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Every eye watched the distant yacht anxiously.
([Page 75](#)) (The Boy Scouts for Uncle Sam)

THE BOY SCOUTS FOR UNCLE SAM

By **LIEUT. HOWARD PAYSON**

AUTHOR OF

"The Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol," "The Boy Scouts
on the Range," "The Boy Scouts and the Army
Airship," "The Boy Scouts' Mountain Camp,"
"The Boy Scouts at the Panama Canal,"
etc.



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The Boy Scouts for Uncle Sam

[5]

CHAPTER I.

THE EAGLES AT HOME.

"After all, fellows, it's good to be back home again."

The speaker, Rob Blake, leader of the Eagle Patrol of Boy Scouts, spoke with conviction. He was a "rangy," sun-burned lad of about eighteen, clear-eyed, confident and wiry. His Boy Scout training, too, had made him resourceful beyond his years.

"Yes, and it's also good to know that we each have a good substantial sum of money in the bank as the result of the finding of the Dangerfield fortune," agreed Merritt Crawford, his second in command, a sunny-faced, good-natured looking youth a little younger than Rob and crowned with a tousled mass of wavy brown hair.

[6]

"Well, at any rate we've had plenty to eat since we've been back," chimed in Tubby Hopkins, a corpulent youth who owed his nickname to his fleshiness.

"That's right, Tubby," laughed Paul Perkins, another bright-eyed young "Eagle"; "that's something we didn't always get in the Adirondacks. I thought at one time that you'd fade away to a shadow."

"Humph! Pretty substantial sort of shadow," grinned Hiram Nelson, who, besides Paul Perkins, was the inventive genius of the Eagles.

The scene of these reminiscences was the comfortably furnished patrol room of the Eagles, situated over the bank of the little town of Hampton on the south shore of Long Island. Rob Blake's father, the president of the bank, was a patron of the Eagles, and had donated the room to the boys some time before.

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Boxing gloves, foils, baseball bats and other athletic apparatus dear to a boy's heart lay scattered about the room in orderly confusion. On the walls were diagrams of the "wig-wag code" and the "Morse code simplified," with other illustrations of Scout activities.

But it was above the door that there was perched the particular pride of the Eagles' hearts—a huge American eagle, a bird fast disappearing from its native haunts. With outstretched wings and defiant attitude it stood there, typifying the spirit of its young namesakes. The eagle had been a present to the lads from Lieutenant Duvall, of the United States Army, whom they had materially aided some time before in various aerial intrigues and adventures. What these were was related in full in the "The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship."

In the first volume of this series, "The Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol," it was told how the boys came to organize, and how they succeeded in unravelling a kidnapping mystery, involving one of their number. In the second volume, "The Boy Scouts on the Range," we followed the boys' adventures in the far southwest. Here they encountered Moqui Indians and renegade cow-punchers. But through all their hardships and adventures they conducted themselves according to the Scout laws.

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The third volume was "The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship," referred to in connection with Lieutenant Duvall. In this book a military biplane played an important part, as did the theft of a series of plans of a gyroscope invention of Lieutenant Duvall's, who was an all-around mechanical genius.

In the story that preceded the present account of the Eagle Patrol the lads found themselves in the Adirondacks on a strange mission. With a certain Major Dangerfield, a retired army officer, they searched for a lost cave in which an old-time pirate, one of the Major's ancestors, had hidden his loot when Indians threatened him. How the cave was located and the startling discovery made there, we have not space to describe here. But in the wildest part of the "land of woods and lakes" the boys encountered some thrilling adventures, not the least of which was Rob's battle with the moonshining gang that infested a lonely canyon.

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From this trip they had returned not more than two weeks before the scene in the meeting-room, which we have described, took place. Bronzed, clear-eyed and alert, they were already longing for action of some sort. How soon they were to be plunged into adventures of a variety even more exciting than any they had yet encountered they little dreamed at the moment.

They were still laughing over the idea of the substantial Tubby's rotund form being compared to a shadow when there came a tap at the door of the room in which they were assembled. [10]

"Guess that's Andy Bowles," said Rob, referring to the only member of the Patrol who was not present; "wonder why he's so late."

Then, in a louder voice, he cried:

"Come in, Andy."

But the voice that answered as the door was flung open was not Andy's. Instead, it was a deep, resounding bass one.

"I'm not Andy; but I'll accept the invitation."

As the owner of the voice, a tall, well-set-up man with a military bearing, stepped into the room all the Scouts sprang erect at attention, and gave the Scout salute. Then they broke into three cheers.

"Why, Lieutenant Duvall, what are you doing here?" exclaimed Rob, coming forward.

The young officer shook hands warmly with the leader of the Boy Scouts. Then, while the others pressed closer to the lieutenant—the same officer who had conducted the aviation tests at the "tunnelled house"—he addressed Rob. [11]

"The fact is, I came down here to see if you are willing to tackle some more adventures," he said.

"Are we—" began Rob; but a roar from the Scouts interrupted him.

"Just you try us, Lieutenant."

"More adventures? Great stuff!"

"I'm ready right now."

"You can count on me."

The air fairly bubbled with confusion and excitement.

The Lieutenant roared with laughter.

"I do believe if you boys were told to lead a forlorn hope up to a row of machine guns you'd do it," he exclaimed; "but all this time I've been leaving my friend outside. May I bring him in?"

"Why ask the question?" exclaimed Rob. "This room is at the disposal of the United States Army at any time." [12]

"Well, in this case it must be at the disposal of the Navy also," smiled the officer. Then, turning his head, he called to someone outside in the hallway, "Dan, the Eagles are prepared to receive the Navy."

At the word, a stalwart young man of about Lieutenant Duvall's age, stepped into the room. He was deeply sun-burned, and had an alert, upright carriage that stamped him as belonging to Uncle Sam's service.

"Scouts of the Eagle Patrol," said Lieutenant Duvall, with becoming formality, "allow me to present to you Ensign Daniel Hargreaves, of the United States Navy, just now detailed on special service."

Once more came the Scout salute, and then, given with a will, the long drawn "Kr-e-e-ee" of the Eagles.

The naval officer's eyes twinkled.

"These are Eagles that can scream with a vengeance," he exclaimed to his companion. [13]

"Yes; and they can show their talons on occasion, I can assure you," declared Lieutenant Duvall. "But 'heave ahead,' as you say in the Navy, Dan, and put your proposition before them."

The boys greeted this announcement with wide-open eyes. Somehow or other they felt impressed immediately that they were on the verge of another series of important adventures; that the unexpected visit of the officers had something to do with their immediate future. And in this they were not the least bit out of the way, as will be seen.

CHAPTER II.

THE FACE AT THE TRANSOM.

"Of course what I am going to say will be held strictly confidential?" began Ensign Hargreaves, looking about him at the bright, eager faces of the young Eagles.

"We are Boy Scouts, sir," responded Rob proudly.

"I beg your pardon; but what I am going to say is so important to the nation that one word of it breathed abroad might cause endless complications and the ruin of certain plans. I have come to see you because my friend, Lieutenant Duvall, told me that he did not know anywhere in the country of a band of boys of similar resourcefulness, courage and high training." [15]

"That's going some," whispered Tubby, behind a plump hand, to Merritt Crawford.

"I said no more than they deserved, Dan," observed Lieutenant Duvall.

"So I should imagine from what you told me about the part they played in the matter of the biplane and the tunnelled house," responded the young officer. "I came to you for another reason, also," he went on reverting to the subject in hand; "I have heard that as well as being land scouts you are thoroughly at home on the water."

"Well," said Rob, "we've all of us been brought up here on the south shore. I guess we are all fair sailors and know something about sea-scouting as well as the land variety."

"It is mainly for that reason that I came to you," rejoined the naval officer. "For the mission which I am desirous to have you undertake a knowledge of sea conditions is essential." [16]

"Gee! He's a long time coming to the point," mumbled Tubby impatiently.

"Have any of you boys ever heard of the 'Peacemaker submarine'?"

"So called because the nation possessing it would be so formidable as to insure naval peace with other countries?" exclaimed Rob quickly. "Yes, sir, I've heard of it."

"What has reached your ears about it?"

"Why, a week ago the papers said that a submarine of that type had been sold to Russia and shipped for that country from the factory of the inventor at Bridgeport, Connecticut," said Rob, with growing wonder as to what all this could be leading.

"Correct. But that submarine never reached Russia!"

"Did the ship that was carrying it sink?" asked Tubby innocently.

"No," smiled the ensign, amused at the fat boy's goggling eyes and intent expression; "the *Long Island*, the freighter conveying it, did not sink. Instead, it hung about the coast, and then, under cover of fog, slipped into the harbor of Snug Haven on the South Carolina coast. Snug Haven is a small place and a sleepy one. Under the blanket of fog the *Long Island* slipped in, as I have said. Then the submarine was hoisted overboard by means of a derrick, and under her own power run to anchorage off a small island not far from Snug Haven. The captain and crew of the *Long Island* were sworn to secrecy, and so far as we know not a soul, but those directly interested, is aware of the present location of the *Peacemaker*." [17]

"But why, if the submarine was sold to Russia, was she not sent there?" inquired the mystified Rob.

"For the excellent reason that she was *not* sold to Russia at all," was the naval officer's rejoinder; "that was simply announced for the benefit of inquisitive newspapers who have been trying for a long time to get at the details of the 'Peacemaker submarine.' But it is not alone the newspapers we have had trouble with. Foreign spies, anxious to secure the *Peacemaker* for their governments, have harassed us at Bridgeport ever since the keel plates were laid." [18]

"Then the United States has bought the submarine?" asked Merritt Crawford.

"Not yet. But the construction and principles of it are so efficient that Uncle Sam wishes to have first call on the craft."

"And you are going to test it at this lonely island in South Carolina?" cried Rob, guessing the truth.

"Perfectly right, my boy," was the response. "Off that little-frequented coast, beset with islands and shoals, we hope to carry out our tests unobserved. At Bridgeport this would have been an impossibility, and for that reason the story of the sale to Russia was concocted. Russia, I may add, was about the only country not represented by spy service at Bridgeport." [19]

"And you say that nobody but the officials directly connected with the craft has any knowledge of its whereabouts?" asked Rob with deep interest.

"As far as it is humanly possible to be certain, such is our positive belief."

"But where do we fit into all this?" sputtered Tubby, acutely coming to the main point.

"I am coming to that," was the response. "From what I have told you, you will have gathered that no ordinary class of watchmen could be trusted to keep quiet about what is to go forward on the island. Yet it is necessary to have sentries of some sort to keep constant watch that no one approaches unexpectedly. For that purpose we have adopted various mechanical precautions,

such as submarine detector bells, etc. But our main reliance must be on human intelligence."

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"I see," said Rob, nodding. The object of the officer's visit was beginning to dawn on him.

"To come straight to the point," went on the officer, "how would you boys like to take a camping trip to the South Carolina coast on Uncle Sam's service?"

"You mean to act as guards to the submarine?" almost shouted Rob.

"Just that," responded the officer. "I have——"

But a roar of cheers drowned any further remarks he might have had to make.

"I knew it would happen," cried Merritt when the riot had, in a measure, subsided.

"What?" demanded Tubby.

"Action!" responded Merritt briefly.

The hubbub grew tumultuous. All the Eagles were trying to talk at once. The wonderful prospect opened up before them of fresh adventures fairly set them wild.

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At last, above the turmoil, Ensign Hargreaves managed to make his voice heard.

"Boys! Boys!" he exclaimed, "one minute till I outline the plans."

A respectful silence at once ensued in which each Scout was prompt to join.

"Of course, it will be necessary for you to obtain written consent of your parents," spoke the naval officer.

At this some of the faces in the room fell several degrees.

"The government will absolutely require such authority," he continued. "The service on Barren Island, as it is called, while not necessarily hazardous, may prove dangerous, and each boy's parents must be so informed."

"We'll get plenty to eat, I suppose?" inquired Tubby anxiously.

"Why, of course," laughed the officer; "moreover, I forgot to inform you that there is a wireless plant on the Island, and other conveniences unusual in so remote a situation."

[22]

"Well, so long as the grub holds out, I'm satisfied," muttered Tubby in a contented tone.

"How soon will we start, supposing our parents allow us to go?" asked Rob, as soon as the laughter over Tubby's remark had subsided.

"At the end of this week if possible. Mr. Danbury Barr, the inventor of the *Peacemaker*, will meet us in New York. We shall voyage south on the U. S. Derelict Destroyer *Seneca*."

"Derelict Destroyer," repeated Rob. "Those are the craft that Uncle Sam sends out to destroy drifting wrecks that might prove a menace to navigation, aren't they?"

"Correct, my boy," rejoined the officer. "Our reason for making the voyage on the *Seneca*," he continued, "is that no regular passenger steamer makes a stop near Barren Island. Furthermore, if we went down on a naval vessel some of these sharp reporters would be sure to make inquiries, with the result that our retreat might be discovered."

[23]

"And that would be a serious matter?" put in Rob.

"Yes, very serious. Several nations are on the *qui vive* to discover just what the *Barr Peacemaker* is. They have sent shrewd, cunning men, versed in the art of espionage, to this country on that mission. These men will stick at nothing to ferret out the secret if they can. Mr. Barr has been approached with all sorts of offers. But he is a staunch American to the backbone, as you will discover when you meet him. If anyone is to have the *Peacemaker* it is to be Uncle Sam, first, foremost and all the time."

"Kree-e-ee-ee!" shrilled the Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol in unison.

The sharp, screaming note of the Eagle was still resounding when Merritt uttered a startled cry, and pointed to the open transom above the door. The others were still staring at him when he darted toward it and flung the portal open. The passage beyond was empty, and the boy turned to his companions with a puzzled look on his face.

[24]

"What's up, Merritt?" asked Rob.

"Seeing spooks?" inquired Tubby.

"Seeing nothing," snapped out Merritt; "I *saw*——"

"Saw what?" demanded Lieutenant Duvall.

"A face peering at us over that transom. It dodged into the darkness as I looked up, but I saw it as plain as daylight."

Both officers bent forward almost breathlessly. Merritt's communication appeared to affect

them strangely.

"What kind of a face was it?" demanded Ensign Hargreaves.

"A wild looking one. Very pale, and fringed with dark whiskers."

The effect on the officers was electrical. They both sprang up and made for the door followed by the puzzled Scouts. [25]

"Was—was it anyone you know?" demanded Rob, as he paced beside Lieutenant Duvall.

"Yes. From the description it was Berghoff, the spy of a powerful European nation whose ambition it is to outgeneral all other powers on the sea. We must apprehend him if possible. It is only too clear that he followed us here from Washington and must have heard a great part of our conversation."

"Phew! This is action with a capital A!" gasped Rob as they ran down the stairway and out into the lighted street.

But although a rigorous search was made and all trains watched, no trace was found of Nordstrom Berghoff, the naval spy. It was surmised that he must have made good his escape in a speedy "roadster" car in which he had crept into Hampton earlier in the evening.

CHAPTER III.

 [26]

AN OCEAN DERELICT.

"What's that object off on the starboard bow, sir?"

It was a week after the events narrated in the preceding chapters, and the *Seneca*, a converted gun-boat fitted with torpedo tubes for the destruction of derelicts, was plowing her way southward through an azure sea under a cloudless sky.

Rob Blake asked the question. In full Boy Scout Leader's uniform, and wearing the different badges to which he was entitled, the young chief of the Eagles stood on the *Seneca's* bridge with Ensign Hargreaves and Lieutenant Murray, who were in command of the destroyer. [27]

"Jove, lad, you have sharp eyes!" exclaimed Lieutenant Murray. "Even the lookout has not yet spied it. Let's see what it may be. Possibly it's our 'meat'—food for our torpedoes."

"In that case the boys are in for a bit of excitement," said Ensign Hargreaves.

"You think it is a derelict!" exclaimed Rob. "Oh, boys!" he called down to the shady deck below, where the other lads lay reading or writing letters or studying the Scout Manual, "we've sighted a derelict."

"An ocean hobo, eh?" hailed back Merritt.

"Hold on! Hold on! Not so fast!" laughed Lieutenant Murray.

He took his powerful naval binoculars from their case and carefully focussed them on the dot which Rob's sharp eyes had espied at so great a distance.

"You are right, Master Rob," he exclaimed the next instant; "it *is* a derelict, and a big one, too."

"And you are going to blow it up?" asked Rob, his voice quivering with excitement. [28]

"That's our business, lad."

"Hooray! Boys, stand by for the fireworks!" shouted the delighted Rob.

The Boy Scouts, who had pretty well the run of the ship and were favored alike by officers and men, came swarming upon the bridge. Lieutenant Murray was adjusting the range finders and directing the quartermaster at the wheel to change his course so as to bear down on the drifting hulk. As they drew closer to the dismantled derelict they saw that, as Lieutenant Murray had declared, she had been a large vessel. Stumps of three masts rose from her decks above the broken bulwarks. Ends of bleached and frayed-out shrouds hung from her fore, main, and mizzen chains. From the look of her, she had been a considerable time adrift.

As she rolled slowly on the gentle swell they could see that her underbody was green with seaweed and slime, the accumulation of years. Amidships stood a small deck house, and at the bow a broken bowsprit pointed heavenward as if invoking mercy on her forlorn condition. [29]

"Why, she might have been drifting about since the time of Noah, to judge by her looks," exclaimed Merritt, gazing at the odd sight.

"I have heard of derelicts that have followed the ocean currents for fifty years and more," declared the Lieutenant. "This craft looks as if she might date back that far. Certainly she has been a long time adrift. Sailors sometimes become panic-stricken and leave their ships when there is no real necessity for so doing. A case in point is that of Captain Larsen of the *Two*

Sisters, which sailed from Bath, Maine, for a West Indian port. She was abandoned in a hurry after a hurricane, and the captain and crew took to the boats. After drifting for weeks—they had had time to provision the boats well—they arrived in Kingston, Jamaica, and the first sight that greeted the captain's eyes was the hulk of the *Two Sisters*. She had drifted close to the island and had been towed in, arriving ahead of the crew that had forsaken her!"

[30]

"Hark!" cried Merritt, while they were still commenting on the Lieutenant's story, "what was that?"

"Sounded like a bell tolling," exclaimed Rob.

"It is a bell!" cried Merritt.

Sure enough, borne over the gently heaving water, there came to their ears the melancholy ding-dong of a deep-toned bell. Coming as it did from the abandoned sea-riven hulk it cast a gloom over them.

"Who can be ringing it?" cried Tubby, in what was for him, an awe-stricken voice.

"No mystery about it, I guess," said Lieutenant Murray; "it is the ship's bell, and as the craft rolls it is ringing a requiem for the dead."

"Ugh! It gives me the shudders!" exclaimed Hiram.

[31]

"It's not a cheerful sound certainly," agreed Rob.

"Bom-boom; bom-boom," chimed the bell, waxing now faint, now loud, as the wind rose and fell.

"I'd like to go aboard that boat and explore her," declared Merritt.

"That's an opportunity you shall have," said the Lieutenant. "It is our rule to explore all such derelicts for a hint as to the fate of their crew before we consign them to the deep."

Orders were given to check the speed of the *Seneca* and to prepare to lower a boat.

"Are we to go?" chorused the Scouts eagerly.

"Of course. Mr. Hargreaves will accompany you."

"Aren't you going?" asked Rob.

"No. It's an old story with me. While we are waiting for you, I will work out our position, which must go in with my report of the derelict's destruction."

[32]

Five minutes later, in one of the *Seneca's* whale boats, the boys were skimming over the sea toward the melancholy old derelict. As they glided along, the bell kept up its monotonous booming with the regularity of a shore bell summoning worshippers to church.

As the whaleboat was pulled around the derelict's stern they could see a name painted on the square counter, surrounded with many a scroll and flourish in the antique manner. These flourishes had once been gilded and painted, but the gilt and color had long since worn off them.

"*Good Hope of Portland, Me.*," read out Rob. "What a contrast between her name and her fate!"

"Bom-boom," tolled the bell as if in answer to him.

"She must have been one of those old-time clippers that sailed round the Horn with Yankee notions for the Spice Islands and China, and came back with tea and other Oriental goods," opined Ensign Hargreaves.

[33]

"She was a fine ship in her day, sir," ventured the old quartermaster who pulled stroke oar.

"Aye, aye, Tarbox; in those days the American mercantile marine was a thing to be proud of," agreed the ensign. "To-day not one-tenth of the craft that used to fly the Stars and Stripes remain afloat. They have vanished and their keels sweep the sea no more."

By this time they had arrived below the derelict's port main chains. From these several bleached ropes hung down, but all proved too rotten to support the weight of a Boy Scout, let alone a man. But by good fortune a chain, rusty, but still strong seemingly, depended from the bows of the old craft. This withstood a test, and, led by Ensign Hargreaves, the boys clambered on deck. Quartermaster Tarbox and the four sailors who had manned the oars were left in the boat.

[34]

The boys' hearts beat a little faster as they stood on the forecastle of the abandoned *Good Hope*. Nor was this caused by the exertion of the climb altogether. There was something uncanny in standing upon that long-untrod deck, while right below the break in the forecastle the bell kept up its doomsday-like tolling.

The ensign's first task was to make fast a lanyard to the clapper of the dismal thing, and thereafter their nerves felt steadier. With the dying out of the clamor of the bell, a death-like hush fell over the abandoned ship. Only the rippling complaint of the water as she rolled to and fro broke the stillness. The boys actually found themselves talking in whispers under the spell

that hung above the decks of the ill-fated *Good Hope*.

"Let us explore that deck house first," said Ensign Hargreaves, and, followed by the boys, he started for the small structure which stood just aft of the wreck of the foremast.

[35]

Little dreaming of the surprise that awaited them within, the boys followed, on tip-toe with curiosity and excitement.

CHAPTER IV.

[36]

A MYSTERY OF THE SEA.

The door of the deck house was closed. But the ensign opened it without difficulty, and with the boys pressing close on his heels he entered the place.

Hardly had he done so before he fell back with a sharp exclamation. The next instant the boys echoed his interjection with a tone in which horror mingled with surprise. Seated at a table in the cabin was what at first appeared to be a man. But a second glance showed that, in reality, the figure was a grim skeleton upheld by its posture and still bearing mildewed and mouldy sea clothes.

"What a dreadful sight!" cried Rob, shivering, although the day was hot.

[37]

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the naval officer. "He must have perished just as he sat. See, there is a paper under his hand, and there lies the pen with which he had been writing."

He stepped forward to make a further examination, and the boys, mastering their instinctive dread of the uncanny scene, also approached the table.

The writing beneath the dead man's hand was on a fragment of paper, yellowed with age and covered with scrawlings grown brown from the same cause. Mastering his repugnance, the ensign took the paper from under the skeleton's fingers that still rested upon it.

"What is it?" demanded Rob.

"Look at it for yourself," returned the officer after scrutinizing the document.

Thus addressed, Rob took the mouldy screed while his chums looked over his shoulder curiously.

[38]

"Why, it's nothing but a mass of figures," he exclaimed.

"That is certainly so. Some sort of cipher, I suppose," struck in Merritt.

"That's what it is, I imagine," agreed the ensign; "but see this cross marked in red ink in the midst of the figures! What can that be intended for?"

"If you don't mind, I'll try to figure this out sometime," said Rob. "I'm rather fond of working cryptograms and such things. It will serve to pass the time, too, when we reach the Island."

"That is perfectly agreeable to me," returned the officer. "If you can make anything of it, it may serve to solve the mystery of this ship. For that a mystery there is about the whole thing, I feel certain."

"It does seem uncanny, somehow," agreed Rob; "the posture of this man, this strange writing! I wonder how he died?"

"Impossible to say," rejoined the officer; "but let us investigate further. We may make some more discoveries."

[39]

"I hope we don't make any more finds of this character," rejoined Rob with deep feeling.

Reverently and quietly they made their way out of the presence of the dead mariner.

Their next objective point was the poop of the vessel, where a high, old-fashioned quarter-deck upreared itself above the main deck. Port holes looked out from this, and the party of explorers rightly judged that here had been the living-quarters of the ship's officers. A door of heavily carved mahogany gave access to the space below the lofty poop-deck. Pressing through this, they found themselves in a dark, dingy-looking cuddy. The cushions of the lockers, which ranged along each side, were green with mould and in the air hung the odor of decay.

A skylight above gave light to this chamber, and at its sides four doors, two to a side, opened off.

[40]

"Those doors must lead to the staterooms of the former officers," declared the ensign, and a tour of inspection of the rooms was begun at once. In the first three, after a thorough ransacking nothing more interesting was to be found than some old sea chests, containing garments and nautical instruments of antique pattern. In the last, however, which bore traces of having been better furnished than the others, there hung a crudely painted picture of a grizzled-looking

seaman, on whose breast hung conspicuously a gold image of a whale. Apparently this was some sort of an emblem. But to Rob the portrait presented a clew.

