowd had got the best of you. When we heard the row both of us hurried from the depot, thinking you were in some way the cause of it."

"I was afraid you might leave when I failed to show up."

"Not much. On such a job as this we'd have stayed here more than one day before jumping back."

During the last portion of the journey, Jet dozed as he rode along, forcing himself to open his eyes now and then to make certain he was on the right course, and it was while he was thus in a semi-conscious condition that a shout from a clump of bushes told the tramp was nearly at an end.

"That is Mr. Harvey," Jet cried, gleefully, all desire for slumber gone from his eyelids now.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE TRAIL.

The detective had crawled out of the bushes by the time the new-comers were opposite his place of concealment, and, before speaking to the two men, he clasped Jet warmly by the hand, as he said:

"I knew you could do the job, if it was in the power of any one, my boy. After making the capture, single-handed, it would have been strange if you had failed at the last minute."

"He didn't tell us that it was him who took the fellow prisoner," one of the men said, in surprise.

"But he did it nevertheless, and I would trust him as far as any person I ever saw."

Then the men held a short consultation as to what should be done, and Harvey insisted on making a detour, in order to approach the house on the side opposite where he believed the enemy were stationed.

"If you help me on the horse I can ride," he said, "and it will be possible to hold communication with the besieged, if nothing more."

"But you should go where your wound can be dressed properly."

"There is time enough for that. I want to get hold of Bob, and then I'll give you fellows a chance to clear up the counterfeiting case."

Since Harvey was really the leader of the expedition, the others could do no more than advise against his engaging in work, and he led the way, seated on the saddle, with his wounded leg fastened to the pommel in such a manner that it would not be injured by the trees while they were passing through the woods.

In due time the party came to a point from which the building could be seen.

A deep silence reigned. One would have said the house had long been deserted.

"I'll go where they can see me, and, if no one shoots, climb over the wood-pile," Jet suggested.

To this plan Harvey would not listen.

He first sent the new-comers to beat the thicket on this side, for the purpose of learning if any of the enemy were in the vicinity, and, when they returned with the information that no one had been seen, he advanced to the very edge of the bushes, where the signal was given.

"They won't be likely to answer it after having been fooled this morning," Jet suggested, and, without waiting for orders, he stepped beyond the shelter of the trees.

Instantly he did so one of the besieged appeared at the window, and hailed:

"Are you alone?"

"There are three besides me," Jet replied, and the words were hardly out of his mouth before the remainder of the party came into view.

"Are you all right?" Harvey shouted.

"Except for being mighty hungry and thirsty."

"Have you seen anything of the enemy?"

"Not since early this morning. It's my opinion that they have skipped after trying to get in here."

"We can soon find out," Harvey said. "We'll go boldly up to the gate, and before it is torn down we shall know how many are in the vicinity."

During the time Jet and the two men were forcing an entrance nothing more was heard from the

adjoining woods, and when the party entered the yard it was with the belief that the gang had been frightened away by the escape of the detective and Jet, and the disappearance of their leader.

"It won't do to take chances," Harvey said, as his friends opened the door of the house. "Go out with these gentlemen who have just arrived, and make careful search. The boy and I will care for things here."

This order was obeyed after the detective had been assisted into the building, and the horse fastened in the stable.

The prisoner was occupying the same position as when Jet saw him last, and appeared to be thoroughly tired of the whole business.

"If you had brought up some food we might have stayed here until morning; but as it is I reckon we must make a move pretty soon."

"How strange that I never thought of such a thing," Jet replied, and straightway he began to blame himself, until his companion said soothingly:

"After what you have gone through with, it is not strange such a thing should have escaped your mind. We shan't suffer very much if we don't get anything for a few hours more."

A short time later the searchers returned laden down with provisions, and reported that they failed to find any signs of the enemy.

They had come upon a place where the ground appeared to have been lately disturbed, and on digging there discovered a large store of bacon, hard-tack, flour and potatoes.

Before waiting to discuss the situation, the hungry men at once proceeded to cook a hearty meal, two of them going in search of water, and while this work was being done Harvey had a long, serious conversation with Jet.

"There is no question but that they have grown frightened and run away," he said by way of beginning, and to this remark Jet assented, nodding his head.

"Our trip will have been a failure, despite the fact of having captured Joe, unless we also get Bob."

"It'll be mighty hard work to find him now."

"That may be; but yet I am depending upon you to do the work."

"Me?" Jet repeated in surprise.

"Certainly; what is to prevent?"

"I don't even know where to look for him."

"Neither do I; but we shall hit upon the trail after a while, for I believe in the maxim that 'all things come to him who waits.'"

"But surely some of these men could do better than I."

"Are you afraid to try it?" Harvey asked, as he looked Jet full in the face.

"Not a bit of it. I only thought that there'd be more chance of success if somebody else took the job. You see I've made a big fool of myself half a dozen times since this thing was started."

"And by so doing have gained just so much experience. I want the whole work done by you and I, except when we have to call for assistance, as in the present case. It's professional pride, my boy, and I look to you to take my place, until I can crawl around once more."

"I'll be only too willing to do anything you say, Mr. Harvey."

"Then it is all right, Jet, and before three months go by we'll have our friend Bob behind the bars. Now, lie down and take a nap so as to be in condition for our final trip to the town."

"Then you have given up all hopes of finding the men here?"

"Yes; although it may be possible they will be foolish enough to come back. We'll leave two men here on watch for a few days."

Jet threw himself on the floor, and in a very few seconds was sleeping soundly.

When he was awakened the hunger of those who had been so long without food was appeased, and all preparations made for the return trip.

As a matter of course Harvey rode on the horse; Jet walked by his side, and the officers traveled in advance.

The last arrivals were perfectly willing to remain on guard in the house a few days, now that there were plenty of provisions, and they were busily engaged repairing the gate when the little party started.

Nothing of especial interest occurred during the journey, and when they arrived in town an officer was met who had come from New York to take charge of the prisoner.

The two men who had attempted to rescue Joe were held on the charge of resisting an officer, and it was believed they could be detained until it might be possible to connect them with the manufacture or passing of counterfeit money.

To this last, however, Harvey paid but little attention, allowing the officers from Albany full charge of the case. He was on the trail of a murderer, and all else seemed of but trifling importance.

A surgeon in the village dressed Harvey's wound, and when that had been done there was yet two hours remaining before a train bound for Albany would arrive.

"Now you and I will have a final talk, Jet," the detective said, when the two were left alone in one of the rooms at the hotel.

"Why? Ain't you counting on taking me with you?"

"Certainly not. I thought it was agreed you were to search for Bob."

"So I am; but I didn't know I was to be left here."

"That is not exactly what will be done, although it amounts to much the same thing. I propose to have you get on the train with us, as if you were going off, and then, stopping at the next station, travel back thirty or forty miles to whichever town we may decide upon as the most promising."

"What am I to do there, sir?"

"Look for Bob. Move about from town to town just as seems best at the moment, and I have no doubt but that you will soon strike his trail."

"Am I to let you know when I find it?"

"Certainly. Can you write?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then let me hear from you every day. Here is an address where the letters will reach me at the earliest possible moment."

"But, Mr. Harvey, can't you tell me how to begin the work?"

"No; circumstances must decide. I have no question but that you will succeed finally, and in two weeks, if the job isn't finished before, I hope to be with you again."

The detective wrote on a slip of paper the address to which letters should be sent, gave Jet more money, and concluded the interview by saying:

"It isn't well to let even the officers from Albany know what you propose to do. I will cook up some story to satisfy their curiosity. Now, go and buy me a through ticket, and one for yourself to the next station."

Jet did as he was directed, and, as he entered the depot saw Joe, who, guarded by the officer sent from New York, was waiting the coming of the train.

The alleged murderer bestowed a wicked look on the boy who had captured him, and then turned his head away.

"If he ever gets the chance I shall have a hot time of it," Jet thought, as he transacted his business with the ticket-seller and then returned to Harvey.

The latter was just being brought down stairs, for the time of departure was near at hand, and Jet followed him to the station, where the detective was warmly greeted by Joe's guard.

Here Jet felt proud by being introduced as the one who had made the arrest and afterward brought his prisoner safely through the woods where the remainder of the gang were lurking, and District Messenger No. 48 felt amply rewarded by the words of praise for all he had suffered.

The cars arrived. Jet followed his companions on board, and, twenty minutes later, alighted at a small village where it would be necessary he should wait half an hour before a western bound train came along.

"It's a tough job I've undertaken," he said to himself, when the long line of coaches had pulled out, leaving him alone, "and somehow or other I feel pretty certain I'm going to come to grief before this thing is ended."

CHAPTER XVII

AN OLD FRIEND

To Jet the idea of loitering around first one town and then another with no definite plan, unless the simple hope of meeting the man by accident could be called one, was in the highest degree unsatisfactory.

He had embarked on the enterprise, however, and it was now too late for regrets.

In due time the train arrived, and, stepping on board, he was surprised at hearing a familiar voice ask:

"Hello Jet! Have you concluded to join us again?"

It was his old friend the manager of the minstrel company, who appeared to take it for granted Jet had boarded this particular train for no other purpose than that of going into the show business again.

"Where are you playing?" the boy asked without answering the question.

"Nowhere to-night, or I shouldn't be here. We've been having mighty hard luck, and had to lay off to reorganize— At least that's the best way of putting it. The company is about twenty miles down the road, and we shall play that town to-morrow."

While the manager was speaking, Jet thought to himself that he could attend to his particular business as well, if not better, by traveling with the show a few days than in any other way, and he asked:

"Do you want a good dancer?"

"If you mean yourself, I'll say yes mighty quick. Will you come?"

"There is no reason why I shouldn't for a while, providing you won't make any objection if I should leave very suddenly."

"Say, my boy, what are you up to in this section of the country, eh?"

"Nothing in particular, or perhaps it would be best to say, nothing that I can explain."

"Then I won't ask any questions. How much do you want a night to do two turns, and help us out in any other way that may come up?"

"If you'll pay my traveling expenses and hotel bills, I'll go on for one night, and, perhaps a week, but when it comes to leaving this section of the country I shall have to stay behind."

"I'll accept the offer, and reckon we can keep you with us a good while, if you are so stuck on this part of the State, for we intend to remain within a circle of fifty miles for a couple of weeks. Business has been so bad that we can't afford to make many long jumps, and there are plenty of little towns where I hope to pull out money enough to set us on our feet."

This plan exactly suited Jet, and he believed he had been very fortunate in thus meeting the manager.

When the conductor came for the tickets, Jet's friend paid his fare to the town where the company had been waiting for funds ever since the day the young dancer felt forced to leave them.

It was a very cordial greeting which he received from the members of the show party that night, and many times was he forced to give an evasive answer in reply to their searching questions, lest his secret should be discovered.

During the evening he wrote to Harvey, telling him how he proposed to travel, and concluded by saying:

"You see, by this means I can stay around here a long while without spending any of your money, and it seems as if there is less chance of being suspected by friends of Bob's whom I might meet without knowing them."

During the following day he helped distribute programmes, put the hall to rights, and otherwise made himself so useful that all looked upon him as a decided acquisition to the company.

On this night he did his regular turn, and instead of trying to prevent himself from looking at the audience, stared at each person every time he came on the stage, hoping he might get a glimpse of Bob.

It was doubtful, he admitted to himself, whether he would recognize the two who had played the part of Albany officers, for he saw them only at night and in the feeble rays of light cast by the station lamps.

As to Bob, he was confident of knowing him under almost any disguise that might be assumed.

However, this night's appearance before the public brought him no other result than that of establishing himself yet more firmly in the minds of his companions as a good dancer, and he had no reason to be discouraged since that which must necessarily be a long task had but just begun.

According to promise, he wrote a short letter to Harvey, and on the following morning received, a reply to his first.

Among other things the detective wrote:

"I am glad you had an opportunity to join the company, for it is the best way you could prosecute the search. It would do no harm to go even farther from the house in the woods than you propose doing, since Bob will most likely give that place a wide berth for some time to come. Do not get discouraged, and use as much money as may be necessary for your comfort. My wound is improving rapidly under proper treatment, and I am told that in two weeks I shall be able to walk with the aid of a cane."

It is true this was not a very important communication; but it was highly satisfactory to Jet, since it showed that the detective approved of his course.

The second performance after the "reorganization" of the company, was given in a small town of about twelve hundred population, and the receipts at the door were not enough to pay the hotel bill and traveling expenses to the next town, therefore on that same evening the manager called the performers to his room for consultation.

"We shall take big money in the next place, providing we can get there early enough in the morning to make a parade; but I am broke again, and want your advice."

No one spoke for some time, and Jet asked:

"How far is it?"

"Only six miles."

"I will walk, or pay my own expenses, either one you choose."

"Now, that's what I call coming to the front in great shape. Who's willing to walk?"

It was some time before he could persuade the other members of the company to agree. They had received no wages for several weeks, and it seemed particularly hard to ask them to work for nothing, and, in addition, tramp from town to town.

It was finally decided two of the company should ride, in order to transport the baggage, and that the remainder would take to the road as soon as sunrise next morning.

The manager, knowing that Jet had some money, because of his offer to pay his own railroad fare, borrowed five dollars of him, with the promise that it should be repaid with the first money taken at the door on the next evening, and the amateur detective went to bed feeling that, perhaps, he could travel around the country more cheaply than by working for a manager who borrowed his funds.

All hands were called at an early hour on the following morning, and Jet set out immediately after breakfast with those who were to travel on "Shank's mare."

It was unfortunate that some of these involuntary pedestrians, while not having enough to pay their railroad fare, managed to scrape together sufficient to buy a large bottle of whisky, and when a trifle more than half the distance had been traversed, several were under the influence of the fiery liquor.

Jet had many invitations to drink, but he stoutly refused even to taste of the stuff, and walked on ahead with the other temperate members of the company.

The dissipated portion of the party danced and sang to the amusement or disgust of the inhabitants whose houses they passed, and the town was in sight when a loud shout from the rear caused Jet and his companions to look back.

Half a dozen of the men had scaled a fence, and were industriously engaged filling their pockets with fruit, paying no attention to the damage done the trees as they broke branches or threw heavy clubs up to bring down the apples or pears.

"Say, this won't do!" Jet shouted as he ran toward them. "You stand a good chance to be arrested, and then how shall we get out of town?"

"Walk, as we had to this time," some one replied with a laugh, and the thefts went on with redoubled eagerness.

Jet tried to persuade the fellows to desist, but deaf ears were turned to all his entreaties, and he was leaning over the fence when two women and a boy came out to drive the intruders away.

The drunken men paid no attention either to threats or entreaties, but continued at the work until a sufficient amount of fruit had been obtained, when they continued the journey.

Immediately after arriving in town Jet had plenty to do in the way of distributing programmes, and finished the task only to take his place in the street parade.

The drunkards had sobered off in a measure by this time, and managed to march through the village without reeling; but the fumes of liquor were quickly driven from their brains on returning to the hotel, when one after another was arrested for trespass and theft preferred by the owner of the orchard, who brought the two women and boy into town as witnesses.

Jet was not made a prisoner when the majority of the party were marched to the squire's office, nor did he anticipate any trouble, for he had done nothing more than try unsuccessfully to prevent the mischief.

Therefore he followed those under arrest to learn what disposition would be made of the case, and as he entered the closely-packed room was surprised at hearing one of the women say, in a voice loud enough to be understood by all:

"There's another of 'em—that boy. I seen him standin' there all the time."

"But I was only trying to make the others stop," Jet said quickly, as if the remark had been addressed to him.

"Don't you believe him, squire, he was doin' that to poke fun at me, an' jest egged the others on."

To Jet's surprise the magistrate included him in the list of prisoners, and he had the questionable satisfaction of hearing all three of the witnesses swear that he was aiding and abetting the thieves.

Jet tried hard to defend himself, but the squire had evidently made up his mind in advance as to what the sentence should be, for without allowing the prisoners to make more than a shadow of defense, he said sternly:

"It's time you show people got to learn that you can't travel 'round the country cuttin' up shines an' then tryin' to excuse yourselves by sayin' you was under the influence of licker. This court don't recognize any sich pleadin', an' sentences every one of the crowd to pay ten dollars an' costs."

"Do you mean that each man must pay that fine?" the manager asked in dismay.

"That's what I said, an' if there's any row kicked up I'll double it."

Jet was literally stunned and could make no reply. It is true he had sufficient money with which to settle his fine, but he did not feel that he was entitled to do such a thing, and besides, the injustice of the verdict was so great as to overshadow everything else.

Extra constables were sent for to convey the prisoners to the village lock-up until such time as they should pay the money, and when one of these officials entered the room, Jet's anger and surprise was changed to bewilderment.

The man who advanced to carry him to jail was none other than a member of that party of alleged tramps who had attempted to rob him on the railroad track, and consequently a pal of the murderers.

The fellow was unquestionably at the house in the woods when Harvey and his men were besieged, and had since then returned to this town, where, of course, he lived.

