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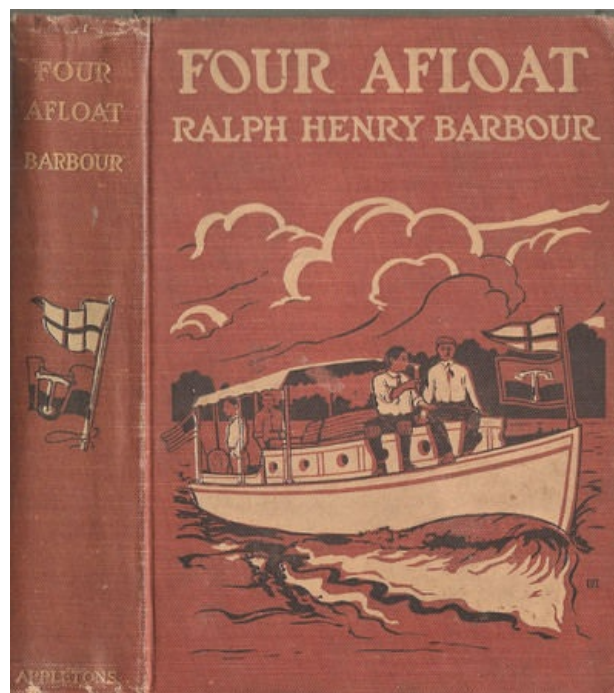
Author: Ralph Henry Barbour

Release date: August 10, 2011 [EBook #37021]
Most recently updated: January 8, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Roger Frank and the Online Distributed
Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net>

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OF THE BIG FOUR ON THE WATER ***



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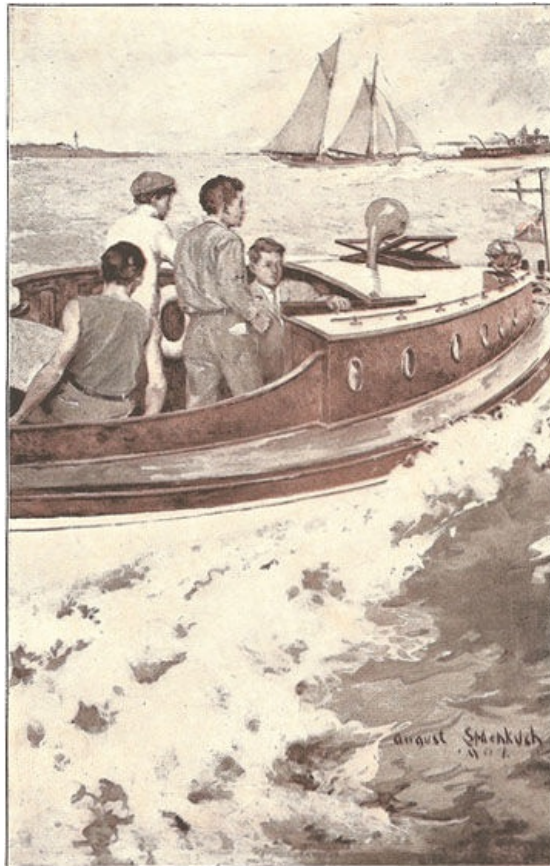
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"The *Vagabond* started after the other craft with a rush." (Page 65)

FOUR AFLOAT

BEING THE ADVENTURES OF THE
BIG FOUR ON THE WATER

By RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

*Author of "Four in Camp,"
"Four Afoot," etc.*



NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1907

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Published, September, 1907

TO
J. W. A.
SKIPPER OF MANY
CRAFT

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FOUR AFLOAT

"She's a pu-pu-pu-pu—!"

"Quite so, Tommy," said Dan soothingly, "but don't excite yourself."

"—pu-pu-peach!"

"Oh, all right!" laughed Nelson. "I thought you were trying to call her a puppy. What do you think of her, Bob?"

"Best ever," answered Bob promptly and quietly.

They were standing, the four of them—"to say nothing of the dog," which in this case was a wide-awake wire-haired terrier—on the edge of a wharf overlooking a small slip in which, in spite of the fact that it was the last week in June and many of the winter tenants had been hauled out and placed in commission, a dozen or more boats lay huddled. There were many kinds of pleasure craft there, from an eighty-foot yawl, still housed over, to a tiny sixteen-foot launch which rejoiced in the somewhat inappropriate name of *Formidable*. Beyond the slip was another wharf, a marine railway, masts and spars, and, finally, the distant rise of Beacon Hill, crowned with the glittering, golden dome of the State House. To their right, beyond the end of the jutting wharf, Boston Harbor lay blue and inviting in the morning sunlight. From the boat yard came the sound of mallet and caulking iron, and the steady *puff-puff, puff-puff* of the machine-shop exhaust. Nearer at hand a graceful sloop was being hurriedly overhauled, and the *slap-slap* of the paint brush and the rasp of the scraper were mingled. The air was pleasantly redolent of fresh paint and new wood—oak and cedar and pine—and the salty breath of the ocean. And to the four boys all these things appealed strongly, since they were on the verge of a summer cruise and were beginning to feel quite nautical.

The object of their enthusiasm lay below them at the edge of the wharf—a handsome gasoline cruising launch, bright with freshly polished brass work, gleaming with new varnish, and immaculate in scarcely dry paint. She was thirty-six feet long over all, nine feet in extreme breadth, and had a draught of three feet. A hunting cabin began five feet from the bow, and extended eighteen feet to the beginning of the cockpit. The sides of the cabin were mahogany and the roof was covered with canvas. A shining brass hand rail ran around the edge of the roof, a brass steering wheel protruded through it at the sternmost end, and toward the bow a search light stood like a gleaming sentinel above a small whistle. Between wheel and search light rested, inverted and securely lashed to the roof, a ten-foot cedar tender. The cockpit was nine feet long, and, like the deck fore and aft, was floored with narrow strips of white pine which, since the scrapers had just left it, looked, under its new coat of varnish, as white and clean as a kitchen table. There were iron stanchions to support an awning which, when in place, extended from well forward of the steering wheel to the stern of the cockpit, where a curved seat, with a locker beneath it, ran across the end. ("There are some wicker chairs that go in the cockpit," Nelson was explaining, "but we won't need more than a couple of them.") Below the water-line the boat was painted green. Above that the hull was aglisten with white to the upper strake save where a slender gold line started at the bow and terminated at the graceful canoe stern just short of the gold letters which spelled the boat's name.

"*Vagabond*," said Dan. "That's a dandy name."

"Mighty appropriate for a boat that you're in," added Bob unkindly. "Come on, Nel; I'm dying to see inside of her."

"All right. Here's the ladder over here."

"What's the matter with jumping?" asked Tom.

"Remember your weight, Tommy," counseled Dan.

They followed Nelson to the ladder, Dan bearing the terrier, whose name was Barry, and scrambled into the cockpit.

"I don't see that we need any chairs," said Dan. "This seat here will hold three of us easily."

"Oh, we've got to have some place for Tommy to take his naps," answered Nelson as he produced a key, unlocked a padlock, and pushed back a hatch.

"Hope you choke!" muttered Tom good-naturedly.

Nelson opened the folding doors and led the way down three steps into the engine room. This compartment, like that beyond, was well lighted by oval port lights above the level of the deck. On the left, a narrow seat ran along the side. Here were the tool box and the batteries, and a frame of piping was made to pull out and form a berth when required. In the center was the engine—a three-cylinder fifteen horse-power New Century, looking to the uninitiated eyes of Dan and Bob and Tom very complicated. On the starboard side was, first of all, a cupboard well filled with dishes and cooking utensils; next, an ice box; then a very capable-looking stove and sink, and, against the forward partition, a well-fitted lavatory. The floor was covered with linoleum of black and white squares, and the woodwork was of mahogany and white pine. A brass ship's clock pointed to twelve minutes after nine, and two brass lamps promised to afford plenty of light.

A swinging door admitted to the forward cabin, or, as Nelson called it, the stateroom. Here there were four berths, which in the daytime occupied but little room, but at night could be pulled out to make comfortable if not overwide couches. Dan observed Nelson's demonstration of the extension feature with an anxious face.

"That's all very well," he said, "for you and Bob and me, maybe, but you don't suppose for a minute, do you, that Tommy could get into one of those?"

And Tom, who, after all and in spite of his friends' frequent jokes, was not enormously large, promptly charged Dan and bore him backward on to the berth which Nelson had drawn out. As thirty inches afforded insufficient space whereon to pummel each other, they promptly rolled off to the nice crimson carpet, and had to be parted by the others, much to the regret of Barry, who was enjoying the fracas hugely and taking a hand whenever opportunity offered. The disturbance over, the four sat themselves down and looked admiringly about them. There was a locker under each berth, numerous ingenious little shelves above, and several clothes hooks against the partition. At the extreme forward end of the stateroom there was a handsome mahogany chiffonier built in between the two forward berths.

"Well, I call this pretty swell!" said Dan.

"You bet!" said Tom. "I had no idea it was like this. I thought maybe we slept in hammocks. Say, Nel, your father is a trump to let us have her."

"That's so," Bob assented. "But, seems to me, he's taking big risks. Supposing something happened to her?"

"Well, don't you talk that way at the house," laughed Nelson. "I had trouble enough to get dad to consent. I had to tell him that you were a regular old salt."

"You shouldn't lie to your father," said Dan severely.

"I didn't. Bob has sailed a lot—haven't you, Bob?"

"I can sail a boat all right," answered Bob, "but I don't know one end of an engine from the other."

"You won't have to," Nelson assured him. "I'll look after that and you can be navigating officer."

"Whatever that is," murmured Dan parenthetically.

"Who's going to cook?" asked Tom.

"You are," said Bob.

"Heaven help us all!" cried Dan.

"Huh! I'll bet I can cook better than you can," Tom replied indignantly.

"Get out! I'll bet you can't tell why is a fried egg!"

"Oh, you dry up! What's he going to do, fellows?"

"Me?" said Dan. "I'm going to be lookout, and sit on the bow and yell 'Sail ho!' and 'There she blows!'"

"Let's have an election," suggested Bob. "I nominate Nel for Captain."

"Make it Admiral," amended Dan.

"All in favor of Nel for Captain will say——"

"Aye!" cried Dan and Tom.

"You're elected, Nel."

Nelson bowed impressively, hand on heart, and Barry barked loudly.

"Then Bob's first mate," said Nelson, "and you can be second, Dan. Tom's going to be cook and purser."

"How about Barry?" asked Bob.

"He's the Sea Dog," said Dan. "But look here, fellows; if we're really going to get off to-morrow, we'd better be moving. What's the programme for this afternoon, Nelson?"

"Buy supplies and get them down here. We'll get dad to tell us what we need. It's almost twelve o'clock, and we'd better light out now."

"All right," answered Dan, "but I hate to go. I'm afraid the boat may not be here when we get back. Don't you think I'd better stay here and watch her?"

They passed out into the engine room, and Bob stopped to look at the engine curiously.

"Where's the gasoline?" he asked.

"In a tank at the bow," Nelson answered. "Here's the supply pipe here."

"And what's that thing?"

"Vaporizer. The gasoline enters here and the air here—see?"

"Then what happens?"

"Why, they mix into vapor, which passes up through this pipe to the cylinders."

"Oh!" said Bob. "Well, it sounds all right, but I don't see how that makes the boat go. If I were you I'd stick a mast on her and have some sort of a sail."

"Oh, if the engine gives out," laughed Nelson, "we'll put Tommy overboard and let him tow us!"

"I mean to learn all about this thing," said Bob resolutely with a final look at the engine. "How fast did you say she can go, Nel?"

"She's supposed to make eleven and a half miles an hour, but she's done better than that."

"That doesn't sound very fast," said Tom.

"It's fast enough for cruising," answered Nelson. "Are we all out? Where's Barry?" He put his head back into the engine room. "Barry, where are you? Oh, I see; sniffing around the ice chest, eh? Well, you'd better wait until to-morrow, if you want anything to eat out of there. Come on!"

Nelson locked the doors and the four boys climbed back to the wharf, pausing for a parting look at the *Vagabond* ere they turned toward home.

Possibly you have met these boys before, either at Camp Chicora two summers before, when they came together for the first time and gained the title of the Big Four, or a year later, when in a walking trip on Long Island they met with numerous adventures, pleasant and unpleasant, all of which helped to cement still closer the bonds of friendship, and when they secured an addition to their party in the shape of a wire-haired terrier. If Bob and Nelson and Tom and Dan are already old acquaintances, I advise you to skip the next few paragraphs, wherein, for the benefit of new friends, I am going to introduce my heroes all over again.

First of all—if only because he is the oldest—there is Robert Hethington. I call him Robert, though nobody else does, as a mark of respect. He is seventeen years of age, and a full-fledged freshman at Erskine College; and if that doesn't call for respect, I'd like to know what does! Bob—there! I've forgotten already; but never mind—Bob comes from Portland, Maine. He is a very good-looking chap, tall, broad-shouldered, and healthy. He has nice black eyes, somewhat curly black hair, and is at once quiet and capable.

Then there is Nelson Tilford, of Boston. He, too, is booked for Erskine in the autumn. In fact, they all are, with the possible exception of Tom. (Tom has just taken the examinations, in spite of the fact that he has only finished his third year at Hillton Academy, and has yet to hear the result.) Nelson is fairly tall, slimly built, lithe and muscular. He isn't nearly so well-behaved as his thoughtful, sober countenance promises. He is sixteen years old, and has just finished at Hillton.

The third member of the quartette is Dan Speede, of New York. Dan has decidedly red hair, the bluest of blue eyes, and is somewhat heavily built. Dan, as the mischievous twinkle in his eyes suggests, is fond of fun—any kind of fun. He is generally on the lookout for it, and generally finds it. Dan is sixteen, and has just finished, not too brilliantly, I fear, his senior year at St. Eustace Academy.

And last, but not least, there is Tom—otherwise Tommy—Ferris. Tom lives in Chicago (but Dan declares that that is his misfortune and not his fault) and is sixteen years old—almost; so nearly sixteen that he gives his age as that when Dan isn't by to correct him. Tom is inclined toward stoutness; also laziness. But he's a nice boy, just the same, with gray eyes, light hair, and a cheerful, good-natured disposition which the other members of the party are inclined to take advantage of.

There you have them all—the Big Four. But I am forgetting the little fifth, which Dan wouldn't approve of at all. The fifth is Barry. I suppose that his last name, since he is Dan's property, is Speede—Barry Speede in full. Barry is an aristocratic member of the fox terrier family, a one-time prize winner. As to age, he is about two and a half years old; as to looks, he is eminently attractive; as to disposition, he is undoubtedly as well if not better off than any other member of the party. In short, he is a nice, jolly, faithful, and fairly well-behaved little dog, and Dan wouldn't part with him for any sum of money that has ever been mentioned.

Last summer the four had made up their several minds that this summer they would again be together, and when Nelson announced in May that his father had at last consented to lend them his launch for a cruise along the coast, the manner of doing so was settled. And so, when school was over, Bob and Dan and Tom had joined Nelson at his home in Boston, prepared for the biggest kind of a good time.

CHAPTER II—STARTS THE *VAGABOND* ON ITS CRUISE

They were very busy that afternoon. Armed with a list of necessary supplies, they stormed one of the big grocery stores, and a smaller but very interesting emporium where everything from a sail needle to a half-ton anchor was to be found.

Bob listened to the order at the grocery with misgivings. "I don't for the life of me see where we're going to stow all that truck, Nelson," he said.

"Oh, there's more room on the *Vagabond* than you think," was the cheerful response.

"And he's not referring to Tommy, either," added Dan.

"You fellows are having lots of fun with me, aren't you, this trip?" asked Tom, mildly aggrieved.

"And the trip hasn't really begun yet," laughed Nelson. "Don't you care, Tommy, you're all right. Let's see, did we have pepper down? Yep. Well, I guess that's all, isn't it?"

"How about oil?" asked Tom.

"Oil? Do we need it? Look here, you don't think you're going to feed us on salad, do you?"

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"If it's seaweed salad, I pass," said Bob.

"No," answered Tom, "but I thought you always carried oil in case of a storm; to pour on the water, you know."

"Oh, we use gasoline for that," explained Nelson gravely. "Come on and let's find the other joint."

Their way lay through a number of extremely narrow and very crooked streets—only Dan contemptuously called them alleys—and because of the crowds it was usually necessary to proceed in single file. First there was Nelson as guide; then came Bob; then trotted Barry; at the other end of his leash was Dan; and Tom jogged along in the rear.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Bob at last. "The chap who laid out this town must have been crazy! I'll bet you anything, fellows, this is the same lane we were on five minutes ago. Look here, Nelson, are you plumb certain you're not lost?"

"Yes," answered the other.

"Well, I'm not," growled Dan. "I'm lost as anything. I don't know whether I'm coming or going. I'd just like to——"

But at that moment a dray horse tried to walk up his back, and Dan's remarks were cut short. When he had reached the other side of the street in safety he half turned his head and addressed himself to Tommy.

"Did you see that blamed horse?" he asked indignantly. "He deliberately tried to walk through me. Guess he mistook me for one of those short cuts that Nelson is always talking about. I've a good mind to go back and have him arrested."

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As there was no reply, Dan turned and looked back. Then:

"Whoa! Back up!" he shouted. "We've lost Tommy!"

Consternation reigned.

"When did you see him last?" asked Nelson anxiously.

"About five minutes ago, I guess," said Dan. "It was when we were coming through that three-inch boulevard back there. Poor Tommy!" he said sorrowfully. "We'll never see him again."

"I guess we'd better go back and look for him," said Nelson.

"Have you any idea you know how we came?" asked Dan incredulously.

"If we don't find him, he'll make his way home, I guess," said Bob.

"I'll bet I can tell you what's happened to him," said Dan.

"What?"

"He's got stuck fast in one of these narrow streets, of course. I only hope they won't have to tear down a building or two to get him loose."

"Oh, they'll probably let him stay there until he is starved thin," laughed Nelson.

"That's so. And build a flight of steps over him. Bet you a dollar, though, that when they do pry him loose, they'll arrest him for stopping the traffic!"

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"Well, come on," said Nelson. "We'll see if we can find him."

So they turned and retraced their steps, although Dan affirmed positively that they had never come that way.

"The sensible thing to have done," he grumbled, "was to have stayed just where we were and waited for the streets to come around to us. Then, when one went by with Tommy on the sidewalk, we could have just reached out and plucked him off."

But no one heard him save a newsboy, who thought he was asking for an afternoon paper.

After five minutes on the "back trail," they concluded to give it up, agreeing that Tom had probably wandered into one of the side streets, and that he would undoubtedly find some one to direct him to Nelson's house. So they started again for the yacht-supply store, Dan pretending to be terribly worried.

"Who's going to break the news to his parents?" he asked lugubriously. But by the time they were in sight of their destination he had acquired a more cheerful frame of mind. "Of course," he confided to Nelson—the sidewalk here was wide enough to allow them to walk two abreast—"of course, I'm sorry to lose Tommy, but it's well to look on the bright side of things. You see, Bob will have to be cook now, and you know he's a heap better cook than Tommy ever was or ever would have been. Oh, yes, every cloud has a silver lining!" In the store he insisted on buying a dory compass for his own use. "You see, Bob, I might get lost myself on the way back," he explained. Bob, however, convinced him that what he wanted was a chart.