"Why, that same emblem hung on the uniform of the dead man in the deckhouse!" he exclaimed.

"So it did," cried the ensign. "Boys, from the looks of it, this was the cabin of the master of the ship, and yonder body, it is my firm belief, is his."

But Merritt had stumbled upon another discovery. This was nothing more than a large book, bound in leather. But to the ensign it seemed to be apparently a highly important find. [41]

"It's the ship's log-book," he exclaimed, pointing to the embossed words on the cover. "Now perhaps we may light on a partial solution of this mystery."

He opened the book at the first page, and learned from the crabbed writing with which it was covered, that the *Good Hope*, Ezekial T. Daniels, master, had set sail from New Bedford for the South Pacific whaling ground in April, 1879.

"Gracious, that was about thirty-three years ago," stammered Merritt.

"I have heard of derelicts that drifted longer than that," said the naval officer calmly.

He began turning over the leaves of the log book. It was an epic of the sea. Every incident that had befallen the *Good Hope* on her long voyage was faithfully set down. He skimmed through the records, reading the most interesting bits of information out aloud for the benefit of his youthful companions. [42]

From the log book it was learned that the *Good Hope* had met with indifferent luck on her long three years' cruise, but had suddenly run into a most extraordinary bit of good fortune.

"Listen to this, boys," exclaimed the ensign with what, for one of his self-contained nature, was strong excitement, "it reads like a bit of wild romance."

Without further preface he began reading:

"May, 1883—This day encountered the strangest thing in all my experience. As set down, we have drifted into the Antarctic ice pack. This day sighted a berg within which was a dark, shadowy object. On going in the ship boats to investigate we saw to our amazement that the said object was a ship. The ice surrounding it was thin, mostly having melted.

"From what I knew of such craft I decided, incredible as the idea might seem, that the craft within the berg was a long frozen up Viking ship. Not knowing just what her recovery might mean, I undertook to blast her free of her prison. We had plenty of dynamite on board for the very purpose of ice-blasting. By three of this p. m. we had the ship blasted open. I and my officers at once entered the hole the explosive had made in the craft's side. We expected to find strange things, but none of us was prepared for what followed. The hold of the imprisoned ship was full of ivory. [43]

"My first officer, William Clydesdale, an Englishman, and a college man before strong drink ruined him, pronounced the ivory to be that of the tusks of the extinct mammoths which scientists say formerly inhabited these regions."

"Phew! This is romance with a vengeance!" exclaimed Rob.

"Did they get the ivory?" asked the practical Paul Perkins. [44]

"Yes," rejoined the officer, rapidly skimming over the further pages of the log, "and they estimated the stuff roughly at about five hundred thousand dollars' worth of exceptional quality."

"How did the ship get frozen in the ice?" asked Hiram. "The Viking ship, I mean."

"Who can tell," returned the ensign. "I have heard of such things at the North Pole. Several explorers have even brought back fragments of the Norseman's lost craft; but I never heard of such an occurrence transpiring in the Antarctic regions. But let's read on."

The log continued to tell of hardships encountered in beating back around the Horn with the valuable cargo; of discontent of the crew; of their constant demand to have the hoard divided equally among the officers and men, and of the captain's refusal to accede to their requests. Finally the entries began to grow short and disconnected, as if whoever was writing up the log was on constant watch and had little time to spare. Indeed, one entry read: [45]

"Mutiny threatens constantly. The men mean to seize the ivory and take to the boats."

Following that no entries were made for several days. Then came a startling announcement, both in its brevity and suggestiveness of tragedy.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PAST

"What I dreaded has come to pass," read out the ensign; "the men mutinied, but thanks be to Providence, we are safe. But a fearful catastrophe overtook the misguided fellows. Short handed as we were, having lost ten hands by scurvy and drowning in the South Seas, the crew mustered but eight men. Thus, with my two officers, we were three against them. The attack came at midnight on July 27th, 1883. Luckily we were on the watch, and as the men came aft we met them with firearms. Four went down at the first volley. Three died shortly, the other the next day.

"The remainder fled, but before I could stop them my officers had shot down three, leaving only the cook alive. I saved his life. But as we were examining the injured, one of them whipped out a knife and killed my first officer. The next day we buried the dead and worked the ship as best we could with three hands. Luckily the breeze was light, for in a brisk blow we could not have handled the ship.

[47]

"Finding ourselves off the coast of the Carolinas, and despairing of navigating the ship to port, we ran in and anchored off a small desolate island. On it grew a few scrub trees, but not much else. After a consultation we decided to abandon the ship; but first we agreed, while the weather was fair, to bury the ivory on one of the islands. It was a long, tedious task, but at last it was done, and the spot where it had been secreted, marked.

"This done, we rowed back to the ship to obtain my chronometers, papers, and so forth. I should have explained that we had but one boat, heavy seas off the Horn having smashed four of them, and a fifth was broken in a fight with a whale. I was some time below, getting papers, when suddenly I heard a splash of oars. By some inspiration, I guessed what had happened. Rushing on deck I was in time to behold my rascally second mate and the cook rowing from the ship with might and main.

[48]

"I shouted, entreated, and raged. But it was all in vain. All the rascals did was to laugh at me. I might have guessed their terrible purpose to maroon me on my own ship, but I had paid no heed to some whispering I had observed between them while on the island working at the burial of the ivory. All this has been written since they abandoned me in so cowardly a fashion for the sake of the ivory. Their intent, I readily guessed. They would reach the shore ahead of me. Find some capital, get a ship and seize the whole cache. I count myself lucky that they did not kill me outright."

[49]

By this time the boys were leaning forward, all else forgotten in the thrilling interest of the extraordinary narrative.

The ensign read on.

"I find no more entries till several days later," he said, "then comes this one:

"Since last I wrote I have encountered a fearful experience. The night succeeding the occasion on which the two villains left the ship, a terrific gale came up off shore. Unable to reef sail single-handed, I was compelled to cut the cable and head out for sea. For three days we scudded before the gale. The canvas was torn to ribbons, and one after another my masts went. I managed to cut the wreckage free with an axe.

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"Some days later. What is happening to the ship? She is being drawn by some strong but invisible current. There is no wind, but she is moving fairly fast. What can be going to happen to me? One thing is sure, I am out of the track of ocean vessels. Heaven help me, for I fear I am beyond human aid!"

[50]

"The poor fellow's mind evidently gave way soon after this," said the ensign; "the entries grow disjointed and wild. He declares the cabin is haunted. That the ghosts of the dead mutineers haunt the ship. At last they cease abruptly with the words, 'God be merciful to me, I am going mad.'"

A silence fell over the party in the dead mariner's cabin. The mystery, the spell of the horror of it all, was strong upon them. In each lad's mind was a vivid picture of the unfortunate captain held in the grip of a strange current, being driven day by day further from the track of ships, while his fevered mind pictured ghostly forms all about him.

"How do you suppose his death came?" asked Rob, after the silence had endured some moments.

"I have an ugly suspicion which I shall soon verify," said the ensign; "you boys wait here for a time."

[51]

Alone he reëntered the deck-house, where sat the dead seaman. When he returned his face was very grave.

"Boys, my suspicions were correct," he said; "by the man's side I found a pistol. Undoubtedly, crazed by despair, he ended his life."

"After writing this strange paper?" asked Rob.

"Evidently. To judge from the jumble of figures, it was the product of his poor, demented

brain."

"If you don't mind, I'll keep it, though," said Rob. "I've an idea about it."

"In what way?"

"Why, that it may not be what you think, after all. It bears the earmarks of an orderly cipher and is not scrawled at all as are the final entries in the log book."

"That's right," agreed the ensign admiringly, "you Boy Scouts have mighty keen minds. Well, my boy, keep it and study it at your leisure, although I am free to confess that I cannot think of it otherwise than in the way mentioned." [52]

"Perhaps you are right," said Rob, "but I'll have a try at puzzling it out, when I get time."

CHAPTER VI.

 [53]

A STARTLING ADVENTURE.

During the conversation recorded none of the party had given much thought to conditions outside. Now, when he stepped to the door of the cabin, the ensign uttered a sharp cry of consternation.

"What's the matter?" asked Rob, as he approached.

"Matter enough. Look there!" was the rejoinder.

A dense white fog had come softly rolling up, and now the derelict *Good Hope* lay enwrapped in fleecy white clouds, thick and impenetrable.

"Well, we'll have to wait here in the boat till this clears off," declared Bob; "we could never find the *Seneca* in this mess." [54]

"That's the worst of it," rejoined the lieutenant, "there is no boat."

"No boat," echoed Rob uncomprehendingly; "but we came in one. It will be waiting for us."

"No. I gave orders for the men to return to the *Seneca* and bring over a destructive mine, for I had determined to blow up this dangerous menace to navigation. They have not returned, that is evident, or I would have been notified. Boys, we are in a bad fix. I don't know how fast this old hulk is drifting; but I imagine that if this keeps up much longer, we shall fetch up a long way from the *Seneca's* whereabouts."

"Can't they cruise about and find us?" asked Merritt rather piteously. He was not a lad to underestimate the real seriousness of their position on board the old hulk in the impenetrable fog that hung in blanket-like wreaths everywhere about them.

In reply to the boy's question the ensign declared that it would be impossible for the *Seneca* to pick them up until the weather cleared, if then. [55]

"It would be risking the vessel to cruise about in this smother," he said; "why, she'd be as likely to strike the *Good Hope* as not!"

Rob's face grew long, though he did his best to make light of the situation.

"Then we've got to picnic here till the fog clears off," he said.

"That's the case exactly, Rob," was the officer's rejoinder.

"But what are we going to picnic on?" inquired Tubby anxiously. "There's no food or water on board, and we haven't brought any."

"There you go again. Always thinking of that precious tummy of yours," cried Hiram. "A little starving won't hurt you."

"Huh, just because you look like a human bean pole, you don't think anyone has a right to be fat. You're jealous, that's what you are," was the indignant reply of the fat youth. [56]

Under other conditions there might have ensued a rough and tumble battle; but just at this instant, through the fog, there came the booming sound of a vessel's whistle.

"Waugh-gh-gh-gh!"

The long bellow sounded through the white, all-enveloping mist surrounding the old hulk and its young company of castaways.

"That's the *Seneca's* whistle," exclaimed the ensign anxiously. "She's calling for us."

"Gee! She must know that we can't come to her," exclaimed Paul Perkins.

"I guess she's 'standing by' till the fog lifts," rejoined the officer. "We'll release the bell. That

may help to locate us."

But instead of standing by, it became apparent, before long, that the *Seneca* was cruising about. The reason for supposing this was that the next time they heard the hoot of the siren it sounded much further off.

The boys exchanged glances.

[57]

"How long do these fogs last, as a rule?" enquired Merritt.

"Impossible to say!" was the quick reply, with an anxious look about. "If only we could get a slant of wind!"

But there was not a breath stirring. Only the *Good Hope* swung to the soft swells, lifting and falling with a hopeless, helpless sort of motion. In fact, an experienced seaman could have told her waterlogged condition by the very "heft and heave" of her, which was sluggish to a degree.

"Well, I suppose we must make up our minds to spend some time here," said Rob, with another attempt to treat the matter lightly. "Goodness, our adventures are surely beginning early this trip!"

The others could not help but agree with the young leader of the Eagles, although they could hardly foresee the still more thrilling experiences that lay just ahead of them.

"I would suggest," began the ensign presently, "I would suggest that we search for some trace of food."

[58]

"Humph; mouldy ship's biscuits!" grunted Tubby half under his breath. "Even if there are any on board, they must be rotten by this time. This is a fine fix! Maybe we won't get any supper at all," and the fat boy looked positively tragic over the dire prospect.

But although Tubby had spoken in a low tone, more to himself than to anybody else, the ensign's sharp ears had overheard him.

"Young man," he said somewhat sternly, "if you want to be a good Boy Scout you must learn to take hardships as they come."

"Even missing meals?" asked Tubby, in an injured voice.

"Yes, even that," repeated the young officer with a smile, which in the Eagles' case was a perfect roar of laughter at Tubby's keen distress. The fat boy strode off sullenly by himself, gazing at the fog as he went in a very knowing way.

[59]

They searched the ship over for something that it would be possible to eat; but not so much as a crumb of edible supplies did they find. In one hold was discovered a number of barrels of "salt horse and pork," but they were all dried up and unfit for human food. The same thing applied to the biscuit kegs, and all the other supplies. It was out of the question to think of touching any of them.

"Whatever are we going to do?" gasped Rob, a note of real alarm in his voice for the first time.

The ensign's calmness served to steady all the boys a bit.

"Don't worry; everything will come out all right," he said; "we are in the track of ships, and ___"

"But in this dense fog, that fact make it all the more dangerous," declared Rob, and the young officer could not but answer him with a nod in the affirmative.

[60]

"I can't help admitting that, my boy," was his further rejoinder; "all we can do is to trust to Providence and hope that the fog will disappear before long."

"Let's whistle for a wind," suggested Rob, who had heard of sailors doing such a thing.

"Better than doing nothing. It will fill the time in, anyway," agreed the ensign.

The boys squatted in a circle.

"What will we whistle?" asked Merritt.

"'Wait Till the Clouds Roll By,' of course," rejoined Rob.

As the plaintive notes came from the whistlers' puckered lips, Tubby sauntered up, his hands in his tunic pockets.

"What are you doing?" he asked, staring at them, "gone crazy with the heat, or what?"

"We're whistling for a wind," answered Merritt.

"Huh; why don't you whistle for grub?" demanded Tubby, turning on his heel, and striding gloomily off once more.

[61]

CHAPTER VII.

TRAPPED BY FLAMES.

Night fell and found them still in the same plight. The fog had shut in closer if anything. Since the last time they had caught the diminishing sound of the *Seneca's* siren, they had heard no sound from any vessel. Others besides Tubby were hungry on board the *Good Hope* that night. Then, too, the thought of the tragedy that had been consummated on board the derelict, and the gloom-inspiring presence of the silent figure in the forward deck house, were not calculated to inspire cheerful thoughts.

One thing they did have, and that was light. For in the course of their investigation of the old hulk they had stumbled across several old candle lanterns, the candles in which were still capable of burning. One of these lanterns was lashed to the stump of the forward mast, but the other was hung up in the cabin below. For it was in this latter place that the little party of castaways gathered and tried, by telling stories and cracking jokes, to keep their spirits in the ascendent. [62]

But their efforts were not very successful. As the Scotch say, "It's ill jesting on an empty stomach," and that is the malady from which they all were suffering. Thirst did not as yet trouble them much, but they knew that if they were not speedily picked up by some vessel, that would also be added to their ordeal.

So the night passed away, with the castaways watching in turn for some ray of hope of the fog lifting. It was soon after midnight, and in Rob's watch, that a startling thing happened—something that brought his heart into his mouths, and set his every nerve on vibrant edge. [63]

The boy was sitting up forward, pondering the strangeness of the day's happenings, when suddenly, right ahead of him, as it seemed, the fog was split by the hoarse shriek of a steamer's whistle.

Rob's scalp tightened from alarm as he leaped for the lantern.

"Look out!" he shouted at the top of his voice; "look out!"

But for reply there only came back out of the dense smother ahead another raucous call of the big steam whistle.

"Gracious! We'll be run down! We'll be sunk!" cried the boy, half wild with alarm.

He shouted to his companions to come on deck; but before they could obey, a huge, black bulk loomed up right above the derelict. Rob shouted at the top of his voice. It seemed as if the *Good Hope* would be cut in two and that the steamer was also doomed to disaster if she struck. [64]

Through the blackness flashed a green side-light, and then came the rushing by of the great hull, with its rows of illuminated portholes. Rob stood stock still. He was fairly rooted to the spot with panic. But the big steamer raced by in the blackness and fog without anyone on board her ever dreaming that she had been in such close proximity to the drifting derelict. [64]

As her stern lights flashed for an instant and then were shut out in the fog, Rob's companions came rushing on deck.

"What is it? What has happened?" demanded the ensign, readily perceiving that something very serious had occurred.

Rob, still shaky from his experience, related, as briefly as possible, just what had caused his cry of alarm.

"Well, those liners take desperate chances," commented the officer; "had they struck us, not only we, but they, would have been seriously injured."

"Gee! I wish you could have found time to ask 'em to throw us some sandwiches," said Tubby, rubbing his stomach; "I'm as empty as a dry gourd." [65]

"I reckon we could all do with something to eat," chorused the other young "Eagles".

The ensign bade them cheer up.

"By daylight we may have a wind, and then, with the fog gone, it won't take long for some vessel to pick us up."

He spoke with a cheerfulness he was actually far from feeling. In fact, his boyish listeners were not inclined to look hopefully on the situation. By this time every one of them would have given almost all he possessed for a big pitcher of cool ice water.

"I will take the remainder of your watch, Rob," said the ensign, with a glance at his watch. "You only had a few minutes to serve anyway, and the next round of duty is mine."

"Very well," said Rob; "to tell the truth, a nap would feel pretty good. I hope things will have cleared by the time I wake up."

The boys went below, leaving the officer on the fog-circled deck. The mist gleamed on [66]

everything, the rays of the candle-lamp making them glisten as if water had been newly poured on them. Far off the hoarse hooting of the ship that had so nearly run them down was to be heard.

"Narrow escape, that! Narrower than I quite care to admit, even to myself," mused the young officer. "I wonder if those lads realize how bad a fix we are in. I must confess I don't like the look of things at all."

He fell to pacing the deck, and then decided to have a cigar. For this purpose he produced a perfecto from his pocket and lighted it. Then he fell to pacing the deck once more, thinking deeply. His cigar finished, he tossed it aside. Possibly it was his worry over their predicament that made him absent-minded in this regard, but instead of observing the rule of the sea to cast all such things overboard, he threw it to the deck. A lurch of the *Good Hope* caused the glowing butt of the cigar to go rolling across the deck and to drop into the hold below. [67]

It was some time later that Paul Perkins came on deck to take his turn at the night vigil.

As he came forward he was startled to see what appeared to be a ghostly figure, slightly darker than the fog, slip from the forward hold and glide across the deck toward the ensign, who was pacing up and down. Much startled, Paul called out aloud, and at the same instant a peculiar acrid odor came to his nostrils.

"Something's burning!" he cried.

Simultaneously he had come up to the side of the hatch and saw that smoke was pouring from it. What he had taken for a ghostly figure was a whirl of smoke.

"Fire! Something's on fire below!" cried the boy, dashing forward.

The ensign reached the edge of the hold as quickly. Together they peered over into the great open space below. Both involuntarily recoiled with a cry of horror and alarm at what they saw. [68]

The *Good Hope's* hold was a mass of flames! To gaze into them was like looking into a red hot furnace.

Adrift in a blinding fog, on a burning ship, and without boats, was a predicament the like of which their adventurous lives had never before encountered!

The cigar so carelessly cast aside by the ensign had fallen upon a pile of sacking, grease-soaked and inflammable, lying in the former whaler's hold. Like all whale ships the timbers of the *Good Hope* were literally soaked with grease, the result of whale oil and blubber. Such timbers burn like matchwood.

Small wonder that, brave man as he was, and schooled against emotional display in the stern school of the Navy, the ensign should yet cry out:

"If help does not arrive, we are doomed to die like rats!"

CHAPTER VIII.

 [69]

A BOY SCOUT SIGNAL.

It was five minutes later that the whole company of castaways was gathered around the hatchway. A red glare from below shone on their faces, illuminating expressions of dismay and apprehension.

"What can we do?" gasped out Rob. "There are no boats, no means of escape!"

"We'll be burned to death," shuddered Paul Perkins.

All looked to the ensign for some suggestion. His tightly compressed lips and drawn features suggested that he was thinking deeply, thinking as men think whose very lives depend upon quick decision. [70]

"We must put on the hatches," he said decisively; "there they lie yonder. That will deprive the fire of oxygen and give us at least a few hours before we have to vacate."

The coverings of the hatch, big, thick planks, lay not far away. Evidently they lay just as they did on the day that the cargo of mammoth tusks had been taken from the *Good Hope* and hidden. Working with feverish energy, the boys soon had the hatch covered tightly. But the work had almost exhausted their strength. The fumes of the blazing hold and the suffocating black smoke that rolled out, had almost caused them to succumb.

Their desperate task accomplished, they lay panting on the deck, incapable, for the time being, of further effort. However, with the hatch in place and tightly dovetailed, there was a gleam of hope that the flames might be smothered, or at least held in check till the fog cleared and they could sight a vessel. [71]

The first faint glimmering of dawn, shown by an increasing transparence in the fog, found the

derelict still lying inert. But a second later the boys were on their feet with a cheer. A light breeze had sprung up and the fog was agitated by it like drifting steam. Little by little the breeze increased and the fog thinned out to mere wisps. The sun shone through and disclosed a glimmering expanse of sea stretched all about. But, to their bitter disappointment, the great heaving expanse was empty of life. Not a sail or a sign of a steamer marred its lonely surface.

They exchanged dismayed looks. There was no knowing at what moment the fiery, seething furnace beneath their very feet might break through and force them to fight for their existence.

Already the decks were hot. Aside from this, however, so well did the hatch fit that not even a wisp of smoke escaped. Except the extreme heat, there was nothing to indicate that the interior of the *Good Hope's* hull was a fiery furnace. [72]

The hours wore on, the little company of castaways dreading every moment that what they feared might happen. Still no indication that the fire was about to break through occurred. But their sufferings from thirst were terrible. One after another the Boy Scouts sank to the decks in a sort of coma. Rob, Merritt, and the ensign himself alone retained their strength.

"If some vessel doesn't appear before long we are doomed."

It was Rob who spoke, and the mere fact that the others were silent indicated plainly that they shared his opinion.

Despite their sufferings and anxiety a bright lookout was kept. It was Rob who electrified them by a sudden shout:

"Look! Look out there to the north!"

"A sail!" shouted the ensign, springing to his feet. [73]

"Yes. A steam yacht, rather! She's coming this way, too!"

"That's what. But how can we signal her? If she doesn't hurry she may be too late!"

"We can wave and shout!"

The ensign shook his head.

"She is too far off to see or hear us. Is there no other way to attract her?"

A dozen plans were thought of and discarded. Then Rob spoke:

"I've thought of a way, but it's a desperate one."

"Never mind, what is it?"

"We will signal her in Boy Scout fashion. Maybe there is someone on board who understands it."

The others looked puzzled. Rob hastened to explain.

"You all know the smoke column system of signalling?"

"I see what you mean!" shouted Merritt. "You mean to send up two columns of smoke meaning 'Help! We are lost!'" [74]

Rob nodded.

"But how is that possible?" demanded the ensign, with a puzzled inflection in his tones. "We've got a whole ship full of smoke under us, of course, but I don't see how we are going to utilize it in the way you suggest."

"I've thought it out," declared Rob modestly.

He produced his heavy-bladed scouting knife.

"Merritt, you take your knife and we'll cut two holes in the top of the hatch. That will make two smoke columns, and if anyone on that yacht is a Scout, they will come rushing at top speed toward us!"

"Jove! You boys are resourceful, indeed!" cried the ensign admiringly.

Without more ado the boys fell to work on their task. They cut the holes about ten feet apart. It was hard work, but they stuck to it perseveringly, and at last, from the two holes, two columns of black smoke spouted up. Luckily for their plans the wind had, by this time, moderated so much as to have fallen almost flat. [75]

High into the heavens soared the two black columns of smoke like two pillars of inky vapor.

Every eye watched the distant yacht anxiously. For five minutes the anxiety was so intense that no one spoke. The pitch of expectancy was painful.

Then came a great cry.

"They've seen our signal!" shouted Rob.

"Yes; look, she's changing her course. Look at the black smoke coming from her funnel. She's making top speed to our rescue!" cried Merritt.

"Let's hope that she won't be too late," murmured the ensign under his breath, and then aloud he cried:

"Three cheers for the Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol!"

CHAPTER IX.

[76]

THE BOYS MEET A "WOLF."

Faster and faster came the yacht. She was a large white craft, with a yellow funnel and two rakish-looking masts, with light spidery rigging. Between her masts was suspended a parallel sort of "antennæ," wires betokening that she carried wireless. At her bow the foam creamed up as she rushed through the water on her errand of mercy.

With what anxiety those on the *Good Hope* watched her, may be imagined. Their eyes fairly burned as they regarded the race of their rescuers against the fire which raged below them. For the two holes cut by Rob and Merritt, while they had had the good effect of attracting aid, had also had a less gratifying result.