The question in Jet's mind now was as to whether Bob and the others had accompanied this one.

"Being arrested may turn out to be a mighty good thing, after all," he said to himself, "and I wouldn't be surprised if I held off a long while before paying my fine."

CHAPTER XVIII

JAIL LIFE

The manager of the minstrel company was, and quite naturally, in a high state of excitement when his people were marched off to the lock-up.

If he was not able to raise sufficient money to pay for the railroad tickets, it was useless to think he could satisfy the claim which alleged justice had against the men.

To remain there even for twenty-four hours without giving a performance would result in utter bankruptcy, and in case he was willing to desert the company he did not have money enough to go out of the town, except by leaving the baggage behind and walking.

An hour after the now saddened minstrels had been lodged behind the bars the manager called upon them.

"I've been trying to chin that old fool of a squire into letting you off for this evening, so's we can give a show, but he won't listen to anything of the kind," the visitor announced in a disconsolate tone.

"If you could rope off the yard and put up some seats we might perform behind the bars. Advertise that the gentlemen composing the greatest aggregation of minstrel talent in the known world will attempt the difficult feat of playing themselves out of jail."

This suggestion was made by the "funny" man of the party, but the distressed manager failed to see in it anything witty or comical.

"Can't some of you fellows suggest a plan?" he asked.

"Announce that we are to lay off a short time in order to—to—well anything you can think of."

"That is no plan at all; it would look rather fishy to reorganize twice in one week."

"Say that we are studying our parts for a realistic drama, entitled 'Would You put Yourself in Their Places.'"

"Now see here, boys, this isn't a thing to joke about. We must give a show to-night, and the question is how can it be done?" the manager asked in a tone of despair.

This was what no one could answer.

It surely seemed as if the squire had been prompted by an unkind fate to lay the heavy hand of the law upon this particular branch of the minstrel business, in order to deter others from traveling in the same path, and to prevent this company from inflicting stale jokes upon the public.

Finding that the chief performers could not suggest a way out of the difficulty, the manager took Jet as far aside as the size of the cell would permit.

"How much money have you got?" he asked in a whisper.

"None that belongs to me. The five dollars I loaned you was put in my hands for an especial purpose, and I really had no right to dispose of it as I did."

"But if you've got enough to pay these fines, I'll promise faithfully that you shall have every cent we take in until the full amount is paid back. There isn't any risk, my boy, for we shall certainly do a big business here."

Although Jet had had but little experience in this line, he knew that the receipts at the door, even if the small hall should be filled, would not amount to enough to settle the bills, and from it must necessarily be taken sufficient to carry the party to the next town.

"I haven't got half as much as you need, and if I had it would be wrong to use it."

"Then you intend to pay your own fine and give us the slip, eh?"

"I should have a perfect right to do so, because I took no part in the stealing of the fruit; but I shall stay with the rest."

During the next ten minutes the manager pleaded in vain with the boy, and then recognizing the uselessness of his arguments, left the building in a pet.

Meanwhile the members of the company did not look upon the imprisonment as such a very great hardship.

"Say, who has to pay our board while we are here?" one of the party asked the jailer.

"I reckon it'll come on the town."

"Then so long as it costs us nothing, what's the use of repining?" and the man started a song, in which he was joined by his companions, until the dilapidated building fairly shook with the alleged melody.

As a matter of course, this had the effect of drawing the idle ones to the jail doors, and the

applause from the outside induced a continuance of the free concert.

All those who could show any right to enter the building crowded in, and among them was the constable whom Jet had recognized.

While his companions were amusing the visitors and themselves, he edged along as near this particular man as he could without exposing himself too freely, and during the pauses between the songs he was fortunate enough to overhear the following conversation between the fellow in whom he was interested and a brother constable:

"You've been away quite a while, eh, Jabe?"

"Only three weeks."

"Where was you?"

"Tendin' to some private business."

"I thought when a man was elected constable he'd got to stay 'round in case he might be needed."

"I didn't ask for the office, an' don't intend to loaf here when there's a chance of makin' a dollar outside."

"What have you been up to?"

"That's my own business."

"Of course it is, Jabe; but I know you're makin' money somehow, an' it seems as if you might give me a show."

"Well, I can't. I had a good thing for a while, but it's busted now."

If Jet had had any doubts as to the identity of the man they would have been dispelled by this last remark, and he listened eagerly for a continuation of the conversation.

"Got company up to your house, ain't you?" the inquisitive party asked.

"How'd you know that?"

"Some of the folks said you brought some friends back."

"It seems as if the people in this town had nothin' better to do than watch their neighbors."

"Then it is true?"

"I've got an old friend visitin' me for a spell, but he's sick now, an' we don't want folks 'round to disturb him."

"That must be Bob," Jet said to himself. "Perhaps he was wounded, and has come here to stay till he gets better. Now, how can I send word to Mr. Harvey?"

This was the one important thing to do in view of what he had learned, but it would be necessary that none of the townspeople should see the letter, and the manager of the company was so angry with him that it was a question if he would attend to the matter.

He seated himself in one corner of the room, where his face could not be seen plainly, and waited for this particular constable to leave the building.

In about an hour the prisoners tired of giving a free concert, and, finding they were not likely to be amused any longer, the visitors took their departure.

From one of his companions Jet begged a few leaves out of a note-book, from another he borrowed a pencil, and thus equipped he sat down to detail what he thought was important news.

"Sending for money to pay your fine, Jet?" one of the party asked jokingly, and this caused the others to think of what they might do.

"I reckon a good many of us had better try the same game," a second man said seriously. "The manager can't get us out of the hole, and we may as well begin to hustle for ourselves."

"It won't cost much to do it," Jet replied, thinking that if a number of letters were sent from the jail his would attract less attention.

Nearly all the party concluded to make the attempt, and a call was made upon the turnkey for envelopes.

Jet offered ten cents to pay for the same, and in a short time the note-book was stripped of its leaves as each prisoner set about making a written appeal for funds.

The question of postage was next raised, and to this Jet was forced to respond, in order that his missive should be sent without delay.

By the time the letters had been made ready, the member of the company who came over on the cars with the manager paid his companions a visit, and, quite naturally, agreed to post the mail matter.

Now that he was reasonably certain Harvey would soon know the exact condition of affairs, Jet felt very light-hearted. It seemed almost positive he had stumbled upon Bob's hiding-place, and if such should prove to be the case, the second man implicated in the murder must be captured within a few days.

Shortly before mid-day the squire came over to interview his prisoners.

It was possible he had been figuring the cost to the town in case this party of twelve should remain contentedly in jail; and perhaps he was beginning to believe the sentence too severe when taken in the aggregate.

"Your manager has been tryin' to talk me into lettin' you fellers out," he began, assuming a friendly tone and air. "I told him that justice couldn't be tampered with, an' have come 'round to see what you're goin' to do 'bout payin' the fines."

"Squire, did you ever try to get blood out of a stone?" one of the party asked.

"What has that got to do with it, eh?"

"Nothing, except that it would be as easy to bleed a rock as to get cash from them who are flat broke."

"But, bless my heart, you can't stay here forever, you know."

"It depends on you. If the manager has made any kind of a fair offer I advise you to accept it, for it will cost something to feed this crowd, and I don't suppose you would care to take the responsibility of starving us to death."

The squire wiped the perspiration from his face, although the room was by no means warm.

"If you could pay somethin' on account, an' give bonds for the rest——"

"I don't believe you could scare up a dollar among the whole of us, and as for bonds—who would sign them?"

"But you can't expect me to let you go free after robbing a man's orchard, an' bein' sentenced in a regular court?"

"Certainly not, and for that reason we have settled down to the belief that we shall be your guests a very long while."

"If I should let you out long enough to give a show, would you come back here?" the squire asked after a long pause.

"Who would get the money taken at the door?"

"It would go toward payin' your fines."

"That's a matter we shall have to discuss, for it isn't a pleasant lookout to give a performance for the benefit of your court when we need money so badly ourselves."

"I'll come back in an hour an' get your answer," the squire replied with considerable show of dignity, as he left the building.

Jet was distressed at the thought that it might be possible the fines would be paid in a short time, for then he could make no excuse for loitering about the town, and even if he should do so there was every reason to believe the constable he was eager to have arrested would recognize him.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DINNER

Dinner, consisting of soup, with a liberal supply of meat and bread, was served to the prisoners at twelve o'clock, and, half an hour later, the manager arrived to talk with his company regarding the proposition to reduce the fines so far as was possible by giving a performance.

The "funny" man of the party acted as spokesman for his companions, and Jet listened with deepest interest to the following conversation:

"There is no question about persuadin' that idiotic squire to give all hands a few hours' liberty, if you agree to return here as soon as the performance is ended," the manager began.

"And in what way shall we be benefited?"

"At least a portion of the fines will be paid, and it may then be possible to get his consent to our moving on to the next town."

"How will you get there, if he insists on taking all the receipts?"

"There must be some kind of a bargain made whereby we can take car-fares and expenses out of the show."

Although the majority of the prisoners were responsible for the deed which committed them to prison, not one seemed willing to give an evening's work, in order to pay a portion of the amount exacted.

The fines were so large in the aggregate, considering the value of the property taken, that all felt as if it would be the proper thing to let the town support them for a time.

To the manager the case presented itself in a different aspect.

He had made dates ahead, and if the company failed to keep them, after having already disappointed the public once, his position would be that of a veritable bankrupt with whom the owners of the halls would refuse to transact business.

Therefore it was that he spent considerable time urging his company to do as he hoped the squire might approve of, and finally, much to Jet's mental discomfort, he succeeded in extracting a promise from each that he would agree to go on the stage, and afterward return to the jail.

Then he went to try his powers of persuasion on the squire.

During the afternoon the other member of the party who was at liberty, reported that the matter had been arranged satisfactorily, and "dodgers" were now being distributed around the town calling upon the people to aid in "rescuing from imprisonment a number of gentlemen, whose exuberance of spirit rather than evil propensities, had plunged them into sore distress."

More than one of the company predicted that the appeal would be a signal failure, and Jet earnestly hoped these "exuberant gentlemen" would prove truthful prophets.

Evening came, and with the shadows of night the constables arrived to conduct the performers to the hall.

A supper of bread, cold meat, and tea had been served, and, save for the severe headaches with which the intemperate portion of the party were suffering, all were in reasonably good spirits.

Both the squire and the manager were at the door to take the money from the charitably inclined, and the owner of the hall also stood near by to make certain of receiving his rent from the first cash paid over.

Watching through the peep-hole in the curtain, Jet saw the constable in whom he was especially interested seated near the stage, and for an instant he resolved not to appear lest he should be recognized.

A moment's reflection, however, showed him that such a course would unquestionably arouse suspicion, and he settled the matter by blackening his face, a disguise which, under the glare of the footlights, would prove most effective.

The inhabitants of the town did not respond very generously to the "appeal."

When the curtain rose on the first act, there were hardly more than enough in the hall to pay the actual running expenses of the evening, and there was no longer any hope of being able to reduce the amount owed for fines.

Both the manager and the squire looked despondent, the latter particularly so, for he had saddled upon the town what might prove to be a white elephant before the matter was ended.

Despite the discouraging state of affairs the performers did their best, and the audience were delighted. Jet danced until it was impossible to take another step, and then, on being called before the curtain, was forced to bow his thanks instead of responding to the fourth encore.

During all the time he was on the stage he had scrutinized the faces of the spectators, but without recognizing any face other than the one before him, and it was in a decidedly contented frame of mind that he followed his companions back to jail after the result of the "show" was made known.

By this evening's work, after the hall rent, printing and services of the musicians had been paid, the company were able to reduce the entire amount of fines exactly four dollars, and one of the party remarked, laughingly:

"At this rate, by hard work, providing the people are willing to come to a show every night, we may manage to pull through in about three months, which won't be a profitable speculation, considering the fact that we might have bought all the fruit for a dollar at the outside."

On the following afternoon Jet received a reply to his letter, and in it Harvey said:

"Pay your fine and come out of jail at once. You can avoid our constable by remaining with the company the greater portion of the time; but it is necessary you should learn who the visitor is. Can't you walk around that way now and then? I don't fancy Bob will stay in the house all the time. This work can be done better now by you than any one I could send, since the presence of a stranger in the little village would attract attention."

While reading this Jet was busily engaged in trying to make some excuse whereby he could do as Harvey ordered without arousing the suspicion of his companions.

If he had paid the fine in the first place all would have been simple; but reason must be given for leaving after telling the manager that he did not dare to spend the money he had on his person.

A happy thought occurred to him.

Pretending to read after the letter was finished, he contrived, without being seen, to take fifteen dollars from his pocket, and, holding them up triumphantly, he cried:

"Here's enough with which to pay my fine, and I'll have more in a few days if you fellows don't get out."

As a matter of course his companions supposed the money had been taken from the letter.

Several tried to persuade him that it would be useless to spend that amount when by waiting the squire might be forced to free them; but he professed to be sick of life in a jail, and summoned the turnkey to take him to the magistrate's office.

Twenty minutes later he was formally released from custody, and the squire began to believe that two or three more days of imprisonment would force the others to follow Jet's example.

He went at once to the hotel, paid twenty-four hours' board in advance, and on turning, after completing this transaction, found himself face to face with the manager.

"So you concluded that it wouldn't be so very much out of the way to use some of that money, eh?" the latter asked, sarcastically.

"I wrote for funds, and got fifteen dollars by the last mail."

"Was that the best you could do?"

"It wasn't to be supposed I could pay the whole amount."

"No; but since you have friends with money enough to let you loaf around this section of the country, I didn't know but that we might raise a stake somehow."

Now Jet regretted having followed Harvey's advice, for if the manager should make this same remark in the hearing of the constable, many and grave suspicions might be aroused, for, of course, the man would be on the alert for anything which needed an explanation.

"That's where you are making a big mistake," he said, with an assumption of carelessness which was far from natural. "I only wanted to stay here till I could get a job."

"That wasn't the way you talked when I met you the other day; but it doesn't make much difference now, for I am beginning to see my way out of this snarl."

"How?"

"There's a constable in this town who seems to be pretty well fixed, and he gave me to understand that he might take the company out of jail, providing I'd let him act as treasurer until the amount was paid."

"Which one is he?" Jet asked, trying hard not to betray the eagerness for knowledge which he felt.

"The fellow who took you to jail."

"Are you pretty certain he'll make the trade?"

"Here he comes now to talk the matter over; it won't take us long to find out."

Jet glanced toward the door, and saw the man in whom he felt so great an interest.

The manager, eager to clinch the bargain, advanced to meet him, and the boy, keeping his back toward the new-comer, managed to walk out of the opposite door without being observed.

Now the one question in the mind of the amateur detective was as to why this man should be willing to travel with the show.

It did not require many minutes for him to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion.

"He has got a lot of that counterfeit money with him, and by running the company through a number of towns some distance from here can pass it," Jet said to himself. "Now, what shall I do if he makes the trade?"

The proper thing seemed to be to send a letter at once, and, going to his room, he wrote a full account of what he had heard, concluding by saying:

"To-night I shall lay around his house trying to get a sight of the man who is visiting there."

This done he went into the office once more, and there saw the manager, who was highly elated.

"It is all arranged," he said. "The fines will be fixed in some way to-morrow, and we shall start once more. We only lose to-night's stand, and then go on with a backer who has plenty of money. Will you tell the boys of our good luck, while I make arrangements for sending the posters ahead?"

Jet promised to carry the tidings, and stopped only long enough to add the following postscript to his letter:

"The trade has been made, and the constable will leave here to-morrow with the company. I shall loaf near his house this evening, and walk to the next town to send you a telegram if I learn anything."

This letter he mailed in time for the night train, and then visited the jail, delivering news which the prisoners were not particularly glad to hear, since it gave them no immediate prospect for money.

"We have made up our minds to tire the squire out," one of them said, "and I don't take favorably to the idea of working to pay the fines when there's no real need of it."

CHAPTER XX

A RECOGNITION

Jet did not spend much time trying to induce the prisoners to take advantage of the constable's offer.

It suited his plans best to have them refuse, and, after giving the information, he walked back to the hotel, as if the one desire of his life was to get a good supper.

When the meal was finished the night had fully come, and he would have set out at once to loiter around the constable's house but for the fact that as yet he did not know where that gentleman lived.

While standing in the office trying to make up his mind whom he could approach, in order to get this information, the manager joined him, as he asked:

"What did the boys say when you told them what was to be done?"

"I didn't wait to hear very much; but it struck me that they were not particularly well pleased."

"Why not?"

"They think it is foolish to work for the money when it may be possible to tire the squire out by holding on a while and letting the town support them."

"Is it possible they can be such fools? Come with me, and we'll see if it isn't possible to beat some

sense into their stupid heads."

Jet did not want to waste the time; but since he could make no good excuse, there was nothing for it but to comply, and the two started at once.