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Their purchases here were not many but bulky, and so they decided to call a hack. When it came, they climbed into it and surrounded themselves with bundles of rope, fenders, lubricating oil in gallon cans, and assorted tools and hardware. It was getting toward five o'clock by this time, and

they decided to go to the boat yard, put the things on board, and leave the arranging of them until the morning. They dismissed the carriage at the entrance to the wharf and took up their burdens again. Dan, hurried along by the impatient Barry, was the first to reach the edge of the wharf, and—

“Well, I’ll be blowed!” he cried.

Bob and Nelson hurried to his side. There, lolling comfortably in the cockpit seat of the *Vagabond* and eating caramels, was Tom!

“You’re a nice one!” said Nelson indignantly. “We thought you were lost!”

“So I was,” answered Tom calmly. “Quite lost. So I hired a hansom and came here.”

“Well, you’ve got a great head, Tommy,” said Dan admiringly. “Give you my word, I’d never have thought to do that! I’d have just roamed about and roamed about until overcome by weariness and hunger. What you eating, you pig?”

“Caramels. I stopped to buy them at a store, and when I came out, you fellows were gone and some one had turned the streets around.”

“And there we were searching for you for hours, worried half crazy,” said Dan. “Stand up there and catch these bundles, you loafer!”

They went home in the elevated and finished Tom’s caramels on the way. After dinner they got their baggage ready to send to the launch in the morning, studied the charts for the twentieth time, and listened to final directions and cautions from Mr. Tilford.

Nelson’s father was a tall and rather severe-looking man of about fifty, and at first the three visitors had been very much in awe of him. But they had speedily discovered that his severity was, to use Dan’s expression, “only shin deep,” and that in reality he was a very jolly sort in a quiet way. And as they entertained an immense respect for him, they listened very attentively to what he had to say that evening in the library.

“Now there’s just one way in which you boys are going to be able to keep out of trouble,” said Mr. Tilford, “and that’s by using sound common sense. The *Vagabond* isn’t an ocean liner, and you mustn’t think you can take deep-sea voyages in her. I want you to be in port every evening before dark. I don’t care how early you set out in the morning, but I want you to find your mooring or your anchorage by supper-time. If you take my advice, you’ll have at least one square meal every day on shore. You can’t do much cooking on the launch, even if you know how, and to keep well and happy you’ve got to be well fed on good food.

“I naturally feel a bit anxious about this trip, boys. You’ve all received permission from your parents to take it, but it’s my boat and I don’t want anything to happen to you while you’re on it. You’re all of you getting old enough to look after yourselves pretty well, but I don’t know whether you can all do it. My first idea,” he went on, turning to Bob, “was to send a man along with you. But Nelson didn’t like that, and I realized that it would just about cut your fun in half. So I let him back me down on that proposition. Now it’s up to you to prove that I haven’t made a mistake. Nelson knows that engine about as well as I do, and I don’t think there’ll be any trouble to speak of there. Don’t be sparing of oil, Nelson; half the gas-engine troubles originate with the lubrication. Oil’s cheap and repairs are dear; remember that. And don’t be afraid to throw your anchor out. It’s better to ride out a blow in a stanch boat like the *Vagabond* than to try to make some port that you don’t know anything about.

“I want to get word from you at least every other day, too; oftener, if you can make it. Just a line will do, so that your mother and I won’t worry. Watch your barometer and the weather flags, and when in doubt hug the harbor. Now, how are you off for money?”

Whereupon the session resolved into a meeting of the Committee on Ways and Means.

The next morning the luggage was dispatched to the wharf, and, after a hurried breakfast had been eaten and they had bade good-by to Nelson’s mother, the four followed. The provisions were there before them, and for an hour they were busy stowing things away. It was wonderful what a lot of supplies and clothing and personal belongings it was possible to pile away in that little cabin. The cushions, mattresses, and awning were brought aboard, and the cockpit was supplied with two of the wicker chairs belonging there. The side lights and riding light were filled, trimmed, and put in place, the searchlight tank recharged, and the ice box filled. Everybody was intensely busy and excited, and Barry was all over the boat and under everyone’s feet. Mr. Tilford hurried over from his office at ten o’clock, looked things over anxiously and hurried off again to attend a meeting at eleven, shaking hands all around and wishing them good luck. Then the launch was hauled around to the head of the wharf to have her gasoline and water tanks filled.

By that time Nelson had invaded the flag locker, and the *Vagabond* was in holiday trim fore and aft. From the bow fluttered the pennant of the Boston Yacht Club and, beneath it, the owner’s burgee, an inverted anchor in white, forming the letter T, on a divided field of red and blue. Over the stern hung the yachting ensign. Their personal effects were disposed of in the stateroom; underclothing and such apparel in the chiffonier, toilet articles in the lavatory, sweaters and oilskins on the hooks, and shoes in the berth lockers. Tom, to whom had fallen the distribution of the provisions, had completed his task, and the ice box and shelves above were full. Doubtless they had taken aboard a great deal more than they would stand in need of, but that is an error that most inexperienced mariners commit. Save for such things as eggs and butter and bread, their provisions were mostly canned or preserved. At eleven Nelson busied himself with the

engine, filling his oil cans and cups, cleaning and polishing. The batteries were brand new and so was the wiring, and when he tried the spark he smiled his satisfaction.

"Fat and purple," he muttered.

"Who is?" asked Tom resentfully as he slammed down the lid of the ice box.

"The spark, Tommy, my boy," was the reply. "I was not referring to you; you're not purple, are you?"

"No, nor fat, either. Say, what's this? I thought it was something to eat at first."

"That," answered Nelson, "is something you'll become better acquainted with to-morrow, Tommy. That is a nice quart can of metal polish."

"Huh! I'd like to know what I've got to do with it!"

"Oh, the cook always shines the bright-work."

"Now, look here——"

"Careful," warned Nelson, "or we'll put you in irons for mutiny."

"Guess the iron wouldn't be any worse than the brass," said Tom with a grin.

At half-past eleven all was in readiness. One of the yard hands threw off the mooring rope and Bob took the wheel. Dan and Tom stood at the engine-room door and watched Nelson as he turned on the gasoline, looked to his vaporizer valve, and closed his battery switch.

"All clear?" he shouted.

"All clear!" answered Bob.

Nelson opened the valve at the vaporizer and turned over the fly wheel. The engine hummed, and from without came the steady *chug-chug, chug-chug* of the exhaust. Then, with Nelson at the lever and moving at half speed, the launch pointed her nose toward the outer harbor. The cruise of the *Vagabond* had begun.

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CHAPTER III—WHEREIN DAN PRACTICES STEERING

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Never was there a brighter, more perfect June day! Low down in the south a few long cloud-streamers floated, but for the rest the heavens were as clear as though the old lady in the nursery rhyme who swept the cobwebs out of the sky had just finished her task. In the east where sky and sea came together it was hard to tell at first glance where one left off and the other began. Golden sunlight glinted the dancing waves, and a fresh little breeze from the southwest held the *Vagabond's* pennants stiffly from the poles.

The grassy slopes of Fort Independence looked startlingly green across the water, and the sails of the yachts and ships which dotted the harbor were never whiter. But, although the sun shone strongly, it was more of a spring day than a summer one, and the four aboard the *Vagabond* were glad to slip on their sweaters when the point of Deer Island had been rounded and the breeze met them unobstructed. Bob set the boat's nose northwest and headed for Cape Ann.

So far they had made no definite plans save for the first day's cruise. They intended to make Gloucester, a matter of twenty-six miles, to-day and lie over there until morning. After that the journey was yet to arrange. There was talk of a run to the Isle of Shoals, and so on up to Portland, Bob's home; but Dan, for his part, wanted to get to New York for a day. And just now they were too taken up with the present to plan for the future.

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The *Vagabond* was reeling off ten miles an hour, and Nelson had returned to the cockpit, greatly to the alarm of Tom, who was of the opinion that Nelson ought to stay below and keep his eye on the engine. Nelson, however, convinced him that that wasn't necessary. Bob still held the wheel, and was having a fine time.

"It's more fun than a circus," he declared. "It works so dead easy, you know! How long will it take us to make Gloucester, Nelson?"

"Oh, call it three hours at the outside, if nothing happens."

"If nothing happens!" exclaimed Tom uneasily. "What could happen?" He looked doubtfully at the open water toward which they were speeding.

"Lots of things," answered Nelson, with a wink at Dan. "The engine might break down, or we might run on a rock or a sand bar, or you might get too near the edge of the boat and tip it over, or——"

"Thought you said we were going to keep near the shore," Tom objected.

"We're only a mile out now."

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"Yes, bu-bu-bu-but we're going farther every mi-mi-minute!"

"Tommy's getting scared," said Dan. "You didn't mind that little jaunt in Peconic Bay last

summer.”

“Well, that was a pu-pond and this is the ocean,” was the answer.

“It looked mighty little like a pond at one time,” said Bob. “Besides, you could have drowned just as easy there as you can here, Tommy.”

“Anyhow,” added Dan soothingly, “you couldn’t drown if you tried. You’re so fat you can’t sink.”

“I can su-su-swim under water as well as you cu-cu-cu-can!”

“What’s the town over there, Nelson?” Bob interrupted.

“Winthrop; and that’s Nahant ahead. You might head her in a bit more until Tommy gets his sea legs.”

Bob turned the wheel a mite and the launch’s bow swung further inshore.

“What time is it?” asked Dan.

“Just twelve,” answered Nelson, glancing at the clock.

“Well, what time do we feed?”

“About one, I suppose,” answered Nelson. “Who’s hungry?”

Dan groaned. “I, for one. I could eat nails.”

“Same here,” said Bob. “Tommy, you get busy, like a good little cookie, and fry a few thousand eggs.”

“And make some coffee,” added Dan.

“All right,” Tom replied. “Only there’s a lot of canned baked beans down there. What’s the matter with those?”

“Search me,” said Dan. “Suppose you heat some up and we’ll find out. Beans sound better than eggs to yours truly.”

“I suppose that, as Tom’s the cook, he had better give us what he thinks best,” said Nelson.

“Maybe,” Dan replied, “only it gives him a terrible power over the rest of us. If he should get a grouch, we might have nothing but pilot bread and water.”

“You’ll have to be good to me,” said Tom with a grin as he started down the steps to the engine room.

“Oh, we will be,” answered Dan earnestly; and to give weight to his words he aided Tom’s descent with a gentle but well-placed kick.

“You get short rations for that,” sung out the cook from below.

“If I do, I’ll go down there and eat up the ice box!”

“Say, Nelson,” sang out Bob, “what about that sloop over there? It looks as though she was trying to cross. Who has the right of way?”

“She has. Keep astern of her,” answered Nelson.

“Say!” came a disgusted voice from below. “We haven’t any can opener!”

“Thunder!” exclaimed Nelson. “Is that so? Have you looked among the knives?”

“Looked everywhere,” answered Tom, “except up on deck.”

“Use your teeth, Tommy,” suggested Dan.

“Let the beans go, and fry some eggs,” called Bob.

“Use the potato knife,” said Nelson, “and we’ll get a new one when we go shopping.”

“All right,” answered Tom. “If I bust it—there!”

“Did you?” laughed Dan.

“Short off! Say, Bob, lend me your knife a minute, will you?”

A howl of laughter arose, and Tom’s flushed face appeared at the companion way.

“Well, I’ve got to get the lid off somehow, haven’t I?” he asked with a grin.

“Not necessarily with my new knife,” answered Bob.

“I’ll tell you a way you can do it,” said Dan soberly, and Tom, looking suspicious, asked how.

“Why, you set the can on the stove and get it good and hot all through, and just as soon as it begins to boil hard the lid comes off.”

“Huh! And everything else, I guess,” said Tom.

“And we spend the rest of the cruise picking Boston baked beans off the cabin walls,” supplemented Nelson. “No explosions for me, if you please. I don’t see why we should bother ourselves about the can, anyhow; it’s the cook’s funeral.”

“Well, it’s your luncheon,” Tom replied.

“It’s a job for the ship’s carpenter,” said Bob. “Call the carpenter.”

"I guess I'm it," said Dan. "Come on, Tommy, and we'll get the old thing open."

They disappeared together and for a minute or two the sound of merry laughter floated up from below, and the two on deck smiled in sympathy. Then there was a loud and triumphant chorus of "Ah-h-h!" and Dan emerged.

"I want to try steering," he announced. "Get out of there, Bob."

"All right, but don't get gay," was the response. Dan tried to wither Bob with a glance as he took his place at the wheel. Then—

"Gosh! Don't she turn easy? Who-oh! Come back here, Mr. *Vagabond*! Say, Nel, how much does a tub like this cost?"

"Thirty-four hundred, this one. But there's been a lot of extras since then."

"Honest? Say, that's a whole lot, isn't it? I suppose you could get one cheaper if you didn't have so much foolish mahogany and so many velvet cushions, eh?"

"Maybe. You thinking of buying a launch?"

"I'd like to. I'm dead stuck on this one, all right. A sailor's life for me, fellows!" And Dan tried to do a few steps of the hornpipe without letting go of the wheel. Nelson, laughing, disappeared to look after the engine, and with him, when he reappeared, came an appetizing odor of cooking.

"Tommy's laying the tablecloth," he announced. "When grub's ready, you fellows go down and I'll take a turn at the wheel."

"Get out!" said Dan. "I'm helmsman or steersman, or whatever you call it. You run along and eat; I'm not hungry yet." 27

"How about it, Bob?" asked Nelson. Bob looked doubtful.

"I'm afraid he'll run us against the rocks over there just for a joke."

"Honest, I won't," exclaimed Dan earnestly. "If I see a rock coming, I'll call you."

"All right," laughed Nelson. "See that you do."

At that moment there came eight silvery chimes from the clock in the engine room.

"Sixteen bells on the Waterbury watch! Yo-ho, my lads, yo-ho!" sang Dan. "Say, what time is that, anyhow?"

"Twelve," answered Bob.

"Twelve! Well, that's the craziest way of telling time I ever heard of! What's it do when it gets to be one?"

"Strikes two bells."

"Yes, indeed! Isn't it simple?" asked Dan sarcastically.

"When you get the hang of it," Nelson answered. "All you have to do is to remember that it's eight bells at twelve, four and eight. Then one bell is half-past, two bells one hour later, three bells half-past again, and—"

"That'll do for you," interrupted Dan. "I don't want to learn it all the first lesson. But, look here, now; suppose I wake up in the night and hear the silly thing strike eight. How do I know whether it's midnight or four in the morning?" 28

"Why," said Bob, "all you have to do is to lie awake awhile. If the sun comes up it was four, and if it doesn't it was twelve."

"Huh! I guess I'll go by my watch. The chap who invented the ship's clock must have been crazy!"

"Lunch is ready!" called Tom.

"Go ahead, you fellows," said Dan. "But don't eat it all up."

"And you keep a watch where you're going," cautioned Nelson. "If you get near a boat or anything, sing out; hear?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Bet you he runs into something," muttered Bob as they went in.

"No, he won't," said Nelson, "because he knows that if he does we won't let him do any more steering. I've got to wash my hands; they're all over engine grease. You and Tommy sit down."

The table, which when not in use was stored against the stateroom roof, was set up between the berths and was covered with a clean linen cloth, adorned in one corner with the club flag and the private signal crossed. The napkins were similarly marked, as was the neat china service and the silverware.

"Say, aren't we swell?" asked Tom admiringly. "And I found a whole bunch of writing paper and envelopes in that locker over there, with the crossed flags and the boat's name on them. I'm going to write letters to everyone I know after lunch." 29

The menu this noon wasn't elaborate, but there was plenty to eat. A big dish of smoking baked beans, a pot of fragrant coffee, a jar of preserves, and the better part of a loaf of bread graced the board. And there was plenty of fresh butter and a can of evaporated cream.

"This is swell!" muttered Tom with his mouth full.

"Tom, if I ever said you couldn't cook I retract," said Nelson. "I apologize humbly. Pass the bread, please."

"Oh, don't ask me to pass anything," begged Bob. "I'm starving. I suppose we'll have to leave a little for Dan, but I hate to do it!"

"Wonder how Dan's getting on," said Nelson presently, after a sustained but busy silence. "I should think he'd be hungry by this time." He raised himself and glanced out of one of the open port lights. Then he flung down his napkin and hurried through the engine room to the cockpit.

"What the dickens!" exclaimed Bob, following.

When Nelson reached the wheel the boat's head was pointed straight for Boston. But Dan had heard him coming, and was now turning hard on the wheel.

"Where do you think you're going?" demanded Nelson.

"Who, me? Why, Gloucester."

"Well, what——"

"Oh, I've just been giving myself a few lessons in steering," answered Dan calmly. "I've been turning her around, you know. She works fine, doesn't she?"

"You crazy idiot!" laughed Nelson. "What do you suppose those folks in that sloop over there think of us?"

"Oh, they probably think we're chasing our tail," answered Dan with a grin. "Have you eaten all that lunch?"

"No, but we will if you don't hold her steady."

"That's all right, Nel; I'll keep her as straight as a die; honest Injun!"

The others returned to the table and finished their repast. Then Nelson relieved Dan, and the latter went below in turn. Later he and Tom washed up the few dishes, and when they came up on deck found the *Vagabond* opposite Marblehead Light. It was after one o'clock and considerably warmer, as the breeze had lessened somewhat. Nelson and Bob had already shed their sweaters, and the others followed suit. Nelson was pointing out the sights.

"That's Marblehead Rock over there, where they start the races from. The yacht clubs are on the other side of the Neck. Salem and Beverly are in there; see?"

"What's the light ahead, to the left?" asked Dan.

"Baker's Island Light," answered Nelson. "Only you ought to say to port instead of to the left."

"Sure! Off the port bow is what I meant. A sailor's life for me!"

"We've got all day to make twelve miles," said Nelson, "so we'll go inside of Baker's and keep along the shore." He turned the wheel and the *Vagabond* swung her nose toward the green slopes of the Beverly shore. Tom insisted on having a turn at the wheel, and so Nelson relinquished his place and went below to look after his oil cups. Under Bob's guidance, Tom held the boat about a quarter mile offshore. There was lots to see now, for the water was pretty well dotted with sailing craft and launches, and the wooded coast was pricked out with charming summer residences.

About half-past two the gleaming white lighthouse at the tip of Eastern Point was fairly in sight, and they rounded Magnolia, a cheerful jumble of hotels and cottages. A little farther on Nelson pointed out Norman's Woe, a small reef just off the shore. Dan had never heard of the "Wreck of the Hesperus," and Tom spouted two stanzas of it before he could be stopped. Bob had laid the chart out on the cabin roof, and was studying it intently.

"Where do we anchor?" he asked. "According to this thing there are about forty-eleven coves in the harbor."

"Well, we were in here a couple of years ago," answered Nelson, "and anchored off one of the hotels to the left of that island with the stumpy lighthouse. I guess we'll go there to-day. Here's the bar now."

The *Vagabond* was tossing her bow as she slid through the long swells in company with a fishing schooner returning to port.

"*Adventurer*," read Dan, his eyes on the bow of the schooner. "That's a good name for her, isn't it? I'll bet she's had adventures, all right."

"That's the life for you, Dan," laughed Bob. But Dan looked doubtful.

"Well, I don't know," he answered. "I'd like to try it, though."

A long granite breakwater stretched out from the end of the point on the starboard, ending in a circular heap of rocks on which an iron frame supported a lantern. Before them stretched the long expanse of Gloucester Harbor, bordered on one side by the high wooded slopes of the mainland and on the other by the low-lying, curving shore of the Point. Far in there was a forest of masts, and, back of it, the town rising from the harborside and creeping back up the face of a hill. Launches and sailboats were at anchor in the coves or crossing the harbor, and a couple of funereal-looking coal barges were lying side by side, their empty black hulls high out of water. At

Nelson's request, Tom turned the boat's head toward one of the coves, and Nelson went below and reduced the speed of the engine. Then the anchor and cable were hauled out from the stern locker and taken forward. Nelson again stood by the engine and Bob took the wheel. Then—

"All right," called the latter, and the busy chugging of the engine ceased. Nelson hurried up, and when the *Vagabond* had floated in to within some forty yards of the shore the anchor was ordered down.

