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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RUSHTON BOYS AT TREASURE COVE;
OR, THE MISSING CHEST OF GOLD ***

THE RUSHTON BOYS AT TREASURE COVE

OR
THE MISSING CHEST OF GOLD

BY
SPENCER DAVENPORT

Author of "The Rushton Boys at Rally Hall,"
"The Rushton Boys in the Saddle," etc.

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BOOKS FOR BOYS
BY
SPENCER DAVENPORT

THE RUSHTON BOYS SERIES

THE RUSHTON BOYS AT RALLY HALL

Or, Great Days in School and Out

THE RUSHTON BOYS IN THE SADDLE

Or, The Ghost of the Plains

THE RUSHTON BOYS AT TREASURE COVE

Or, The Missing Chest of Gold

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THE RUSHTON BOYS AT TREASURE COVE

CHAPTER I THE COMING STORM

"Say, boys, it looks like a storm and a heavy one, too."

The jest and laughter ceased at once, and three pairs of eyes looked in the direction pointed out by the speaker.

"See that big bank of cloud climbing up the sky?" continued Fred Rushton. "There's more than a capful of wind in that, if I know anything about weather."

"You're right, Fred," said Lester Lee, who was handling the tiller. "And we're a long way off from home! It's up to us to turn about and make a run for it."

"Oh, I don't think it will amount to anything," said Teddy Rushton, Fred's younger brother, who was never averse to taking a chance. "We're having such a grand time that I hate to make a break for land unless we have to. Besides, I've never been out in a squall, and I'd like to have the experience."

"You'd have more experience than you cared for with this blow that is coming," returned the helmsman, and there was a growing anxiety in his tone. "I'm more familiar with this coast than you are, and I'd rather look at the storm from the shore than from the deck of this catboat. So, here's for a quick scoot for home," he concluded, as he brought the boat around and laid the course for the shore.

It was a staunch little sailboat of twenty-two feet in length, and the way she minded her helm, as well as the ease with which she rode the waves, spoke eloquently of her qualities.

On this afternoon, off the coast of Maine, she held a jolly party of four boys. Lester Lee, who owned the boat and managed the tiller, was the host, and his guests were Bill Garwood and Fred and Teddy Rushton, all of them fellow schoolmates of Lester's at Rally Hall. It was vacation time, and the boys were gloating over the fact that they were going to have several weeks more than usual before school opened in the fall. The news had come in a letter that Fred had received that morning from Melvin Granger, one of his last year's chums.

"Good for old Mel!" exulted Teddy. "He knew how good we'd feel about it, and he couldn't get the news to us quickly enough."

"That stroke of lightning knew its business when it struck the right wing of the building," laughed Fred. "Mel says that several of the rooms were burned out, and it will be fully a month after the usual time before everything can be got in running order."

"I'll bet old Hardtack is raving, because he can't get us under his thumb as soon as he expected," grinned Bill, referring in this irreverent fashion to Dr. Hardach Rally, head of Rally Hall.

"It's lucky the lightning didn't hit the gymnasium, anyway," commented Lester. "We'll have some tough teams to tackle this coming year and we'll need all the practice we can get. Ease her off a little, Fred," he added, to the older Rushton boy, who was handling the sheet.

Fred did so, just in time to avoid the full force of a big wave that was coming on the port side. But enough of it came aboard to drench thoroughly Teddy and Bill, who were lounging at the foot of the mast.

"Wow!" yelled Teddy, as he scrambled to his feet. "That was a corker. I got a gallon down my back that time."

"Gallon?" echoed Bill. "It seemed to me more like a hogshead. I'm as wet as a drowned rat."

"Don't you care, fellows," called out Lester. "We won't any of us have a dry stitch on by the time we get to land."

"You don't suppose there's any danger, do you?" asked Bill, who at his father's ranch would have been perfectly at home on the back of a bucking broncho, but here on the sea felt out of his element.

"Oh, no," replied Lester, carelessly. "That is," he hastened to add, "there's always more or less danger when one's out in an open boat in a storm. But this *Ariel* of mine is a jim dandy, and I don't think we'll have any trouble. Even if she should go over, we could hang on to the bottom, and there are so many boats in these waters that we'd soon be picked up."

Despite his careless air and confident words, it was evident from the way he scanned the sky and the tumbling waste of waters that he was secretly uneasy.

The sky had by this time become completely overcast, and although it was only mid afternoon, it was as dark as though twilight were coming on. The wind came in stronger gusts, and the waves broke ever more threateningly against the side of the boat. The land was blotted out, and only the tossing waters met the view in every direction.

"I ought to have turned around sooner," Lester muttered to himself, "but I was so interested in the letter that Fred got from Mel I didn't notice those storm clouds coming up."

The conversation had ceased. Lester had all he could do to handle the tiller and shape his course, and Fred had to be on the alert in his management of the sheet, which strained and tugged under the force of the wind. It was a time for action rather than speech, and Bill and Teddy, who just then could do nothing but serve as ballast, looked on in silence as the *Ariel* tore through the waves.

Suddenly an object that appeared on the starboard side excited Teddy so much that a cry

broke from his lips.

"Look at that big fish over there!" he exclaimed. "It's a monster. What is it, a porpoise?"

"Porpoise nothing," said Lester briefly, letting his eye wander a moment from the tiller. "That's a shark."

"A shark!" was the cry that broke at the same time from Teddy and Bill, neither of whom had even seen that "pirate of the sea," and they felt a shivery thrill from the sudden discovery.

"Yes," answered Lester, "and from the size of the fin, he must be a whopper. We seldom see them so large in these waters."

"Is he a man-eater, do you think?" asked Bill in an awed whisper.

"That depends," answered Lester. "If he's a blue shark or a hammerhead, he probably is. They pulled one out about fifty miles from here last year, and when they cut him up, they found a man's boot in his stomach. They're good things to keep away from."

"I should say they were," agreed Bill. "I'd rather take my chance with a rattlesnake."

Again they lapsed into silence, but their eyes never left that ominous fin that showed just above the water, cutting it like a knife.

There was a quick exclamation from Lester, and looking at him, they saw that he was peering at an object perhaps half a mile away. It was large and vague in the gathering darkness, but Bill's keen eyes, accustomed to gaze over wide spaces in the West, made it out at once.

"It's a motor boat!" he exclaimed. "And by jinks! it seems to be in trouble. See how it tosses about. It looks as if it would upset any minute."

"Those motor boats are always unsafe," remarked Lester, with the scorn that the master of a sailboat usually feels for any craft driven by machinery. "They're getting out of order all the time, and a fellow takes his life in his hands every time he goes out in one. For my part give me a sailboat."

"Can you see how many people are on board of her?" asked Fred anxiously.

"I see only one," replied Bill, "and he seems to be tinkering with the engine. Wow! but she shipped a lot of water just then."

"What are we going to do?" asked Teddy. "He may get upset, and if he doesn't know how to swim, he'll drown. And even if he were a good swimmer, he couldn't make the shore in a storm like this."

"Here's the answer," said Lester briefly, as he gave the tiller a twist and gave Fred directions to pull in the sheet. In a moment the boat had changed its course and was bearing down swiftly toward the disabled craft.

"I'm mighty anxious to get to shore," Lester remarked, "but we've got to see what we can do for this fellow first."

The storm was now full upon them, and the *Ariel* staggered as the waves beat against her sides. She ploughed along gallantly, however, under the skilful guidance of Lester, riding most of the waves, although now and then her nose would dive through a big one and enough water would come on board to keep Bill and Teddy busy bailing her out. All were thoroughly drenched, but no one thought of his discomfort, so intent were they all on reaching the motor boat, which by this time was absolutely out of control and tossing up and down like a chip in the surging tumult of waters.

The one occupant had given up as hopeless the attempt to fix the machinery. He had caught sight of the *Ariel* and was waving his hands wildly.

"He oughtn't to be standing up," muttered Lester. "He ought to crouch down and hold tight."

They were now not more than a hundred feet away, when suddenly a groan went up from the boys.

A huge wave, cresting over the side, had caught the man on the motor boat full in the chest and hurled him into the sea!

CHAPTER II

DRAGGED FROM THE SEA

"He's gone!" cried Teddy in horror.

"And with that shark around!" exclaimed Bill.

"There he is!" yelled Fred, as his straining eyes caught sight of a white face and a struggling figure at a little distance.

"Stand by with the boat hooks," commanded Lester to Bill and Teddy, as he gave the *Ariel* a turn and bore down on the drowning man.

Those of our readers who have followed the adventures of the Rushton boys, as told in the previous volumes of this series, entitled "The Rushton Boys at Rally Hall" and "The Rushton Boys in the Saddle," already feel well acquainted with them and the other occupants of the boat. Those who have not yet done so will need a word of introduction.

Fred and Teddy Rushton were the sons of Mansfield Rushton, a broker, living in Oldtown and doing business in an adjacent city, to which he commuted. He and his wife, Agnes, were devoted to their boys, and their home was a type of all that is best and wholesome in American life.

An occasional disturbing element in it was the frequent presence of the boys' uncle, Aaron Rushton, who was a crusty bachelor with little liking for boys. He was constantly preaching the need of a firm hand in bringing up his nephews and scolding his brother for his laxity in that respect.

Fred, who was nearly sixteen, was a year older than Teddy. Both were alert and vigorous young Americans, bright in their studies and fond of athletic sports. Teddy was impulsive and given to playing practical jokes, and a large part of Fred's time was taken up in getting his brother out of trouble.

One of Teddy's jokes caused a runaway in which their Uncle Aaron nearly came to grief. He escaped personal injury, but lost his watch and some valuable papers, and he was so angry that at last the boys' parents sent them to Rally Hall, a boarding school recommended by Mr. Aaron Rushton because its discipline was very strict.

The boys enjoyed themselves hugely at Rally Hall, for the year was crowded with fun and adventure. They had enemies as well as warm friends, and Fred had to thrash Andy Shanks, a bully who tried to put on him the theft of some examination papers.

When vacation time arrived, they arranged to go out to the Snake River Ranch in the West, to visit Bill Garwood, one of their chums at Rally Hall. They expected to have a glorious time and were not disappointed. For the first time, they saw rattlesnakes and bears that were not behind bars in a Zoological Garden. A tangled web of events was being wound around Mr. Garwood, Bill's father, in the effort of plotters to get possession of his ranch where, unknown to him, a silver mine had been discovered. Teddy, by means of a moving-picture film taken by a company at the ranch, was enabled to run down a plot to steal Mr. Garwood's cattle, and Fred had a chance to unmask a pretended ghost by which it was sought to frighten people away from the location of the mine.

Their grateful hosts wanted the boys to stay all summer, but they had to cut their visit short, as they had promised to spend a few weeks with Lester Lee at Bartanet Shoals on the coast of Maine. The lads had now been with Lester for about two weeks, and Bill, who had joined them on Lester's earnest invitation, had come a few days later. They had had, so far, what Teddy called a "bang-up time" and the only thing that marred their pleasure was the fact that vacation was so nearly over. Hence their delight at the news in Melvin's letter that, owing to an injury to one of the buildings, the fall term at Rally Hall would open about a month later than usual.

Lester had lived on the coast all his life and there was nothing about handling a sailboat that he did not know, but it taxed all his skill to rescue the man who had been thrown into the water. Had the sea been smooth, it would have been an easy matter to wear about and pull him on board. But in this welter of wind and waves, it was all he could do to get the *Ariel* to obey her helm. Twice he swooped down near the struggling swimmer, but each time the waves beat the man back just far enough to be out of reach of the boathooks. Lester was coming round for another attempt when he was startled by a cry from Teddy:

"There he goes! He's given up!"

The strength of the swimmer had failed. For another moment his arms moved aimlessly. Then he slowly sank from sight.

The boys looked at one another in horror.

Fred was the first to recover from his paralysis. He kicked off his shoes and thrust the rope of the sheet into Teddy's hand.

"Hold this, Ted," he commanded, "and do just what Lester tells you to do. You, Bill, hold on tight to this end of the line," he added, picking up a coil at his feet, "and I'll take the other. Leave plenty of slack till you see me come up."

Almost before they knew what he intended to do, Fred dived overboard.

The sides of the *Ariel* were high and his dive carried the boy far down. Down, down he went, looking through the dim green waters for a white face and limp form. But his efforts were useless and he came up for air.

"There he is!" were the first words he heard, as he shook his head and looked around. "Over there to the right. Grab him, Fred, before he goes down again."

Fred made a wild clutch at an object just beside him, and his fingers clutched an arm. He held on desperately, despite the waves that sought to tear him away.

"You've got him!" yelled Bill. "Hold tight now and I'll pull you in."

There was no movement in the limp form, which made it easier for his preserver. Holding tightly with one hand to the rope which had never left his grip, and grasping his unconscious burden with the other, Fred was drawn to the side of the *Ariel* by Bill's muscular arms. But the strength of all three was necessary to lift the two of them on board, so Lester had to abandon the rudder, while Teddy left the sheet to help. They succeeded at last, after a vast amount of tugging and straining, and laid the stranger's body on the deck, while Fred slumped down beside him trying to get back his breath.

"Why, it isn't a man at all!" exclaimed Bill. "It's a boy and I don't believe he's any older than we are."

"Sure enough," said Teddy. "I wonder who he is."

"I've seen that fellow somewhere," affirmed Lester, "but for the life of me I can't tell where. But that can wait till another time. What we want to do now is to get to work. He can't have swallowed much water in the little time he was under. Get him down on his back with his head low. Tear his shirt open at the throat. Work his arms slowly up and down. Here, Bill, you take one arm and Teddy the other. You'll have to do it without much help from Fred and me, for we'll have all we can do to get this boat to shore. The wind's getting stronger every minute and we simply must reach land before dark."

He resumed the tiller, while Fred again took the sheet, and they swung the boat around to its original course.

"I'd like to save the motor boat if we could," remarked Lester, as they swung around. "It looks as though it had cost a heap of money. But just now it's a question of life rather than money, and we'll have to let it go."

"It does seem a pity," agreed Fred, as he glanced at the boat tossing about helplessly, now allowing in the trough and again rising to the crest of a wave. "But perhaps it may keep afloat till the storm is over. We'll cruise around and look for it to-morrow or next day."

Bill and Teddy were working vigorously, applying all their knowledge of "first aid" to their unconscious passenger. For several minutes their work seemed to be without result, but at last they heaved sighs of relief as they saw a beating at the temples and a fluttering of the eyelids. A moment later the stranger opened his eyes and looked vaguely around him. He tried to speak, but no words came.

"Don't talk just now," Teddy admonished him. "You've been in a tight pinch, but you're all right. Just relax and go to sleep if you want to. We're on the job and we'll take care of you."

The eyes closed again, and the boys, seeing that the danger was past, stopped their "pump-handle work," as Teddy called it, and set about making the stranger's position more comfortable. They made a rough bed for him with some blankets that they dragged from the tiny cabin and put a coat beneath his head for a pillow.

"The longer he stays asleep, the better it will be for him," commented Bill.

"It's lucky for him it isn't his last sleep," said Teddy. "It would have been that, if it hadn't been for that brother of mine," he added with a touch of pride.

"Fred surely is a plucky old scout and a quick thinker too," agreed Bill. "He had his shoes off and was in the water before the rest of us fairly realized what had happened."

"He can swim like a fish," said Teddy, "and with that rope in his hand, I didn't fear but we could get him on board again. But my heart was in my mouth when I thought of that shark."

"It was taking a big risk," declared Bill. "By the way, I don't see anything more of that ugly fin. I guess he's given us the go-by for to-day."

But even as he spoke, there was a rush in the water alongside, and they caught a glimpse of a dark body at least sixteen feet in length, and saw a wicked eye gleaming up at them. It was only for a second and again the shark vanished. But his sudden appearance, at the very moment they were talking of him, made the boys shudder.

"He's following us!" exclaimed Bill.

"That's what," said Teddy. "He knows we're in a small boat and that the storm may capsize it. If it were a canoe or a rowboat, he'd probably try to upset it himself."

"He couldn't have been far off when Fred was in the water," shivered Bill. "He may have been making for him at the very minute we hauled him out."

"We got both out just in the nick of time, I guess," assented Teddy soberly, and his heart was full of thankfulness as he gazed at his elder brother.

The latter just at present had his hands full. The storm had increased in fury and was now blowing half a gale. The sail threatened to split into ribbons, and the gunwale was constantly under water as the *Ariel* plunged along. Lester's muscles were strained to the utmost to hold the rudder against the heavy waves that seemed bound to disable it.

His face was set and worried, as he glanced alternately at sea and sky. He seemed to be debating a question that bothered him. At last he reached a decision.

"It's no use," he said as he jammed over the tiller and changed the course of the *Ariel*. "We'll never make Bartanet Shoals with the wind as it is now. We'd have to do too much tacking and beating up into the wind."

"What will you do then?" inquired Fred anxiously.

"We'll make for a cove I know of, where we can wait till the storm is over," answered Lester. "And we'll have to do some tall hustling to get there before night comes on. Here goes for a run before the wind."

CHAPTER III

A WELCOME REFUGE

The change of course had not been effected without shipping a considerable amount of water as the boat hung for a moment in the wind. Bill and Teddy bailed desperately, and an instant later the *Ariel* was heading in a new direction. The wind now, instead of striking her sail at an angle, was following directly over the stern, and the little craft fairly flew. The power of the wind made her careen at a dangerous angle, and Bill and Teddy had to climb up on the further side to keep her from capsizing.

It was perilous sailing, but the bite of the salt spray on their cheeks and the swift pace at which they were moving filled the boys with wild exhilaration. They might have been four young Vikings out on a voyage of discovery, as they faced and dared the storm.

"See how she foots it through the water!" exclaimed Lester. "Isn't she a beauty?"

"You bet she is!" responded Teddy with enthusiasm. "I don't wonder that sailors get so fond of their boats that they'd rather go down with them than live without them."

"I can't say that I've got so far as that," laughed Lester. "But I'm sure I'd feel as bad about losing the *Ariel* as you boys would if you lost Star and Colonel."

"You'd feel mighty bad then," responded Teddy, as he thought of the horses that he and Fred had brought with them from the West.

At this moment, his attention was attracted by a movement on the part of the boy they had rescued. They had sheltered him as much they could, but they could not prevent an occasional dash of spray from striking his face and this had hastened his awakening. This time, his eyes were lighted with intelligence, and it was clear that he had largely recovered from the effect of his immersion.

Teddy bent over toward him.

"How are you feeling?" he asked with a friendly smile.

"Better," was the response in a faint voice. "I can't remember yet, though, just what happened to me."

"A big wave threw you overboard," broke in Bill. "We happened to be cruising near by, and we picked you up."

"I guess I must have hit my head against something when I went over," said the stranger. "I don't remember a thing that happened while I was in the water. Did I swim?"

"You seemed to be swimming a little," said Teddy, "but I guess it was more instinct than anything else. You went down before we got to you. But you'd better not talk any more just now. We'll be on shore before long I hope, and then we'll tell you all about it."

"There's the shore now," called out Bill in accents of relief, as he pointed to a long dark line ahead of them.

On the right it seemed to be sandy and level, but a little to the left there was a rocky elevation, against which the waves broke with a thunderous roar, sending back sheets of crested foam.

The boat kept on with unslackened speed and the boys grew somewhat uneasy as the tumbling breakers grew plainer to the sight. But that uneasiness became consternation, when Lester with a quick twist of the tiller headed the *Ariel* straight toward two immense rocks that seemed to stand out as sentinels on the coast.

"Lester!" shouted Bill in warning and then stopped. A look at the strained intent face of the helmsman told Bill that he knew exactly what he was doing.

They came nearer and nearer, and the faces of the boys blanched at the fearful turmoil of the breakers. Then Lester threw the tiller to port.

"Sit tight!" he yelled, and the next moment the *Ariel* dashed straight for a point midway between the two giant rocks.

There was an awful moment as she staggered through that seething turmoil of raging waters. But this was followed by an immense relief when they found themselves rocking on the waters of a sheltered cove, which, while rough, were like a mill pond compared to the sea outside.

Before them stretched a sandy beach, which bore no trace of human habitation except a tumbled down hut which stood fifty feet inland. A few scrub pines were scattered here and there, and some dejected looking bushes grew in a little patch of green that the sand had not yet swallowed up. It was not an attractive landscape, but to the boys, after escaping the perils of the sea, it seemed a bit of Paradise.

"Lower the sail, Fred," directed Lester. "We'll get out the sweeps and feel our way to a landing place."

The sail came down with a run, and Fred rose and stretched himself after having been so long in a cramped position.

"Lester, you're some sailor," he said in hearty admiration. "You handled the *Ariel* to the queen's taste. I take off my hat to you."

"Same here," echoed Teddy. "It certainly looked as if it were all up with us when you came shooting toward these rocks."

"It was a dandy bit of work," said Bill warmly. "It's a lucky thing for this crowd that you were at the helm. If you hadn't been, we might be food for the fishes by this time."

"Oh, I don't know," returned Lester, flushing a little at the chorus of appreciation. "I just happened to know of this place, and I knew we had to get to shore before dark. So I took a

chance on making it. But it's nearly dark now, and we've got a lot to do, before we're snug and tidy for the night.

"The first thing to do is to find a shallow place where you fellows can wade ashore. Then I'll take the *Ariel* out a way and anchor her. As soon as that's done, I'll swim ashore and join you."

They poled the boat in carefully with a pair of long sweeps until their soundings showed them that they were in less than three feet of water. Here Bill and the two Rushton boys jumped overboard, and while they held out their arms to him, Lester carefully let down the stranger. He could walk by this time, although he was still weak and shaky, and the boys helped him to the shore.

"Now you sit here for a while," said Fred, when they had reached a point twenty feet or so up the beach, "while the rest of us hustle around and get something to eat. Do you feel hungry?"

"I'm beginning to," smiled the other. "I guess I can punish my part of the supper pretty well."

"Good!" said Fred heartily. "That reminds me. Say, Lester!" he called, as he waded back, "hand us over that string of bluefish. It's lucky we caught them before the storm came up. Is there anything left from the lunch?"

"Not a thing," answered Lester. "You wolves went through that lunch like a prairie fire. But I've got some slices of bacon in the locker, and here's some salt and pepper. I guess we won't go hungry."

"Not from the looks of that string we won't," laughed Fred, as he received from Lester enough bluefish to feed a dozen men. "Now hand over the other things, and by the time you anchor and come ashore, we'll be ready to fill you up."

"That's a big contract," grinned Lester, "but I'm going to hold you to it."

He poled the *Ariel* out a little way and dropped the anchor. Then he made everything shipshape about the little craft, slipped into the water, and swam ashore.

He found that his comrades had not been idle. Teddy had ransacked the hut and found an old frying pan and a bent up broiler, probably left there by the hunters that made this their rendezvous in the sniping season. Bill collected all the shrubs and twigs that he could find, and taking a match from an oilskin pouch started a fire. Fred was busy with his clasp knife, cleaning the fish, and when Lester reached them, he had half a dozen speckled beauties ready for the frying pan.

"Let's use the busted broiler instead," suggested Lester. "Bluefish are twice as good broiled as they are fried. We'll use the frying pan for the bacon."

"The fish would be better yet, if we had some oak twigs to broil them on, instead of the broiler," said Bill, whose experience in camping out made him an expert adviser, "but there doesn't seem to be any wood around here except pine. And the flavor of that spoils the fish."

So they compromised on the dilapidated broiler, holding the fish over a fire of embers that they raked out from the main blaze. Bill busied himself with the bacon, and the appetizing odors that blended together made the hungry boys wild with anticipation.

At last the meal was ready, and they found it a feast fit for a king. They had no forks, but they used their knives as substitutes.

"Eating with your knife, Fred!" said Teddy, in mock horror. "What would mother say if she saw you?"

"I certainly am some sword swallower," grinned Fred. "But we're all in the same boat, and everything goes. I don't suppose Robinson Crusoe and Friday were very particular about their table manners. And this is certainly a Robinson Crusoe stunt we're doing."

"Except that this isn't an island," laughed Lester.

"And there are no cannibals ready to make us into soup," added Bill.

"And our boat hasn't been wrecked," exulted Teddy, looking out over the water, where the *Ariel* lay with the firelight reflected from her side.

CHAPTER IV

A STRANGE MISSION

It seemed to the boys as though they could never get enough, and Fred, as he saw one bluefish after another vanish, reminded the others that they would want something for breakfast the next morning. But at last even their ravenous appetites were satisfied, and they lay back on the sand, blissfully content.

"Easy camping," remarked Teddy lazily. "No dishes to wash, no beds to make, nothing to do till to-morrow."

"Do you think the storm will be over by that time, Lester?" asked Fred.

"I guess so," answered Lester, as he looked up at the sky where some stars showed through. "The clouds seem to be breaking away and the wind has died down a little. The surf doesn't sound so loud on the cliffs outside, either."

"I suppose your father will be worried when we don't get back to-night," remarked Bill.

"I'm afraid he will," assented Lester. "But I've had to stay away sometimes before when I've been caught in a squall, and he knows the *Ariel* is a pretty staunch boat. Still, he can't help feeling worried, and we'll make sail for home the first thing in the morning."

By this time, their clothes had dried in the warmth of the fire, and the comfort that this gave, together with the hearty meal they had eaten, put the youths in a state of supreme content. They were at peace with themselves and with all the world, and their satisfaction was all the greater by contrast with their peril of the afternoon.

The stranger had eaten heartily and joined freely in the conversation, but by tacit consent they had waited till the meal was over before they discussed his narrow escape. The Rally Hall boys had had time to take the unknown one's measure, and the general impression was favorable.

He was a clean-cut, well set up youth of about sixteen years. His form was lithe and muscular, his hair black, and his eyes frank and friendly. His speech showed education, and his manners were easy and correct.

If there was anything about him that marked him out as peculiar, it was a certain baffled expression that came and went in his eyes. He looked like one who was always seeking for something, but never finding it. His glance had taken in the cove and the surrounding shore, as though to impress it on his memory, with a view to using the knowledge later on.

Now as the boys lounged around the fire, he seemed to feel that the time had come to give some account of himself.

"I can't thank you fellows enough for having pulled me out of the water," he began.

"Here's the fellow to thank," interrupted Lester, clapping his hand on Fred's shoulder. "He went overboard after you."

"What?" was the surprised reply. "I thought you pulled me in from the deck. That was an awfully plucky thing for you to do," the stranger declared, as he grasped Fred's hand warmly, "and I'll never forget it. With that shark swimming around there, too!"

"Oh, that was nothing," disclaimed Fred. "I had tight hold of a rope, and it was no trick at all to hold on to you until the other fellows pulled us in."

"You took your life in your hand just the same," affirmed the other. "I hope that some day I'll be able to show you how much I appreciate it."

"What was the matter with your motor boat anyway?" asked Fred, who was always embarrassed by thanks and wanted to change the subject.

"The ignition was bad, and the water that I shipped made things worse. I was tinkering away at it and had almost got it to working right, when that big wave came aboard and carried me over the side. I can just remember its hitting me, and after that everything was blank until I came to my senses on the deck of the boat."

"I've seen that motor boat of yours cruising up and down the coast a good deal this last year or so," remarked Lester. "You seem to be pretty fond of the water."

The stranger shot a swift glance at the last speaker, as if he thought some hidden meaning might lurk behind the words.

"Yes," he said, "I'm never happier than when I'm out on the open sea. Some of my ancestors must have been sailors I guess, and I have it in the blood. But that isn't the only reason I've been cruising along this coast."

"What is the reason then?" asked Teddy curiously. "That is," he went on hastily, "if you care to tell us. We don't want to pry into your affairs."

The other seemed to debate with himself. It was as if a habit of secrecy were battling with a sudden desire for expression.

"I'll tell you," he burst out. "It's a thing I've never told any one else. But you fellows have been so white to me, to say nothing of one of you having risked his life for mine, that I'm going to take a chance. Perhaps it will be a relief anyway. Brooding over it so long and not confiding in any one, I've been afraid some time I might go crazy over it."

The boys were startled, but they gave no sign and the speaker went on:

"My name is Ross Montgomery. I'm looking for a chest of gold."

The effect was electric. The thrilling phrase appealed to all that was most romantic in the listeners. Visions floated before their eyes of hidden treasures, of pirate hoards, of sunken galleons with their doubloons and "pieces of eight." These things had seemed to belong to the misty past, to distant seas. Yet here in the prosaic twentieth century, in a civilized

country, on a quiet beach along the coast of Maine, this boy of their own age was talking of a quest that might well stir the most sluggish blood.

"A chest of gold!" repeated Fred, as though he could not believe his ears.

"Where do you think it's hidden?" questioned Teddy eagerly.

"How much money is in the chest?" asked Bill.

"Perhaps it isn't money," corrected Lester. "It may be gold dust, or it may be in bars. Have you any clue?" he asked, turning to Ross.

"What makes you think it's on this coast?" put in Fred.

Ross raised his hand good-naturedly, as though to ward off the rain of questions.

"Easy there," he smiled, "and I'll tell you the whole thing from the beginning. Perhaps you'll think I'm crazy. Perhaps you'll say I have as good a chance of finding it as the fellow who looks for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. And you may be right. Anyway, I'll give you what facts I know, and you can figure out for yourselves whether I have a chance or not."