On arriving at the jail, the turnkey informed them that it was against orders to admit any one after dark; but he intimated that the matter might be arranged with any one of the constables who had brought the prisoners there.

"Then it won't take us long to fix it," the manager said, as he beckoned Jet to follow him, and when they were in the open air again, he added: "Barker will see that we get in."

"Who is he?"

"Why, Jabe Barker, the constable who wants to take the company on the road."

Jet made no reply, but congratulated himself on thus having the house pointed out to him without any questions on his part.

A walk of ten minutes brought them to quite a large residence on the outskirts of the village, and the manager said:

"That's where he lives, and I'm told he owns the entire property, so you see we'll have a capitalist to back us."

"I guess I'd better not go any farther with you," Jet said, half-apologetically, as he halted.

"Why not?"

"You and he may want to talk business, and, perhaps, it wouldn't look well for me to be where I could listen."

"You are right, my boy. Go back to the hotel, and I'll meet you there in a short time."

Jet turned as if to obey, and walked slowly toward the center of the village, until he saw that the manager had been admitted to the building, when he clambered over a fence, ran across a piece of plowed land, and stood at the rear of the out-buildings when Mr. Barker and the manager emerged.

Not until they were lost to view in the gloom did he dare to make a move, and then he crept softly around in search of a place of vantage from which the house could be watched.

He finally found it immediately behind the woodshed, where, by climbing on the sloping roof, it was possible to look in at the uncurtained windows of the first and second story.

During fully an hour he lay at full length upon the hard boards without seeing that for which he sought.

Now and then a female form would pass one of the lighted windows, but nothing more, and he was beginning to think he had struck the wrong trail, when Barker returned.

He was whistling merrily while coming up the lane which led to the house, and, as if this was a signal, a man came from the building with a pipe in his mouth. Jet's heart beat fast and loud.

Although it was impossible, in the gloom, to distinguish any object clearly, he felt certain that this man was the one whom Harvey was so eager to find. The stature, form, and general appearance was Bob's, and Jet believed his search had come to an end.

It was evident that the two had some business to discuss which they did not care to speak of in the house, where the other members of the family could hear them, for they walked directly toward the shed on which the boy was lying, and, fortunately for his purpose, sat down on a log almost directly beneath him.

"It is all arranged," Barker was saying. "The fool actors kicked at first about working for nothing, as they called it; but we soon brought them to terms."

"When are you going to start?"

"Day after to-morrow."

"Why do you wait?"

"I think we had better find out first what the officers did after we left, and a few hours can't make much difference, for I'll get rid of plenty of the queer to keep us going before we've been out a day."

"I'm not certain that it is best for you to do this thing, Jabe. A minstrel show can be tracked a dozen times where one man could give the officers the slip without trouble."

"I'm not intending to shove so much that there'll be any fuss. Just enough to put us in funds so we can skip if things begin to look black. We wouldn't be in this shape if my advice had been taken; I

always insisted that there was no reason why Joe should carry all the cash."

"He's a slick one, Joe is, and could get out of a tight place where you or I would be pulled."

"Well, with all his smartness he's cornered this time."

"That remains to be proven. He may have had to skin out while we were watching the house. If he was arrested we should have heard it before this."

"That isn't certain; none of the gang have showed up yet, and—— Hello! Who is this?"

Jet looked toward the road and there saw the form of a man coming cautiously up the lane as if trying to avoid observation from those in the house.

Bob and Barker were on their feet in an instant both acting ill at ease, until a low, peculiar whistle was heard, which the latter answered in the same manner, and then said to his companion in a tone of relief:

"Now we shall hear the whole story."

"Who is it?"

"Sam, I reckon; yes it is," and Jabe advanced to seize the new-comer by the hand.

"Well?" Bob asked, as if impatient to hear the news.

"We're cornered, or at least poor Joe is. We did all we could, and the result is that I've left the other fellows in jail on the charge of resisting an officer."

Then Sam went on to tell of Jet's appearing in town with his prisoner, and the remainder of the story which is already known.

Bob was silent for several moments after the new-comer ceased speaking, and then said savagely:

"But for me that cub would have been put out of the way before he'd done anything except tell a certain story in New York. Now all I ask is a chance to get hold of him again, and I'll swear to it that he won't do any more mischief."

"What is the New York racket?" Barker asked curiously. "I've noticed that you and Joe had a secret which bothered you more'n this matter did."

"If I don't tell you there'll be no danger of your splittin' on us," was the gruff reply. "What I want to know is whether there's any show of our being tracked to this place?"

"Of course, no man can say that to a dead certainty; but unless the fellows who are jugged give the snap away, we're safe here, providing Jabe can take care of us," Sam replied.

Mr. Barker did not venture any advice, possibly because he feared it might not be safe to have too many guests at his house for the villagers to gossip about.

"What about the house in the woods?" Bob finally asked.

"Two fellows from Albany stayed there a couple of days, and then got tired of waiting. They took the train home last night."

"Did they find anything?"

"No; I went up to the big oak this morning, and there were no signs the ground had been disturbed since we left."

Again Bob was silent, and when he finally spoke Jet was considerably surprised.

"This part of the country is getting too hot for me, and I'm goin' to make a jump."

"Where?"

"Almost any place is better than layin' around so near. What do you say to a hunting trip in the Adirondacks, Sam?"

"It would suit me. How much cash have you got?"

"Enough to see us through."

"Then I'm ready any time."

"When can we leave here, Jabe?"

"I don't reckon you want to go through Albany?"

"Of course not, you fool."

"Then at five to-morrow morning you'll get a train from here to Schenectady, and there are plenty out of there to take you into the mountains."

"I don't fancy running around those big towns," Sam said, hesitatingly.

"Very well, stay behind if you choose; I'm going," and Bob terminated the interview by walking toward the house.

"It's something besides shoving the queer that's crawling on him now," Jabe said, as the short man passed out of hearing.

"I reckon so; but at the same time I'm bound to be with him, for if there is a man in this country who can steer clear of trouble he is the one, and I don't care to be pulled on a charge of counterfeiting."

Jabe made no reply, and a few seconds later the two followed their friend into the house, leaving Jet to ponder upon the magnitude of the task he felt bound to undertake.

Not until everything was quiet did the boy venture to come down from his hiding-place, and then his plans were formed.

"Between now and to-morrow morning I can walk fifteen miles," he said to himself when he had gained the highway once more, "and then I should be mighty near the junction. There I shall be able to telegraph at any hour, and have everything ready to board this five o'clock train when it comes along. But if we should reach the Adirondacks, and those fellows ever got hold of me there, it would be all up with Jet Lewis."

It was, indeed, a desperate undertaking for him to follow these men into the wilderness where he could not call upon his friend for assistance; but never for a moment did he think of shirking the responsibility.

His first move was to see the manager, and represent that he was going down the road a short distance, in order to prevent anything being said to the constable before the two men should leave.

"I'll most likely meet you at the next town," he said, cheerily, as he went up stairs apparently to retire, and half an hour later he had slipped out of the house without being recognized by any one he knew.

At this late hour the village was in a state of repose, and he hurried to the railroad, saying to himself as he started down the track on the ties:

"Now we'll see how many miles I can cover between this and sunrise."

CHAPTER XXI

THE ADIRONDACKS

Jet gave no heed to his own fatigue during this night's traveling.

His one desire was to reach the junction in time to send the telegram to Harvey, and make such changes in his costume as would serve to disguise him in some slight degree.

In order to effect this purpose, it would be necessary to travel every moment of the time at full speed.

This he did, and it was one quarter past four in the morning when he arrived at the junction.

He had more than two hours before the train would arrive, and his first care was to send the following telegram to the detective:

"He, with a friend, has just started for the Adirondacks hunting. If possible will let you know where they stop; but I may not be able to get out of the woods while they stay."

It had taken Jet a long while to write the message. He wished to word it so the operator could not understand that he was tracking a man, and yet it was necessary the detective should realize it might be many days before he could send any further information.

If the men had remained at Jabe's house one day after he discovered positively that Bob was there, the whole work would have been finished in a few hours, for an officer could have been sent from

Albany to capture him.

Under the circumstances, therefore, nothing could be done, save to follow the men until it should be possible to let Harvey know where an arrest might be effected.

After the message had been delivered to the operator, Jet walked around the town waiting for the stores to be opened.

The "earliest bird" was a clothing dealer, and he "caught the worm" without difficulty.

Jet bought a reefer's jacket, a slouch hat, and such articles of underwear as might be needed. He also invested a dollar in a cheap carpet-bag.

Then he waited a few moments longer for the shoemaker, of whom he purchased a pair of top boots. Tucking his trousers into these, he had the satisfaction of knowing that he bore very little resemblance to the district messenger boy, who had left New York believing his destination to be Yonkers.

"I'd like to buy a gun and some cartridges, if I could get a good bargain," he said to the shoemaker, and the latter replied, eagerly:

"I've got jest what you want."

An ordinary breech-loading, double-barrelled gun was produced from behind the counter, and after some bargaining a trade was made on the basis of eight dollars for the weapon and sixty cartridges.

By this time Jet's stock of ready cash was running low; but he did not feel particularly worried, since there was yet enough remaining to pay his railroad fare to and from the mountains, with something over for the purchase of provisions.

A hearty breakfast at the depot restaurant, a wait of five minutes, and the train arrived.

Jet had good reason to believe his game would go direct to Plattsburgh before striking into the wilderness, for the shoemaker had told him it was the most direct route to the hunting region, and he procured a ticket for that point.

On boarding the train he went into the smoking-car, and there saw the men he intended to follow.

The seat behind them was vacant, and he took it at once, pulling his hat down over his eyes in such a manner that one could not see his face without considerable difficulty.

The men were half asleep; but the conductor awakened them, and Jet was made glad by a glimpse of their tickets.

They were bound for Plattsburgh as he had guessed, and he resolved that at the next station he would telegraph this information to Harvey.

"I don't suppose he could get a man there before these fellows strike into the woods," he said to himself; "but there's just a chance they'll hang around the town a while, and it is best he should have all the information possible."

At Schenectady it was necessary to change cars, and here Jet found an opportunity to send Harvey word.

On boarding the other train, the boy again succeeded in getting a seat directly behind his men without apparently having been observed by them.

They had not started without an ample supply of liquid refreshments, and both indulged liberally, but not to such an extent as to loosen their tongues.

Jet listened eagerly, but not a word of particular interest or importance to him could he hear.

Owing to several delays, it was nightfall before the train reached Plattsburgh, and now came the hardest part of the amateur detective's task.

It was necessary to keep the men in sight, and yet at the same time avoid being seen by them.

He was convinced that it would be necessary for him to stand watch all night; but fortune favored him in a signal manner.

Observing Bob going toward the ticket-office, he slipped through the crowd, and heard the following conversation:

"When does the next train leave for Saranac Lake?"

"Seven to-morrow morning."

"From what depot?"

"This one."

"What is the fare?"

"Three thirty-five."

"Give me two tickets."

"I reckon that's enough for me," Jet said to himself, joyfully. "There's no question about where they are going, and I can do as I please until morning."

After Bob left the window to rejoin Sam, the boy purchased a ticket for the same point, and then went to a small hotel near the depot where he registered as David Small.

The two men had evidently sought shelter elsewhere, for he saw nothing of them during the evening.

After a hearty supper, which was all the more needed, because he had refrained from buying dinner, in order to husband his rapidly decreasing store of cash, Jet wrote a long letter to Harvey, telling him all he had learned, and urging that some officer be sent to Saranac Lake in order to make the arrest.

"I shall keep on their track as long as I can," he said in conclusion; "but after they get into the woods it's going to be a hard job, and the sooner they are pulled the more certain we'll be of having them."

This done he went to bed and slept soundly until awakened at six o'clock.

Half an hour later he was at the depot, and took a seat in the smoking-car.

Neither Bob nor Sam were there; but they arrived five minutes before the train left, and seated themselves some distance from Jet.

From that time until considerably past noon the boy could do no more than watch his men; but he was well content, knowing they had no suspicion as to being followed.

Then the end of the first stage of the journey was finished, and the real work of trailing the human game began.

Jet loitered around the station asking questions relative to the best way of getting into the woods, but all the while keeping his eye on the men.

Their movements puzzled him.

Neither appeared to be in any hurry to leave the town.

They also asked a number of questions; but Jet was not near enough to overhear the conversation, and then both went to the hotel.

A boy about his own age was standing near the depot platform eying Jet curiously, and the latter asked, more as an excuse for remaining where he was than anything else.

"Do you know where a fellow could find some good hunting?"

"You'd have to go down to the lake, and strike into the woods most anywhere."

"Where is the lake?"

"Down that road a couple of miles."

"Isn't there any other way of getting into the woods?"

"Not unless you strike through the fields, an' then you'd be goin' right away from the best hunting. There's a fork in the road a little more than a mile down, an' the people mostly take the right-hand turn. How far are you countin' on traveling?"

"I don't know; just want to have a little trip."

"I don't reckon you want a guide, eh?"

"I guess I couldn't stand anything quite so expensive. I heard one of them fellers say he wanted, three dollars a day."

"Yes, some of 'em get pretty big prices; but I'd put myself alongside of the best, 'less it comes to deers."

"And how much do you charge?"

"I'll go for nothin', if you'll pay the bills."

"Bills for what?"

"Grub, hire of a boat, powder an' shot, an' sich things."

"Have you got a gun?"

"Of course; but she's not so good as your'n."

"I'll take you along. When will you be ready?"

"In five minutes; I've only got to run home a second to get some things."

"Don't be away any longer than you can help."

The boy started off at full speed; and Jet congratulated himself on having made the arrangement.

"That fellow can do a good deal to help me, and since he lives around here, Bob won't recognize me so quick, because he'll be apt to take me for one of the natives."

Jet's guide returned in a very short time.

He brought with him several fishing-lines, an old muzzle-loading gun, some cooking utensils, and a small bundle of provisions.

"Now, you've got to buy a lot of grub, an' then we'll have so much to carry that a team will be needed to haul 'em. I know where we can get a boat."

"I'll stay here while you pick out as much as we'll need; but don't spend more'n ten dollars."

"Ten dollars! Why, half of that'll be enough."

"Go ahead, an' call me when you've found out how much the bill is."

"Why don't you come, too?"

"I didn't know but I might see a friend, an' I want to kinder watch out for a while."

The boy hurried away, and returned half an hour later.

"The stuff comes to six dollars an' eighty cents, an' we'll have to pay a dollar to get it hauled down."

Jet was averse to losing sight of the hotel door even for a moment; but it was necessary to settle the bill, and he hurried off just as the stage drove up.

He paid the amount asked for, and had turned toward the store door when he saw Bob and Sam, with guns, rods, and quite an amount of baggage, clambering on the roof of the coach.

"Hurry up an' get your team," he said, in a low tone to his new friend. "I'd like to know where that stage stops."

"I can show you any time," the boy replied, carelessly; but he obeyed the injunction, and in a few moments after the public conveyance rolled away the amateur detective was following it.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SMALL GUIDE

The driver of the vehicle which Jet had hired did not seem disposed to push his sorry-looking horse to his utmost speed, and the boy experienced no slight amount of mental anxiety through fear that the men would escape him.

Once they entered the woods without his having some idea of their course, the chase would be well-nigh hopeless.

His small guide commenced the process of becoming acquainted by asking Jet's name.

"David Small," was the prompt reply. "What's your's?"

"Jim Crosby."

Then Jet was obliged to explain considerably more about himself; he said he lived in Albany, sold

news papers there, and, having laid by a little money, concluded to see what the Adirondack region looked like.

"If you don't have to go back too soon, I'll show you the whole place," Jim replied, with an air of profound wisdom such as one might have expected from the oldest inhabitant in the vicinity.

Then the small guide went on to explain where he proposed to take his friend and patron, and before his recital was finished the wagon stopped at the lake side.

Here everything was in a state of seeming confusion. Sportsmen and tourists were setting out for their respective destinations; but Jet had no thought for any, save the two he had followed so far.

"You hire a boat, and I'll stay here," he said to Jim, who hurried away, leaving him where he could see all who left the shore by the water-way.

Again fortune favored him.

Bob and Sam had just concluded their arrangements for a craft, and were loading it not more than twenty yards away.

Before Jim returned they had started alone.

These two who thought more of hiding themselves than of hunting or fishing, did not need a guide.

Jet kept his eyes fixed on them as they rowed leisurely down the lake, and when Jim returned, he said:

"See here, can't we keep about half a mile behind those fellows?"

"What do you want to do that for? They won't know where to find the best sport."

"I've got a particular reason for wanting to see where they stop, an' will make it worth your while."

"Oh, that's all right, I don't want to be paid for anything of the kind! Come on an' help me put this stuff aboard before they get around the point."

Jet was so eager to be off that he did most of the work himself, and Jim promised to take the first trick at the oars.

"Don't pull very fast; I only want to keep them in sight," Jet explained, as he shoved the light craft off and leaped into the stern-sheets.