"Aye, aye, sir!" answered Dan promptly, and there was a splash. When the cable was made fast and the *Vagabond* had swung her nose inquiringly toward the nearest landing, the boys went below to spruce up for a visit ashore. Then the tender was unlashed from the cabin roof and lifted over the side, Dan piled in and took the oars, and the others followed. Near at hand a rambling white building stood behind the protecting branches of two giant elms.

"That's where we'll have dinner," said Nelson. "It's a jolly old place."

"Dinner!" cried Tom. "Me for dinner! Give way, Dan!"

"They don't serve it in the middle of the afternoon, though," said Nelson.

"Maybe Tommy could get something at the kitchen if he went around there," Bob suggested. "I don't believe he's a real cook, after all; real cooks are never hungry."

"Huh!" answered Tom. "I'm no cook, I'm a *chef*; that's different. *Chefs* are always hungry."

"Easy, Dan," cautioned Bob. "Look where you're going if you don't want to run the landing down. Here we are, Barry; out you go!"

And Barry went out and was halfway up the pier before anyone else had set foot on the landing.

CHAPTER IV—IS LARGELY CONCERNED WITH SALT WATER AND SALT FISH

"Let's do the town," suggested Dan.

Inquiry elicited the information that the town proper was a good two miles by road, although it was in plain sight across the harbor. By walking a block they could take a car—if the cars happened to be running that day; it seemed that in Gloucester one could never tell about the street cars.

"Blow the cars!" said Dan. "Let's walk."

So they started out, found the car tracks, and proceeded to follow them along the side of the harbor, past queer little white cottages set in diminutive gardens or nestled in tiny groves of apple trees. To their right a high granite cliff shot up against the blue sky, and was crowned with a few houses which looked as though they might blow off at the first hard wind. After three hours on the boat it felt mighty good to be able to stretch their legs again, and they made fast time. Presently they came to what at first glance seemed to be an acre or so of low white canvas tents, and Tom and Dan, walking ahead, stopped in surprise. Then—

"Blamed if they aren't fish!" exclaimed Tom. "With little awnings over them to keep them from getting freckled!"

"What are they doing?" asked Bob.

"They dry them like this," answered Nelson. "They've been cleaned and salted, you see, and when they're dried they are packed in boxes and tubs and casks." Bob whistled expressively.

"I never knew there were so many fish in the world!" he exclaimed. Nelson laughed.

"This is only one," he said. "There are lots more fish yards just like it here."

"What are they?" asked Dan. "Codfish?"

"Oh, all sorts: cod, hake, pollack—everything."

There was row after row of benches covered with wooden slats on which the fish, still damp with the brine, were spread flat. Above the flakes, as the benches are called, strips of white cotton cloth were stretched, to moderate the heat of the sunlight. There was a strong odor of fish, and a stronger and less pleasant odor from the harbor bottom left exposed by the ebbing tide. Tom sniffed disgustedly.

"I never liked fish cakes, anyhow," he muttered.

Beyond the flakes were the wharves and sheds, the masts of several schooners showing above the roofs. As they came to one of the open doors they stopped and looked in. Dried fish were piled here and there on the salt-encrusted floor, and men were hard at work packing them into casks.

"Will they let you go through the place?" asked Dan.

"Yes," Nelson answered.

"Let's go, then. I'd like to see how they do it."

"All right," said Nelson, "but I've seen it once, and I'd rather go to town. You fellows go, if you want to."

Finally Dan and Tom decided to go through the fish house and Bob and Nelson to continue on to town.

"You'll have to shed your clothes and take a bath when you come out," Nelson warned them.

There wasn't much to see in the town, and after making a few small purchases—that of a new potato knife being one of them—they boarded a car and, after the trials and tribulations usually falling to the lot of the person so rash as to patronize the Gloucester street railway, returned to the hotel and found Dan and Tom awaiting them on the porch.

Nelson and Bob halted at a respectful distance.

"Have you had your baths yet?" they asked.

"Not yet, but soon," answered Tom.

"Then we'll stay here, if you don't mind," said Bob.

"Oh, get out! It wasn't very smelly," declared Dan.

"But you are, I'll bet!" Nelson took a few cautious steps toward them, and then turned as though in panic and raced for the landing. Bob followed, and after him came Tom and Dan and Barry. Despite the frantic efforts of the first two to cast off the tender before the others arrived, they were unsuccessful, and Dan, Tom, and the dog piled into the boat. Bob rowed with an expression of deep disgust, and Nelson ostentatiously kept his nose into the wind all the way to the launch.

"I was thinking of taking a dip myself," he said as he climbed out and took the painter, "but I don't know about going into the same ocean as you chaps."

But a few minutes later they were standing, all four of them, on the after deck of the *Vagabond*, clad in their bathing suits.

"I'll bet it'll be as cold as thunder!" said Dan with a shudder.

"Bound to," agreed Bob. "All in when I say three." The rest assented.

"One!" counted Bob.

"Go slow, please!" Nelson begged.

"Two!" They all threw their hands over their heads and poised for the dive.

"Four!"

Three bodies splashed simultaneously into the water. Bob, grinning like the Cheshire cat, seated himself on the bench in the cockpit and awaited their reappearance. Dan's head came up first, and he shook his fist.

"You just wait till I get you in the water!" he threatened.

"He ch-ch-ch-cheated!" sputtered Tom. Tom could talk as straight as anyone until he became excited; then, to quote Dan, "it was all off." At this moment Tom was excited and indignant.

"That was one on us," called Nelson as his head came up. "To think of getting fooled by such an old trick as that! Come out of that boat, now, or we'll throw you out!"

"Try it!" taunted Bob. There was a concerted rush, but it was no easy matter to climb over the side; and, as Bob's first act was to haul the steps in, that was what they had to do. Dan was almost over when Bob caught him and sent him back into the water. Then Nelson got one knee over, only to meet with the same treatment. As for Tom—well, Tom wouldn't have got aboard without assistance in a week of Sundays. Thrice repelled, Dan and Nelson hit on strategy. They climbed into the tender, seized the oars, and shot it to the side of the launch. Nelson and Bob grappled, and in that instant Dan jumped on deck. After that the conquest was easy. With Dan on one side and Nelson on the other, and Tom screaming encouragement from the water, Bob was hustled, struggling, to the side and ignominiously pushed over.

"Three!" he yelled. Then the waters closed over him. When he came up he brushed the drops from his eyes and exclaimed:

"Pshaw! It isn't cold at all!"

"We knew that," answered Dan, "but we weren't going to tell you, you faker!"

They had a jolly time there in the water until the sun, settling down above the wooded hills in the west, warned them that it was time to think of dinner. They got out of their dripping suits in the engine room and dressed again in their shore togs. Afterwards they hung their bathing suits over the awning frame and pulled the tender alongside. At that moment the clock struck four bells.

"Wait!" cried Dan. "I know! It's six o'clock!"

"Right!" laughed Nelson. From the hotel came a loud booming of a gong or bell.

"What's that?" asked Tom, startled.

"Dinner bell at the hotel," said Nelson.

"Sounded like a riot call," observed Dan. Then they piled into the tender and went ashore, to be ushered, four very sedate and well-behaved young gentlemen, into the dining room.

It was all of an hour later when Tom was finally separated from the table and led protestingly back to the porch.

"But I wanted some more frozen pudding!" he explained.

"Of course you did," answered Bob soothingly. "But you must remember that we're only paying for one dinner apiece, Tommy. Don't bankrupt the hotel right at the beginning of the season."

"Hope you ch-choke!" said Tom.

Later they rowed back to the launch over the peaceful cove, which was shot with all sorts of steel-blue and purple lights and shadows. Across the cove Rocky Neck was a blurred promontory of darkness, with here and there a yellow gleam lighting some window and finding reflection in the water below. Seaward, the harbor was still alight with the afterglow, and the lantern at the end of the breakwater showed coldly white in the gathering darkness. It had grown chilly since sunset, and so, after making all fast for the night, the boys went below and closed the doors and hatch behind them. With the lamps going, the cabin soon warmed up. Bob, by request, had brought his mandolin, and now, also by request, he produced it and they had what Nelson called a "sing-song," Tom alternately attempting bass and soprano, and not meeting with much success at either. Finally Bob tossed the mandolin onto the bunk and said he was going to bed. That apparently casual remark seemed to remind Dan of something, for he suddenly sat up on the edge of the berth and grabbed Tom by the arm.

"We haven't given them our stunt yet, Tommy," he said.

"Eh? What stunt? Oh, yes; that's so! Come on!" And Tom climbed to his feet. Dan joined him, and they stood very stiffly at attention.

"What's this?" asked Bob.

"It's called—it's called 'The Dirge of the Salt Codfish,'" answered Dan soberly. "Are you ready, Tommy?"

"All ready."

"Let her go!"

Whereupon they began to recite with serious faces and ludicrous lack of vocal expression, illustrating the "dirge" with wooden gestures.

"They come in three-pound, five-pound, and ten-pound packages," chanted the pair, "also in glass jars. A rubber band is placed around the top, the air is forced out by a vacuum machine, and the cover is clamped on. To remove the cover, you puncture the lid!"

"Where'd you get that?" laughed Nelson.

"The fellow that showed us around the fish shop told it to us. It's the way they put up their codfish. Isn't it great? Want us to say it again?"

"Yes, and say it slow."

For the next ten minutes "The Dirge of the Salt Codfish" had things its own way, Nelson and Bob insisting on learning it by heart. When they could all four say it in unison, standing in a row like a quartet of idiots, they were satisfied. Then the berths were made up and, after Dan had satisfied himself which was the strongest one and therefore best suited to Tom, they undressed and put out the lights. Of course they didn't go to sleep very soon; things were still too novel for that. They talked and laughed, quieted down and woke up again, recited "The Dirge of the Salt Codfish," and—well, finally went to sleep. Some time later—no one ever knew just when, since the clock refused to ring out any information—Bob and Dan were awakened by the sound of some one blundering around the stateroom.

"Who—who's that?" asked Dan in startled tones, sitting up in his berth with a jerk.

"It's me, you idiot!" growled a voice.

"Who's 'me'?" questioned Dan sharply.

"Nelson. We forgot to set the riding light, and I've bumped into everything here. I'd like to know where that door's got to!"

"Well, keep off of me," groaned Bob. "The door's behind you, of course. Can't you find a match?"

"No, I can't. If I could I'd light it, you silly fool!"

"There are some in the engine room, on top of the ice box," laughed Dan.

Then they heard the door swing back and heard Nelson's bare feet go scraping over the cold oilcloth and his teeth chattering. Presumably the riding light was fixed as the law demands, but neither Dan nor Bob could have sworn to it. They turned over in their berths, and by the time Nelson was picking his way along the side of the launch by the light of the flickering lantern they were sound asleep again.

Perhaps it was because Tom had slept undisturbedly through Nelson's prowling that he was the first to awake the next morning. When he opened his eyes the early sunlight was streaming through the ports, and from the other side of the planking came the gentle swish of the lapping waves. Tom stuck one foot outside the covers tentatively, then drew it quickly back again; the air outside, since most of the ports had been left open all night, was decidedly chill. But the sunlight and the breeze and the lapping water called loudly, and pretty soon Tom was out on the floor, scurrying around for his clothes. Now and then the others stirred uneasily, but none awoke. Washed, and dressed in the white duck trousers and jumpers with which the four had provided themselves, Tom glanced at the clock, pushed back the hatch, and opened the doors to the cockpit. It was only a little after half-past six, and the cove and harbor were deserted. From the houses on the Neck thin streamers of blue smoke were twisting upward from the kitchen chimneys, and from the Harborside House, where they had eaten dinner the night before, came the cheerful sound of rattling tins and the thud of cleaver on block.

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That reminded Tom that, as usual, he was hungry. But there was no use in thinking about breakfast yet. He sat down on the cockpit seat—which proved on close acquaintance to be soaking wet with the dew—and looked about him. The sound of oars creaking in rowlocks drew his attention, and he looked across the quiet cove. From around the point came a man in a pea-green dory, rowing with the short, jerky strokes of the fisherman. Tom watched him. Presently he stopped rowing, dropped his oars, and reached over the side of the dory. When he straightened up he had a line in his hand, and now he got on his feet and began pulling it in. Tom wondered what was on the other end, and when the end appeared was more puzzled than ever. For what the man in the dory hauled into the boat looked for all the world like a hencoop, and Tom didn't see why the man kept his hens under water, although he remembered having read somewhere of Mother Carey's Chickens, which, in some way beyond his understanding, were connected with salt water.

The man drew something out of the hencoop and threw it back into the cove. It flashed in the sunlight as it fell, and Tom wondered if it was an egg. Something else was taken out and thrown into the dory. Then, presently, the hencoop was lifted over the side again and sank out of sight. The man took up his oars and started toward the *Vagabond*, but he hadn't gone far when he again ceased rowing and prepared to produce another hen-coop from the vasty deep. That was too much for Tom. He seized the oars, drew the tender alongside, and tumbled in. Then he headed for the dory. When he drew near the second hencoop was coming into sight. Tom leaned on his oars and opened conversation.

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"Good morning," he said. The man in the dory looked up and nodded.

"Mornin'," he answered.

Then the hencoop was pulled over the side of the dory and rested across it, and Tom saw that instead of chickens it contained fish. It was fashioned of laths, was rounding on top, and at one end a funnel of netting took the place of the laths.

"What do you call that?" asked Tom.

"This? That's a lobster pot. Never see one before?"

Tom shook his head.

"No, I don't think so. I thought it was a hencoop."

The lobsterman chuckled as he undid the door of the trap and thrust in his arm. Out came a handful of small fish, which were thrown into a pail in the dory. Then one or two larger fish were tossed overboard, and last of all a fine big greenish-black lobster was produced. Tom paddled nearer and saw that a box in the dory was already half full of lobsters which were shuffling their claws about and blinking their protruding eyes. Another pail held fish for bait, and after the pot was cleared out new bait was placed in it and it was once more let down at the end of a rope. Tom now saw that the surface end of the rope was attached to a white wooden float.

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"Not much there, was there?" said the fisherman as he took up his oars. "You come over to the next one and I'll show you some lobsters."

So Tom rowed after him a hundred yards or so and awaited with interest the appearance of the next pot. The prediction proved true, for when the pot came to the surface it looked to be swarming with lobsters. To Tom's surprise, the first two or three that were taken out were tossed back into the water.

"Aren't those any good?" he questioned.

"Best eatin' there is," was the reply, "but they're 'shorts.'"

"What are 'shorts,' please?"

"Young 'uns under ten inches long. Law don't allow us to keep 'em."

There were a good many shorts in the trap, but there were also four good-sized lobsters, and the lobsterman seemed well pleased.

"Do you sell them?" asked Tom. The man glanced across at him shrewdly.

"'Shorts,' do you mean?"

"Oh, no; the others."

"Yes; want to buy some?"

"If you could let me have a couple, I'd like it."

The man held out two medium-sized ones.

"Fifty cents," he said.

"All right." Tom dived into his pocket, brought up the money and pulled up to the dory, where the exchange was made.

"Guess you never see no hens like them afore," chuckled the lobsterman as he rowed away. "An', say, don't pet 'em much; they might peck yer!"

The lobsters were in the bottom of the tender, and as he rowed back to the launch Tom was careful to keep his feet out of their reach. When he had made fast and carefully lifted the lobsters on board, he put his head into the engine room and listened. Not a sound reached him save the peaceful breathing of his companions. That appeared to put an idea into Tom's head. With a malicious smile, he tiptoed across to the lobsters, took one gingerly in each hand, and descended to the stateroom. There he placed the lobsters in the middle of the space between the berths, where they would each show to the best advantage, kicked off his sneakers, carefully closed the hatch and the doors, and finally crept back to bed. Once under the covers, he threw his arms out and yawned loudly. That not having the desired effect, he called sleepily to Dan:

"Time to get up, Dan! It's most half-past seven! *Da-a-an!*"

"Huh?"

"Time to get up, you lazy chump!"

"Wha-what time is it?" asked Dan fretfully.

"Oh, it's late; most half-past seven," answered Tom.

"Is it?" There was quiet for a moment. Then Dan sat up resolutely, stared drowsily about him and tumbled out of bed. As luck would have it, one bare foot landed plump on the cold, slippery back of the nearest lobster. The lobster rolled over, and so did Dan. There was a shriek, and Dan, staring in horrified dismay at the cause of his upset, tried to retreat into Bob's berth.

That annoyed Bob, who, half awake, struck out at the invader and again sent him sprawling. This time it was the other lobster that Dan came into contact with, and both went rolling up against the locker under Nelson's berth. But it didn't take Dan long to pick himself up, and once on his feet he made haste to get off them by sinking into Nelson's arms and waving them wildly in air.

By that time the stateroom rang with laughter and Barry's barking. Dan curled his feet up under him and, after making certain that neither of the lobsters had attached themselves to him, joined his laughter with the rest. On the floor the lobsters, justly indignant, or, as Tom remarked, "a bit peeved," were waving their claws and trying to get back on their feet again. At last Nelson stopped laughing and turned a puzzled countenance to Bob.

"Where'd they come from?" he asked.

"Eh?" asked Bob.

"By Jove!" cried Dan.

Tom only stared his bewilderment.

Nelson looked suspiciously at the others, but Dan and Bob were each in pyjamas, and so, of course, must be Tommy, although the covers still reached to just below his wondering countenance.

"They must have come aboard last night," said Dan.

"But the doors are closed," said Bob.

"Through the ports, then?"

"Poppycock!" said Nelson. "Lobsters can't climb. Some one must——"

"Maybe there was a high tide last night," suggested Tom.

"What's that got to do with it, I'd like to know?" Bob demanded.

"Why, maybe the water came up to the port lights and the lobsters were swimming on the surface, and they saw Dan and mistook him for a long-lost brother——"

"Tommy, if you call me a lobster, I'll hammer you! Look at the ugly, crawly things! Ugh! Some one throw 'em overboard!"

"Some smart chump must have opened the door and tossed them in here last night," said Nelson thoughtfully. "Or maybe this morning."

"More likely this morning," said Bob. "And probably the person, whoever he was, dropped them in through the ports."

"That's so," said Tom, a trifle too eagerly. "Bet you that's just what happened!"

Bob looked at him in dawning suspicion.

"Think that's the way of it, do you, Tommy?" he asked. Tom nodded, but didn't seem to care to look at the questioner.

"Maybe a fisherman was going by," he elaborated, "and saw us all asleep in here, and thought it would be a good joke——"

"Is that so?" cried Bob, leaning over and jerking the bedclothes from Tom. "You're a very smart little boy, aren't you?"

Dan made a leap and landed astride the culprit.

"You did it, you grinning idiot!" he cried, shaking Tom back and forth.

"Honest, Du-du-du-dan!" gurgled Tom. "I—I——"

"Honest, you what?" demanded Dan, letting up for an instant.

"Did!" squealed Tom. Then chaos reigned and blankets waved as Dan and Tom rolled about the narrow berth. "You'd bu-bu-bu-better lemme up!" panted Tom, "or I won't cu-cu-cook you any bu-bu-bu-bu-breakfast!"