Ross waited a moment to collect his thoughts, and the other boys disposed themselves to listen. Their blood was bounding and their eyes shining. The situation was romantic in itself. The firelight played over their eager faces, the waters of the cove lay shimmering before them, while, at the outlet, the surf thundered against the rocks. The boys might have been castaways on some desert island in the tropics. The great world outside seemed very far away.

"My father was in business in Boston about fifteen years ago," Ross began. "I was just a baby then, and, of course, I don't know anything about those days except what I've been told since by my mother.

"Father was a good business man and he had built up a fairly large trade. We had a home in a suburb near Boston and all the money we needed. The business had been expanding, and father had put into it not only all his own ready money, but a lot that he had borrowed from his friends. Then hard times came. Of course he had to retrench in every way he could. He took in his sails and worked hard to weather the storm. He'd have succeeded, too, but just as things were looking brighter, a big bank failure knocked him out completely."

There was a murmur of sympathy from the boys.

"As if that wasn't enough, he came down with brain fever," went on Ross. "I suppose it was brought on by worry and overwork. Anyway, when he got on his feet again, everything had gone to smash and he didn't have a cent left. Worse than that, he was in debt for a good many thousand dollars.

"Father was honest though," and there was a touch of pride in the boy's voice. "Everybody that knew him at all knew that. If his health had been good, he could have started in all over again, and even some of the men to whom he owed money would have lent him more to get him on his feet. But the doctor told him it would be simply suicide for him to go on under the circumstances, and that he'd have to go away somewhere and take a long rest.

"All of his property had gone to his creditors, but mother owned a small place up in Canada on the Gulf of St. Lawrence. She had inherited it from her father, and as it was free and clear, the whole family packed up and went out there.

"It was a complete change from the life we had lived before and my father's health began to mend right away. There was a good deal of valuable lumber on the place and as there was a good demand for this, he sold it at a profit. Then, too, he traded a good deal with the trappers who came out of the forests every spring with their skins and furs.

"Money began to pile up and father was feeling fine. It wasn't so much because *he* was getting the money, though of course that was a great thing, but he was fairly crazy to pay off every cent of the money he owed when he went into bankruptcy. He was a very proud man and couldn't bear to be in any one's debt. I've often heard him say to mother that the day he stood clear with the world again would be the happiest day of his life.

"He had kept a careful record of every cent he owed in a little memorandum book. Here it is now."

Ross reached into his pocket and drew out a small morocco-covered book that gleamed red in the light of the fire.

CHAPTER V

THE CHEST OF GOLD

Ross Montgomery turned over the pages rapidly, and the boys could see a number of accounts in a precise, methodical script.

"The first two or three years were the hardest," the strange boy went on, "but after that the money came in fast. Father made a number of investments in lumber and in fishing interests, and everything he touched seemed to bring him luck. By the time I was six years old, he had got enough together to pay all his debts and make him independent for life.

"There was one funny thing about it, though. He had burned his fingers so badly in that big bank failure that he never would trust a bank again. Every dollar he got above what he needed to use in business, he stored away in an oak chest that he kept in a secret place at home. He had no use for paper money either. He'd take it, of course, when he couldn't get anything else, but the first chance he got he'd change it for gold. Of course it was just a whim of his, but somehow it made him feel safer. Maybe it was a little mental twist left from his siege of brain fever. At any rate that's the way he felt, and he kept piling up the gold in that old chest. All sorts of money, too, English, Canadian, French and American coins. I was small then and didn't know much of the value of money, but I can remember once how the pieces shone when father gathered up a handful and let the coins fall in a shower back into the chest--"

"Gee!" interrupted Teddy, "just think of it. A rain of gold!"

"I'd like to be caught out in such a shower," laughed Fred.

"And I wouldn't want any umbrella to ward it off either," added Bill.

"Cork up, you money grabbers, and let Ross go on with his story," Lester laughingly advised.

"It brought bad luck to father, though," said Ross soberly. "If it hadn't been for that gold he might be alive to-day."

It was the first intimation the boys had had that the lad's father was dead, and they kept a respectful silence during the moment that followed while Ross seemed struggling with painful memories.

"A little over nine years ago," the boy went on at last, "father concluded that he had enough on hand to settle with all his creditors, capital and interest, and still have enough left to make him independent for life. He planned to leave mother and me--I haven't any brothers or sisters--at home, while he came down to Boston and settled the claims. Then he was going to pick out a home here and send for us to come to him. Although he had made the money in Canada, he had always felt homesick for his own country.

"Then the question came up," continued Ross, "of how he was to get the money down here. Of course, the safer way would have been to take it to some Canadian bank and get a draft on Boston. But I've told you of the bitter feeling he had toward all banks, and he'd counted so long on turning over that identical gold to his creditors that he couldn't give it up.

"We were a long distance from any large city, and the only way to travel by sea was to take some sailing vessel that stopped once in a while at a town near by. There was a good deal of smuggling going on just then between Canada and this country, and as there was a big profit in it, almost all the coastwise sailing vessels took a hand in it now and then. Sometimes it would be opium that had been landed on the Pacific coast and brought over to Quebec. Then, too, there were French laces and silks and wines.

"Of course it was illegal, but lots of people couldn't see much harm in it. You know how it is with people that come over from Europe to New York. A vast number of them try to get things in without paying duty and they think it's rather smart to get the best of Uncle Sam. Many who are honorable in every other way seem to lose that feeling when it comes to smuggling.

"Of course it's wrong, as everything is wrong that breaks the law, whether we think the law is just or not. But I'm just saying this to explain why father was willing to trust himself and his gold on board a smuggler."

The boys bent forward eagerly.

"For that's what he did," continued Ross. "There was a schooner, named the *Ranger*, that often stopped at the river town near where we lived. The captain was a man, Ramsay by name, whom father knew and trusted. His boat did a good deal of legitimate trading, but sandwiched in with that was quite a lot of smuggling off and on. Still, aside from that, Captain Ramsay had the reputation of being a strictly honest man, and he and father had been on friendly terms for years.

"When the time came, father went on board with all his baggage, including the chest of gold. Of course he did not take any one in the secret of what the chest contained. He figured on getting to Boston in a week or ten days.

"But the second day out, a tackle block fell from the foremast and laid Captain Ramsay dead on the deck. He was buried at sea and the first mate took command of the schooner. And it was right here that the trouble began.

"This first mate was a Portuguese, a good sailor, but aside from that I guess he was as big a villain as ever went unhung. There were five others in the crew, and they didn't seem to be much better than the mate. Captain Ramsay had been a rough captain and had been able to hold the men down, but as soon as he had gone things began to happen."

There was a pause for a moment while the boys held their breath waiting for the story to go on.

"And," resumed Ross, impressively, "I'd give my right hand to know just what those things were."

His hearers sat for a moment stunned and bewildered by this sudden ending.

"What!" gasped Teddy. "Do you mean that you don't know what happened?"

"No," was the reply. "I don't *know*. From what I've been able to learn I can make a pretty good guess. All I *know* is that my father was picked up a week later in an open boat, wounded and starving and delirious."

A gasp of wonder and pity ran around the little circle.

"From a letter found in his pocket they learned who he was, and after he had partially recovered they sent him home to us," Ross went on. "But from then to the day of his death, which took place a year later, he was insane."

"The scoundrels!" muttered Fred, clenching his fists in indignation.

"We tried to get at the facts by piecing together what he said when he was quieter than usual," Ross continued. "Again and again, he would speak of 'the lighthouse' and 'Bartanet Shoals.' Then he would imagine himself in a fight with the mate. Many times he spoke of 'burying the box.'"

"All these of course were slight things to go on, but by putting them all together and looking at them from every side, we figured out something like this:

"The mate probably had his suspicions aroused by the weight of the box that held the gold. Father must have come upon him when he was trying to open it, and there was a fight in which the rest of the crew joined. They were probably somewhere near Bartanet Shoals when this happened, and they put in at some quiet place along here to think over what they'd better do. They finally decided to bury the box and leave it there until the matter should have blown over and been forgotten. The men probably intended to put father out of the way, and, after the search for him had been given up, to come back and get the box. Father either tried to escape in the open boat, or the crew, not quite willing to kill him in cold blood, set him adrift, knowing that in his wounded condition it would probably amount to the same thing."

"Didn't the *Ranger* ever turn up?" asked Fred.

"Not at any of the home towns," answered Ross. "But some months later it was found tied up to a wharf near Halifax. It was from the log they found on board that they learned of Captain Ramsay's death. The crew were traced, and it was found that they had shipped on a brig that was bound for the Pacific. She went down in a storm off Cape Horn, and every soul on board was lost."

"Then everybody who was actually concerned in the matter is probably dead," mused Lester.

"Yes," answered Ross, "we can't look for any help from human witnesses. There's a bare chance that some letter or document may turn up that will give us a clue. But that's so unlikely that it's hardly worth considering."

"Then all you have to go on is the possibility that the box was buried somewhere on this coast not very far from Bartanet Shoals, and that if it was, it's never been taken away?" asked Bill.

"That's all," admitted Ross, "except--"

He checked himself hastily.

CHAPTER VI

AARON RUSHTON, CREDITOR

If the other boys noticed the involuntary movement, they made no comment, and Ross went on:

"You fellows may think I'm foolish to go on hunting for the gold when I've got so little evidence to go on. It seems almost like hunting for a needle in a haystack. But there's such a lot at stake that I can't give it up."

"I don't think you're foolish," maintained Teddy stoutly. "It's just what I'd do, if I were in your place."

"So would I," agreed Fred. "Of course you may never find it. But if you didn't try for it, you'd feel restless and uneasy all the rest of your life."

"It's better to have tried and failed, than never to have tried at all," declared Bill.

"You're young enough yet to spare a year or two more at it anyway," said Lester. "If nothing comes of it, you can settle down at something else."

"Yes," replied Ross, "it isn't a matter of life and death anyway. Mother is still keeping the old place up in Canada and looking after the property that father left there. The income is small, but it is enough to keep us going, and if I finally have to give up looking for the gold, I can go back there and do pretty well. But it would take me a long time to get enough together to pay father's debts, and perhaps I could never do it. That's the real reason why I'm so anxious to find the chest. It isn't so much for what it would give me, though of course I'd be glad to have it. But I know how father felt, and I feel that I owe it to his memory to carry out his wishes, if I possibly can."

"Do the debts mount up to a very large amount?" Bill ventured to ask.

"Larger than I care to think of," answered Ross. "I should say that it would take about twenty thousand dollars if they were settled now. And, of course, there's the interest creeping up with every day that passes."

"I guess the creditors would be so glad to get back the principal, that they wouldn't worry much about the interest," remarked Lester.

"I suppose they would," answered Ross. "But they ought to get both, and I shall never feel that I'm clear with the world until they do."

It was clear that the son had inherited to the full his father's independence of spirit, and the boys' liking for him deepened.

"Most of the debts are for small amounts," Ross continued, again taking the little red memorandum book from his pocket, "that is, comparatively small. There's one big one that is more than all the rest put together. The others are for a few hundred dollars each, though one or two of them run into the thousands."

He turned over the pages.

"Father was very methodical and precise," he went on, showing the pages. "You see, he has all the names arranged in alphabetical order. There's Allen, three hundred and twenty-seven dollars; Carey, one hundred and ninety-two; Linson, eighty-five; Masters, six hundred and eighteen. And here we come to the big one, Rushton, twelve thousand four hundred and--"

"What was that?" broke in Teddy excitedly. "Why that's my name and Fred's."

"Is that so?" asked Ross in surprise, for so far he had heard the boys speak to each other only by their first names, and there had been no formal introduction. "It isn't such a common name, either. Perhaps it's your father. What's his first name?"

"Mansfield," came simultaneously from both of the boys.

"Oh, then he isn't the one," said Ross, consulting his book. "This is--let me see," as his finger sought the place, "Aaron--Aaron Rushton."

"We have an Uncle Aaron, my father's brother," stated Fred.

"Can it possibly be Uncle Aaron?" asked Teddy, his pulses quickened by the possibility.

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised," rejoined Ross. "There can't be so many Aaron Rushtons in this part of the country. This man lived, at that time in Medford, not far from Boston."

"That's just where Uncle Aaron used to live!" broke in Fred. "He has some property there yet, although lately he spends a good deal of the time with us in Oldtown."

"Would you know his handwriting, if you saw it?" asked Ross, feeling in his pocket.

"Sure we would!" answered Fred. "We've seen it a hundred times."

"Take a look at that then," said Ross, taking a wrinkled sheet of paper from a collection wrapped in oiled silk and held together by a rubber band, "and see if it's your uncle's writing."

Fred unfolded the paper with hands that trembled with excitement, while Teddy looked over his shoulder.

It was a brief note, dated fifteen years before, acknowledging the receipt of three hundred and sixty dollars, being the semi-annual interest on notes given by Mr. Montgomery. It had been written from Medford, and it bore the stiff precise signature of Aaron Rushton.

"That's Uncle Aaron's writing!" exclaimed Fred. "I can't be mistaken."

"It sure is," echoed Teddy. "I'd know it among a thousand."

"Well, what do you think of that?" chimed in Bill, as he and Lester crowded around to look.

It gave the boys a queer thrill to think of all that had been pressed into the years between the time that note was written and the present. It seemed like a link between the living and

the dead. The man who had received it was in his grave, and the one who had sent it had long since given up all hope of hearing of the matter again. And now chance had brought together the son of one and the nephews of the other on this stormy night on the seacoast, and they sat tracing out the faded lines by the flickering light of the brush fire.

Fred sat back and drew a long breath.

"Do you remember what Dave Parloe said—that it was a small world after all?" he asked Bill. "I know now that he was right."

"To think that it was you who saved my life this afternoon, and that it was your uncle who helped my father when he was in business trouble!" exclaimed Ross. "I feel that I owe you more than ever now. You see, Mr. Aaron Rushton lent part of the twelve thousand dollars to father when he started into business in Canada."

"Just think of Uncle Aaron's doing a thing like that!" exclaimed Teddy.

"You don't owe me anything," affirmed Fred, "and as for what you owe Uncle Aaron, he's stopped worrying over that long ago."

"But won't he be surprised when we write and tell him all about this?" demanded Teddy.

"If we could only pitch in and help Ross find the gold, we'd square ourselves with Uncle Aaron for the rest of our lives," remarked Fred.

"Why, has he anything against you now?" asked Ross, in surprise.

Teddy's eyes twinkled as he looked at Fred.

"Oh, no," he explained, "not especially. Down in his heart I think he's rather fond of us. But he's a bachelor, and he hasn't much use for boys. I got in bad with him last year when I sent a baseball against the horse of a coach he was riding in and made the team run away. He jumped just as they got to a bridge and went head first into the river. Do you remember how he looked, Fred, when he came up dripping?"

"Will I ever forget it?" chuckled Fred, as the picture of his uncle, with his hair plastered over his face and the water streaming from his bony frame, came up before him.

"He was furious," explained Teddy, "and he was worse yet when he found that he'd spoiled his watch and lost some valuable papers. We got those back for him, though, and that made things better, though I don't think he approves of us yet. But if we could get this money for him, he'd sure give us a clean bill of health."

"Uncle Aaron likes money, all right," added Fred, "though I will say that when he does spend, he does it royally. He certainly fixed us up in style when he bought the tickets for us to go out to Bill's ranch. He's got a hair-trigger temper, but take him all in all, he's a good old chap."

"I think he must be, from what mother has told me," said Ross. "He might have seized what property we've got in payment of the debt, but when he learned that father had died and that mother had just enough to get along on, he did not trouble us. And that's one thing that makes me all the more eager to pay what father owed him."

"I tell you what we fellows ought to do!" exclaimed Fred. "We ought to spend the rest of our vacation here helping Ross look for the gold. There'll be lots of fun and excitement in it anyway, even if we never lay eyes on it."

"And think what it would mean if we did really find it," gloated Teddy. "Think what Uncle Aaron would say, and how proud father and mother would be if we had a hand in it."

"To say nothing of how Ross would feel, if we got back his father's money," added Bill.

"The idea looks good to me," declared Lester. "I have the *Ariel*, and if we can get the motor boat back for Ross, there won't be a spot on the coast within fifty miles that we can't explore. Between us, we may run across some clue, and even if we don't, we'll get lots of fun out of the hunt."

"Like the old darky with his lottery ticket," laughed Bill. "His boss reproved him for spending money on a mere chance. 'Oh, I dunno, boss,' the old fellow answered. 'T'ree dollars ain't much to spend fur a whole year's hopin'.'"

"It's mighty good of you fellows to help me out this way," said Ross gratefully, when the laugh had subsided. "Of course, if you do find it, there'll be a great big reward in it for you. I know that isn't what you are looking for, but you'll get it just the same."

"We'll leave that all to you," answered Lester. "We've got to find it first."

"Like the old English recipe for cooking rabbit that begins: 'First catch the hare,'" chuckled Fred.

The lads sat about the fire for another hour, too excited by all that had happened to think of sleep. Then Lester gave the signal.

"Come, boys," he said, "we'll have plenty of time to talk this over, but now we must get some rest. I want to get an early start in the morning, if the storm has blown over. It's me for the downy couch now and the early bird stunt in the morning."

The "downy couch" resolved itself into beds hollowed out in the sand with the boys' coats rolled up for pillows. But no king in his bed of state ever enjoyed a sounder sleep than that into which the tired boys fell at once, while the fire died down and the surf beat on the rocks outside.

CHAPTER VII

THE DRIFTING MOTOR BOAT

The sun had not yet risen the next morning, although the eastern sky was bright with signs of coming dawn, when Lester passed among his sleeping comrades with a shake on the shoulder for each.

"Come along, you sleepy heads," he cried, as they sat up and rubbed their eyes. "We must hustle now and get off. Lively's the word."

"You old tyrant," yawned Teddy. "I feel as though I'd just got to sleep."

"What's that I smell?" demanded Fred, as a savory whiff came to his nostrils. "Is it coffee, or does my nose deceive me?"

"Nary a deceive," grinned Lester. "I just remembered that we had some coffee in the locker, and I swam out and got it. And that isn't all. Just take a sniff of this," and he motioned to an old can that he had rummaged from the hut, and that hung by two forked sticks over the fire, giving off a most appetizing odor.

"Clams," pronounced Fred, as he bent over it. "Lester, you're a wonder. Where did you get them?"

"Found a bed of them up the cove a bit," answered Lester. "Oh, I'm some little hustler, if any one should ask you."

The boys needed no further urging, and after plunging their faces into the waters of the cove, they ranged themselves round the fire and sampled Lester's cooking. The clams were delicious as a beginning, and, topped off with the bacon and the rest of the bluefish, together with the fragrant coffee, furnished a meal that would have made a dyspeptic green with envy.

"Now, fellows," said Lester, when the last crumb and last drop had vanished, "the storm has gone down, although the water's still pretty rough. But we can start all right. I'll swim out to the *Ariel*, get up the anchor, and bring her in far enough so you can wade out to her and get aboard. Then we'll make a break for open water and take a look around for Ross' motor boat."

"I'm none too sure we'll find her," said Ross, dubiously. "She may have been swamped or dashed against the rocks."

"Oh, I don't know," remarked Fred. "It's a wonder what a boat will go through sometimes, and then she was so far out that I don't think she got near the rocks."

"Even if we don't find her, it won't be any proof that she went under," added Teddy. "Some other boat may have caught sight of her and taken her in tow."

"Not in such a blow as we had last night, I'm afraid," answered Ross. "Still, I'm not going to begin to grizzle now. There'll be plenty of time to do that if we don't find her."

In a few minutes they were all on board, and the *Ariel* made for the narrow passage between the sentinel rocks at the mouth of the cove.

"A little different from what it was when we came scooting in last night," remarked Teddy, as the sturdy little boat danced out on the waves that sparkled in the sunshine.

"Well, rather!" answered Lester, as he swung the *Ariel* round to her course. "I don't mind telling you fellows now that I felt mighty shaky yesterday afternoon. I've been out in many a stiff blow, but I've usually had warning and been able to make a dash for home. It takes pretty careful work to get a boat into that cove between those two big rocks even in ordinary weather; but it's a case of nip and tuck when one has to try it in a storm. My heart was in my mouth for a few minutes until we got safely through."

"You didn't show it," said Fred. "You went at it as coolly as any old salt who has done nothing else all his life but buck the seas."

"Well, anyway, we got through all right, and that's all that counts," returned Lester. "But after this I'm going to keep my eyes peeled for signs of trouble before the trouble comes."

"It was our fault for talking too much," remarked Teddy. "We were so stirred up by that letter from Mel that we couldn't think of anything else."

By this time Lester had the boat well out on the open sea, and every one kept a sharp lookout for any trace of Ross' boat. In his heart no one of them really expected to see it again, but they all kept up an appearance of confidence, the Rally Hall boys doing so in order not to discourage their new-found friend.

He, on his part, was almost silent. This was due to some extent, no doubt, to the reaction from his severe ordeal of the day before, but it may have been caused somewhat by the feeling that he had gone too far in taking them fully into his confidence. His secret was no longer his, and while he was strongly drawn toward these wholesome young fellows who were of his own age, he could not help feeling a little uneasy. He felt sure that they would act toward him in perfect good faith, but some careless or indiscreet word dropped by any one of them might betray the secret to others who would not be as scrupulous.

"I wish we had brought a pair of glasses along," remarked Lester. "There's an extra pair at the lighthouse, and we might have had it as well as not."

"Never mind," said Teddy, "we've got Bill's eyes to fall back on, and if they can see as far out over the water as they used to over the prairie, they'll be almost as good as glasses."

Over an hour elapsed without any trace of the derelict, and Lester began to feel uneasy in regard to his long absence from home.

"I hate to cut this short," he said reluctantly, "but I know just how father is feeling after

yesterday's storm, and I feel it's up to me to let him know we're safe. As soon as we've done that, we can put right out again and spend the whole day looking for the boat."

"You're just right," answered Ross heartily. "You fellows have done enough for me already and you ought to make a bee-line for home. The chances are all against our finding the motor boat anyway. It may have sunk long ago."

Just as Lester was about to act on the suggestion, there was a cry from Bill:

"There's something over there that may be what we're after. I've been watching it for some minutes. It's a boat of some kind, and it hasn't any sails. It doesn't seem to be going anywhere, but is just tossing up and down."

The rest strained their eyes, but at first could see only a tiny dot. Lester steered straight toward the object and as a stiff breeze filled the sail he made rapid progress.

"That's it!" shouted Ross jubilantly, as they came closer; "I've handled it too long to be mistaken."

"Hurrah!" cried Teddy.

"Great!" exclaimed Fred. "It wasn't a forlorn hope after all."

"We're some little searchers, all right," exulted Bill.

They were soon within a hundred feet of the motor boat. It was a trim, smart-looking little craft, and the boys admired the long sloping lines that denoted speed. There was no sign of any damage to the boat, but the loggy way in which it moved showed that it had shipped a lot of water.

With a skilful twist of the tiller, Lester rounded to on the port side. Fred reached out and held the two boats together with the hook, while the others let the fenders over the side to keep the boats from scraping.

"Right as a trivet," said Lester. "Here's your boat, Ross, old man, and as far as I can see it's just as good as ever."

"I'll never forget you fellows as long as I live!" exclaimed Ross gratefully, as he leaped to the deck of his own craft.

CHAPTER VIII

A SLENDER CHANCE

Ross was quickly followed by Bill and Teddy. Lester and Fred waited only until they had fastened the two boats securely together, then they followed the example of their mates.

"She isn't full of water or anything like that, is she?" remarked Teddy, as he saw the water sloshing from one side to the other as the boat rocked on the waves.

"Two feet at least," judged Bill.

"Not more than eighteen inches," was the verdict of Lester, who was accustomed to measure depths where water was concerned. "But that's enough and more than enough. She's a pretty good seaworthy boat, or she'd have shipped a good deal more."

"She must have ridden the waves like a cork," said Fred in admiration.

The motor boat was not quite as large as the *Ariel*, being perhaps two feet shorter, and also narrower in the beam. In the stern there was a gasoline engine of the newest type, bearing the name of a celebrated maker. Amidships, there was a tiny cabin that one had to stoop to enter. On one side of this were small lockers, one designed to hold tools and spare parts of the engine, the other serving as a pantry. On the other side was a low, broad seat extending the whole length of the cabin, and on this was a cushion which at night served as a mattress for the owner of the boat.

Everything about the little craft was trim and plain, the only ornament in sight being some brass work that surrounded the binnacle. It was clear that it had been built with an eye to usefulness rather than beauty.

"The first thing now, fellows," said Lester, after a quick glance around had satisfied his curiosity, "is to get the water over into the sea where it belongs. We'd better get off our shoes and socks and roll our trousers up high."

In a twinkling, the boys were ready for wading.

"I have a bailer here," said Ross, producing it from the locker.

"That's all right but it isn't enough," said Fred. "I'll get Lester's, and you fellows can rustle up something else that will do the trick."

The boys were rather restricted in their choice, but the articles they finally got together for the purpose served well enough. As Teddy put it, the collection was "neat but not gaudy." He had the frying pan, Bill handled the coffee pot, Lester used a huge sponge, while Fred and Ross did effective work with the bailers.

Before the onslaught of five sturdy pairs of arms, the water went down quickly and was soon so low that only the sponge could be used. Five minutes more, and the last drop had been squeezed over the side.

"There," said Lester, as he flung the sponge back into the *Ariel*. "She's empty now and the hot sun will soon dry out the planks. But I wouldn't advise you to sleep on those cushions to-night, unless you want to get rheumatism or pneumonia."

"I'm not going to," answered Ross. "As soon as I get the engine going, I'll beat it to Oakland, and I'll sleep between sheets to-night in a regular bed."

"It won't be a bad place, either, after last night on the sand," replied Teddy.

"Are you staying at Oakland right along, when you're not cruising around?" asked Lester.

"Yes, I've been there for the last two months. I have relatives there."

"If there's nothing special to call you there now, I'd be glad to have you come along with us to Bartanet Shoals," said Lester hospitably.

"That would be great!" exclaimed Fred. "Then we could talk more about the missing money. There'll be a hundred things come up that we'll want to ask you about."

"It's very kind of you," responded Ross warmly, "and I'd like nothing better. But just now I'm looking for my mother to come down from her home in Canada. She may be here any time now, and I want to be on hand when she comes. She's going to stay for several weeks. But the very first chance I get, I'll come over to the Shoals."

"All right," said Lester. "The latch string hangs outside the door, and we'll be glad to see you."

"How's the engine?" asked Bill.

"Right as can be, as far as I can see," was the answer. "I'll have to dry it and polish it. There wasn't anything serious the matter with it yesterday-just a little trouble with the ignition-and I was just getting it into shape, when that big wave came aboard and took me over."

"We'll stand by anyway for a few minutes to make sure," said Lester, as he rose to return to the *Ariel*.

"Don't wait another minute," urged Ross earnestly. "You fellows have done enough for me already, and I know you're just aching to get home to relieve your father's mind."

"We'll cast off anyway," was the reply. "It'll take a little time to run up the sheet and get ready to sail, and by that time you'll know better how things are."

"What do you call your boat, Ross?" asked Teddy, as the rest of the boys rose to follow Lester.

"I've named her the *Sleuth*," answered Ross.

"It's a mighty suitable name, considering what you're using her for," laughed Teddy. "Let's hope she'll be sleuth enough to get on the trail of the smugglers."

"She will," said Ross with decision; and a look of determination leaped into his eyes, while

his lips compressed themselves into a straight line.

His chums drew in the fenders and ran up the sail, while Lester took his place at the tiller and eased the *Ariel* off, until a space of twenty feet separated the two boats.

"We'll run a few rings around you, while you get the engine to working," called out Lester.

"All right, if you insist upon it," laughed Ross. "That's easy enough to do now, but some day we'll have a race, and then it may be a little tougher job."

"Here it comes now!" he exclaimed a moment later, as the engine gave a few preliminary barks.

The sparking was fitful at first, but it soon settled down into a smooth steady buzz.

"Listen to that music," cried Ross jubilantly. "Richard is himself again!"

He started the boat, and she darted ahead like a bird. He tested the steering gear and it worked perfectly.

"Capital!" cried Fred delightedly.

"Hurrah!" echoed Teddy.

"She's a pippin!" exclaimed Bill enthusiastically.

Ross flushed with pleasure at the praise of his craft.

"Well," he called, "I owe it all to you fellows that I'm on board of her to-day. I hope you'll never get into similar trouble, but if you do, I only hope that I'm on hand to help you out."

Their courses lay in opposite directions and amid a chorus of good wishes and hand wavings they rapidly drew apart.

"Well!" remarked Teddy, drawing a long breath when they were out of ear shot, "this has been an adventure with a great big A."

"Who'd ever have thought when we started out yesterday that we'd run across anything like this?" added Fred, as he settled down with his hand on the sheet.

"That's the beauty of the sea," remarked Lester, as he brought his boat up a little more into the wind. "On the land, things jog along steadily and there aren't so many surprises. But at sea, anything can happen. You never know what's going to turn up."