"You steer, and tell me when we're coming too near, for I can't keep lookin' around. Say, what game are you up to?"

"I don't understand you."

"I reckon you know what I mean. Why do you wanter keep on the track of that boat?"

"I just had an idea, that's all. They are going without a guide, and I'd like to see how they'll come out."

"There's plenty of them kind of fellers who think they can save money by workin' it alone; but they don't travel very far. What's your other reason?"

Unquestionably Jim was suspicious, and Jet began to study the question of how much he could tell him, for it would soon be necessary to make some more definite explanation.

While he was thus trying to decide, the small guide continued to ply him with questions, until he came to the conclusion that the best plan would be to give a portion of the story, otherwise, in case he met the men, Jim might ask them to solve the riddle.

"If you'll cross your throat never to tell a living person till we get out of the woods again, I'll let you into the secret, and what's more, I'll agree to give you twenty dollars, if this job is finished up right."

"Twenty dollars!" the boy repeated, in surprise. "What do you want me to do?" and he turned to look at the boat.

"Nothing just at present but row slowly without turning around. Will you agree not to tell anybody?"

"Of course, an' I'd do a good deal more'n that to earn so much money."

"Then here it is, and if you breathe a single word I wouldn't wonder if you got into jail. I've been hired to watch them fellows till officers can get here and arrest them."

"Then you're a reg'lar detective," Jim cried, breathlessly.

"Hold your tongue, or everybody on the lake will hear you. I ain't anything of the kind. Didn't I say

I'd only been hired to watch them so's to let the officers know where they stop?"

"What have they been doing?"

"I don't reckon it's very much; but somebody in Albany seems to think it'll pay to catch them."

"Why didn't the constables come with you?"

"Because nobody but me knew they'd started for this place. If the men make a camp we can send back word; but if they have the least little idea that we're on their trail there'll be a mighty good chance of our getting our throats cut."

"I'll be still as a fish; but I do wish I knew more about 'em."

"If they are arrested you can find out the whole story."

This promise seemed to satisfy Jim, and he rowed on in silence, probably fancying he was doing some skillful piece of detective work, which might be spoiled by so much as the splashing of the oars.

An hour later the men were taking matters so leisurely that it was necessary the boys should make a pretense of landing in order to remain behind, otherwise their evident loitering would have caused suspicion.

Jet explained this to his companion, and the latter proposed that they utilize the time by cooking dinner.

The boat was run ashore, and Jim soon proved that he was a valuable assistant in the woods by preparing a hot lunch, which to Jet was decidedly palatable.

By the time the meal was ended the men were a couple of miles in advance, and the boys resumed the chase, with Jim still at the oars.

"I'll bet you they are bound for the falls," the guide said, shortly after the second start. "If that's so we'll have to make a carry, an' that can't be done between now and sunset."

"What's a carry?"

"A place where you have to lug your boat for a while, an' it's no fun I'll tell you."

"If they do it, I reckon we can."

"Of course, only it's a lot of work."

"We must expect plenty of that before the money is earned."

That Jim was correct in his surmise was shown later when Bob and Sam turned their craft into the stream which led to Round Lake, and then landed, evidently for the night.

"How near shall we go to them?" Jim asked.

"It won't do to stay too far away, for we must make it appear as if we intended to run down the same stream. We'll hold up here."

Jet steered the craft into an indentation on the shore about a quarter of a mile from where the others had stopped, and at a spot from which he could keep them in view.

"I'll rig up a camp, and you keep your eyes on them while you're getting some of the grub out," the small guide proposed.

The boys made preparations for the night, and while so occupied could see that the men were doing the same.

Then fires were lighted in both camps, and Jet watched the one down stream until his eyes closed in slumber, despite all his efforts to keep them open.

The gray light of dawn could be but faintly seen in the eastern sky when the amateur detective awakened, and his heart was made glad by the sight of a glow from the lower encampment.

"They haven't started yet," he said, as he awakened the guide, "and it stands us in hand to be ready to leave the minute they do."

"Better let 'em get to the carry first. When they keep on down the stream, we'll know where they're headed for, an' can get through in time, for I don't reckon there's a chance of their stayin' on Round Lake."

"There may be, and we mustn't run any risks."

The boys were ready to continue the journey some time before the men gave any sign of leaving camp, and they bustled around first in one direction and then another to make it appear as if they were

doing work of importance, in case the game should be suspicious.

Not until Bob and Sam had been half an hour on their way would Jim consent to start, and that he had been wise in so doing could be seen after the fatiguing labor of "the carry" had been performed.

The fugitives were not more than two hundred yards in advance when the boys came out of the woods with the last load, and Jim said with a chuckle:

"I knowed they'd take the wrong turn, an' we'd been a good bit ahead if it hadn't been for layin' back."

By working slowly the boat was not reloaded until some time after the men were out of sight, and then when she had been pulled to the entrance of Round Lake, Jet insisted on remaining there a while, concealed by the bushes, to watch the movements of the other craft.

"I swow! They are goin' to stop here after all!" Jim exclaimed, as he saw the men turn toward the shore about a mile from the stream. "There's one thing about it, though, they're bound to leave before many days."

"Why?"

"'Cause there's no game 'round here, an' the fishin' ain't anything to speak of."

"I don't reckon they care, so long as the provisions hold out."

"Of course, they can get fish enough, if they only want them to eat; but I never heard of anybody campin' here."

"That's probably the very reason why they stop; no one would think of looking for them where there's so little sport to be had. Now we'll slip down about half-way between here and there, and build our camp."

This time Jet rowed, and his companion steered the little craft to a small point within less than half a mile of where Bob's boat could be seen.

The guide took upon himself the task of building a shelter, and he had a very respectable looking lean-to finished before night.

The boat was drawn up on the shore; the goods stored underneath her, and everything was ready for the night.

Jim caught four fish from the bank, and these he fried in a most appetizing manner, after which the boys rested from their labors.

A camp-fire had been built, and Jet was lying inside the shanty where the smoke would not disturb him, while Jim remained outside to "brighten the blaze" whenever the fuel should bum too low.

Both were enjoying the luxury of repose when an exclamation from the guide caused the amateur detective to glance quickly toward the water's edge.

That which he saw was sufficient to cause his heart to beat rapidly.

Bob, with his gun thrown carelessly over his shoulder, was coming directly toward them.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE VISIT

There could be no question but that the man was coming for the sole and only purpose of paying them a visit, and Jet was quite confident he had grown suspicious he and his companion were being followed.

The boy's first thought was to edge farther into the shanty, in order to prevent his face from being seen so plainly; but he did not dare make very much of a move lest the man should be aware of his purpose.

"He knows what we're here for," Jim whispered, in a tone of fear.

"Don't let him see you think it. Act as if we wasn't talking of anything but hunting and fishing. Remember he'll kill us, if he knows the truth."

This was sufficient to drive away what little self-possession Jim had left, and he stood stupidly

staring at the visitor until Jet said sharply:

"Pick up that hatchet and begin to cut wood; we haven't enough to last over night."

Jim would have obeyed almost any order at that moment. He was so dazed with fear as not to know what he was about, and mechanically he began to do as he was bidden.

Bob advanced leisurely, looked carelessly around at the boat, the stack of provisions and the weapons, after which he asked, much as if it was really a matter of no concern to him:

"Come up here on a hunting trip, eh?"

"More for fishing than anything else," Jet replied, keeping his face in the shadow as much as possible.

"Is this a good place for that kind of sport?"

"We haven't had a chance to find out yet; but my chum caught four from the shore just after we landed."

"Do you live anywhere around here?"

"I'm from Plattsburgh; but Jim lives at the village of Saranac Lake."

"Then he ought to be acquainted with the best fishing grounds."

"He thinks he is, and wanted me to keep on into the upper lake; but after that long carry I thought I'd had enough of such work, and so we've hauled up here a while."

"Going to stay long?"

"I don't reckon we can be away more'n a week."

"Do many of the visitors stop on this lake?" Bob asked, as he turned to Jim, and Jet took advantage of the opportunity to move farther inside the shanty.

"No, sir, they mostly keep farther on. This place has been fished over so much that there's no fun for the city chaps what wanter catch big fellows."

Under Jet's example Jim was rapidly recovering his presence of mind, and since the visitor did not immediately set about killing them, he dared to look him in the face.

This answer seemed to please Bob, and Jet could readily understand why.

He gazed around once more, and then started back, much to the relief of his hosts.

Jim attempted to say something a moment afterward, but Jet interrupted him by crying loudly:

"Don't you think we'd better try to fix this camp up a little more before night?"

"Why, she's good enough," Jim replied, in surprise, as he came to the front of the hut, which gave Jet the opportunity to whisper:

"Don't you dare to say a word about him yet a while. There's no knowing how near he may be."

It was fully a quarter of an hour before the small guide ventured to speak again, and then Jet had seen both the men on the shore in front of their hut.

"You can talk now," he said, as he rose to his feet; "but in the future be mighty careful where those fellows are before opening your mouth about them. What were you going to say?"

"I don't know now; you frightened it out of my head. I swow! but I thought he'd come over to raise the very old Harry with us."

"It wasn't pleasant to see him so near; but now I'm glad he made the visit, for I don't think he suspects anything, and won't have a reason to prowl around. We must spend a good deal of time fishing tomorrow."

"Why don't you send word for them fellers to come up an' nab him?"

"Perhaps we will to-morrow, if they are still here; but you must remember that it isn't yet certain they'll stay very long, and by the time the officers arrived both might be out of the way."

"Of course, you've got the management of this job; but, if it was in my hands, I'd want to have it over as soon as I could."

"So do I; but at the same time it won't do to make a mistake. How long would it take you to walk back to the village, if I rowed you to the falls?"

"Pretty nigh one whole day."

"Would you go up there and send a telegram?"

"Couldn't you come to?"

"No, because they might leave while we were gone."

"Then I s'pose I'd have to do it," Jim replied; but it could readily be seen that he did not care for such a job.

Without saying anything to his companion, Jet decided that if the men should be in this camp on the morning of the second day he would send Jim to the village, and take the chances of their concluding to make a change of location.

Surely Bob would not think of starting off that night, therefore the amateur detective felt it was safe for him to take all the rest he needed, and, after a hearty supper, he and Jim turned in.

The sun was an hour high in the heavens when the boys awakened next morning.

As a matter of course the first thought of both was regarding the game they were watching, and their gaze was at once directed toward the other camp.

Both men could be seen lounging around the fire, and Jet said in a tone of relief:

"It's all right so far. If they are there to-morrow you shall go back."

Jim made no protest unless one might have been read in the expression of his face.

This second day in the woods was spent in a lazy fashion by the occupants of both camps.

It was nearly noon before Jim and his companion were ready to go out fishing, and then the sport was so dull that they did not remain very long.

Half a dozen medium-sized fish was the only result of their labor, and these the guide proposed to roast, because, as he explained, it would save the trouble of cleaning them.

He set about the task in the most approved backwoods style, and succeeded in bringing forth a most acceptable dish.

After this meal the boys did nothing, save watch their neighbors, and when night came Jet began to discuss the details of the return trip, for he was now confident the men were permanently located.

"Go right to the telegraph office as soon as you get home," he said to Jim, "and if the operator asks who sent the message say it was some one you met in the woods who hired you to bring it."

"S'posen he won't take it?"

"There's no danger of that. I'll give you the money, and he'll be bound to do as you say."

"You'll have to stay here all night alone, for, of course, I can't get back the same day."

"I shan't mind it, except that I may be lonesome; but I mustn't think of such a thing now."

Jim brought up various reasons why it would be better both should go; but Jet would not listen to them, and when they laid down to sleep it was understood that the guide would start at an early hour.

Next morning shortly after sunrise Bob and Sam were seen cooking breakfast, and Jet wrote the following message to Harvey:

"Come at once to Saranac lake, and hire a boat to Round Lake. I will watch for you."

When this had been done the amateur detective suddenly realized that if both he and Jim should set out in the craft and but one returned, it might arouse suspicion, therefore he said to the guide:

"It won't pay to run any risks, and you'll have to walk the whole distance. Here's money enough so you can buy anything you think we may need."

He handed Jim three dollars, and that young gentleman was so delighted at having such an amount to spend as he saw fit that all objections to the journey were forgotten.

"Go up along fast as possible; you can take your time coming back," Jet said, as his companion, shouldering the muzzle-loader, was ready to set out, "and don't delay sending that message."

"I'll fix things in great shape," was the confident reply, and then the small guide disappeared amid the foliage.

During the next hour Jet bustled around considerably more than was necessary, in order to make it appear as if both he and Jim were there, and as a means of causing the time to pass more quickly, attempted to cook an elaborate dinner.

This was a failure, however, owing to his lack of skill, and he dined on boiled potatoes, which were not particularly palatable, owing to the fact that they had been thoroughly scorched.

The men appeared to be well contented with their camp. They lounged around near the shore, but without showing any desire to fish, and otherwise behaved as if determined to remain.

When night came Jet felt more than lonely. The night noises of the forest almost frightened him, and only by piling the fire high with wood could he keep his courage screwed to the "sticking point."

He had not slept more than half an hour, and was promising himself a long nap after the sun rose; but when the day dawned he had something more serious to think about.

He watched Bob and Sam as they prepared breakfast, and then, much to his surprise and sorrow, saw them launch the boat, packing into her all their belongings.

"Jimminy! They're going to leave, and I've sent that telegram just at the wrong time. Now, what's to be done?"

There could be no question but that the men were intending to break camp, and, uncertain as to what he should do, Jet watched until all the camp equipage had been stowed on board the craft.

Then they pushed off, rowing leisurely down the lake, and again Jet asked himself what should be done.

To pursue them in the boat, no matter how far in the rear he might keep himself, would simply be to tell the men he intended to watch them, and, unfamiliar as he was with the country or woodcraft, it seemed both foolish and dangerous to follow on land.

Not until those he so ardently wished to keep in sight had rowed fully a mile away did he arrive at any decision, and then he said to himself:

"There's no other way out of it. I must go on, and take the chances. I only hope when Jim comes back he won't be such a fool as to pull down the lake in search of me, for they'd be certain to see him."

Filling his pockets with cartridges, and wrapping in a paper a small stock of provisions, he set off, only to come back a moment later and write on a piece torn from a paste board box:

"I have had to go down the lake. Wait here for me."

This he fastened to a tree where Jim would be most likely to see it immediately on his arrival, and then he started for the second time.

When Jet set out, the boat containing the men was a long distance in advance heading directly toward the lower end of the lake where were a number of small islands.

At first it had seemed a simple thing to follow a craft by keeping close to the edge of the water; but in a short time he learned the difference to his cost.

CHAPTER XXIV

A STERN CHASE

For a certain distance Jet could walk through the fringe of bushes growing at the water's edge, enabled to see the boat and its occupants distinctly, and then a bit of marsh or small stream would force him to a detour of a mile or more.

"At this rate, I'm making about three times the distance they have to," he said, as he staggered across a shallow water-course so laden with the provisions, and the gun that he could not hold the branches back from his face, and thus received many a severe blow. "Most likely the next time I get to the edge of the lake they will be behind one of those islands, and then what's to be done?"

The catastrophe he feared did not occur quite as soon as he feared, although it came finally.

Twice more he saw the little craft, Sam rowing and Bob steering, and then she had disappeared.

By this time he was so near the outlet of the lake that it was impossible to say whether the men had crossed over into Upper Saranac, or were making camp near by.

During half an hour Jet sat concealed by the bushes where he could have a full view of the water, and no sign of life met his anxious gaze.

The only benefit derived from this halt was that he had lightened the bundle of provisions by making a hearty meal from a portion of its contents, and enjoyed the repose.

"There's no question but that they have either gone into camp on one of the islands, or kept on through the stream," he said, as he rose to his feet; "but I declare I don't know which way to turn."

He finally decided to walk to the outlet, scanning the shores of the island as he passed, and, failing in seeing any signs there, continue on until nightfall.

He tramped steadily for an hour without finding that for which he sought, and by this time was at the carry with the gloom of night settling rapidly around him.

Added to the desolateness of the situation was the sorrow caused by the belief that he had lost the trail at the very time when allowing Harvey to believe the men were where they could be arrested without difficulty.

"If I hadn't sent that telegram," he thought, mournfully, "Jim would have been here to help keep them in sight, or, if we lost them entirely as I have done, he'd have some sort of an idea where they went to."

The thought of the small guide gave him a new idea.

"I'll go back to our camp, if it takes all night," he said, resolutely, turning his face in the direction he believed it was located. "We can come down in the boat and find out whether they stopped on one of the islands."

Now he walked rapidly, in order to cover as much ground as possible before it grew so dark as to shut out surrounding objects from view.

Weary as he was, and owing to the broken ground, his progress was exceedingly slow, and night had fully shut her black curtain down before he reached the edge of the lake.

Then he was forced to proceed at a snail's pace, lest he inadvertantly walked into one of the small streams; but he continued manfully on until it was no longer possible to take another step.