[77]

Through them the air had been transmitted to the flaming mass below, and flames were now shooting up through them and enlarging the openings every instant. The air grew so fearfully hot that all were compelled to beat a retreat to the extreme stern of the *Good Hope*.

Little was said as the yacht rounded up as close to the burning ship as she dared, and lowered a boat. By this time clouds of black smoke, shot with livid flames, were shooting skyward above the doomed craft. It was a fortunate thing for the castaways that no wind was stirring or this story might have had a different termination.

The boat was manned by sailors in white duck clothes and was guided by a lad wearing the Boy Scout uniform. As soon as they saw this the boys gave the cry of the Eagle Patrol. As the long drawn "Kree-ee-ee!" died out, the boy in the stern stood erect and gave the Scout salute. Then followed a long-drawn, growling shout:

[78]

"How-oo-oo-oo!"

"That's the cry of one of the Wolf Patrols!" cried Merritt.

"Yes; and that boy is a Wolf," declared Rob.

"Well, at all events he comes in sheep's clothing," the ensign could not resist saying.

The next instant the boat was under the stern and the rescued castaways were sliding down a rope into it. Hardly a word was spoken while this was going on; the work in hand was too important.

But hardly had they all found places before, in an earnest voice, the ensign exclaimed:

"Pull for your lives, men; spare no time."

"Why, you are safe enough now," declared the Wolf Scout.

"Far from it," declared the young officer seriously, "the log book of that craft spoke of dynamite on board. They used it to blast their way out of the polar ice. I think——"

A terrific concussion that threw them all from their seats interrupted him. Then came a blinding flash, and this in turn was followed by an explosion that seemed to shake the sea.

[79]

"Pull for your lives!" shouted the ensign to the alarmed sailors.

Dazed as they were, they lost no time in doing so, but even then fragments of blazing wood and red-hot metal rained about them in a downpour of great danger.

Luckily, however, none of the blazing fragments struck the boat. As soon as they recovered their faculties, the boys gazed back at the spot where the *Good Hope* had last been seen. There was not a trace of her. The dynamite had literally blown the ill-fated whaler out of existence. Only oily pools remained on the surface to show the spot of her vanishing.

"I can easily see that you chaps have been through some thrilling experiences," remarked the Wolf boy, whose name proved to be Donald Grant, attached to the Wolf Patrol of the 14th New York City Troop.

[80]

"We have, indeed," rejoined Rob, "but we would rather defer the telling of them till we arrive on board your yacht. What's her name?"

"The *Brigand*," was the reply; "we are on a cruise through the West Indies."

"The *Brigand*," echoed the ensign. "Isn't that J. P. Grant, the great financier's yacht?"

"Yes, he's my father," rejoined Donald simply; "he's on board. You'll be glad to meet him, and I know he'll be delighted to welcome you and hear your story."

"Did you recognize our signal as soon as you saw it?" inquired Rob.

"I sure did," responded Donald; "lucky you sent it up, too, as we were on another course, and would not have passed near enough to see that there was anyone on board what we thought was just an old hulk drifting about the ocean."

"You'll be more interested still when you hear how we made the signals," spoke up Hiram.

"Well, I knew that the call meant that the necessity was urgent, and although we were going slowly at the time we soon got under full speed. Dad has been a bit sceptical about scouting, but I guess he'll admit there's some good in it now."

[81]

"It was Scout lore that saved our lives," said the ensign quietly.

"Not a doubt of that," agreed Donald; "but here we are, almost alongside the *Brigand*."

The boys gazed up at the towering sides of the big yacht, at her glittering brass work, and crowds of white-jacketed sailors gazing over the side curiously. Astern a big bronzed man leaned over the rail gazing down with equal interest. Rob recognized him instantly from pictures he had seen of him in the papers, as Junius P. Grant, the "Wall Street King," as he was called.

He greeted them with a wave of his hand.

"Welcome to the *Brigand*, young men," he hailed in a hearty tone; "you have the Boy Scout idea to thank for your lives. Had my lad there been five minutes later we'd have been too late to save you."

[82]

"That's true enough, sir," hailed back the ensign; "we all thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your prompt relief work."

"The best thanks you can give me will be to come on board at once and get washed up and partake of the best the *Brigand* can provide," was the pleasant reply.

"Yes; get on board, quick," urged Donald, as the gangway was lowered and the boatmen shipped their oars, "you look about all in."

"We look like a lot of tramps, I guess you mean," laughed Rob, but for all that he felt a bit ashamed of their appearance. They were covered with grime from their fire-fighting experiences. Loss of sleep, hunger, and exposure had drawn their cheeks and reddened their eyes. Altogether, they looked very unlike the trim crew that had set out from the Derelict Destroyer *Seneca* only a comparatively short time before.

[83]

As soon as they arrived on board, they were turned over to the steward, who provided them with quarters in which to spruce up. Everything on the *Brigand* was appointed as luxuriously as could be possible. This fact rather added to the boys' embarrassment. But when half an hour after their arrival they gathered about a splendidly appointed luncheon table, their embarrassment turned to positive bashfulness. Never had any of them felt so out of place. The ensign alone retained his self-possession.

It was not till Mr. Grant had tactfully interested them in relating their adventures, that they forgot their self-consciousness and ate and drank during the narrative, like famished wolves—or Eagles.

CHAPTER X.

[84]

A NEW RECRUIT.

It was about an hour after luncheon, which, naturally enough, with all that had to be related, had been a rather protracted meal. The party of which the Boy Scouts and their naval friend had so unexpectedly become members was foregathered beneath the stern awning in comfortable wicker chairs.

The ensign was relating to Mr. Grant, under pledge of secrecy, some details of the work which was expected to be accomplished on the lonely island. Mr. Grant, who was intensely interested, agreed to put the officer and his young charges ashore at Charleston or some convenient port, provided the *Seneca* could not be reached by wireless. The boys were secretly hoping that this would prove impossible, that they might protract their cruise on the *Brigand*.

[85]

Donald and the boys had instinctively become chums. The millionaire's son was a manly, self-reliant sort of chap, with crisp, curly hair, and blue eyes that could be merry or determined. Then, too, he was a first-class Scout and deeply versed in Scout lore. In fact, the Eagles were no more than a match for the knowledge of this young Wolf.

While the ensign and Mr. Grant chatted, they watched the youngsters with interest. When Donald had carried them off to show them the *Brigand* from stem to stern, as he expressed it, Mr.

Grant laid down his cigar and, turning to the ensign, said, with his customary abruptness:

"Could you use another Boy Scout on this work?"

"Well—I—really, I've hardly considered it," was the astonished rejoinder. [86]

"If you could, I have one for you."

"You mean your son Donald?"

"Yes. He is a manly, fine lad, but he has been a little bit coddled by his mother and sisters. Now he and these other boys appear to get along famously, and they are just the sort of lads I should like my boy to associate with."

The naval officer nodded.

"I never saw or heard of such another lot of lads as those comprising the Eagle Patrol," he said with emphasis; "although, of course," he continued, "there are probably many such enrolled in the ranks of the Boy Scouts."

"I don't doubt it. Donald is a different lad already since he joined the Wolf Patrol. Now this cruise of mine will be dull at best to the lad. You see I am combining business with pleasure, and he will be thrown much on his own resources. He has seen the West Indies before, so there would not be much that is novel to him in the scenery or the people. What do you say to my proposal?" [87]

Cigar in hand, the great man of Wall Street paused for an answer, knitting his famous black eyebrows as he did so.

"Why, if Donald is anxious to go, I don't see why it could not be arranged," was the ensign's reply; "but why not ask the lad himself?"

"And your boys, too, of course," was the rejoinder; "they might object to adding an outsider to their number."

"Not much fear of that," smiled the officer; "why, you would think they had been lifelong friends. Hark at that!"

A merry peal of laughter came ringing from somewhere about the ship.

At this juncture, a young man in a natty uniform came hastening up. He bore a slip of yellow paper which he respectfully handed to the Wall Street magnate.

"Ah, Collins,—Mr. Hargreaves, this is our wireless operator."

The ensign nodded while Mr. Grant gazed over the message. [88]

"So you picked her up, eh, Collins?" he said, handing the message he had just perused over to the ensign.

"Yes, sir. It appears that after missing the derelict in the fog the *Seneca* cruised in circles looking for her. She is now within ten miles of us."

"So I see by this message," struck in the ensign; "we are fortunate not to have drifted further."

"What do you wish to do?" inquired Mr. Grant.

"Naturally, to be transferred to my own ship, if you will be so kind."

Mr. Grant nodded.

"Collins, get our exact position from the captain, signal it to the *Seneca*, and tell her we will lay off and on here till she arrives."

"Very well, sir," said the man of the wireless, with a bow.

He had hardly withdrawn when the boys came up, fresh from their inspection of the *Brigand*. All were loud in praise of the craft, especially Rob and Merritt. [89]

"Would you rather cruise on this craft or go on the duty for Uncle Sam which lies before you?" asked Mr. Grant quizzically.

The Boy Scouts drew themselves up.

"Why, sir, our duty to our country comes before pleasure," declared Rob, acting as spokesman. "Cruising about is all right, but we Boy Scouts like to be doing something useful for somebody else, but most of all for Uncle Sam."

Rob paused, rather alarmed at his temerity at thus addressing one of the richest men in the world.

"So you think I am wasting my time cruising, eh?" said Mr. Grant amusedly glancing at the upright, slender boy before him from under his heavy brows.

It was impossible to tell whether he was displeased or not. But Rob decided not to recede from his position. He knew that the Boy Scouts were supposed to be manly, self-reliant, and upright under all conditions. So putting his fears of offending the man before him aside, he spoke up [90]

boldly:

"It's different for you, sir. Your life work has raised your monument; but I think, and I guess my Patrol agrees with me, that it is better for boys to be on active duty and," he added, his eyes flashing and his cheeks glowing, "especially such service as we are now going on. It's—it's glorious," he concluded breathlessly.

"I think you are quite right, my boy," was the magnate's reply, a very different one from the rejoinder Rob had dreaded.

"I hope you don't think me presumptuous or impudent," replied Rob, "but you asked my opinion, and you know, sir, we Boy Scouts must always tell the truth. Perhaps it seems a poor return after you saved our lives, to——"

But Mr. Grant cut the boy short with a wave of the hand.

[91]

"Nonsense, all I did was to stand by and watch. If Donald had not understood those smoke signals, you might not be on earth now. But in return, I want to ask you to do something for him."

Rob nodded respectfully but said nothing. He wondered greatly what could be coming next.

"I want you to take Donald with you on this duty for Uncle Sam. The ensign here has agreed. Are you willing to make my son one of your party?"

"Are we willing?" stammered out Rob. "Why, sir, we've just been discussing what a shame it was that he had to go on a stupid old cruise—I beg your pardon, on a cruise—when real work lay ahead, and——"

But Donald had danced up to his father cheering and throwing his hat in the air. Then he rushed up to his newly-found comrades and a hand-shaking and "bear hugging" match ensued, such as is rarely seen except among lads who are real companions, bound together by a common bond.

[92]

Suddenly above the tumult Rob's voice sounded.

"Boys, let's give the cry of the Wolf Patrol!"

Instantly savage growls resounded, and after that the Eagles joined hands, formed a circle about Donald, and danced a sort of war dance of joy, concluding with the screaming cry of their Patrol.

Mr. Grant and Ensign Hargreaves smilingly watched this scene.

When something like order had been restored, the latter announced the closeness of the *Seneca*.

This, too, was greeted with a cheer, which was cut short by the reappearance of Collins.

"I've been talking with the *Seneca*, sir, and he says that they are proceeding here at full speed."

"Good. That will do, unless you have any communications to make," said Mr. Grant, turning to the ensign.

[93]

"No, sir, none whatever," was the reply.

It was ten minutes later when Rob's sharp eye descried a trail of smoke on the horizon. A short time after, by the aid of glasses, the craft was made out to be the *Seneca*, bound at full speed for the yacht. On the latter's signal-halliards up went a gaudy string of signal flags announcing her identity. The signal was answered from the Derelict Destroyer, which also fired a gun in honor of the recovery of the castaways.

By midafternoon good-byes, warm and hearty, had been said, three ringing cheers exchanged between the crews of both craft, and the *Brigand* was headed due south, while the *Seneca* made in toward the coast. Long before sunset both craft had vanished from each other's sight.

"So that was one derelict that Uncle Sam did not have to destroy," laughed Ensign Hargreaves to Lieutenant Murray as they stood side by side on the bridge.

[94]

"No," rejoined the other, "she committed suicide; but if it hadn't been for our young recruit, Donald, she wouldn't have gone to her grave alone!"

CHAPTER XI.

[95]

BARTON THE MACHINIST.

An island, a sandy, scantily grown spot of land, shaped like a splash of gravy on a plate, loomed up over the *Seneca's* bow. On it stood a shed, two naked masts with wireless antennæ strung between them, and some tents, and that was all, except that, removed from the shed mentioned

above, was a similar and larger structure. This second structure was built on piles right out over the sea, and as the coast of the island declined abruptly at this point, there was considerable water under its corrugated iron roof.

"So that's Barren Island?" asked Rob, who, with the boys and the two officers, was standing on the bridge of the *Seneca* regarding with the most intense interest that desolate spot of land.

[96]

Beyond it lay other islands equally barren, so that applicability of the name was not quite clear, while in the dim distance a faint blue line betokened the Carolina coast.

"Yes, that is Barren Island," nodded Lieutenant Murray; "and strange as it may seem, the hopes of the Naval Department are centered right at this moment on that sandy patch yonder."

"Seems queer, doesn't it?" commented Merritt.

"Queer but safe," smiled Ensign Hargreaves.

"I'm aching to get ashore," exploded Donald eagerly. "Is that a powerful wireless?"

"It is capable of sending up to three hundred miles on an average, and more under favorable conditions," was the reply.

"What's in that big shed?" demanded someone.

"That houses the *Peacemaker*. The shore shelves off abruptly and the submarine is housed under that roof in more than forty feet of water."

"And the other building?"

[97]

"A combination cook house and dining room."

"Shall we have lots to eat?" asked Tubby, his eyes glistening as he heard.

"Plenty, I hope," rejoined the ensign smiling. "There is an ample stock of provisions, and they will be received from the mainland as occasion requires."

"But how shall we reach the mainland?"

"In a powerful motor boat," was the reply.

"Say, this is going to be a regular picnic. I thought you chaps said hard work lay ahead of us," complained Donald.

"Don't worry," laughed Rob; "I guess we'll find lots to do."

"Never fear," struck in the ensign. "Besides the inventor of the *Peacemaker*, Mr. Danbury Barr, and ourselves, there will be only three trusted sailors, familiar with submarine work, to conduct the tests; so you see that you boys will have your time well occupied."

"Are those tents for us?" asked Paul Perkins interestedly.

[98]

"Why, no. You brought your own camping outfits with you. I shall sleep in one, Mr. Barr in another, while the third will be occupied by the sailor assistants."

"And they are already there?" asked Rob.

"Watch," smiled Lieutenant Murray.

He seized the whistle cord and blew three resounding blasts.

Instantly, from the large shed referred to as housing the submarine, four figures appeared, three wore sailor garb and the fourth, it could be seen, was in overalls and shirt sleeves.

They waved and the boys cheered.

"I guess we'll drop anchor right here and take you ashore in a boat," said Lieutenant Murray.

The necessary orders were given, the chain roared out, and the *Seneca* swung at anchor off Barren Island in twenty fathoms of water.

"Can we go down as deep as that in the *Peacemaker*?" inquired Rob.

[99]

"Deeper, much deeper," was the rejoinder; "we hope to go deeper than any submarine has ever been before."

"Whoof!" exclaimed Donald.

"What's the trouble?" inquired Merritt.

"Oh, nothing; only it makes a fellow feel kind of creepy, that's all," was the rejoinder.

No sooner had the anchor been dropped, than a scene of great activity ensued. The wireless operator of the *Seneca* was flashing signals back and forth with the shore station, and sailors were piling Boy Scout equipment into one of the boats while another was lowered for the passengers. Donald had his own outfit, it having been on board the *Brigand* when he transferred to the *Seneca*. Although he was the son of one of the richest men in the world, it in no wise differed from the other lads' outfits, except that it had not seen such hard service as theirs had

been through.

At last all was ready, good-byes were said, and not without some regret the Boy Scouts left their kind friends of the *Seneca* behind. Ashore a warm welcome greeted them. Mr. Danbury Barr proved to be a tall, lean individual with a prominent, thin-bridged nose, and sharp, gray eyes with all the keenness of a hawk in them. His skin was burned a deep golden brown by his sojourn on the island while getting his craft in readiness for the tests. Like most inventors he had not much to say, but seemed to be agreeable and glad to see the newcomers.

[100]

The three sailors, as became them in the presence of an officer, stood respectfully back without saying anything, only drawing up and saluting. But this was not the case with a man who has not yet been mentioned. This was an individual named Luke Barton. He was Mr. Barr's expert machinist and mechanical superintendent. Rob took an instinctive dislike to the fellow. Not that there was anything actually repulsive about him. On the contrary, he was a well-set-up chap of about thirty-five, dark haired and mustached; but it was something shifty in the fellow's eyes that made Rob distrust him. This impression was not removed when he asked of Mr. Barr, in a voice by no means an undertone:

[101]

"What's this parcel of kids doing here? Looks like a Sunday school picnic."

Mr. Barr explained.

"Oh, a bunch of kid tin soldiers," he sneered, and strode off swinging a big monkey wrench. Right then and there Rob's instinctive dislike of the man crystallized into a feeling of distrust. He felt sure that the fellow had some reason to resent the presence of the Boy Scouts.

Mr. Barr made no comment on his assistant's remarks, doubtless not thinking that they had been overheard. In fact, the rest of the party, except Rob, had been standing at some little distance when the fellow uttered his sneering jibes.

CHAPTER XII.

[102]

THE SUBMARINE ISLAND.

Under Mr. Barr's guidance the party toured the island. It was about half a mile across and slightly longer than its width. Coarse grass grew almost to the water's edge, and in the centre, where it rose in a cone-shaped formation, some stunted, wind-twisted bushes grew. Also on the summit was a driven well, which was formed of galvanized piping, and went down, so the boys were informed, for more than two hundred feet.

But to the lads of the Eagle Patrol the most interesting thing on the island was, of course, the shed that housed the submarine. This shed was open at both ends, and under its iron roof lay the submarine craft. Lying as it did, with only its rounded back showing above the surface of the water, it reminded the boys of a sleeping whale.

[103]

On the top of it, amidships, was the conning tower, with thick glass lenses for observation. From the conning tower also protruded the periscope, an instrument which enabled the operators of the craft to see the ocean about them even when submerged some twenty feet below the surface.

A stout rail ran around the top of the hull so as to allow the crew to walk along the slippery decks without danger of going overboard. But it was the interior that the boys were most anxious to see, and a glad rush followed when Mr. Barr invited them on board. Access to the conning tower was gained by a gang plank running from the side of the shed. Reaching the conning tower, with a press of eager lads about him, Mr. Barr threw open a metal door in the top of the observation post, and climbed inside. The boys needed no invitation to follow him.

[104]

Inside they found themselves in a compartment much resembling the wheelhouse of an ordinary surface craft, except that there were various instruments to show submergence, and the quality and pressure of the air, and devices for handling the engines; for one of the features of Mr. Barr's invention was that it could be handled by one man once the engines were going.

Leaving the conning tower, they descended a steel ladder into the heart of the submarine. The centre was occupied by a comfortably fitted-up room which contained, among other things, a small library and a phonograph. The inventor switched on a button and the "cabin," as it may be called, was instantaneously flooded with a soft light, bright but not glaring. In the bulkheads at either end of this compartment were doors, steel riveted and solid looking. The inventor explained that beyond the stern one were located the engine room and crew's quarters, while on the other side of the forward portal lay the sleeping quarters, galley or kitchen, and bathroom. Beyond these again came the torpedo room, which contained the machinery for launching the death-dealers. Each of these was inspected in turn, the boys being delighted with the compactness and neatness of everything.

[105]

"Now," said the inventor, "we will visit the engine room." Paul Perkins and Hiram looked interested; machinery was one of their hobbies.

The *Peacemaker* carried two sets of engines, electrical for running under the surface, and gasoline for use above water. The engines were fitted tandem-wise, and to their shafts were attached twin screws of a novel design that gave great speed and controlled the submarine easily. The gasoline engines were of fifteen hundred horse-power each, and the electrical had a trifle lower capacity.

[106]

In the engine room, too, were the powerful pumps used for emptying or filling the submarine's submergence tanks as it was desired to rise or descend. Aft of the engine room came the gasoline tanks, the storage batteries, and some minor machinery, such as an ice-making plant, air compressor, and so on. In the engine room, too, was a comfortable upholstered lounge for the engineer on duty to rest upon. Several dials and gauges were on the walls of this compartment, enabling the engineer to know at all times under just what conditions the submarine was proceeding.

It was in the engines themselves that the inventor had excelled all other types of submarines, as well as in the peculiar attributes of the hull. Extra tanks were provided whereby, in the event of the main supply of gasoline giving out at any time, the *Peacemaker* could be run quite a distance on those alone.

"How long could you stay below the surface?" asked Rob, as they came back into the main cabin once more. There they took their seats on broad leather divans which at night time could be converted into beds or bunks by pulling a lever which caused them to turn over and reveal a snug resting place.

[107]

"I have not yet made an exhaustive test of that," rejoined Mr. Barr, "but I estimate that we could remain below, if necessary, forty-eight hours."

"Forty-eight hours!" gasped Rob incredulously.

The inventor nodded calmly.

"My air purifying device makes this supposable. I have a plan by which fresh, pure air is almost manufactured. At the same time the foul air is forced out."

"I suppose you boys are aching to take a trip," laughed Ensign Hargreaves.

"Aching is no word for it," Rob assured him.

"Well, you may have a chance to-morrow," said Mr. Barr; "I am going to test out the whole craft thoroughly, and you boys can come along if I go."

[108]

For the next five minutes nothing could be heard but enthusiastic shouts. The boys fairly went wild with delight at the prospect of a trip below the ocean's surface. Soon afterward the party emerged from the submarine in time to see the *Seneca* making out to sea on her return journey. She carried letters from the boys to their families, as they were by no means sure when they would get the next opportunity of sending a letter north.

The next hour was occupied in making camp. Then the Stars and Stripes and the Eagle banner went up. Donald had no Wolf banner with him, but above his tent he hung up something that resembled a wolf's head, painted on a bit of canvas.

"Looks more like a chicken than a wolf," scornfully sniffed Tubby when he saw it.

[109]

"You couldn't think of anything but something good to eat, could you?" was Donald's crushing reply.

By the time camp had been made and everything placed neatly in order, Andy Bowles, on Ensign Hargreaves' order, sounded the dinner call.

"That's the call that Tubby never forgets," laughed Rob, as the stout lad cantered off in the direction of the combination dining hall and cook house above mentioned.

They found a bare, pine table, scrubbed scrupulously clean and set with metal plates and cups. Lieutenant Hargreaves showed each boy to his seat, while he and the inventor sat at opposite ends of the board. The sailors, and the machinist who had impressed Rob so unfavorably, ate later.

The cook, a stout, good-natured looking negro, came bustling in with a huge bucket-like pan full of steaming soup. Tubby's eyes glistened as he saw it, and soon he was piling in prodigious quantities of it. The soup was followed by salt beef, potatoes, and other vegetables, and then came a big wedge of cocoanut pie.

[110]

"We get fresh meat fairly often," explained Mr. Barr, "but the launch has not been to the mainland recently, so we have to get along on what sailors call 'Willie'."

"Isn't there game of any kind hereabouts?" asked Rob.

"Oh, yes. There are several shore birds of different varieties, but we have really been too busy of late to go after them. Now that you boys have come, however, you can take out my shot guns—I have three of them—and see what you can do as hunters."

"Are the shore birds good eating?" inquired Tubby with his mouth full of pie.

"Yes, Master Hopkins. Epicures, in fact, declare that there is no better dish than roasted plovers."

[111]

"I'll take one of the guns," declared Tubby, his eyes glistening, as, even his appetite satisfied for the while, he sank back in his chair.

As they filed out of the dining hall the negro cook announced to the sailors and the mechanic, by means of a big bell, that it was time for them to eat.

Rob, on his way to the camp, happened to pass by Luke Barton. He greeted the latter with a cheery nod.

"Going to eat, Barton?" he inquired.

The man glowered at him a minute, and then muttering something about "fresh kids eating up everything," he strode on toward the eating place.