"I don't know about that," replied Bill, moved to a defence of his beloved prairies. "Plenty of unexpected things turn up on land too. I guess Fred and Teddy didn't find things very tame out at the ranch this summer."

"We surely did not!" returned Fred. "What with ghosts and rattlesnakes and bears and cattle rustlers, we didn't find time hanging heavy on our hands."

"Not so that you could notice it," chuckled Teddy.

"Of course there are exceptions," admitted Lester, "but I was speaking in a general way. My father was a sailor and the sea is in my blood. I never get tired of it and I'm always finding in it something new and exciting."

"How do you like our new friend?" asked Fred.

"Fine," said Teddy promptly.

"All to the good," was Bill's verdict.

"He seems to be the real thing," agreed Lester.

"He's certainly had hard luck," said Fred. "If his father had been able to carry through his plans, life would be a mighty different thing to Ross from what it is."

"It must be an awful strain on a fellow to be on a still hunt like his," mused Bill.

"Yes, and with so little to work on," chimed in Teddy. "If he had anything definite to go on, like a map or a letter or a confession, it would be another thing. But he seems to be relying altogether on chance and the ravings of his father. And a crazy man may say anything. What does his speaking about Bartanet Shoals mean? It might have been just chance that he didn't mention Cape Horn or Baffin Bay or any other place."

"Do you think," asked Lester slowly, "that Ross has told us everything he knows?"

The others looked at him in surprise.

"Why, what makes you ask that?" inquired Teddy.

"I don't know just how much there is to it," was the answer; "but did you notice how he checked himself last night, when some one asked him whether those were all the clues he had?"

"Now that you speak of it, I do remember that he said he hadn't anything else, and then he used the word 'except,'" said Fred. "Then he stopped suddenly and didn't explain what that 'except' meant."

"He acted as though something had slipped out before he thought," volunteered Bill.

"You can hardly blame him, if he felt a little doubtful about us," observed Teddy. "He had never seen us before, and I think he went pretty far in telling us even as much as he did."

"You're right there," said Lester. "How did he know that we wouldn't blurt out the whole thing to any one who would listen. It might spoil all his chances of recovering anything. There are plenty of fellows who would spy on his every act and make life a burden to him. Others might plan to follow him and take the gold away from him by force if he should find it."

"It would be a big temptation," agreed Bill. "There are some fellows who would sell their souls for a ten dollar bill. How much more, if the reward were a chest of gold!"

"I don't blame Ross a bit under the circumstances," said Fred, "but I'm sorry just the same. We have so little to go by that we can't afford to lose the slightest thing that may help us out."

"We'll see him again before long anyway," put in Teddy hopefully, "and he may grow to know us well enough to put us wise to all that he's been keeping back."

"We'll live in hopes," said Lester. "But look over there, boys, and see a sight to gladden your eyes. We are almost home."

They followed his gaze and saw the Bartanet Shoals Lighthouse, its great reflector

sparkling in the rays of the morning sun.

CHAPTER IX

THE BEACON LIGHT

The lighthouse was a massive structure, over a hundred feet in height. It had been built in obedience to a general demand, owing to the number of vessels that had been wrecked in the vicinity. There were treacherous currents and swiftly running tides due to the peculiar conformation of the Maine coast at that point, and if a ship once grounded on the shoals while a storm was raging its hours were numbered.

In the distance, with the sun playing on it and the sea gulls swooping about its top, it seemed something slender and ethereal. It was only when one was close at hand that its real strength and solidity could be appreciated.

It was built on a solid rock foundation that sloped down into the sea many feet distant from its base. The tower was circular in form so as to offer as little surface as possible to the wind from whatever quarter it might blow. The walls at the bottom, where the force of the waves spent itself, were many feet thick, but they grew thinner as the tower rose in the air. At the top was the enormous light of many thousand candle power. It was the alternating kind, and every fifteen seconds it threw out a ray that could be seen by mariners for many miles.

The lighthouse stood about a mile from the mainland, and all the household supplies had to be brought over by Lester or his father from the little village of Bartanet. Whatever was needed for the light itself came at stated intervals on the government cutters that cruised along that section of the coast.

The boys, under Lester's guidance, had long before this explored every portion of the lighthouse and wondered at the marvels of the machinery that set the light in motion and kept it going automatically through the night. Brought up in inland towns, all this was new to them, and their curiosity and interest were insatiable.

Now as they watched it growing larger as they drew nearer, they shared the delight and pride of Lester in the noble structure of which his father was the guardian.

"Isn't it glorious?" demanded Fred.

"Think of the lives that have been saved by it," said Teddy.

"And will be saved by it during the next hundred years," added Bill.

"I wonder if poor Mr. Montgomery saw it on that last cruise of his," pondered Fred.

"He must have, if the smugglers really came this way," answered Lester. "That was only about nine years ago, you remember Ross said, and the lighthouse has stood for twenty years."

"Has your father had charge of it all that time?" asked Bill.

"No, he was appointed about twelve years ago."

"Then he must have been here at the time the gold was stolen," said Teddy eagerly. "I wonder if he heard anything about the matter."

"I never heard him speak about it, but I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he had. There are so many old salts that run over to spin yarns with him, that there's very little sea gossip going around that he doesn't hear at one time or another."

"Let's ask him," suggested Bill.

"Surely we will. He may be able to tell us something that Ross himself doesn't know."

"In that case, the next time we meet Ross it will be our turn to look wise and mysterious," laughed Fred.

"Or we can bargain with him. We'll tell him what we know in return for what he was going to tell us but didn't," added his brother.

"We'll have to come to something like that sooner or later," said Lester decidedly. "It's all nonsense our going round blindly, when each might be able to help the other. A sick man ought to tell everything to his doctor, and a prisoner oughtn't to keep anything back from his lawyer. When he does, he has no one to blame but himself if things don't go right. I'm going to put it up to Ross, full and plain, the next time I see him."

"I wonder when that will be," murmured Teddy.

"Before long I hope. If he doesn't come over to see us, we'll go up to Oakland to see him."

"How far is Oakland from here?" asked Bill.

"Not more than thirty miles. With a good wind we can make it in a few hours. But I think I see father standing on the platform of the tower. Take a look, Bill, and tell me if it is. My eyes are pretty good, but yours are better."

"That's who it is," pronounced Bill, after a minute's scrutiny. "He has a pair of glasses in his hands. There, he's waving to us."

"Dear old dad!" exclaimed Lester. "I suppose he's worried himself half sick, wondering what had become of us. But he knows now that we are safe, and with this wind we'll not be more than twenty minutes or half an hour in getting in."

They flew along over the waves, cunningly coaxing every inch of speed out of the *Ariel*, and in less time than Lester had predicted they rounded to at the little dock on the leeward side of the lighthouse rock. A bronzed, elderly man, of medium height, came hurriedly down to meet them.

"Thank God, you are safe!" he exclaimed, as he grasped Lester's hand, then that of each of the boys in turn. "I haven't been able to think of anything but you all night long. What happened to you?"

"It's a long story, Dad," said Lester, beaming affectionately on his father, as, after

fastening the *Ariel*, they all walked up to the lighthouse. "We picked up a fellow that had been carried overboard from his motor boat, and by that time the storm had grown so bad that we had to run for it to the nearest place that offered us shelter."

"And where was that?"

"Up in Sentinel Cove. You know, where those two big rocks stand at the entrance."

"Do you mean to say that you took the boat through that entrance while that storm was raging?" asked his father, in a tone in which surprise and pride were equally blended.

"There wasn't anything else to do," answered Lester.

"You ought to have seen the way he shot through there, Mr. Lee," put in Fred. "It was a fine bit of seamanship. He's your own son when it comes to sailing."

"I'm glad I didn't see him," was the answer. "It would have made my hair grayer than it is, and that's gray enough. But all's well that ends well, and I needn't tell you how thankful I am to have you turn up safe and sound. It wasn't only my own boy, but I feel that I'm responsible for you young chaps, too, while you're visiting here."

The boys had grown very fond of this kindly, hearty man who was their friend's father. He had made them instantly welcome and given them the run of the place. His means were limited but his heart was big, and from the outset he had spared no pains to make them feel at home and to give them a good time.

There were no women on the little island, as Lester's mother had died ten years before. Because of this, the father and son, having no one but each other, were bound together by the strongest affection.

Their housekeeping was of the simplest kind, but both of them were prime cooks and they set such an abundant table that even the boys with their ravenous appetites were completely satisfied. They even found a certain pleasure in the lack of some of the "trimmings," as Teddy called them, that had surrounded them in their more elaborate homes. It gave them a sense of freedom, and the whole adventure became a sort of exalted camping out.

Bill's life and Fred's and Teddy's recent experiences in the West had hardened and toughened them and also made them more self-reliant. The breezy outdoor life had become almost a necessity to them. So they entered heartily into the domestic arrangements at Bartanet Shoals, making their own beds and helping to prepare the meals. It is probable that some of their women relatives would have sniffed contemptuously at some of the results they reached, but this bothered them not at all. They ate like wolves, slept like logs and were content.

Mr. Lee had followed the sea for many years. When scarcely out of his teens, he had entered the navy. Later, he had shipped as a whaler, and the boys listened breathlessly to the thrilling stories he had to tell of his adventures in that perilous calling. After his wife's death, he felt that the interests of his son required that he should stay at home; so he had applied for the position of lighthouse keeper at Bartanet Shoals, and had received it.

"You boys must be half starved," he said, as they entered the living room of the lighthouse. "As I remember, you didn't have anything when you started out except a few slices of bacon, and those wouldn't go far with such a hungry crew as you are."

"Guess again, Dad," laughed Lester. "We didn't exactly starve last night and this morning, did we, boys?"

"Um-yum," assented Fred, "I should say not! Clam soup and fried bacon and broiled bluefish and hot coffee! Nothing more than that. And we didn't do a thing to them, eh, fellows?"

"Not a thing!" chorused Bill and Teddy fervently.

Mr. Lee's eyes twinkled.

"I'm afraid I've made an awful mistake then," he said soberly. "I thought you'd be nearly famished, and so I spread myself in getting up an extra good dinner. But of course, if you've had so many good things, you won't want anything more and I'll have to eat all alone."

He threw open the dining-room door and savory odors issued forth.

"Lead me to it!" shouted Bill. The next moment there was a regular football rush, as the four laughing boys tried to beat each other to the table.

CHAPTER X

THE CASTAWAY

For the next few minutes there was not much talking, and the boys devoted themselves to making a wreck of the good things heaped before them. Their morning in the salt air on the open sea had put them in fine fettle and they had enormous appetites.

"Well," said Fred, when at last they were satisfied, "we have to hand it to you as a cook, Mr. Lee. You certainly know how to make things taste good."

"Lester comes rightly by his talent in fixing up the eats," declared Bill.

"A sailor has to learn to turn his hand to anything," laughed their host. "He gets into lots of places where he has to depend on himself alone or go hungry. I've been shipwrecked twice in the course of my life, and I've had to learn to eat all sorts of things and to cook them in a way that would help me get them down."

"Talking about shipwrecks," he went on, as he filled and lighted his pipe and settled down for an after-dinner smoke, "reminds me of the fellow you say you picked up yesterday. How did he come there? Go ahead and spin your yarn."

"It wasn't exactly a shipwreck," explained Lester. "The boat wasn't smashed, and as a matter of fact we found it for Ross again to-day. It was a motor boat--"

"A motor boat!" interrupted Mr. Lee, with a sniff. He had the distrust felt by most deep-water sailors, of what he called "these pesky modern contraptions."

"Ross was tinkering with some part of the machinery that had gone wrong," continued Lester, "when a big wave caught him and carried him overboard. We were near by at the time and we made for him and got him."

"Yanked him in with a boathook, I suppose," said his father.

"We were too late for that," answered Lester. "He had gone down, but Fred grabbed a rope and dived over after him. It was a close call, but he got him, and then we dragged them both in."

"A plucky thing to do in a storm like that," commented Mr. Lee, looking approvingly at Fred.

"Ross came to after a while, and we found that the only hurt he had was the water he had swallowed," went on Lester. "We couldn't do anything with the motor boat just then, so we made straight for Sentinel Cove. This morning, Montgomery was as good as ever."

Mr. Lee started slightly as he heard this name.

"Montgomery, did you say?" he asked. "I thought you called him Ross."

"Yes, Ross Montgomery. Why?"

"Nothing," was the reply. "Go ahead with your story."

"There isn't very much more to tell, as far as we're concerned. We anchored at the cove for the night, and got away bright and early this morning. But Ross himself had a story to tell that has got us all worked up. You'd never guess what it was, Dad, in a thousand years."

"I never was much good at guessing," smiled Mr. Lee, "so let's have it just as he told it."

Lester started at the beginning and told the story as he had received it from Ross, with frequent suggestions from the other boys to remind him of some slight detail he had overlooked.

Mr. Lee listened intently, but he asked no questions, and for some minutes after Lester had finished he continued to smoke in silence, while the boys looked at him eagerly, anxious to know what he made of it.

"Well, Dad," said Lester, a little impatiently, "what do you think of the story? Is there anything in it?"

"There's a great deal in it," replied Mr. Lee gravely, removing his pipe from his mouth. "I believe every word of it is true."

The boys were delighted at this confirmation of their own feeling by a mind more mature than theirs. They had been afraid that Mr. Lee would ridicule the story, or throw cold water on their plan to go ahead and try to find the treasure.

"I was perfectly sure that Ross was telling us the truth," jubilated Teddy.

"I never doubted that for a minute," put in Bill, "but I thought he might be building hope on a very slight foundation. After all, he has so little to go on."

"Then you really think that there was a chest of gold and that smugglers took it from Mr. Montgomery and buried it?" asked Fred.

"I think they took it from him, but I don't think they buried it," answered Mr. Lee.

"What do you think they did with it; spent it?" asked Teddy in quick alarm.

"I don't think that either," was the reply. "I think they hid it somewhere and that it's there yet."

"Oh!" said Fred, with a sigh of relief. "Then we still have a chance."

"Now, look here, Dad!" exclaimed Lester, "I can see by what you're saying that you know more about this thing than we do. Don't tease us by acting in such a mysterious way. Come right out with it."

Mr. Lee laughed good-naturedly.

"You boys are always in a hurry," he remarked as he refilled his pipe with a deliberation that was maddening to his hearers. "But just let me get my pipe drawing well, and I'll tell you all I know. It isn't so much after all as maybe you think, but it may help to piece out a bit here and there."

He settled himself comfortably in his seat and began:

"It was about nine or ten years ago—I don't remember the exact date—that Mark Taylor was out fishing at a point about twenty miles from here."

"The Mark Taylor who lives in Milton?" inquired Lester.

"That was the one. He wasn't having very good luck, and had about made up his mind to pull up and go home, when he caught sight of a little boat tossing up and down on the waves. It didn't seem to be going anywhere, and Mark could see that there was no one rowing or steering it. He thought that was strange and made up his mind he'd look into the matter. So he ran up his sail and ran over to what he thought was the empty boat. He told me afterwards he was knocked all in a heap, when he saw a man lying in the bottom of it.

"At first Mark thought the man was either dead or drunk. But there wasn't any smell of liquor on him, and he moved when Mark touched him. Mark saw that something serious was the matter, and he tried to get the man into his sailboat. But Mark didn't weigh more than a hundred and twenty pounds, and this man was so big and so heavily built that he had to give it up.

"So, leaving the man in it, he tied the small boat to the stern of his, and made a quick run for home. He took the man into his cabin and sent for the doctor. The doctor examined the man carefully and found a big gash in his head that looked as though it had been made with a hatchet. He saw it hadn't reached a vital point, though, so he sewed it up and left some medicine, promising to come again the next day.

"Mark said that the doctor had no sooner gone than the man began to rave and toss about. After a while he became violent, and Mark, being a small man as I have said, had to call in some of the neighbors to hold him down. He seemed to imagine that he was in a fight and that a crowd was piling on him. And he kept talking about 'the gold' and 'the chest,' and vowing that they would never get it away from him."

A murmur ran around the listening circle.

"Mark didn't pay much attention to what he said," resumed Mr. Lee, "because he thought it was only the raving of a crazy man.

"Mark and the neighbors searched his clothes and found some papers that showed them the man's name was Montgomery. They found out, too, that he lived in a place on the coast of Canada. They wrote to his folks right away, and a couple of men came down to take him home as soon as he was able to travel.

"That wasn't for a good while, though, for Montgomery had come down with an attack of brain fever that kept him on his back for weeks. He got over that at last, but his mind wasn't right. He wasn't violent any longer but was melancholy. Went around all the time in a daze. Couldn't get anything out of him, except that he kept muttering to himself about 'the gold.' Sometimes, though, he'd speak of debts that seemed to worry him. He couldn't carry on any connected conversation, and he'd get so excited when any one tried to question him, that the doctor said they must let him alone.

"He was taken away as soon as he was strong enough, and that's the last Mark ever saw of him. A little while later, the man's wife sent a little money to Mark to cover his expenses in caring for her husband, and she said in her letter that he was no better. And from what you boys tell me to-day, he must have died soon after."

"Didn't he give any hint of where this fight and robbery had taken place?" asked Fred.

"No, except that Mark says the man often spoke of Bartanet Shoals. Of course, that may have meant something and it may have meant nothing. Still, judging from where the boat was found, it probably was somewhere within fifty miles of here."

"Fifty miles," murmured Bill. "That's an awful lot of territory to cover."

"Wasn't there anything in the little boat to give a clue?" asked Teddy.

"Not a thing except that it had the name '*Ranger*' painted on the stern. That showed that it must have come from a large boat of that name."

"Are you sure that Mark didn't tell you anything else that might give us a hint?" asked Lester. "Try to remember, Dad."

"Well," mused his father, "I didn't question him very much at the time, because I felt as he did, that it was just the foolish raving of a man who was out of his head."

"How far is Milton from here?" questioned Bill.

"Only a matter of twenty-five miles or so," was the answer.

"We'll go over and see Mark the first chance we get," said Lester decidedly. "He may drop something when we put him through the third degree that may put us on the trail."

"That's a good idea," commented his father. "Mark's growing pretty old now and his memory isn't as good as it was, but he may remember something that will be of use. At any rate there's no harm in trying."

"We have something to work with now," said Fred cheerily. "We've been able to check up Ross' story and know that he wasn't dreaming. Then, too, we have the name of the man who actually found Mr. Montgomery when he was set adrift, if that's the way he came into the open boat."

"But there must be more," persisted Lester. "What did you mean, Dad, when you said that the gold wasn't buried but that it was hidden?"

"You're right," admitted his father, "there is more that happened some time later."

CHAPTER XI

THE SMUGGLERS' FLIGHT

The boys were all on edge as they awaited further developments.

"Six years ago," resumed Mr. Lee, "an old sailor, named Tom Bixby, who had sailed on the same ship with me in the old days, drifted down this way, and hearing that I had charge of the lighthouse came over to see me. Tom was always a decent sort of fellow, and I was glad to see him and talk over the old times when we had sailed the seas together.

"He stayed here a couple of days and one night he told me a strange story.

"It seems that his last trip had been on a four-master sailing out of Halifax. She had been rather short-handed, and the skipper had been worrying about where he could get enough sailors to work his craft.

"While he was casting around, he was surprised and glad one day to have half a dozen burly fellows come aboard and offer to sign articles for the voyage. They told a story of just having finished a trip on a tramp from Liverpool, and as they were all messmates they were anxious to get a berth together on the same ship.

"The captain didn't ask any question--no captain ever does when he happens to be short-handed--and he signed the men on at once. That very night the ship hove her anchor and put out to sea.

"They were to go around Cape Horn, and it would be at least two years and maybe more before they would see home again.

"Tom said that the men were good, smart sailors and no mistake. But there was something queer about them. They didn't mix much with the others of the crew. They would gather together in a little knot when they were off duty and talk in whispers. It seemed as though some secret held them together.

"The man who seemed to be most influential among them was a big Portuguese named Manuel. The others seemed to stand in fear of him. He didn't seem like a common sailor, but acted as if he were used to giving orders instead of obeying them.

"Tom said that at last he got rather chummy with one of them, named Dick, and used to have long talks with him. From what the man let slip, Tom learned that he had passed most of his life in the coastwise trade, and though he didn't say right out that he had been a smuggler, Tom guessed as much.

"One night Dick, while reefing sails in a blow, had a bad fall from aloft. He was a very sick man for a while, and the skipper didn't know whether he'd pull through or not. The captain detailed Tom to look after him, and in that way they got more confidential than ever.

"One day Dick had a turn for the worse and thought he was going to die. He was dreadfully scared and after a good deal of beating around the bush, told Tom that he wanted to get something off his mind. He didn't want to die, he said, without having made a clean breast of it.

"Then he went on to say that he had been a seaman on board a coastwise trader called the *Ranger* that hailed from some Canadian port not far from Halifax. She did a good deal of legitimate trading, but mixed in with this a considerable amount of smuggling.

"Her captain was a man named Ramsay---"

"That's the very name Ross gave us," broke in Teddy excitedly.

"He was a hard man, but, outside the smuggling, a straight one," resumed Mr. Lee, "and the people along the coast had confidence in him.

"One day a man, whose name Dick didn't remember, came aboard for a trip to the New England coast. He had considerable luggage, and among other things there was a heavy box that it took two men to handle. The man had them put the box in his cabin, although some other things he permitted to be placed in the hold.

"They had only been a day or two out, when Ramsay was killed by a tackle block that fell from aloft while he was walking the deck. The mate, Manuel, who Dick explained was the big Portuguese, took command and the captain was buried at sea.

"The passenger seemed to grow nervous after the captain's death, and kept pretty closely to his room. But he couldn't stay there always, and one day when he entered it he found Manuel there trying to open the chest. There was a fight right away, and in the struggle the man was badly hurt by a blow from a hatchet that Manuel had in his hand.

"The whole crew had been drawn to the spot by the struggle, and Dick says they were all scared, even Manuel himself, at the outcome of the fight. Manuel would have robbed, but neither he nor the others would have gone so far as to murder.

"But they had got into the scrape now, and felt that they might as well be hung for sheep as for lambs. They had passed Bartanet Shoals a few hours before the fight took place--"

"That's why Mr. Montgomery kept harping on that, I suppose," said Lester. "It was one of his last conscious thoughts."

"That must have been it," said his father. "They opened the box and got the surprise of their lives. Dick said that there was nothing but gold pieces, and it shone so that it dazzled their eyes."

"Did he say how much there was?" asked Bill.

"Dick said he didn't know, but it must have been a great many thousands of dollars. Dick was an ignorant fellow and he said he didn't know that there was as much money as that in the world.

"At any rate, there was more money than any one of them could ever hope to earn at the beggarly wages they were getting. They took an oath then and there that they would divide the gold evenly among them, and all swore to take the life of any one who betrayed the others.

"They didn't dare keep on their voyage to the port where they were going. There would have been too much explaining to do. So they made for a cove on the coast--"

"Where was it? What was its name? How far from here?" came in a chorus from the boys.

"A cove on the coast," went on Mr. Lee, disregarding the interruption, "where they could think things over and make their plans. They anchored at a little distance out, and came into the cove in a small boat, carrying the chest of gold and the unconscious passenger. They carried the gold ashore and left the passenger in the boat. But in the excitement, they must have failed to draw the boat far enough up on the sand. At all events, it got adrift and floated out into the darkness.

"When they missed it, they were panic-stricken. They didn't know what to do with the gold. If it had been in small bills that couldn't have been traced, the matter would have been easy enough. But they feared that if Mr. Montgomery escaped and recovered there would be a regular hue and cry, and a close watch kept for any one who was spending gold pieces, which is rather an unusual thing to do in these days of paper money. Of course, professional sharpers would have found some way out, but these men were not that, and now that they had taken part in a crime they were in deadly fear of detection.

"They concluded at last that the best thing they could do for the present was to leave the gold in its chest carefully concealed in that lonely place, sail their ship to some harbor where they could sell it for what it would bring, and then ship together on a long voyage that would keep them out of the country until the storm blew over. Thus each could watch the others and when they got back they could get the chest and divide the gold among them.

"Tom told me that when Dick got to this point, he couldn't hold in any longer but asked him point blank where it was that he had buried the treasure chest.

"We didn't bury it," Dick answered. "We hid it in--"

"Just then the skipper called Tom and he had to leave Dick, but promised to come back as soon as he could.

"But one duty after another kept him busy, and he wasn't able to go back to Dick for some time. Then he found that a great change had taken place. Dick's fever had gone down, he had a little appetite, and it was clear that he was on the mend. Perhaps the relieving of his conscience by telling of the crime had helped him get better.

"However that might have been, he was a very different Dick from the night before. His mouth was shut as tight as an oyster, and Tom couldn't get another word out of him. When he reminded him that he hadn't finished his confession of the night before, Dick stared at him coldly and asked him what confession he was talking about. Tom told him, and Dick said that was the first he had heard of anything of the kind. Said he must have been out of his mind, if he'd gotten off any nonsense like that. And he gave Tom a hint that it wouldn't be healthy for him, if he spread the report among the rest of the crew.

"He didn't need to do that, for Tom had no idea of talking. He knew that if he did, it would be a very easy thing for one of the half dozen confederates to knock him senseless and heave him overboard some dark night. So he kept a quiet tongue in his head, and neither he nor Dick ever referred to the matter again as long as Tom was on board.

"As luck would have it, they soon after fell in with another ship of the same line that was on its way back home. Some of her crew had been swept overboard in a cyclone, and she was short-handed. Her skipper asked the captain of Tom's craft to let him have a couple of men and he consented. Tom and one other sailor volunteered, and they were transferred to the other ship. It was a lucky thing for Tom, because his old ship went down in a hurricane off Cape Horn and every soul on board was lost."

"Is that certain?" asked Bill.

"As certain as those things can ever be," was the answer. "That was as much as eight years ago, and not a single man of her crew has ever turned up anywhere. If any one of them had been picked up by another ship, the matter would have been reported as soon as the ship reached port. Of course, there's a bare chance that some of them might have reached a desert island and still be alive. But that's so unlikely that it might as well be put out of mind."

"What's become of Tom Bixby?" asked Teddy.

"He shipped on a Canadian sealer soon after he was here, and I haven't seen or heard of him since."

"Is there any chance that he might have gone on a still hunt for the treasure?"

"Not Tom," laughed Mr. Lee. "He didn't have enough to go on. But he certainly was sore at the skipper for having called him away from Dick just when he did. Another minute--yes, another ten seconds--and Dick would have blurted out just where the treasure was hidden."

"It must have been fearfully exasperating to come so near finding out and yet just to miss it," remarked Bill.

"It is a lucky thing for Ross that he didn't find out," interjected Fred. "Tom didn't know who the rightful owner was, and if he'd found it he would have kept the gold."

"I'm afraid that he wouldn't have tried to find out very hard," laughed their host. "Sailor men have peculiar ideas about hidden treasure. The general rule they go by is that 'findings is keepings.'"

"I guess there are a good many besides sailors who would go by the same rule," said Teddy.

"Human nature is much the same, no matter what a man's calling is," assented Mr. Lee. "But you lads have kept me talking a long while, and I've got to look after my work. I've

given you all I know about the Montgomery case, and it's up to you now to put your heads together and make the most of it."

CHAPTER XII

UNCLE AARON REJOICES

"Well," said Fred, drawing a long breath and looking around at his companions after Mr. Lee had left the room, "we've certainly got more than we expected from this after-dinner talk."

"And we didn't know at the start that we'd get a thing," exulted Teddy.

"It's queer that dad never mentioned the matter to me," mused Lester. "Still I was a little chap when it all happened, and the whole thing has been almost forgotten."

"But what's the net result?" asked Bill. "We haven't the least idea yet where the treasure really is."

"No," admitted Fred. "We haven't. And yet we've made a long step forward. In the first place, we know that Ross was absolutely honest and truthful in all that he said. Then, too, we know from Tom's story that the treasure wasn't taken away by the smugglers then, and couldn't have been afterwards, since they were all drowned. So we can be sure that it's still where they left it unless some one else has stumbled on it, which isn't at all likely. Further than that, we know where the man lives who picked up Mr. Montgomery when he was adrift, and there's no knowing what we may be able to get out of him. It seems to me that we're already far ahead of where we were this morning."

"There's another point too, Fred," broke in Teddy. "Dick told Tom that the chest wasn't buried, but was hidden somewhere. That gives us a mighty good tip. If we didn't know that, we might waste our time and break our backs in digging, when it wouldn't do us a bit of good."

"That's funny, too," remarked Lester. "You'd think that burying would have been the first thing they thought of. In all the stories one reads of pirate hoards, the treasure is buried deep down in the earth."

"And the pirate usually shot the man who dug the hole and left his skeleton to guard the treasure," said Bill.

"Perhaps Manuel might have done something of the kind, if there hadn't been so many in the crew," said Fred. "He seems from all accounts to have been more desperate and bloody-minded than the rest."

"We needn't worry our brains as to why it wasn't done," remarked Teddy. "The only thing that concerns us is that it was hidden instead of buried."

"Hidden is a pretty big word," put in skeptical Bill. "It might be hidden on a mountain top or in a thicket or in a hollow tree or under water or in a cave or any other old place. Instead of making the problem easier, it seems to me it makes it harder."