Now came the alarming knowledge that he was lost.

Had he been going in the right direction he should have reached the lake before sunset, and it could not then be less than nine o'clock.

He was no longer able to find the stream which had served him as guide, and stretched himself on the ground at the foot of a gigantic tree feeling as if it made but little difference whether he ever arose again or not.

In utter despair he remained silent and motionless until slumber came to his relief, and he remained wrapped in blissful unconsciousness for several hours.

When he awoke it was yet dark, and he was benumbed with the chill which came from the damp earth.

"There's no need of freezing to death, if I am lost," he said to himself. "Things are so bad now that they can't be much worse, and I may as well make the best of a bad bargain."

By feeling carefully around he succeeded in getting together a small quantity of decaying wood, and this he lighted after some difficulty.

"It's lucky I had to cook dinner to-day, or I shouldn't have had a match," he said, grimly, as he sat about gathering more fuel.

In a short time he had a cheerful blaze, and the warmth, which was so grateful, served to revive his courage.

Slowly the hours passed.

Now and then he fell into a light slumber, but only for a few moments at a time, and it seemed as if forty hours must have elapsed before the sun lightened the sky again.

Toasting some of the crackers on the coals, and refreshing himself with water from a tiny stream, he made ready to continue his search.

Now he took his bearings carefully, with the sun as a guide, and, knowing the lake must lie to the west, pushed straight across the wilderness.

One, two, three hours, and then his heart was made glad by a glimpse of the water.

Never had anything looked as beautiful as did the lake at that moment.

He ran to the bank, and looked out through the bushes.

He was nearly opposite the islands, at the exact spot where the trail was lost on the previous afternoon.

To reach the camp it would be necessary to travel the greater portion of the day, and the important question was as to whether Jim would remain quietly there until he returned.

"There's no use thinking about it; I've got to take the chances," he said, resolutely to himself, and the weary march was resumed.

More than once before the journey came to an end was he tempted to give himself up to the rest he so sadly needed; but the thought that he might be forced to spend another night in the woods alone without a shelter, prevented him from giving way.

The last of the provisions were eaten for dinner.

A halt of half an hour was indulged in, and then he trudged forward once more, traveling a trifle more easily since one of his hands was now free.

It was late in the afternoon when he finally arrived within sight of the encampment; but there were no signs of Jim.

Before reaching the shanty he shouted loudly, receiving no reply, save the mocking echoes.

Now he ran the short distance remaining, and looked around eagerly.

Everything was apparently as he had left them. The notice was still fastened to the trunk of the tree.

The store of provisions was untouched, and he went to the water's edge.

The boat had not been launched, and this in itself was sufficient to show the small guide had not returned.

It was time he arrived, even supposing he remained over night at his home, as had been intimated, and the only reason for delay which he could imagine was that the young gentleman's parents refused to let him continue the hunting trip.

If that had been the case it seemed strange he did not come back to let Jet know he could no longer act as guide and assistant detective.

Thoroughly disheartened Jet threw himself on the ground near the front of the shanty, trying to decide what he could do; when the sound as of some person forcing his way through the underbrush caused a look of joy to come over his face.

An instant later it was replaced by one of disappointment.

Instead of seeing Jim as he had hoped, a very disreputable-looking stranger came from the direction of the upper carry, approaching Jet with a careless "Howdy?"

"Good afternoon," Jet responded.

"Out here on a fishin' trip, eh?"

"Yes, something of that sort."

"Been 'round long?"

"A few days."

"I reckon you don't want to hire a good guide, who can beat any one in this section cooking, eh?"

"No, and I haven't got the money if I did want to."

"I'd go mighty cheap seein's how business is dull."

Jet shook his head.

"Well, there's no harm done. I don't reckon you'd kick agin givin' a feller a bite, eh?"

"Help yourself; the provisions are under the boat."

The stranger proceeded to overhaul the outfit in the most matter-of-fact way possible, even grumbling because certain articles he evidently expected were not to be found.

"How would it do, if I got up a dinner for both of us?" he finally asked.

"All right, go ahead."

It made very little difference to Jet what the fellow did so long as he left him free to think the matter over, and he paid no attention to his movements.

After an hour had passed the stranger invited Jet to "fill up" from his own stock of provisions, and as he accepted the invitation the boy discovered that whatever this man might think of his abilities, he was certainly a very poor cook.

"I'd a-done better if you'd had more stuff," he said, half-apologetically, and then he began an attack on the food which speedily emptied the dishes.

The visitor made no move toward clearing away the cooking utensils; but leaving them where they were last used, proceeded to fill his pipe.

Then he stretched himself out inside the shanty, and took, as he said, "solid enjoyment."

"I allow there's no reason why I can't stay here till morning, eh?"

Much as Jet disliked the proposed companionship, he could not well refuse the request, therefore he gave consent with rather an ill-will.

"Seen anybody else huntin' 'round here?" the fellow asked, after a pause.

"There were two men camping down there a bit, but they left yesterday."

"When did they come?"

"Three or four days ago."

"Do you know where they went?"

Jet fervently wished he did; but he simply answered "no."

The visitor appeared deeply interested in these men; but his host showed such a disinclination to talk that he finally relapsed into silence.

Jet soon fell asleep, and was so tired that he did not awaken again until an hour or more after sunrise.

To his delight the stranger was no longer, there.

He glanced around leisurely, and to his surprise found that more than the man had disappeared.

The boat, his gun, the store of provisions, and even the pot and frying-pan had taken their departure.

"The thief!" he cried, leaping to his feet, and then a thought which was little less than an inspiration came to him.

"He is one of Bob's gang. That is why he wanted to know so much when I spoke of two men. Jabe probably told him where Bob and Sam were bound for, and he came here hunting them."

CHAPTER XXV

JIM

The idea that he had been tricked by one of the gang he was hoping to run down seemed particularly humiliating, and during at least five minutes Jet stood silent and motionless gazing across the lake.

Then anger took the place of bewilderment, and he managed to say some very vigorous things which might have excited the ire of the gentleman who claimed to be such a skillful cook had he been there to hear.

Scolding doesn't as a rule, make any material difference in a fellow's situation, and this Jet came to understand when he was forced to cease from sheer lack of breath.

"What a fool I'm making of myself!" he exclaimed. "The idea of standing here raving when I ought to be trying to mend matters."

It was difficult, however, when he began to reflect, to decide upon his course.

Should he go toward the town in search of Jim, and also to hire another boat?

That would involve the loss of two days, during which time the officer for whom he had telegraphed might arrive, and, failing to find him, go down the lake on a wild goose chase.

To attempt to search for the men, alone and on foot, seemed the height of folly, and while he stood near the water's edge deliberating upon the question of whether he could replenish his stock of provisions without paying a visit to the settlement, the rustling of the bushes proclaimed an arrival.

Jet looked around, half expecting to see his seedy friend of the previous evening come back to tell him it was all a joke, when the small guide Jim stepped into view.

He was evidently in the best of spirits, and gazed at Jet as if wondering why he was not welcomed more warmly.

"I've made two dollars, though I ain't got 'em yet, since I've been gone," he said, as he threw on the ground in front of the shanty a well-filled bag, "an' now there's as much grub in camp as will last us for a month, providin' we do a little cookin'."

"What made you stay so long?"

"Why, you see, it was to earn the two dollars I was tellin' about. I met a feller the other side of the carry what was askin' if I'd seen two men 'round here fishin', an' we had a real sociable talk——"

"Was that when you were going up to the village?" Jet interrupted.

"Of course."

"And the fellow had black whiskers on his chin, and said he was a guide and cook."

"That's the very one. Have you seen him?"

"I will tell you after your story is finished."

"Well we had a right nice time together. I gave him part of my lunch, an' then he wanted me to come back with him; but I told him I'd got to get to the telegraph office——"

"Did you let him know what you were going there for?" Jet asked, excitedly.

"Of course not, though he tried mighty hard to find out. He was lookin' for a party what's coming through the carry in a day or two, an' has got a job with 'em at four dollars a day. He said they was over to Pine Pond, an' promised to give me two dollars, if I'd see if I could find 'em."

"Why didn't he go?" Jet asked, in a peculiar tone.

"'Cause he didn't know the way."

"Funny kind of a guide not to be better acquainted than a boy who never attempted anything of the kind."

"Well, you see, the most of his work has been done 'round Raquette Lake way."

"So you went over to the pond for him?"

"Yes, it wouldn't take me so very much longer, an' it was earnin' two dollars mighty easy."

"But what about the telegram?"

"Oh, that's all right. He offered to carry it to the village for me, an' to pay the charges out of his own pocket, though it was to be taken from what he owed me when I got back."

"And you gave it to him?" Jet asked, his face growing very pale.

"Yes, it would get there jest the same, an' I'd be helpin' buy the grub," Jim replied, in a matter-of-fact tone, wholly unconscious of the black looks Jet was bestowing upon him. "I couldn't find anybody 'round the pond, an' I reckon the party must have come that very day, for when I got back to the village the man wasn't there; but I'll have the money when he finishes the job."

"Did you ask the telegraph operator if the message had been sent?"

"No; what was the use of that so long as he'd promised to fix everything? But say," Jim cried, suddenly, as he looked toward the water's edge, "where's the boat?"

"Your friend, the Raquette Lake guide borrowed her this morning."

"So he's been here, eh? Did he say anything about meetin' me?"

"Not a word," Jet replied, grimly. "I guess he was too busy getting ready to leave, for he had to pack all our provisions, my gun and the other things which were lying around into the boat."

"What do you mean?" Jim cried, as he gazed about him and failed to see any of their outfit.

"I reckon he's gone to Raquette Lake with the two fellows who were camping over on the point."

"Have they skipped?" and now Jim's eyes were opened very wide.

"Went yesterday morning bag and baggage."

"What'll we do when the officer comes to arrest 'em?"

"See here, Jim, are you so stupid as not to know what has happened?"

"Why don't you tell me?" the guide screamed.

"Because you have been giving me the story. The very jolly fellow you met was a friend of the men I came here to watch; he talked with you long enough to find out that the telegram you were carrying concerned them in some way, and cooked up the yarn about Pine Pond, in order to get hold of it. Then he came down to hunt me, stole the things to prevent our following him, and skipped on to look for his pals."

Jim gazed at his friend with dilated eyes while this explanation was being made, and when Jet concluded, he said in a half-whisper:

"Then I'm to blame for all that has happened?"

"There's no question but you have been the means of informing those fellows what we are here for," was the gloomy reply.

"Do you know where they have gone?"

Jet told of his fruitless journey, and when he concluded, Jim said decidedly:

"They didn't go into the upper lake, if they want to keep out of sight. I'll bet they've landed on Dollar Island."

"Which is that?"

"The one nearest the outlet. It's a good place to camp, and from it they can keep track of everybody coming or going. Suppose that fellow who said he was a guide hasn't found 'em yet?"

"Well, what then?"

"We might catch him before the others find out about the telegram message."

"He has a boat, and we haven't."

"But he's bound to land somewhere, and I know of a trail down this side, which would take us to the outlet in short order. It isn't more'n two miles."

"Are you willing to go and take the chances? Remember if Bob and Sam have learned what we are here for it will likely be a case of life or death with us."

"See here, Dave, I've spoiled all your plans without meanin' to do wrong, an' now I'm ready to take any risks if things can be straightened out. You've got a revolver, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then let's see what can be done."

Jim was thoroughly excited now, and his determination to rectify the error put new life into Jet.

He sprang to his feet at once; reloaded his weapon lest the cartridges should have been dampened during the night in the woods, and while he was thus occupied Jim packed the provisions into a more convenient shape for carrying.

When all was ready, and but a few seconds had been spent in these preparations, Jim led the way to a well defined trail a hundred yards or so from the shore of the lake, saying as he did so:

"It's queer you didn't find this when you were lost."

"I shouldn't have noticed it if I'd come across it, because the most of the tramping was done after dark, and in the morning I thought only of finding the lake."

"We shall see it two or three times before coming to the outlet."

The boys walked at their best pace, Jet carrying Jim's gun, and the latter with the greater portion of

the provisions slung over his shoulder.

At the end of a quarter of an hour the trail brought them to the edge of the lake, and they looked out over the water eagerly, but without seeing any signs of life.

Again their way wound through the woods, and when the journey was a trifle more than two-thirds finished they were within sight of the water once more.

"Unless that fellow has made straight for the upper lake, he ought to be 'round here somewhere, so we'd better not show ourselves," Jim suggested, as he crept cautiously down to the fringe of bushes bordering the banks.

The boys were now where they could see between the cluster of islands to the opposite shore, and after gazing for some time in silence, Jet said, as he pointed directly across the lake:

"Isn't that a line of smoke over there?"

"It is, an' I'll bet our man has made camp to watch for his chums. Let's go over!"

It seemed to be a sort of forlorn hope; but the chances were well worth taking in view of the possible result, and Jet replied:

"Go ahead; but we must keep a good watch of the shores in case that should not be the fellow we are searching for."

Jim hardly needed this caution. Since having done so much harm he was careful to a fault, and many times before reaching the outlet did he run to the edge of the wood to search with his eyes the borders of the lake.

Each time he reported that no one was in sight, and always concluded the information with the assurance:

"I'm certain the two men are on Dollar Island."

The outlet was reached and crossed at the expense of a wetting; but the boys thought nothing of that; it was too trifling a matter to be considered at such a time.

From this on there was no trail to follow, and Jim led the way as near the water's edge as possible.

Finally the moment came when they were so near the thin curl of blue smoke that the utmost care was necessary lest a noise should give token of their approach.

Jim crept through the bushes in the most approved manner of alleged Indian hunters, and when they had thus traveled a couple of hundred yards, he motioned for Jet to look as he parted the foliage in front of him.

There on the shore was the boat which had been stolen, and farther up, near a hastily constructed shelter of branches, sat the man who had promised to send the telegram for the small guide.

CHAPTER XXVI

SUCCESS

The man was sitting in front of a small fire, over which he had evidently been cooking, for the frying-pan was close at hand, and the odor of bacon could be distinguished in the air.

Most likely he had just finished his morning meal, and was now solacing himself with a pipe.

The stolen gun had been leaned against a tree close by the hut, and about a half a dozen yards from its new possessor, but on the opposite side from where the boys were crouching.

"What are you goin' to do?" Jim whispered.

"We've got to get hold of him somehow, and by that means prevent Bob and Sam from knowing what we are about."

Jim nodded to show that he agreed fully in this assertion.

"I don't s'pose you'd dare to shoot him."

"Of course not; that would be murder."

"Then how is it to be fixed?"

Jet studied the situation for several minutes, and whispered:

"We must manage to creep around on the other side, and get hold of the gun first. Then I'll cover him with my revolver, and you must do the same with the other weapon. When he sees that both of us have got the drop on him, I reckon there won't be much trouble in keeping him quiet."

Jim did not stop to argue the matter.

According to his opinion the sooner the job was finished, the better, and he started off at right angles with the camp, Jet following him.

The boys moved so slowly and cautiously that not so much as a leaf was disturbed, and the man by the fire heard nothing to arouse his suspicions.

Jim made a needlessly long detour.

Many times before it was ended Jet felt convinced that the guide had made a mistake, and once he stopped the boy to say so; but the latter replied, in the tone of a fellow who knows perfectly well where he is:

"We're all right. The camp is just over there, and I want to come in sight of the lake once more before turning toward it."

Twenty minutes later Jim pointed ahead with a gesture of triumph.

Jet could see dimly through the foliage the outlines of the hut; but the trees hid the man from view.

Now the progress was even more slow and cautious. It seemed at times as if Jim hardly moved, so afraid was he of making a noise; but the advance was certain, and finally he stopped, motioning for Jet to come beside him.

The two were hardly more than a dozen feet from the weapon, and about the same distance farther away was the man they hoped to make prisoner.

His pipe had gone out, his head was sunk on his breast, and there was every indication of his having fallen asleep.

"Can you get the gun?" Jet whispered.

Jim nodded his head.

"Then creep up to it. I'll have the revolver ready, and jump in if he awakens. In case he's still asleep we'll go toward him until he opens his eyes. Start now," and Jet drew his weapon.

The boys advanced side by side until Jim grasped the gun, and then Jet motioned for him to rise to his feet, he setting the example.

They stepped forward softly, each with his weapon leveled at the half-reclining man, who did not so much as move until the boys were close upon him.

Then he lazily opened his eyes, and turned his head ever so slightly.

"Throw up your hands; but don't make the slightest noise, or I'll shoot you as I would a dog!" Jet said, sternly.

The fellow obeyed the first order with alacrity as he saw the muzzles of the weapons within a few inches of his head, and said in a careless tone:

"I reckon you didn't care about lendin' me your outfit."

"That's just the size of it, and there is other business to be settled."

By this time the prisoner had caught a glimpse of Jim's face, and he added with a smile:

"Come to collect that two dollars, eh?"