"My gracious," exclaimed Tubby, who had witnessed the whole proceeding, "you and that fellow get along like a pair of panthers, don't you?"

CHAPTER XIII.

[112]

DOWN TO THE DEPTHS.

It was the following morning, a bright, clear day, with a clean swept sky overhead, and seaward, the waves whipping up into smart little whitecaps under a brisk breeze. Breakfast was over, the Boy Scouts' bugle had sounded an assembly call, and now all were eagerly mustered about the submarine shed awaiting Mr. Barr's arrival and permission to go on board the *Peacemaker*.

True to his promise, the inventor had decided to make the boys participants in the trial trip of the slate-colored diving boat. Presently he appeared, accompanied by Ensign Hargreaves. Ten minutes later the chatting, laughing party was on board the *Peacemaker*, and half an hour after that she was pronounced ready for the start. Mr. Barr took his place in the conning tower with Ensign Hargreaves beside him. Barton was in the engine room, sullen and uncommunicative as usual. Rob and Merritt were on deck with one of the sailors, delegated to the duty of casting off the diving boat's lines.

[113]

At last came the word from the conning tower:

"Cast off."

Rob seized a rope and cast off from the stern bitts, while the sailor performed the same operation at the bow.

"Must we come inside now?" inquired Rob, through the open hatch of the conning tower.

"Not yet; unless you wish to. I will notify you before we dive," was Mr. Barr's reply.

"Goodness, I hope he doesn't forget," said Rob laughingly, as the inventor turned on a switch and started the engines. The cigar-shaped form of the craft trembled as the powerful twin propellers beat the water. Then, handling as perfectly as a catboat, she backed slowly out of the shed and on to the open sea.

[114]

Once outside the shed, her helmsman headed the craft about and made directly east. To Rob and Merritt, standing on the deck, the sensation was a thrilling one. Faster and faster the craft was driven till great clouds of spray compelled the two lads to seek refuge in the conning tower.

Inside the boat the hum of machinery and the vibration of the powerful engines could be plainly distinguished. Rob glanced at the speed indicator on the steel wall of the "pilot house."

"Twenty-five knots! Phew! that's going some," he gasped.

"She can make thirty-two on the surface and twenty-one under water," said the inventor calmly.

As he spoke, he drew a lever toward him and the *Peacemaker* appeared to leap forward like a horse under the lash.

[115]

Rob watched the handle of the indicator as it sped slowly around the dial. Up and up it crept till it stopped at thirty-two knots and a half.

"Jove! Barr," exclaimed the ensign, "this is the wonder craft of the century."

"I think I could get even more speed out of her, but I don't wish to strain the engines," was the confident reply.

"This is fast enough for me, thank you," said Rob to Merritt in an undertone.

From the conning tower lens the *Peacemaker* appeared to be rushing between two solid walls

of water, so great was the quantity of spray she threw as she was remorselessly driven through the choppy sea. Yet the vibration was not nearly as bad as might have been expected.

"Let's go below and take a look at the engine room," said Merritt.

"All right; but I'll ask Mr. Barr's permission first," was Rob's rejoinder.

This was readily obtained, and the two boys went below. They found their comrades gathered in the large central cabin, excitedly discussing the novelty of their voyage. Passing them, the young leader and his lieutenant made their way back into the machinery department. Barton glowered at them as they entered. [116]

"Well, what d'ye want?" he asked gruffly.

"Merely to have a look at the engines," said Rob.

"Aw, what do you know about engines?" growled the man. "You ain't got no business in here."

"We have Mr. Barr's permission," rejoined Rob in a calm, even tone, determined not to let the fellow make him angry.

"Well, take a look around and get out quick," was the ungracious reply of the surly fellow.

Rob thought it best not to answer him, and arm in arm he and Merritt wandered among the flashing, smoothly working machinery, which, despite its size and power, was almost noiseless. Whatever his failings might be in the way of politeness, Barton must have been a good engineer, the boys decided, for every bit of metal and paintwork about the engines was polished to a brilliant finish, and the engine room was as neat as a new pin. [117]

Rob was examining the powerful pumps when his eye suddenly fell on a bit of paper lying on the floor. He picked it up, prompted by he knew not what instinct, and found that it was covered with minute sketches, apparently of machinery. The sketches were numbered and lettered, as if they had been "keyed" for the purpose of making the diagram clearer.

He was still examining the sketches when there was a swift step behind him and a heavy hand fell on his shoulder. Rob, facing about, looked into Barton's face. The engineer's countenance was livid, his eyes fairly blazed.

"Give me that paper, you young jackanapes!" he exclaimed, "and then get out of here—quick!"

"As to giving you the paper, here you are," said Rob, quietly handing the engineer the mechanical sketches. "If I'd known they were yours, I'd have returned them to you at once. I must ask you, however, to be a little less rough in your manners. I don't know what harm we've ever done you, that you should show such a dislike for us." [118]

"Bah!" growled Barton as he turned away, thrusting the paper into a pocket of his jumper.

After this incident neither of the boys cared to remain in the engine room, and soon joined their companions in the main cabin.

They found them chatting and laughing over different boyish topics, and Merritt joined in the fun.

But Rob, usually talkative and bright, was strangely silent. He found himself musing over the incident of the scrap of paper covered with mechanical sketches. Why had Barton become so agitated when the boy picked it up? What was there about the affair to excite the man so strangely? [119]

Suddenly into the boy's mind there flashed a startling suspicion. But so grave was the idea that he dismissed it, or rather tried to; but with all his efforts the idea kept recurring like a dominant note in a piece of music. Rob decided to be on the watch and try to verify or disprove his suspicion, which was nothing more nor less than an idea that Barton was a traitor to his employer, and was also in the service of some powerful interests striving to get a grip on the secrets of the *Peacemaker*.

"That man will bear watching," decided Rob.

Scarcely had he come to this conclusion when Mr. Barr shouted down from the conning tower:

"I'm going to dive!"

The hearts of all the lads beat perceptibly quicker at the words.

They were about to descend into the unknown regions beneath the surface of the ocean, down into the dark waters where men's souls are put to a supreme test.

CHAPTER XIV.

FACING DEATH.

"Ready?" came the cry from the conning tower.

"All ready!" shouted back the lads assembled in the cabin, waiting for they knew not what.

"Then hold tight, we're going down quick."

S-w-ish-ish-ish! The roar of the water, as the powerful pumps sucked it into the submerging tanks, filled the interior of the Barr submarine. Suddenly she gave a forward plunge, and the boys now learned for what purpose several handholds were attached to the cabin walls!

"Say, this is a queer sensation, isn't it?" gasped Merritt, looking rather alarmed as the downward rush could be distinctly felt. In the engine room the electric motors had been connected, and in the conning tower the hatch which gave entrance and egress when on the surface had been clamped tightly down. [121]

"S-s-pose we don't come up again?" exclaimed Donald.

"We haven't got an awful lot to eat on board," murmured Tubby anxiously.

"Gracious, how far down are we going?" spoke Merritt, as five minutes passed and still the *Peacemaker* continued her descent into the depths of the sea.

All at once the tilting motion ceased, the *Peacemaker's* stern tanks were filled, and she floated on an even keel. Leaving the care of the wheel to Ensign Hargreaves, who, as we know, was familiar with the usual type of submarine, Mr. Barr came into the cabin.

"Well, boys, what do you think of it?" he asked with a smile.

"It's g-g-great," rejoined Tubby, with a notable lack of his usual assurance. [122]

"And now I suppose you'd like to see what the bottom of the sea looks like. We are down some two hundred fathoms and about fifty miles off the coast. Should you care to see how things look down here?"

"How will that be possible?" asked Merritt.

By way of reply Mr. Barr went to the starboard wall of the cabin and pulled a lever connecting with a worm gear. As he did so, a great section of the *Peacemaker's* steel side drew back and revealed a plate glass window set between the inner and outer "skins" of the craft.

The boys crowded round the window and peered out eagerly. But to their disappointment they could see no more of their surroundings than if they had been looking out of a train window on a dark night. It was as black as a wolf's mouth at those unknown depths.

"Why, we can't see anything," came a disgruntled chorus.

"Wait a minute," smiled the inventor.



THE BOYS CROWDED ROUND THE WINDOW AND PEERED OUT EAGERLY.

Pressing a button, he extinguished the cabin lights. Then he opened a sort of closet in the wall alongside the window and swung out a powerful, though small, searchlight attached to an adaptable arm in the same manner as a desk telephone. [123]

There was a clicking sound, and a flood of white light pierced the blackness outside. The boys broke into delighted exclamations as the powerful rays revealed all sorts of fish, many of odd shapes and colors, attracted by the light.

Suddenly a dark, shadowy form swung into view. Instantly the other fish vanished, and the boys saw that the newcomer was a large shark swimming leisurely along.

No doubt he wondered who the strangers in his deep sea abode could be, for he swam up close to the window, causing the boys to shrink back. They quite forgot that between them and the tiger of the deep was a solid plate of glass as strong almost as steel. [124]

The shark gazed at the window for an instant and then vanished. With its disappearance, the other fish reappeared and kept the submarine company, for all the world like sea gulls circling round a ship entering port.

"I wonder if they are hungry and want us to throw some food out to them," said Tubby stolidly, as he gazed at the finny tribes darting here and there in the searchlight's rays.

"Gracious, do you think that the fish have the same appetite as you have?" laughed Merritt.

"Just the same, some of those fellows would taste all right broiled," declared the stout youth, at which there was a general laugh.

After an hour spent in this manner the searchlight was switched off and the panels slid back into place.

"I think we will rise now," said the inventor; "you boys had better hold on, for we may go up pretty quick."

"I hope we *do* go up," muttered Tubby, rather nervously. The stout youth was not particularly in love with the dark depths in which they were navigating. In fact, all the lads, though they did not admit it, experienced a longing for daylight. It was an awe-inspiring feeling—too awe-inspiring to be comfortable—to be in the depths of the ocean where no keel had ever before plowed. [125]

Mr. Barr remounted to the conning tower. A minute later a renewal of the swishing sound told that the pumps were emptying the tanks at the rate of a thousand gallons a minute. The submarine could be felt to leap upward toward the surface. The boys held on for dear life, exchanging rather alarmed glances.

All at once the pace slackened, and the swishing sound ceased. Mr. Barr had decided that the pace was too swift and had cut off the pumps.

"Well, thank goodness that's over!" gasped Donald. "At the rate we were going up we'd have bounced clean out of the sea." [126]

"I guess we're all right now," remarked Merritt.

The words had hardly left his lips when there came a jar and a bump that shook the submarine in her every frame and rivet.

The boys were thrown from their feet and hurled about the cabin. At the same instant the engines stopped and the submarine began to back, but slowly, like a stricken animal.

"We've rammed something!"

"We're sinking!"

These and a hundred other exclamations came from the alarmed boys.

Mr. Barr poked his head down into the cabin.

"Are you all right below?" he asked.

"Yes; but what has happened?"

"Have we been badly damaged?"

"Are we sinking?"

The above questions were all shouted at once in the tense excitement.

Barton, his face white as ashes, came out of his engine room. [127]

"What did we hit?" he demanded in a frightened voice.

"I don't know; but we struck something, possibly a sunken wreck, a hard blow," was the inventor's reply. Although his face was deadly pale, his voice was without a tremor as he spoke.

"We must make an examination at once," he went on. "Andrews, Higgins, and Ross," addressing the three sailors who had appeared from forward, "make an examination forward at once and see if any of the plates have started. If you find a suspicion of a leak report to me at once."

The sailors, trained in naval discipline, saluted, and hastened off on their errand.

"If we are leaking, what are we to do?" demanded Rob.

"Meet death as bravely as we can," was the reply in steady tones; "submarines carry no boats and we must go to the bottom unless we can find some way to stop the leak."

Small wonder that the boys were stricken aghast. Barton, the machinist, flung himself face downward on a couch and began whimpering. [128]

The inventor looked at the man with contempt.

"Stand by your engines, Barton," he commanded sternly; "the first man to shirk his duty in this emergency will have to settle with me."

Barton rose to his feet unsteadily. He was pasty yellow with terror. In his eyes was a wild look. But under the inventor's stern gaze he reëntered the engine room, shaking like a leaf.

It was then that Rob noticed that a revolver was in the inventor's hand as he stood at the top of the cabin ladder.

THE STRANGE FLAG.

After ten minutes of the most painful suspense that any of the boys had ever known, the three sailors returned with the report that while one of the forward plates was bent and was leaking slightly, there appeared to be no danger.

Mr. Barr made no secret of his relief at receiving this bit of information. The boys burst into a cheer, and Barton, crouching in cowardly panic in the engine room, knew by this sound that all was well.

"Now we'll get to the surface quick and see what happened," declared the inventor.

The *Peacemaker*, which all this time had been slowly backing, was sent upward once more. As soon as they reached the surface Mr. Barr opened the conning tower hatch, and they all hastened out on deck. To their amazement the water all about was dyed crimson, and the cause was almost immediately apparent. Not far off lay the carcass of a whale, almost cut in two. This was beyond question the obstacle that the submarine had struck. Probably the dead cetacean could not get out of the way of the steel diving craft in time, or else deemed it another whale, and so was rammed by the sharp steel prow.

[130]

"Suppose that had been a solid object, like a rock, or a submerged derelict?" asked Rob.

"We shouldn't be here now," rejoined Ensign Hargreaves calmly enough, but in his voice there was palpable evidence of the relief he felt at their narrow escape.

"I guess we'll stay on the surface for a while now," decided the inventor. Accordingly, the craft was put about and headed for the island at a good rate of speed. The return voyage was made without incident, except that Tubby caused much amusement by inquiring if whale flesh was edible, and if it was, he should enjoy a broiled whale steak for dinner.

[131]

When the shed was reached the bow of the submarine was elevated by means of powerful geared tackle provided for this purpose, and the job of substituting a new plate for the damaged one was begun. It was finished by sunset.

That afternoon Rob and Merritt took the shotguns and started for the other shore of the island to see if they could not bring down some shore birds. They tramped along the beach and met with some success. Their walk brought them to the opposite shore of the island, as has been said, and they found themselves in a desolate stretch of country, nothing but sand and brush and coarse shore grass.

They were discussing the odd nature of their mission on the island, when Merritt suddenly grasped his companion's arm and pointed seaward, toward another of the islands that have been mentioned as being scattered pretty closely in the vicinity. Rob was just in time to catch sight of a motor boat, seemingly a fast one, slipping behind the spot of land.

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At the same instant a figure rose from the grass almost in front of them. It was Barton the machinist. He had apparently been concealed in the grass, and had not calculated on the boys discovering him.

"Well, what are you after now? Spying on me again, eh?" he snarled angrily.

"I don't know why you should say we were spying on you," rejoined Rob, "unless you are up to something wrong."

"What do you mean?" asked Barton, stepping quickly toward him as if to strike him.

The man's hand was upraised, but the determined way in which Rob met his angry glare caused him to drop it.

"I want you to quit followin' me around, that's all," he said.

[133]

"I guess this island's big enough to hold all of us," snapped Merritt, "and as for following you around, we have other and better occupations on our hands."

The machinist made an angry reply and set off across the island at a rapid pace. As he did so an odd incident took place on the island behind which the motor boat had vanished.

On a staff which the boys had not previously noticed a red flag began to glide up and down. Sometimes it was hoisted quickly and then again slowly.

"What in the world are they doing over there?" wondered Merritt.

"I can't make out unless they are a party of crazy campers amusing themselves," rejoined Rob; and then he suddenly burst out: "By Jove, I have it; they are signalling."

"But signalling what or who?"

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"I haven't decided yet; but I wonder if the same thought has occurred to you as to me?"

"Namely, what?"

"Why, that Barton was watching those signals."

"You mean that they were intended for him?"

"That's what."

"But what would they be signalling him for?"

"Only one thing that I can think of. You know what the ensign said about spies; well, if that fellow Barton isn't up to some crooked work, why should he sneak off like this and be so anxious to hide from us when we happen along accidentally? Then, too, there's that paper covered with drawings that I found in the engine room."

"By ginger, I see what you are driving at. You think that Barton is a traitor, and is in league with those spies?"

"It's a grave accusation to make, but I can hit on no other explanation of his actions. He is angry at us because he thinks we may see too much. Look, they are still signalling."

"I wish we could read what they are saying."

"I think I can," rejoined Rob quietly.

"You can?"

"Yes."

"How are you going to do it?"

"By bringing my knowledge of Morse into play. I think that when the flag is run up slowly it means a dash and a quick run is a dot. Let's try it anyway."

Luckily the spot where the two boys were was grown with high, coarse grass, and the sand dunes rose high in places, affording protection for them.

As the flag rose and fell they spelled out a word according to the Morse code.

"That's 'Ready'," proclaimed Rob exultingly; "we have hit on their code, all right."

"They're still at it," exclaimed Merritt, as the flag continued its eccentric rises and falls; "what's next, I wonder?"

Dash—dash—dash—dash, spelled out the flag.

"That means 'to'," declared Rob.

"Yes, and there comes 'night'," exclaimed Merritt a moment later. "And now they've stopped. Let's see what message we've caught."

"Short and sweet," laughed Rob. "I guess we came in at the tail end of their confab. All we've got is 'Ready to-night'."

"Well, isn't that something?" demanded Merritt. "At all events it's a complete sentence and tells us that somebody will be ready for something to-night."

"Right you are, and that 'somebody' is to be Barton, I'll bet a doughnut."

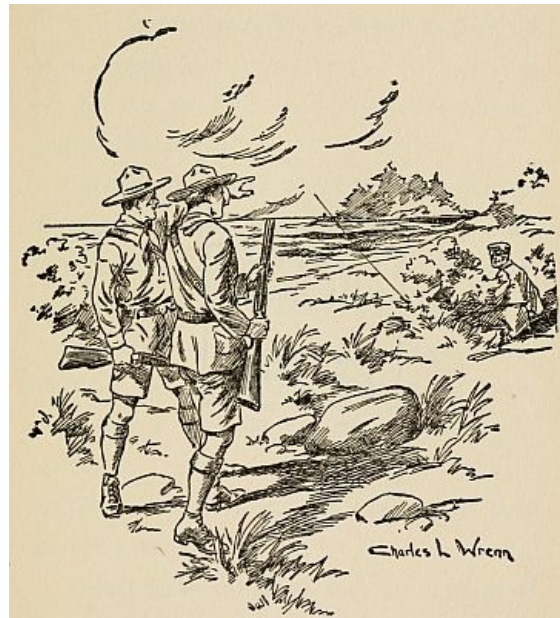
"But ready for what?"

"That remains to be seen. I've always thought Barton would bear watching. I'm certain of it now, and if the submarine isn't mixed up in this tangle somewhere, call me a Chinaman."

"Are you going to tell the ensign about this?"

"Not till we have something more tangible to go upon. After all, we have proved nothing, but to-night we'll keep a close watch on Barton and in that way find out if our suspicions are correct or not."

And so it was arranged. The boys hunted a bit more, but somehow the strange signals and the peculiar behavior of Barton had got on their minds, and they gave up their sport earlier than they had expected and trudged back to camp to complete their arrangements for the night's work.



ROB WAS JUST IN TIME TO CATCH SIGHT OF A MOTOR BOAT, SLIPPING BEHIND THE SPOT OF LAND.

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CHAPTER XVI.

SCOUTING FOR UNCLE SAM.

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"Rob! Rob! Rob!"

Merritt nudged his dozing companion as they lay near to the submarine shed, where they had taken up their position earlier in the night. Immediately after supper the lads had, apparently, slipped off to their tents; but as soon as they were sure that they were free from observation they had, in pursuance of their plans, taken up a position close to the sheltering place of the *Peacemaker*.

Rob had dozed off shortly before midnight, and the words at the beginning of this chapter formed Merritt's notification to him that it was time to bestir himself. [139]

The boy, aroused at once from his nap, sat up at his comrade's summons.

"What is it?" he asked in a whisper.

"Look! Look yonder! Don't you see Barton sneaking toward the shed?"

There was no moon, but in the starlight Rob, thus admonished, could distinctly discern a shadowy figure gliding across the sand dunes to the submarine shed.

"It *is* Barton, sure enough!" he exclaimed in a low, tense voice. "I guess we were right, Merritt, when we read that 'Ready to-night' message."

"We sure were," was the response; "the question now is, what is that fellow up to?"

"Some sort of mischief, just as we surmised," was the reply. "Let's do an Indian crawl toward the shed and see what we can find out."

The next instant both boys were noiselessly wriggling their way on their stomachs toward the shed into the interior of which Barton had, by this time, vanished. It was easy work to make a noiseless advance over the soft sand, but so thoroughly had both the Boy Scouts practiced the maneuver of silent advance that even had the ground been different, it is likely that they could have approached unheard. [140]

Right up to the very walls of the shed they wriggled their way and then, placing their eyes to a crack in the timbers, they peered in. By the yellow light of a lantern Barton had lighted they saw him dive down into the interior of the submarine and emerge, ere long, with several rolled sheets of paper.

The fellow did not appear to labor under anxiety that he was being watched, for he went boldly about his business, taking no apparent pains to screen the light or to move noiselessly. Having emerged from the submarine and reached once more the door of the shed, he extinguished the light and glided out into the night like a half-embodied form. [141]

Merritt half leaped to his feet as he saw the fellow making off, but Rob drew his companion down into their place of concealment with a whispered,

"Hold on. Don't spoil everything now by betraying our presence. Let him get a little way and we'll follow him."

"But we may lose him in the darkness," objected Merritt.

"I scarcely think so," was the rejoinder; "in fact, I have a pretty good idea where he is bound for."

"And where may that be?"

"The place in which he lay this afternoon to read those signals from the distant island. Depend upon it, he is going to meet the men who manipulated that flag!"

"By hooky! That's so, Rob. What a mind you have for figuring out things! Of course, it's plain enough now that he is betraying Mr. Barr by giving drawings and plans of the submarine to Mr. Barr's enemies, but I didn't think he'd take so bold a method." [142]

"There's nothing very bold about it," retorted Rob. "He is a trusted man, and has been given every opportunity to be dishonest, if it so suits him."

"I guess that's right; but it's our duty to thwart him."

"You just bet it is, and we'll do it, too, if it's possible. See, there he goes over the top of that sand dune. I could see his figure silhouetted against the sky. I reckon it's safe now to take after him."

"All right, you say when."

"I'll give the word right here. Silently, now; remember he is on the outlook for some interference with his plans, and a false move may spoil everything."

"Don't worry about me. A first class Scout should be able to carry through a simple little thing like this." [143]

"Don't be too sure it's simple," admonished Rob, as they silently rose from their crouching postures and took after the vague shadow; "this thing may turn out to be bigger than we thought."

"Have you laid any plans as to what you will do if we do apprehend him in the act of transferring the plans to Mr. Barr's enemies?"

"Not yet. There's no use crossing a bridge till you come to it."

Through the night the boys pursued their quarry as silently as two snakes. At times they lost sight of him, but always his figure would loom up against the star-sprinkled sky as he topped a sand dune. At length they saw him pause and light the lantern, which he had used in the shed, and which he still carried.

This done, he swung the light twice across his body, after the fashion of a brakeman signalling a train to come ahead.

Instantly, out of the darkness, flashed an answering beacon—a red light. The boys clasped each other's arms. That they were on the brink of an exciting adventure they did not doubt. But in each lad's heart was a firm resolve that, come what might, they would do their duty by Uncle Sam. [144]

"Was that red light shown from the other island?" whispered Merritt.

"No, I am inclined to think it came from that launch we saw sneaking in behind the island this afternoon just before the signalling commenced," was the response.

"In that case, she must be still far out?"

"Yes; but in any event they would have to send a boat ashore. That launch is too large to land on the beach directly."

As if in answer to his opinion the watching boys presently saw a red light creeping over the water toward the island. Undoubtedly it came from a small boat, so low on the water was it.

Before long they could detect the splash of oars, although whoever was rowing the boat was trying to make as little noise as possible. [145]

As the light drew close in shore, Merritt seized Rob's arm.

"What's the next move?" he asked.

"It looks as if it were ours," was the quiet, but determined, rejoinder.

CHAPTER XVII.

 [146]

ROB'S BRAVE ACT.

While the boys had been watching, Barton had lain down, as though tired, on the summit of a near-by dune. As the red light came close in shore, however, he arose, and once more waved his lantern.

At the signal the course of the red light shifted and headed directly toward him. The boys' hearts beat thickly; the time for action was at hand. The bow of the boat they had seen approaching grated on the beach, and two figures sprang out while Barton advanced to meet them.