"I can see Bill getting cross-eyed trying to keep one eye on the mountains and the other on the sea," jibed Teddy.

"Bill's all right," assented Fred. "He acts as a brake to hold us in check and keep us from going ahead too fast."

"I guess we can cut out the mountain top idea," put in Lester, "as there aren't any mountains of any size close to the coast."

"And you must remember, too," chimed in Fred, "that they were in a hurry to get away. Mr. Montgomery was adrift, and they didn't know at just what moment he might be picked up. Of course, he was unconscious, but he might come to his senses at any time and tell his rescuers just what had happened. In that case, the fat would be in the fire right away."

"No," said Lester thoughtfully, "whatever was done had to be done in a hurry. It's a dead sure thing that they didn't go far in from the coast."

"For the same reason, we can dismiss the hollow tree idea," said Teddy. "Those things can't be found just when you want them, and they didn't have time to hunt around for one. Besides it would take a mighty big hollow to hold a chest as big as that."

"We'll consider the other possibilities later," summed up Fred. "For the present, the one thing on which I guess we're all agreed is that the chest was hidden somewhere close to the coast."

"There's one thing we fellows must do above everything else," recommended Lester, "and that is to keep the whole thing absolutely secret. Even when we go to see Mark, we must put our questions in such a way that he'll not have the slightest suspicion of what we're really after. He might set his tongue wagging, and some reporter might get wind of it and put it in a local paper. Then it would be copied in others, and the first thing we knew it would be written up for the front page of the Sunday edition of a city paper with all sorts of scareheads and pictures. That would put the hoodoo on us for fair. We'd be followed and spied on, and the first thing you know some other party would be finding the money and Ross wouldn't get a dollar of it."

"Of course, Tom Bixby, if he's still alive, knows something about it, but that was so long ago that he probably only thinks of it once in a while, and if he should speak of it to any of his mates it would be put down only as a sailor's yarn."

"Fred, you and Teddy will have to tell your folks, because it's only right that your Uncle Aaron, who is so heavy a creditor, should know about it, and then, too, he may be able to give us some information that will help. But you can give the tip to the folks at home that it is to be kept strictly among themselves. Dad, of course, won't let on to anybody."

"That reminds me," said Fred, "that we ought to write to Uncle Aaron right away."

"Suppose you fellows do that then, while I'm over in Bartanet," suggested Lester. "I have

to go over there this afternoon to get supplies. Want to come along, Bill?"

"Sure thing," answered Bill, rising and stretching himself. "I need a little fresh air and exercise after the big dinner I've just put away."

The Rushton boys, left alone, got out pen and paper and prepared to send the momentous news to their family at Oldtown.

Up to now, letters to their Uncle Aaron had been rather hard to write. Sometimes they had been little notes of thanks for presents sent to them at Christmas or on birthdays. Often—much too often—they had been apologies that their parents had forced them to write for some piece of mischief that had offended their uncle. He had usually been so crusty and had so obviously resented the fact that they had ever been born to cause him trouble, that they had usually approached the task of writing with the feeling of martyrs.

This time it was different. Mr. Aaron Rushton, though by no means a miser, was sufficiently fond of money, and took great care to get all that was rightfully his. Therefore the boys knew that the letter, telling of the bare possibility of getting back such a large sum, would be very welcome.

"I'd like to see his face when he reads it," chuckled Teddy. "By the way, Fred, who shall write it, you or I?"

"You do it," said Fred. "He's always been sorer at you than he has at me, and this will help square you with him. While you're doing that, I'll write a line to mother."

"Think of me writing a letter to him that really pleases him!" laughed Teddy. "It will be the first time in my life."

"We really have an awful lot to thank Uncle Aaron for, although he didn't think he was doing us a favor," replied his brother. "If it hadn't been for his insisting on it, we wouldn't have gone to Rally Hall, we wouldn't have met Bill and Lester, and we wouldn't have had the glorious times we've had so far this summer."

"And you wouldn't have thrashed Andy Shanks," grinned Teddy. "Don't forget that when you're counting up the advantages."

"It was a satisfaction," grinned Fred. "But go ahead now with that letter, or we won't get through by the time Bill and Lester come back."

Thus adjured, Teddy set to work. He wrote at first of ordinary matters, keeping the tidbit till the last. When he came to that he wrote exultingly, telling in glowing terms all they had found out and all that they hoped to find in the future.

"Don't forget to tell him how Ross and his mother appreciate the way he's acted toward them," suggested Fred, himself busy on the letter to his mother.

"I'm glad you reminded me of that," said Teddy, making the addition. "I was so wrapped up in the rest of it that I'd have surely forgotten that."

At last both letters were finished and stamped ready for mailing.

"There!" remarked Teddy, with a sigh of relief, "I'll wager there'll be some little excitement at home when they read that letter."

"If only we can follow it up with another one later on, telling that we have actually found the chest of gold!" said Fred.

"If we do, you'll have the pleasure of writing it," declared Teddy. "Turn about is fair play."

It was late on the following day when the letters reached the Rushton home. The head of the house had not yet returned from his office in the city, and the only people in the house, besides Martha, the colored cook, were Mrs. Rushton and Mr. Aaron Rushton.

The latter had been detained at home by an attack of neuralgia, and was in a bad temper. At his best, he could never be called a congenial companion, but when to his naturally surly disposition neuralgia was added, he became simply intolerable. Mrs. Rushton's nerves had been worn to a frazzle by having him around, and it was almost with a hysterical feeling of relief that she pounced upon the letters that Martha brought in. There were several, but that from Fred was on top.

"A letter from Fred!" she exclaimed delightedly, as she recognized the writing. "I wonder what the dear boys are doing."

"Doing everybody, probably," said her brother-in-law gloomily. "Especially that boy Teddy. He's either in mischief or he's sick."

"Now, Aaron, you oughtn't to talk that way about Teddy," protested Mrs. Rushton, bridling in defence of her offspring. "There are plenty of worse boys than Teddy in the world."

"Maybe, but I never met them," retorted Aaron Rushton.

"He has a great, big heart," went on Teddy's mother.

"His gall has impressed me more than any other bodily organ he owns," was the reply. Evidently Mr. Aaron Rushton's temper had a razor edge that day.

"You forgot how he got back your watch and papers," Mrs. Rushton indignantly reminded him.

"I don't forget that if it hadn't been for him I wouldn't have lost them," snapped Aaron. "Who was it that hit the horse with a ball and caused the runaway that might have cost me my life? Who was it that painted Jed Muggs' team red, white and blue on the Fourth of July? Who was it that nearly caused a panic on the common, when he set those mice loose among the women?"

Mrs. Rushton knew only too well who it was, and she took refuge in generalities.

"He's just the dearest boy, anyway," she declared defiantly. "He's fond of mischief like all boys of his age, but he never did a mean or dishonorable thing in his life. And didn't I hear you tell Mr. Barrett once, just after you got your papers back, that your nephews were the finest boys in Oldtown?"

"If I did, I must have been out of my mind," growled Aaron, as a twinge of neuralgia made him wince. "But I'll admit that the boys are angels. Heaven forgive me for lying. Go ahead

and read your letter.”

But Mrs. Rushton had already torn the envelope open and was deep in the reading of its contents.

“Why,” she remarked, after a paragraph or two, “Fred says here that Teddy was writing a letter to you at the same time. I wonder if it’s among these,” and she turned over the other letters in her lap. “Oh, here it is, sure enough,” she added as she saw Teddy’s scrawling writing.

Aaron Rushton himself was somewhat startled at the unusual occurrence.

“For me?” he growled, reaching for it. “What has he been doing to me now that he has to apologize for?”

“That’s not a nice thing to say,” protested Mrs. Rushton. “Can’t a boy write to his own uncle without having an apology to make?”

“Not Teddy,” said Aaron with conviction.

He took the letter and tore the envelope with studied indifference, to conceal his real curiosity.

The first few paragraphs dealt with ordinary topics, and he passed them over quickly. Then the letter seemed to grip him. He read with ever increasing excitement, while Mrs. Rushton watched him wonderingly. He finished it at last and leaped to his feet with an exulting exclamation.

“Eureka!” he shouted. “Those boys are wonders!”

CHAPTER XIII

AN EXCITING CONFERENCE

Mrs. Rushton gasped with astonishment. It was an unusual thing for Aaron Rushton to let himself go in this manner.

"Why, what on earth is the matter?" she asked.

"Matter enough!" replied Aaron, beginning to pace the floor. "The best news I've heard for years!"

"Has any one left you a legacy?" she queried, not knowing of anything else that could cause him such joyous emotion.

"No such luck as that," he replied, "but it may amount to the same thing in the long run."

He sat down again, fixed his glasses on the bridge of his nose and again ran over the contents of the letter.

"For goodness' sake, Aaron, don't keep me on tenter-hooks!" cried Mrs. Rushton, no longer able to restrain her curiosity. "What can Teddy have to say that makes you feel so good?"

"Here," he replied, thrusting the letter into her hand, "read it for yourself."

She took it, while he resumed his pacing, and for the first time in years he actually hummed a tune.

"A chest of gold!" he muttered to himself. "Twelve thousand dollars!"

Mrs. Rushton hurriedly ran over the first few lines of the letter. Then she uttered a frightened exclamation and her cheeks grew pale. She had reached the part where Teddy told of Fred's daring exploit in diving overboard to rescue Ross.

"A shark!" she exclaimed. "And my Fred in the water!"

"Bother the shark," cried Aaron impatiently. "It didn't bite him, did it?"

"No, but it might have," returned Fred's mother, in tones that were a blending of pride and terror. "My brave, rash boy!"

"Your 'brave, rash boy' is all right," retorted Aaron. "Get on to the really important part of the letter."

Mrs. Rushton darted an indignant glance at her brother-in-law, but went on, her eyes shining and her breath coming fast. When she had finished she was almost as excited as Aaron Rushton himself.

They looked at each other in mutual congratulation, he rejoicing in the unexpected windfall, she exulting in the part her boys had played in the affair.

At that moment Mr. Mansfield Rushton, returning from business, strode into the room. He tossed his hat on a chair and greeted his wife affectionately.

"You seem to be conducting a correspondence school, judging from the letters on hand," he said gaily.

He seemed to bring a flood of sunshine with him, and it was easy to see where Fred and Teddy got their high spirits and joyous outlook on life.

"You'd never guess what's happened, Mansfield!" cried his wife. "We've just got letters from the boys and there's the greatest news," she added proudly.

"Let's see them," he said with quick interest.

"Read this one first," she said, thrusting Teddy's letter into his hand.

"Why!" he said in surprise, as he glanced at the address, "this is directed to Aaron."

"Yes," Mrs. Rushton replied. She could not forbear the thrust and added: "Aaron thought it was an apology."

Aaron Rushton squirmed in his chair a little uncomfortably.

"Never mind what I thought," he growled. "Go ahead, Mansfield, and then we'll talk the matter over."

Mansfield Rushton's quick eye ran rapidly over the lines while the others watched him.

"Hurrah for Fred and Teddy!" he cried at the end. "They're boys worth having, eh, Agnes? What's your opinion, Aaron?" he added slyly.

"They've done very well in this case," his brother was forced to admit, though it cost him a pang. "If this thing really pans out as I hope it will, I'll see that they get a liberal share of what they turn up."

"Oh, they'll get all the pay they want in the fun of hunting for it," laughed their father. "I know if I were their age, there'd be nothing that would suit me better than searching for hidden gold. I'm so much of a boy even now, that if I were down there I'd go into the thing with the same zest as the boys themselves."

"I'm going to write to them this very night," said Aaron, "and send them a little money for current expenses. They may run across somebody who can give them some information, and there's nothing like a little money to make people talk."

"Well, I certainly hope you get this, Aaron," said his brother heartily. "Twelve thousand dollars is a whole lot of money."

"It certainly is in these hard times," answered Aaron. "I've been hit rather hard in some of my investments lately, and this would do a good deal toward helping me out of the hole."

"How is it that you never happened to mention this matter to me?" asked Mansfield. "I never heard you speak of Montgomery or of any money that he owed you."

"It was a long time ago, when I lent it to him," returned Aaron. "All of fifteen years, I reckon."

"It seems to me that it was a good deal to put into one loan," remarked Mansfield. "What

security did he offer?"

"It wasn't a matter of security, so much as it was of friendship and gratitude," was the answer. "James Montgomery was one of the most upright men I ever met. His word was his bond, and when he borrowed money it was his character that was the best collateral.

"He had lent me money when I was struggling to get ahead in the world. I had expanded too rapidly in my desire to get ahead, and I was so tied up and so in need of ready cash that I was right on the brink of failure. I couldn't get a loan from the banks, and I was almost in despair when I applied to James Montgomery. He went over my affairs with me, saw that I was really solvent, and that the trouble was only that immediate cash was needed to pull me through.

"He was doing well in business then, and he lent me the money and gave me all the time I needed to pay it back. It wasn't long before I was on my feet again, and the first thing I did was to pay him back the full amount with interest.

"I vowed to myself then, that if the chance ever offered, I'd do the same by him as he had done by me. And it wasn't a meaningless vow, for I've never felt more warmly toward any one outside my own people before or since.

"It was some years, though, before I got my chance. Then I learned that he was in straits. He had built up a big business, but hard times came and squeezed him, and a big bank failure put the finishing touch to his ruin.

"I didn't know of his predicament until it was too late to save him. But after he had recovered from the illness that followed his failure, I went to him and offered him as much money as he needed to start over again. His wife had a little property on the coast of Canada and with enough money to develop it, it promised to yield big returns. All told, I lent him about twelve thousand dollars.

"He paid the interest promptly every six months, and I never worried about the principal. I was sure if he lived that I'd get it back, and if he died, I'd charge it up to profit and loss."

"I notice that Teddy says in his letter you refused to take the property he left as payment for your debt," said Mrs. Rushton. "I think that was fine of you, Aaron."

"I don't prey on widows and orphans," replied Aaron, dismissing the matter with a curt wave of the hand. "Least of all, on the widow and orphan of James Montgomery."

"But didn't you hear of this chest of gold at the time Mrs. Montgomery wrote to you?" asked Mrs. Rushton.

"Only in a vague and jumbled way," answered Aaron. "She was so much upset and distressed that I couldn't make much of her letter. I gathered that he had taken a box containing a large amount of money aboard a coastwise craft, and that he had been found later drifting in an open boat. He had been wounded, and the presumption was, of course, that he had been assaulted and robbed of the money. But, of course, I concluded, as I suppose every one else did, that the money had been divided and spent. At any rate, I gave it up for gone from that moment."

"Did you follow the matter up in any way?" asked his brother.

"Not to any great extent," was the answer. "I sent a specialist up to Canada to see if he could do anything toward getting back poor Montgomery's reason, and I offered a reward for the discovery and arrest of the thieves. But nothing came of it, and after Montgomery died a year or so later, I gave the matter up. I haven't thought of it for a long time, until this letter came to-day."

"Well, it looks as though there is a chance at least of getting the gold," commented Mansfield Rushton.

"After all these years!" added Mrs. Rushton, whose imagination had been captured by the romance and tragedy of the story.

"Of course, it's only a chance," said Aaron, on whom doubts began to crowd after the first exhilaration. "They're a long way off from finding it yet. They have only the most slender kind of clues."

"I believe they'll do it," said Mansfield, buoyantly. "Those boys seem to have a knack of getting what they go after."

"Yes," chimed in his wife, her face lighting up, "look at the way they exposed that masquerade of the ghost out on the Garwood ranch this summer. And think how cleverly they got on the trail of the tramps who stole your watch."

"Ye-es," assented Aaron slowly, as though the concession was wrenched from him. "They do seem to get there one way or the other. I don't know whether it's because they're smart or lucky."

"They're both," said Mrs. Rushton proudly.

CHAPTER XIV

A FEROCIOUS ENEMY

When the boys woke the morning after their adventure, their first thought was of the weather. They had set their hearts on taking the trip over to Milton to call on Mark Taylor and they would have been sorely disappointed at any indication of a storm.

But they could have spared their worry. There was not a cloud in the sky, the sun was rising brilliantly in the east, and the waves fell in a soft monotonous murmur at the foot of the lighthouse.

"It's going to be a dandy day," reported Teddy gleefully, as he came back from the window. "Get up there, you sleepy heads," he commanded, with the conscious virtue of the one who rises first.

Three rumpled heads turned on the pillows of the various cots in the big room where the boys slept. A well-aimed pillow caught one of them plump and full, and caused a hasty withdrawal beneath the sheet.

"Cut out the rough house, or I'll get up there and fan you," came the drowsy voice of Bill, who happened to be the victim.

"No danger," jeered Teddy. "You haven't ambition enough to make a move."

"I haven't had half sleep enough," yawned Fred. "Why don't you get up in the middle of the night and be done with it?"

"'Tis the voice of the sluggard, I hear him complain," quoted his brother. "I'd hate to be as lazy as this bunch of hoboes. If you don't hurry, I'll go out and find that chest of gold all by my lonesome."

The mention of the gold had a magical effect. It acted like a dousing of cold water. In a moment the boys were on their feet and hurrying into their clothes.

"By ginger! I hadn't had time to think of that," remarked Bill, as he poured the water in his basin, "or you wouldn't have needed a pillow to rout us out."

"Dad has the coffee pot on already," said Lester as a savory aroma came up the stairs. "Let's get a wiggle on."

The boys trooped down the stairs to find breakfast ready for them.

"We want to eat a plenty, fellows," observed Lester, setting them the example. "We've got a long sail before us."

The lads needed no urging and the way the food disappeared was almost miraculous.

"Now," said Lester when the breakfast had been finished, "you fellows go out and get the boat ready to start, while I get enough grub together to last a couple of days. We may not always have clams and bluefish just when we want them, and I'm not going to take any risks."

"Do you think we'll be away over night?" asked Bill.

"I shouldn't be surprised," answered Lester. "Maybe we'll be gone for more than one. It's a pretty stiff sail up there, and we may have to do a good deal of tacking on the way back. Then, too, Mark may not be in when we get there, and we may have to wait till he gets back."

"What kind of a fellow is this Taylor, anyhow?" asked Fred. "Has he any family?"

"No, he lives all alone in a little cabin down near the beach. Spends his time fishing and doing odd jobs. He's a little wizened-up fellow. He's fond of talking, and all we'll have to do is to get him started and he'll do the rest. I only hope we'll find him in condition to talk."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Teddy.

"Mark is a little too fond of a black bottle that he keeps in his cabin," explained Lester. "But he's usually sober in the daytime, and if we get to him before night, he'll be all right."

The boys went down to the little dock where the *Ariel* was riding. They had all grown more or less expert in handling her since their arrival at the Shoals, and in a very short time they had her ready for the trip.

"I wonder if Uncle Aaron has got my letter yet," remarked Teddy, as he helped Bill pull up the anchor.

"Not yet," replied his brother, "but he's sure to get it before the day is over."

"I'd like to see his face when he reads it," chuckled Teddy.

"You aren't usually so anxious to see his face," laughed Fred. "That time, for instance, when he came up on the bank after his ducking in the river."

"No," admitted Teddy. "But this time things are different."

Lester had made several trips to the boat, each time loaded with provisions, and by the time everything else was ready the little larder was well stocked.

"No danger of starving on this trip," smiled Mr. Lee, who had come down to see them off.

"Not much," laughed Lester. "Now, Dad, don't worry if we're gone longer than we expect to be. We'll be back when we get here."

"I'll not worry," promised his father. "Any one who can take a boat through Sentinel Rocks in such a blow as we had the other day, can get out of any kind of scrape."

He waved his hand genially in farewell as the *Ariel* fell away and set her course for Milton.

"We've a following wind," remarked Lester, as he settled himself at the tiller, "and if it holds out, we ought to make Milton in three hours."

"We want to keep a sharp lookout for Mark on the way," suggested Teddy.

"That's right," agreed Lester. "He's more than likely to be out fishing somewhere in our course. And this time we won't have to rely on Bill's eyes alone, for I've brought a pair of

dad's binoculars along."

"You've brought something else along," said Teddy, as his eyes fell on a big hook at the end of an iron chain. "I never saw this thing before. What are you going to do with it?"

"Hook a shark if I can," was the answer.

"What!" came in an excited exclamation from the other three.

"That's what I said," repeated Lester, enjoying the sensation that his words had caused.

"Have you ever caught any before?"

"How do you do it?"

"Do you think we'll catch sight of one?"

The questions poured in upon him and Lester laughed, as he raised his hand in protest.

"One thing at a time," he answered. "Anybody'd think this was a political meeting where every one's trying to heckle the speaker at once.

"I've caught them before," he went on, replying to the first question that had been hurled at him. "Not often, of course, because they're not as common as other fish. But there are altogether too many on this part of the coast. They scare off the fish and break the nets of the fishermen. Then, too, they're dangerous if any one falls overboard, and no one can be comfortable when he knows those pirates are cruising around, ready to gobble him up."

"It isn't exactly a pleasant sensation," agreed Fred, with a little shiver as he thought of the time he had gone over the side for Ross.

"All the people along the coast hate them like poison," continued Lester, "and it is looked on as a public duty to put them out of business whenever they are come across."

"Just the way we feel out West about rattlesnakes," put in Bill.

"I suppose so," agreed Lester.

"Perhaps we'll run across the very fellow we saw in the storm," suggested Teddy.

"Perhaps," assented Bill, "although there won't be any strawberry mark by which we can identify him."

"If he doesn't turn up, his brother or his cousin will do just as well," laughed Fred.

"What kind of bait do you use?" asked Bill.

"I've got a few chunks of pork stored away in the locker," returned Lester. "If we catch sight of one swimming around, we'll throw over some small pieces. Their sense of smell is wonderful, and they'll get on the job right away. The shark will follow us for more, and just when he thinks he's found a regular meal, we'll heave over the big piece attached to the hook. He'll nab it in a hurry, and then his guileless and unsuspecting nature will receive a sudden shock."

"But how will you get him on board?" asked Bill.

"If he's a big fellow, we'll not," was the answer, "unless we can get him near enough to stun him with a hatchet. Even on board a big ship the men often have to attach the rope to a windlass to draw the big fellows in while they're still full of fight. Even if he were stunned, I don't think that all of us pulling together could lift his dead weight on board the *Ariel*."

"Then what would we do with him?" asked Teddy.

"We'd have to tow him astern until we could run in somewhere and pull him ashore," answered Lester. "That's what the fishermen round here usually do when they hook one. Once get him on the beach, and the rest is easy."

"Perhaps we'll have a shark steak for supper," said Teddy.

"Perhaps, but I wouldn't recommend it," said Lester, with a grimace. "I've tasted it and I must admit that it's pretty rank. I wouldn't care to have it as a steady diet, unless I were starving and couldn't get anything else. The Chinese make soup of its fins though, and they say that it's dandy."

"You say you'd try to stun him with a hatchet," said Bill, the skeptic. "But suppose you couldn't get him near enough for that?"

"Then we'd try something else," replied Lester. "Here, Teddy, take the tiller for a minute."

Teddy did as requested, and Lester, reaching down into the cabin, drew out and displayed to the astonished eyes of the boys a long harpoon.

CHAPTER XV

CAPTURING THE SHARK

"Where on earth did you get that harpoon?" asked Fred.

"It belongs to father," was Lester's answer. "He shipped on board a whaler once and made a three-year cruise. He was the head harpooner of the first mate's boat and many's the time this old harpoon has struck a ninety barrel whale. Dad has any number of yarns to spin about it, and some day I'll set him going and you'll hear them all."

"That'll be dandy!" exclaimed Teddy. "There's nothing stirs me up so much as a whaling story. I've often thought I'd like to make a voyage on a whaler when I am old enough."

"There's a good deal of romance and excitement about it," admitted Lester, "but it's very hard and dangerous work. A man takes his life in his hands when he ships for such a cruise."

"This certainly looks as though it meant business," commented Bill, as he examined curiously the broad, flat, triangular head. "The edge is like a razor, and nothing could pull this barb loose after it once entered."

The shank was about two feet long and served as a socket to the shaft which gave a total length to the harpoon of more than six feet.

"My, but it's heavy," said Fred, as he lifted it. "It must take some muscle to handle a thing like that."

"It takes a good deal of experience to master it," said Lester.

"Do you know how to throw it?" asked Teddy.

"Father has shown me how, and I've practised a good deal on and off just for fun," was the reply. "I might be able to hit a shark with it, if he wasn't very far off, and I might not. I'd have a chance though, and if I missed I could try again. This rope attached to it prevents its being lost, and I could draw it in again and make another attempt at it."

"Of course this is rather old fashioned these days," Lester went on. "Now, in most of the whaling boats, they put the harpoon in a gun, just as you might thrust a ramrod down the muzzle of a rifle. The harpoon has an explosive shell attached to its head like the torpedo of a submarine. The harpoon is shot from the gun, and after it leaves the muzzle, a rocket charge attached to it carries it still further. When it hits the whale, the bomb explodes and it's all over. Of course, it's safer and surer than the old way, but it's too much like business. It does away with the exciting, desperate struggle between man and whale."

"What stories this old weapon could tell, if it could only talk," mused Fred.

"Yes, and they'd be more exciting than anything you read in fiction," added Bill.

"We may have a chance to use it before the day is over," said Teddy hopefully, as he looked over the waves on every side.

"It's a bare possibility," assented Lester. "I thought it wouldn't do any harm to bring it along anyhow just on the chance."

"You fellows want to keep a keen lookout for anything that looks like a fin," he continued. "It would be too bad to let any guilty shark escape."

As Lester had charge of the tiller and Fred was looking after the sail, the work of watching devolved on Teddy and Bill. They took opposite sides of the craft, Teddy handling Mr. Lee's binoculars while Bill depended upon the remarkably keen eyes with which nature had gifted him.

An hour went by, during which the little boat made rapid progress. But nothing rewarded the vigil of the two, and Teddy began to grow disgusted.

"Nothing doing to-day, I guess," he grumbled. "Somebody's sent a wireless to the sharks telling them to keep out of sight."

"And after Lester has taken all that trouble in getting a warm welcome ready for them," mourned Fred.

"It's certainly very ungrateful on their part," grinned Bill.

"The shark who hides and runs away
May live to bite another day."

Teddy was the perpetrator of the lines.

Fred groaned and, as he made a pass at his brother with his unoccupied hand, asked: "What have we done that such awful stuff should be pulled off on us?"

"Hi, there!" shouted Bill suddenly. "I saw something just then."

"Hang out the flags," drawled Fred unbelievably. "Bill saw something."

"He saw the sea, he saw the sky,
He saw the drifting clouds go by,"

chanted Teddy, the irrepressible.

"I'd see a couple of boobies, if I looked over your way," retorted Bill. "Cut out the chatter and hand me those glasses."

The binoculars were passed over to him, and he turned them on an object far out to starboard.

"I thought so," he said exultingly a moment later. "I can see the dorsal fin of a shark out there."

Disbelief vanished before his confident tone, and all looked eagerly in the direction he indicated.

"Perhaps it's only a floating bit of wood," said Teddy doubtfully, after a long gaze through the glasses.

"Let Lester look," suggested Bill. "He knows a shark when he sees one."

Lester relinquished the tiller to Bill and took a long, steady look through the binoculars.

"Bill is right," he announced at last. "It's a shark and a big one too. I guess we're going to have some sport, after all."

"But how are we going to get a trial at him?" cried Teddy. "He seems to be going in the opposite direction."

"I guess he won't go far," replied Lester with easy confidence. "This is probably his feeding ground, and he'll keep going round and round in lazy circles. We'll get a little nearer to him before we do anything else."

He retook the tiller and changed the *Ariel's* course toward the spot where they had seen the shark.

"Lower the sail, now," he commanded, when they had gone half a mile. "Just keep up enough to give us steerage way. A shark thinks a boat's disabled when it isn't moving much, and his instinct teaches him that the occupants are probably in trouble and his chance of finally getting them will be better."

"Do you think that will bring him around?" asked Bill.

"It'll help, anyway," replied Lester. "But to make it surer, we'll cut up the pork into small pieces and scatter it on the water. He'll smell it as sure as guns, and I'll wager you that before ten minutes are over you'll see the old rascal swimming toward us."

The boys got their clasp knives out at once and slashed the pork into bits, taking care however not to touch the big piece.

"He's coming," cried Teddy, after perhaps five minutes had passed. "I saw his fin just then, not fifty feet away."

The pieces of pork were now bobbing up and down on the water at the stern of the *Ariel*, which had almost stopped moving.

There was a twitch and one of the pieces disappeared. For an instant the boys saw a long black body, the wet skin glistening in the rays of the sun like so much velvet.

"By jinks!" whispered Bill in awe. "What an old sockdolager!"

"He's one of the biggest I've ever seen," returned Lester. "Fellows of his size don't get up this way very often."

"I'd hate to fall overboard just now," said Teddy.

"You'd make just about one mouthful for him," was Fred's comforting rejoinder.

Lester was making feverish haste in the task of preparing the hook. He sank it deep into the yielding pork, so that the point was at least six inches from any surface.

"Suppose he nibbles it off," suggested Bill.

"Sharks don't eat that way," grinned Lester. "They're gluttons, and if they bite at all they take everything down-hook, line and sinker."