"Apologize?" asked Dan.

But at that moment a terrific yelping drowned the question. Barry had left the foot of Bob's berth and proceeded to investigate the visitors on the floor. The natural thing had happened, and Barry was jumping about with a pound and a half of lobster attached to one of his front paws. Hostilities between Dan and Tom were forgotten and everyone rushed to Barry's rescue. It was Nelson who finally released the dog and tossed the two troublesome guests up into the cockpit. Barry's paw was badly pinched, but not seriously damaged, and after he had licked it for five minutes steadily he was apparently willing to call the episode closed.

"What did you bring those things in here for," demanded Nelson, "and where did you get them?"

Tom explained the manner of acquiring the prizes, and said that he was going to cook them.

"Cook them!" shrieked Dan. "Why, they aren't fit to cook; they're green as grass! They're probably spoiled!"

This feezed Tom until Bob explained that live lobsters were always more or less green, and that it was boiling them that made them red. But Dan remained antagonistic to the plan of eating them.

"I wouldn't touch one of them for a hundred dollars," he declared. "I don't believe they're lobsters at all."

Tom was hurt.

"They are, tu-tu-too!" he asserted indignantly. "I gu-gu-got 'em from a lobster fisher, and saw him pu-pu-pu-pull 'em up."

"Oh, you get out! Who's going to believe you, Tommy? You run along and get breakfast."

"That's so," said Nelson. "You're in disgrace, Tommy, and you'll have to cook us something pretty nice if you expect to be forgiven."

"Something nice!" growled Tom. "What do you expect? Spanish omelet and sirloin steak?"

"I don't care what we have," replied Dan, "but I want mine fried on both sides."

"Me too," added Nelson.

Tom left them to their dressing and took himself off to the corner of the engine room where the stove and sink and ice box were located, and which he had nautically dubbed the galley. Here he busied himself, chuckling now and then over the lobster episode, until Barry's frantic barking took him to the door. He looked out and then called to the others. The lobsters, quite still now, as though wearied by their recent experiences, were lying side by side near the after locker. In front of them, a safe two feet away, stood Barry. His tail—there was only a bare two inches of it—wagged violently, the hair stood up along the middle of his back and neck, and he was daring the lobsters to mortal combat. Finding himself reinforced by the quartet of laughing boys at the door, he grew very brave and began a series of wild dashes at the enemy, barking hysterically.

"Anybody want to eat them?" asked Bob finally.

Nobody seemed enthusiastic, and Bob heaved them over the side. "There goes your fifty cents, Tommy," he said. Tom glanced at Dan and grinned.

"It was worth it," he said.

After a breakfast of fried eggs, bacon, toast, and coffee the four went on deck, feeling ready for anything. Nelson and Tom found seats on the edge of the cabin roof, Dan and Bob sat on the after seat, and the subject of destination was discussed. Bob advanced the merits of the Maine coast as a cruising ground, Dan was in favor of heading south toward New York and Long Island Sound, Tom was for staying where they were, and Nelson remained neutral. Thus matters stood when a launch of about the size of the *Vagabond* chugged around the point and picked up moorings some fifty feet distant. The discussion died away and the boys watched the new arrival with interest. Her name was the *Amy*, and she was very similar to the *Vagabond* in build, save that her cabin was much longer and her whole length perhaps two feet greater. She flew the flag of the Knickerbocker Yacht Club of New York, and trailed a tender behind her. She had a crew of five men, and as the tender was drawn alongside one of the number called across.

"Hello, there!" he called. "Are you entered for the race?"

"No," answered Nelson. "What race do you mean?"

"To-morrow's. Marblehead to College Point. Saw you had a tender along, and thought maybe you were in it."

"No; are you?" replied Nelson.

"Yes." They seemed to lose interest in the *Vagabond* after that, and piled into their tender and rowed across to the hotel landing.

"Going for breakfast, I guess," mused Bob. "What race are they talking about, Nel?"

"I don't know for sure, but seems to me I read something in the paper about a race for cruising launches from Marblehead to New York."

"College Point, he said," observed Tom.

"That's near New York, on the Sound," said Dan. "Let's go into it!"

"We couldn't now," said Nelson. "It's probably too late. Besides, it wouldn't do for us to try it; it would be pretty risky."

"I don't see why," spoke up Tom eagerly. "That boat isn't any bigger than the *Vagabond*; at least, not much!"

"Hello!" said Bob. "Tommy must have got over his nervousness!"

"I tell you what we might do," said Nelson. "We might go over and see the start. That would be fun, wouldn't it?"

"Let's do it!" cried Dan. "Then we can decide meanwhile where we're going."

The idea suited all hands, and it was agreed that they should spend the forenoon in cleaning up and run over to the scene of the race after luncheon. "And," said Dan, "let's find out about the race. It ought to be in the morning paper. If one of you fellows will put me ashore, I'll go and buy one."

So Bob rowed him to the landing, and when he returned the three got out the mops and metal polish and rags and set to work cleaning up the woodwork and polishing the brass. They hadn't nearly finished by the time Dan hailed from the landing. Tom brought him aboard. He had found a paper and was full of the race. All hands stopped work while he read the account of it.

The race was a handicap affair for cruising launches, and there were twelve entries. The start was to be made the next afternoon, at six o'clock, from Marblehead, and the boats were to race to College Point, N.Y., a distance of about three hundred miles.

"But if it isn't until to-morrow at six," asked Tom, "what's the use of going over there this afternoon?"

"That's so," said Bob. "We might as well wait until to-morrow morning."

"But what shall we do this afternoon? Run up to Portland and back?" asked Nelson laughingly.

"Let's cruise around here," said Bob. "And you can show me how to run the engine. Some one ought to know, Nel, in case anything happened to you."

"All right. We'll finish cleaning up, and then take a run around the harbor if there's time before lunch. If there isn't, we'll go afterwards. How's that?"

All were agreeable and the work went on again. Nelson got into the tender and, armed with a hand mop and a canvas bucket of fresh water, cleaned the white paint-work of the hull. Tom scrubbed the deck, cockpit floor, and cabin roof, Dan cleaned up below, and Bob shined the bright-work. But, try as they might, there was no such thing as finishing before noon. And so they had an early lunch, and very hungry for it they were, too, and then weighed anchor and headed for the inner harbor on a sight-seeing cruise. They *chugged* in and out of the shipping, read the names on the dozens of fishing schooners which lined the wharves, and finally raced a tugboat out to the breakwater, winning easily.

There the wheel was given to Dan, and Nelson took Bob below and initiated him into the mysteries of the gas engine. Nelson started at the gasoline tank, and traced the flow of the fuel until it had passed through the cylinders and was discharged at the exhaust. Carburetor—or, in the present case, vaporizer—pump, oil cups, spark plug, and clutch were duly explained, and then Nelson took up the ignition, starting at the battery and following the wires to the engine. Finally, the motor was stopped, the gasoline shut off, and Bob was allowed to start things up again. Of course, he didn't succeed the first time, nor the second, but in the end he did, and was as pleased as could be. For the rest of the afternoon he stayed in the engine room—while Dan and Tom had a beautiful time on deck running the boat to suit themselves—and by the time they reached their anchorage again Bob had qualified, to his own satisfaction at least, as a gas engineer.

"It's simple enough when you understand it, isn't it?" he asked earnestly.

"Yes," laughed Nelson; "there's nothing to it at all—until the engine stops and you can't find out why!"

They had dinner at the Harborside again, and in the evening wrote home to their folks on the lovely stationery with the crossed flags. And at half-past nine, everyone having personally assisted at the lighting of the riding light, they turned in and slept like logs until morning.

"Well!" exclaimed Bob. "Look at the boats!"

The *Vagabond* was cutting her way through the sunlit waters at the best pace of which she was capable—"easily twelve miles an hour, I'll bet you," according to Nelson. Bob had the wheel, and was turning to port as the point drew abreast. Once around the lighthouse, the harbor lay before them blue and sparkling in the morning sunshine, and as full of boats as a raisin pie of raisins. Even Tom, eminently matter of fact, drew his breath as the *Vagabond* dashed across the harbor mouth.

Marblehead Harbor is naturally one of the most beautiful on the coast, and this morning, thronged with yachts of all descriptions, swinging at their moorings, cream-white sails aflutter in the light breeze, flags flying everywhere, paint and varnish glistening and brasswork catching the sunlight on every side, it presented as fair a sight as one is apt to find. Between the white and black and mahogany-red hulls of the yachts busy, cheerful, impertinent launches darted in and out, filling the air with the sharp explosions of their engines.

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On one side the quaint old town came tumbling down to the wharves and the dripping seawall, a delightful hodgepodge of weather-stained sheds and whitewashed houses. On the other, green lawns set with summer cottages and shaded by vividly green elms stretched from the distant causeway to where the shore broke into a rocky promontory, from which the stone and shingle house of the Corinthian Yacht Club arose as though a part of the natural scenery.

"By Jove!" said Nelson. "It doesn't look as though there was room for us anywhere."

And it didn't, so closely were the boats packed together. Nelson stopped down the engine to half speed, and, with her bunting flapping in the breeze and her bright-work agleam, the *Vagabond* nosed her way through the throng until she was opposite the Boston Yacht Club House. Here a space large enough to swing around in was discovered, and as Bob skillfully turned her toward it Dan held the anchor ready. Then there was a splash, and an excited protest from the exhaust as the engine was reversed; then silence, and the *Vagabond* had come to anchor as neatly as you wish. After that the four gave themselves to a thorough enjoyment of the scene.

There was plenty to look at. Near by, at one of the boat yards, the contestants were being measured with steel tape and rule. Others were coming in from their full-speed trials outside the harbor. Gasoline was being taken on, tenders lashed into place, and final arrangements generally were being made. At half-past twelve Tom cooked luncheon, and it was eaten, for the most part, on deck, that nothing of the busy scene around them need be lost sight of. After luncheon the boys got into the tender and rowed to the yacht club landing, leaving the boat there and spending over an hour in exploring the town. After that they returned to the launch and cruised about the harbor, turning and twisting in and out between the anchored craft. There were big steam yachts there, gasoline cruisers galore, dozens of launches, big sloops and little ones, yawls, catboats, and one schooner yacht. And where there was nothing else, tenders and dories flitted about. Once Tom caught Nelson excitedly by the arm and pointed across the harbor.

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"Lu-lu-look at that, Nel!" he stuttered. "Su-su-su-see that su-su-su-sloop coming in wi-wi-without any su-su-sails!"

"Yes; what about it?"

"Wh-wh-what about it? How the di-di-di-di-dickens does she du-du-do it?"

"Oh, there's a fellow at the stern, pushing," said Bob gravely.

"She's an auxiliary, Tommy," explained Nelson.

"Wh-what's that?" asked Tom suspiciously.

"Why, she's got a gasoline engine in her, just like we have, only hers is probably smaller."

"Really?" Tom marveled. "I didn't know you could du-du-do that."

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"Lots of them have auxiliaries nowadays. When the wind gives out, they just start their engines and—there you are."

"Say, that's swell!" murmured Tom.

"There goes the committee boat!" said Dan excitedly. "Let's follow her."

The committee boat was a handsome sailing packet, and as she moved out to where the start was to be made she presented a fine picture. The *Vagabond*, together with fully half the craft in the harbor, followed at her heels. She took up her position close to the black spar buoy at the harbor entrance, and one by one the contestants chugged up to her and clamored for their ratings. As there had been delay in figuring the handicaps and time allowances, it was announced that the start would be postponed until half-past six. But the time didn't drag. The entries for the race were all together for the first time, and the audience afloat and ashore examined them with interest and compared them, and predicted victory for first one and then another. The twelve boats varied in length from forty feet, the measurement of the *Sizz* and the *Gnome*, down to thirty-one, which was the length of the *Shoonah*. But the greatest difference was in horse-power. The *Gnome* and the *Amy* were rated at thirty, while the little *Sue* had but nine. As a result, the *Sue* had a handicap allowance of about thirteen hours over the *Gnome*, which was scratch boat. One by one the boats got their directions, handicaps, and paid their measurement fees, and stood

away to await the starting signal.

"Let's follow them a bit," suggested Tom. "It would be great sport, wouldn't it?"

"Great!" cried Dan. "Let's do it, Nel! What do you say?"

"I'm game if you are," was the answer. "You want to remember, though, Tommy, that we'll be late to dinner."

"Oh, you run away and play! To hear you fellows talk, you'd think nobody ate anything but me. I'd just like to know who got away with the most of the lunch—and I'm not looking at Bob, either!"

"Not you, kittie, nor me, kittie, but one of us," murmured Nelson.

"What time will we get back?" asked Bob.

"Depends on how far we go," said Nelson. "We'd ought to get back before dark, I suppose."

"Oh, it doesn't get dark until late," said Dan cheerfully.

"I tell you what we'll do," cried Tom. "I'll cook something and we'll have dinner on board! What do you say?"

"Well, we've never eaten one of your dinners, Tommy," answered Dan, "and so we may, I think, be excused if we say nothing; least said soonest mended, you know."

"Have we got anything to cook, Tommy?" asked Nelson doubtfully.

"Eggs, bacon, beans, tomatoes, potatoes, jam, bread——"

Boom!

"First gun!" cried Bob.

"There's a quarter of an hour yet, then," said Dan.

"Let's get our lanterns lighted," suggested Nelson. "We might as well do it now as later. The others are lighting theirs."

So for the next few minutes they attended to the lights, saw to the lashings of the tender, filled oil cups, and prepared to join in the scramble across the starting line. At six-twenty a second gun was fired from the committee boat, and at six-twenty-five a third. By that time all the contestants were chugging and churning into positions from which they could make quick starts. Everyone had his eyes glued to watch or clock, and as the minutes passed the excitement grew intense. The crew of the *Vagabond* felt as though they, too, were off for a wild race to New York, and Dan was for rounding outside the committee boat so that they wouldn't get left. But Nelson shook his head.

"We'll stay here and get over the line after the last one. Then we'll see if we can't give some of them a tussle for a few miles."

"Hey! Look at the *Amy!*" cried Bob.

All boats were in motion now, and were dashing toward the open water between the committee boat and the black spar. The *Amy* had started a bit too soon, and now, having almost reached the line, she turned and ran parallel with it until, when almost at the end of it and it seemed as though she must head back again, the last gun went off, and with a quick turn of her wheel she swung her nose to port and dashed across the line several lengths in the lead. Then the others went over, their propellers churning the water, flags flying, and exhausts throbbing loudly. Whistles blew and sirens shrieked, caps were waved and flags were dipped, and the twelve plucky little boats headed for the blue-gray rim of the horizon on their all-night voyage.

"All right!" sang Bob from the wheel, and Nelson, hand on the lever, shot it forward and the *Vagabond* started after the other craft with a rush that took her across the line the first of the noncontestants. In their endeavor to cut the corner as much as possible, several of the launches got too near the Point, and for a moment it looked as though the race was already over for some of them. But after a breathless minute all got safely away and passed out between the Point and Marblehead Rock. The sun was nearing the hills in the west and a crimson flush lay over the quiet sea and dyed the sails of the yachts. Back of them the whistles still tooted as the crew of the *Vagabond* stood in the cockpit and watched the contest with breathless interest.

The Point fell farther and farther away and grew indistinct in the sunlit haze. The racers had formed into two broken lines, the *Amy* still holding the lead, with the *Scrappier* and the *Gnome* striving to nose her out of it. Suddenly the sun went down, throwing a last intense ray across the water, and the blue twilight descended. The lantern at the top of the lighthouse on Baker's Island bade good night to the speeding boats, and wished them safe voyage. The whistling had long since ceased, and nothing was to be heard now aboard the *Vagabond* but the chugging of the boats ahead and an occasional hail from some one of the following craft. The *Vagabond* was by no means the only boat in pursuit. Launches little and big were trying to keep up in order to get a last view of the contest. But one by one they dropped astern, turned and headed homeward. The twilight deepened, but the boys on the *Vagabond* paid little heed, for they had passed two of the racers, and were gaining on a third.

"Say, maybe we're not going some!" cried Tom delightedly.

"Twelve miles and over," answered Nelson with satisfaction.

"Bet you we'll pass that one there inside of five minutes," crowed Tom. "Gee! I wish we were in

the race!”

“Looks as though we were,” said Bob with a smile. “There’s the *Sue* ahead there. She’s going along in great shape, isn’t she? If she wasn’t so small, I’d be willing to bet she’d win out.”

“Wouldn’t be surprised,” answered Nelson. “She’s got a whole lot of handicap allowance to help. And even if she is small, she’s certainly keeping her end up with some of the others. How about that dinner you were going to cook, Tommy?”

“Just wait till we pass the next one,” begged Tom excitedly. “I love to see the way the fellows look at us when we go by.”

“They’re probably wondering what we’re butting in for,” said Nelson laughingly. “I’d rather like to know myself!”

“Just to show them what a real boat looks like,” suggested Bob. “Could we keep up this pace all the way?”

Nelson shook his head.

“Maybe, but I wouldn’t like to try. We’d probably overheat something, and get in a fix. No; if we were going clear through with the bunch, I’d stop her down to about eight or nine miles and see what would happen.”

“Let’s do it!” cried Dan.

The others looked expectantly at Nelson. He shook his head again.

“It wouldn’t be safe, fellows,” he answered. “It’s all right now, but we might meet a whole lot of nasty water outside the Cape.”

“What Cape?” asked Tom.

“Cape Cod.”

“Oh! do we have to go by there?” he asked in surprise. Whereupon there was a laugh at Tom’s knowledge of geography.

They were pulling abreast of the next launch now, and her red side-light shone brightly through the gathering dusk.

“Now, Tommy, you can start your fire,” said Dan. “We’re up to them and passing. Hello! that chap’s going to hail us.”

“Hello, the launch!” came a voice through a megaphone.

Nelson picked up his own megaphone and answered the hail.

“Are you in this?” was the demand.

“No; we’re just following!”

“Oh! Are you going back to Marblehead tonight?”

“Don’t think so,” answered Nelson. “We’ll probably try for Boston.”

“I see! Much obliged! Goodnight!”

“Good night,” called Nelson, “and good luck!”

The other nodded and laid aside his megaphone. Then the *Vagabond* went ahead. It was too dark to read the name of the other boat, although Dan said he thought she was the *Sizz*.

“Did you mean that, about going to Boston?” asked Bob.

“Yes,” answered Nelson. “We might as well, because we’ll be nearer Boston than Marblehead by this time.”

“How far have we come?” asked Dan.

“About”—Nelson looked at his watch and whistled softly—“about fourteen miles, I think. And if we’re going back, we’d better be doing it. Our best port would be Hull, but I don’t like to look for it after dark. Come to think of it, I don’t know that I want to fuss around Boston Harbor at this time of night. Maybe, after all, we’d better put back to Marblehead or Lynn. Where’s that chart, Bob?”

It was found and spread out on the cabin roof. Tom held the lantern and Nelson and Bob studied it for a moment.

“I think the best thing to do,” said Bob finally, “is to keep on for Cohasset. It isn’t much farther, and looks like an easy harbor.”

“I guess you’re right,” Nelson replied. “Yes, that’s the best thing to do. Then we want to swing in now or we’ll never get there until about ten o’clock. There’s Minot’s Light over there. Make for that, Bob.”

“All right!” Bob turned the wheel and the *Vagabond* swung to starboard and crossed ahead of the launch which had hailed them. Beyond, in the darkness, the lights of the other racers gleamed and swung as the boats tossed slowly in the long seas. As they passed the *Sizz*—if it was the *Sizz*—a cheery “good night” reached them, and the four answered it. A few minutes later they were all alone, and the lights of the racers, headed for Highland Light, showed but dimly across the

dark waters. Tom sighed.