"Get as close as you can," whispered Rob, as he wriggled forward; "we want to get every word." [147]

Merritt merely nodded; but his silent advance was as rapid as his leader's. Owing to the nature of the ground, they were able to run forward in an almost upright position when they reached the hollows of the dunes, being compelled to cast themselves down only when they topped a rise. Therefore, they were within ear shot when Barton greeted the two men who had disembarked from the boat.

"Well," said one of the newcomers in a voice which plainly betrayed his foreign origin; "well, did you do as you said you would?"

"Yes," responded Barton; "I've got the drawings here. They are not complete, however, and you will have to give me more time."

"As you were told at Bridgeport, before you left for this island, you can have all the time you want, only make the job complete."

"You can depend upon me to do that," was the response. "So long as I'm well paid, I'll sell out all I know, and that's about everything about the Barr submarine." [148]

Here another voice, that of the second man who had left the boat, struck in:

"What about the models?"

"I've got them hidden up here in the sand," came Barton's voice in reply. "I'd have had them ready but two blooming kids trailed me here."

"Trailed you? What do you mean?" demanded the voice of the man who had first spoken and who, with the solitary exception noted, had carried on most of the conversation.

"Why, this Ensign Hargreaves, this Navy dude, saw fit to bring a band of Boy Scouts down here. They're the nosiest kids ever, and I half think they suspect me of not being all I appear to be."

"That's a good guess," whispered Rob to Merritt.

Merritt could not refrain from a quiet chuckle.

"As a long distance and local guesser, Barton takes the palm," he breathed.

[149]

"Hush!" murmured Rob under his breath: "What are they up to now?"

"Going to dig up those models, I guess. Barton must have stolen them from the workshop at odd moments."

Right then something happened that gave Merritt a shock. Rob rose to his feet and started toward the beach. The men that the two Boy Scouts were watching had headed inland, evidently to aid Barton in uncovering the hidden models.

"Have you gone crazy, Rob? Lie down here," cautioned Merritt.

"Not much," was the response; "I'm going to do some reconnoitering while I've got the chance."

"What do you mean?"

"That I'm going down to have a look at that boat, and if I can I'm going to shove her off and thus leave those men prisoners on the island."

[150]

"By ginger, Rob, you are a great fellow for ideas. If only you can cast the boat adrift, we'll have those chaps bottled up as securely as if they were in a jail."

"Wait here till I come," responded the boy leader. "I won't be gone more than ten minutes."

"I'd like to come with you, Rob."

"No; this is a job I can do best alone."

Rob noiselessly slipped away. The boat from which the mysterious men had landed was plainly discernible as a black blot on the sandy beach. Rob tried to make himself as inconspicuous as possible, but against the white strip of sand he felt as noticeable as an elephant. However, he gained the boat without interruption.

Its bow had been built up, apparently, to make it more seaworthy, and the boy noticed that a small door had been cut leading into the space beneath the raised bow. He had hardly discovered this when he was startled to hear voices close at hand.

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It was Barton and his crooked accomplices coming back. Fortunately for Rob, they were behind a dune, so that it was impossible for them to observe him. But in a moment, the boy realized with a thrill, they would be upon him.

Quick as a flash, and hardly realizing what he was doing, Rob sought the only place of concealment close at hand—the space under the raised bow of the boat. He had hardly squeezed into his cramped quarters before the trio of rascals topped the rise.

Rob, with a sinking of the heart, realized at that moment that it would have been better for him to have taken his chances and run away from the scene. But it was too late now. With something that was not exactly fear, but very like it, Rob recognized the fact that he was a concealed passenger, a stowaway, on board a boat on which his presence might cost him his life.

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As these reflections ran through his mind the men drew closer, talking about the "clever" work they had done.

"I guess Barr and his *Peacemaker* can say good-bye to Uncle Sam now," laughed one of them.

"Yes, and the best of it is that Barton will never be suspected," responded the other. "Our government will be manufacturing submarines of the Barr type, while Barr and the United States Government are still in blissful ignorance of the fact that all efforts are for nothing."

"You can bet I never put through a job unless I do it right," struck in Barton with great self-complacency.

Rob, crouched in his cramped place of concealment, flushed with anger. Right then and there he determined that, come what might, he would see this strange adventure of his through to the bitter end. This resolve was still in his mind when the two men shoved the boat off, bade good-night to the rascally Barton, and, all unconscious of their secreted passenger, got under way.

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"If I get out of this alive, I'll be lucky," soliloquized Rob as he heard the oars and felt the boat moving through the water. "I wonder if I've done right? At any rate I'm in it now, and, as a Boy Scout, I'm going to see it through."

CHAPTER XVIII.

[154]

THE ISLAND HUT.

Rob, in his place of concealment, could hear the two men talking as they rowed.

Their conversation related, in the main, to the affairs of the night. Apparently, so far as Rob could gather, the stealing of the plans of the submarine was not yet complete. It appeared that Barton was to remain on the island in his capacity as trusted aide to Mr. Barr, and to gather up all he could of the details of the new submarine, down to the smallest particular.

Scarcely daring to breathe, Rob listened with all his might to the conversation of the oarsmen.

At the same time the thought was running through his mind that he had acted rashly in taking the step he had. But the boy pluckily made up his mind to stick to his resolution of discovering just what was going on inimical to the plans of the United States Government and Mr. Barr.

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Before very long the prow of the boat grated on a sandy beach, and the two men, gathering up some rolls of paper and several bulky-looking objects, left the craft, first securing it by an anchor and line.

As their footsteps died away, Rob ventured to raise his head above the gunwale of the boat and follow them with his eyes. He saw them ascend the beach and enter the hut, apparently a structure once used by fishermen or hunters.

After an interval a light shone from the solitary window of the hut, and Rob came to a sudden resolve to find out just what was going forward. With this object in view he clambered out of the boat, taking every precaution against making unnecessary noise. On hands and knees he then approached the lighted window.

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The night was dark, and, standing at a fair distance from the casement, he did not feel much fear of being seen from within. It is hard for persons in a brightly lighted chamber to perceive what is going on outside.

Seated around a rough table in the hut, which consisted of only one room, Rob saw three men. Two of them, undoubtedly, were those who had unconsciously rowed him to the island. The other he recognized with a start as the possessor of the face which had peered through the transom on the memorable night in Hampton, when plans for the experiments on the island were in process of being formulated. In other words, the third member of the party was none other than Nordstrom Berghoff, the spy.

Instantly many things that had been vague to Rob crystallized into a clear understanding of the situation. The signals from the island, the indignation of Barton over the presence of the Boy Scouts, and the stealing of the plans and models, all stood out plainly now as being part of an elaborate plot of which Berghoff was the mainspring.

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A wave of indignation swept over the boy as he contemplated the rascals within the hut gloating over the things they had obtained from the treacherous Barton.

"The scoundrels," he thought; "so they think they can rob Uncle Sam of one of the greatest submarines ever invented, and do so with impunity! I don't care what happens, I'll fool them if I can."

With this resolve firmly embedded in his mind, Rob crept closer to the window. By skillful maneuvering he was at last almost under the casement. In this position every word uttered within the hut was clear to him.

He heard Berghoff chuckling gleefully over the manner in which the night's work had been carried out.

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"Undt not a vun of dose Boy Scouts knew anting aboutd idt," he exclaimed.

"No," rejoined one of his companions, a swarthy man with a pallid face on which there stood out a bristly beard; "those kids were out of the game so far as we were concerned. That Barton is a slick one, all right."

"Well, he's getting well paid for the job," struck in the third man, who was short and stocky, with a crop of rough, reddish hair and a protruding chin that gave him a "bull doggy" aspect.

"Of course, he gedts vell paid," rejoined Berghoff; "dis job is vorth de naval supremacy of the worldt to der country vot I represent."

"As if we didn't know that as well as you," rejoined the red-haired man. "It was lucky we worked in the same machine shop in Bridgeport with Barton and knew he was a man who could be bought."

"Yes, there isn't much that he wouldn't do for money," chimed in the pallid-faced man.

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"Vell, ledt us see if dese plans are all righdt, or if ve must get some more of dem," remarked

Berghoff.

From his manner of examining the intricate prints and plans, Rob knew that the man, as were most probably his two companions, was an engineer of no mean ability. With a small pocket scale he went over every scrap of paper and then fell to examining the models. From his expression, Rob judged that Barton had served the rascal well. Berghoff declared the plans and the models all that would be required to produce a *Peacemaker* almost the exact duplicate of Mr. Barr's diving-boat.

"Well, when do we make our getaway?" queried the red-haired man when the examination was concluded.

"To-morrow ve go," declared Berghoff. "In New York I catch der steamer for Europe undt you two scatter verefer you like."

Rob felt his face flush with indignation, and at the same time he experienced a sort of hopeless feeling of indecision. The plans and the models lay there, almost within his reach, but so far as the possibility of recovering them was concerned, they might as well have been in China. [160]

"If only all the boys were here," he thought, "it would be possible to 'rush' those scoundrels and secure all their loot."

Finally Rob came to the decision to remain where he was for the present and see if some opportunity would not present itself to recover the articles of such vital importance to Uncle Sam's Government.

The men talked on, conversing in low tones, and presently the red-headed man started to prepare some food on an oil stove, which must have been brought from the motor boat earlier in the day. Till sundry appetizing odors began to drift out to him from the plotter's cookery, Rob did not realize that he was hungry. Before long, however, his desire for food became almost overwhelming. It was tantalizing to lie out there in the dark, tired and hungry, and hear within the hut the clatter of knives and forks and inhale the odors of what was evidently a hearty meal. [161]

At length the men stopped eating, and Rob heard them discussing whether they should sleep in the hut or on board their motor boat. The boy pricked up his ears as he listened. If only they decided to sleep on the boat and leave the models and plans in the hut, he would have a chance to recover the stolen property and make away with it in the beached rowboat before dawn.

Rob could hardly restrain an exclamation of delight when the men came to the decision to pass the night on their boat.

"What are you going to do with this stuff?" inquired the pallid-faced man with the stubbly beard, indicating the mass of papers and models. [162]

"Oh, we'll leave that here till morning," was Berghoff's response; "dere is no use in taking idt by der boat now."

"Goodness," thought Rob, "I sure am in luck! It will be no trick at all to get that stuff as soon as they have gone, and carry it back to the island. I almost wish it was going to be a harder task. It's a bit too much like burglary to suit me."

But Rob was not to have such an easy time of it as he anticipated.

CHAPTER XIX.

 [163]

A CHASE IN THE NIGHT.

The men left the hut, banging the door behind them. Rob waited till the sound of their voices grew dim in the distance, and then raising himself cautiously he crept around to the door of the hut.

The light had been extinguished, but as the boy had matches in his waterproof case this fact did not worry him. Pushing the door open Rob entered the place. Before striking a light he did all he could to assure himself that he was not likely to be interrupted by the sudden return of the men.

Having established to his satisfaction that he was safe, which was not until he perceived a light on the motor boat, which lay not far from the hut, he proceeded to light up the lantern the men had left behind. [164]

Anxious not to lose any time on his risky task, he began stuffing papers and plans into his pockets at once. The models, or most of them, he decided he would have to convey to the boat in his arms.

He had hardly completed the task of stowing the papers in his pockets, when he was startled at hearing footsteps coming toward the hut. Hastily he extinguished the light, uttering an inward prayer that it had not been seen. Luckily for himself he had taken the precaution of closing the door as soon as he had the lantern lighted.

Just before extinguishing the lamp, he had gazed about the place for some spot of concealment. But the hut, as has been said, was a crude affair, and no closets or cupboards presented a chance of hiding. The only thing that Rob could think of to do was to slip under the table and trust to a miracle that he would not be discovered. Hardly had he carried out his intention when the door opened and two men entered.

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They were the red-headed man and the pallid-faced individual, who appeared to act as assistants to Berghoff. At any rate, judging by their accents, they were foreigners.

Rob had placed the lantern on the table in a position as much resembling that in which the men had left it as he could. He heard a match scratched and then the sputter of the flame.

"Don't see why Berghoff sent us back to get that stuff," grumbled one of the men angrily; "it's as safe here as it would be anywhere."

"Well, as we're getting good pay for this job, we might as well obey orders," was the reply.

"Gee whillakers!" came a sudden exclamation from the man who had attempted to light the lantern.

"What's up?" asked the other.

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"Why, the plagued thing is red hot!"

"Red hot?" exclaimed his companion in tones of amazement. "How can that be when it's a good half hour since we put it out?"

"Dunno, but it burned my fingers, all right."

"Say, Mike, do you think anyone has been here since we left?"

"Who could have been here? And yet, come to think of it, it's blamed queer. Tell you what we'll do."

"What?"

"Search this place. It won't take long."

"Good for you," rejoined the other, while Rob quaked in his place of concealment.

"There ain't many nooks or crannies, so the job won't take long."

"That's right. We'll begin by looking under the table—Jeehosopha!"

The sudden exclamation was caused by Rob's suddenly springing up, upsetting the table and planting his fist full in the fellow's face. The lantern was dropped in the excitement and the hut was plunged in darkness. Rob had come to his sudden decision to act as he did as the only way to escape the men.

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For a time it looked as if he would be successful. Dashing past the man who remained on his feet he made for the direction in which he knew the door lay. In fact, as the men had not closed it, he had no difficulty in locating it by the starlight outside.

"Hey! Stop! Stop!" roared the fellow behind him.

Rob sped on like the wind, using every ounce of running ability he possessed. Straight for the beach he made, devoting all his energies to a swiftly formed plan to get into the beached boat and row to safety. It was a desperate plan, but he had no other resources.

He was within a few yards of the beach when a dark form loomed suddenly before him. In the starlight Rob saw something glittering in the newcomer's hand. This object was leveled at him, and a stern voice commanded him to stop or be shot.

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Rob, with a throbbing heart, pulled up. He recognized the voice as that of Berghoff and knew that if he did not obey the order the desperate ruffian would have no hesitation in sending a bullet into him.

Berghoff, who had been aroused by the cries of his aides when Rob escaped from the hut, came up to the lad, keeping him covered with his wicked-looking "gun."

"Who are you? What you doing here?" he demanded sternly.

The next moment, and before Rob could reply, the fellow noted the Boy Scout uniform.

"Oh, ho!" he exclaimed in a malignant tone. "So you are one of dose Boy Scouts, eh? You think you pretty smart, eh? You wait. I may make you pay for your fun."

There was a cold sort of malice in the man's way of speaking that actually sent a chill down Rob's spine.

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But he plucked up courage to make a bold reply.

"I know the sort of illegal trafficking you are engaged in, Berghoff," he said boldly, "and I tell you, you had better leave me alone."

"Is dot so?" sneered the fellow. "You haven't seen the last of me for a long time yet."

"My friends will punish you for this," exclaimed Rob, in as confident a tone as he could assume.

"It will be a long time alretty before you see your friendts again," jeered the other. "Ah, here comes Mike and Gyp, now. Now ve findt out what you vos doing up by der hut."

As the spy had said, the two men who had been in the hut came up at the moment.

Berghoff instantly demanded to know what had occurred in the hut.

"By gosh, cap," said the red-headed man who, it seemed, was "Mike," "it happened so sudden I can hardly tell you. We goes up there to get them papers as you told us, and the first thing you know out jumps this young catamount and hits me a swat on the jaw that 'most put me out fer the count."

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"That's right," corroborated his companion; "that's just what he done, cap."

"How did he get here?" demanded Berghoff angrily.

"Dunno, unless he flew," rejoined Mike helplessly. "Hadn't we better search the young varmint and see what he's got in his pockets?"

"Yes, you had better search him at once."

"My last chance has gone," thought Rob as the two fellows seized him roughly and began rummaging his pockets.

It would have been worse than useless to resist, so Rob submitted to the search, while Berghoff stood looking grimly on as the papers were extracted from his pockets by the two ruffians.

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"If only I'd hurried a little more," thought Rob to himself bitterly. "If only I'd hurried, I'd not have been in this predicament now."

"So you almost got away mit vot you came after," exclaimed Berghoff as the last of the papers was removed from Rob's pockets and handed over to the spy; "it voss an inspiration dot made me send my men back by der huts."

"What will we do with the kid?" asked the man known as Mike.

"I don't know yet," was the rejoinder in a harsh voice. "Ve ought to throw him in der sea. He knows too much aboutt us."

"That's right, cap," came from Gyp, the pallid-faced man, "it's just as Barton told us, these blamed Boy Scouts are on to us."

"Vell, it don't be goodt to get ridt of him righdt now. Better bring him aboard the boat."

"All right, cap. Come on, you young sneak!" said the man known as Mike.

He gave Rob's arm a vicious twist, and with one of the men on either side of him, and Berghoff walking close behind with the revolver, there was no recourse for Rob but to accept the situation as it came. But in mind he was casting about desperately for a means of escape. None had occurred to him by the time they reached the motor boat, which was moored at a tumble-down wharf, or jetty.

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The motor boat proved to be a sixty-foot affair, with a cabin amidships. Into this Rob was gruffly ordered.

"Get aboard now, and look slippy about it," was Mike's way of urging the Boy Scout on board the craft.

Rob obeyed the order with a sinking heart Things looked about as black as they could be, so even his optimistic nature was compelled to admit.

CHAPTER XX.

[173]

ON BOARD A STRANGE CRAFT.

Once inside the main cabin Rob was thrust into a small stateroom opening off the larger apartment. He heard the lock click as the door was slammed to, and knew that he was a prisoner.

It was dark inside the cabin, but by feeling about he discovered a bunk on one side of the place. Critical as his situation was, the boy was so tired that he flung himself down on this, and, before long, while still pondering his quandary, he sank into a deep slumber.

When he awakened it was broad daylight. By the motion of the craft Rob knew that she was at sea. Getting up from the bunk he peered out of the small porthole of the stateroom. Outside nothing but the ocean was to be seen. Of course the boy had not the slightest idea where they were, or how long the boat had been running.

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All he did know was that he was a prisoner, ravenously hungry, achingly thirsty and almost fagged out. His slumbers had been uneasy and had not refreshed him.

Outside he could hear voices in the larger cabin. Crawling to the keyhole he listened intently. Berghoff was talking. Rob heard enough to convince him that the plans of the band had been changed.

"There will be a big hue undt cry ven dey findt oudt der boy is gone," declared Berghoff. "We must findt some place where we can stop till der excitement dies out."

"That's right, cap," agreed one of his companions, "but where can we go?"

"There are plenty of small islands further down the coast. One of those would suit our purpose," struck in another voice, which Rob recognized as that of the pallid-faced Gyp. [175]

"Dot's a good idea," agreed Berghoff; "gedt out der chart and look one up."

The voice sank into inaudibility and Rob threw himself back on the bunk. At least he knew now what to expect, isolation and captivity with three desperate men. It would be wrong to say the lad was frightened. Possibly the very nature of his predicament had dulled his brain, as is sometimes the case.

"I wonder if they are looking for me now?" he mused, and with the thought came a glad realization that Merritt knew of the signals from the island and would inform the ensign of them.

"If they only follow me up quickly, maybe they can overtake this craft," he said to himself, "although she's a fast one."

At this juncture of Rob's cogitations the door was thrust open and Gyp entered with some food and water. [176]

He placed them on the floor and started to leave the room in sullen silence, when Rob stopped him.

"What are you going to do with me?" he demanded.

"Don't ask no questions and you'll get told no lies," growled the man, slamming the door and relocking it on the outside.

"Well," thought Rob, "it's plain that I'm to be kept in the dark as to my fate. Well, it's no use worrying. I'll tackle this food and take a good long drink of water and then see if I can come to any conclusion."

The meal brightened Rob up wonderfully. After eating it he sat on the edge of the bunk casting about for something to keep his mind off his troubles, when he suddenly recollected the mysterious cipher found on the *Good Hope*.

Reaching into his pocket he pulled it out and began figuring with the stump of a pencil on the back of an old envelope. But ingenious as he was, he found it hard to decipher. He tried half a dozen well-known systems on it and was about to give up in despair when he recalled the "Letter" method of reading cryptic numeral ciphers. [177]

This system requires the operator to figure out the recurrence of different numerals and the order in which they appear. Rob noticed that the number 5 occurred most frequently. Now E is the most used letter in any bit of English writing, so the lad set down 5 as answering for E.

After this he figured industriously till he had managed to make something like sense out of the first paragraph of the old writing.

It would be wearisome to take the matter step by step in all its details. Suffice it to say, therefore, that Rob found that he had hit on a correct system and at the end of two hours had the following message before him.

"It is buried twenty-four paces from dead cypress and to the west. The island lies in long. 80 degrees 50 minutes and lat. 33 degrees 24 minutes. To whoever finds this and reads it, I will the ivory. Death is close to me now. Good bye to all." [178]

When his task had been completed, Rob sat gazing at the paper before him. Unquestionably it gave the location of the dead whaler's cache. For an instant the boy thought, with a thrill, that he was within reach of a fortune. But the next moment he recalled where he was, which, in the interest of his task, he had forgotten. Then, too, he remembered that the dead man's two companions who marooned him on his own ship had probably carried out their intention of returning and carrying off the precious hoard.

"So that's all of that," mused the boy, "but just the same, if I ever get out of this scrape, I mean to hunt up that island and see if I can locate the fate of those mammoth tusks."

All day the boat moved swiftly along, and it was not till the following morning that anchor was dropped, as Rob knew by feeling the motion of the craft stopped, and by hearing the rattle of the anchor chain. [179]

"I wonder what is going to happen to me now?" he mused.

He had not long to wait.

"Come out on deck and help us row the dinghy ashore," Gyp muttered as he unlocked the door.

Heartily glad to get out of his cramped quarters, Rob obeyed.

Coming on deck he found Berghoff and Mike already there. The former had a formidable-looking revolver strapped on him. The boat was lying off a small, sandy island, isolated from the others, in one of the groups that are common on that part of the coast.

It was wooded and appeared to be a fine spot for Berghoff's purpose of remaining in seclusion till Rob's friends gave him up for lost, and the mystery of his capture blew over. [180]

The dinghy, which hung on the davits astern, was lowered, and Rob roughly told to "pile in and row us ashore." He obeyed the order, noticing that in the boat were tent and camping supplies. Evidently these had been placed in it before he was called on deck.

His heart sank as he observed these preparations for an extended stay on the lonely island. Once ashore, he was forced to help in putting up the tent, building a fire and doing other jobs to make the camp habitable. Then, without food, he was set to chopping wood. After a hasty meal, Berghoff disappeared, leaving Rob guarded by Gyp and Mike, who lay at full length smoking lazily while he worked.

When Berghoff returned he announced that there was no trace of humanity on the island. With this statement vanished Rob's last hope of help. He had nourished a secret aspiration that there might be some campers or fishermen living on the place. [181]

When the sun set that night Rob's feelings were down to zero. The very fact that he was not closely watched seemed to prove to him the utter impossibility of his escaping. True, there was the boat, but that had been drawn up on the beach by his wily captors so that it would be impossible for him to move it without attracting their attention.

CHAPTER XXI.

 [182]

OFF ON A SEA TRAIL.

As minutes and then hours elapsed and Rob did not return, Merritt became first anxious, and then seriously alarmed. He knew Rob's daring nature, and had a keen fear that it might have led him into doing something reckless.

It was almost dawn when he at length determined to return to the encampment and seek out Ensign Hargreaves. By the time he had tramped back over the sandy dunes day was breaking, and in the camp of the Boy Scouts the notes of the morning bugle were ringing out cheerily. The first of the Scouts to note Merritt's return was Donald Grant.

He came running toward him, and then stopped short as he noted the other's drawn, tired face. [183]

"Why, what in the world's the matter with you, Merry?" he gasped out. "You look as if you'd been drawn through a knothole. Where's Rob? Where have you been all night?"

"I'll explain that later," said Merritt wearily; "just now I've got to find Ensign Hargreaves. Rob's either been kidnapped or lost."

He hastened on, leaving the other lad rooted to the spot with amazement and alarm. He knew Merritt well enough already to realize that the other was not the sort of lad to overrate a situation. If Merritt was as scared and weary as he looked, something serious indeed must have taken place.

In the meantime Merritt hastened to Ensign Hargreaves' tent. Hastily arousing him, he hurriedly explained the whole matter. The officer was out of his cot in an instant.

"You had no business to go off alone like that without notifying me," he exclaimed rather sharply. "Don't you know that the first duty of a soldier, a sailor or a scout is to obey orders?" [184]

Merritt crimsoned and hung his head. He knew that the officer was right.

"We thought we were doing a good thing," he said, "but I know now that we did wrong in not notifying you."

The ensign's hand fell on the lad's shoulder. Then kindly enough he said:

"Well, acknowledging that you did wrong is a manly thing, my boy, and we'll say no more about the matter. But about Rob, something must be done right away. Arouse Mr. Barr while I am dressing and we'll set about searching for him at once. There's little doubt in my mind but that he is on that island where you saw the signals flying."