"We mustn't stand here chinning," Jet said, as he pressed the muzzle of the revolver to the back of the man's head. "Look around for something to tie him with, Jim, and be quick about it."

"What are you up to now?" the fellow growled.

"It won't take long to find out, and I shall be forced to waste this cartridge if you make any row."

"I thought I was behavin' myself in proper shape."

"So you are just at present; but I am ready for any change of plans, and want you to understand fully how little it would take to induce me to send a bullet into your worthless head."

This was sufficient to silence the prisoner.

"I can't find anything but the boat's painter," Jim cried. "Shall we use that?"

"Yes, and be quick about it."

The rope was soon detached from the craft, and, as Jim approached with it, Jet said to the man:

"Now put your hands behind you."

This order was obeyed without a murmur, and the small guide began to tie them securely.

The painter was of sufficient length to serve as bonds for the fellow's legs also, and when he was thus trussed up Jet began fashioning a gag from a piece of pine wood.

Having had this instrument of torture applied to himself on two occasions, he was well prepared to put it on in a proper fashion, although the prisoner begged abjectly to be spared the indignity.

"We have got to take care of ourselves, and I wouldn't trust to your oath if you should swear from now till Christmas."

When it was impossible for the fellow to move or speak, Jet made a thorough search of his clothing, and succeeded in finding, among several unimportant things, the telegram Jim had supposed was sent many hours ago.

"It hasn't been a bad forenoon's work," the amateur detective said, as he wiped the perspiration from his face, for the mental anxiety of the past few hours had caused the big drops to flow down his cheeks as the heat of the sun never could have done.

"What are we going to do with him?"

"Take him back to the camp, of course. It won't pay to let him out of our sight until the officers take charge of affairs."

Before making preparations for the return, Jet scanned closely the shores of the islands, which were situated nearer the opposite side of the lake, hoping to discover some signs of Bob and Sam; but in this he was disappointed.

Nothing in the shape of a boat could be seen, and he said to the small guide:

"I'm afraid they have gone into the other lake."

"It doesn't seem reasonable, and I shan't believe it until we have searched over all those islands."

"How can we do that now we've got this fellow to look out for."

"That's what you must figger out; I'm willin' to carry out whatever you say."

"Of course the first thing is to get back to the camp. Do you suppose we can load that fellow into the boat so in case the men are where our movements may be seen they won't suspect it is a human being."

"Cover him over with a lot of pine boughs."

"That's the idea. Come on; we have no time to lose, for we must do something toward finding the others before night."

Jim hastily gathered an armful of branches and threw them over the prisoner, completely concealing his form, and then the boys carried him to the boat much as if he had been nothing more than a log of wood.

The fellow was laid in the bottom of the craft, and around him were packed the goods he had stolen from the camp.

"It will load the old boat down pretty heavy; but there's no wind blowing, an' we shan't have a very hard pull back," Jim said, as he took his place at the oars, leaving Jet to push off.

It was not much past noon when the start was effected, and the boys had the supreme satisfaction of knowing that the most important of their human game had not been warned of what was being done.

"Say, how would it do to move our camp down opposite Dollar Island after dark?" Jim asked, when they were some distance from the shore. "We could then take the chances of running over to search the place, and wouldn't have so far to go."

"We'll try it," Jet replied, as he steered the boat away from the islands.

When the two arrived at the camp the prisoner was carried into the shanty, and there so covered with boughs and blankets that any one passing would not have had any suspicion a human being was concealed in the vicinity.

A hearty dinner was next on the programme, and then arrangements were made for moving camp.

Jim thought they would not be warranted in building a shanty at the proposed halting-place, unless loose brush could be found, since the noise of an axe might betray their whereabouts, and he also decided against a fire.

"I'll cook up a lot of stuff this afternoon," he said, "and then we must get along with cold grub. Can't you catch some fish while I'm working over there?"

Jet rowed the boat a short distance out into the lake, and soon had all he could do to attend to his line, so rapidly did the finny denizens of the water attack the bait.

He brought ashore as many as would serve them for food during the next three days, and the small guide cooked every one.

All this work was not completed until after nightfall, and Jim was eager to be off.

"It is so dark that they can't see us now," he said, "and after the moon rises things will be different."

"We'll feed the prisoner, for I reckon he needs something by this time."

Jet removed the gag, while Jim stood over the fellow with a cocked revolver, and a plentiful supply of fish, bacon, and water was put in his mouth, after which he was "bottled up" again, as the guide expressed it.

The craft was loaded as before; but this time Jet took the oars, because Jim was so well acquainted with the lake that he was needed at the helm.

"Be careful not to run too near the islands," the amateur detective said, as he made ready for work, "and after we start not a word must be spoken, for sound travels farther on the water than the land."

"Don't pull too hard, and be careful about splashing with the oars."

"Shove off, I'm ready."

During the next hour nothing was said. The little boat moved silently through the waters, and at the end of this time Jet could see the loom of the islands on the right.

They were near the proposed camping-place, and every precaution should be observed.

Suddenly Jim leaned forward, touched his companion on the arm, and pointed to the right.

A light as from a camp-fire could be seen among the trees, and the small guide whispered triumphantly:

"I told you they were there."

"Then we must contrive to get hold of one or both in the morning. It won't pay to wait for the officers."

CHAPTER XXVII

RECONNOITERING

The small guide steered the boat into the mouth of a tiny creek as skillfully as if it had been noonday, and when her bow grounded motioned for Jet to step ashore.

Then he followed the example and hauled her farther up to prevent any possibility of the craft's drifting away, after which he stood motionless as if awaiting orders.

"How far from here do you count on camping?" Jet asked, in a cautious whisper.

"A short bit straight back is a thick clump of cedars. We could stay there a month without being seen, no matter how many people might come on the lake."

"Take hold of the fellow's feet, and I'll carry his head. He'd better be taken care of first."

Jim obeyed, and thus loaded down led the way to the place he had described.

It was, indeed, just such a spot as Jet would have asked for.

The cedars, with their branches growing to the very ground, covered about fifty square feet of

space, and through the center of this apparently impenetrable thickness ran the stream at whose mouth the boat had been brought.

It would not have been possible to put up a decently-sized shanty, because the trees were so near together; but there was ample opportunity for a hundred boys to find comfortable places in which to sleep, and the foliage would shelter them sufficiently well except in case of a rainstorm.

Although it hardly seemed necessary, Jet insisted that the prisoner should be made fast to one of the trees in a sitting posture, and not until this had been done was the balance of the work attended to.

First the provisions were carried into the natural camp, and stored in the center, then the other goods were cared for in the same manner, and nothing but the boat remained to mark their landing.

"It's goin' to be a hard job; but she's got to come here too," Jim said, when they stopped for a moment to rest.

"Do you think we can do it?"

"Oh, yes, she isn't so heavy but that we could take her around a carry, and I reckon it's to be done here."

"How long before the moon rises?"

"Somewhere about midnight."

"Then suppose we try to find out for certain if those camping on Dollar Island are the ones we want to keep in sight?"

"I'm willing if you say the word."

"Then come on. That fellow is safe enough, and we shall be just so much farther ahead with our work."

Jim led the way back to the boat, removed his shoes and stockings as a precaution against making a noise, Jet doing the same, and the two started, with the small guide paddling instead of rowing.

The faint glimmer of light served as a beacon, and toward it they advanced slowly until the boat's bow struck the shore.

Jim motioned for his companion to help him pull her up, and then stole through the woods as noiselessly as a shadow.

The gloom was so dense that it was necessary Jet should hold on to the leader's coat, otherwise they would speedily have been separated, and a watcher ten feet away could not have said a human being was passing.

Thanks to the fire-light, it was not a difficult matter for the two to go straight to the camp, and in a comparatively short time they were where it was possible not only to see the occupants, but to hear everything which was said.

Jet's spirits rose very high as he recognized the two he had followed so long, and now all previous discomforts and suffering were forgotten in the knowledge that he was once more carrying out Harvey's instructions to the letter.

The men had built quite a comfortable looking hut in the center of the island, where it would not be seen from the water, and near by was the boat, turned bottom-up as if they did not expect to use her for some time.

The fact that they allowed themselves a camp-fire at a time when it could be distinguished from a distance was probably owing to the fact that visitors seldom visited this particular lake after dark, since the absence of deer in the vicinity prevented hunters from scouring the banks with a jack light.

Both were ready for trouble, however, as could be told by the guns stacked within reach while they smoked and drank in front of the cheery blaze, and Jet was forced to admit to himself that these men could not be made prisoners with as much ease as in case of the other.

For some time the boys watched in silence, mentally jotting down all the details of the camp for future reference, and then Sam said, with a yawn:

"This is what I call mighty dull sport."

"It ain't very lively, for a fact; but I reckon it's way ahead of what poor Joe's having."

"If it's so bad now what will it be in another week? I don't think I can stand it very long."

"There's nothin' to prevent your goin' any time you get ready; but here I stay for quite a spell."

"What about more liquor an' grub?"

"There won't be any trouble in getting all we want as long as the money holds out."

"And by fall you'll have bark on your back."

"Better than a striped coat. It isn't so bad as you make out, though. We can move our camp whenever we feel like a change, an' then there's plenty of fishin' an' sich like that the swells call sport."

Sam's only reply was another prolonged yawn as he stretched himself out at full length, and Bob replenished the fire without moving from his seat.

Jet understood that it was time for them to take their departure.

When the men got ready to turn in for the night, one or the other might take a fancy to have a look around to make sure they had no unwelcome visitors, in which case the spies would be discovered.

Motioning Jim to follow his example, he started toward the shore, moving at a snail's pace to prevent a noisy disturbance among the foliage, and not until they were in the boat once more paddling toward the opposite bank did he feel at liberty to draw a long breath.

Arriving at the point from which they started, Jim insisted on carrying the boat to the clump of cedars, and this required so much time and labor that it was nearly midnight before they could seek the well-earned rest.

Even then Jet took pity on the prisoner, and removed the gag sufficiently long to give him food and water, the small guide standing over him with the cocked revolver, lest he should make an outcry.

"What are you boys countin' on doin' with me?" he asked, when his hunger and thirst had been appeased.

"Deliver you to the officers in a day or two."

"Am I to be kept trussed up in this fashion until then?"

"It's pretty rough, I know; but there's no other way out of it. You'd treat us the same or worse if the tables were turned, and we're bound to take care of ourselves."

"I don't reckon it would do any good if I was to swear I wouldn't so much as yip?"

"Not a bit, for we shouldn't dare run the risk you would break your word."

The prisoner had nothing more to say; but obligingly held his mouth open so that Jet might replace the gag, and after this had been done the boys wrapped themselves in their blankets, lying down in the softest spot they could find.

"How are we ever goin' to get the best of them fellers?" Jim whispered when they were ready to go to sleep.

"I don't know; but we must cook up some kind of a plan."

"Don't you think it would be better to send for the officers, an' let them do the job?"

"I'm afraid the fellows will make another move before anybody could get here. You heard what Sam said, and it shows he is so discontented that he'll be insisting on breaking camp very soon, unless he turns his back on this place entirely."

"That's all right enough; but at the same time I don't see that we can do anything without somebody to help us," Jim said, with a sigh, and then he rolled over as if determined not to rack his brain with the perplexing subject any longer.

Neither of the boys slept very soundly on this night. The fact of the prisoner in their midst, and the problem which they must solve shortly, prevented that feeling of restfulness which is necessary for profound slumber.

The sun had not yet risen when Jet awakened, shook Jim into consciousness, and made his toilet in the tiny stream which wound its way through the camp.

"We'll feed the prisoner the first thing, and then keep watch of the island," Jet proposed, and this task was performed as quickly as possible, neither captive nor jailors indulging in conversation during the operation.

There was to be no cooking, and the boys carried as much food as they thought would afford them a hearty meal to the edge of the water, they crouching behind the bushes with their gaze centered on the spot where they knew the camp to be located.

"Have you thought of anything?" Jim asked, while they were eating the not very palatable meal.

Jet shook his head despairingly.

Half an hour passed, and neither spoke.

Then both started as if electrified, for they saw both the men approaching the shore of the island nearest the main land.

"They heard us last night, and are comin' over here to see who has come," Jim whispered, his face growing pale.

It certainly looked as if he had guessed correctly, and Jet drew his revolver.

The men were carrying the boat between them, and on reaching the water launched it.

The distance was not so great but that a conversation carried on in an ordinary tone could be distinguished from one shore to the other, and the first words spoken by the fellows caused the greatest relief.

"Now, don't fool your time away up there," Bob said, sharply, as Sam took his seat in the boat and pushed her off.

"Why? Do you think this is such a pleasant place that I shouldn't lose the opportunity to stay here as many hours as possible?"

"I think that if you once begin drinking you'll get full, and five minutes afterward every loafer in the village will know we are hiding here."

"You must allow I'm a fool."

"So I do, or you'd be willing to stay twenty-four hours longer without liquor rather than run the first minute the bottle is empty."

"There would be jest as much risk to-morrow, as now, so what's the use waitin' with our tongues hangin' out when plenty can be got by takin' a short walk?"

"When shall I expect you?"

"Some time before mornin'. I'll start back within half an hour after I land."

"If you do that there'll be little harm come to us," and Bob disappeared amid the foliage while Sam rowed vigorously up the pond.

"There is no need of our trying to cook up a plan now," Jet whispered.

"Why?"

"Because it is all arranged. We must tackle Bob before Sam comes back."

Jim appeared thoroughly alarmed by his companion's bold statement.

He looked upon Bob as the most desperate of the three men, as really was the case, and the idea of a struggle with him seemed alarming; but yet he said nothing against the plan.

"What puzzles me is why they launched the boat on this side of the island? They had to bring her way across."

"Perhaps they have seen some one on the opposite shore, and don't care to let folks know where the boat started from."

"Do you suppose that fellow will call at our old camp?"

"I shouldn't be surprised; but it will be too late to do us any harm, unless he comes directly back with the news that we have made a change of base."

"You seem to think there isn't a question but we shall get the best of that fellow."

"I didn't say anything of the kind. We shall either have him prisoner, or be in the same fix ourselves in his camp by the time Sam gets back. Bob will take good care we are not in condition to trouble him again, if we fail this day."

"How are we to set about it?"

"In the same way as the other was taken. Trust to our chances of finding him asleep, or so far from his gun that he can't get at it until we have the drop on him."

"Don't you suppose he carries a revolver?"

"Of course he does."

"Then he'll be certain to shoot."

"This case is different from the other. There I had no right to fire; but here I should take the chances rather than let him kill me."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE STRUGGLE

Jet was talking altogether too boldly to please the small guide, and he began to repent ever having consented to take part in such work.

"It won't do to call on our friend for some time, so let's go back to the thicket and make ready," Jet said, as he arose to his feet, and Jim followed like one who feels positive he is going to his doom.

Once inside the shelter of the trees, the amateur detective set about preparing for the work on hand.

He examined the revolver carefully, greased the lock with a bit of bacon rind, and assured himself that every part worked freely and correctly.

Then he loaded the gun with ball cartridge, and put half a dozen in his pocket. The bacon rind was also used with good effect, and, Jet said, as he slipped a couple of crackers in his coat:

"Now come on, Jim. We may as well sit there as here, and we shall know if he leaves the place."

"He can't unless he swims, for the other fellow has got the boat."

"I forgot that; but anyhow it won't do any harm to be ready. We'll carry the boat down to the bushes on the bank, and that will take some time."

The small guide obeyed.

The craft was taken as near the water as possible without exposing her to view in case Bob should look that way, and then the boys settled down for the last rest before the struggle.

"How long are we to wait here?" Jim asked.

"A couple of hours. He will have all his chores done up by that time, and there's more chance of finding him lying down."

"Why wouldn't it be as well to row around boldly, and make believe we've jest come for a visit? Then when he wasn't looking you could clap your revolver to his head."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't work. In the first place, he'd be pretty certain to recognise me in the daylight—you know my face was half-hidden in the shadow of the shanty when he called at the other camp. Then again I question if any visitors could catch him unawares after first showing themselves. He has reason to know there are a good many hunting for him, and is too old a bird to take chances."

Jim sighed. Almost any plan seemed to him preferable to trying to steal upon a fellow, who would be likely to shoot at the first alarm, and he had little faith in the ultimate success of the undertaking.

Jet waited patiently another hour, and then he said, as a look of resolution came over his face:

"We must start now. If he happens to see us rowing over we must pretend that we came to look at the island, and then get away as soon as possible. In case we land without his knowledge, the thing must be worked exactly as was the other: creep up till we see him, and take advantage of the first chance that offers."

"Shall I carry the gun?"

"No; here is the revolver, and be sure to use it if things get hot. We shall be fighting for our lives when we tackle him."

Jet took hold on one side of the boat, and Jim with an expression of despair on his face, cared for the other, launching the little craft without a splash.

The amateur detective motioned his companion to take up the oars, and then shoved off, leaping lightly on the stern-sheets where he could handle the tiller.