"Seems kind of lonesome, doesn't it?" he asked, with a glance at the surrounding gloom. He shivered as he looked.

"You go down and get that dinner you talked so much about," said Bob. "I'm starving to death."

"All right," replied Tom uneasily. "But if anything happens——"

"We'll call on you for advice, Tommy," finished Dan. "Get a move on, now; and when you make the coffee, don't forget the coffee."

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So Tom descended, rather mournfully, lighted the lanterns in the engine room and cabin, and set about his task.

The *Vagabond* was a good twelve miles away from Cohasset, and that meant a full hour and a half's run, for Nelson had slowed down the boat's speed to eight miles. He began to wish that he hadn't gone so far. To be sure, the *Vagabond* was the stanchest sort of a craft, and the weather was of the calmest; also there were no dangerous rocks nor bars between them and the harbor. But it was awfully dark and rather cold, and there was a whole lot of water around them. For a moment he wished that he had kept company with the racers until the Cape was reached; then he could have put in to Provincetown. But after a moment, when the odor of Tom's coffee stole up on deck, the qualm of uneasiness passed. He took his place beside Bob, who, at the wheel, was staring intently ahead into the night.

"Can't see much, can you?" asked Bob. "I suppose most of the sailing craft carry lights, don't they?"

"All of them," answered Nelson. "Keep on; you're all right. There isn't a rock between here and Minot's Ledge. Let me take the wheel awhile; you go down and get something warmer on."

"I guess I will; I hadn't realized that it was so cold."

Bob had just reached the lowest step, when he turned and thrust his head out again with a shout to Nelson. But Nelson had already called Dan to take the wheel, and was hurrying down. The engine had stopped!

CHAPTER VII—IN WHICH NELSON DISCOVERS A STOWAWAY

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For a moment the silence was startling. For an hour and a half the hum and whir of the busy engine had filled the boat until it had long since grown unnoticeable. And now to have it suddenly cease without warning seemed a veritable catastrophe. The silence which ensued while Nelson went anxiously over the motor seemed unnatural and fraught with disaster. On the stove, Tom's viands stood forgotten while the *chef* watched with worried countenance the captain's efforts to locate the trouble. Bob stood silently by and Dan peered down from the hatch, for there was no use in holding the wheel. The *Vagabond* drifted silently, rolling a little from side to side as the swells took her.

Finally Nelson stood up and scowled impatiently.

"I can't see where the trouble is. The spark's all right, she doesn't seem hot, and the gasoline cock is wide open. The only thing——"

He seized a wrench and began to unfasten the vaporizer.

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"This thing may possibly be stopped up," he muttered.

He cleaned it out, turned the gasoline on again, and whistled.

"What is it?" asked Bob.

"She doesn't get any gasoline," said Nelson thoughtfully. "It surely hasn't been shut off at the tank! No one has been trying any fool tricks like that, have they?"

There was a prompt and sober denial from each.

"Then," said Nelson, "either the supply pipe is stopped up or the tank's empty, and I don't see how either is possible. Bring that light, Bob, will you? I'm going to measure."

A moment later, when the measuring stick had been pulled out of the tank for the third time, perfectly dry, Nelson gave in.

"That's it," he said quietly. "The tank's as dry as punk."

"But I thought we had something like ninety gallons aboard," said Bob.

"So did I. Either there's a big leak in the tank or else they only gave us about ten gallons at the wharf. I wasn't looking. Did anyone notice how much gasoline was put in?"

"Why, it couldn't have been much," answered Dan. "The young fellow that was doing it was only at it three or four minutes."

"That's it, then," said Nelson. "It couldn't be a leak. If it was, we'd smell it easily. Well, we can't

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run the engine without gasoline. I ought to have seen to the filling of the tank, I suppose; but you'd think they could be trusted to do that, wouldn't you? They'll hear about it, all right!"

"Wh-wh-what are we gu-going to do?" asked Tom.

"Well, there are three things we can do," was the answer. "We can get into the tender and tow the launch, for one thing. But we're a good ten or eleven miles from the harbor, and that's an all-night job. Or we can let her drift as long as she keeps near the shore. Or we can drop her anchor and ride here until morning."

"Let's do that," said Dan. "It—it's perfectly safe, isn't it?"

"Yes, safe as you like while this sort of weather lasts. Only I don't know for certain whether we've got cable enough to the anchor. It depends on how much water there is here."

"Well, we can soon find out," said Bob cheerfully. "Come on and let's get it over."

There was an anxious moment or two following the splash of the anchor, and while the cable paid out into the dark water.

"How's she coming?" asked Nelson.

"Plenty left yet," answered Dan.

"All right!" called Nelson. "Make her fast. It isn't nearly as deep as I feared it would be."

The *Vagabond* swung her nose seaward and tugged at the cable, but the anchor held fast. Nelson and Bob examined the lanterns carefully, took in the flags, which had been forgotten, and came back to the cockpit. Barry, who seemed to scent trouble, followed Dan's heels at every step.

"If the weather stays like this," observed Dan, "we'll do pretty well."

"Yes, and I don't see any sign of a change," answered Nelson. "Barometer's behaving well and the wind's clean from the west. All we've got to do now is to have our dinner, turn in, and sleep until morning. But we've got to keep watch on deck. I'll take it for two hours and then you fellows can take it for two each. That'll bring us to daylight. Then we'll have to find some one to give us a tow. How about dinner, Tommy?"

"I'm afraid it's all cooked away," said Tommy sadly.

But it wasn't, and Bob, Dan, and Tom sat down to the table and ate hungrily, while Nelson kept watch above, putting his head in the doorway now and then to beg some one to keep an eye on Tommy. The coffee was hot and Tom had not forgotten to "put the coffee in," and before the repast was half finished everyone's spirits had risen to normal once more. The catastrophe began to take on the guise of an interesting adventure, and the prospect of keeping watch on deck was quite exciting. Presently Dan relieved Nelson, and the latter took his place at table.

It was decided that the first watch should commence at nine o'clock, with Nelson on duty; that Tom should relieve him at eleven, and be followed by Bob and Dan in order. But when nine came, those who were off duty refused to go to bed in spite of Nelson's protests. Instead, they wrapped themselves up and snuggled down in the cockpit out of the wind, which seemed to be freshening gradually and was quite chill, and talked and stared up at the stars or across the black void to where Minot's flashed its signal. Once lights, a white and a green, passed them to the eastward, but there was no telling how far distant the craft was, and Nelson decided that it would be a waste of breath to try and make those on board of her hear. The novelty of the situation added its spice of enjoyment, and it was long after ten when Tom announced sleepily that he was going to turn in.

"What's the use, Tommy?" asked Dan. "You'll have to take the watch in a half hour."

But Tom only muttered incoherently as he stumbled below. Dan and Bob followed soon after, and Nelson was left alone. He drew the hatch shut in order to cut off the light which came from below, and took his stand by the wheel. Presently Bob shouted good night, and he answered. Then everything was very silent out there. For awhile he kept his eyes busy on all sides, but such a sharp outlook was quite unnecessary, and so presently he leaned his elbows on the cabin roof and let his thoughts wander. He blamed himself for their predicament, and would be heartily glad when they were once more in port. Six bells sounded below, but he was not sleepy, and so he didn't wake Tom until almost midnight. It was no easy matter even then, but at last Tom stumbled up on deck, promising sleepily to keep a sharp watch, and Nelson divested himself of his shoes and sweater and threw himself onto his bunk. Barry watched him from his nest at Dan's feet and thumped his tail companionably. Sleep didn't come readily, and so he lay for awhile with wide-opened eyes, staring at the dim light above Dan's berth. Presently his thoughts worked around to Tom out there on deck. He recollected how sleepy that youth had been when he went out, and he became uneasy. Of course, with the lights in place, there was really no danger of anyone running them down, but at the same time there was always a possibility of accident, and Nelson felt himself liable for the safety of his companions. Presently he slipped off the berth and crossed the engine room quietly. All was still outside save for the rush of the wind and the slap of the water against the boat. He put his head out, expecting to see Tom huddled up asleep on the seat. Instead—

"Hello!" said Tom. "Is that you, Bob? You're ahead of time."

"N-no," answered Nelson a bit sheepishly, "it's me. I—I wasn't sleepy, and I thought I'd see how you were getting along."

Which wasn't quite truthful, perhaps, but was possibly excusable, since Nelson didn't want to hurt Tom's feelings.

"Oh, I'm getting along all right," was the cheerful reply. "It's rather jolly out here. Do you know what time it is?"

"About half-past twelve."

"All right. Haven't seen a thing yet."

"Well, I guess you won't, Tommy, unless it's a whale. Call Bob at one. Goodnight!"

"Good night, Captain!" answered Tom.

Relieved, Nelson went back to his berth and fell promptly to sleep. He had a hazy idea once that the watch was being changed, but he didn't really wake up until Dan shook him at a little after five.

"Everything's all right, I guess," said Dan softly, "but it's raining and blowing a good deal, and I thought maybe you'd want to know about it."

Nelson put his feet to the floor and instantly realized that weather conditions had altered. The launch was pitching endwise and sidewise, and through one or two of the ports, which had been left open, the rain was blowing in.

"It's after five," said Dan, "but I thought you fellows might as well sleep awhile longer. We couldn't see a boat anyhow, unless she bumped into us; it's as thick as anything outside."

Nelson drew on his oilskins, closed the ports on the weather side, and followed Dan to the cockpit. The wind had passed around to the southwest, the sea had risen a good deal, and all sight of land was shut off by the rain squalls. It was what the fisherman would have called a "smoky sou'wester." Nelson went forward and saw that the cable was fast, although it was no easy task to stay on the launch's plunging bow. The water swept over the forward end of the cabin in spray every moment.

"You go and take a nap," said Nelson. "I'll look out for her awhile."

"All right," agreed Dan, "I guess I will. The fact is"—he grinned apologetically—"I'm feeling the motion a bit."

"I should say you were!" answered Nelson. "You're as white as a sheet! Go on down and see if you can't get to sleep."

"Well—is everything all right?"

"Yes. This is only a squall, I guess. There's no danger, anyway, although it'll be pretty wet for awhile."

Dan went down and Nelson made himself comfortable in the lee of the cabin. It seemed earlier than it really was, but that was due to the clouds and rain squalls. At about six Bob put his head out, with surprise written large on his features.

"What's happened?" he asked.

"Oh, a nice little blow from the sou'west," answered Nelson. "The old *Vagabond* thinks she's doing a Highland fling."

"How long's it going to last?" asked Bob, with a dubious look about him.

"Not long, I guess. I hope not, anyhow, for we're not likely to find a tow while it keeps up. Wake Tommy and get him to start breakfast, will you? A cup of hot coffee might taste nasty, but I don't think so."

Bob's eyes brightened as he drew back out of the wind to awaken the *chef* and finish dressing; "hot coffee" surely has a grateful sound on a wet deck at six o'clock in the morning. And it tastes a whole lot nicer than it sounds; everyone would have agreed to that half an hour later, especially Nelson, who drank his coffee from a tin cup and ate his bacon and eggs from the top of the cabin, where the end of the tender sheltered the plate from the rain.

"I'm just as well pleased that we didn't try to go to New York with the others," observed Bob after breakfast. "About this time they must be down around the mouth of Buzzard's Bay, and I'll bet it's blowing up nasty there."

"Well, there was no danger of our getting there," said Nelson.

"Why?"

"Because we had no gasoline, of course."

"That's so; I'd forgotten that. But, say, I'm glad I'm not on the *Sue* about this time!"

"I wonder which will win," said Dan.

"So do I," said Nelson. "Well, we'll find out if we ever get to land. Hang this wind, anyway! Last night we might have used the tender and towed a bit, but we couldn't do that now in this sea to save our lives."

"I hope it won't be necessary to try it," said Bob dryly.

And as it proved, it wasn't. For before nine the wind died down, the sun came out strongly, and

the sea, while still choppy, calmed considerably. Nelson set the yachting ensign upside down as a signal of distress, and the Four kept a sharp watch for boats. Little by little the shoreline showed clear and sharp to the west, and sails and smoke showed here and there on the water. But it was all of an hour before any craft came near enough to see the *Vagabond's* dilemma. Then it was an ocean-going tug, which bore down on them from the north with a schooner in tow. The boys waved and used the megaphone, and the tug presently altered her course and ran up to them.

"Broke down?" shouted a man from the door of the pilot house.

"Yes," answered Nelson. "We're out of gasoline. Have you got any?"

"No, we don't use it," laughed the other.

"Can you give us a tow, then?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"Anywhere we can get more gasoline."

"Well, I'm bound for Sanstable. If you want to make fast to the stern of the schooner back there you can. But I cal'ate if you wait awhile you'll find some feller bound toward Boston."

There was a hurried conference. They were tired of lying there, and Sanstable sounded as good as any other place.

"We'll go with you," answered Nelson.

"All right. Get your mud hook up and be ready to throw a line to the schooner as she goes by."

The tug started on slowly, the boys pulled the anchor up, and Nelson found a sixty-foot rope which would serve as a towline. By good luck, the man on the schooner caught it at the first throw, ran aft with it, and made it fast, and in another moment the *Vagabond* was sliding through the water once more at a seven-mile gait. The crew of the schooner, the *Lizzie and May of Rockport*, laden with big blocks of granite, came aft and smoked their pipes and observed the launch with phlegmatic interest.

"When will you reach Sanstable?" shouted Nelson.

One of the men took his pipe from his mouth, spat over the rail, and cocked an eye at the sun.

"'Bout three o'clock," he answered finally.

"Thunder!" muttered Nelson. Then, "How far is it?" he asked.

The pipe came forth again and the informant let his gaze travel around the horizon as though he were looking for a milestone.

"'Bout thirty or forty miles," he said.

"Thanks!" shouted Nelson. There was no reply to this. Doubtless the sailor thought it a waste of time to remove his pipe for a mere polite formality. Presently he and his companions, all save the man at the wheel, disappeared.

The sun grew warmer and the sea calmer. The wind had stolen around into the south and blew mildly across the sparkling waves. There was nothing to do save take life easily, and so Bob and Dan stretched themselves out on the cabin roof, Tom went to sleep in the bow, and Nelson stayed in the cockpit where he could get to the wheel if the necessity arose. At twelve Tom was awakened out of a sound but not silent slumber, and sent below to cook luncheon, and at a little before two bells they ate. By this time they were near enough the shore so that they could distinguish objects. Plymouth was passed at two, and at three the tug was heading into the shallow harbor of Sanstable.

"How much are you going to offer him?" asked Bob.

"The tugboat fellow? I don't know. What do you think?" said Nelson.

"Well, I suppose he could demand a lot if he had a mind to, but I think ten dollars would be about right, don't you?"

Nelson thought that it would, and so when the tug slowed down and the man at the wheel of the *Lizzie and May* tossed them their line Nelson dropped into the tender, which had been put over, and rowed to the tug.

"Ten dollars!" said the captain. "Why, say, young man, I'd tow you around the world for that! No; you give me a couple of dollars for the boys and we'll call quits."

"Well, we're awfully much obliged," Nelson assured him as he handed up the money.

"That's all right," answered the captain, who, on nearer acquaintance proved to be a squat, broad-shouldered man with a grave face lighted by a pair of twinkling blue eyes, "that's all right. Maybe you can give me a tow some day!" And he chuckled as Nelson assured him of his willingness to do so. The tug and schooner proceeded on up the harbor along the waterfront, and Nelson rowed back to the *Vagabond*. There Dan joined him with the towline, and the two pulled the launch up to the nearest wharf. The harbor was not large, nor were there many piers, but it was well filled with pleasure craft and small schooners, and every slip was occupied. As there was no chance of getting up to a wharf, they decided to tie up to a schooner—the *Henry Nellis*—which was landing a load of pine boards.

"We'll have to stay here until morning," said Nelson, "so we might as well make the best of it. As

soon as we get some gasoline aboard we can run out and anchor in the harbor.”

Luckily they were able to buy their fuel at the head of the wharf where they had berthed, but it was hard work getting it aboard, since they had to carry it down from the little store in five-gallon cans, lug it across the schooner’s deck, and hand it down the side. Dan stayed aboard the launch and the others carried. It was awkward work, and they decided that they would take aboard merely enough for a two days’ run and fill again where things were more convenient. So they put in thirty gallons and called it off. It was then four o’clock, and they decided to go ashore awhile before taking the launch out to her anchorage. After they had reached the village street Nelson stopped.

“Say, I forgot to lock that hatch,” he said. “I wonder if I’d better go back.”

“You closed things up, didn’t you?” asked Bob.

“Yes.”

“Oh, it will be all right, then. Come on!”

They found the post office, and Nelson wrote a brief account of their adventures to his father. When he had signed his name to the postal card he paused and chewed the end of the pen for a moment. Then—

“Look here, fellows,” he said to the others, who were watching the village life through the dusty window, “we ought to decide where we’re going, so that dad can send our mail to us.”

“That’s so,” agreed Tom.

“Let’s keep on to New York, now that we’ve started,” said Bob.

“Well, but you wanted to go to Portland,” answered Nelson doubtfully.

“Never mind Portland. Maybe we can run up there when we come back. Let’s make it New York.”

“All right. Then I’ll tell dad to send our mail to the general delivery at Newport, and we’ll stop for it there the day after to-morrow. How’s that?”

“Sounds good to me,” said Dan.

An hour later they were back at the wharf, having given their legs a good stretching, and were making their way through the piles of lumber which covered the pier.

“It’s time we got here,” observed Bob. “The schooner’s through unloading, and there comes a tug to take her out. Let’s get a move on.”

He led the way across the deck of the schooner and was hailed by a thin, red-faced man, who came hurrying back from the bow.

“Hi, there! Where you going?”

Bob explained.

“Oh!” said the other. Then, “Say,” he asked, “you ain’t seen a young feller about fourteen around here, have yer?”

Bob replied that he had not.

“Well, if you do, you let me know,” said the captain of the *Henry Nellis* savagely. “He’s my boy, and if I catch anyone helpin’ him to run away from this ship, there’ll be trouble.”

“Oh, run away, has he?” asked Dan.

“What’s that to you, young feller?” asked the man angrily.

“Nothing,” replied Dan, flushing. “Only if he has, I hope he keeps out of your way.”

“Oh, you do, eh? Well, you get off my deck, do you hear? Get, now!”

“Come on,” whispered Bob. But Dan’s ire was aroused.

“Don’t think I want to stay here, do you?” he asked sarcastically. “You aren’t laboring under the impression that your personal attraction is so great that I can’t tear myself loose, are you? Why, I’ve seen better-looking folks than you in the monkey cage!”

By that time Nelson and Bob were hurrying him unwillingly to the side of the schooner, and Tom, choking with laughter, was scrambling over the rail. The captain choked with anger for an instant. Then he found his voice, and the boys landed on the deck of the *Vagabond* amid a veritable thunder of abuse. He came to the side of the schooner and continued to give his opinion of them while they cast off.

“Go it!” muttered Dan. Then, seeing the boat hook in Bob’s hands, “Say, let me have that a minute, Bob,” he begged. “Just let me rap him one over the knuckles with it!”

But Bob refused, and the *Vagabond* slid astern under the amused regard of the crew, who had gathered as the storm broke. Dan waved farewell in the direction of the flaming red face which still regarded them savagely over the rail.

“Write often!” he called.

There was a quickly hushed howl from the crew, the captain disappeared from the rail, and from the subsequent sounds it was evident that he had transferred his attention to his subordinates.