"But how could he get there unless he had an airship?" inquired Merritt.

"Hasn't it occurred to you that he might have hidden in the boat while the men were out of it?"

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"Gracious! In that case he may be their prisoner by this time!"

"I am afraid that there is little doubt of that. We must get after the rascals at once."

By the time the ensign was dressed, Mr. Barr was also attired, and the two immediately began a discussion of plans for the rescue of Rob. But first the ensign wanted to know about Barton.

It was hard for Mr. Barr to believe that the man whom he trusted implicitly could have proved traitor to him.

"The best way to find that out is to look at your papers and models and see if anything is missing," was the response.

"I'll do so; but I'm sure the boys must be mistaken in Barton. He has worked for me for many years."

"Possibly the large price he was offered to turn over the plans of the *Peacemaker* had something to do with it," suggested Merritt.

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"Perhaps; but I'll not say anything till I find out definitely that something is missing."

Mr. Barr hastened off toward the shed, but returned before long with a countenance filled with apprehension.

"My most important blue prints and models are missing!" he exclaimed.

The ensign made a dry grimace.

"Our young friends were right," he said. "In detecting the rascal they have done an excellent piece of scouting work. But now let us hurry off in search of Rob at once."

"How will you reach that other island?" asked Merritt.

"We will go in the motor boat. She is fast and does not draw much water."

"Can we all go along?"

"No, we'll take one of my sailors, your chum Donald, Tubby Hopkins, you and myself. We haven't settled accounts with Barton yet, and I don't want him left practically alone on the island."

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"Do you think he would try to harm the submarine?"

"I think it likely. He has probably been paid to injure it so that the rival power that is working against us can construct its submarines first."

"But you are going to make him confess?"

"If he will, yes. If not, he faces a long prison term, although it will be hard to prove that he actually stole the papers and models."

"But we saw him answering those signals, and then again, last night we saw him meet the men."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't make very good evidence in a court of law," was the rejoinder. "But enough of this now. Tell Hawkins (one of the sailors) to get the boat ready, and hurry through your breakfast We'll start right afterward."

"We can't start too quick for me," was the brisk reply. "Poor old Rob, I wonder what has happened to him."

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While he ate a hasty meal Merritt outlined to the other Scouts what had happened. Following this, Ensign Hargreaves announced a change of his plans. He had decided, he said, to take Barton along, not caring to leave the man on the island.

"He is clever and dangerous," he said, "and I want him under my eye till I have decided how to dispose of his case."

"You are not going to let him know you suspect him?" asked Merritt.

"For the present, no. As to what I shall do in the future, I have not yet made up my mind."

Ten minutes later a black motor boat shot out of the little inlet in which she had been moored. As she sped seaward, making for the other island, those left behind set up the cry of the Eagle and Wolf patrols.

Barton, looking sullen and suspicious, was at the engines. He knew the object of the trip, but, of course, had no knowledge that his part in it was suspected. Nor did any of the party show him by looks or words that so much as a breath of suspicion attached to him. This was by the orders of Ensign Hargreaves, who had determined to give the fellow plenty of rope.

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As the *Viper*, as the black motor boat was called, raced over the water, Merritt found himself gloomily contemplating the future. If anything serious had happened to Rob, he felt that he would be in a measure responsible for allowing the young leader of the Eagles to go off alone.

CHAPTER XXII.

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A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.

Half an hour after her start, the *Viper* glided alongside the island from which Merritt had seen the signals go up the afternoon before. He could not forbear to take a glance at Barton as the ensign ordered the engines stopped.

The machinist was stooping over the motor to hide his agitation; but by the trembling of his hands Merritt could tell that the fellow was apprehensive of something that might involve himself. As soon as the anchor dropped, the motor boat's dinghy was drawn up alongside and the ensign and Merritt boarded it. The others were left on board the *Viper* with whispered orders from the officer to watch Barton's every move. The island was a small one, and from its highest point it was possible to see all around it. To Merritt's bitter disappointment, however, no sign of another motor boat was in sight. Their quarry had flown.

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"There's but one thing to do," declared the ensign; "we must make for that small hut over yonder and search it thoroughly. It may yield a clue of some kind."

A short walk brought them to the hut which had been the scene of the stirring events of the preceding night. Hardly had they entered the door before Merritt gave a start of surprise and a swift exclamation.

"Look! Look there!" he cried. "There's Rob's hat!"

Sure enough, lying in a corner was the boy leader's campaign hat, which he had lost in the scuffle with Mike and Gyp.

"Well, that shows conclusively enough that he was here last night, and from that upset table and the general look of things, I should imagine there had been a pretty lively scrap here," commented the ensign.

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"But where can Rob be now?"

"Probably fearing discovery if they remained here, the men who have taken the plans and the models carried him off, too."

"How will it ever be possible to obtain a clew as to where they have gone?"

The ensign's answer appeared enigmatical.

"Could you describe the motor boat you saw off here yesterday?"

"Well, she was of a very remarkable color—a light green, with a signal mast sticking up amidships. Then, too, her cabin was unusually high."

"Good. Such a boat as that ought not to be very hard to locate."

"I don't quite understand."

"Well, then I'll explain. These waters are fairly well traveled, and by working our wireless we may be able to get into communication with some boat similarly equipped, which may have seen that green motor boat."

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"Cracky, that's a good idea," cried the admiring boy; "let's go back and try it at once."

"Yes, it's small use our waiting about here. The rascals overreached us by getting away as quick as possible. I suppose they didn't want to run any chances of discovery."

The return to the *Viper* was quickly made, and the motor boat was driven back to the Submarine Island at top speed. Barton tried with all his might to overhear what was said in the bow of the boat where the Boy Scouts had gathered; but the ensign was careful to keep his voice low, and then, too, the noise of the engines precluded the machinist from catching a word, hard as he strained his ears.

Under the tutoring of Hiram Nelson, the wireless scout, the others had all become fair operators. It was agreed that day and night one of them should be at the apparatus, seeking for news of the green motor boat.

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It was the ensign's opinion that the craft would not put into a port immediately, fearing a hue and cry, but would cruise about or hide in some little frequented part of the coast. But he hoped that if the wireless "caught" some vessel that had spoken to her, he could at least obtain a line on which direction she had taken.

The first "session" at the wireless was taken by Hiram, then came the others in rotation; but when at ten o'clock that night Donald, who had learned wireless on his father's yacht, came on duty, there had come no word from the air of a green motor boat. Several ships had been spoken to, but not one reported anything to give the boys hope.

"Well, good-night, old man," said Merritt, as Donald, who relieved him, came on duty, "and

good luck."

"I'll keep a good watch out, all right," was the earnest response. "It's our only way to get poor old Rob back."

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"I'm afraid so," sighed Merritt, leaving the place with a despondent air. As Donald had said, it was a chance—but what a long, seemingly hopeless one!

Donald, left alone, began sending out calls, and every little while he paused for an answer out of space to his appeals. As he pressed the sending key the blue, lithe spark leaped and crackled between its points like a fiery snake. Then all would become silent again as he listened for an answer to his call.

Once he caught a steamer bound north and carried on quite a conversation with its operator. He felt quite lonesome when he closed down his sending apparatus with a parting "good-bye."

It was very still about the encampment. So still, in fact, that the boy began to feel more and more lonesome. He longed for someone to talk to; but he knew that chance would not come till Tubby, his relief, appeared.

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The stout youth was almost due when Donald suddenly got into communication with a steamer called the *Cambria*, bound north from New Orleans to New York. He put his customary query about the green motor boat.

"A green motor boat?" came back the reply.

"Yes," flashed Donald.

"With one signal mast and a high cabin?"

"Yes! yes," shot out Donald, pounding the key excitedly. "Have you seen such a craft?"

"We sighted her this evening."

The boy's fingers shook as he wrote down the reply with flying pencil on the scratch pad at his elbow.

"Down off some islands about Lat. 80 deg., Long. 33 deg.," came the answer. "She was coming straight toward us and then all of a sudden she headed away. Seemed like she didn't want to get near us. Is that all?"

"Yes; good-bye, and thank you," flashed back Donald exultantly.

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His fingers had hardly left the key before he was startled by a soft footfall behind him.

The boy wheeled like a flash and then almost fell off his chair. Facing him, with an ugly-looking revolver in his hand, was Barton, the machinist.

There was a mean sneer on his sinister face as he snarled out:

"Let me see that message and let me see it quick."

"I've got no message for you," responded Donald, determined not to let the man know that he had information of the green motor boat's whereabouts.

"That's a lie," snarled Barton; "don't monkey with me. I've got this gun and, jingo, I know how to use it, too."

CHAPTER XXIII.

[198]

THE DEPTHS OF OLD OCEAN.

Just as Donald, who was no match physically for the burly machinist, was pondering what to do, the door which was open became filled by a rotund figure.

It was Tubby.

In a jiffy he took in the scene, the threatening attitude of Barton, the alarmed look of Donald, who stood staring at the revolver like a bird fascinated by a snake. Tubby realized that it was no time for thinking the situation over. Instead, he crouched low, and then, darting forward with surprising agility, he seized the machinist around the legs before the fellow knew what was happening.

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Taken utterly by surprise, and borne off his feet by Tubby's rush, Barton came crashing to the floor in a heap. As he fell the revolver exploded, the bullet passing by Donald's head.

Barton struggled desperately with Tubby, but the stout youth held on to him like a leech, at the same time yelling for help. In a few seconds the ensign and Mr. Barr came rushing in, followed by the Boy Scouts and the sailors. There was an end to the battle then and there. After a brief resistance Barton, snarling and cursing, was tied hand and foot, and the ensign ordered him

locked up in the dining room shed for the present.

Donald soon told his story and proudly exhibited the message from the air which told of sighting the green motor boat. All agreed that it was a cheering bit of news.

"If they were near a lot of islands when sighted, it is most probable that they are hiding on one of the group. At all events, having the latitude and longitude, it will be easy to go down there and see."

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"What are you going to do about Barton? We have full proof of his villainy now," struck in Merritt.

"I suppose we shall have to take him along with us. We can't waste time going ashore now and risking the law's delays. We will go down the coast in the submarine with the *Viper* acting as escort, and Barton a prisoner on the *Peacemaker*," decided the ensign.

"I wonder why he was so anxious to see that message?" spoke Tubby.

"I guess he knew we were trying to trace the green motor boat, and was watching the wireless through that window. When he saw Donald busy taking a message, he guessed what it was, and decided that it was necessary for him to see it," hazarded Mr. Barr. "How I have been deceived in the rascal!"

"You certainly have. His actions show him to be a scoundrel of the worst type," agreed the ensign.

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There was not much more sleep for anybody that night. Excitement ran far too high for that. An attempt was made to force Barton to confess his part in the conspiracy, but he sullenly refused to talk.

"You've got nothing on me," was all he would vouchsafe. "Anything those tin soldier kids tell you is patched up out of whole cloth."

Slumber being out of the question, the rest of the night was devoted to stocking both craft with food and water in good quantities. In this work the Scouts helped with a will. They were aided by the three sailors, who were to be left behind to guard the island, and therefore did not work any too hard.

Dawn found all in readiness, and at the summons of the bugle all lined up before Ensign Hargreaves to receive their orders. To the submarine were assigned Merritt and Donald, besides Mr. Barr, Ensign Hargreaves, and the prisoner Barton. The *Viper's* crew was captained by Tubby, a capable motor boat engineer, and Hiram and the others. When this had been done, Barton was led before Ensign Hargreaves.

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"Barton," said he sternly, "you have acted the part of a scoundrel and should be behind the bars now. But I need you for work, and upon the manner in which you perform it, will depend just how severe your punishment will be. Cast him loose, men, and take him into the engine room of the submarine. You are to stand by for orders."

"I'll try to do my best, sir," rejoined Barton in a soft tone of voice, very unusual for him. "I'm sorry, sir, for what I did, but I was led astray by promises of money."

This change in the man was almost startling. From a sullen, morose fellow he had suddenly, or so it seemed, become a dutiful, attentive man, willing to obey orders and do his best. Was all this genuine? We shall have to go further to see.

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There being no excuse for delay, and as all were anxious to get off as quickly as possible, the two craft were boarded. The hatch of the submarine was left open for the present, for it was the intention of the ensign to run "awash," as it is called.

The motor boat running very nearly as fast as the submarine, they kept each other company down the coast with little difficulty. It was fine, exciting sport in the motor boat as it cut its way over the swells, hurling spray and water out to either side of its sharp bow. If only the boys had had Rob with them, they would have enjoyed it much more, though.

All that was visible of the submarine was the top of her conning tower, and the slender, needle-like "eye" of the periscope. The water surged round her conning tower as she rushed along, for all the world like some sea monster speeding on an errand of destruction. She was not going full speed, for the ensign wished to keep company with the motor boat.

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At noon, just as the lads on the motor boat were settling down to lunch cooked on a blue-flame stove, a head was thrust out of the conning tower. It was that of Mr. Barr.

"We are going to run under the surface in a short time," he said; "just follow your same course, and you'll pick us up when we rise again."

"All right," shouted Tubby, his mouth full of ham sandwich, which he held in one hand, while with the other he clasped a big wedge of pie.

The hatch on top of the conning tower closed shortly after with a metallic "clang." The next instant the craft vanished from view in a swirl of water. For a time the tip of the periscope tube, which was twenty-five feet long, projected above the surface; then that, too, vanished, and the

motor boat was alone on the ocean.

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On board the submarine the lads were enjoying themselves as much as their fellow Scouts on the motor boat. This second experience was even more novel and enjoyable than their first dive. Mr. Barr sat in the cabin reading some scientific works. Barton, seemingly a changed character, was at work in the engine room. The negro cook was in the galley, while in the conning tower the ensign was giving Donald and Merritt a lesson in handling a diving craft.

In fact, it was Merritt who was at the deflecting apparatus when the occupants of Tubby's boat saw the submarine sink.

"That is the descending lever and this the ascending one," explained the officer before Merritt sent the boat under the surface.

The levers were small affairs and looked fragile for the work they did of starting up the mighty pumps that caused the boat to rise or sink at will.

"What if one of them should break or be lost?" asked Donald.

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"Well, if we were under water and the ascending lever happened to be missing, we should be in an awkward position, and I don't believe that Mr. Barr carries an extra one."

"Gracious! Then if the lever was lost we should have to stay at the bottom of the sea?"

"That's about the size of it," was the reply.

Mr. Barr, coming into the conning tower just then, confirmed the officer's suspicion that no extra lever was carried.

"I admit there ought to be one as a matter of precaution," he said, "but we were in such a hurry to give the boat her tests that we forgot about it."

All the afternoon the submarine ran under the water, rising about sunset to the surface. In the distance was the motor boat, but far in the rear. The *Peacemaker* was sent around in circle and soon came alongside her companion craft.

Then the hatchway was opened and the ensign shouted some orders to Tubby. The submarine was going to dive once more, but would come up before dark. When night fell a red light would be carried astern which the motor craft was to follow throughout the night. When this had been made clear, the *Peacemaker* dived once more, but this time it had been decided to send her down to a good depth.

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"We will eat an early supper under water just for the novelty of it," declared Mr. Barr.

While the meal was going forward Barton was sent into the conning tower to navigate the craft. He obeyed with the same smooth complacency with which he had received every order since his attack on Donald. Evidently the man was hoping, by good behavior, to save himself from a long jail sentence.

After supper Barton was relieved, and Merritt sent to the wheel in his place. He had been in the conning tower but a short time when he was joined by Ensign Hargreaves and Mr. Barr.

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"I guess we'll go to the surface now," said the inventor; "it must be almost dark up above."

Merritt reached for the lever that operated the ascending pumps. Right then he received the most acute and alarming shock of his life.

There was no lever there!

"It's gone!" he shouted.

"What? What's gone?" repeated the inventor in a puzzled tone.

"The lever! The ascending lever! We can't rise to the surface without it."

The inventor turned pale. Drops of sweat stood out on his forehead. Even the ensign turned a shade whiter than usual.

If the lever could not be discovered, they were doomed to an awful death in the depths of the sea!

CHAPTER XXIV.

[209]

ROB MAKES A DISCOVERY.

Rob, disconsolate and miserable, passed a bad night, and rose early. As his captors were still asleep and had, apparently, made no effort to guard him, he decided to make a tour of the island himself. For one thing, he was by no means sure that Berghoff had been speaking the truth when he said that the place was uninhabited; and again he thought that some form of escape might present itself if only he investigated the place thoroughly.

So the lad tiptoed out of the camp, first taking the precaution to fill his pockets with food. He headed straight into the woods, planning to come out again when he had traveled a safe distance from the camp. He followed out this idea, pushing his way through the brush for a time, and then emerging on a strip of white beach that seemed to extend around the island.

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He trudged along, keeping a bright lookout, but saw nothing that would further his prospects of getting away. All at once, though, as he came around the other side of the little spot of land, he saw another island lying at no great distance off. And on the beach of this island was a boat.

A more welcome sight could not have presented itself to the boy's eyes just then. It meant that there was somebody on the island,—somebody who would surely be glad to help out a lad in his predicament.

"But how on earth am I to get over there?" mused the lad. "The tide is running like a mill race, and I don't know whether I'm a strong enough swimmer to buck it."

Then another idea occurred to him. Just above him was a small point of land. By going into the water from the end of this, he would be some distance above the island he wished to gain, and the current, would, therefore, carry him down.

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"If I only could get a log or something," thought the boy; "it wouldn't take me long to get over there."

He started to hunt for a log that would suit his requirements; but logs didn't seem very plentiful in that vicinity. In his search, he reëntered the woods, and after looking about a bit succeeded in finding one that would just suit his purpose.

Stooping down, he lifted it, and then jumped back with a startled exclamation. A huge black snake had been coiled under the log, and now it struck at him, hissing and darting its red tongue in and out, and showing its vicious fangs!

Before Rob could avoid the creature's attack, it had wrapped itself around his arm, fastening its fangs into his sleeve.

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HE TOPPLED BACKWARD OVER THE BRINK AND PLUNGED DOWN INTO THE SWIFTLY FLOWING CURRENT BENEATH.

Rob battled desperately with the reptile, which lashed its tail and hissed with vicious intonations. The feel of the creature's grip was loathsome to the boy, and although its fangs had not penetrated his tough khaki coat, they might do so at any moment.

In the battle Rob backed out of the woods, striving all the time to free himself, and unconsciously stepped nearer and nearer to the water's edge. Before he realized his position he toppled backward over the brink and plunged down into the swiftly flowing current beneath.

Down he went until it seemed he must strike the bottom! But his fall into the channel had had one good effect. The snake was not gripping his arm any more. When he shot to the surface he saw it swimming for its life, but being carried away from the shore.

In fact, the same thing was the case with Rob. The grip of the water drew him far from the island he had just vacated in such an unceremonious manner, and hurried him toward the spot of land where he had seen the boat. Striking out with all his might, the lad fought the current so as to reach the other island before the water hurried him past it. It was a hard fight even for a powerful swimmer like Rob. His clothes encumbered him cruelly, too; but at last, almost exhausted, he touched bottom and reeled ashore.

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For a time he could do nothing but lie there gasping. Had his life depended on it, he could not have moved hand or foot. But at length his youthful vitality came to his aid and he rose to his feet to look about him.

The current had landed him on a part of the beach from which the boat he had spied was not visible. But he knew in which direction it lay, and started out for it. As he rounded a small promontory he came upon it, a heavily-built, rickety-looking old thing, but still a boat.

Rob in his present situation would have taken anything that would float.

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"I'll examine it first and then go hunt up the owner and make a bargain with him for it," he thought.

With this intention he approached the craft, and the next instant received one of the cruellest shocks of his life.

The boat was a mere shell, falling to pieces from age and exposure to the hot sun. It must have

been years since she had been used, and Rob's experienced eye saw that she would have sunk like a stone the instant she was put in the water. It was a bitter blow to the lad, and for a time he sank down on the sand, completely knocked out.

But after a time he rallied his spirits.

"After all," he mused, "there may be somebody living on the island and that boat may be just an old one they have discarded. I'll dry my clothes and then start out to investigate."

With the drying of his clothes, Rob made an alarming discovery. The food he had taken was most of it reduced to pulp by its immersion, some canned goods alone remaining edible. [215]

"That makes it all the more urgent for me to find some aid," he said to himself; "I don't think that bunch on the motor boat will trouble to look for me. I guess they'd be glad to leave me here if this is a deserted island. In that case, I might die here before aid came."

But thrusting all such thoughts as that aside, Rob determined to meet the situation like a brave Scout.

"I won't give up till I'm at the last ditch," he said to himself with determination, as he put on his clothes. "I'll fight it out to the end."

Somehow this resolution of his made the boy feel better. With renewed courage he set out to explore the island. But he made the circuit of it in vain. There was not a trace to be found of human habitation nor any indication, except the stranded, sun-dried boat, that anyone but himself had ever landed there.

So despondent did he feel over this discovery that had he possessed the strength to do so, he would have swum back to the other island and thrown himself on the mercy of his recent captors. But this was now out of the question. [216]

Unless he could find some way out of his dilemma, it looked as if he would indeed be doomed to leave his bones on those sands. The thought was a dreadful one, and although it was a warm, almost tropical day, the boy shivered and cold sweat ran down his face.

If he were indeed to die there, nobody would ever know his fate, in all probability. He had failed in his mission to recover the papers, too. Altogether he felt in a very miserable frame of mind. It was in this mood that, in order to keep his mind off his predicament, more than anything else, he fell to examining the old boat again. There might be some way to patch her up, he thought desperately, hoping against hope.

Suddenly he made a discovery that set his heart to beating wildly. On the stern board of the boat was cut the name "*Good Hope!*"

CHAPTER XXV.

 [217]

THE DEAD MAN'S HOARD.

The "*Good Hope!*"

What a crowd of memories the name brought buzzing about the boy! The lone derelict, the figure in the mouldering cabin, the—the plan in his pocket!

With fingers that trembled Rob drew out the solution of the cryptogram and read it over.

Then he held his head in his hands a moment to keep it from whirling round.

Could it be possible that this was the island where the hoard of century-old ivory was buried? Had he stumbled by a complete accident upon the cache that had sent one man to his death? [218]

Then he recalled that on his trip of exploration he had noticed a big dead cypress on the other side of the island. But if this was the veritable island where the whalers had buried their ivory, why was the boat lying there mouldering on the beach? Why had they not left again? [218]

The more the boy thought of it, the more mysterious and inexplicable the whole thing became. He resolved to go back to the dead cypress and follow the directions of the cryptic message of the captain of the *Good Hope*.

As has been said, the island was not a large one, and he was not long in reaching the gaunt, dead tree. Somehow he felt a chill go through him as he stood beneath its leafless gray limbs. It reminded him oddly of that skeleton in the deck house of the derelict.

But he pulled himself together and struck off into the woods in a direction that, by using his watch as a compass, he knew to be the west. The undergrowth was thick, but after going a few paces, he reached an open space. [219]

In the centre of this was a sight that made his heart jump and then beat wildly. Strewn in every direction were big tusks of yellow ivory, evidently lying just as they had been dug from the ground.

Rob was still contemplating them when his eye caught the flutter of a rag of cloth at the edge of the open space. Attracted by a curiosity he could not account for, he made his way toward it. If the sight of the ivory had made him jump, what he now saw sent a chill of horror down his spine. The rag that had fluttered had been part of the clothing of what had once been two men.

Both lay close together, their bones showing where the cloth had worn away under Time's finger. A pair of rusty pistols lying by each showed how they had come to their death. The whole tragedy was as clear to Rob as if he had seen it:—the quarrel between the two ivory stealers, the duel with the pistols, and the death of both combatants beside the treasure pile they had done so much wickedness to acquire. [220]

"Truly that figure in the deck house is avenged," thought Rob, gazing with horror-stricken eyes at the things before him. "Death was indeed the wages of sin in their case."

Turning from the grisly relics of that far-off duel on the lonely island, Rob fell to examining the ivory. There was a large quantity of it.

"It must be worth an immense sum," he thought.

But in the very moment of his triumph, Rob suddenly recollected what, in his excitement, he had entirely forgotten for the moment. He was a castaway on a strange, uninhabited island, with only a few tins of beef between him and starvation. Thirst he did not fear, for close to where he had struggled ashore was a spring of sweet, cool water.