There was no attempt at conversation now, for the utmost silence was necessary if they would land without making their coming known to the man both feared.

Jet steered the boat under an overhanging tree, made the painter fast, and then crept softly onto the bank, leaving his companion to follow.

Since both the boys knew the exact location of the camp, their task was just so much the easier,

and they crept cautiously along in a straight line, but keeping a close watch ahead lest Bob should suddenly appear.

Half an hour after landing they were where the shanty could be seen clearly; but its occupant was not in it.

Jet had begun to fear he might have circled around the island merely for the sake of walking, and would come up in their rear; but this cause for alarm was soon found to be groundless.

Jim espied the man lying under the shade of some trees, where he could have a full view of any who might pass, and pointed him out to Jet.

There was no chance to creep upon him as in the case of the other fellow, for he was unmistakably awake and on the alert.

"We shall have to wait until he changes his position," the boy whispered. "It won't do to tackle him yet a while."

Jim breathed more freely.

Any respite, however brief, was a great relief.

When ten minutes had passed, and there was no change in the position of affairs, Jet said:

"I'm going to creep around the hut, and try to get through the back. The guns are probably there, and it will be a big thing if we get hold of them."

"How long are you goin' to be gone?"

"I don't know; but in case I stay you can make up your mind that I've concluded to do the business there, and when he comes toward the shanty be on your feet ready to jump in the minute you hear my voice."

"Hadn't we better keep together?"

"If there's a good chance to hide, I shall wait and try to get the drop on him from the inside."

Then Jet started off as if fearing his companion might attempt to dissuade him from his purpose.

Bob was so far away that there was no reason for moving with such extreme caution, and he walked rapidly around through the underbrush until the hut was between himself and the man, after which he went boldly forward.

It was not a difficult matter to make his way into the shelter, constructed as it was only of brush, and he entered at once.

The hut was entirely enclosed on all sides, save where a narrow door-way had been left open, and Jet soon realized that he could ask for no better place to attempt the capture.

He found both guns in one corner, and these he carried out, hiding them under the leaves some distance away.

It was well he finished this work quickly, for he had hardly regained the shelter of the shanty when from between the branches he could see Bob rise to his feet, yawn wearily, and then come leisurely up the incline.

The decisive moment had arrived, and only by the greatest exercise of will power could Jet prevent his hands from trembling violently.

Gently pushing the muzzle of the gun through the brush which formed the side of the hut, the boy waited until the man should be within a few feet.

Bob came on in a lounging fashion, looking back every now and then as if undecided what to do, and thus approached the shanty in the exact direction which best served the purpose of his would-be captor.

Not until he was within a couple of yards did Jet shout, as he pushed the muzzle of the gun farther out and took careful aim:

"Hold up your hands, quick! I shall fire at the first move you make."

Bob obeyed instinctively, as any other man would have done in the same position, with that ominous-looking barrel almost touching him.

"Now, remember that the slightest movement will cost you your life, for I shall let both barrels go if you do more than wink. I know what your reputation is, and don't intend to take any chances. Where are you, Jim?"

"Here," was the prompt reply, and Jet saw the small guide coming rapidly from his place of

concealment.

"Stand on one side of that fellow so you won't spoil my aim, and take his revolver away. Be quick, and don't fear his hurting you, for he can't make but one move."

Bob scowled fiercely; but did not dare to offer any resistance. Perhaps if he had known who was behind that gun the case might have been different; but there was every reason to believe an officer held it, and he could not afford to run any risk.

Jim searched the prisoner carefully, and then, when a revolver and a knife had been thrown into the camp, Jet said:

"Now, stand directly behind him with your revolver pressed to the back of his head, and pull the trigger if you feel him move ever so slightly."

Jim was beginning to regain his courage, and obeyed without hesitation.

The amateur detective now came into view, and Bob literally gnashed his teeth in rage.

"I wish I'd known it was you," he cried, savagely.

"Be careful or your head will move so much my friend will shoot; his hand trembles so now that there's danger your brains will be blown out unintentionally."

On first entering the shanty, Jet had seen plenty of ropes with which to bind the prisoner, and these he brought out, lashing Bob's arms behind his back, and tying his legs securely together.

During this last operation, the prisoner struggled most desperately, for Jim's revolver had been lowered in order that he might assist his companion, and before the boys finally got him under subjection they were reeking with perspiration, in addition to being nearly tired out.

"Well," Jim said, triumphantly, as he rose to his feet, "that part of the work was done as slick as grease, and at this rate it won't take us long to wind the whole gang up."

"I'm afraid the hardest job is ahead," Jet replied, as a most unaccountable fit of gloominess came over him. "You know the other makes the third one, and superstitious people believe a fellow always comes to grief on that number."

CHAPTER XXIX

BOB

When Bob was fettered beyond his power to make any resistance he relapsed into a sullen silence, which troubled Jet more than reproaches or threats would have done.

He had expected to be overwhelmed with curses, and fancied the man would rave and struggle uselessly until he was completely worn out; but such was not the fact.

It was much as if Bob had suddenly conceived the idea of reserving his strength until the time should come when he could use it with effect.

He lay silent and motionless on the ground, and when Jet had prepared a gag he was even so complaisant as to open his mouth to receive it.

"S'posen we let up on his legs a little so's he can walk down to the shore," Jim suggested. "He's goin' to make a big load if we try to carry him."

This seemed to be a very good idea, and Jet acted upon it at once, saying to the prisoner:

"If you'll come along quietly we'll treat you the best we can under the circumstances."

Bob did not move.

"Get up," Jet said, in a louder tone, as if believing his first remark was not understood.

Bob shook his head, and there was no mistaking the look on his face as he did so.

He had no intention of aiding his captors in any manner, and if they claimed him as prisoner they must take him by sheer expenditure of strength or not at all.

"There's no use spending time trying to coax or drive him," Jet said, after a long pause. "If he won't walk we've got to carry him, and that's the end of it."

Jim, who had been examining the shanty while resting after the battle, discovered a hammock tucked away in one corner, and he proposed that this should be used as a litter, for the man could be conveyed more easily on something than if the boys raised him simply by the head and feet.

"Roll him in here, and we'll run this pole through the ends so all the weight will be on our shoulders."

This was done at once, and although the prisoner was bent nearly double when the density of the foliage forced the bearers to approach each other closely, the labor of removing him to the boat was greatly lessened.

"There's no chance Sam will be back until late in the night," Jet said, as Bob was deposited in the bottom of the craft with no gentle force, "so we can move about without fear of being discovered, and you might give us a hot dinner."

"We'll take our ease this day, an' that'll put us in better shape for tackling the other feller to-night. If he helps himself to the liquor as he comes down the lake we may have our hands full."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Jet replied, gloomily, and then, recovering himself as with an effort, he added: "There's no use borrowing trouble, however, and we should be mighty thankful we've succeeded so well in getting two of them."

"You can bet I am thankful," Jim replied, with such emphasis that Jet could not prevent himself from laughing heartily.

By this time Bob had been carried to the cedar thicket, and an expression of surprise came over his face as he saw the first prisoner; but Jet did not intend to allow them an opportunity to communicate with each other even by signs.

Bob was made fast to a tree at the farther end of the encampment, where he could not see his former companion, and then Jet went to the first prisoner as he said:

"If you will promise not to speak, I'll take the gag out of your mouth for a while, because we shall likely be here a long time."

There was an expression of deepest thankfulness in the fellow's eyes, and the amateur detective felt reasonably certain that he would not attempt to make any disturbance.

"Now, if I hear you so much as whisper, back it goes," he said, as he removed the uncomfortable preventive of speech.

"You needn't be afraid," was the meek reply. "I'll do anything rather than have that thing put in my mouth agin. How did you get hold of Bob?"

"Took him unawares, as we did you."

"Well, all I can say is, you fellers are corkers!"

This in a tone of admiration. "If any one had told me that a couple of boys could get the best of him, I'd said it was a lie, an' here you sneak off an' bring him in when you get ready."

"We shouldn't have done it if you'd found them."

"That's a fact; but you can't expect that a feller wouldn't help his pals."

"That's all right, since no harm has been done," Jet replied, feeling very magnanimous now he had been so successful.

The boy had every reason to feel proud of what had been accomplished. He had acted as Harvey wished, and, in addition, arrested the man so particularly wanted, with one of his companions.

Now if he could transfer them to the charge of an officer his triumph would be complete, and the detective have good reason to keep his promise relative to employing him as an assistant.

It was the fact of his having been successful, more than anything else, that caused Jet to fear the third attempt at capturing a man would be attended with signal failure, and several times during the day was he tempted to bundle the two into the boat, instead of waiting to make prisoners of all three.

He even went so far as to suggest this to Jim, saying:

"We could get up to the village with these fellows before morning, and I'm not sure it wouldn't be the best plan, for if Sam downs us these will be set free. Then all this work counts for nothing."

"Let's go the whole hog or nothing," the small guide replied, bravely, for he was rapidly beginning to think that he and Jet could accomplish anything they might attempt.

Then Jim set about cooking an elaborate dinner as a sort of thanksgiving.

The fire was built inside the thicket between the two prisoners, so that the boys might keep watch

of both at the same time, and when the food had been prepared Detective Harvey's assistants set themselves down to enjoy it to the utmost.

Then it was necessary to feed the prisoners, a task which required considerable time.

Jim attended to the stranger, while Jet fed Bob, and the latter said, when his gag was removed:

"I reckon you're countin' on turnin' us over to the Albany officers."

"Yes, unless some one comes from New York."

"Ain't you the messenger boy I smuggled up on the boat?"

"Yes. I don't suppose you expected to see me again, eh?"

"I wish I'd done as Joe wanted me to. You could have been thrown over that night, and no one would have been any the wiser."

"Lucky for me you didn't know as much as you do now."

"You can well say that," was the surly reply, and during the next five minutes Bob paid strict attention to receiving the food which Jet held to his lips.

"I wonder if it would be any use to try an' buy you off?" the fellow said, half to himself, when the meal was finished.

"Not a bit; Joe tried that, but it wouldn't work."

"Are you the same boy who nabbed him?"

"Yes."

"It's hard, mighty hard, to be pulled by a cub like you," and Bob shook his head mournfully. "A feller expects something of the kind from a reg'lar officer, if it so be that he's put himself in the way of trouble; but it comes tough to be downed by a couple of whiffletts I could break all up with one hand."

"It does seem queer we should be able to do so much," Jet replied, modestly, and then he added: "If you give me your word as a man that not a word shall be spoken, and no noise made, I'll leave this gag out until sunset, otherwise, it must go in again."

"I'll agree, because you've got me foul."

"Very well; but if I hear so much as a whisper it will go in your mouth again, not to be taken out till the officers get here."

"I know when I'm licked," Bob growled, "an' don't need threats after I can't help myself."

During the remainder of the afternoon the boys had nothing to do save discuss the chances of taking Sam a prisoner, and when they were tired of this Jet suggested that each take a nap.

"From this out we shall have to keep our eyes open pretty much all the time, unless Sam succeeds in getting the best of us, and it will be a good idea to scoop in what rest we can now. You lie down first, and I'll stand watch."

The small guide was quite ready to act upon this suggestion, and it seemed as if he had but just rolled over on the blanket when his eyes were closed in slumber.

When the sun was an hour high Jet awakened his companion, and said, as he prepared to take his turn at sleeping:

"Be sure to call me at sunset, and keep your eyes on those fellows all the time. I don't reckon there's much chance of their being able to get free; but we mustn't run any risks."

His orders were obeyed to the letter, and the sun had but just sunk behind the trees when Jim shook him into wakefulness as he was instructed to do.

"I haven't seen so much as a boat," he said. "The men have been quiet as mice, sleeping a good deal of the time. When shall we start for the island?"

"As soon as we've had supper, and gagged the prisoners again. It won't do to let them have the chance of warning Sam."

"It ain't likely he'll get back before midnight."

"That's true; but in the meanwhile we have a good deal to do. The camp-fire must be lighted, to prevent him from being suspicious when he comes in sight of the island, and we need to look about a bit for a hiding-place."

"Have you made up your mind how we are to strike him?"

"I think it will be best to wait near the shore, and knock him down. If he comes back half-drunk he won't be likely to put up his hands very quickly, even if a revolver is at his head, and I don't want to shoot."

"You were willing enough to do so in Bob's case."

"That was different. Sam's crime isn't as serious."

"What's Bob accused of?"

"Murder."

"I swow!" and Jim looked around in alarm, even though the man was powerless to so much as move his hands. "If I'd known that I wouldn't have gone to help catch him for a hundred dollars."

"That is exactly why I didn't go into any particulars when we made the trade for you to help me," Jet replied quietly. "Now let's get our work done, and row over to the island for what I hope will be the last time."

CHAPTER XXX

A FAILURE

The boys soon had their camp in order. The prisoners were gagged again; their bonds examined to make certain there could be no chance of an escape, and the smouldering remains of the fire carefully extinguished.

"I reckon everything will be safe if we are gone all night," Jet said, as he looked around for the last time to assure himself nothing had been forgotten; "but those fellows would have a pain in their jaws if we should stay so long."

Jim insisted on carrying his muzzle-loader on this expedition, believing it a more trustworthy weapon than the revolver, and Jet made no objections, although he would have much preferred that the ancient musket had been left behind.

The boys did not draw the boat upon shore when they landed with Bob, therefore they had nothing to do but step on board.

The small guide pulled her across to the hiding-place under the overhanging trees, and there she was made fast.

Then the boys went directly to the camp, and built a fire, after which nothing could be done save wait and watch.

Since it was not known on which side of the island Sam would come ashore, the two went to the extreme northern point where they could see the fellow in time to hasten back and get into ambush.

Jet's plans were already formed, and had been explained to his companion. He now said, as they sat among the bushes, waiting for the first sound which should betoken the coming of the man they hoped to make captive:

"I shall hit him over the head with the butt of the revolver, and the moment he drops you must be ready to jump on him, for it'll be sharp work if I don't stun him at the first blow."

"Ain't you afraid of killing him?"

"Not a bit of it; he'd stand up under a good deal harder blow than I shall give him."

Then the conversation ceased, and after a time Jim's heavy breathing told that he was sleeping at his post of duty.

Jet had quite as much as he could do to keep his eyes open; but he succeeded after a fashion, and when they had been in hiding at least three hours the alleged melody of a song coming across the still waters told their hoped-for captive was approaching.

That Sam had been indulging to a considerable extent in liquor could be plainly understood by the sound of his voice, and again Jet felt the same misgivings which had assailed him immediately after the capture of Bob.

The new-comer had no thought of prudence; but was evidently bent on landing in front of the camp on the outside of the island.

Jet shook Jim, at the same time placing his hand over the boy's mouth to prevent a possible outcry, and whispered:

"There's no time to lose. We must get there ahead of him, or the jig is up, and, according to the noise, he's rowing mighty fast."

Jim was on his feet in an instant, and the two started at full speed through the underbrush, paying little attention to the disturbance of the foliage, because Sam was so nearly intoxicated that he would not heed slight sounds.

"He'll land somewhere here," Jet said, breathlessly, as he halted where the glimmer of the camp-fire could be seen. "If he don't we must creep up while he's fastening the boat."

Sam was evidently amusing himself by making the light craft spin through the water, and when he turned for the shore the boys saw that they had stationed themselves in the most advantageous position.

It was not necessary to move out of their tracks, for after landing the man came directly toward where they were standing.

Jet raised his revolver by the muzzle, and Jim stood ready to make a spring.

Sam reeled along shouting for Bob and lurching from side to side.

The time had not come to strike the blow; but the boy, believing he was about to be discovered, struck at the fellow's head.

The blow was not delivered fairly, but glanced off, and instead of being stunned Sam was only alarmed.

Leaping back quickly, before Jet could strike again, he fired into the bushes from whence he believed the attack had come.

The bullet whistled so near Jim's nose that the young gentleman leaped back with a howl, and this outcry was sufficient to show Sam where to send another. Before the echoes had fairly died away the sound of hurried footsteps through the bushes told that the small guide had taken refuge in flight.

Jet was alone, amid darkness so intense that he had no means of judging the whereabouts of his enemy save by the flash when the revolver was discharged.

The knowledge of danger had sobered Sam, and he understood he must make a desperate fight or be arrested, for, quite naturally, the first thought was that the officers of the law were on his track.

Jet was wholly at a loss to know what course should be pursued.

Sam was not charged with a capital crime, and Harvey never intimated that he cared to take him prisoner, therefore to shoot now, save actually in self-defense, would be little less than murder.

Sam emptied the chambers of his weapon while retreating toward the boat, and that he had reloaded before reaching her was told by the second volley which he sent in the direction of Jet.

By the grating of wood and sand the amateur detective knew the boat was being pushed off from the shore, and at that moment he could have fired with a very good chance of hitting the mark; but he refrained from doing so.

The most important thing just now was to assure the safety of the prisoners in the other camp, and he made his way across the island hurriedly, lest by accident Sam should happen to stumble across his comrades.