"Gee, isn't he an old bear!" marveled Dan.

"Don't blame the boy for running away!" observed Nelson, as he shoved back the hatch and opened the doors. "Take the wheel, Bob, and we'll run across there toward the bar, where we'll be out of the way. See that spar over there? Sing out when we get almost up to it and I'll shut her off."

"Yes, sir! Very good, sir!" replied Bob, touching his cap ceremoniously.

Nelson went below, and as his feet touched the engine room floor he heard a shuffling sound in the stateroom beyond. With a bound, he was at the door. There was no one in sight. Evidently his ears had deceived him; probably he had heard some one moving on deck. Then, as he turned to go back to the engine, he saw that he had not been mistaken after all. Huddled in the corner of Tom's berth lay a boy, whose anxious face gleamed pale in the dim light and whose wide, eager eyes stared pleadingly up at him.

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CHAPTER VIII—TELLS HOW THEY OUTWITTED THE CAPTAIN OF THE *HENRY NELLIS*

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"What are you doing here?" demanded Nelson sternly.

His first thought was that the boy had sneaked into the cabin during their absence, bent on theft, and that on hearing their return he had attempted to hide. But the other's first words disillusioned him.

"Don't you tell him! Don't you, please, sir!" begged the boy in hoarse whispers. "I ain't done any harm here, honest! And if he gets me, I'll have to go back on the boat, sir, and she's going away up to Newfoundland, and—and—I just can't stand it any longer, I can't!"

"Oh," muttered Nelson, "I see! You're—that boy of his."

"I ain't his boy, not really!" cried the other eagerly. "He told my mother he'd take me one voyage and make a sailor of me. And I wanted to go; I didn't know what it was like. And I went up to Casco with him, and when we got here I wanted to go home, and he said I couldn't because I'd signed on with him for a year. I never signed anything, sir; he was just lying! And we been here more'n a week, and he kept watchin' me all the time. And to-day I saw your yacht, sir, and I thought maybe he wouldn't miss me till you'd gone out again, and so I sneaked down here a little while ago. And I ain't touched a thing; honest, sir, I ain't! If you'll just let me stay here till the *Henry* sails, sir, I'll get out right away, I will. You ain't going to tell him, are you, sir?"

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"You stay here," answered Nelson quietly, "and keep still. I'll see what the other fellows say."

"Don't you, please!" whispered the boy, half sobbing. "If he catches me now he'll whip me awful! Just let me stay a little while, sir, won't you? I'll do anything you say—"

"Cut it out!" said Nelson kindly. "I dare say you won't have to go back, but I've got to tell the other fellows and see what they think. Don't you worry, though; I guess it'll be all right."

Nelson hurried back to the cockpit. The *Vagabond* was floating gently away from the wharf on the outgoing tide. Forty or fifty feet away a small tug was snuggling up to the *Henry Nellis*, preparatory to towing her outside the harbor. Bob was at the wheel, but he and Dan and Tom were looking intently toward the stern rail of the schooner, where the captain and one of the sailors, the latter a small, swarthy man with rings in his ears, were talking excitedly and looking toward the *Vagabond*. The next moment the captain hurriedly disappeared, the watchers heard an order given, and three sailors sprang to the stern davits and began to lower the small boat which hung there.

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"Now, what's he up to?" asked Dan resentfully. But before anyone could answer him, Nelson had called to them.

"Here a minute, fellows," he said softly. "Keep on looking, but move over this way so you can hear me. That boy that the captain spoke of—"

"He's getting into the boat," interrupted Bob.

"I'll bet he's coming over here, too," said Dan. "If he tries to come aboard, I'll plaguey well dump him into the water!"

Nelson paused and watched proceedings. If the captain came aboard, he was certain to find the boy. Perhaps he had every right to, but Nelson didn't like the idea of giving the youngster up to him.

"Here he comes!" muttered Dan.

"Stand by the wheel, Bob," said Nelson. "I'm going to start her." He darted below, turned the gasoline valve, threw on the switch, and bent over the wheel. Once, twice, thrice he turned it over, but the engine refused to start. Perplexedly Nelson stood up and ran his eye over the motor. Then he remembered that the gasoline had not been turned on at the tank since the latter had been filled. It was too late now to run away before the captain of the *Henry Nellis* reached them. But he hurried forward, opened the outlet valve at the tank, threw a warning glance at the boy,

who still sat huddled in the dim corner of the bunk, and returned to the engine. One more lift of the wheel and the engine was running. But he didn't throw the clutch in and start the boat. Voices outside told him that the captain was already alongside. He hurried up the steps, striving to look unconcerned. The boat from the schooner was bobbing about a couple of yards away. It was manned by two sailors, one of them the man with the earrings, and in the stern sat the captain.

"Say, Nel," said Bob, as the former appeared, "this gentleman wants to know if he can't see the launch. Says he's very much interested in launches." Bob was very sober, but his left eye, out of the captain's range of vision, winked meaningly.

"Why, I'm sorry," answered Nelson, turning to the captain, "but we're just leaving. The fact is, we've got quite a ways to go before dark."

"Where you going?" asked the captain, smiling ingratiatingly.

"Duxbury," answered Nelson on the spur of the moment.

"Well, that won't take you long. You let me see your engine, like a good fellow. I've been thinkin' of getting one of them naphtha launches for a good while." He made a slight motion with his hand and the sailors dipped their oars.

"Sorry," replied Nelson firmly, "but we can't stop. And I shall have to ask you not to come alongside unless you want to take a trip with us. All ready, Bob?"

"All ready."

Over on the schooner the crew was lining the stern rail, and the tug, too, held its small audience. Nelson turned toward the engine-room door.

"Hold on a bit," exclaimed the captain. "You listen to me, now. You'd better. You don't want no trouble and I don't want no trouble, eh?" He smiled with an attempt at frankness, a smile that made Nelson shiver and caused Dan to clench his fists. "My boy's run away, and this man here says he seen him getting on to your boat." He nodded at the sailor with the earrings, who grinned and bobbed his head. "That boy's bound to me for a year—signed papers, he did—and I'm his lawful guarden and protector. His mother give him into my care. How am I going to answer her when she asks me where is her boy, eh?"

"More than likely he's halfway home by this time," suggested Bob politely.

"If I was sure o' that," answered the captain, with a shake of his head, "I wouldn't mind so much. 'Cause I think a heap o' that boy, I do, and I wouldn't have no harm come to him for half my vessel, I wouldn't." One of the men in the boat, the one who didn't wear earrings, choked, and, finding the captain's baleful glare on him, took a quid of tobacco from his mouth and tossed it overboard as though it were to blame for his seeming mirth. "No, that boy's on your boat, I tell you," continued the captain sorrowfully. "He was seen a-climbin' down into her. Of course, I ain't sayin' as you knew anything about it; that ain't likely, 'cause it's agin the law to harbor deserters; but he's there, I'll take my oath. And so you just let me come aboard and talk to him kindly. I'm like a father to him, and I can't think what's got into his head to make him act this way. Pull in, Johnnie."

"Hold on!" cried Nelson. "I've told you that you can't come aboard, and I mean it!"

The captain's smiles vanished and gave way to a very ugly scowl which dwelt impartially on the four boys.

"Mean it, do ye?" he growled. "And I mean to have that boy. I've got the law on my side, let me tell you that, you young dudes, and I can have you put in jail!"

"Look here, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is," said Dan impatiently, "you're talking a whole lot of nonsense. Can't you see that we haven't got your boy, and never saw him? If we did have him, you might have reason to kick, for I'm hanged if I'd give him up to you!"

"You're lying!" cried the other angrily. "He's in the cabin! You go look and see if he ain't."

"No use in my looking," answered Dan carelessly. "Nelson's been down, and there's no place anyone could hide there. You haven't seen anything of his plaguey boy, have you, Nel?"

Nelson had been fearing that question, and for an instant he found himself in a quandary. He didn't mean to lie about it, and in spite of the fact that the captain evidently had the law on his side, as he claimed to have, he hated to give the boy up. Already suspicion was creeping into the captain's face when a way out of the quandary suggested itself. Nelson looked thoughtful.

"Well, it doesn't seem possible," he said slowly, "that he could be in the cabin without my seeing him, but what the captain says is so, I guess. If he is here, I suppose it's our duty to give him up. There's no harm in being sure, anyhow, and so I'll take a look around down there. Is he big enough to make a fight?"

"Fight? Him? No; he ain't got the spunk the Lord gave a duck!" answered the captain disgustedly. Nelson's manner had imposed on him thoroughly. "But when you find him you call me and I'll get him out in a shake. I knew you didn't want to obstruct the law, boys."

"Oh, I guess he isn't worth going to law about," laughed Nelson. "I'll see if he's there."

He turned and made for the door. Bob was still at the wheel. As he passed him he whispered softly: "Ready!"

He disappeared, and Bob slowly, idly turned the wheel.

"He ain't a bad boy," said the captain, no longer frowning, "but he's dreadful stubborn. I told his mother I'd make a man and a first-class sailor of him, and I mean to do it, but it's— Hi! Stop her! You come back here!"

The quiet throbbing of the engine, running light, had suddenly changed to a deeper note; there was a quick churning at the stern as the propeller lashed the water, and on the instant the *Vagabond* shot at full speed in a wide curve toward the entrance of the harbor.

"I'll have the law on you, you robbers!" shouted the irate captain of the *Henry Nellis*, shaking his big fist after them. "If you don't stop, I'll have every last one of you arrested. Hear me, do you?"

Dan knelt on the seat and put his hands to his mouth.

"Say! You go to thunder, will you?" he bawled.

"Hush up, Dan!" said Bob. But he smiled, nevertheless, as he straightened the *Vagabond* for a run through the channel. Back of them the little boat was bobbing erratically in the wake of the launch, and the captain was still hurling invective after them. Nelson put his head out of the cabin and viewed the scene with satisfaction.

"Is he du-du-du-down there?" asked Tom excitedly. Nelson nodded.

"What?" cried Dan. "The kid's on board? Well, I'll be blowed!" Then he sat down on the stern seat and laughed till the tears came. "Oh, say, this is great! And there I stood, lying up and down to him! Say, don't you know he's peeved?"

"Well, you didn't know he was here," said Nelson, "so you weren't really lying."

"Pshaw!" said Dan. "I'd have said the same thing if I had known. It isn't lying to fool an old brute like that!"

"A lie's a lie, no matter who you tell it to," answered Tom.

"Look out for that schooner coming in, Bob," Nelson cautioned. "When you pass the Point, swing her straight across the bay. We'll try for Provincetown, seeing that I told him we were going to Duxbury."

"Hello!" cried Dan. "Look there!"

The boat containing the captain of the *Henry Nellis* was returning as fast as oars could send it, and now it was alongside the tugboat and the captain had leaped aboard her.

"What's he up to?" muttered Dan.

The *Vagabond* was dipping her nose into the waves of the bar.

"Oh, he's beaten," said Tom, "and he knows it!"

"Like fun he does!" cried Dan. "They're casting off the tug, and he's still aboard. I'll bet you anything——"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Nelson.

"Nonsense be blowed! He's after us in the tugboat!"

Dan turned and faced the others with a broad smile.

"Now for some fun!" he chuckled.

At that moment the *Vagabond* swung around the Point and shook herself clear of the harbor waters. But over the low sandspit a sudden cloud of black smoke floated upward, showing that the captain had taken up the chase.

CHAPTER IX—PROVES THAT A STERN CHASE IS NOT ALWAYS A LONG CHASE

For a moment there was silence in the cockpit of the *Vagabond*. Nelson and Bob looked serious, Tom somewhat frightened, and Dan as happy as a lark. It was Bob who first broke the silence.

"How fast can one of those tugs travel?" he asked. Nelson shook his head.

"It depends on the tug," he answered. "That one looked pretty small, and so I guess her engine isn't very powerful. But even so, it's likely she can give us a mighty good run."

"How's our engine running?" asked Bob.

"Full speed," was the reply. "If it was dark we could lose them easily, but it won't be dark for an hour and a half yet. Well, we'll give them a good chase of it, anyway."

"Even if they catch us, what can they do?" scoffed Dan. "I'd just like to see them try to set foot on this boat!"

"Well, I guess they could do it if they got alongside," answered Nelson dryly. "I noticed about five men on that tug."

"But they haven't any right to!" protested Tom.

"I don't believe they'd care much about that," said Bob. "So what we've got to do is to keep away from them. Watch for her at the mouth of the harbor."

They watched in silence. One minute passed, another; then the tug stuck her blunt nose around the sandspit and headed after the *Vagabond*. She was a good half mile astern, but from the way in which she was coming it seemed to the boys extremely unlikely that she would stay at that distance very long.

"Gee!" quoth Tom anxiously. "Isn't she humming!"

"She certainly is," answered Bob. "But, then, so are we, for that matter."

"I'll go down and have a look at the oil cups," said Nelson. "I'd hate like thunder to have the engine stop at this stage of the game."

"Gu-gu-gee! If it did!" muttered Tom fearfully.

"Keep your courage up, Tommy," laughed Dan. "What you need is something to eat. So do I, for that matter. But I suppose we can't talk supper yet, eh?"

"No; let's wait until we see how this thing's coming out," said Bob. "Where's the runaway, Nelson?"

"He's down here," answered Nelson from below. "I've told him what's up, and he says he'll go back to his friend if it's going to get us into trouble."

"To the captain? Get out!"

"Nu-nu-nu-not on your lu-lu-life!" cried Tom.

"That's the stuff, Tommy," said Dan, clapping him on the back. "The old guard dies, but never surrenders, eh? Now, look; you go down and see if you can't find something we can nibble on—crackers or bread and butter—will you?"

"Yes, there's plenty of pilot bread," answered Tom. "Shall I butter some?"

"No; let's have it *au naturel*, Tommy. That's French and means something, but I don't remember just what. No; pilot bread is better without butter. Scoot along, now; we may have a desperate battle before us," with a wink at Bob, "and we must have our bodies fortified. Whatever that is," he added, as Tom went below.

"I don't see that she's gained any," said Bob presently.

"No," answered Dan. "Lost, if anything."

The welcome news was passed below to Nelson, and he came up to see for himself.

"That's right," he said. "They've dropped back a little, and I'm mighty glad of it. The fact is, we aren't getting all our speed. There's something wrong somewhere, and I guess it's the gasoline. It was probably pretty poor stuff; full of water, I dare say."

"But there's no fear of the engine stopping, is there?" asked Bob. Nelson shook his head.

"Not likely; but she's missing a spark now and then, and she may do worse than that. I don't believe we're doing better than ten and a half miles."

"Well, if we can beat her at that," said Dan, "what's the use of worrying?"

Tom came up with a dish of pilot bread and a jar of marmalade, and there was an impromptu feast in the cockpit.

"How about the kid down there?" asked Dan. "Maybe he's hungry, too."

"That's so," exclaimed Nelson. "I'll take some of this truck down to him." When he returned he said: "Glad you thought of it, Dan; the poor duffer's putting that pilot bread away as though he hadn't seen a square meal in an age."

"Maybe he hasn't," said Bob. "I don't believe the grub's very good at the captain's table."

"Much the fellow down there would know about the captain's table," scoffed Dan. "He probably ate in the forecabin."

"Not if he was cabin boy," returned Bob. "Cabin boys eat at the officers' mess."

"Who said he was cabin boy?" asked Dan. "I'll bet he was just a—a sort of apprentice. Why can't we have him up here and hear what the row is?"

"They might see him from the tug," said Tom, glancing uneasily toward that boat.

"What if they do? They know he's here, anyhow. Call him up, Nelson."

And in a moment he appeared at the steps, glanced about him anxiously and diffidently, and stood as though awaiting further instructions. He was a small boy, but he looked hard and healthy. His rather thin face was bronzed by the wind, and the skin on the end of his funny little upturned nose was peeling off, perhaps from the same cause. He didn't look overly clean, but he had rather nice, honest brown eyes and a serious mouth, at one corner of which, just at present, a flake of pilot bread was adhering. He was dressed in a pair of brown trousers, which were neither long nor short but which left off a good three inches above his shoes, a blue-and-white-striped cotton shirt, guiltless of collar or tie, and a jacket, very much too large for him, of a color

once blue and now a queer brownish purple. His hands were broad, and brown and scarred—not at all pretty to look at—with broken and blackened nails. On his touseled brown hair he wore a dirty canvas cap. As the Four observed him for a moment in silence, he took off his cap, awkwardly and hesitatingly, and clutched it in his hands.

“What’s your name?” asked Bob kindly.

“Spencer Floyd,” was the answer in a husky voice that seemed years too old for him.

“Well, Spencer, supposing you sit down there and tell us what the trouble is,” Bob suggested. “Your friend the captain’s after us in the tug back there, but I don’t believe he’ll catch us. What’s the trouble between the captain and you? Let’s hear about it.”

The boy climbed up so that he could see the pursuing tug. He watched it for a moment silently. Then he sat down obediently on the top step and looked at his cap. Evidently he needed prompting.

“Wasn’t the captain good to you?” asked Dan. Spencer shook his head slowly.

“He beat me,” he muttered finally.

“Beat you, did he? What for?”

“‘Cause I wanted to go home.”

“Where do you live?” asked Nelson, taking up the role of examiner.

“Mullen’s Cove.”

“Where’s that?”

“Long Island.”

“Oh, Long Island, eh? Folks living?”

“My mother is,” answered the runaway. “My father died three years ago. He was first mate on the *Independence*.”

“Fisherman?”

“Yes, sir; seiner. She was wrecked on the Banks.”

“Oh!” said Nelson sympathetically. “That was bad, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, sir. He didn’t leave much money, but we own our house, and ma she raises vegetables and sells milk.”

“I see. And where does the captain come in? By the way, what’s his name?”

“Captain Sauder.”

“Not soft solder, I’ll bet,” murmured Dan.

“Is he a relative of yours?” Nelson asked.

“No, he ain’t,” was the decided reply. “But he and my father used to be together on some boat once. And he used to come and see us sometimes. And when father died, he offered to take me and learn me to be a sailor. So ma, she let me go for a year.”

“Did you like it?”

“No, sir.”

“But you stuck it out?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And then what?”

“When my time was up with him I told him I was going to leave and go home. But he said I couldn’t. Said I’d signed articles for two years, and if I tried to get away he’d flog me.”

“Did you try?”

“Yes, sir, about three weeks ago. But he caught me.”

“Did he flog you?”

The boy shivered and nodded.

“Bu-bu-brute!” growled Tom.

“And you say you never signed anything?”

“No, sir, I never did. And I ain’t heard from my mother for most a year, and—and—” He stopped and sniffed, the tears welling into his eyes.

“That’s too bad!” said Nelson. “But don’t you worry. We’ll get you ashore somewhere, and you can get home.”

“I guess he’ll catch me,” said the boy hopelessly.

“Oh, no, he won’t! Got any money?”

“Yes, sir.”

"How much?" Spencer observed his questioner suspiciously for a second. But Nelson's face showed only kindness and sympathy, and the boy's eyes dropped.

"Most two dollars," he answered.

"Well, that's not a great deal, is it? Did you get paid on the ship?"

"Fifty cents a month."

"Gee!" exclaimed Dan. "Isn't he the reckless captain!"

"Well," said Nelson, "I don't pretend to know what the law is in such cases, but I'm for getting Spencer back to his home. Maybe we'll get in trouble about it, though. What do you fellows say?"

"Trouble be blowed!" said Dan. "If he hasn't got the law on his side, he ought to have."

"That's so," said Bob. "We'll help him along. How about it, Tommy?"