"I'm afraid we couldn't hold him if we did hook him," said Teddy. "He'd yank us overboard in a minute."

"I'll take care of that," replied Lester, at the same time taking several turns around the mast with the slack of the rope. "He'll have to pull the mast out of the *Ariel* to get away."

By this time all the floating bits of pork had been snapped up by this cormorant of the sea.

"He seems to like our lunch counter," laughed Teddy.

"We've made him a steady customer, I guess," returned Bill.

"Well, if he likes the samples, we'll show him some of the real goods," chimed in Lester, as he prepared to throw the baited hook overboard.

Just then the shark appeared, swimming lazily under the counter of the boat. He was just under the surface, and his glassy, wicked eyes looked full in the faces of the boys as they crowded to the side.

"My, he's a terror!" exclaimed Teddy, as the pirate of the seas slowly moved past. "Is he going away do you think?" he asked in alarm, as their intended prey vanished in the direction of the bow.

"No fear," responded Lester cheerily. "The pickings round here are too good for him to think of going away just yet."

"Why don't you wait till he comes around again and then make a throw at him with the harpoon?" asked Bill. "I should think you might hit him."

"Wouldn't have a chance on earth," was the answer. "He'd dodge it like a flash of lightning. Then he'd take alarm and make a quick sneak away from here. After we get him hooked, we can hold him steady and I'll have a chance to take aim."

With a mighty heave, Lester threw the hook as far as he could over the stern. The iron chain attached to it hung several inches under the water, but its buoyancy kept the huge chunk of pork floating on the surface.

For several minutes the boys waited, their hearts beating so hard that it almost seemed that they could be heard.

"Do you think he's really cleared out and left us?" asked Teddy, with disappointment in his tone.

"Don't worry," was Lester's encouraging reply. "He thinks he has too soft a snap here to dream of giving it up."

Just then Teddy's question was answered by the shark himself. There was a swish in the water on the other side of the boat, and the boys saw that ominous fin sweep past.

The shark made straight for the hook with its tempting bait. But he sniffed at it a moment and then commenced to swim slowly around it in wide circles.

"He's a little bit suspicious," whispered Lester. "This is so much bigger than the others

that it seems too good to be true.”

For several minutes the great fish kept up his circular movement, but the onlookers noticed that the circles were steadily growing smaller.

“He can’t resist it!” exulted Fred. “His judgment tells him he’d better not, but his appetite urges him on.”

“From what I know of sharks, I’ll wager that his appetite will win,” chuckled Lester.

Suddenly the shark seemed to reach a decision. Like a flash he darted toward the bait and it disappeared in his rapacious maw.

“Hurrah!” yelled Teddy in uncontrollable excitement. “He’s hooked at last!”

CHAPTER XVI

A DESPERATE STRUGGLE

For a second after swallowing the bait the shark remained perfectly still. Then he darted away, only to be brought up with a round turn as he reached the end of the rope.

It half stunned him and wholly bewildered him. He did not know what had happened. He tried again, but with the same result.

Then, as he realized that he was hooked, the fury of the shark became frightful. He sprang out of the water, lashing the waves into foam. The mast creaked and strained, and the counter of the *Ariel* was pulled down until the water rushed over the side.

"Get up the sail," shouted Lester, rushing to the tiller. "He'll capsize us if we don't."

Teddy and Bill sprang to help Fred, and the sail was quickly hoisted. The wind caught it at once, and as the breeze was a stiff one, it swelled out the sail to the fullest extent, and with this added resistance against the struggles of the shark, the *Ariel* was soon on an even keel.

"There!" exclaimed Lester, with a sigh of relief, "now we can hold our own. I thought for a minute that we were going over. And just now I wouldn't want to get too close to that pirate. Something seems to have ruffled his temper."

The rage of the shark was beyond belief. At first he tried to disgorge the hook. But it had a secure grip and his efforts only served to exhaust him. Then he snapped furiously at the chain with his mighty jaws.

"Do you think he can break it?" asked Bill anxiously.

"Not on your life," answered Lester serenely. "If it were rope, he'd snap it as though it were thread. But even the jaws of a shark can't bite through a three-inch iron chain."

The shark darted here and there, trying by sudden jerks to break the chain. But it held fast despite his tremendous efforts. Then he changed his tactics and hurled himself against the *Ariel* with a force that made the timbers shiver.

"Do you think he can start a leak?" asked Fred, as the deck shook under him.

"I hope not," answered Lester, "but he might. The *Ariel* is a mighty stout boat, but she wasn't built to stand the rushes of a crazy shark."

"What about giving him a clip with the hatchet the next time he comes close enough?" suggested Fred.

"Suppose you try it," was the answer. "Get a tight grip on the rail and bend away over. Then the next time he hits the boat, hit him on the nose. If you catch him right it will stun him, and then I can finish him with the harpoon."

Fred grasped the hatchet and disposed himself to take advantage of the next rush. He gripped the rail with his left hand, while Bill and Teddy held his legs tightly.

"If you go over, we go over with you," Teddy assured him.

"The shark would have a square meal then for fair," laughed Fred.

But the shark seemed to understand the trap laid for him and refused to fall in with their plans. He resorted again to fierce lunging and diving, but did not again approach the boat.

"He's laughing at you," jibed Teddy.

"I don't think he feels like laughing at anything just now," replied Fred, as he rose to his feet. "But he's evidently given up the idea of dashing his brains out against the boat."

"He'll be tired out before long," judged Lester, "and then I'll give you a chance to see what an expert I am at throwing a harpoon."

It was clear that the sea pirate was exhausting his strength in his futile struggles. His long career of cruelty and rapine was rapidly coming to an end.

"I think I have a chance now," said Lester, after a few minutes more had passed. "You take the tiller, Teddy, while Bill and Fred haul him in."

But this was not an easy task. Fred and Bill strained until they felt as though their arms were being pulled out of their sockets. But the shark still had enough strength left to make them pay dearly for every inch they gained.

But they were gaining, nevertheless. They wound the slack around a cleat as they pulled it in, so as not to lose what they had once won. Lester joined them after he had got the harpoon ready to throw, and with this reinforcement they soon had the shark within three feet of the stern of the boat.

"That's near enough," said Lester, rising to his feet and grasping the harpoon. "Now hold fast while I throw."

He took careful aim, poised himself so as to get his full force into the cast and let his weapon go. It hissed through the air straight at its quarry. But the shark lunged aside, and the harpoon clove the water three inches to the right.

"Good shot, old scout!" cried Fred, as Lester, a little chagrined at the miss, drew the dripping harpoon in over the side. "It wasn't your fault that you didn't get him. It was going at him straight as an arrow when he dodged."

"I'll get him yet," muttered Lester to himself, as he straightened up for another effort.

He took his time in aiming and summoned up all his strength. Then he threw.

The sharp point caught the shark a little behind the head and went clear through his body. It must have struck a vital point for the monster gave one convulsive leap and fell back in its death flurry, lashing the water into yeast. Then it turned part way over and remained motionless, the leverage of the shaft preventing it from turning wholly on its back.

A yell of triumph went up from the delighted boys.

"Glory, hallelujah!" shouted Teddy.

"That was a dandy throw, old scout!" cried Bill, clapping Lester on the back.

"This is our lucky day," yelled Fred in great exultation.

Lester flushed with pleasure. He had vindicated his throwing ability, and had proved himself a worthy son of his sea-going forebears.

"Father will be tickled to death when he hears of it," he remarked, trying to speak coolly, as though harpooning a shark was a daily occurrence with him. "He hates the brutes with all his soul. He was nearly nipped by one while in the water off the Bahamas, and his mates just hauled him on board in time."

"Well, now that we've got him, what are we going to do with him?" asked practical Bill.

"Could we pull him on board, do you think?" inquired Teddy.

"Not in a hundred years," replied Lester. "If we had a pulley big enough and rope strong enough, we might hoist him up, but in no other way. I guess the best way to do is to crowd on sail and tow him in to Milton."

"How much further do we have to go?" asked Fred.

"Oh, it's a matter of ten or twelve miles yet," was the answer. "If we were free, we could make it in a little over an hour the way this wind is holding up. But the shark will be a big drag against us, and it will take us at least twice as long. The harpoon sticking out at that angle helps to keep us back."

"What do we care how long it takes us to get there!" gloated Teddy. "We have all the time there is and I don't care whether it takes us two hours or ten. We'll have something to show the natives when we do get there."

"Oh, they've seen plenty of sharks," said Lester. "But I don't think they've often clapped eyes on one as big as this."

"After we reach Milton, how are we going to get the shark ashore?" persisted Bill.

"Oh, that will be no trick at all," was the answer. "The beach shelves out gradually there and I can take the *Ariel* pretty close in. Then you fellows can tumble overboard and wade in, dragging the shark with you. We couldn't lift him, but it will be easy enough to drag him up on the sand."

"I'm anxious to get close to him so that I can study him," said Fred.

"You might have been nearer to one than you liked the day you went over after Ross," laughed Bill.

"Yes," admitted Fred, "he'd have had the laugh on me then. But they laugh best who laugh last."

"And we're laughing last, all right," declared Lester.

"Thanks to your good arm and the old harpoon," added Bill.

"We have with us to-day, gentlemen," said Teddy, assuming the air and tone of a professional introducer, "two renowned throwers. Indeed, I may say three.

"This gentleman at the tiller, Mr. Lester Lee, throws the harpoon. This other at the sheet, Mr. Frederic Rushton, throws the baseball. This idler at my right, Mr. William Garwood, throws the lasso. I admit, gentlemen, with deep regret, that of all this illustrious company I am the only one who doesn't throw something."

"Oh yes you do," put in Bill quickly.

"What?"

"You throw the bull," said Bill.

CHAPTER XVII

A PLEASANT SURPRISE

The other boys roared, and for a moment Teddy was disconcerted. But he quickly recovered his balance.

"I suppose," he retorted, frowning severely at the culprit, "that this low-brow means to intimate that I am a Spanish athlete. I should be deeply pained to know that any one who has been under the refining influence of Rally Hall should indulge in the practice of slang. What would our dear Doctor Rally say if he heard one of his pupils--"

But the question remained forever unanswered, for just then a piece of pork that Bill had picked up from the deck whizzed past the orator's face, and, in the quick and undignified duck he made, Teddy lost the thread of his discourse.

"Suppose you two cut out the fooling and get down to business," grinned Lester. "Fred and I are the only ones doing anything, and it's time you loafers got busy. Bring out the grub and let's have something to eat."

"That's always in order, like a motion to adjourn," acquiesced Teddy. "Come along, Bill, and we'll show these fellows how to cook."

Teddy and Bill went down into the little cuddy, got out the tiny oil stove, and the odors of sizzling bacon and steaming coffee soon made Lester and Fred sniff the air hungrily.

"I didn't know how hungry I was till just now," said the latter.

"I didn't either," returned Lester. "I was so worked up over that tussle with the shark that I didn't have time to think of anything else. But now I'm hungry enough to eat nails."

"If that's the way you refer to the meal we're getting up, you can't have any," threatened Teddy. "We may not be hotel chefs, but we'll not stand for having our eats compared to nails, will we, Bill?"

"Not by a jugful!" answered Bill, as he scrambled some eggs in the bacon grease.

"Take it all back," laughed Lester.

Teddy cut some slices of bread and Bill opened a jar of marmalade, which they put with the other eatables on the tiny table leaves that they propped up on both sides of the centerboard.

"Come along now, you aristocrats," called out Teddy, "and profit by the labor of us poor working men."

The wind was steady, so that Lester could fasten his tiller while Fred hitched the sail rope round a cleat. Then they crowded into the little cabin and passed judgment on the dinner. That it was a favorable one was shown by the magical rapidity with which every crumb disappeared.

"No dyspeptics in this crowd," laughed Fred, when the board had been swept clean.

"Not so that you could notice it," returned Bill. "A doctor would starve to death if he had to depend on our patronage."

"My belt is so tight that it hurts," admitted Teddy, loosening it a few holes.

They lay around lazily for a few minutes, too happy and satisfied to move. Then Fred and Lester resumed their places, while the other two drew a bucket of water and washed the dishes and pans. This done, they slumped down comfortably in the stern, watching the body of the shark that lunged along clumsily in the wake of the *Ariel*.

"He has an open countenance, hasn't he?" grinned Teddy, as they caught an occasional glimpse of the huge mouth on the under side of the head.

"And look at those teeth," shivered Bill. "They say that an alligator's jaw snaps shut with the power of fifteen hundred pounds. But I'll bet that the alligator has nothing on the shark."

"I guess you're right," agreed Teddy. "Those jaws would cut a man's leg off as neatly as if it were done with a razor."

"I shouldn't like to have him practise on me," said Bill.

"If that fellow ever had a toothache, it would be some ache," put in Fred.

"I wouldn't care to be the dentist that had the job of pulling one of them," laughed Bill. "I'm afraid the patient would be a little peevish."

"I'd get my assistant to pump a ton of chloroform in him first," declared Fred. "And even then I'd want to get into a suit of armor before I operated on him."

"No wonder the sailors hate the brutes," mused Teddy, as he thought of the poor fellows who had been devoured by the monsters.

"No one of them knows but that he may be the next," added Bill.

"The sailors get even whenever they have the chance," chimed in Lester. "The minute they see any of the beasts near the ship, they trail a hook over the stern in the hope of catching him. Sailors are superstitious, and they believe that as long as a shark is in sight some one on board is doomed to die. So they try to kill the hoodoo, by putting the shark out of business."

"It's a great thing to feel a good deck beneath your feet, when a shark heaves in sight," remarked Bill. "Even in a boat no bigger than the *Ariel*, we're reasonably safe. But think of what it must be like to be on an open raft on the ocean with a crowd of these hungry pirates swimming all around you."

"And flinging themselves half way across the raft sometimes, trying to upset it," added Teddy.

"It must be something fearful," agreed Lester. "But there are some people who are not afraid to meet the shark on its own ground--if one can call water ground."

"It must take a lot of nerve," declared Teddy. "I don't want to take their job away from them."

"Of course it takes a lot of nerve," was the answer. "It takes a heap of skill too. No one could do it, if he couldn't swim just about as well as the shark himself."

"Dad has told me of what he has seen with his own eyes. A native of some of the South Sea Islands, when he learns from a fisherman that a shark is cruising around, will take his knife between his teeth, slip into the water and swim out to meet him."

"As the shark is looking for him too and can smell him, it isn't long before they come together. The native knows when the shark is coming by the fin that shows above the surface, and when the shark gets close the native dives under."

"Of course you know that the shark has to turn over on his back in order to bite. The second it takes to do this has saved the life of many a poor fellow, and it is that that gives the diver his chance."

"The instant the shark turns over, the native plunges his knife into its stomach. He knows just where to aim, and that one stroke usually does the business. If not, he tries it again until the shark is killed. But everything has to be timed to a second. The least little slip, and it's all up with the native."

"I should think there'd sometimes be a chance of meeting a school of sharks instead of a single one," commented Bill. "What would the native do in that case?"

"That does happen sometimes, but it doesn't worry the South Sea Islander much," explained Lester. "He can usually keep the sharks off by shouting and splashing. Then, too, if he kills one of them the others are attracted by the blood of their comrade, and they tear him to pieces, while the native swims back home."

"Nice lot of cannibals those sharks are, to prey upon each other," said Teddy.

"Just like a pack of wolves," agreed Lester. "Let one of them be wounded, and the others tear him into bits. These wolves of the sea do the same thing."

"Dad says that sometimes the native won't even take a knife, but will just carry with him a stick of hard wood, sharpened at both ends. When the shark turns over to nab him, the native thrusts the stick crosswise between the open jaws. They close down on it, the points sink in so far that the shark can't shut its mouth, and the water flows in and chokes it to death."

"Seems funny to choke a fish to death with water," laughed Fred.

"Think of thrusting your arm into jaws like that," said Bill. "If the stick didn't go straight up and down--?"

"There'd be a one-armed native," Lester grimly completed the sentence. "But here's a boat coming up this way, and we've been so busy chinning that we hadn't noticed it. What do you make her out to be, Bill?"

"She hasn't any sail," pronounced Bill after a brief scrutiny. "Here, hand me those glasses."

"It's a motor boat," he announced a moment later, "and she's coming straight for us."

"A motor boat!" exclaimed Teddy. "Do you think it can be Ross?"

"It's more than likely," answered Lester. "But he'll be near enough in a few minutes for us to make sure."

The boat drew rapidly nearer.

"That's who it is," cried Teddy jubilantly. "It's Ross and the *Sleuth*. Now we can compare notes about the chest of gold!"

CHAPTER XVIII

TOWING THE PRIZE

The boys forgot all about the shark for the time, and their thoughts went with redoubled intensity toward the object of their search, the missing treasure.

"I wonder if he'll be in a more talkative humor now than he was when we saw him last?" mused Fred.

"I hope so," said Teddy. "He's had time to think us over and size us up, and he may decide to make a clean breast of all he knows."

"Assuming that he really does know more than he has told us," remarked Bill, the skeptic. "We fellows may have drawn wrong conclusions from the start he gave and that exception of his."

"Well, at any rate, we know a great deal more than we did when we saw him last," declared Teddy. "We know for a certainty many things that he only guessed, especially that partial confession of Dick's as to the way Mr. Montgomery met his death."

"I wish we had had time to hear from Uncle Aaron," said Fred. "He may be able to give us some pointers, though I don't suppose he knows much outside of the fact that he loaned Mr. Montgomery money and didn't get it back."

"I'm banking a good deal more on Mark Taylor than I am on what your uncle may know," said Lester, "although of course we may get nothing from either."

"What do you think we'd better do in regard to Ross?" asked Teddy. "Tell him right off what we know, or wait for him to tell us everything first?"

"I think that instead of trying to wait or to swap, we'd better be perfectly frank," advised Fred. "If he's a bit suspicious now, he'll grow more so if he thinks we're trying any kind of a game. Confidence breeds confidence, and we'll set him the example."

"I guess that will be the better way," acquiesced Lester. "After all, he's got so much more at stake than we have in this matter that we shouldn't blame him for being a little cautious."

By this time it was evident that Ross had recognized them, for he was standing up, waving at them vigorously.

"Seems to be glad to see us," remarked Teddy, as the boys waved back. "I take that as a good sign."

"Hello Ross," they yelled over the water when he got within earshot.

"Hello, yourselves," the boy in the motor boat shouted eagerly in reply. "What good wind blew you up to meet me?"

"What good engine drove you down to meet us?" Teddy flung back at him with a grin.

"I was on my way down to pay you a little visit at the Shoals," replied Ross. "I didn't think I'd be able to get over there so soon. But when I got back to Oakland I found a letter from my mother saying she had been delayed in starting, and wouldn't be here for three or four days yet. So I thought I'd scoot over and make hay while the sun shone."

"That'll be bully," said Lester warmly. "Dad will be glad to see you, and I hope you'll be able to stay with us at the Shoals until you have to meet your mother."

"I'd like nothing better and it's good of you to ask me," responded Ross. "But where are you fellows bound for now?"

"We're going up to Milton on an errand that will interest you, when we get time to tell you about it. Come right along with us."

"Sure thing. I'll just round to under your stern and we'll travel up alongside."

He started his engine going, and then for the first time he noticed the huge bulk that was trailing along in the wake of the *Ariel*.

He gave a startled shout, while the boys viewed his astonishment with expressive grins.

"A shark!" he exclaimed.

"That's what it is," said Fred. "And for all we know it may be the same fellow that might have bitten us in two the other day. What do you think of him?"

"He's a monster!" ejaculated Ross, who seemed unable to believe his eyes. "Do you really mean that you fellows hooked and killed him?"

"Here's the fellow that gave him the finishing touch with his little harpoon," affirmed Teddy, indicating Lester.

Ross circled about the body, viewing it from every side.

"He must have been a terror when he was alive!" he exclaimed with a shiver. "Even now, I'd feel a little nervous if I fell in alongside of him."

"He's good and dead all right," declared Bill. "Teddy and I have been watching him for the last half hour, and he hasn't made a movement. That harpoon knew its business."

"What are you going to do with him?" asked Ross.

"Oh, we'll tow him up to Milton and land him on the beach," replied Lester. "We'll have a better chance to look him over then."

"I want to get some souvenirs from him before we cast him away altogether," said Fred.

"You might get enough teeth to make a necklace and go strutting around like a cannibal king," grinned Bill. "I hear that those ornaments make a great hit with the dudes of the South Sea Islands."

"They'd go well with that bunch of rattles we brought back from the ranch this summer," laughed Teddy.

"Not if mother sees them first," said Fred. "She was half scared to death when we brought

home those rattles, and we had all we could do to get her to let us keep them. Even as it is, they have to be kept out of sight, and to bring home some shark's teeth would be the finishing touch."

"I'm going to cut a strip of the hide to make a belt," declared Bill. "They say they last forever."

"A hat band for mine," voted Lester.

"A watch case will hit me hardest," said Fred.

"There'll be plenty to go round, I guess," laughed Ross. "From the size of that fellow, you could cut out enough hide to make all the belts and other gewgaws that could be used if you lived to be as old as Methuselah."

"Come along now, fellows," called out Lester. "We'll have plenty of time for a gab-fest when we get to Milton. We want to be getting on."

"How about taking off some of your passengers, Lester?" volunteered Ross. "That carcass makes a big weight for you to pull, and I can just as well take two of you aboard as not."

"That's a good idea," agreed Lester. "Take Bill and Teddy. They're no earthly good here anyway. Fred and I are doing all the work."

"I like that," replied Teddy in mock indignation. "Who was it that got up a dinner that was good enough, I notice, for you fellows to stow away in a hurry?"

"It wasn't because it was so good that we bolted it," chaffed Fred. "It was a disagreeable duty and we wanted to get it over with as soon as we could."

"Come along, Ted," said Bill with dignity, "and don't bandy words with those common sailors."

"It was only that I wanted to lift them up to our own level," rejoined Teddy. "But I guess you're right, Bill. They can't appreciate the value of our companionship, and we'll leave them to herd together. They've had their chance, and there's no use our wasting time trying to make them into human beings."

Ross brought the *Sleuth* alongside and the two boys leaped aboard.

"I'll take the shark too, if you want me to," proposed Ross. "I guess my engine could stand the strain."

"No, thank you," replied Lester. "You've got two sharks on board now, and I guess that'll be all you can manage."

The boats fell apart and the lightening of the *Ariel's* load showed results at once as the little boat leaped through the water at a quickened pace. Ross dropped away to a distance of perhaps a hundred feet, in order that the *Ariel* might have plenty of sea room, and with their noses pointed toward Milton the two craft went on in company.

"How much further have we got to go?" asked Fred, as he let out the sheet in order to get every ounce of wind.

"Not more than eight miles, I reckon," answered Lester.

He looked over the side to gauge the speed at which they were traveling.

"It's a ten-knot breeze," he conjectured, "and if we didn't have that ugly customer in the rear to tow along, we'd make it in less than an hour. But even as it is, we'll surely do it in an hour and a half."

But the wind freshened and cut some time off their schedule, so that it was only a little over an hour when Lester gave a turn to the tiller that swung the *Ariel* in toward the coast.

"There's Milton," he said, pointing to a tiny village of small, straggling houses that came down close to the beach, "but we don't go so far as that. Mark lives in a little hut about a mile this side of the town. Take the glasses and you can make it out. It stands all by itself and you can't miss it."

Fred pointed the binoculars in the direction that Lester indicated and plainly saw a shack near the edge of the water.

"Do you see any one about the cabin?" asked Lester.

"No, I don't," replied his companion. "The door is open though, and he may be inside."

"That doesn't prove anything," laughed Lester. "Mark hasn't anything worth stealing, and I guess the door's open all the time except in winter. But it won't be long now before we find out."

CHAPTER XIX

THE SPOILS OF WAR

Just where the cabin stood was a little bay formed by an inward bend of the coast, and in this the water was comparatively smooth.

Lester headed his boat into this and Ross, who took his sailing directions from the *Ariel*, followed his example.

A hundred yards from shore, Fred ran down the sail and the boat drifted in with its own momentum, while Lester took soundings cautiously to find the best place to cast anchor. The *Ariel* was of light draught, and, with the centerboard up, found three feet of water ample to prevent her scraping.

"Here we are," Lester said at last, when the two boats had reached a suitable spot and he could see the sandy bottom through the clear water. "Heave over the anchor now, and you fellows stand ready to go overboard."

The boys followed his directions, and a moment later all were in the water.

Lester had previously unfastened the line by which they had been towing the shark and thrown it over to Fred, who stood the nearest to the shore. The rest ranged themselves along the line at intervals and bent their backs to the strain.

For strain it proved to be. While the huge carcass was floating clear of the bottom it was comparatively easy to draw him along; but when the lower part began to scrape, it was a more difficult matter. They progressed only an inch at a time. By taking advantage of the rollers, however, as they came tumbling in, the boys finally got their booty to the edge of the water line. They could not drag it entirely clear of the water, but got it half way out, the head and upper part of the body remaining exposed, while the tail swished idly to and fro in the shallow water.

"Whew!" said Teddy, wiping his streaming forehead. "I wouldn't like to work so hard as that every day in the week."

"You won't have to," remarked Lester, comfortingly. "Lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place, and the chances are that you'll never catch a shark again in your life."

"As long as a shark never catches me, I won't kick," said the philosophical Bill.

They threw themselves down on the beach, panting and perspiring. The day was very warm, and the excitement of the catch, together with their recent efforts, made the rest a needed and grateful one.

"Well," said Lester, the first to get on his feet again, "while you weary Willies are loafing here, I'm going up to Mark's cabin and see if he's at home. The chances are that he isn't, or he'd have been out to see what all this fuss was about. Still, he may be asleep. Anyway, whether he's home or not, I want to scare up an axe or hatchet or something of the kind to dig out that harpoon."

"What's the matter with the hatchet we've got?" asked Teddy lazily.

"That's rather small, and, besides, with that only one can work at a time. It'll take some digging to get through that hide. Then, too, you fellows were talking of getting out the teeth and strips of the hide for mementoes, and you can't do that with your pocket knives alone."

"Go on then, you horny-handed son of toil, and luck be with you," drawled Bill. "You'll find us here when you get back."

"I'm sure of that," retorted Lester. "It would take an earthquake to make you fellows move."

Lester went up the beach until he reached the open door of the cabin and looked in. He found it deserted as he had expected. He went in and hunted about among its meagre belongings and came back to the boys, triumphant, bringing with him a hatchet, an axe and a large, keen-bladed knife that was used by Mark in cleaning his fish.

"Here they are!" he exclaimed, as he laid them down on the sand. "Mark wasn't at home, so I made free with these things of his, as I knew he wouldn't mind. There's no further excuse for you hoboes now, and you want to get a wiggle on."

"Take back them cruel woids," groaned Teddy.

"Listen to the chant of the slave driver!" jibed Bill.

"There's nothing left but to obey, shipmates," said Fred with mock resignation. "Remember he's the captain and we don't want to be tried for mutiny."

They distributed the implements among them and moved in a body toward the shark.

The first thing to do was to get out the harpoon, and this was no easy task, for the barb of the shank lay deeply imbedded among the tough fibres of its victim. The implement was freed at last, however, and Lester carefully washed it off in the water and then polished it with sand until it shone.

"Just see him gloat," laughed Teddy. "You'd think he was a pilgrim who had just come across a precious relic."

"Or a miner who had found a diamond," added Ross.

"He's earned the right to gloat," maintained Fred. "If I'd driven home a harpoon with such a sure hand and steady aim as his, I'd be so proud that my hat wouldn't fit me."

"I'm thinking as much of dad as I am of myself," grinned Lester. "He'll be tickled to death when he hears that I've speared a shark with that old harpoon of his. He's always thought a lot of it, but he'll think still more of it now."

"Well, now that the harpoon is out, let's turn this fellow on his back. I want to have a good

look at that mouth of his," remarked Fred.

It was quite an undertaking, but by distributing themselves along the body, using their implements as levers and all heaving at a given signal, they finally succeeded.

It was a frightful mouth, armed with huge rows of sawlike teeth, and although they knew the brute was dead the boys could not repress a shudder as they looked at it.

"Talk about a buzz saw!" exclaimed Teddy. "It couldn't cut you in two more neatly than this fellow could when he was swimming around."

"If those teeth could talk, I imagine they'd have some stories to tell," added Ross.

"And they wouldn't be pretty stories either," observed Bill.

"I wouldn't want him to be the undertaker at my funeral," said Fred, who could not help thinking that that dismal function might have been performed by this shark or some other the day he had gone overboard.

"Look at those wicked eyes," said Lester. "They're almost as fiendish now as they were when they looked up at us as he came swimming around the boat. I'll wager we'll see them more than once in our dreams."

"As long as we don't see them any other way it won't matter much," concluded Bill, the practical.

It was a full hour before the boys had cut the teeth from the bony sockets and had secured all the strips of hide they wanted to make up into souvenirs.

"We'll leave the rest of the carcass here until the tide comes in and carries it away," remarked Lester, when the work was finished. "It'll float out to sea and the other fish will make short work of it."

"That'll be only justice," said Teddy. "He's feasted on them or their brothers by the ton in his time."