Rob made his way back to the beach and the boat. Inside the boat he now noticed what had hitherto escaped his attention. There were several hundred feet of light rope which seemed to be still in fairly good condition. There was, too, a pair of oars. At the same moment the boy was seized by a sudden idea. He could get away from the island, and in a boat, too! [221]

His Boy Scout training had made him fertile in ideas, and if the present one succeeded it would mean his escape from a terrible fate.

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Ensign Hargreaves and Mr. Barr looked sternly at each other.

"There is only one man who could have taken that lever," said the ensign.

"And that is who?"

"The rascal Barton."

"But for what possible object?"

"I cannot think unless he has hidden it and will only give it up as the price of his liberty."

"But if he keeps us down here, he will die, too." [222]

"He is playing his life against ours and he holds the cards."

"Not for long. Come below at once. We must act quickly. There is a chance he still has it on his person."

Down the stairs they ran, leaving Merritt at the wheel with a sinking feeling of fear clutching at his heart. If Barton, turned desperate, had hidden the key and would not reveal its hiding place, it meant that they must remain in the depths till death put an end to their sufferings.

In the meantime, the ensign and Mr. Barr, both excited, had rushed through the cabin and toward the engine room. As they approached the door, it was slammed and a pistol thrust through a small hole in it, which had been cut for ventilation.

Then Barton's voice came ringing out:

"Don't come a step closer unless you want to get a bullet in you."

"What's the matter, man, are you mad?" exclaimed Mr. Barr. [223]

A shriek of demoniacal laughter was the sole response.

It sent a shudder through everyone who heard it. The man was mad, violently insane. The seeds of lunacy, which had been germinating in his brain for a long time, had burst forth into a terrible harvest.

"And on that man everyone of our lives depends," breathed the ensign.

Then in a louder tone, which rang with authority:

"Barton, did you take that ascending lever?"

"Yes; ha-ha-ha! It's a good joke on you! You thought you'd put me in prison, but now we'll all die together."

"Barton," pleaded Mr. Barr, "be rational. Return that lever and you shall have immunity."

"It's too late now!" screamed the demented wretch. "We'll all die together in the depths of the [224]

sea, where dead men's bones rot and the fish eat their eyes out."

A hasty consultation followed between the ensign and Mr. Barr. The man was undoubtedly violently insane, and there didn't seem a chance in the world of dislodging him from his position.

The situation was the more serious from the fact that the fresh air devices were not working properly and the air inside the submarine was already getting noticeably stale and foul.

"We must rush that door; it's our only chance," declared the officer in a whispered voice.

"But he is liable to shoot," objected Mr. Barr, eyeing the blued-steel muzzle of the revolver which was pointed threateningly at them.

"It cannot be helped. It means death in a fearful form if we do not dislodge him from that position, and a man in his condition cannot listen to reason."

"Well, what do you propose?"

"That you start talking to him to distract his attention, offer him money or anything to give up the lever. Then I'll watch my chance and rush in on him; thank goodness, that door has no lock on it."

[225]

"Barton!" said Mr. Barr, in a resonant voice.

"Well?" snarled the lunatic.

"Be calm now and listen to reason. Is it money you wish?"

"No, blood! Human lives!" shrieked the maniac.

At precisely that instant, like a projectile from a gun the ensign's powerful body shot forward. Crash came his solid one hundred and eighty-five pounds against the door.

At the same instant there was another crash, the sharp crack of a revolver! In that confined space it sounded terribly loud.

"He's shot him!" cried Mr. Barr.

But Barton had done nothing of the kind. The attack had been utterly unexpected by him, and as the door banged against him with terrific force, he had been knocked down. As he fell the revolver exploded; before he could pull the trigger a second time the powerful young officer of Uncle Sam's Navy was upon the man. Barton fought like a wildcat, and with the superhuman strength of those afflicted with insanity.

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At last, however, he was overpowered and, raving incoherently, was tied hand and foot and carried out to the cabin where he was placed on a lounge. Mr. Barr, who knew something of medicine, gave him a calming dose from the submarine's medicine chest, and he became less violent.

"Barton, where did you put that lever?" demanded the ensign.

The man whimpered like a child.

"I—I don't remember," he gasped out.

Consternation showed on every face. Already the air was getting worse and worse.

The ensign bent over the bound man, who was now crying weakly.

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"You must remember, man. You must, I say!" he snapped, in tones that cut like the crack of a whip. "Think! think! our lives depend upon it!"

"If I knew, I would tell you," murmured the man; "but I don't. I don't remember."

A stillness like death itself settled on the occupants of the cabin. Barton had accomplished his insane purpose only too well, it seemed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

[228]

WHICH WILL WIN?

Rob's idea was a simple enough one. With his knife he would cut bundles of branches and then bind them to the sides of the boat with the rope. This would at least keep the crazy craft afloat and offer him a means of reaching the shore.

He set to work at once with great enthusiasm, and by dusk his strange-looking boat was ready to be launched. By placing round branches under it for rollers and using another branch as a lever, he soon succeeded in getting it into the water. But it was hard work, and he paused to eat some of his canned beef before going any further.

[229]

To his huge delight the boat, though lopsided and half full of water, was buoyed up by the

branches, and he had no doubt that he could navigate her with the oars. As soon as he had finished his unappetizing meal, Rob clambered on board his "ark," as he mentally called her, and thrust the oars into the rowlocks. The boat was very heavy, and owing to her waterlogged condition pulled very hard. Worse still, Rob encountered a current that carried him toward the other island, the one he had left that morning; and even worse, a fact he presently perceived, his craft was being carried around a point, on the opposite side of which he could see the glow of a fire against the night sky; for by this time it was dark. Rob was heartily glad that this was the case, for he knew that the fire must be that of the rascals who had abducted him, and in the darkness he might slip by them unnoticed.

Luckily the current set a bit from the shore at this point, and although the boy could hear the three rascals carousing around their fire over a keg of spirits, and singing and shouting at the top of their voices, they could not see him, partly because of their condition, and partly because of the firelight. [230]

Past the camp, with its carousing inmates, the boy was carried, and suddenly his boat was bumped against something. Rob looked around. At first he thought he had struck a rock. Instead he saw before him the green motor boat.

Like a flash an inspiration came to him. He clambered on board, and not till he was fairly on deck did he recollect that he had neglected to tie his ark to the side.

He looked over the stern rail. In the dim light he could see his clumsy craft drifting off, bobbing up and down on the tide.

"Well, I've burned my bridges behind me now," he exclaimed to himself. "If I can't carry this thing through, I'll be cold meat by morning." [231]

Just at that moment came a shout from the outlaws carousing on the beach.

Keener-eyed than his companions, Berghoff had spied a dark form on the motor boat, silhouetted against the thickly sprinkled stars.

"There's someone stealing our boat. After him, boys!" Rob heard the fellow roar.

Then he ducked as a volley of bullets came whizzing over his head. His next move was to clamber forward, keeping as low as possible till he reached the anchor chain.

There was no time to haul in, for the men had already run down the beach and launched their small boat.

Rob merely knocked out a shackle pin and let the whole thing go. This done, he scrambled back and descended to the engine room.

"If I can't make this old tea-kettle go, I'm a gone coon," he admitted to himself with grim humor, as he switched on gasoline and spark, and turned the fly wheel over. Outside the shouts were coming closer every instant, and the motor showed no signs of intending to start. [232]

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It was Donald, the Wolf Scout, who saved the day for the prisoners of the submarine.

As Barton rolled about whimpering and cursing by turns, he spied a bright object protruding from the man's pocket.

"Is—is that the lever?" he asked, in tones that trembled with excitement.

Mr. Barr darted on the object and pulled it out with a shout of triumph.

"Once more the Boy Scouts have saved the day!" he cried. "It is the lever, sure enough!"

Close as the atmosphere of the cabin had by this time become, they all found breath enough to give three ringing cheers. In the conning tower Merritt, at the wheel, heard them, and guessed what they meant.

Fifteen minutes later the submarine was shooting upward to the surface toward the blessed air. With what speed the hatch was opened when they reached the surface and could inhale the pure ozone once more, may be imagined. As soon as they had somewhat recovered a red light was shown from the stern, and presently the *Viper* came chugging up. [233]

"Well, where in the world have you been?" asked Tubby.

"Where *under* the world, you mean," laughed Merritt; "but for a time it was no laughing matter, I assure you."

He then gave his fellow Scout a description of all they had undergone. When the excitement was over, word was given to get under way once more, and with the submarine leading, and the *Viper* following the red light, they held their courses toward the south.

It was dawn when they found themselves off a maze of small islands and islets. Donald had the wheel, and was gazing ahead as the submarine, at reduced speed, threaded her way among the shoals and sand bars. [234]

All at once he saw something coming toward them that made his pulses beat far above normal.

It was a green motor boat, with a single military mast and a high cabin.

He lost no time in notifying everybody, and the submarine decks were soon crowded.

"Better get below, boys," warned the ensign; "that is undoubtedly the rascals' boat. In fact, Merritt says he recognizes it. They are desperate fellows, and when they see we have them cornered, they will put up a fight. If they run, I mean to pursue them to the bitter end."

Reluctantly the boys went below, while the ensign and Mr. Barr stood on the foredeck, revolvers in hand.

But although whoever was on the green boat must have seen them, the craft came right on.

"Why, they actually mean to fight," gasped Mr. Barr.

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"They're nery fellows, all right," commented the ensign; "we may have a tougher time of it than we think, Barr."

He turned and warned Tubby to take his boat back out of range. On and on came the green boat without making a sign of any kind, hostile or otherwise.

"What can they be up to?" wondered the ensign in tones of blank amazement.

Scarcely twenty feet intervened between the two boats now, when suddenly a boyish figure, bareheaded and clad in a Boy Scout uniform, leaped to the rail of the green craft.

"Kre-ee-ee-ee!" he shrilled out.

"The call of the Eagle Patrol!" gasped Mr. Barr.

"Yes, and by all that's wonderful, that lad is Rob Blake!" fairly shouted the ensign, waving his cap.

By this time Tubby, too, had recognized his leader. The air rang with cheers, shouts, questions and answers in a perfect babble of sound.

[236]

"Well, who on earth but a Boy Scout could get himself kidnapped and then kidnap his abductors' boat!" exclaimed the ensign that evening as they lay at anchor off Rob's "Ivory Island."

The climax of a wonderful day had been reached. Only one thing marred it. The rascals who had pursued Rob, for he only got the engine going in the nick of time, had got clear away in the rowboat. Possibly they hailed a passing steamer and were picked up.

But, after all, their escape, while annoying, was not of so much importance, for in their haste they had left behind the most important papers and models, and the ones they had taken were valueless, Mr. Barr declared, without the missing ones.

The next day, after a long evening of jollity, the *Viper* set out for Jamesport, S. C., with the unfortunate Barton bound with ropes to keep him from further violent manifestations. The poor man never recovered his reason, but died shortly after being admitted to an asylum. It appeared that in his youth he had been an inmate of an institution for the feeble-minded, but had been discharged as cured.

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On the *Viper's* return, work was begun on transferring the ivory, which was ultimately sold for an amount that netted all of them a handsome sum; for Rob insisted on sharing his good fortune with all his comrades.

CHAPTER XXVII.

[238]

THE ENDURANCE RUN.

The ensuing days, following the return to the island, were filled to overflowing with activity. Exhaustive tests only made the *Peacemaker* appear to be more and more the ideal type of boat for her particular work. By means of the island wireless Ensign Hargreaves, using "code" of course, sent glowing accounts to Washington of the progress of the tests. In these despatches, too, the Boy Scouts were favorably mentioned for their pluck and heroism in the pursuit of Berghoff and his rascally companions.

One day, about two weeks after the return to the island, it was determined by the ensign and Mr. Barr to make quite a run out to sea to test to the full the endurance capacity of the *Peacemaker*. Rob and Merritt were chosen to accompany them. The rest of the boys were left to guard the island, which, among other valuable property, now housed the precious ivory hoard recovered in such a strange manner.

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The day dawned with a red, angry sky proclaiming nasty weather. But this, instead of dampening the ardor of the inventor and his aides, only increased it. It meant that the submarine was in for a real test in a bad sea.

By the time they were ready to start, the wind had freshened into half a gale and a high sea

was running, heaving up big gray combers with white tops which broke angrily.

Into this storm the *Peacemaker* was headed without hesitation. On board were the ensign, the inventor, Rob and Merritt. The two latter were to serve watch and watch in the engine room, while the inventor and the ensign placed themselves under a similar arrangement in the conning tower. [240]

Both Rob and Merritt were by this time fully conversant with the running of the *Peacemaker's* intricate machinery and were trusted to the full by their superior officers.

"Gee! This feels like being afloat in an empty bottle!" exclaimed Merritt as the *Peacemaker* headed into the tumbling seas.

"It sure does," responded Rob, hanging on to a handhold while he oiled a bearing. "I suppose they want to see how much she'll stand on the surface."

"Wonder they wouldn't dive and give us a chance to get a little quiet," observed Merritt as the rolling, bucking *Peacemaker* leaped, as it seemed, skyward and then plunged dizzily down again.

"There must be a hummer of a sea outside. Guess, as I'm off duty, I'll go up and see what's doing," said Rob presently. [241]

He made his way with much difficulty toward the steel ladder leading into the conning tower. The passage could only be made by fits and starts, and the boy for the first time realized the necessity of the handholds placed at frequent intervals on the cabin walls, to which reference has already been made.

Reaching the ladder he scrambled up into the conning tower, and, once inside, braced himself against the wild and erratic motions of the *Peacemaker*. To see through the lenses was impossible. The seas that swept over the little craft blurred the glass with green water and obscured everything outside. But on the *Peacemaker* this condition did not matter. The contingency had been provided for.

The long arm of the periscope with its "eye" on top had been raised, and it reached far above the biggest combers. In front of the helmsman, who happened to be Mr. Barr, was a big plate of ground glass on which every object outside was plainly shown, although of course in miniature. Those of my readers who have ever seen a "camera obscura" will recognize what I mean. [242]

Upon the ground glass, as within a picture frame, was reproduced the motion of the furious seas, the scurrying clouds and the angry storm wrack. It was an inspiring marine painting, with the motion and sweep that an actual painting could never possess. It thrilled Rob as he gazed at it and realized that it was through this pandemonium of the storm that the *Peacemaker* was bravely fighting her way.

"Better slow down a bit, hadn't I?" asked Mr. Barr as the *Peacemaker*, urged by her powerful engines, ploughed right through a mountainous sea.

As she bored her way through the mighty wall of green water, a roar like that of a railroad train resounded and the craft pitched as if she were going to plunge to the bottom of the sea. This latter, in fact, Rob rather wished she would do. He knew that in the depths all would be quiet and undisturbed. [243]

In reply to Mr. Barr's question, the ensign nodded.

"The strain is already pretty strong," he said; "we don't want to force her too hard."

Accordingly the inventor, utilizing the auto control device, cut down the speed till, instead of ploughing through the waves, the *Peacemaker* skimmed over them. Unlike most submarines, which cannot do otherwise than plunge into heavy seas, the *Peacemaker's* hull was so constructed that she rode the waves like a duck.

After a while the sensation of heaving and falling began to get upon Mr. Barr's nerves.

"I'm feeling a bit squeamish," he declared; "let's dive and get out of this."

The ensign nodded and laughed.

"Our friend Rob here is getting a bit pale, too," he said; "and as we don't want a sea-sick crew, maybe we had better seek the seclusion of Davy Jones' locker." [244]

An instant later the *Peacemaker* was plunging downward. At a depth of twenty feet the angry motion of the waves was unfelt. In those dim depths all was as quiet and undisturbed as if the elements were at perfect peace above.

Down, down dropped the submarine till her depth indicator showed that she was submerged five hundred fathoms.

"The chart gives seven hundred hereabouts," commented Ensign Hargreaves, glancing at it; "so I guess we are safe for forty miles more before the floor of the ocean slopes upward. We must go up a bit higher then."

The inventor nodded.

"I understand," he said, and then, "we are now running at what speed?"

The ensign turned to the speed indicator.

"A trifle under twenty miles an hour," he said.

Mr. Barr glanced at the clock before him, which was illuminated by a tiny shaded electric bulb. [245]

"I'll keep on this course at this speed for about two hours then," he determined.

"That will be all right, I imagine," was the rejoinder, "but don't keep on too long. The bed of the sea, according to the chart, rises up very rapidly further on. It must be almost cliff-like in its sudden elevation."

"I'll be on the lookout," the inventor assured him.

Rob descended the ladder once more and reëntered the engine room to find out how Merritt was getting along. He found the young engineer seated on the leather lounge alongside the engines watching them lovingly.

"Work smoothly, don't they?" he said.

"They sure do," was the other's response; "smoothly as a Geneva watch."

The boys sat chatting on various matters, and the time flew along rapidly till Rob suddenly looked at his watch. [246]

"Almost two hours. It's time we were rising," he said.

"What do we want to rise for? It's deep enough here, isn't it?"

"That's just it. The ensign says that the chart shows that a sort of submarine cliff looms up right ahead of us somewhere hereabouts."

"Great ginger snaps! I thought the bottom of the sea was as level as a floor."

"Not a bit of it. It's as full of mountainous regions and flat, depressed plains and valleys as the Rockies themselves."

"Gee whiz! I'd hate to hit one of them. I—"

Merritt stopped short. A terrific crash shook the submarine from stem to stern. Rob saved himself from falling into the machinery by seizing a rail.

For an instant the vibration lasted, and then the diving craft came to a dead stop.

The boys gazed at each other with blanched faces. [247]

Did the crash mean that they had actually struck one of the submerged ranges that make deep sea traveling full of dangers? Had Mr. Barr delayed too long in rising?

On the answer to these questions both boys felt that their lives depended.

They were still regarding each other with consternation when the ensign burst into the cabin.

"Shut off the engines instantly!" he ordered.

"What have we struck? That submerged cliff that you feared?" Rob managed to gasp out, while Merritt hastened to obey the officer's command.

"I—I don't know," was the reply, "but I fear that we are in serious danger!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

 [248]

THE SUPREME TEST.

"Open the side window panel and turn on the searchlight!"

The order came from Mr. Barr five minutes after the *Peacemaker* struck. Naturally enough, everyone on board was seriously alarmed; but in the face of danger the Boy Scouts took their example for action from the naval officer and the inventor.

Although deadly pale, Mr. Barr kept his voice as cool as an icicle. Ensign Hargreaves, while fully realizing the danger, yet steeled himself to calmness; and both Rob and Merritt simulated the courage of their elders.

Rob hastened to obey Mr. Barr's command. After a few seconds of manipulation the slide drew back, exposing the large plate glass panel. To bring the powerful searchlight into play was the work of but a moment. [249]

As its white rays pierced the gloomy depths of the ocean like a scimitar of light, all on board peered intently from the panel and strove to make out what it was that the diving boat had

struck.

At first nothing could be seen but the dark water with myriads of fish swarming about the bright light, which appeared to attract them as moths are attracted to an arc light.

"Swing the light," ordered Mr. Barr; "bring it to bear a little more forward."

Rob obeyed, and the ray of light swung in an arc through the obscurity outside of the *Peacemaker*. All at once, with a sharp exclamation, Rob stopped it.

"Look! look!" he cried, pointing from the window.

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They looked and saw before them what appeared to be a steep acclivity, ribbed and rocky as a mountain side. It was against this submerged cliff that the *Peacemaker* had struck.

"That submarine cliff appears to be of a soft formation," declared the ensign after a brief scrutiny; "our bow has driven into it."

"Then we are doomed to remain here?" asked Merritt with a bit of a quiver in his voice.

"Not necessarily. It's up to us now to do all we can to extricate ourselves."

"But how?"

The question came from Rob, whose voice, try as he would, persisted in faltering. It was an awful feeling to experience, this of being penned scores of fathoms beneath the ocean's surface in a diving boat.

"Well, I have a plan in mind. It is a desperate one, but possibly it may work."

"What do you propose to do?"

This time it was the inventor who propounded the query. Clearly enough Mr. Barr himself could think of no way out of the quandary.

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"I don't care to say just yet," responded the naval officer.

"Why not?"

"Because it is a sort of forlorn hope that I don't care to advocate until absolute necessity arises."

In the dire extremity into which they were plunged, not one of them cared just then to waste time by asking questions. Clearly Uncle Sam's officer was at the head of affairs. In silence they awaited his next word.

"Rob, you must reverse the engines. Give them all the power they will stand. It's just possible that we may be able to back out without injury, although I fear that we are pretty deeply buried in this cliff."

Rob, accompanied by Merritt, hastened to obey. Together the two boys entered the engine room, and Rob at once operated the mechanism which caused the *Peacemaker* to go backward.

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As he pulled over the lever and the engines began to whirr and buzz, everyone on the boat waited breathlessly for the result. But the *Peacemaker* did not move. Under the strain of her laboring engines the steel fabric shook and chattered, but not an inch did the diving boat budge.

Rob and Merritt exchanged despairing glances.

"Can't you get any more power out of her?" asked Merritt anxiously.

Rob shook his head.

"Not a bit more, old man. She's running at her utmost now."

"Then we're stuck?"

"It looks that way."

"And we're doomed to die right here unless the nose of the boat can be got out of that cliff!"

"Never say, 'die,' Merritt. We've done the best we can, and remember the ensign said that he had a plan if all else failed."

[253]

"Yes, 'a forlorn hope' he called it."

"In a case like this we can endure anything. Desperate situations require desperate means to solve them."

As the young Scout leader spoke, Ensign Hargreaves burst into the engine room.

The engines were still whirring and buzzing, and the hull of the *Peacemaker* was quivering under their powerful stress.

"Have you developed every ounce of power they are capable of?" asked the naval officer.

"Yes, sir," responded Rob respectfully; "they can't do another revolution."

The officer looked anxious.

"In that case, we shall have to resort to my forlorn hope," he said.

"And what is that, sir?" asked Rob, his heart beating uncomfortably fast.

"Come forward and you shall see."

The ensign turned and swung out of the engine room, followed closely by two anxious boys, Rob having waited only to shut off the engines. [254]

In the main cabin Mr. Barr, his face white and strained, sat on one of the leather divans.

He looked up as the boys and the naval officer entered.

"The engines won't back her out?" he asked in a voice harsh and rough from anxiety.

"No. I'm sorry, Barr, but we're in a mighty bad fix. This submarine cliff must be of a sort of blue clay formation that is common off this coast. We have apparently driven into it so far that nothing short of an earthquake would dislodge us."

"An earthquake?"

"Yes; such a spasm of nature alone can set us free."

"Then we are doomed to remain here."

"Not of necessity; we have still a chance of escape."

"What do you mean?"

"That my plan offers a mere chance." [255]

"Then let us not delay in putting it into execution."

"But it is a dangerous one!"

"Never mind that. Nothing could be more serious than our present predicament."

"Very well then, we will try out my idea. It's our last chance."

"Our last chance!" The words sounded to the boys almost like a requiem. Plainly enough, whatever Ensign Hargreaves' plan might be, there were dangers attached to it, and no light dangers, either, to judge from his grave tones. Eagerly they awaited his next words.

"My plan is nothing more nor less than this," he said; "I propose to create an earthquake."

"To *create* an earthquake!" Mr. Barr echoed the words, staring at the ensign as if he thought he had gone suddenly insane.

"Precisely. I intend to produce by artificial means an eruption which will destroy enough of this cliff to set us free, or else blow the *Peacemaker* herself into atoms." [256]

Mr. Barr buried his head in his hands. Skillful inventor and scientific expert though he was, the last words of the naval officer had sapped even his iron courage.

"Is there no other way?"

"No other way. It's a gamble for our lives."

"What do you propose doing?" asked Mr. Barr in a strange, broken voice.

"As I said, to create an artificial earthquake."

"I am unable to follow you."

"Then I'll make it clearer. In the torpedo compartment forward you have six Red Head torpedoes fully charged with gun cotton?"

"Yes."

The inventor was regarding the naval officer with intense interest now, and the boys also stood transfixed, their eyes riveted on the ensign as he unfolded his plan.

"What I propose to do," he continued, "is to discharge from the side torpedo tubes two torpedoes. They will be aimed at the cliff and, of course, when they strike it, will explode." [257]

"But in that case our bow would be blown off also, and we should perish almost instantly," declared Mr. Barr.

"Wait a minute. I didn't say we would discharge them *directly* at the cliff. What I propose doing is this: We will aim one on each side of the spot where our bow drove in, taking care to train the tubes so that the torpedoes will not strike too near."

"Yes, the tubes are movable. That is one of the features of the *Peacemaker*."

"Very well, then, they will be as easy to train in any desired direction as a rapid fire gun."

"Exactly. But I never thought when I designed them that I might some day owe my life to that very feature."

"Well, we are by no means out of the woods yet," responded the ensign drily.