"If we du-du-du-don't we deserve tu-tu-to be ki-ki-ki-ki——"

"You're missing sparks, Tommy," warned Nelson.

"Water in his gasoline," said Dan, with a grin.

"——to be kicked!" ended Tom explosively and earnestly.

"And so we do," agreed Nelson. "How's the enemy coming on?"

"Just about holding her own, I'd say," was Bob's verdict. "What are your plans, Nel?"

"Make for Provincetown, over there. We ought to reach it a little after dark at this rate."

"Then what?"

"Put the boy ashore, give him a few dollars, and trust to him to keep out of the way."

"But look here, Nel. If we land him at Provincetown, he'll have to come back all around the Cape. That'll take him an age."

"There's the railroad. Why can't he take a train?"

"Suppose he does? All Captain Chowder, or whatever his name is, will have to do is to go down the Cape and head him off."

"That's so," answered Nelson thoughtfully. "But it seems to me he ought to be able to hide out for awhile. The captain can't afford to spend much time chasing him. What do you say, Spencer? Do you think that if we put you ashore at Provincetown, you could keep out of the captain's way?"

Spencer shook his head.

"He'd get me," he muttered. "He'd say I had deserted, and then they'd be looking out for me along the road."

"He's right," said Dan. "That's just what would happen. They'd probably telegraph along the railroad, and he'd be yanked back to the *Henry Nellis* quick-time. That won't do. We've got to think of some other scheme."

"I wish I'd started up the coast," said Nelson regretfully. "We might have made Plymouth easily, and if we'd got him ashore there he'd have had the whole State to hide in."

"Do you suppose the captain will come after him if he gets home?" asked Dan.

"How about that, Spencer?" Nelson questioned. "Do you think the captain would take you away again?"

"No, sir," answered the boy, with a decisive shake of his head. "Ma wouldn't let him after I'd told her about his beating me."

"Well, then," said Nelson, "what we've got to do is to get you home. Let's see that chart of the Long-Island coast, Dan. It's down there in the locker."

The chart was produced and spread out on Nelson's knees.

"Now, let's see. Where's Mullen's Cove situated, Spencer?"

"It's near Mattituck, sir."

"Mattituck, Mattituck," murmured Nelson. "That has a familiar sound. Let me see, now, where—Oh, here it is! And here's Mullen's Cove, too."

"May I look at it, sir?" asked Spencer eagerly.

"Yes; come here. Here it is, see?"

The boy leaned over Nelson's shoulder and looked for a long while without saying anything. Then, with a sigh——

"Yes, that's it," he said. "That's where I live—right there." He placed a blackened finger on the chart. "It—it's almost like seeing home, ain't it?" he asked shyly. Nelson didn't answer, but he folded the chart up in a determined manner and tossed it to Dan.

"You stay right here with us, Spencer," he said, "and we'll put you ashore at Mullen's Cove, if it takes a week to do it. Now I'm going to look at the engine."

A moment later he was up again and looking anxiously back across the water. The sun was

sinking, and the long, level rays were tipping the little waves with gold. In the hollows purple shadows were floating. Back of them, perhaps a little more than a half mile, the tugboat was following doggedly in their wake. Nelson glanced at Bob and their eyes met.

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"She's missing like anything," muttered Nelson ruefully. "It's that blamed gasoline we bought this afternoon; seems like it was half water. I've done everything I know how, but it doesn't make any difference. She's missing about a third of her explosions. I wish to goodness it would get dark!"

"It will be in about half an hour," answered Bob hopefully.

"I know, but—" He stopped, staring at Bob. The engine had ceased working! But in another instant it had started again. With a frown, Nelson went below. Bob glanced back at the tug. Already it seemed to have gained on them. Dan and Tom were talking to Spencer, and had not noticed anything. The *Vagabond* had covered some fourteen miles of the twenty that lay between Sanstable and Provincetown, and now the "toe of the boot," as the tip end of Cape Cod has been fancifully called, lay before them well defined in the last flare of sunlight. Directly to the east the curving coast was perhaps a mile nearer to them than was the harbor of Provincetown, but to alter their course would be giving an advantage to the pursuers, since it would enable them to cut across, and perhaps head off, the *Vagabond* before port was reached. Bob studied the chart before him and saw that, even if they turned eastward, they would have difficulty in finding a harbor. If the engine would hold out, their best plan was undoubtedly to keep on around the Cape. It was doubtful if those on the tug would care to keep up the chase when they saw that the *Vagabond* was not putting in at Provincetown; or, if darkness came before they reached the end of the Cape, they could head northwest and perhaps throw the tugboat off the track. But it all depended on the engine. Bob leaned down so that his head was inside the hatchway and listened. The sound that reached him was not reassuring. The engine was missing spark after spark, sometimes stopping for seconds at a time. He raised his head and again looked back over the darkening water. There was no longer a half mile between the launch and the tug, nor anything like it. Unless something happened, very soon the chase was as good as over!

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And something did happen, and almost instantly, but not what Bob would have chosen. The engine stopped altogether! Nor, although Bob listened and waited with anxious ears, did it start up again. Dan and Tom and Spencer looked at Bob and one another with inquiring eyes. The moments passed. The *Vagabond* slowly lost headway. Then Nelson's face appeared at the engine-room door.

"It's all up, I guess," he said quietly. "I'll have to take the vaporizer apart, and that will take some time. And even then I'm not sure that she'll work. Where's the tug?"

"About a quarter of a mile away, and coming like thunder!" answered Dan.

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"Well, I'll be as quick as I can," said Nelson sadly, "but I guess our goose is cooked!"

He disappeared again, and in the silence that ensued those above could hear the sound of the wrench as it fell to work. Back of them, coming nearer at every turn of her propeller, raced the tugboat.

The *Vagabond* rolled lazily in the little waves.

Dan began to whistle cheerfully.

CHAPTER X—SHOWS THE CREW OF THE *VAGABOND* UNDER FIRE

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Even Barry seemed to appreciate the awkwardness of the situation. He got out of the chair he was occupying, jumped on to the stern seat, put his front paws on the coaming, and looked back inquiringly at the approaching craft, his little black nose sniffing and twitching. Then he jumped down, trotted to the engine-room entrance, looked in, and scratched twice on the brass sill, as though begging Nelson to start up the engine again. After that he climbed to the side deck, from there to the roof of the cabin, and settled down, shivering in the little, chill evening breeze, against the wheel, on which Bob was leaning. He had done his best for them; now they would have to look after themselves; personally he was going to sleep.

Spencer Floyd, anxious but silent, sat, out of sight again, with his back against one of the doors beside the entrance. Dan stood up, hands in pockets of his duck trousers, and watched the oncoming tugboat with smiling face. Tom, too, was on his feet, but he didn't stand still, nor were smiles visible on his rotund countenance. He went nervously from Dan to the cabin entrance, where he leaned down and asked Nelson how he was coming on. All the reply he received was a growl.

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"There's our friend the captain in the bow," observed Dan. "Dear old captain! How I long to meet him once more! By the way, Spencer, you'd better go down and keep out of sight as long as you can. My old friend the captain has a quick temper, and the sight of you might infuriate him. It would be awful if he went mad and bit the bow off the tug."

Tom giggled hysterically.

"Wu-wu-wu-wish he'd fu-fu-fu-fall over-bu-bu-board!" he said.

"The wish does you credit, Tommy," answered Dan, as he followed Spencer below. "I'll be right up again, fellows," he added.

Nelson, on the floor beside the engine, was toiling desperately, the perspiration trickling down his nose. About him lay sections of the brass vaporizer, wrenches, screwdrivers, and nippers. He looked up inquiringly as Dan went by toward the stateroom.

"Oh, she's about a couple of hundred yards away," said Dan lightly.

"I'm almost through," said Nelson. "Keep them off two minutes more, Dan, and I'll try the engine again."

"Oh, we'll keep them off! That's right, Spencer, my lad, you lie down there and be comfortable. And don't you worry; old Bluebeard hasn't got you yet!"

As he went up the steps he turned and called down softly to Nelson:

"Here they are, Nel, coming alongside. But I'll see that you get your two minutes, so keep agoing."

The tug's engine had stopped and she was sliding slowly forward through the water with her bow set for the *Vagabond's* port rail. On the forward deck stood the captain of the *Henry Nellis*, the tugboat captain, and another man, possibly a mate. The cook, a long and much-soiled apron enveloping his portly form, looked on interestedly from the door of the galley. In the wheelhouse was a third hand. On the face of Captain Sauder was a smile of triumph which struck those on the launch as being far more disagreeable than his scowl.

"Pretty smart, weren't yer?" greeted the captain as the tug floated up. There was no reply, and the captain concluded to attempt sarcasm.

"Real nice of you to stop and wait for us," he said with a chuckle; "real friendly, I call it."

"Captain," answered Dan sweetly and earnestly, "we've been simply devastated with grief since we left you. Your gentle words and kindly deeds won our hearts, and we just couldn't go on without one more sight of your dear face." ("Keep her off with the boat hook," he muttered aside to Bob.) "And—yes, you have," cried Dan joyfully, "you've brought your dear face with you, haven't you? I was afraid you'd change it!"

The captain and the crew of the tug were smiling broadly, but the object of Dan's raillery went purple in his "dear face," and his hands clenched and unclenched at his sides. ("For all the world," as Tom said afterward, "as though he was going to bu-bu-bust up!")

"You young whelp!" he roared.

A bell rang in the engine room and the tug—the *Scout*, as the gilt letters over the wheelhouse announced—trembled as the propeller was reversed. Up came the bow with its big rope fender, and Bob, boat hook in hand, stood ready. As the tug slid alongside Bob reached out with the hook, and the tug, instead of nestling up to the launch, sheered off.

"Here! What are you doing that for?" yelled Captain Sauder.

"Saving our paint," answered Bob calmly. There was five feet of water between the two boats.

"Bring your boat hook here!" called the tugboat captain to one of the hands. "You boys might as well give in," he added, not unkindly. "You're beat, I guess. Where's Captain Sauder's boy?"

"Didn't you meet him?" asked Dan, in surprise. ("Don't let that fellow get his hook on to us, Bob!") "Why, he started to walk back half an hour ago; said he couldn't stay away from the captain there any longer. Sure you didn't pass him?"

The tugboat captain chuckled. But Captain Sauder, muttering inarticulate things, seized the boat hook from the deck hand and sprang toward the stern, which was now opposite the cockpit of the launch. There was an eight-foot haft on the hook he held, and he would have experienced no difficulty in reaching the launch had not Bob interfered. But every time the captain tried to get his hook fixed around one of the awning posts or over the edge of the coaming, Bob politely but firmly knocked it away. The captain's remarks were unfit for publication, and even Barry looked pained. After a moment of this duel the tugboat captain came to the rescue.

"Back her and bring her alongside," he called to the man at the wheel. The bell rang and the *Scout* slid back a few yards. The bell rang again, the man at the wheel twirled the spokes around, and the blunt nose of the tug poked its way toward the launch's quarter. On the bow stood the captain of the *Henry Nellis*, ready to leap aboard the *Vagabond* as soon as the boats touched.

Tom, I think, would have liked to saunter below about this time, but to his credit let it be known that he did nothing of the sort. Instead, he stood firmly in the center of the cockpit and grinned pathetically. Dan, glancing swiftly about him, saw that grin and wondered whether Tom would ever be able to get it off again. Then the tug was ready to bump and the moment for action had arrived.

Bob did his best with the boat hook, but the tug had too much way on to be stopped or shoved aside. Bob, although he went red in the face, had to give ground. Then the two boats met with a shock that almost threw Tom off his feet, but did not disturb his grin, and Captain Sauder made ready to jump.

But he didn't jump, because he happened to look to see where he was going, and in looking caught sight of the revolver in Dan's hand. The muzzle of it, which was pointing directly at the

captain, glistened uncannily in the twilight, and the captain paused. There followed a moment of silence, disturbed only by the sound of Nelson's hurried footsteps in the cabin. Then—

"Drop that!" roared the captain of the *Henry Nellis*.

But Dan did nothing of the sort. Instead he asked:

"Where are you going, captain?"

"I'm going to fetch that boy you've run away with!" was the answer. "Don't you think you can scare me with that toy pistol!"

"Nonsense!" answered Dan quietly. "You know this isn't a toy, captain. It's got five thirty-two bullets in it, and I'm just dying to see whether they'll come out if I pull the trigger. It's a mighty easy sort of a trigger, too," he added musingly.

Bob and Tom stared fascinatedly, Tom's grin spreading until it revealed his teeth and made him look like a catfish; or so, at least, Bob declared later on. Captain Sauder stared, too, and so did the others on the tub. But no one seemed inclined to offer advice or to step into the range of Dan's revolver. Captain Sauder growled and swore under his breath, and his fists clenched until the veins stood out on the backs like cords.

"You'd murder me, would ye?" he said finally.

"Not a bit of it, captain," answered Dan cheerfully. "I'd do my best to plug you in some place where it wouldn't really matter very much. But I'm not a dead-sure shot, you know, and I might make a mistake. Anyhow, there's one thing certain"—and Dan's voice rang out earnestly—"and that is that if you put your dirty old feet on this deck you're going to get shot, I don't know just where, and what's more I don't care. You might as well believe that."

And the captain, looking at Dan's flashing blue eyes and bristling red hair, somehow did believe it. He shook his fist in Dan's face.

"I'll get you yet, my boy!" he growled. "And when I do—"

Turning, he stumbled aft and disappeared into the deck house.

"He's after a pistol!" warned Bob. "Everyone get to cover!"

Spencer tumbled helter-skelter down the steps, followed by Tom and Bob. But Dan held his ground, although his face paled.

On the *Scout* everybody seemed for a moment paralyzed. Then the tugboat captain turned and ran clumsily toward the deck-house door, and the sailor who had been holding the two boats together with a boat hook fixed around the after cleat of the launch dropped the haft and disappeared quickly around the other side of the cabin. Probably he thought he was too near the scene of action. Captain Sander must have known where to look for a weapon, for before the tugboat captain had reached the door he was back again with a formidable revolver in his hand and his face convulsed with passion.

"Stop that!" cried the captain of the tug. "You can't shoot folks on my boat! You haven't hired me for a warship!" And hurrying to the other, he seized the arm that held the revolver.

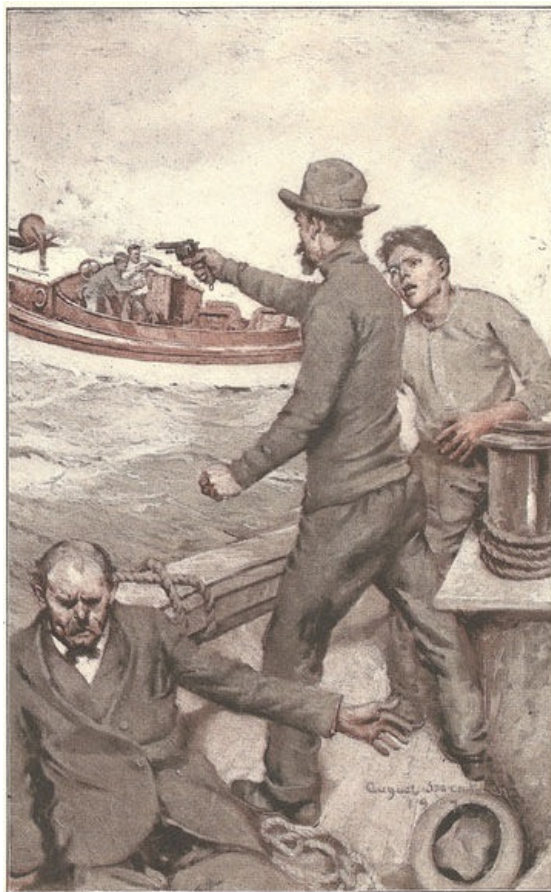
"Let go o' me!" bellowed Captain Sauder.

"You give me my pistol and I will," panted the other. There was a struggle, in which one sought to wrest away the weapon and the other to keep possession of it and throw off his adversary. Bob, viewing the conflict from the cabin doorway, called to Dan.

"Come down here, Dan!" he commanded. "Don't be a fool! He'll shoot you, sure!"

But Dan held his ground, revolver in hand.

Then several things happened simultaneously. Tom pushed Bob aside, hurled himself across the cockpit, locked his arms around Dan's legs and brought him crashing to the deck; Captain Sauder broke away from his opponent, raised his revolver and fired; and the *Vagabond* churned the water under her stern and darted away at full speed.



“Captain Sauder ... raised his revolver and fired.”

The captain's aim had been hurried and the bullet sped singing through the air several feet above the launch, and before he could pull the trigger the second time the captain and mate of the tug had borne him back against the side of the deck house and wrested the revolver from his hand. The *Vagabond*, with no one at the wheel, charged across the tug's bow and headed for the west. On the floor of the cockpit Dan was fighting and struggling to regain both his feet and the revolver which he had dropped under the suddenness of the attack, and which now lay beyond his reach.

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“Let me up!” he panted.

“In a mu-mu-mu-minute!” gasped Tom, still holding on as though for dear life. Then Bob sprang to the wheel, brought the *Vagabond's* head again into the course for Provincetown, and looked back at the tug, already a couple of hundred yards astern. The two captains were still arguing it out near the cabin door, but the mate was on his way to the wheelhouse. A deck hand was trying to recover the boat hook, which had fallen into the water when the *Vagabond* started up. In a moment he had succeeded, and the tug's nose swung around and pointed toward Sanstable. A minute later she was on her way home, billowing smoke from her stack and evidently resolved to make up for lost time. Bob called to Tom.

“Let him up, Tommy,” he said.

Nelson, rubbing the oil and grease from his hands with a bunch of waste, appeared at the door.

“Wh-what the dickens!” he cried in amazement as he looked.

“Oh, Tommy and Dan have been having a little football!” answered Bob. Dan climbed to his feet and observed Tom disgustedly.

“You think you're mighty smart, I suppose!” he growled. “For two cents I'd bump your silly fat head against—”

“Cut it out!” said Bob sharply. “You've made a fool of yourself long enough, Dan. You came near getting yourself plugged full of holes, and Tommy did just right. You think yourself a bloody hero, I dare say, but you ought to be kicked. Nice mess you'd made of it if that old terror had put a bullet into you! Next time I go cruising, I'll bet there'll be no red-headed lunatics aboard! Hand me my revolver!”

Dan, abashed, picked up the pistol and gave it to its owner.

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“You needn't be so blamed grouchy,” he muttered.

“You'd make anyone grouchy,” answered Bob. “And I want you to understand that you're to let my things alone after this.” He broke the revolver to extract the cartridges. Then he looked in surprise at Dan.

“Why,” he cried, “it isn't loaded!”

"I suppose I know it, don't I?" growled Dan. "I couldn't find your silly old cartridges!"

CHAPTER XI—RECORDS A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

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An hour later the *Vagabond* was swinging quietly from her anchor cable in the harbor of Provincetown. About her in the darkness the lights of other craft twinkled and the curving waterfront of the old town was dimly illumined. On the *Vagabond's* deserted deck only the riding light gleamed, but in the cabin all lamps were doing their best, there was a fine odor of steaming coffee and things fried and the crew and their guest were sitting around the table in the stateroom doing full justice to a dinner all the more enjoyable since so long delayed. Good humor had returned and everybody was in the best of spirits; unless, possibly, we except Spencer Floyd. It was difficult at all times to tell whether he was happy or unhappy. He seldom spoke unless spoken to, and his habitual expression was one of intense gravity. But he certainly had not lost his appetite; once Dan forgot his own hunger for nearly half a minute in marveling at Spencer's capacity. Of course they talked and, equally of course, the subject of discourse was the day's happenings.