"The gulls will help them out," said Lester, as he pointed to a number of the great birds circling around. "They're getting ready now to pick the bones, and are only waiting for us to get out of the way before they settle down to the job."

"It's getting pretty late, isn't it?" inquired Bill. "I hardly think we'll see Bartanet Shoals again to-night."

"Not a chance in the world," replied Lester, as he looked at the sky, already crimsoning in the west. "We'll have to stay all night with Mark and make a break for home in the morning. But it doesn't matter, and dad won't be worrying about us this time, especially if the weather stays clear."

"I'm afraid Mark will find it some job to put us up for the night," observed Ross, as he noted the tiny dimensions of the little cabin on the beach.

"It isn't exactly a summer hotel," grinned Lester. "There's only one room and that's pretty well cluttered up with his nets and tackle and other junk."

"We'll probably have to sleep outside on the sand," remarked Bill.

"All the more fun," chimed in Teddy. "We've done it once and we can do it again. One thing sure, there won't be any kick coming on the question of ventilation. The earth for a bed, the sky for a blanket--"

"And the sea for a lullaby," finished Ross.

CHAPTER XX

THE EMPTY HUT

"Listen to the poets," jibed Bill. "Homer and Milton have nothing on them."

"Don't mind his knocking, Ross," said Teddy. "He's only envious because he can't rise to our heights. He's like that fellow that Wordsworth tells us about:

"A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him
And nothing more."

"Well, what more was it?" grinned Bill, stubbornly holding his ground.

"A hopeless case," groaned Teddy. "If he heard a bobolink singing, he'd ask whether it was good to eat."

"What is this anyway?" laughed Fred. "It sounds like elocution day at Rally Hall."

"Talking about eats," chimed in Lester, "what's the matter with getting our stuff off the boat before it gets dark? Mark will have plenty of fish with him when he gets back, and with what we can supply we ought to be able to get up a nifty little supper."

"Count me in on this," said Ross. "I've got quite a cargo of supplies on the *Sleuth*, and we'll all chip in together."

"The more the merrier," cried Lester, accepting the offer. "I imagine Mark doesn't have much variety in his diet, and we'll see that to-night at least the old man has a bang-up meal."

"They say that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach," observed Teddy, "and if we fill him up, he'll be all the more ready to loosen up and tell us all he knows."

"I wish we had a Chinaman along," remarked Fred. "We'd get him to make us a soup out of the shark's fins."

"We'll try it ourselves if we get hard up," laughed Ross, "but it seems to me we've got our money's worth out of the shark already, without taxing him any further."

They waded out to the boats and ransacked the lockers, returning loaded with coffee and bacon and beans and eggs and jams, the sight of which added a spur to their already lively appetites.

"That looks like Mark's boat out there now," observed Lester, as he straightened up and surveyed the sea.

He pointed to a tiny catboat coming in at a spanking gait, and that seemed to be headed directly for that part of the beach where the boys stood.

"At the rate he's coming, he'll be here in fifteen minutes," Lester announced a moment later.

"What's the matter with having supper all ready when the old man gets in?" chuckled Fred. "It'll pay for using his tools, and it will give him the surprise of his life."

"Good thing!" exclaimed Lester heartily. "The poor old chap doesn't get many surprises-pleasant ones I mean-and it will warm his heart."

"To say nothing of his stomach," added the ever practical Bill.

The boys set to work with a zest, and five pairs of hands transformed the interior of the little hut in a twinkling. Fred lighted a fire in the rusty stove, Bill cut up some wood for fuel, Ross brought water for the coffee from a neighboring spring, Teddy cleared the litter of odds and ends off the rough pine table and set out the eatables, while Lester fried the bacon, warmed the beans and made the coffee. Everything, even down to salt and sugar, had come from their own stores, so that Mark's meagre stock was not drawn upon for anything. A fluffy omelet finished Lester's part of the work, and when Ross produced a big apple pie that his landlady had given him to take along that morning, the boys stood off and viewed their handiwork with pride.

"It makes one's mouth water," said Teddy, who claimed to be an expert where food was concerned.

"I can't wait," declared Bill. "I wish Mark had wings."

"He doesn't need them," replied Lester, looking out of the door, "for here he comes now."

The boys ran out to greet the returning master of the house, who had rounded the point into the sheltered bay and was fast approaching the beach. He had already noticed the two boats lying side by side and surmised that he had visitors. He looked at the boys curiously and waved his hand to Lester in friendly fashion.

Then his boat claimed all his attention. With surprising agility for one so old, he did all that was necessary to lay it up snugly for the night. Then he clambered into a small rowboat that trailed at the stern, loosed the rope that held it and with a few deft pulls at the oars rowed in until he grounded on the beach. The boys ran forward and drew the boat far up on the sands above the high water mark, while Lester shook hands with the newcomer.

"How are you, Mark?" he said heartily.

"How be yer, Les?" responded the other with no less cordiality, "an' how's yer pa?"

"Dad's all right and so am I," was the answer. "You see I've brought a bunch of my friends over to see you."

"I take it kindly of yer," said Mark. "I get a leetle lonesome here all by myself, an' it heartens me up a bit ter git a sight of young critters. Out on a fishin' trip, I s'pose?"

The boys had crowded round them by this time, and Lester introduced them to the old fisherman, who shook hands heartily, albeit rather awkwardly.

"Yes," said Lester, when this ceremony was finished, answering Mark's last question, "we are on a fishing trip, but we're fishing for information more than for anything else."

"Information?" repeated Mark, taken a little aback. "Waal," he said, recovering himself, "ef there's anythin' I know, yer welcome ter have it. What is it yer want ter know?"

"Lots of things," laughed Lester. "But they can wait till after supper. By the way, Mark, I suppose you'll let us stay to supper? I know it's awfully nery to plump ourselves down on you this way without any warning and without being invited. But if you can take care of us for the night and give us a bite to eat, we'll be mighty thankful."

"Sure I will," replied Mark warmly. "But yer'll have ter take pot luck. Come up ter the cabin an' I'll hunt yer up a snack of sumthin'."

The boys had been standing between him and their catch of the morning, but as they separated to go up to the shack he caught sight of the stranded body of the shark. He stopped short in amazement.

"Sufferin' cats!" he shouted. "Where in the world did that thing come from?"

"He didn't come of his own accord," laughed Fred. "We picked him up and brought him along."

"Do yer mean ter tell me that you youngsters caught him all by yerselves?" asked Mark, looking from one to the other in incredulous astonishment.

"That's what we did," replied Teddy. "That is, we all had a part in hooking him, and then Lester, here, finished the job with his father's harpoon."

"Les, ye're a chip of the old block," cried Mark delightedly. "Yer pa was one of the best harpooners that ever sailed from these parts an' ye sure have got his blood in yer ter do a man-sized job like this. A mighty good job it is too, fer I don't know when these fellers has been more troublesome than they've been this year, what with sp'ilin' the nets an' scarin' away the fish."

He walked around the body, giving vent to muttered exclamations of wonder and satisfaction, and the boys had a chance to study him more closely than they had yet been able to do.

He was a wizened, dried-up little man, not much more than five feet in height. His shoulders were bent with the infirmities of age—they judged him to be over seventy—but his movements were spry, and they had already seen by the way he handled his boat that he was not lacking in dexterity. There was a suspicious redness about his nose that was explained by Lester's hint about his fondness for a certain black bottle. But his eyes were friendly and free from guile, and the simple cordiality with which he had welcomed them to his scanty fare showed that his heart was kindly.

He found it hard to tear himself away from gloating over the body of the shark—the shark he hated with the hatred of all the members of his calling—but he recalled himself at last to the duties of hospitality.

"Waal, I swan!" he ejaculated. "Here I am wastin' time on this cantankerous old pirate when I ought ter be hustlin' around ter get you boys some grub."

The boys could see a growing perplexity in the old fellow's kindly face as he tried to think how to feed such a hungry crew as he saw about him.

"Oh, anything will do," Lester hastened to assure him. "Come along up to the cabin and we'll pitch in and help."

They reached the door, and as Mark's eyes fell upon the crowded table, and as the fragrant odor of the coffee and the other good things assailed his nostrils, he gave vent to an exclamation of astonishment and relief that was lost in the roar of laughter that burst from the boys.

"Waal, I vum!" he exclaimed as soon as he could catch his breath.

"Some surprise party, eh Mark?" asked Lester.

"Yer could knock me down with a feather," the old fisherman replied. "An' me a-rackin' my old noddle as ter how I was goin' ter giv' ye anythin' but fish."

"You're not going to taste of fish to-night," stated Teddy.

"Waal, that won't be no loss," grinned Mark delightedly. "I eat so much fish that I'm expectin' almost any minnit I'll be sproutin' fins an' gills."

"This treat is all on us," affirmed Fred, "and all you have to do is to fill up on what you see before you and tell us what you think of our cook."

"I'll do that right enough," said Mark, "an' ef it tastes as good as it smells an' looks, there ain't one of you youngsters that will stow away more than I kin."

They installed him at the head of the table in the one chair that the cabin boasted, while they disposed themselves around on boxes and whatever else would serve as seats. Their surroundings were of the rudest kind but the fare was ample and their appetites keen and there was an atmosphere of mirth and high spirits that made full amends for whatever was lacking in the way of what Teddy called frills. Mark renewed his youth in the unaccustomed company of so many young lads, and ate as he had not eaten for many a day or year.

They did not broach the object of their visit until the meal was finished and the remnants cleared away. Then they adjourned to the beach in front of the cabin, where Mark filled his pipe and tilted back in his chair against the front of the shack, while the boys threw themselves down on the sand around him.

"Well, Mark," began Lester, when, with his pipe drawing well, the old fisherman beamed on them all in rare good humor, "I suppose you've been wondering what we mean by coming down and taking you by storm in this way."

"I'd like ter be taken by storm that way a mighty sight oftener than I be," returned Mark. "But sence yer speak of it, I am a leetle mite curious as ter what yer wanted with an old fisherman like me."

"It's about something that happened nine or ten years ago," went on Lester. "Do you remember the time you picked up a man in an open boat off this coast somewhere?"

Mark was attentive in an instant.

"I'll never forgit it," he declared emphatically. "I never was so sorry fur a feller-bein' in all my life as I was fur him."

"This is his son," said Lester, indicating Ross.

CHAPTER XXI

BITS OF EVIDENCE

If Mark had received a shock from a galvanic battery he would not have been more startled.

"What's that you say?" he demanded, bringing his chair down from its tilted position and looking around upon the group in a bewildered way.

"Lester is right," said Ross, who had risen to his feet and stretched out his hand. "My name is Ross Montgomery, and I want to thank you with all my heart for what you did for my father. I've never had the chance to do it before."

His voice was shaken with emotion at this meeting with the man who had played so large a part in the tragedy of his family so many years before.

Mark grasped the extended hand and shook it warmly.

"So it was your pa that I picked up that day," he said. "I hed a sort of feelin' to-day that I had seen you somewheres, an' I s'pose it's because you favored him some. You have the same kind of hair an' eyes, as near as I kin rec'lect."

"Of course I was only a little chap when it all happened," said Ross, "but I've often heard mother tell how kind you were to him after you found him adrift."

"Oh, pshaw! that was nothin'," replied Mark deprecatingly, as he resumed his seat. "I only did fur him what any man would do fur an' unfo'tunit feller-man. He was nearly all gone when I come across him. The doc said he would 'a' died ef he'd floated around a few hours longer."

"Do you remember anything he said to you while you were taking care of him?" asked Lester.

"Oh, he said a heap o' things, jest like any man does when he is out of his head," was the answer. "I didn't pay much attention like. I was too busy holdin' him down when he got vi'lent, as he did pretty often the first few days. After that he kind of settled down an' only kep' a-mutterin' to himself."

"Yes, but didn't he say anything that would give you a hint of what had happened to him and how he came to be adrift?" asked Fred.

Mark ruminated for a full minute, evidently doing his best to tax his memory.

"I ain't got the best memory in the world," he said apologetically, "an' I couldn't make out fur certain all he said. But I got the idee thet there'd been a fight of some kind an' thet he'd lost a pile of money. He kep' a talkin' of 'gold' an' some 'debts' he owed. Course I thought it was only the ravin's of a crazy man an' I didn't take much stock in it."

"Wasn't there anything else?" prodded Fred.

"N-no," replied Mark hesitatingly, "nothin' thet I remember on. Oh, yes," he went on, as a sudden flash of memory came to him, "I do rec'lect he kep' sayin': 'It's where the water's comin' in.' But of course there wasn't no sense in that."

The boys sat up straight.

"Say that again, won't you?" asked Teddy.

"It's where the water's comin' in," repeated Mark. "He said that over and over. I s'pose it was the feelin' of the spray thet came over him in the boat. I don't rightly know what else it could have been."

As the boys themselves turned the phrase over in their minds, they could not see how it bore on the object of their search. They filed it away in their minds to think about later on.

For the next two hours they discussed the matter with Mark, trying to get from him any little shred of evidence that would be of help, and yet at the same time guarding carefully against revealing the real object of their questioning. He, for his part, set it down to the natural curiosity they felt in an event that touched the life of one of them so nearly, and did his best to cudgel his memory. But nothing more came of it than they had already learned, and it was with a sense of depression and failure that they finally gave up the cross examination that they had come so far to make.

"Well, Mark," said Lester at last, when several long yawns had shown that the old man was tired and sleepy, "we can't tell you how much obliged we are to you for all you've told us. But I guess we've tired you out with all our questions."

"Not a bit of it," denied Mark valiantly, though his drooping eyelids belied his words.

"I was just a-wonderin' where I was goin' to put all you boys for the night," he went on. "There's only one bed in the cabin, but I kin spread some blankets on the floor, ef that'll do yer."

"Don't worry at all about that," said Fred cheerily. "You go right in to bed and we'll bunk out here on the beach. It's a warm night, and we'd as soon do it as not."

As there was really nothing else to do, Mark, after making a feeble protest, said good-night and went inside, while the boys moved down the beach until they were out of earshot and prepared to camp out.

"We didn't get much out of the old chap after all, did we?" said Bill rather despondently.

"After coming all this way too," added Teddy, even more dejectedly.

"The only thing we'll have to show for the trip will be the shark, I guess," said Lester.

"Well, that would be enough if we hadn't gotten anything else," declared Fred. "But I'm not so sure that we came on a fool's errand after all."

"What makes you think we didn't?" asked Bill. "What do we know that we didn't know before?"

"Well," suggested Fred, "we hadn't heard before of that phrase Mr. Montgomery used over and over. 'It's where the water's coming in.'"

"That's nothing at all," affirmed Bill decidedly.

"I have a hunch it does mean something," replied Fred, "and I'm going to keep mulling it over in my mind until I find out what the meaning is.

"By the way, Ross," he went on, turning to their new-found friend where he sat brooding a little way apart from the rest, "we've learned something since we saw you first that may interest you. We'd have told you earlier this afternoon, but we've been traveling in different boats, and then when we got on shore we were so busy with cutting up the shark that we didn't get a chance till now."

Ross looked up eagerly.

"What is it?" he cried, getting up and joining the group.

He listened breathlessly while Fred told him what they had learned during their talk with Mr. Lee—the fight with the smugglers, their flight to the south Pacific, the partial confession of Dick and the going down of the ship with all on board.

When Fred had finished, Ross rose and paced the beach excitedly.

"You fellows found out in a few minutes what I've spent years trying to learn," he cried. "All the time I've been hunting, I've been haunted by the fear that even if I found where the gold had been hidden, the money would long ago have been taken and spent by the robbers. I've felt like all kinds of an idiot in keeping up the search on such a slender chance, and again and again I've been tempted to give it up. But this puts new life and hope in me. There's still a chance to find the gold and pay my father's debts."

"It's practically certain that the money is still there," affirmed Fred. "The fellows who took it are all drowned—unless they're living somewhere on a desert island, and that's so unlikely after all this time that it isn't worth giving it a second thought. The only living man, outside of ourselves, who knows about the gold is Tom Bixby. He's just a rough sailor knocking about all over the world, and he too may be dead by this time. The whole secret lies with us, and if the gold's ever found, we'll be the ones who will find it."

"You boys have been perfect bricks," declared Ross warmly, "and you make me ashamed for having kept anything back from you from the start."

"You needn't feel that way at all," asserted Teddy. "For my part, I think you've been very generous and outspoken in telling us as much as you have. You'd never met us before that day of the storm and didn't know anything about us."

"Well, I know all about you now," declared Ross, "and from now on, everything I find out will be known to you as fast as I can get it to you."

The boys said nothing but waited expectantly.

"There's one thing I didn't tell you that first night," Ross continued. "I don't know how important it may prove to be, but at least it's a clue that may lead to something."

"As you know, the *Ranger* was taken to Halifax and abandoned there by the smugglers. Ramsay, the captain who died on the trip, had owned it, but he had no family and the authorities took charge of the boat and sold it after a while, holding the money they got for it for the benefit of the heirs, if any should ever turn up. The new owner used the boat for a voyage or two, but he found it hard to get a crew. You know how superstitious sailors are. The mysterious way it was found abandoned gave sailor men the impression that there was a hoodoo of some kind connected with it, and they wouldn't ship aboard her. So the new owner sold it and the name was changed.

"One day in Canada I ran across a sailor who had made a trip in the ship before the name was changed, and he told me a queer thing. He said he had found a rough map cut out on the wood of the forecastle with a jackknife. There were wavy lines to represent the water and a shaded part that might stand for a beach. Then there was a clump of three trees standing together, and a little way off were two more. One big rock rose out of the water on the right-hand side.

"Of course I jumped to the conclusion that it might have something to do with the place where the gold was hidden. I thought perhaps some of the sailors had wanted to impress on their memory just how the place looked, so that they could find it more easily when the time came. I pumped the man for more details, but that was all he could remember. I've tried in every way I knew to trace the old *Ranger* but she has slipped out of sight like a ghost. If I could only have one look at that old forecastle, I think that the map might put me on the right trail."

"I'll bet it would," declared Fred with conviction, and his opinion was eagerly echoed by the others.

For a long time they debated the matter from this new angle, and it was very late when Lester urged that they should settle down for the night.

"We'll get an early start in the morning and get back to the Shoals before noon," he suggested. "I want to get busy on the government maps and plot out every mile of the coast so that we can start out in earnest."

But Lester's plan miscarried in part. They got the early start after a cordial good-bye to Mark. But the wind was baffling and they had to make long tacks, so that dusk was drawing on when they at last reached Bartanet Shoals.

CHAPTER XXII

ANGRY WATERS

As the five boys entered the lighthouse, Teddy happened to glance at the barometer that was fastened to the wall near the door.

"Say, fellows!" he exclaimed, "the glass is certainly mighty low this evening. Looks as though there might be some weather coming."

"Let's take a peep," responded Lester carelessly. "We're not due for any bad weather yet awhile, and I don't think-Whew! but it is low, isn't it?" he exclaimed as he examined the dial of the instrument. "There's something on the way, that's sure. I don't remember the barometer often getting quite as low as that."

"Oh, well, let it come!" exclaimed Fred. "What do we care? We won't be out in the *Ariel* this time, and I guess it would take some storm to wash this old lighthouse away."

"Yes," assented Lester. "I guess no storm that ever blew or ever will blow can do us much damage. It is built on a ledge of solid bed rock, and it would take an earthquake to shake it loose. We'll be snug and safe enough, no matter how hard it blows."

"In that case, bring on your show," grinned Teddy. "I've always wanted to see a first-class, bang-up storm, so you can't pile on the scenic effects too strong. Let's have plenty of wind and waves and all the rest of the fixings. Do a good job, while you're about it, Lester."

"Judging from the looks of that barometer, I won't have to do a blessed thing," replied Lester in the same tone of banter. "My stage manager, old Father Neptune, is going to be right on the job, and when he gets going I don't feel called on to interfere. I've seen a few of his performances and I must confess that I haven't seen much room for improvement."

"Except," he went on in a graver tone, "that if I had my way, I'd leave some of the ships out of the production. After you've once seen some big craft go to pieces on the shoals, you rather lose your liking for the entertainment."

"Yes, I suppose that's so," acquiesced Teddy, his usually high spirits sobered for a moment by having this view of the case presented to him. "I hadn't thought of that part of it."

"Well," observed Fred, "if there's going to be a storm, as seems pretty likely now, we'll hope that nothing of the kind occurs. After that stormy time we had on the *Ariel*, I can imagine pretty well what it must feel like to be shipwrecked. When we were headed for those rocks, I expected to be swimming for dear life in about two minutes."

"It must have been rather bad, I suppose," said Lester with a smile. "It wasn't so bad for me, because I had done the stunt before and was sure I could do it again."

"But this is no time for talking," he added. "Either I've got to get something to eat pretty soon or else quietly give up the ghost. I'm as hungry as a bear in spring time, and I'm willing to bet something that you fellows feel the same way."

"You win," admitted Fred. "But luckily for us it's near dinner time so we still have a chance to live awhile."

"Let's hurry and clean up then before dad calls us to the table."

As Lester stopped speaking, a gust of wind tore past the lighthouse with a mournful wail. The sound died down for a few seconds and then rose again in a dismal, long-drawn-out note that caused the boys to give an involuntary shudder.

"That's the beginning," declared Lester. "It will keep getting worse and worse, and after a while we'll hardly be able to hear each other speak. We're in for a real blow this time I think."

"Let's go up into the light room and see what it looks like outside," suggested Fred. "It's getting dark fast and we'll not be able to see anything before long."

"All right, come ahead," agreed Lester.

He headed the group up the spiral stairs that led to the lamp room.

An early dusk had fallen over the heaving ocean, yet it was not so dark but that they could see that the seas were rising rapidly. Here and there the big waves were capped with white crests as they raced away before the spur of the merciless wind. Already they were breaking against the rocks on which the lighthouse stood with a heavy roar and a force that caused the building, stout as it was, to tremble.

"It sure is working up fast, isn't it?" asked Teddy in a subdued voice. "I'd hate to be out in it even now. And I suppose it hasn't really begun to get bad yet."

"You're right, it hasn't," assented Lester grimly. "But now while we are up here, I'd better light the lamps. Then I can go down and eat with an easy conscience."

Accordingly, he lit the wicks of the great lamps and, after assuring himself that everything was in perfect order, he and the other boys descended to the dining room. There they found everything in readiness and made one of the hearty and satisfactory meals that the lighthouse larder never failed to afford.

As they ate, they could feel the building shake to the furious blasts that smote against it, and Mr. Lee shook his head gravely.

"It will be a wild night on the ocean, I'm thinking," he remarked, "and we can thank our lucky stars that we're all in a snug shelter and well out of harm's way. I feel sorry for those who have to be abroad on the water to-night."

"So do I," echoed Fred. "Just listen to that wind roar, will you? It seems as though a million demons were yelling at once."

"And the ocean's a good second," chimed in Teddy. "Wow!" he cried, as a giant breaker

thundered down on the reef, "that must have been the daddy of them all, I guess. Let's go up to the lookout room as soon as we're through and watch the storm."

The other boys were quite as eager as Teddy, and when they had finished their meal they went up the stairs to what might be called the observation room. This was situated just below the room in which the lamps were placed, and had windows of thick glass facing the sea. A door led out from it on to a balcony that ran completely around the structure. This door also faced the ocean, and Teddy, always enterprising, thought that he would like to go out on the balcony to feel the force of the wind.

He attempted to push the door open, but without success. He tried again, with the same result.

"Guess the old thing must be locked," he remarked, "but I don't see the key anywhere. Have you got it with you, Lester?"

"No," replied Lester, who had been watching Teddy's ineffectual efforts with a smile, "but that door isn't locked. The reason you couldn't open it was because the wind was blowing so fiercely against it. I doubt if the four of us put together could do it."

"It's no wonder that I had trouble then. But never mind. The wind can't keep me from *looking* out, anyway."

He shaded his eyes with his hands and peered through the thick plate glass windows. The others followed his example, and saw a sight that they never forgot.

The wind had piled the waves up higher and higher, until they looked like an endless succession of undulating, constantly advancing hills and valleys. From the ragged crests the spray was torn and blown in solid sheets before the raging wind so that at times it was impossible to see the heaving waters beneath. As the breakers came up against the lighthouse ledge, their tops would curve over and come crashing down with mighty blows that it seemed must pulverize the solid granite. The rebounding spray was snatched up by the gale and hurled against the lighthouse, as though the elements were furious at this one obstacle that prevented them from wreaking their full rage on some unfortunate ship and were resolved to sweep it from their path once and for all.

The boys gazed spellbound at the awe-inspiring spectacle, and for a time none of them uttered a word. Lester was the first to break the long silence.

"I've never seen anything better-or worse-than this," he said. "I guess the barometer knew what it was doing to-day."

"It surely is a tremendous thing to watch," assented Fred, and again applied himself to the window, where the others kept their faces glued, too fascinated with the elemental turmoil to think of anything else.

They tore themselves away at last and went up into the lamp room where Mr. Lee was on duty.

He had just finished trimming the wicks when the boys entered.

"What do you think of this for a storm?" he quizzed. "Is it blowing hard enough to suit you?"

"It's tremendous!" ejaculated Ross. "I never knew that wind could blow so hard or waves get so big. It's something to remember for a lifetime."

Mr. Lee smiled at his earnestness and nodded his head.

"You may well say so," he observed. "Of course, I've seen worse winds in the tropics, when they developed into hurricanes or typhoons. But for this coast, it doesn't often blow harder. There's more than one fine ship will lay her bones down on some reef or beach this night."

While Mr. Lee was speaking, the boys had noticed several dull blows against the outside lens of the light, and Teddy took the first opportunity to inquire the cause.

"That's caused by sea-gulls and other water birds dashing themselves against the light," explained Lester. "They're driven by the wind, and are so confused and terrified that I don't suppose they know what they're doing. Or perhaps the bright light has an attraction for them. At any rate, they always do it in a big storm, and in large numbers too. Why, in the morning we can go out and find hundreds of dead birds where they've dropped at the base of the tower."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Teddy, who always had a tender place in his heart for dumb creatures. "I suppose they don't see the glass at all, and think they can keep right on going."

"That's about the way of it, I guess," affirmed Mr. Lee. "They come against the glass with such force sometimes that I'm almost afraid they'll break it. It's too bad, but there's no help for it yet, though men are at work trying to find some device to prevent it."

"How long do you think the storm will last?" inquired Fred.

"Chances are that it'll last out all to-morrow," answered their host, "though it's blowing so hard that it may blow itself out before that. There's no telling."

"We'll have a good chance to mend up our fishing tackle then," remarked Fred, "because it doesn't look as though there'd be much chance doing anything outdoors."

"If you find time hanging heavy on your hands," observed Mr. Lee with a sly twinkle in his eye, "you might get busy and clean out the lamps. They're about due for a good scouring, and it might help you to pass away a long day indoors."

"That's certainly a great idea," said Lester reflectively, "but there's nothing in it for me. I've done it before and there's no novelty in it. But I'm sure that Teddy and Fred would enjoy it immensely."

"Nothing doing," replied Teddy hastily. "Fred and I aren't going to come to see you, Lester, and then butt in on all your simple pleasures. You just go ahead and enjoy yourself cleaning out the lamps, just as though we weren't around. We'll manage to plug along some way in the meantime."

They all laughed at this sally and shortly afterwards the boys took leave of Mr. Lee and

returned to the observation room. The wind roared and the ocean boomed on the rocks with undiminished force, and they spent the rest of the evening gazing out through the streaming windows and wondering at the mighty spectacle spread out before them.

At last Lester, to whom the fury of a storm was a more common thing than to his companions, proposed that they go to bed, and they reluctantly tore themselves away. The last thing the lads heard as they sank into dreamless slumber was the crash of tumbling waves and the maddened shrieks of the wind as it hurtled past the lighthouse.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN UNEXPECTED WINDFALL

Dawn broke the following day without any sign of the storm's abating, and the boys were forced to keep close within doors. Despite their forced imprisonment, time did not hang heavily, and they found plenty with which to occupy their hands and minds.

Of course, all about the lighthouse was new to Ross, and he spent a good many hours exploring its delightful mysteries under the guidance of Lester and Mr. Lee himself, who had taken an instant liking to this new addition to his household and had given him a most cordial welcome, not only on his own account, but on account of his romantic story, which had appealed strongly to the old man's fancy and sympathy.

Bill busied himself with overhauling and getting into first-class shape his fishing paraphernalia, and discharged a neglected duty in writing a long letter to his mother, filled with enthusiastic descriptions of the glorious times he was having, and dwelling most, as may be imagined, on the hooking of the shark the day before.

Fred and Teddy had been delighted to find letters waiting them from the family at home, including one from their Uncle Aaron. They pounced upon the letters eagerly. That from their mother, to which their father had added a few lines as postscript, was full of pride at Fred's exploit and delight at the prospect opened up of being useful to their uncle in case they found the missing gold.

Teddy tore open the letter which bore the precise handwriting of his uncle with a broad grin on his face.

"Just think, Fred, of opening a letter from Uncle Aaron that doesn't contain a scolding!" he exclaimed.

"Don't be too sure," laughed Fred. "Perhaps he'll scold you for not having found the chest, instead of telling him you hoped to find it. Hello, what's that?" as a blue slip fluttered out from the envelope and fell to the floor.