Neither Jim nor the boat were to be seen when he arrived at the clump of trees where the craft had been moored.

The small guide had thought only of his own safety, and paid no attention to what might happen to his friend.

Jet would have tried to summon him by whistling, but for the fear Sam might hear the signal and come that way.

It was possible to swim across the intervening space; but it would be at the cost of wetting both weapons, and he decided against the idea almost before it took form in his mind.

He splashed the water gently, hoping Jim would believe it a signal to come back.

Then he waited in silence nearly an hour, fancying all the previous work would speedily be undone, and when it seemed certain the small guide had deserted him entirely, he heard his name whispered.

"Is that you, Jim?" he asked in a low tone.

"Yes. Where's that feller?"

"Left the island, I think. Why don't you row in here?"

"Is it safe?"

"It won't be if you don't take me off precious quick."

This threat had the effect of deciding the timid guide, and in a few moments the boat was paddled alongside the bank.

"What did you run away for?" Jet asked, angrily, when they were a short distance from the shore.

"What for? Didn't you hear that bullet come across my nose?"

"Of course he fired; but there wasn't much chance of being hit in the darkness."

"There was too good a chance to suit me. If that bullet had come an inch nearer I'd be dead by this time."

"But it didn't, and when you found he hadn't hit the mark, you told him where you was by runnin' away."

"I couldn't help it," Jim replied apologetically. "I don't reckon I was cut out for a detective, an' when folks begin shootin' right at me I'm bound to run."

"Have you been up to the camp?"

"Not much. I stayed right here in the boat to find out what was goin' on."

"Then there's no knowing but he has been ashore and set the men free."

"If that's so the sooner we get out of this place the better," and Jim would have headed the boat toward the outlet, but that Jet prevented him by pulling lustily on the other oar.

"Look here," the latter said, angrily, "if you act like this I'll dump you overboard, or shoot, whichever comes handiest. Now row for our camp, and do the best you know how, if you don't want to get into a pile of trouble with me."

Jim obeyed meekly, and a few moments later Jet was running at full speed toward the clump of cedars.

The encampment was, apparently, just as they had left it, and Jet gave vent to a sigh of relief as he ascertained that the prisoners were still bound securely.

Then he ran back to help Jim bring the boat ashore, and the guide asked in a trembling voice:

"Are you goin' to try to stay here now?"

"What else can we do? It would be running a big risk to start in the boat with both men, for Sam is rowing around somewhere, and he's certain to help his friends if he sees them in trouble."

"Suppose he should find out we were here?"

"That's exactly what I'm afraid of. We must keep mighty close for a day or two, and then I'll try to send another message."

"I can't stay as long as that."

"Very well, start for the village now, and I'll hold my own against him if he comes."

"But I don't dare to go off by myself while he's prowlin' 'round."

"Then don't be a fool, but help me keep things quiet until he gets tired of hunting for us, and leaves."

Jim was not in such a frame of mind as would best fit him to be an assistant in such a desperate case as was now before the boys; but in the absence of other help Jet could do no less than utilize him in some way, and he began by threatening all kind of punishments if he didn't stand up like a man and do his duty.

There was no sleep for the amateur detective on this night.

He spent the time pacing to and fro in the encampment, watching the prisoners, going to the water's edge, or listening to the slightest unusual sound, fearing it might be made by Sam.

When daylight came Jet was hidden among the fringe of bushes which bordered the lake, and the first living thing he saw was the man whom he had failed to capture on the previous evening.

Sam was standing on the shore of the island, apparently on the point of embarking in the boat.

While Jet could have counted twenty he remained there, and then, stepping on board, began to row directly toward the spot where the boy was in hiding.

CHAPTER XXXI

AN ATTACK

It could not have been other than an accident which caused Sam to head for this particular spot; but excited as he was Jet believed the man knew they were encamped in the cedars.

The first question in his mind was whether he had best make a stand on the shore, or in the thicket, and the latter course was decided upon.

Sam was not more than two boat lengths from the island when he started, and there would be several moments in which to arrange for a defense before the man could land.

Jim was overhauling the cooked provisions preparatory to feeding the prisoners when his comrade burst into the encampment looking quite as excited as he felt.

"Sam must have come to the conclusion that those who hit him last night were not officers of the law, for he went back to the island, and now is heading straight for this place."

"What?" Jim cried, sharply, as he leaped to his feet, dropping a handful of fried fish.

"Now, don't get excited, and, above all, keep quiet. It isn't dead certain he has any suspicion there is a camp here; but we must be prepared for the worst."

"What are you goin' to do?" Jim asked in a voice trembling with fear.

"Fight him off if he tries to come inside this thicket. It will be strange if two of us, well armed and under cover, can't hold our own against one man."

"But how is it to end? He may keep us shut up here till the provisions are all gone."

"There is no need to look so far ahead. Get your gun and come with me."

Jim obeyed very unwillingly.

This was one of the moments when he felt more like running away than fighting, but Jet took good care that he should not have an opportunity.

The two crept to the very edge of the thicket, where it would be possible to see any one who came up from the lake, and they had hardly concealed themselves before the man appeared.

He was walking slowly, gazing around scrutinizingly, as if expecting to find enemies, and carried a revolver in his hand.

Jet hoped sincerely that he would pass the cedars without devoting to them any especial attention, but in this he was disappointed.

Sam had already noted the place, and came straight on as if determined to examine every inch of the ground.

There was no time for hesitation.

Already he was within a dozen yards of where the boys were crouching, and in a moment more would be upon them.

Jet suddenly pushed the muzzle of his gun out from among the branches, and cried:

"Put up your hands, or I'll fire."

Unfortunately Sam was not taken by surprise as the others had been; his revolver was ready for use, and it seemed as if the words had hardly been uttered when he fired three times in rapid succession.

He aimed directly for the muzzle of Jet's gun, but was forced to discharge his weapon so quickly that there was no time to shoot with any degree of accuracy.

Two of the bullets whistled past Jet, but the third lodged in the fleshy portion of his arm.

For the instant he was conscious of nothing more than a sharp twinge such as might have been

caused by the sudden application of a galvanic battery, and he pulled both triggers of his gun at the same instant.

Unfortunately neither of the bullets took effect.

At the moment he fired Sam leaped behind a tree, thus shielding himself from what might otherwise have put a speedy end to the battle.

"Stay where you are, and fire whenever he shows himself!" Jet whispered sternly to Jim, who was showing signs of beating a retreat.

"Where's the use?" the small guide whined. "You're pretty nigh killed, an' what am I goin' to do?"

"I'm all right; there's no need to worry about me if you'll only do your share."

"But look at the blood!" and Jim pointed to his friend's shoulder down which the life fluid was flowing copiously.

Just at that instant Jet had no time to bestow upon his own injuries.

He had seen Sam edging around as if to advance nearer, and he emptied two chambers of his revolver as a warning that it would be dangerous for him to make the attempt.

The man shrank behind the tree very suddenly, and this gave the amateur detective an opportunity to slip a couple of cartridges into his gun.

"Shall I go to see if the prisoners are all right?" Jim whispered. "They'll be sure to try an' give us the slip after hearin' all this shootin'."

"Stay here, and keep your eyes oh that fellow! The others must be left to do as they can for a while."

This scheme of Jim's for getting out of the way of danger had proven a failure, and with a deep sigh he turned his attention once more to the enemy in front.

Jet knew how dangerous it would be to allow Sam a chance to rush in upon them, and after loading his gun he fired one ball at the fellow's leg, which was visible from behind the tree.

A smothered curse, and two shots fired at random told that he had succeeded in making matters even, so far as wounds were concerned, and Jet whispered:

"Fire, whenever you see a bit of his clothes; that will prevent him from jumping in on us."

During the next ten minutes no less than a dozen shots were exchanged without apparent effect.

Sam was growing more cautious.

The discharge of Jim's weapon, thus showing there were at least two confronting him, had taught a salutary lesson, and he now appeared eager to find a better shelter.

Jet understood what the man wished to do and determined to prevent it if possible.

Sam, in his present position, did not dare show himself long enough to take aim, and while he remained behind this particular tree there was little danger he could do very serious damage.

By this time Jet's wound had begun to make itself felt.

The pain had become great, and the blood was yet flowing freely.

Once he thought he would creep over to Jim that the latter might fasten a ligature above the aperture, thus checking the blood, but in order to do so it would have been necessary to expose himself to a certain extent, and also give Sam the desired opportunity to gain a better shelter.

"I don't see any way out of the scrape," he said to himself, "for there's no chance anybody will come this way, and he's bound to get the best of us after a time, because I can't hold out a great while longer if I keep on growing weak; but anything is better than surrendering willingly."

Therefore he remained where he was, firing on the slightest chance of hitting the mark, and using the revolver when the gun was empty.

The only ray of hope which Jet could see in the entire business was the fact that Sam might not have a full supply of cartridges.

He no longer shot at random, reserving his fire as if it was necessary to make every shot count, but this might mean nothing more than a desire to tire the others out.

Jet was growing weaker each moment.

Jim watched his companion anxiously, ready to take flight the instant he was overcome.

Jet knew exactly what would happen the instant he failed to show a bold front, and between two evils he chose the one which seemed the least.

Loading the gun and the revolver he laid both at his side, and stripped off his coat to stanch the flow of crimson fluid.

Sam must have seen this movement, for at that moment he ran for a clump of trees half a dozen yards farther off, and succeeded in gaining the desired spot before Jet could pick up his weapons.

"Why didn't you fire?" the latter asked sharply.

"I didn't know he was goin' to leave so sudden," was the innocent reply.

"That move was just what I've been trying to guard against, and now we must push back a bit, to prevent him from picking us off."

The small guide was only too willing to beat a retreat, even though it was only for a short distance, and he followed his companion quickly.

An overturned tree twenty feet away was the barricade Jet selected, and when they were sheltered by it he said:

"Tie this handkerchief around my arm above that bullet hole, and then twist it with a stick until the blood stops. I'll use the revolver in the meanwhile so he'll know we haven't gone far."

Jim did as he was directed, and Jet discharged one chamber of the weapon every few seconds, taking good aim at the clump of bushes behind which he believed Sam was hiding.

Twice he loaded his revolver, and twice exploded every cartridge before the surgical work was done, and then Jim seized his own weapon, saying as he did so:

"That fellow has got a good chance now to creep around behind us an' let the others loose. Then the fat will be in the fire for certain, because we shan't even have a chance to run away."

This was a possibility which Jet had failed to take into consideration, and for the first time since the battle began he was thoroughly alarmed.

He did not know whether it would be best to go up to the encampment or remain where he was, either course seemed fraught with danger, and he was beginning to despair when the sound of a human voice startled both him and Jim.

"Hold up your hands!" some one shouted, the speaker evidently being between the lake and Sam's hiding-place.

"Drop that revolver, but don't lower your arm!" was the next command, and Jet cried joyfully:

"Some one has come to help us, Jim, and it don't make much matter who, for we can get him to help take the prisoners up to the village."

The small guide had recovered all his lost courage immediately upon hearing the words, and was dancing about in a triumphant manner, but much too cautious to venture from his hiding-place until knowing to a certainty that the enemy was really disarmed.

During a couple of minutes not another sound was heard, and then the listeners could distinguish the words:

"Go up farther and find out what this fellow was shooting at."

There was a sound as of some one making his way through the foliage, and again the voice shouted:

"Hello there! What's the matter?"

"Who is that?" Jet cried.

"Harvey!"

"Come on! Come on! You've got here just in' time!" and Jet started down the slope to meet the one person in the world whom he particularly wished to see at that moment.

HARVEY & CO.

When Jet was where he could see the new-comers Sam had been handcuffed, and was in charge of a stranger who was dressing the wound in his leg, while the detective, walking with a cane, was coming up the ascent in advance of another man.

"It seems as if you'd been in pretty snug quarters," Harvey said as he clasped Jet warmly by the hand. "Who is this fellow who has been making a target of you?"

"One of the gang we met at the house in the woods. He introduced himself to me when he was made up as a tramp, on the railroad track."

"You are wounded!" Harvey interrupted, as he pointed to the boy's arm. "Let me see if it is serious; you are looking pale."

"I shall be all right now you are here. Come up to our camp, and you can attend to it."

Jet led the way hurriedly to the cedar thicket, taking such a route that his visitor must pass Bob, who was looking woefully disconsolate and uncomfortable.

"Hello!" Harvey cried in astonishment, "I'm blest if you haven't bagged the game already," and once more he clasped Jet's hand. "I knew you would suit me for a partner, and from this day out we'll work in company or my name's not Dan Harvey. How long have you had this fellow?"

"Since last night, and that's why Sam was trying to get the best of us. We attempted to capture him, but made a botch of the business."

"Bob's arrest is enough to cover you with glory, my boy, for you've done what every man on the force would have liked to had a hand in. Here, Downs," he continued to the man behind him, "slip the bracelets on this man, and take the gag out. I reckon his jaws ache by this time."

When this order was obeyed Jet led his visitors to where the other prisoner was trussed up, and Harvey's amazement was complete.

"Is this another one of the gang?"

"Yes, in the counterfeit money business, and when we get back I calculate the constable can be found without much trouble."

"Well, Jet, you've done this job up about as brown as possible, and there'll be no mean reward coming when Bob reaches New York."

"What do you mean?"

"One thousand dollars has been offered for the apprehension of those charged with murder, and in regard to the makers of the queer, Uncle Sam ought to shell out liberally for having them brought in so cleverly. The firm shall be Harvey & Co., for a boy who can do so much single handed will be an ornament to the force even though he isn't larger than a pint of cider."

"I had Jim to help me," Jet replied modestly.

"Who is Jim?"

"A boy I met up at the village, and promised twenty dollars if we succeeded."

"But I haven't earned it," Jim cried, "I was mightily frightened, an' would have run home long ago if you'd let me."

"The money has been earned," Harvey said as he took a roll of bills from his pocket, "and I'll add ten on my own account."

The small guide looked in bewilderment at the thirty dollars, and then broke into a dance which was quite as vigorous if not so skillful as Jet's performances with the minstrel company.

"How did it happen you got here in the nick of time?" Jet asked after Jim had ceased his contortions.

"When I received your letter telling me you were coming into the woods it was enough to show you would want assistance. I never thought for a moment you'd be able to bag the whole gang, but only counted on saving them from cutting your throat. Not being well enough to walk very handily I brought a couple of friends along, and now we've got force enough to take our men back."

"How did you happen to find me?"

"We heard at the village that a couple of boys, one a stranger, had come this way, and we started on chances. Last night we camped this side of the first carry, and was striking for the upper lake when the reports of your weapon gave us a clew. It was easy to tell that the shots were not fired by hunters, and we rounded up your friend Sam on general principles."

While this conversation was being carried on Harvey's companions released the prisoners from the bonds which had been put on by the boys, and shackled them in much more secure and less painful fashion.

Then Jim remembered that none of his party had breakfasted, and he cooked the remainder of the provisions at once, when all hands joined in the meal.

Harvey had already examined Jet's wound, and pronounced it a trifling one, more painful than dangerous.

The ball was extracted, the arm bandaged properly, and fastened in a sling, the detective saying, when the work was finished:

"You'll come around all right in a week or two with care, and that I'll guarantee you shall have in abundance."

It was not yet noon when the party were ready to leave Round Pond. Harvey and the boys traveled in the boat Jet had hired, and the other craft, which was considerably larger, carried the two officers and their prisoners.

Except at the carry, where all hands were forced to assist in transporting the boats, the journey was made in a leisurely fashion, and that night Jet slept in a comfortable bed at the Saranac Lake House.

Jim disappeared as soon as the party arrived at the village. He was eager to show the money earned, and to tell his chums of his wonderful skill as a detective, but it is not probable he spoke of the many times when he would have sold his position very cheaply.

He was on hand next morning to see his friend and companions take their departure, and then Jet was forced to promise he would visit the Adirondacks on a regular hunting trip as soon as his business would permit.

"I'd like to go out with you once when there wasn't a lot of ruffians 'round to make trouble," Jim said, and a moment later the train rolled out of the depot.

Jet was praised and petted by the officers at headquarters, when the party arrived in New York, at a rate which would have turned many another boy's head, but he knew in his heart that a good portion of the success was due to "luck" rather than detective skill.

Harvey kept his word in regard to taking him in partnership, and to-day Jet Lewis, young as he is, does a full share of Detective Harvey's work. In fact, that gentleman often says that without his partner he would fail in many cases which he now "works up" successfully.

Jet received the reward of one thousand dollars for the arrest of Joe and Bob, and those worthies are serving a life sentence at Sing Sing for murder, the crime having been fully proven against them.

Sam, the constable, and the fellow who stole the boys' boat have been sentenced to ten years for uttering counterfeit money, and Jet insists that at some future time he will find the plates they buried in the vicinity of the house in the woods, for he keeps well in mind what he heard regarding the big oak.

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