He led the way to the forward torpedo room. This was right in the bow of the boat and most of the space was occupied by odd-looking machinery. Wheels, worm gears and strange-looking levers were everywhere. At the farthest end of the steel-walled chamber was a sort of derrick contrivance. This was the piece of machinery used to raise the torpedoes and swing them into the tubes. [258]

Like the other machinery on the *Peacemaker*, the derrick was operated by electricity. A pull of a lever and Mr. Barr had set its machinery in motion. The torpedoes were placed on racks so that it was a simple matter to secure them to the lifting chain of the derrick. First one and then another of the polished steel implements of deadly warfare were raised to the mouths of the torpedo tubes which projected into the chamber.

Despite their immense weight, the torpedoes were placed within the tubes with no more difficulty than a sportsman experiences in shoving two cartridges into the breech of his gun.

In ten minutes from the time the party entered the torpedo chamber, the steel implements of death had been "rammed home" and the breech of the tubes clamped and fastened. On the *Peacemaker* type of submarine compressed air at an enormous pressure was used to give the torpedoes a start, although, of course, they contained the usual machinery within themselves to drive them through the water after they left the tubes. [259]

There followed a moment of suspense as the compressed air, with a hissing sound, rushed into the tubes.

Mr. Barr, deadly pale but without a tremor in his voice, announced that all was ready.

The ensign merely nodded and began to operate a worm gear which swung the tubes at an acuter angle to the body of the submarine vessel.

"I think we are all right now," he said presently.

"Very well," spoke the inventor, his hand on a lever, "when you say the word, I'll discharge the torpedoes." [260]

"You might as well do it right now," was the response.

The inventor, with hands that shook, swung the lever back.

There was a hissing sound and a slight tremor as the compressed air shot the torpedoes from the tubes. Less than a second later, simultaneously it seemed, the submarine was rocked and swayed by a terrific convulsion. The boys and their elders were thrown right and left with a force that almost knocked them senseless.

It was but a few moments after the explosion of the two torpedoes that Ensign Hargreaves uttered a shout that thrilled them all.

"We're rising!" he cried. "My plan succeeded after all!"

"I think that we ought to give thanks to Providence," said Mr. Barr reverently. "As the ensign has said, the plan succeeded, but it was taking one chance in a thousand. Had that cliff not been shaken so as to release us, we might have perished miserably and left our fate a mystery." [261]

The boys were in the conning tower by the conclusion of Mr. Barr's words. The barograph showed them to be rising a hundred feet a minute. No words were exchanged between the two young Scouts, but each grasped the other's hand in a firm grip and gazed into the other's eyes. There was no necessity of speech. Both realized that they had passed through the gravest peril that even they had experienced in all their adventurous lives.

When the *Peacemaker* reached the surface once more, the storm had subsided. With their hearts full of deep gratitude for the miraculous chance that had saved their lives, her occupants headed the speedy diving craft back for the island at top speed. The *Peacemaker* had been through the supreme test and had not been found lacking.

"I tell you what, Barr," declared Ensign Hargreaves, as they neared the familiar island, "you have the most wonderful boat on earth, and Uncle Sam has *got* to have it. My report goes in to Washington to-morrow and you can guess what it will contain." [262]

"Thank you," said the inventor simply, extending his hand.

CHAPTER XXIX.

INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH.

"That's queer, Rob!"

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"What's queer, Merritt, the way you've been sitting and staring for the last ten minutes?"

"No; that odd noise. Don't you hear it?"

The two lads were seated in the cabin of the submarine on "night guard duty," as it was called. Following the anxious days when Berghoff had made affairs on the island so filled with uneasiness for the Scouts and their friends, this sentry duty had been regularly maintained.

On this particular night the task had fallen to Rob and Merritt. There was nothing very arduous about it, the only duty involved being to keep ears and eyes open. Both lads had been engrossed in books dealing with their favorite subjects when Merritt called Rob's attention to the odd sound he had noticed. [264]

"Maybe my ears are not quite so sharp as yours, old boy," said Rob, after an interval of listening. "I've got a slight cold, anyhow, and perhaps that's why I don't hear so readily."

"Possibly so."

"You are sure you weren't mistaken?"

"Think I'm hearing things?" indignantly responded Merritt. "No, siree, I'm willing to bet. Hark! There it is again!"

"By Hookey! I heard it that time, too. What can it be?"

"Hush!"

The noise was a most peculiar one. It seemed to be a sort of scraping on the outside of the submarine's hull. The diving craft was anchored at some distance from the shore, so as to be more readily prepared for a projected run the following day. This made the noise all the more inexplicable, as, had the craft been in the shed, it might have been caused by the inventor or the ensign paying a night visit to see that all was well, which they sometimes did. [265]

"Perhaps it's a log bumping against the side."

"No; it appears to come from under the water."

"That's so," agreed Rob; "tell you what, Merritt, it's up to us to investigate."

"Yes, let's go on deck and see what we can find out."

Together the two lads climbed the steel stairway leading to the conning tower, and presently emerged on the rounded steel back of the diving craft. They stood here for a minute or two, trying to get their eyes used to the sudden change from the bright light of the cabin to the inky darkness of the night. It was overcast and starless, and it was impossible under any condition to see more than a few yards about them.

Suddenly Rob clasped Merritt's arm with a grip that made the other lad wince. [266]

"Look! Look there!" he cried. "Off there. It's gone now. It only showed up for an instant."

"It's your turn to be nervous," rejoined Merritt; "blessed if I saw anything!"

"My eyes must be as sharp as your ears, then. I'd swear I saw a shadowy thing sneak away from us across the water."

"What sort of a thing?"

"A boat. I only saw it an instant, of course; but I'm sure I wasn't mistaken."

"You think that somebody in that boat was monkeying with the *Peacemaker*?"

"That's the only reasonable explanation."

"But what could they have been doing?"

"That remains to be seen; but it's our duty to try to find out."

"What's your plan?"

"Well, that scraping noise appeared to me to come from the under side of the hull."

"Yes."

"Then that's the place to look for mischief."

"But how are you going to get at it?"

"Dive over and feel around at about the place where we heard the sound."

"That was on the port side and apparently right under the cabin floor."

"Then that's the place to look."

As he spoke, the young leader of the Eagles stripped off his shirt, for the night was warm and he was coatless, and then divested himself in turn of his shoes and trousers. [267]

This done, he turned to Merritt.

"I don't know just why, old fellow," he said, "but I've got an idea in my head, somehow, that there's some sort of dirty trick being put up to-night."

"What do you mean?"

Merritt asked the question looking into his comrade's eyes as he clasped Rob's extended hand. For some reason he felt a cold shudder run through him. What the danger was that Rob dreaded he did not know, but there was something in the hand-shake that his leader gave him that almost seemed like a farewell clasp. [268]

Before his inquiry was fairly out of Merritt's mouth, Rob had disengaged his palm and slipped silently over the side of the submarine. As the waters closed above him, Merritt almost cried out aloud. The same mysterious sense of a danger, terrible and imminent, had run through his brain like a warning flash. But it was too late to recall his comrade now.

Whatever peril Rob was facing, he was called upon to brave it out alone.

* * * * *

Earlier that evening a small, but fast and high-powered motor boat had glided almost silently out of Bellport, a fishing village on the coast, and, waiting till darkness had descended, made at top speed for the vicinity of the submarine island.

The men who had chartered the craft were two in number. Both were strangers in Bellport, having driven over there that afternoon from the adjacent railway station of Farmington. One was an old man, stoop-shouldered and bleary-eyed. The other was an individual of about thirty, tall, emaciated, and with a wild light dancing in his crafty eyes, which darted back and forth as if constantly on the lookout for something. [269]

Going directly to the Bellport Hotel, they had inquired of Enos Hardcastle, the proprietor, where they could hire a motor boat.

"A fast one?" croaked the old man.

"The faster the better," supplemented his companion, in a queer, rasping voice.

Enos scratched his head.

"Wa'al, motor boat's is scarce around here, though some of ther boys uses 'em in fishing," he said finally.

"Good!" exclaimed the younger of the pair of strangers. "Direct us to the man who has the fastest one." [270]

"That's Lem Higgins; but Lem drives a hard bargain. It'll cost ye——"

"Never mind the cost; never mind the cost," croaked the old man impatiently. "Come, Ivan, let's find this Higgins."

"You go ter ther foot of this street and you'll find Lem down on ther wharf," directed the landlord of the Bellport Hotel, whose curiosity was by this time aroused. There was something odd about the two strangers, almost as odd as the large black bag the younger one carried. This receptacle he held as gingerly as if it contained some article of the most fragile description.

"Beg pardon, strangers," spoke up Enos, "but what might you be after havin' in that bag?"

The slender man turned a pair of blazing orbs on him.

"What business is that of yours?" he snapped out, his queer eyes appearing to emit sparks of malignant fury.

Enos hastened to extend the olive branch. [271]

"Oh, no harm, no harm," he hurriedly exclaimed. "I thought that you two might be sellin' suthin' the wife 'ud have a use fer, thet's all. Wanted to give you a chancet ter drive a trade."

"I reckon your wife wouldn't care much for what's in this bag," snarled the old man viciously; "and let me give you a bit of advice, my friend: Don't ask questions and you'll be told no lies."

So saying, the two oddly assorted strangers made off down the street, the tall one still carrying the black bag with precise care.

Enos reëntered his hotel, wagging his head sententiously.

"Suthin' queer about them two fellers," he muttered to himself; "ain't sellin' nuthin' an' they don't look as if they was on a pleasure trip. Wa'al, it's none of my business, but if Lem makes a dicker with 'em he'll hev ter come across to me with a commission, an' that's all I care about." [272]

Lem Higgins was sitting on the wharf, swinging his legs and regarding with interest an imminent fight between two dogs of the "yaller" variety, when the old man and his tall companion came up.

"Your name is Lem Higgins?" asked the old man sharply.

"That's what they usually say when they want me," responded Lem. "Do you want me?"

"We want your boat."

Lem's eyes lightened. Fishing had been poor, and perhaps here was a chance to make some easy money. He scrambled to his feet, showing unusual animation.

"You want my boat? You want ter hire her, you mean?"

"Yes. What's your figure?"

The old man was doing all the talking now. His tall companion stood silently by. At his side was the black bag, which he had deposited on the ground with the same curious care that had marked all his dealings with the mysterious article. [273]

Lem ruminated a minute, looked seaward, ejected a small fountain of tobacco juice, and then asked, with his head cocked on one side:

"Where might you be a-goin'?"

"Never mind that, my friend. That is none of your business."

The old man spoke sharply. Lem regarded him blankly.

"None o' my business! Then how in Sam Hill am I a-goin' ter run the boat?"

"You are not going to run it."

"I ain't, eh?"

Lem was all "taken back," as he would have put it. He had been figuring on a good price for the hire of the boat and a further fee for himself as skipper. Certainly neither of the pair before him looked capable of handling a power boat.

"No; if we take your boat we shall run it ourselves." [274]

"You will?"

The astonished Lem gazed at the stooped figure before him. He was almost bereft of words.

"Yes, I will; does that satisfy you?"

"Wa'al, I'll be plumb dummed," choked out the fisherman; "I should think you'd know more about crutches an' arm-chairs than about running gasoline boats."

"Your opinion is not of the slightest interest to me. How much do you want for the boat?"

"Fer how long?"

"From about sunset till daylight to-morrow."

"Fer all night, you mean?"

"Yes."

"That's a queer time to go out."

"Possibly; but we choose to do it. If you don't want to let your boat, say so, and have done with it. We'll find another."

"Oh, as far as that's consarned, ef you kin run her I don't mind ef you go out any old time. But I'd like ter see ef you kin, afore we go any further." [275]

"Where is she?"

"Right out there. I'll row you out to her. Come on down this ladder; easy, now. You're pretty old for this sort of work."

But, despite the old man's apparent decrepitude, he stepped down the steep and rather rickety ladder, at the foot of which lay a dory, with the agility of a youth. His companion declared that he would remain on the dock.

Guessing that he didn't want to leave the bag, of which he seemed so careful, Lem hailed him.

"Come on and bring your grip, ef ye scared o' leavin' it," he said.

But the other shook his head, and Lem pulled out toward his launch with only the old man as passenger. The launch was a black, rakish-looking craft, and once on board the old man expressed approval of the powerful, two-cylindrical engine with which she was equipped.

"Say, you do know suthin' about ingines, don't yer?" admired Lem, after a few sharp questions had shown him that the queer old man really knew what he was talking about. [276]

A muttered grunt was the only reply. The old man was spinning the fly-wheel over, after making a few adjustments of the gasoline and spark supply. A moment later the motor was sputtering and coughing, and the launch was struggling at her moorings.

Lem cast off and ran the craft about the harbor for a while. At the conclusion of the test he was satisfied that the old man actually did understand the workings of gasoline motors. Returning to the wharf, it only remained for a bargain to be struck, and this was speedily done. But Lem still held out for something more.

"Seein' as I don't know you an' you're takin' ther boat out alone, I ought ter hev a deposit or suthin'," he declared, his eyes narrowing.

"What's your boat worth?" demanded the old man.

"Wa'al, I paid a thousand fer her," rejoined Lem, who had only doubled the actual sum the launch cost him. [277]

"Here you are."

The old man reached into a recess of his black coat and produced a roll of currency, which Lem later declared to his cronies would have "choked a horse." Rapidly peeling off several bills of large denomination, he paid the exorbitant deposit, plus the price agreed upon for the hire of the boat for the night. Lem, too astonished to do more than stutter, pocketed the money without a word.

"One thing more," said the old man; "we shall need a small boat to tow along."

"Oh, then yer goin' ter land some place?"

Lem, having recovered the use of his voice, had also regained his rural curiosity.

The old man regarded him angrily, and then, in his peculiar, snarling voice, he whipped out:

"What's that to you? We've paid you too much for your boat, and you know it. Here's fifty dollars more. That's not to ask any questions and not to answer any." [278]

"Oh, I'll keep mum," Lem assured him, pocketing the extra money with sparkling eyes. "When you're ready to go, I'll have a small boat ready for you, never fear."

"Good. We'll be here at five o'clock sharp."

The old man and his companion sauntered off up the street. Lem watched them till they entered the Bellport Hotel. Then, to himself, he exclaimed in tones that fairly burst out of him:

"Wa'al, what d'ye know about that? Them chaps is either lunatics or millionaires, or both. Wa'al, it's none of my affair, an' there might be things I wouldn't do for fifty dollars, but keepin' my mouth shut for a while ain't one of 'em. What a yarn I'll have ter tell when them two chaps gets out of town! Kain't get over thet old feller, though. Fer all his years, he's spry as a boy; suthin' mighty funny about both on 'em."

With this, Lem resumed his seat on the edge of the wharf and dismissed the matter from his mind as far as was possibly consistent with the knowledge of the—to him—gigantic sum reposing in his blue jeans. [279]

Yet, had he known it, he was letting slip through his fingers the possibility of earning a far larger sum. For the man with the queer eyes was Ivan Karloff, a notorious anarchist, for whom a reward of five thousand dollars was offered, following a bomb outrage in New York, and his companion was Berghoff himself.

What were these two men doing in Bellport? Why did they want a fast boat for a mysterious night trip?

The answers to these questions would have held a burning interest for our friends on the submarine island. Like a vicious snake, Berghoff was preparing to strike what he hoped would be a vital blow at the *Peacemaker* and her guardians. Crafty and unscrupulous, he had invested in his services Ivan Karloff, whose price for dangerous undertakings was high, but whose skill in his nefarious line of endeavor was supreme. [280]

It was about midnight when Lem Higgins' motor boat crept up to a spot not far from where the *Peacemaker* lay at anchor. Behind her she towed the promised small boat. Berghoff, as we must now call the old man, was at the engines. His companion was steering.

"Is this near enough?" inquired Karloff, in a low tone, as Berghoff slowed up the engines.

"Yes. We want to run no chances. It would not be pleasant for either of us to be nipped now."

No more words were exchanged till the anchor was noiselessly let drop.

Then Berghoff spoke.

"Have you got everything?"

"Yes; it's all in the bag—the wire, the batteries, and all. Wonder what those farmers would have done if they could have guessed what else we had in there?" [281]

"Gone through the ceiling, I reckon," chuckled Berghoff grimly; "but come on, let's get to work. We may have a long job to find the submarine."

"Yes, and we've no time to lose. After the job's done the quicker we put the Atlantic between us

and Uncle Sam, the better," was the reply.

"You're not nervous, are you?"

"Nervous! My friend, I have done more dangerous jobs than this."

Depositing the bag carefully in the small boat, the two men rowed off. They made absolutely no noise as they proceeded, the reason for this being that the oars had been carefully muffled soon after they left Bellport, and felt free from observation.

After ten minutes or so of rowing, Berghoff laid a hand on his companion's arm.

"What is it?" asked Karloff, who was rowing.

"Look right ahead. What's that?"

"The glow of a light. Can that be it?"

[282]

"It must be. That light is reflected from the conning tower. There is somebody on board."

"That matters not, if they are not on deck. Even so, we can take care of them."

"You mean to hurl it?"

"Yes; but I'd rather fasten it to the craft itself. It's safer for us and more effective."

A diabolical grin stole over the anarchist's face as he spoke. He resumed his cautious rowing.

"There's no one on deck," declared Berghoff, as they crept closer to the dark outlines of the anchored submarine.

"Good; then we can do our work quickly. Have you everything ready?"

"Yes; we'll be alongside in a minute. Don't make a failure of it."

"I have never failed yet," was the quiet reply, spoken in a voice so menacing and evil that it would have caused a shudder to run through any one less hardened than the man to whom it was addressed.

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Rob flashed to the surface after a longer interval than Merritt would have believed it possible for anybody to remain submerged. As he appeared, Merritt rushed to aid him upon the slippery deck of the *Peacemaker*.

Rob shook his head, as Merritt tried to draw him up. Instead, he choked out:

"A pair of pliers. Quick! Our lives depend upon it."

Merritt, who had been working on the engine, happened to have the required tool in his pocket. Without a word, he handed it to Rob. From his leader's manner he knew that down there under the water the boy had discovered some deadly hidden peril. Breathlessly, he watched for his reappearance, for the instant he received the pliers Rob had dived.

* * * * *

In the rowboat which they had towed out from Bellport, Berghoff and his companion sat bending over some object. Had it been daylight it could have been seen that this object was a battery box.

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Also, daylight would have revealed Berghoff's face as being white and drawn under his disguise; but his companion's evil countenance never changed an iota, as his long fingers sought and found the button of the battery box which lay before him on a thwart.

From this box two wires led off into the darkness. When the button was pressed a flash of electricity would pass through those wires and the climax of a fiendishly ingenious plot would be reached. In the tense silence that preceded the pressing of the button, Berghoff's breath could be heard coming gaspingly. His companion, on the other hand, appeared as cool as an icicle.

"Are you certain we are far enough away?" stammered Berghoff.

"Absolutely. I have no desire to be hoisted by my own petard. Now then, if you are ready, say the word."

[285]

"I—I——" stammered Berghoff.

"Bah! You are a coward; come, I am all ready."

"I don't mind the submarine, curse it; but it's the thought of the lives on board her."

"My friend, you are too sensitive. Come, are you ready?"

"Ye-es," choked out Berghoff, his teeth chattering, and the sweat pouring off his face. The man was shaking like a leaf, and his breath came raspingly from between his half-opened lips.

"Now!"

He steeled himself to utter the signal firmly, but it was merely a harsh whisper that issued from his dry throat.

The long fingers pressed down. Berghoff, swaying like a stricken thing, placed his hands before his eyes. But the sound that both had been expecting did not come. No roaring explosion followed the pressing of the button, no flash of livid flame and shattering of the wonderful structure of steel they had hoped to destroy. A death-like stillness prevailed.

[286]

"You've failed!" choked out Berghoff.

His companion's eyes flashed in the darkness like a cat's. He swallowed convulsively.

"There is only one explanation," he snarled.

"And that is?"

"That they have discovered the mine. My friend, we had better be leaving as soon as possible. It will not be good for us to be found in this vicinity."

At that very moment two boys were standing with horror-stricken eyes on the deck of the submarine. In his hands Rob held a peculiar looking cylinder of steel. From one end of it hung two severed wires. It was so weighted and balanced as to float a distance of about five feet under the surface of the water.

"If I hadn't found those wires and cut them," Rob said, in an awe-stricken voice.

But Merritt did not answer. He could only clasp his companion's hand. The realization of the fearfully narrow limit by which they had escaped death almost overcame him. The night was hot, but both boys shivered as if stricken with the ague. It was some minutes before they could give the alarm to those on shore. Then the rapid blowing of the whistle used by the submarine when on the surface signalled their companions.

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Some fifteen minutes later two pale-faced, wild-eyed lads were explaining to an absorbed group the foiling of the diabolical plot against Uncle Sam's diving boat. It was not long after, that the submarine was rushing through the water for the nearest harbor.

"If we can arouse the police along the coast we may yet be able to capture the authors of this outrage," exclaimed the ensign, as at full speed the *Peacemaker* clove through the waters.

"Yes; it's hardly probable that they had as swift a boat as this," agreed Mr. Barr. "If we can get ashore ahead of them, we can cause a police net to be spread that they can scarcely break through."

[288]

But it was decreed that the fate of Berghoff and his companion should be a different one. Suddenly, off to port of the *Peacemaker*, the night was split by a roar and a red flash of flame.

"Great Scott! What was that?" gasped out Ensign Hargreaves.

"The searchlight—quick!" cried Mr. Barr.

In an instant the great beam of white light was cutting the night like a fiery sword. Suddenly its rays concentrated on a dark object not far distant from the *Peacemaker*.

Within the radiant circle was limned a strange picture. Two men were struggling in the water, while beside them the outline of a boat showed for an instant and then vanished forever.

At top speed the *Peacemaker* was rushed to the scene. She reached it in time for those on board to see one of the two men struggling in the water throw up his arms. The next instant, with a shuddering cry, that might have been either defiance or agony, he vanished as had the boat.

[289]

The other man was picked up. He was an old man, seemingly, and almost exhausted from his struggle with the waves. But, as he was being dragged on board, a strange thing occurred. The salt water, with which he was drenched, had likewise soaked his beard and hair. As he was hauled over the sloping deck of the submarine his beard and hair slipped away, and there before them lay Berghoff, seemingly dead or dying.

As soon as they had recovered from their amazement, he was carried below and made as comfortable as possible; for it was found that he was shockingly burned. The chart was consulted, and it was reckoned that Bellport was the closest place at which to land. And so it came about, that Berghoff—or the wreck of the man—was brought back to the very spot from which he and his ill-fated companion had set out on their diabolical trip.

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Under close police guard the injured man was carried to the local hospital, and with his first conscious breath he cried aloud for Karloff. He was told of the man's fate, and then made a full confession of the plot to blow up the submarine. As for the accident that had destroyed their own craft, he explained that Karloff, stooping to light a cigarette, had ignited some leaked gasoline in the bilge. In a flash the flames had reached the fuel tank, and an explosion that ripped the boat apart followed.

For days the man lingered in the hospital, apparently contrite and suffering great pain. But one night a drowsy nurse and an open window aided him in a plan of escape that must have formed itself in his mind some time before. In a weak voice he begged his police guard to get him a drink of water. When the man came back, Berghoff had gone. Nor was he ever heard of again. Whether he managed in some way to communicate with his friends, or whether he gained financial resources to aid his escape by robbery or other means, will never be known.

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"Wa'al, I'm glad I stuck to that thousand," said Lem Higgins, when he heard of the escape. "I'll git another boat now."

* * * * *

And so ends the tale of the Boy Scouts' services for Uncle Sam. Of course, they remained on the island till the conclusion of the tests. But they were molested no more, and so far as they were concerned Berghoff and his evil designs ceased to exist. Their experiences had proved of much value to them, and broadened and developed their characters to a marked extent.

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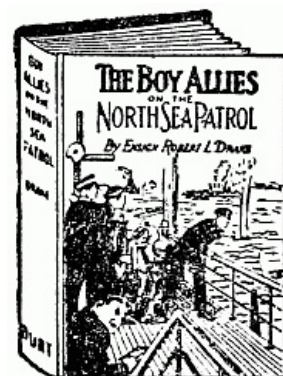
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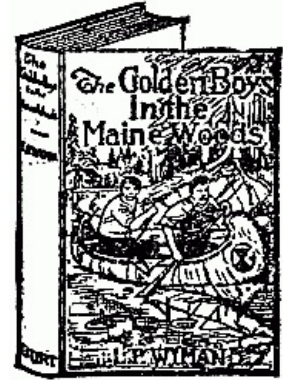
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