Teddy was on it like a hawk.

"Glory, hallelujah!" he yelled, as he capered around the floor, waving the paper in the air. "It's a money order for fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars!" cried his brother in amazement. "Do you mean to say that Uncle Aaron has loosened up as much as that? You must be crazy."

"Straight goods," replied Teddy. "Look for yourself."

Fred scanned the paper. There was no mistake.

"I take back what I said about your being crazy," Fred remarked, as he handed the money order back, "but if you're not, Uncle Aaron is. He must have had a sudden attack of enlargement of the heart."

He looked over Teddy's shoulder and they read the letter together. It was written in their uncle's customary style, except that it was tinctured with a more cordial feeling than he usually displayed toward his nephews. He spoke in terms of great respect of Mr. Montgomery and confirmed what the little memorandum book had revealed as to the amount of the debt. He declared that if the money was found he wanted nothing but the principal, and stated that the interest could go to Ross and his mother as a gift. He warned the boys about letting their hopes get too high, but at the same time urged them to spare no time or pains in the search. If they were successful, they could depend on him to reward them handsomely. As they might need a little extra money he was enclosing fifty dollars, to be used in any way they might think best in carrying on the hunt.

"He's not such a bad old chap after all," observed Fred, as they finished reading the letter.

"You bet he isn't!" echoed Teddy. "There are lots of worse fellows than Uncle Aaron."

With this qualified praise, they sought out their comrades, who were almost as delighted as the Rushton boys themselves were at the letter and the money order.

"It's up to us now to get busier than ever," remarked Lester. "It won't do to disappoint him after raising his hopes."

"That's what," replied Fred. "So get out the maps you were talking about yesterday, and we'll lay our plans for the next week or two."

The boys went to the room where the government maps were kept. These showed every creek and inlet and cove and indentation of the Maine coast, together with the depths of water at these points and a host of other details that were of use to seafaring men.

The boys went at them in a businesslike way, picking out those places most likely to be entered by a sailing ship, rejecting others that were difficult or dangerous to approach, until they had mapped out a program that would keep them busy for ten days to come.

Toward evening the storm gave signs of having spent its worst fury, and just before supper a rift appeared in the clouds on the western horizon.

"That looks promising," observed Lester to Teddy, who was looking out over the water with him. "Probably it will clear up during the night and we'll have a peach of a day to-morrow."

"I certainly hope so," replied Teddy. "I don't so much mind being cooped up for one day, but after that it gets kind of monotonous. The strenuous life for me, every time."

"Yes," agreed Lester, "one day is about my limit, too. If it's clear to-morrow, I'll have to go over to Bartanet to order some supplies and maybe you and the rest of the bunch will come along and keep me company."

"Surest thing you know," acquiesced Teddy heartily. "We can see all the excitement that

may be stirring in that rushing burg, too. I notice that there's usually a great deal going on there-not."

"Well, I've got to admit that it isn't the liveliest place in the world," admitted Lester with a grin. "Still, once in a while, somebody wakes up long enough to start something. Not often, though, for a fact."

The others were equally anxious to go and the matter was settled, provided that the weather permitted.

As Lester had predicted, the next day was bright and clear and the boys were up early. Mr. Lee had made out the list of the things he needed, and the boys went merrily down to the little landing place where the boats were kept.

It was decided that they were to row over to the mainland, and Lester and Fred took their places at the oars while the others acted as ballast.

"I'll let you fellows row at first," remarked Teddy, in a patronizing tone. "It's easy going now with no storm in sight. I'll take it easy, but if any emergency should arise, I'll take the oars and bring the boat safe to shore. There's no earthly use, though, in an expert navigator like me spending his time in every-day tugging at a pair of oars. It would be wasting my giant strength for nothing."

"Oh, it would never do to let Ted row with an ordinary pair of oars," said Fred sarcastically to Lester. "He'd break those as easily as most people would break the stem of a churchwarden pipe. Back home, we had a pair of tempered steel oars made especially for him and even then he broke them every once in a while. It's really altogether too expensive."

"Yes, I should think it would be," replied Lester gravely. "He must be a good deal like a very strong rower we had about these parts a few years ago."

"Did he have steel oars, too?" asked Ross, keeping a straight face.

"No," said Lester slowly. "I've no doubt he would have used them if he could have found a pair, but as it happened there weren't any of that description around. He used to get around it, though, by using two very heavy wooden oars in each hand. That was all right as far as it went, but it wasn't good enough."

"Why, what was the matter with that?" asked Teddy.

"Well, you see, there wasn't any boat strong enough for him," explained Lester. "He'd sit up in the bow and start to row, and he'd give such tremendous strokes that the front part of the boat would tear away from the stern and go on without it. Of course, the people who owned the boats found this rather expensive, so after a while this man couldn't get a steady job in the fishing trade at all. He did get another position, though, and as far as I know is working at it yet."

"It must be a job requiring some strength," remarked Teddy. "What was it?"

"Carrying barrels of holes from a swiss cheese factory to be made into crullers," chuckled Lester. "I guess that will hold you for a while. If you like that one, I'll tell you some more."

"That's quite enough from you," said Teddy, with great dignity. "You're apt to bring a judgment on us with such stuff as that. One of these big waves may come slap into the boat and send us all to Davy Jones' locker, if you're not careful."

CHAPTER XXIV

RIDING THE SURF

The words were spoken in jest, but they bade fair before long to turn to earnest.

Although the wind had died down, the waves were still running high from the effects of the storm. Lester, however, handled the oars like the skilled waterman he was, and Fred was not far behind him, so that the occupants of the boat felt that they could not be in safer hands. As they got farther out from under the lee of the lighthouse rocks, however, they felt the force of the waves more and more, and Lester had to draw on all his knowledge to keep the boat headed before the big rollers. As one wave followed another, it would shoot the boat ahead as though propelled by some invisible motor, and while this was very exhilarating, it also had a strong element of danger. As long as they went before the waves they were safe enough, but Lester knew that if they broached to, broadside to the waves, they would be swamped in the twinkling of an eye. The water was pretty shoal where they were, and while not actually surf was still near enough like it to keep them all tense and expectant.

As the boys approached the shore, they could see that there was a big surf breaking on the sands. Lester scanned it closely.

"I think we can get through all right, fellows," he said, "but if we should be swamped going in, it won't mean anything more than a good wetting. When I say the word, Fred, we want to act fast and together. If we can get a wave just right, we'll shoot in like an arrow."

"All right, say when, and I'll pull my arms out," promised Fred, taking a firm grip on the oars. "Let her go."

"Look out you don't pull the boat apart," admonished Teddy. "Remember, I'm in the stern, and I don't want to be left behind."

His more serious brother rebuked Teddy's frivolity with a glance, and then turned his eyes toward the line of thundering surf they were rapidly approaching. Lester was absorbed in the problem before him, glancing now at the line of breakers and then at the big waves chasing the boat, each one looking as though it must surely overwhelm it. At last, when they were not more than a hundred feet from the beach, Lester bent to the oars with all his strength, calling:

"Now, Fred, pull! Pull for all you're worth!"

An involuntary exclamation broke from Bill as he glanced astern. Close behind was a gigantic roller, its foaming crest already starting to bend over. As he gazed, fascinated, the crest broke and rushed at the little boat with a seething hiss. Up, up went the stern and the bow dug deep into the water.

"Pull, pull!" yelled Lester.

His oars and Fred's bent beneath the force of their straining backs. For a moment it seemed as though the wave must surely break into the boat and swamp it. But suddenly they felt the boat leap forward, as though some giant of the deep had seized it and thrown it from him. With the white water boiling under the stern the boat raced on, caught in the grip of the breaker and traveling inshore with the same speed at which the wave itself moved. The bow cut through the water, curling up a bow wave on each side that at times came into the boat.

Suddenly the little craft started to turn to starboard.

"Pull on the starboard side," shouted Lester, suiting the action to the word.

Fred promptly obeyed, and after a few straining strokes, the boat returned to a straight path before the roller and the next moment had rushed up on the sand, propelled by the last force of the breaker which went seething and hissing up the beach.

"Out! Get out! Quick!" shouted Fred. "Let's lift the boat up higher before the next wave comes. Lively's the word!"

The boys leaped out and rapidly dragged the boat up past the high water mark, just as another wave, even larger than the one that had carried them in, came sweeping over the place where they had landed.

They were a little white and shaken at the danger they had passed through, but at the same time were wildly exhilarated by the excitement of it.

"Whew!" exclaimed Teddy. "It seemed to me that we were traveling faster than the Twentieth Century Limited just then. Why, we were fairly flying. While we were going through I was scared to death, but now I think I'd like to go out and try it again."

"Not while I'm still in my right mind," protested Lester. "Surf riding is good sport sometimes, but not when there's the kind of sea running that there is to-day. It's possible to have too much of a good thing, you know."

"Oh, I suppose so," said the incorrigible Teddy. "But you fellows didn't have anything to worry about, anyway. I was in the stern, and if a wave had come aboard, I'd have been the one to get wet first."

"Yes, by about one-tenth of a second," laughed Bill. "However, all's well that ends well. I think we all owe a vote of thanks to Teddy for taking us through the way he did. Nobody could have sat there and watched others work better than Teddy did. I think he deserves all sorts of credit."

"Well, you see, I was neutral," explained Teddy. "If I didn't help you, you'll have to admit that I didn't help the wave, either."

"Ted wins," declared Lester. "Anybody who wants to prove anything against him has got to get up early."

"If he's ever accused of a crime, he'll be able to argue his way out without half trying," affirmed Ross.

"He could probably get off by giving the judge and jury a bad attack of brain fever," sniffed Fred. "But what do you say; shall we bail the boat out? We shipped quite a good deal of water."

"Not so much, considering what we came through," replied Lester. "Let's turn the boat over and save the trouble of bailing."

They turned it over on one side and soon had all the water drained out. Then they left it to dry out in the sun until they should be ready to return.

"Get a wiggle on now," enjoined Lester. "We've got a lot to do and we'd better get going at once."

The boys started off at a brisk pace and soon found themselves in the part of the village where the stores were located. They made the rounds, Lester making the purchases and having them wrapped up for him and his friends to call for and carry back later on. They met several of Lester's friends and the time passed so quickly that they were surprised when they found that it was past noon.

"Time to eat!" exclaimed Teddy. "Think of me passing up lunch time like that! I must be sick or something."

"It is rather a bad sign," admitted his brother. "Still I guess you're not going to die just yet. Only the good die young, and that lets you out. But what do you say to stopping in somewhere and getting a bite, Lester? Now that it's brought to my attention, I find that I'm almost as hungry as Ted usually is. And I can't put it much stronger than that."

"Well," replied Lester, "I was thinking that it might be fun to buy something here and eat it on the way back. We can get some sandwiches and other things and have a regular picnic after we get out of town."

"Great!" pronounced Bill.

"And the sooner the better," added Ross.

The lads stopped at the nearest store that promised to supply their needs. As they gazed in the window, trying to make up their minds what to buy, Teddy exclaimed:

"What a nuisance it is to choose! You always have to leave behind more than you take away. If I had plenty of money, I'd buy out the whole store. Wait till we unearth that fortune of Ross' and then--"

"Sh-h, keep quiet," warned Fred in a low tone. "You don't want to tell the whole town all you know, do you?"

"That was a slip of the tongue for fair," confessed Teddy ruefully, "but I won't do it again, honest. Besides, nobody could have heard me."

CHAPTER XXV

ANDY SHANKS, EAVESDROPPER

Suddenly the boys heard two voices raised in what seemed to be an altercation of some kind. The sound appeared to come from behind a board fence a few feet away.

One of the speakers was evidently threatening, while the other was begging off from something that had been demanded of him.

"I tell you, I can't," the latter was saying. "I've already given you every cent of my allowance and I've borrowed from every friend I have in this town. You can't get blood out of a stone. If gold dollars were selling for fifty cents, I couldn't buy one."

"I tell you, you must," the other said fiercely. "I know well enough you can pawn something. You can get a few plunks on that ring and scarf-pin of yours. I've long ago put everything I had in hock. Come now, Sid," and the voice became more wheedling in tone, "you know well enough this state of things won't last long. The old man will take me back again and I'll be rolling in money. Then I can pay back all you've let me have."

Fred and Teddy looked at each other with a conviction that flashed on both of them at the same moment.

"Where have I heard those dulcet tones before?" murmured Fred. "Either I'm going crazy or that's Andy Shanks."

"And the other is Sid Wilton," replied Teddy. "Come to think of it, I heard he lived down this way somewhere. I wonder what all this gab is about."

"It seems to me that Andy's father has thrown him out to face life on his own hook," conjectured Fred.

"And he doesn't seem to be making a success of it," judged Bill.

Just then the two debaters emerged from behind the fence and came face to face with their former schoolmates.

The former bully of Rally Hall and his crony started back, and for a moment were so nonplussed that they could do nothing but stare.

"How are you, Sid?" said Fred, breaking a silence that was beginning to be awkward.

Sid made a stammering reply.

Andy had flushed angrily at the sight of the boys and seemed about to indulge in his usual bluster, but a thought appeared to come to him suddenly that made him change his mind.

"How are you, fellows?" he asked, in a way that was meant to be ingratiating, and holding out his hand.

The movement was so wholly unexpected that for an instant the boys hardly knew what to do. They all disliked him heartily, and the Rushton boys in particular had been bitterly wronged by him during their first year at Rally Hall. Still, it would have seemed ungracious to reject the proffered hand, so they took it under protest, mentally resolved to get away from him as soon as possible.

It was a different Andy from the one to whom they had been accustomed. He had formerly been expensively dressed, and had borne himself with the arrogance of the snob and the brutality of the bully. Now he was beginning to look shabby and his eyes had a furtive look very different from the insolent assurance that the boys remembered.

They exchanged a few commonplace remarks, and then, as Andy made no move toward following Sid, who had excused himself and gone on, Bill finally gave him a gentle hint.

"Well, so long, Andy," he said. "We'll have to be going."

Then the motive for Andy's sudden change of front became apparent.

"Wait just a minute," he said rather sheepishly. "Will you fellows do me a favor and lend me a five spot? I'm stony broke—not a dime to bless myself with. You know the governor has gone back on me. Says he won't give me a red cent, and that I'll have to learn to hoe my own row. I'm up against it for fair, and I know you fellows won't mind lending me a little something. I'll pay it back as soon as the old man comes across, which he's bound to do sooner or later. What do you say?"

Fred, who remembered how the bully had tried to put on him the theft of some examination papers at Rally Hall, hesitated, but Teddy, who noticed how shabby and downcast Andy looked, intervened.

"I guess we might fix it up," he ventured to say. "Just let me speak to the others for a minute."

They had a short conference, as a result of which Teddy collected and handed over the five dollars that Andy desired.

Andy's thanks were profuse, but after having tucked the money safely away in his pocket, something of his old surly manner returned. He took leave of his benefactors with scant ceremony, but the boys were so glad to get rid of him that they hardly noticed this.

"After all," remarked Bill, as they watched Andy go down the street, "five dollars isn't so much to pay for getting free from that bird. I'd be willing to lose a lot more than that if I could be sure of never seeing him again."

The boys made their purchases and took their way to the place that Lester had in mind to eat their lunch. They found themselves on a high sand dune, overgrown with coarse grass. It afforded an excellent view of the sea and also furnished a comfortable place to lean against.

"This is great!" exclaimed Ross. "Let's get out that grub and pitch in. I could eat a barrel full of brass tacks and never know I had eaten anything."

"I guess you wouldn't know anything very long," laughed Lester, as he proceeded to lay out the provisions.

The eatables vanished with surprising speed, and after the first sharp edge of their hunger had worn off, the conversation turned, as it usually did these days, to their quest for the missing treasure.

A brisk breeze was blowing in from the ocean and the brittle sand grass kept up a constant rustling. This sound served admirably to cover the approach of a stealthy figure that had followed the boys at a distance ever since they had left Bartanet. This figure crept closer and closer to the sand dune, until only a projecting hump concealed it from the five boys on the seaward side.

As it attained this position of vantage, Teddy was addressing a remark to Ross.

"Haven't you lost a bit of your confidence yet, Ross?" he queried.

"Not a particle," affirmed Ross stoutly. "We'll find that treasure, sooner or later, if it ever was actually hidden in the neighborhood of Bartanet Shoals."

"You bet we will!" declared Fred, "even if we have to import a steam shovel to dig up the whole territory."

"I hope it will be soon," interposed Bill. "It'll be us for Rally Hall, you know, before long, and then what chance will we have?"

"Keep a stiff upper lip," counseled Lester. "We've just begun to fight."

During the conversation the eavesdropper had lain quietly and listened with the closest attention. Now he edged away cautiously, and when he had reached a sufficient distance rose to his feet and hurried back in the direction of Bartanet.

The boys light-heartedly got into their boat and rowed back to the lighthouse without the slightest suspicion that almost all they had said had been overheard by Andy Shanks.

That rascal hastened back to town, his brain awl with dreams of sudden riches. He had heard enough to know that there was treasure buried in or around Bartanet, and he also knew that the boys whom he held in hatred were in search of it. What joy to steal the riches from them and thus gain the twofold advantage of thwarting them and at the same time putting himself in a position to indulge those vices in which he delighted!

Before Andy had gone far, he met one of the village youths whose acquaintance he had recently made. Unfortunately for Andy, this young fellow, who was named Morton, had a strong liking for practical jokes, and after Andy, with his usual boastfulness, had thrown out sly hints about knowing how to "pick up all the money that he wanted," Morton scented a chance to make a victim.

As Andy was very vague regarding the sources from which he expected to get his wealth, Morton did not hesitate to impart to Andy the slighting opinion that he was "talking through his hat."

"Not much I'm not," retorted Andy, stung by the imputation. "I tell you I know there's oodles of money buried somewhere around here and what's more, if you'll help me to find it, I'll let you in for a share of it."

His acquaintance, seeing that Andy was in earnest, quickly formed a plan to have some fun at the other's expense.

"Well, seeing you're so certain of it, I *will* help you, then!" he exclaimed. "Shake hands on the bargain."

CHAPTER XXVI

BADLY FOOLED

Morton gravely extended his hand and Andy shook it.

"Let's see, now," said the town youth, pretending to be racking his memory, "whereabouts could that money be hid? It's probably in some old shack or cave somewhere. Say!" he shouted as though struck by an idea, "I'll wager I know the identical place where it's stowed away. Come to think of it, I'm sure I do."

"Where? Where?" questioned Andy eagerly.

"Well, I know you're on the square and won't give me the double cross," replied Morton, "so I don't mind telling you what I know.

"There was an old fellow partly tipsy one winter night, who told me a long yarn about knowing where there was a mint of money hidden away. I didn't pay any attention to him then, because I thought he was just raving, the way those people often do. But now I come to think of it, I remember his speaking of an old hut that was almost buried in a sand dune close to the water. Let's see now, where is there an old shack that answers to that description?"

Morton pretended to meditate deeply, while Andy waited breathlessly for him to continue.

"I have it!" exclaimed Morton abruptly. "It's the place old Totten used to have on the beach just north of Bartanet. He kept very close to himself, but he always seemed to have slathers of money. He died two or three years ago, and since then the sand has nearly rolled over his shack. I'll venture to say that if we dug there we'd find money enough to make us both rich for the rest of our lives."

"By jinks! but I believe you're right," blurted out Andy with an avaricious glitter in his shifty eyes. "Let's go there to-night and see if we can find it."

"Oh, we won't be able to go to-night," protested Morton. "We'll have to get picks and shovels, and we'll have to do it so quietly that nobody will catch on. And I can't do it to-morrow night, either," he continued, as though just recalling something. "I've got an engagement that I can't break. But I'll make it the night after that, if you're willing."

"Sure!" assented Andy. "That suits me fine."

But there was a reluctance to look into Morton's eyes as Andy spoke, that convinced the joker that his plans would work out as he expected. He knew Andy Shanks pretty well, and he was sure that Andy would not wait till the appointed time to hunt for the treasure. He guessed that Andy would endeavor to cheat him out of his share of the fictitious treasure by getting in before the time agreed upon. And he made no mistake in reckoning on the mean nature of Andy Shanks.

The two arranged the details of the expedition, such as securing shovels and picks and candles. Then they parted, after Morton had exacted an oath of secrecy from the other.

The latter was no sooner left to himself, however, than he began revolving in his mind plans to outwit the friend, who, he thought, had confided in him so completely.

"It's a lucky thing for me," thought Andy, "that he can't be there to-morrow night. I'll get a pick and shovel somewhere and beat him to it. If he's such a fool as to tell all he knows, he deserves to lose his share."

In the meantime, Morton was hugging himself in anticipation. He confided the matter to a few of his friends, who were delighted at the chance of playing a joke on Shanks, who was anything but popular in the town. All volunteered to help Morton, and having secured an old trunk, they armed themselves with spades and sallied forth in the direction of Totten's old shack.

After shoveling the sand away from before the door, they entered and started to "plant the treasure," as one of them expressed it. They dug a hole four feet deep and wide enough to contain the trunk. Then they filled the trunk with sand and lowered it into the excavation. This done, they filled the hole up again, replaced the rotting boards that formed the floor and surveyed the completed job with satisfaction.

"I guess that will keep him busy for a while," remarked Morton, "especially as he won't know where to look and will have to dig the whole place up, more or less. It's going to be more fun than a circus."

"But we want to see him while he's at it," objected one of his followers. "How are we going to manage it?"

"That's so," agreed Morton. "Guess we'll have to clear the sand away from the little window there."

The lads set to work with a will and soon had enough of the sand shoveled away to permit a clear view of the interior of the shack. This accomplished, they closed the door and heaped sand against it, leaving everything as they had found it.

"Well," declared Morton, "that was considerable work, but it will be worth it. We'll hustle back to town now and tell the other fellows that everything's all right. Then we'll have nothing to do but wait for the fun. I'm as sure as I am that I'm alive that that sneak will try to circumvent me. I could see it in his eye."

Andy spent a restless night, his mind busied with plans to get the best of Morton. He rose early the next morning and roamed restlessly about town. The great problem confronting him was how to get the pick and shovel without Morton's getting wind of it. He finally concluded that it would be taking too much of a risk to buy the implements in the village, so he made a trip to a town five miles distant and got the necessary tools.

Night came at last, and the sneak sallied forth and set out for the old cabin, the location of which Morton had been careful to give to him. Throwing down his tools, Andy carefully reconnoitred the surroundings. The jokers had done their work so carefully that he saw nothing amiss, and after satisfying himself that the coast was clear, he started digging in the sand in front of the door.

It did not take him long to gain an entrance, and after getting in he lit two of his candles and took a careful survey of the surroundings. There was nothing in sight to give him a clue. The sole furniture consisted of an old table and a couple of rickety chairs.

Somewhat at a loss where to begin, Andy finally started sounding the rough planking of the floor. When he came to the place where the planks had been ripped up the preceding evening, he saw that they were loose and resolved to take a chance there. He removed the boards, took off his coat and began to dig in earnest.

He made rapid progress at first, but soon his muscles, flabby and unused to such strenuous exercise, began to protest and he was forced to take a breathing spell.

Had he chanced to glance at the little window, his labors might have come to a premature conclusion. Grouped outside were Morton and his friends, almost bursting with smothered laughter. The sight of Andy, whose antipathy to work was well known, sweating away over the hardest kind of labor, amused them immensely.

Wholly unconscious of the amusement he was providing, Andy resumed his task and worked with such good will that it was not long before his spade struck on the edge of the buried trunk. He uttered a shout of delight and scattered the remaining sand in every direction. Before long he had uncovered the top of the trunk. This he tried to lift out of the hole. Finding it too heavy for this, however, and not able to restrain his impatience to see what it contained, he seized the pickax and smashed in the top.

His chagrin may be imagined when instead of the treasure he expected he found that the trunk was filled with sand. On top of this was a sheet of paper which Morton had placed there the previous evening. It contained one word done in heavy capitals:

STUNG!

For a few moments Andy gazed stupidly, unable for the time to understand that he had been made the victim of a hoax. While this was slowly dawning upon him, the door burst open and, with a yell of laughter, the crowd rushed into the hut.

Andy jumped as though he had been shot, and, scrambling out of the hole, stood with open mouth facing the laughing boys. His surprised and discomfited attitude was so ludicrous that their laughter increased tenfold and they fairly shrieked.

"Wh-what's the big idea, anyway?" gasped Andy at last. "How did you fellows come to be here?"

"Well, you see," replied Morton, sobering down a little, "I counted on your doing the crooked thing and I wasn't mistaken."

"I'll get even with you some day," growled Andy. "You think you're pretty smart, don't you?"

"Since you ask me, I must admit I cherish some such idea," admitted Morton, his eyes twinkling. "The fellows from the city don't always know everything, you understand."

"You'll live to be sorry for this trick," blustered Andy. "You just see if you don't."

He made his way to the door and passed out amid another burst of merriment from those who had witnessed his discomfiture, leaving his implements lying where he had thrown them.

An account of the affair spread quickly over the village and life for Andy became so unbearable that before another twenty-four hours he left the town.

In the natural course of events the story came to the ears of the boys at the lighthouse.

"I'd have given something to be there," declared Bill. "It must have been worth a year's allowance to see his face when all those fellows gave him the laugh. He thinks such a lot of himself that it must have been a bitter pill to swallow."

"Let alone his not finding what he went after," put in Fred. "It hit him in his pride and his pocketbook, and they're both sensitive spots with Andy."

"But how do you suppose he got wind of our being in search of treasure?" queried Teddy.

"I was wondering at that," replied Lester, "and the only way I could figure it out is that he must have followed us the day we were at Bartanet, and heard what we were talking about when we were eating."

"Well," concluded Fred, "he couldn't have got anything of real value from what we said, or he wouldn't have gone digging in old Totten's shack. But it's up to us to put a padlock on our lips when there's any chance of being overheard. We may not be so lucky the next time."

CHAPTER XXVII

A FIGHTING CHANCE

"Only one week more now before we have to go back to Rally Hall," sighed Teddy one morning, just after they had risen from the breakfast table.

"And nothing done yet in the way of finding that chest of gold," groaned Fred.

"It's now or never," declared Lester with decision.

"I'm afraid it's never, then," put in Bill, the skeptical. "Here for days we've been blistering our hands and breaking our backs, to say nothing of racking what brains we have, and we're no nearer finding it than we were at the beginning."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that," protested Fred. "We've at least explored a lot of places where there were no signs of the peculiar trees and rock shown in that map that Ross told us about. That leaves just so many fewer places to waste our time on, and makes it more likely that the next will be the right one."

"Not much nourishment in that," persisted Bill. "I'll admit that we've found plenty of places where the gold *isn't*, but that doesn't get us anywhere. And we'll be gray-headed before we can explore the whole coast of Maine."

"Oh, stop your grouching, you old sinner," exhorted Teddy, clapping him on the back. "This is like football or baseball. The game isn't over till after the last minute of play."

"That's the talk," cried Lester emphatically. "If we go down, we'll do it with the guns shotted and the band playing and the flag flying."

It was not to be wondered at that the lads were all assailed at times by the doubt and discouragement that troubled Bill acutely that morning. They had taken advantage of every day when the sea permitted, and, as Teddy phrased it, had "raked the coast fore and aft." Their main reliance had been the map that had appeared in the story of the old sailor to Ross, and the first thing they did after entering any bay or cove was to look about them for the clump of two and three trees, with the big rock standing at the right. Once or twice they had found conditions that nearly answered this description, and they had dug and hunted near by, wherever the lay of the land held out any hope of success.

In the absence of anything better, this supposed map was their strongest clue. Yet even this was only supposition. It might not have been anything more than the fanciful sketch of an idle sailor. Or if it indeed were a map of any given locality, it might not refer in the slightest degree to the robbery by the crew of the smuggler.

The knowledge that this might be so had at times a paralyzing effect on the boys. They felt the lack of solid ground beneath their feet. Like the coffin of Mahomet, they were as though suspended between earth and sky.

Still, it was the only clue they had, and there was something in the make-up of these sturdy young Americans that made them desperately unwilling to confess defeat. It was the "die-in-the-last-ditch" spirit that has made America great. Even Bill, although he relieved himself sometimes by grumbling, would not really have given up the search and when the pinch came he dug and hunted as eagerly as the rest.

This morning, they had arranged to set off for a final cruise that might take up all the remaining time of their vacation, which was now drawing rapidly to a close. Their party was complete, with the exception of Ross. He had gone up to Oakland to spend a few days with his mother, who had arrived from Canada, but he had arranged to meet the boys that day at a point agreed on, about fifteen miles up the coast.

As their cruise was expected to be longer than usual, it took them some time before they had everything on board the *Ariel* and were ready to cast off from the little pier below the lighthouse.

"Well," said Mr. Lee, who had come down to see them off, "good-by, boys, and luck go with you."

"Watch us come back with that chest of gold," called out Teddy gaily.

"I'll be watching, all right," grinned the lighthouse keeper, "and I have a sort of hunch that you boys will get there this time. You certainly have earned it, if you do lay your hands on it."

"And that's no merry jest, either," remarked Bill, as he looked at the callous spots on his hands.

"Bill wasn't made to work," scoffed Teddy. "He's made to sit on the box and crack the whip, while we common trash pull and strain in the shafts."

"Not much," retorted Bill. "I'm no mule driver."

"It's a touching picture, that of Teddy pulling and straining, isn't it?" laughed Lester, as he pointed to that young gentleman slumped down comfortably in the stern.

With jest and banter, the morning wore away. The day was serene and beautiful, with not a cloud obscuring the sky, while there was just enough wind to make their progress steady and rapid. Almost before they knew it, they had reached the point agreed upon with Ross, and soon after descried the *Sleuth* coming down to meet them.

They hailed Ross cordially, and his beaming face showed how deep and warm was his feeling for the boys, whom he already seemed to have known for years rather than weeks.

"Some smart navigators, we are, to meet just where we arranged to!" laughed Lester.

"We're the real thing in the way of sailor men," assented Ross, throwing out his chest.

"Listen to the mutual admiration society," jibed the irrepressible Teddy. "Blushing violets aren't in it with them. Here you let my modest worth pass unnoticed, while you're handing

bouquets to each other. But that's the way it is in this world. It's nerve and gall that counts. Now if I--"

But his eloquent peroration was spoiled by a hasty shift to escape a life preserver that Lester hurled at his head, missing him by an inch.

"You'd better let me have Teddy aboard the *Sleuth*," laughed Ross. "Then if the engine gives out, I'll start Teddy wagging his tongue. That will furnish power enough."

"Not a bit of it," replied Lester. "I want him here, in case the wind gives out."

"It's evident that I'm the most important person here, anyway," retorted Teddy. "Neither one of you seems to be willing to get along without me."

"Seven cities claimed Homer, you know," said Bill sarcastically.

"Yes," said Teddy complacently, "he and I are in the same class."

Ross turned his boat around, and the two craft went along side by side.

"The sea's like a mill pond to-day," remarked Fred. "How different from the day of the storm, when we watched it from the observation room. Do you remember what your father said?"

"Not especially," answered Lester. "What particular thing do you mean?"

"Why, when he prophesied that many a good ship would lay her bones on a reef or beach before the storm was over."

"I suppose he was anxious," answered Lester gravely, "but I haven't heard of any ship's being wrecked on this particular strip of the coast during this storm. The worst time we've had around here, as far as I can remember, was about three years ago. That storm kept up for three days and three nights, and when it was over there were at least a dozen wrecks, just on the coast of Maine.

"By the way," he went on, as a sudden thought struck him, "we'll have to pass one of those wrecks a few miles from here. It's a schooner that went ashore in the storm. There's part of the hull left, and, if you like, we'll run in and look it over."

"Was the crew saved?" asked Fred.

"Every soul aboard was drowned," Lester answered soberly. "They were swept overboard before the life-saving crew could get to them. The masts went over the side, and the hull was driven so hard and deep into the sand that it has been there ever since."

A half hour more passed, and then Lester gave a twist to the tiller and turned the *Ariel* inshore.

"There's the wreck," he said in response to Fred's look of inquiry, as he pointed to a dark object near the beach. "We'll just run in and look her over. But we won't be able to stay more than a few minutes, for this is to be one of our busy days."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ABANDONED SCHOONER

"Look," cried Teddy suddenly, pointing at right angles to the course they were pursuing.

"What is it?" came from his companions.

"It's a shark," cried Teddy excitedly. "Perhaps it's the mate of the one we caught the other day. Have you your harpoon along, Lester?"

"No," replied Lester, as he, with the others, watched the ominous black fin just showing above the surface; "and I haven't the shark hook, either. It's just as well anyway, because we can't afford the time to-day to look after that fellow."

"I suppose you're right," sighed Teddy, reluctantly abandoning his idea, "but I sure would like to add to my collection of shark's teeth."

"Wait till we find the chest, and you'll have money enough to buy a shark and keep him as a pet," suggested Bill.

"And feed him out of your hand," grinned Ross.

As they drew near the shore, the wreck of the abandoned schooner came clearly into view. It was a dismal spectacle. There was nothing visible above the main deck, not even stumps. The masts had been snapped close to their butts, showing the terrific fury of the gale that had severed them almost as neatly as though done by a razor. There were several yawning rents in the side through which the water poured and retreated. It was evident that the hold must be entirely flooded. The bow was deeply imbedded in the sand, and there was only a slight perceptible motion of the stern, as it swayed and lifted in obedience to the surge of the waves.

The ship seemed at a casual glance to be about eighty feet in length. The beam was comparatively narrow, and the long graceful lines falling away from the bow showed that she had been built for speed. She was of the greyhound type, and this fact only emphasized her present forlorn condition.

Despite the dilapidated condition of the lower part of the hull, the upper part and the deck itself seemed to be fairly solid.

"Good timber in that old boat," muttered Lester, as they came close, "or she'd have broken up into kindling wood long ago."

"How are you going to get aboard?" asked Bill.

"By way of the stern, I guess," Lester replied, as he measured distances. "Of course it would be easier to get over the bow, but we'd have to go pretty close inshore for that, and I don't know just how deep it is there. I don't want to take any chances with the *Ariel*."

Fred shortened sail, and they ran in cautiously under the stern. The planks were weatherbeaten, but there were still some vestiges of paint on the upper part, and the boys could clearly make out the name of the unfortunate boat to have been the *Albatross*.

"Poor old *Albatross*," murmured Fred. "Her wings are broken, sure enough."

"She'll never fly again," added Bill.

They put the fenders over the side to avoid scraping, and Lester tossed a coil of rope over a butt that rose at the end of the stern. He held the ends, while Teddy shinned up like a monkey and fastened it more securely. Then Fred and Bill went up, while Lester stayed below to look after the safety of his craft.

"Aren't you fellows coming along?" asked Fred, looking down over the stern.

"I guess not," replied Lester. "I've seen lots of wrecks in my time, and I want to make sure that the *Ariel* doesn't make another."

"How about you, Ross?" inquired Teddy.

"I'll stay and keep Lester company," Ross answered, as he brought the *Sleuth* a little closer. "You can tell us what you see, which can't be much, I suppose, after all this time."

After a little more friendly urging, the others acquiesced in the arrangement and went forward, cautiously testing each plank before they set their feet down, for fear it might give way under them.

A certain feeling of eeriness settled down upon them. Living men, hearty, boisterous, vigorous men, full of the joy of life, had trodden these planks when the vessel was in her prime and winging her way over the seas as swiftly as the gull whose name she bore. Now the hungry waves had swallowed them, and the subdued chanting of the water along her side might well be their requiem.

Instinctively the boys drew closer together, and their voices lowered almost to a whisper.

"Makes you feel kind of creepy, doesn't it?" remarked Bill.

"It sure does," answered Teddy. "I shouldn't care to sleep here over night."

"You wouldn't do much sleeping," affirmed Fred. "You'd be expecting every minute to see something standing at the foot of your bed."

But these first fancies could not long endure in the flood of sunlight that beat upon the schooner, and the boys soon recovered their normal confidence. They went through the captain's cabin and two others that had evidently been set apart for the mates. Except one or two sodden mattresses and a huddled bunch of mouldy bed coverings, there was nothing of the slightest value. Whatever there had been at the time of the wreck had either been washed overboard or taken possession of by the authorities, shortly after the wreck occurred.

"Nothing more to see here," declared Bill, after a brief look around. "I guess we'd better

join the other fellows now. Lester'll be anxious to get going."

"Right-o," acceded Fred. "Let's get a move on."

But something, he did not know what, moved Teddy to stay a little longer.

"You fellows go back and unfasten the rope," he suggested, "and I'll be with you in a minute."

They went slowly back to the stern and started to untie the rope, bantering meanwhile with Lester and Ross, who were getting restive.

Teddy ran forward toward the bow and looked into the gloomy depths of the forecastle. He could see that the floor was solid, but it was some inches deep in water. He hesitated only a moment and then leaped lightly down.

Three minutes later, Fred and Bill were startled to see Teddy running toward them, his face as white as chalk and his eyes blazing with excitement.

"What's the matter?" they cried in alarm, leaping to their feet.

Teddy tried to speak, but for a moment no words came.

"The m-m-map!" he stuttered at last. "It's in the f-forecastle!"

"The map?" repeated Bill blankly.

A light sprang into Fred's eyes.

"Do you mean the map that the sailor carved?" he demanded, clutching his brother's arm with a force like a vise.

Teddy nodded, still a prey to his tremendous agitation.

"But how can it be?" asked Fred wildly. "This isn't the *Ranger*."

"How do you know it isn't?" cried Bill, catching the contagion. "Her name was changed, you remember."

"What are you fellows chinning about up there?" demanded Lester, with a touch of impatience in his voice.

"Lester!" called Fred. "Scrape the paint off the name on the stern there, and see if you can make out anything underneath."

Lester took out his claspknife and scraped vigorously.

"There has been something else there," he announced after a moment, "but I can't fully make it out. I can see a couple of R's--"

"That's it," shouted Fred jubilantly. "It's the old *Ranger*. Come aboard, you fellows. Lively, now. Don't mind about the boats. They're safe enough for a few minutes."

A moment more, and those on board were joined by Ross and Lester, as breathless and excited as themselves, for the meaning of Teddy's discovery had dawned upon them.

They all raced to the forecastle and tumbled in pell mell.

CHAPTER XXIX

TREASURE COVE

With a finger that he vainly tried to keep steady, Teddy pointed to a rough tracing on the wall at the left side of the forecabin.

It took a moment to accustom their eyes to the dim light of the place, then their vision cleared and the boys could make out the details of a map similar to the one which the old sailor had described to Ross.

There were two clumps, one consisting of two and the other of three trees, at a little distance in from the beach. To the right was a huge rock that rose like some giant sentinel and seemed to mark the entrance to a bay or cove. A series of waving lines appeared to indicate the water, and a more heavily shaded part was evidently meant to denote the land. There was no artistic element in the drawing, but just then the boys would not have exchanged the rough scrawl of that knife blade for a painting by Titian or Raphael.

"Glory, hallelujah!" shouted Teddy, who had by this time recovered his power of speech.

"Eureka!" cried Lester.

"We've found it," translated Fred.

"Joy!" exulted Bill, his habitual caution swept away in the flood of his excitement.

Ross alone said nothing, though his trembling hands and moistened eyes betrayed the depth of his emotion. To the Rally Hall boys this meant a tremendous step forward, they hoped, toward the achievement of their ambition. It meant all that, too, to Ross, but it meant much more. He was on the spot where his father had been foully assaulted and brought to his death. Somewhere in this ship there had been the scuffling of feet and the thud of a deadly weapon, as his father had fought for his property and his life.

The other boys were quick to recognize his feeling, and with the true courtesy that marked them, they strove to restrain their exultation for a time, and to talk among themselves until Ross should have had time to get a grip on himself.

Bill, as usual, was the first to put a brake on their optimism and subdue their enthusiasm by questioning cautiously the real value of their discovery.

"It's splendid, of course," he ventured to suggest, "but, after all, what does it give us that we didn't already know? To be sure, it shows that the sailor was telling the truth. But there doesn't seem to be anything in the map that he hadn't already described."

"That's so," admitted Teddy, his enthusiasm a little dampened.

"Don't be too sure that there's nothing else," said Fred. "It's so dark in here that we can't see anything but the rough outlines. Who has some matches?"

"Here you are," replied Lester, producing an oilskin pouch from an inside pocket.

Fred struck one, and as it flared up, five eager pairs of eyes scanned the wall in front.

But while it brought into greater distinctness the main features that they had already seen, the map seemed to reveal nothing more and there was a general sigh of disappointment.

"Why didn't that fellow go a little further while he was about it?" groaned Teddy.

"If he had only told us not only what it looked like, but where it was," mourned Lester.

"It's maddening to get so close and yet miss the one thing that would clear it all up," complained Bill.

"I can understand now how Tom Bixby felt, when Dick was just on the point of telling him where the gold was hidden," said Lester.

"I'm not giving it up yet," declared Fred with determination, "and I'll not, until I have used up every match we have with us. Even after that, I'll get a torch somewhere and keep on looking."

But several more matches struck in quick succession were of no more value than the first, and the boys' hearts went down.

Just as the fifth match was burning low, Bill gave utterance to a sharp exclamation.

"I saw something down in the corner that time," he declared. "It looked like figures of some kind."

The boys had a deep belief in Bill's sharp eyes, and it was with renewed hope that Fred struck another of the precious matches and held it with fingers that trembled.

"I was right!" exulted Bill. "See there," and he pointed to some scarcely legible marks in the lower right-hand corner.

"They're figures, all right," he confirmed. "I can make out a 'four' and a 'seven' and, yes, a 'six.' But they're very faint and I can't make sense of them."

"Try again, Bill," begged Teddy.

"Wait a minute," cried Ross. "I've got a small magnifying glass in the cabin of the *Sleuth*. I'll get it in a second."

"That's the stuff!" gloated Fred. "Now, we'll make it out, sure."

It was less than two minutes, but it seemed a long time to the impatient boys before Ross dropped into the forecabin, holding a small but powerful convex glass.

Bill snatched it eagerly and held it in front of the faintly outlined figures.

"All over but the shouting!" he jubilated. "Take them down, you fellows, while I read them aloud to you."

Three pencils were all the boys could muster, but these fairly leaped from their pockets.

"I don't know what they mean," was Bill's prelude, "but here they are. Forty-four, then a space, then thirty-two. That's what's on the first line. Then under that is another lot, sixty-

seven, then a space, then forty-one."

"Hurrah!" yelled Lester, jumping up and clicking his heels together. "Latitude! Longitude! We'll find it now!"

"Do you think that's what the figures mean?" inquired Bill, his caution still in evidence.

"I don't think at all, I *know*," jubilated Lester. "It means longitude sixty-seven degrees forty-one minutes, and latitude forty-four degrees and thirty-two minutes. Look again and see if there's anything about seconds."

But further search failed to reveal anything more than had already been detected.

"Never mind, that's near enough," concluded Lester. "That will give it to us within a few miles, and it's up to us to find the exact spot."

"Have you got the instruments to take the observations with and find out just where the spot is?" asked Teddy.

"Sure I have," was the answer. "I've a sextant stowed away in a locker on board the *Ariel* and father has shown me how to use it."

"I have one, too," put in Ross.

"So much the better. We can take independent observations and then compare them. But come along, boys. We're on the right trail at last."

They all hastened out of the fore-castle, wildly excited by this latest and most important clue.

It was the work of only a moment to throw off the lines, and the boats were off at the fastest speed of which they were capable. Teddy had gone aboard the *Sleuth*, so as to run the boat while Ross took his observations, and the other boys took the *Ariel* off Lester's hands for the same purpose.

In a few minutes this had been done, and the boats ran alongside each other, so that the skippers could compare notes.

"It's somewhere within five miles from here," declared Lester, at the end of the conference. "Now, fellows, keep your eyes peeled for the first big rock you see standing at the right of any opening and we'll put in there so quick it will make your heads swim."

"Trust us to keep a close watch," said Fred emphatically. "We won't let any guilty rock escape."

"You bet we won't!" echoed Bill.

Their excitement chased away from the boys' minds any idea of getting a regular meal, and they contented themselves with hasty bites of whatever was found at hand, while they kept their eyes glued to the irregular coast line.

It was late in the afternoon when a shout came from Bill.

"There's a big rock, the biggest that we've seen," he cried, pointing to the right.

Both boats turned in the direction indicated. Ross, in his eagerness, made his engine hum and came first in sight of a cove that opened out beyond the rock, and a shout went up that thrilled the hearts of those in the *Ariel* ploughing on behind.

"Here it is!" yelled Teddy exultingly. "Three trees standing together and two more a hundred feet away. Now for the chest of gold!"

CHAPTER XXX

A DISCOVERY-CONCLUSION

As the boys were unfamiliar with this part of the coast, and did not know what depth of water they might expect to find, they had to moderate their speed, a tantalizing proceeding when every impulse prompted them to rush ashore.

However, "better to be safe than sorry," was the maxim that had been drilled into Lester by his father, and despite the urgings of the others, he felt his way, foot by foot, until he found a good place to drop anchor a hundred feet from shore. Ross followed suit. Then they packed the supplies and implements they had brought into the small boat, and rowed to the beach. Several trips were necessary, but at last everything was safely landed, just on the verge of dusk.

"Oh, if it were only morning!" groaned Teddy.

"We can't do much more than take a look around to-night, for a fact," said Fred. "Perhaps it's just as well, though, that we have time to rest a little before we tackle the job."

"It'll be a man-sized job, all right," warned Bill.

"But we'll have a week to do it in if necessary," said Lester. "And what we won't know about this place in a week won't be worth knowing."

"What's the name of this place, anyway?" asked Fred.

"I don't know that it has any name," was the reply.

"Suppose we christen it, then. What's the matter with calling it Treasure Cove?"

The suggestion met with unanimous approval, and all hoped that what they should find would justify the name.

In the waning light the boys examined curiously the five trees that had helped them to locate the place. But there was nothing cut into the bark that gave them any clue. Nor were there any hollow places in any of them that were large enough to contain the box they sought.

"Well," said Fred, as they retraced their steps to the sheltered place they had picked out as a camping spot, "we can't do any more to-night. But I think we can be well content to call it a day's work and let it go at that."

"Think of the difference between the way we felt this morning and the way we're feeling now!" exulted Teddy. "Then we didn't know that we'd ever get within a hundred miles of it. Now, we may be within a hundred feet of it for all we know."

Now that the strain of the chase for the Cove was over, the boys' appetites returned, and were all the keener because of the abstinence through the day. The lads set to work at once and in less than half an hour they had a steaming, savory meal prepared in the best style known to Lester and Bill, who were the acknowledged leaders in the culinary line. They ate as only hungry, healthy boys can eat, with digestions that asked no odds of any ostrich. Not until the last crumb had vanished did they settle back with a feeling of absolute physical content.

For an hour or more afterward, they sat around the blazing fire they had made, discussing eagerly ways and means for the morrow's search. All of them were keyed up to the highest pitch. They had no definite plans except to hunt and dig until their strength gave out, but there was not one of them, even including cautious Bill, who did not feel sure that victory was within their grasp.

They found it hard to get to sleep, but nature would not be denied and they did sleep at last, to be awakened at the first sign of dawn.

They made a hasty breakfast and then got out their picks and spades, of which they had brought enough along for each member of the party. There was no shirking or holding back. They were like so many young hounds eager to slip from the leash when the signal should be given.

"Suppose we divide the space within easy reach from the shore into five separate sections," suggested Fred. "Each of us can take one and go over it a foot at a time, as though he were looking for a needle that he had dropped. If there's any opening that might lead to a cave or any place where the ground's heaped up as if something had been buried there, then we'll all go to that spot and dig."

But half the morning spent in this way showed nothing that was at all unusual.

"Nothing doing on the first try, but we can't expect to win the game in the first inning," said Fred cheerily. "Now, what's next?"

"I tell you what," suggested Teddy. "Perhaps these trees have something to do with it. Isn't it natural to think that if they buried it in the earth at all, they'd do it somewhere on a line between the two clumps? Let's draw a straight line from one clump to the other and dig along that line."

"That's a good idea," said Lester approvingly. "But instead of starting at one end and digging up every foot of the way, what's the matter with dividing it into lengths of ten spaces each and digging at those points? Wouldn't the minds of those men work in that way? Instead of choosing distances of seven feet, nineteen feet, twenty-three feet, wouldn't they first think of ten, twenty, thirty and so on? It's the simplest way, and they were rough, simple-minded men."

"Lester, you're a dandy," laughed Bill. "We'll have you elected a professor at Rally Hall for the first vacancy."

But though the plan was good, it yielded no results up to the time the boys stopped work at noon to eat and rest.

They were not depressed, but it was only natural that their failure should have taken some of the fine edge off their first elation. Into the mind of each had crept the hint of the smuggler that the gold was not buried, but hidden. They did not accept this as conclusive, but it helped somewhat to dampen their enthusiasm.

"I'm hot and tired," remarked Teddy, after they had eaten dinner, "and I'm going in for a swim before I start in again."

A moment later he was in the water and the others were not long in following his example. All were good swimmers and they sported about indulging in all sorts of fancy practices.

"How far can you fetch under water, Teddy?" called out Bill.

"Watch me," said Teddy, drawing in a long breath and plunging beneath the surface.

He swam with all the vigor of his sturdy young arms, helped by the current that was running strongly with him. He stayed under until his lungs felt as though they were bursting and he was forced to come up.

He was astonished to find himself in an atmosphere of twilight instead of the brilliant sunshine he expected. His first thought was that the sun had gone under a cloud. He shook the water from his eyes and looked up.

He could see neither sun nor sky!

For a moment panic seized him. Then he pulled himself together. He could hear the shouts of his companions, alarmed because they had not seen him come up.

"I'm all right," he shouted, to quiet their fears. Then he looked around him and realized what had happened.

He had passed under a projecting shelf of rock into what seemed to be a cave. The water was shallow and he found that he could stand on the sandy bottom.

His first feeling was that of relief. His second was one of amusement at the involuntary trick he had played on his mates. His third came to him so suddenly that it nearly took him off his feet.

What was it that Mr. Montgomery had said? "*It's where the water's coming in.*" In a moment of sanity, had the robbed and wounded man seen the place where the robbers had hidden his money?

"It's where the water's coming in."

With legs that trembled, Teddy waded forward. He soon struck dry ground. He went up a slight slope, feeling his way until he was above high-water mark. He felt rough ledges as he steadied himself against the rough side of the cave and suddenly a shock went through him that thrilled him to the finger tips.

On a ledge at the right, his hand rested on a box! He tried to lift it. It was too heavy.

He turned and raced for the entrance, plunged into the water and reappeared among his comrades.

"I've found it! I've found it!" he sputtered incoherently.

"Found what?" they yelled in chorus, already anticipating the answer.

"The money!" he repeated. "Ross' money! I've found the chest of gold!"

None of them could remember very clearly just what followed. Like so many young otters the other boys swam after Teddy. They brought the chest to the water's edge, and got it into the boat that Bill had swum back to fetch. They reached the beach, broke open the rusted lock with blows of a pick, and there before them in the sunlight was the gold. Golden sovereigns, golden eagles, golden twenty-franc pieces, gold that gleamed, gold that dazzled, gold that mirrored back their own delighted faces! A great wrong had been righted, and their persistent search had been crowned with a glorious success.

There were three triumphal journeys during the days that followed. The first was to Oakland, where a widow wept happy tears because her husband's name was to stand clear before the world and her son's future was provided for. The second was to Bartanet Shoals, where the kindly keeper of the lighthouse had his part in the general jubilee. The third, and to the Rushton boys the most important of all, was to Oldtown, where Ross, who accompanied Fred and Teddy, had the proud delight of putting into the hands of Mr. Aaron Rushton the gold that paid his father's debt.

"I wonder what Uncle Aaron will say when he finds out the money has been found," remarked Teddy, when the three youths were on the way to Oldtown.

"I'll wager he'll hardly be able to believe his ears and eyes," returned Fred.

During the journey Ross was unusually thoughtful. His eyes showed his deep delight over the mission he had undertaken.

"You can't realize what this means to me," he said to the Rushton boys with much feeling. "It has taken a wonderful load off my shoulders."

"Take it from me, Teddy and I feel just as happy as you do, Ross," responded Fred affectionately.

"I'm mighty glad that I took that swim," remarked Teddy, with something of a grin. "It was worth while, wasn't it?"

"The most wonderful swim in the whole world!" declared Ross, emphatically.

"Say! I'd like to take a swim like that again and find another treasure," continued the fun-loving Rushton boy.

When the Rushtons arrived at their home they found that their parents had gone out on a short errand. Their Uncle Aaron, however, was on hand, sitting in the library reading a book.

"Well, well! Home again, eh?" said their uncle, looking at the boys. Then he gazed questioningly at Ross.

"This is Ross Montgomery," said Fred, by way of introduction. "Ross, this is my Uncle

Aaron."

"Hum!" came from Uncle Aaron. He gazed fixedly at the youth, who was smiling broadly. "You look rather happy."

"Yes, Mr. Rushton, I suppose I do, for I never felt happier in my life," returned Ross. "We've got good news."

"The lost treasure has been found!" burst out Teddy, unable to control himself. "Every dollar of it, Uncle Aaron! What do you think of that?"

"Found!" repeated the man. "Do you really mean it?"

"Yes, Uncle Aaron, it's true. The lost Montgomery fortune has been found," added Fred.

"And I am here to pay you all that is coming to you," announced Ross.

The picture that Uncle Aaron presented at that moment was one that his two nephews were likely never to forget. He stood as if transfixed to the spot, while his eyes grew larger and larger. He clutched the back of his chair as if to support himself.

"What is that I hear?" he demanded, in a strangely unnatural voice. "You have come to pay me back all that money?"

"Yes, Mr. Rushton, every cent of it."

"And he's going to pay it to you in gold, too," added Teddy eagerly.

"Well! Well! Well!" murmured the man. "I-I can scarcely believe it. Why, boys, this is wonderful news!" he continued, warming up. "Got every bit of the money, have you? Well now, isn't that wonderful!" His face began to beam. "And so you've come to pay me what is due me, have you? Very fine of you, young man! Very fine, indeed!"

Thereupon Uncle Aaron sunk back in his chair and demanded that the three youths give him all the particulars of the finding of the treasure. They were in the midst of a graphic recital of these happenings when Mr. and Mrs. Rushton arrived.

"Hullo!" cried the boys' father. "I hardly expected to see you yet."

"Oh, we've found the treasure! We've found the treasure!" burst out Teddy, rushing up to shake hands with his father and then to hug his mother.

"Teddy, Teddy, don't crush me to death!" panted Mrs. Rushton, as the youth drew her closer and closer. "Why, I declare, I can't breathe!"

"But isn't it grand news?" cried the elated boy.

"Indeed it is!"

"This is Ross Montgomery, father," said Fred. "He, you know, is the owner of the treasure."

"And so you actually found it?" returned the father, with a smile of satisfaction. "I didn't think you'd be able to do it."

"Wonderful boys! Wonderful boys!" murmured Uncle Aaron. "When they first came in and told me, I thought they were putting up some sort of job on me. Say! It isn't a joke, is it?" he queried quickly and with sudden suspicion.

"You don't think we'd play a joke like that, do you?" demanded Teddy.

"Well, I've known you to play some pretty hard jokes," said their uncle dryly. "But never mind that now, my boy," he continued, almost affectionately. "I'll forgive you for all of 'em, now that this money has come to light. I had about made up my mind that I'd never see a cent of it."

"You'll have to tell us all the particulars," said Mr. Rushton.

"That is just what we had started to do when you came in," answered Ross.

"Teddy is the hero of this story," broke in Fred. "He's the one who found the box that contained the gold pieces."

"Oh, come now! Don't put it that way," returned Teddy modestly. "We all had a hand in finding that box. Didn't we all search for it day in and day out?"

"Never mind, you are the one who really found it, and you ought to have the credit," said his brother firmly.

"That's right!" broke in Ross. "If Teddy hadn't made that wonderful dive and come up into the cave, that box might still be where it was."

"It is queer to me that some one else didn't find it in all these years," was Fred's comment.

"Well, I'm mighty glad somebody else didn't find the money box!" cried Uncle Aaron. "But go ahead and tell the story. I want to hear every word of it."

"All right, then," answered Ross. And sitting down with the others he told his tale in full, aided by Fred and Teddy.

It goes without saying that the older Rushtons were tremendously interested in the recital. When Mrs. Rushton heard how Teddy had made his wonderful dive she shuddered.

"Oh, my son, what a risk to take!" she murmured. "What if you had never come up to the surface again!"

"Oh, don't worry, Momsey," he answered affectionately. "I know how to take care of myself."

"I'll wager that the folks at Bartanet Shoals were surprised to hear the news," was Mr. Rushton's comment.

"Yes, indeed," answered Fred.

"But you should have seen my mother when she heard the great tidings," came from Ross, and his voice choked a little when he spoke. "Why she was the happiest woman in the whole world!"

"I have no doubt of it," answered Mrs. Rushton, "and she had good cause for her happiness."

That their parents were proud of the part that Fred and Teddy had played in the finding, goes without saying. Their Uncle Aaron was so delighted that he gladly wiped off the slate all his past grievances against his nephews. He even went so far as to claim some share in what

they had done.

"Wasn't it through me they went to Rally Hall?" he demanded. "If they hadn't gone there, they wouldn't have met Lester or gone to Bartanet Shoals, and I'd have been twelve thousand dollars to the bad."

Ross had insisted on a share of the recovered money going to the Rushton boys and Lester. The friendship between the boys had grown very strong and they were delighted when in answer to their urging, Ross agreed to go with them to Rally Hall. They little knew at the time that they were destined to take part in fresh and stirring adventures before the fall term was over.

"Well," remarked Fred, when he was talking it all over with his brother, "we've had some exciting times together, but this has been ahead of anything yet!"

"Yes," agreed Teddy, "but I have a feeling that we're in for something better yet when we get back to Rally Hall."

And here let us say good-bye to the Rushton boys.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RUSHTON BOYS AT TREASURE COVE;
OR, THE MISSING CHEST OF GOLD ***

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