"I think we got out of the mess mighty luckily," said Nelson. And the sentiment was indorsed by the others. It had taken fully ten minutes, Bob, Dan and Tom all talking together and at top speed, to acquaint Nelson with what had happened on deck, very little of which he had been able to glimpse from the engine room. "Only," continued Nelson affectionately, "I think you were a great big galoot, Dan, to stand up there and bluff Captain Chowder with an empty revolver."

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"The bluff worked, though," laughed Dan. "I couldn't find Bob's box of cartridges anywhere, you see, and there wasn't any time to lose. Maybe if the captain had looked a bit closer he would have seen that the cylinder was empty, but I had to chance that."

"Huh!" said Tom. "Bet you if I was in the captain's place I wouldn't waste any time examining the cylinder!"

"That was a great tackle you made, Tom," said Dan with a grin. "I hit the deck like a load of bricks. Gosh! I didn't know what had struck me! Only you forgot, Tommy, that the new rules forbid tackling below the knees."

"I didn't tackle you below the knees," answered Tom promptly.

"Felt like it!"

"I don't see but what Tommy's the hero of the day, after all," observed Bob. "I'm plumb sure I wasn't! The way I got into the engine room when that old pirate came on deck with his gun must have been one of the sights of the trip!"

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"I guess the real hero," said Dan, "was Nelson. Anyhow, he did the most practical thing and worked hardest."

"Hero be hanged!" replied Nelson, spreading his fifth slice of bread. "But you can bet I worked hard, all right! I thought I'd never get that old vaporizer together again. One of the parts got away and I couldn't find it for weeks! And I didn't know whether the thing would work any better after I got through with it. The first thing we do to-morrow is to empty that tank and fill up with some decent gasoline."

"I suppose we need it," said Bob, "but how about staying around here that long? Don't you think Captain Chowder will telegraph here and get the local Scotland Yard after us?"

"I rather think," answered Nelson, "that he's decided by this time to let the thing drop. But, of course, there's no telling for sure. There's one thing, though; he doesn't know for certain where we are. We started out toward Provincetown, but maybe he'll argue that we were only trying to throw him off the track and that after a bit we turned and headed across to Plymouth or somewhere on the south shore."

"That's so," Bob agreed after a moment's consideration.

"Even if he did telegraph," said Dan, "what could the police here do? If we told our story they wouldn't dare to arrest us."

"Well, they might take Spencer and hold him until the thing was cleared up," said Nelson. "And it might end with Spencer going back with the captain. And I'll be blowed if I'm going to have that!"

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"Nor I," said Bob.

"Same here," agreed Dan.

Tom had his month too full for utterance, but he shook his head violently and scowled disapprovingly.

"Then what's to be did?" asked Nelson.

There was a moment's silence, during which everyone ate busily, broken at last by Spencer.

"Seems to me I've been trouble enough to you," he said diffidently. "If you'll put me ashore I

guess I can make out all right now. And I'm much obliged for what you've done for me. And——"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Dan. "You'd be caught and lugged back to that old schooner the very first thing. No, sir, the best place for you is right here aboard the *Vagabond*. And if Provincetown isn't a safe place to stay, I vote we move on."

"To-night?" asked Bob.

"I don't care. In the morning, if you fellows think it'll be safe to stay until then. Only we want to get out before Captain Chowder begins to use the wires."

"I tell you!" exclaimed Nelson. "Just as soon as it's light we'll run outside a ways and put Spencer in the tender. Then he can row around and keep out of the way until we get our tank filled again. And then we can pick him up."

"Dandy!" cried Tom. "And if they come and search us they won't find him! And we can tell them that he fell overboard and——"

"And was swallowed by a whale," laughed Bob. "That's a good scheme, though, Nel. Would you mind if we did that, Spencer?"

"No, sir. I'd be all right if you left me some oars."

"Of course we'll leave you oars," said Nelson. "That's settled then. But we want to get out pretty early and be back here before the folks along the wharves are taking notice."

"Well," said Dan, "we'll get Tommy to wake us."

"Hope you choke," responded Tom dispassionately.

"Haven't anything to choke on," answered Dan. "Pass me the bread."

"I don't believe the telegraph office will be open until about eight o'clock," said Bob. "And it isn't likely that the *Scout* would get back to Sanstable to-night in time for the captain to telegraph. So I guess we're safe until, say, nine to-morrow morning. That being the case, and Dan having eaten the last thing on the table, I will adjourn to the deck."

"There's some more coffee in the pot," said Tom.

"Couldn't drink another drop, Tommy. I've had three cups already. Come on, Barry; you and I'll go up and look at the moon."

"Isn't any," grunted Tom.

"What!" exclaimed Bob. "No moon? How careless of the weather man! Then we'll look at the nice little lantern at the bow, Barry."

"Oh, we'll all go up," said Dan. "I want a breath of air. How about the dishes, though?"

"Let 'em go," muttered Tom lazily.

"Couldn't I do them?" asked Spencer.

"Why—do you mind?" asked Nelson.

"I'd like to," was the answer.

"All right, then; go ahead. I guess Tommy will let you."

If there was any objection from Tom it was so slight that no one noticed it.

Up in the cockpit the Four made themselves comfortable in the chairs and on the seat, while Barry curled up into a perfectly round bunch in Dan's lap. The breeze still held from the southward and the night was quite warm, and, although Bob continued to complain at intervals over the absence of moonlight, the stars glittered in an almost cloudless sky and shed a wan radiance of their own. Somewhere in the darkness along the wharves a concertina was stumbling uncertainly through the latest success in rag-time melody.

"Say, Bob," said Dan, "you can do worse than that. Get your mandolin."

So Bob got it and the concertina was soon drowned out. Spencer crept up and silently snuggled himself in a corner of the cockpit. The lights in the town went out one by one and four bells struck in the cabin.

"Hello!" exclaimed Nelson. "This won't do, fellows, if we're going to make an early rise. Come on, Dan, and help me fix up the berth for Spencer."

So the pipe berth in the engine room was pulled out and the other beds were levied on for a pillow and blankets, and half an hour later only Tom's snores disturbed the silence.

At half-past six the next morning the *Vagabond* turned her bow toward the harbor entrance, passed the light at the end of Long Point and went westward for a half-mile along the shore. Then the tender was put over and Spencer, his own attire supplemented with an extra sweater of Bob's, jumped into it.

"If I had some line and a hook," said Spencer gravely, "I could catch you some fish."

"That's so!" said Nelson. "And I think there's fishing tackle aboard somewhere. Wait a moment and I'll see if I can't find it."

"Yes," remarked Dan casually, "and you might dig a few worms while you're down there."

Nelson's enthusiasm wilted and he joined in the laugh.

"I forgot about bait," he said. "I guess you couldn't catch much without bait, eh, Spencer?"

"You leave me the line," answered the boy, "and I guess I can find some bait somewheres."

So Nelson rummaged around and found what was wanted, and when the *Vagabond* went chugging slowly and softly back toward the lighthouse and the harbor entrance Spencer, oars in hands, was pulling toward the outer beach. Back in the harbor Bob steered the launch up to a landing in the lee of a shed bearing the sign "GASOLINE" and made her fast. Then they set about completing their toilets, while Tom prepared breakfast. By the time that repast was ready the waterfront was wide awake and the sun was shining warmly. After breakfast the tank was emptied and refilled with what was represented to be "the best gasoline on the Cape." As the boat's funds were depleted to the extent of almost twenty dollars when payment had been made, there was a unanimous hope among the crew that the claim would not prove too great.

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"It's mighty expensive stuff, isn't it?" asked Tom. "Think what we could do with twenty dollars!"

"That's so, Tommy," said Nelson. "Gasoline doesn't taste as nice as caramels, but it's a lot better for fuel."

"Gee!" muttered Tom wistfully. "Think of twenty dollars' worth of caramels!"

Later, when they went shopping for provisions, Tom got into a candy store and wouldn't come out until he had bought a little of everything in sight. They returned to the wharf laden with bundles just as the clock struck ten.

"Now to pick up the tender and run around to Chatham," said Nelson as they went down the wharf.

But when the float lay below them Bob nudged his arm. On the edge of the float, seated on an empty nail keg and talking to the gasoline man, was a tall individual in a faded blue coat on the left breast of which glittered a badge.

"Cop!" whispered Bob.

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As they went down, the tall man, who looked more like a sailor than a police officer, arose and awaited them. Then,

"You gentlemen own this launch?" he asked with a slow drawl.

"Well, we're sailing her," answered Nelson. "She belongs to my father."

"Pretty nice boat," said the other, his eyes traveling swiftly from one to another of the quartet. "Which of you is Spencer Floyd, now?"

"None of us," answered Nelson.

"Well, I got a message for him," said the officer. "You tell him I want to see him, will you?"

"He isn't here," said Nelson.

"I want to know!" drawled the officer. "Ain't drowned him, have you?"

"No, he isn't drowned. He just isn't here."

"Well, well! Don't mind my lookin' about a little, I guess?"

"No, you're perfectly welcome to, sir. Come aboard, please."

The officer followed and looked admiringly over the launch while Nelson unlocked the cabin door. Then they all trooped down into the cabin and the officer satisfied himself that the runaway was indeed not there.

"Much obliged, gentlemen," he said at last. "I see he ain't here. I guess you don't care to tell me where he is, do you?"

"No," Nelson replied smilingly, "I don't believe we do. And anyhow, we don't know just *where* he is—by this time."

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Which was a good deal nearer the truth than Nelson suspected.

"Well," said the officer, with a twinkle in his eye, "if you chance to see him again you tell him that his friend Captain Sauder, over to Sanstable, is particularly anxious to see him, will you?"

Nelson promised gravely to do so and the officer stepped ashore.

"Good mornin'," he said. "I hope you'll have a fair voyage."

"Good morning," Nelson replied. "Thank you."

Halfway across the float the officer paused, turned and retraced his steps, and Nelson went to meet him.

"Now, I don't know much about this," said the officer confidentially, "but you fellers don't look like a very desperate set to me. So you tell this feller Floyd—if you should happen to meet him, you understand—you tell him that the Cape's a bit unhealthy just at present; kind of malarial, you know; and maybe he'd be better off across the bay. See what I mean?"

"Yes, I do," answered Nelson. "And I'm much obliged. And if I should happen to see him I'll tell him that."

"You needn't mention me, of course," said the other. "It ain't any of my business. So long."

"That means," said Bob, when Nelson had told the others, "that means that they're on the lookout for Spencer all down the Cape. So what the dickens are we to do? We've got to put in somewhere; we can't make Newport to-day."

"That's so," said Nelson. "Let's see the chart."

After they had all studied it awhile Dan asked:

"What's the matter with trying to make Nantucket? It isn't likely that he's warned them down there."

"No, but it's a jolly long ways," said Bob. "Let's see how far. Why, it's nearly eighty miles! Could we do that before dark, Nel?"

"We could do it by seven o'clock," was the answer. "But wouldn't it be better to take Spencer over to Plymouth and send him home by train?"

They discussed the question at length and in the end decided that the latter plan was the more feasible. Then they cast off and ran across the harbor to the Point and so westward in search of the tender. But after they had rounded the lighthouse there was nothing in sight resembling their boat in the least.

"That's mighty funny!" said Bob. And all the others agreed heartily. They went southward for two miles in chase of a craft that might, so Nelson thought, turn out to be the tender. But when they got within fair sight of it they found it to be a pea-green dory containing two fishermen.

"Let's go back to where we left him," suggested Dan. "Perhaps he went ashore and pulled the boat up on the beach."

So they turned back and ran along the shore, but without success. Then Bob headed the launch westward. All four kept a sharp lookout, but it was Tom who asked presently:

"What's that over there?"

All turned to look.

"Seems like a water-logged boat," said Nelson. "Run her over there, Bob."

Bob obeyed and two minutes later the *Vagabond* floated alongside the puzzling object, puzzling no longer. It was the tender, filled with water almost to the gunwales and empty of everything except the oars and a few dead fish. The four stared at each other in consternation.

CHAPTER XII—WHEREIN NELSON SOLVES THE MYSTERY

The *Vagabond* rolled and dipped while the boys silently struggled with the problem confronting them.

Where was Spencer Floyd?

There was the boat, there were the oars, there were the fish which he had promised, and, entangled with one of the oars, was the line he had used. But—where was he? Also, why was the tender full of water?

"It's the funniest thing I ever ran up against!" breathed Dan, finally breaking the silence. After that questions came fast and furious and no one tried to supply the answers until Tom cried:

"I know! Su-su-su-somebody ru-ru-ran him du-du-du—!"

"Pshaw!" said Nelson. "Collisions don't happen in broad daylight in a place like this where there's water enough to float a fleet of warships!"

"Bu-bu-bu-but look at the tu-tu-tender!"

"I know," Nelson muttered, "but I don't believe—"

"If it was an accident Spencer's a goner," said Dan.

"Not necessarily," said Bob. "If he was run down by a steamer or a schooner they might have stopped and picked him up."

"If they had wouldn't they have landed him when the harbor was just around the corner?"

"They might not have," Bob answered. "They might have been in a hurry and just taken him along."

"That doesn't seem likely," objected Dan.

"No," added Nelson. "The least they could have done would have been to land him."

"Then he's a gu-gu-gu-goner!" said Tom sadly.

"I don't believe he was run into," protested Nelson.

"I know you don't; you said so before," Dan replied. "But if it wasn't that, what was it? Where's

he got to and why is the boat full of water?"

"I don't know, but there are lots of things that might have happened."

"Such as what, Mr. Solomon?"

"Well, he might have gone ashore for more bait and left the tender on the beach. Then the tide floated it out while he was gone. When he came back and saw that he couldn't get it he decided to walk to town in hopes of finding us before we left."

"Well, that might be it," acknowledged Bob after a moment's consideration of the theory, "but somehow I can't make myself think so. If you're right then he's waiting for us in the village."

"And maybe the officer fellow has him," added Dan.

"Hold on!" protested Tom. "That's all ru-ru-right, but how did the boat get full of water?"

Nelson looked nonplused.

"It might have gone floating around and hit against something," he finally ventured, "maybe a rock or a submerged log."

"Submerged poppycock!" said Dan. "I'll tell you what really happened."

"Of course you will," said Tom. "You know all about it, du-du-du-don't you?"

"A boat of some kind came along and Spencer saw a chance of getting away in it, maybe to New York. Probably he offered to work his passage and they took him aboard. And somehow the tender got a hole stove in her."

"How?" demanded Tom.

"Oh, I don't know; there's plenty of ways. Maybe Spencer thought if he sank the boat and disappeared altogether Captain Chowder would stop hunting him."

"The first part of your yarn is all right, Dan," said Bob, "but the last part is mighty weak. But whatever happened there's no use in our spending the day out here. The question now is: What's to be done next? If Spencer's drowned we can't do any good here. If he's run away on another boat, why, we might as well attend to our own affairs. What about it?"

"Best thing to do," said Nelson, "is to tow the tender back to the wharf and get the water out of it. Then we can see what's happened to it. Anyhow, it will probably have to be repaired and that means staying here until to-morrow. Pull her in, Dan, and I'll get hold of the painter."

"All right," answered Dan, who was holding the tender with the boat hook. "But won't she go under completely and sink if we try to tow her?"

"I don't think so. How about it, Bob?"

"Not in this sea, if we go slow," answered Bob.

"Anyhow, it isn't likely that we'd ever get the water out of her here. There's a little beach at the end of that slip by the wharf where we were, and we can beach her there."

So, running very slowly, the *Vagabond* returned to town, the submerged tender rolling and splashing along behind at the end of a short painter and threatening to disappear completely every minute. But she didn't carry out her threat, and when the launch was once more tied up at the float the tender was pulled along to the end of the slip until she grounded. There they left her until the tide, which was still running out, should leave her high and dry. Bob and Dan went in search of a carpenter to patch her up, following the explicit directions of the gasoline man, who was very much interested in the sudden and unexplained appearance on the scene of the tender. Nelson and Tom made discreet inquiries for Spencer, describing his personal appearance without mentioning his name. But neither the man at the wharf nor the loungers at the street end of it had seen anyone answering to their description. Bob and Dan returned presently with the information that the carpenter was busy but would be on hand in about half an hour. So they went back to the launch, made themselves comfortable in the cockpit and speculated anew on the disappearance of Spencer. Many new and ingenious theories were aired, but in the end it was all nicely summed up in Tom's verdict:

"It's a regular jim-dandy mystery," declared Tom. "That's what it is!"

At twelve the carpenter had not arrived.

"He won't come now until after his dinner hour," said the gasoline man when asked for his opinion.

"Then I vote that we find a hotel or restaurant," said Dan, "and have a thundering good dinner. If the old duffer comes while we're gone he can wait till we get back."

The vote was carried, the cabin was locked again and the quartet set off in search of dinner. It wasn't hard to find, and at a quarter before one they were back at the wharf. The carpenter, garrulous and apologetic, arrived a few minutes later and the entire party went back up the pier, climbed down a slippery ladder and reached the little beach where lay the tender looking like a novel bathtub. The beach was composed largely of black muck and the resulting operations were disastrous to four pairs of white canvas shoes.

"Catch ahold here," said the carpenter, "and turn her over."

Out splashed the water and the dead fish and over went the tender until she lay bottom up. It

wasn't necessary to hunt long for the leaks. Half a dozen small splintered holes on each side of the keel confronted them. The carpenter examined them attentively.

"How'd you do it?" he asked finally.

"We don't know," answered Nelson lamely. "We think, though, that she struck a rock or something."

"Rock, eh?" said the other with a sniff. "Must have been inside the boat then, unless you had her turned inside out. See them splinters? Point outward, don't they? Whatever made them holes was inside the boat, gentlemen."

"That's so," Nelson acknowledged. "I wonder what did it."

"If you're asking me, 'twas a boat hook as did it. And it wa'n't no accident, neither. Boat hooks don't up of themselves and go to punchin' holes in the bottom of a boat like that." He looked expectantly around as though explanations were in order. But Nelson and the others only looked grave and unenlightened.

"Humph!" said the carpenter, returning to his examination of the injuries. But that "Humph!" said a whole lot.

"Can it be mended?" asked Nelson.

"Course it can be mended," was the reply, "but I can't do it here. I'll have to put in two new planks. I'll get my dory and tow her around to the shop."

"How long will it take?" asked Bob.

"Oh, I cal'ate you can have her to-morrow some time."

"That won't do. We've got to start away first thing in the morning. Can't you work on it this afternoon?"

The carpenter pushed back his old felt hat and rubbed his bald head reflectively.

"Well, I'm pretty busy right now, but I'll do my best. Got any oakum, cap'n?"

The gasoline man went in search of some and when he returned the holes were temporarily stopped up and the carpenter ambled off for his dory. The others carried the tender down to the water and towed her around to the end of the float. Presently the carpenter returned in a disreputable tub of a dory and the tender was towed away. The gasoline man, who had given them the pleasure of his company continuously since the tender was examined, finally took himself off to carry gasoline to a small launch which had puffed up to the float, and the Four seated themselves in the cockpit and looked inquiringly from one to another.

"It's mighty funny," said Dan.

"The mystery deepens," said Tom excitedly.

"It certainly does," agreed Bob, "eh, Nel?"

"I think the mystery is explained," Nelson replied quietly.

"The dickens you do!" exclaimed Dan. "What's the explanation?"

"The boat hook."

"Boat hook? What boat hook?" asked Bob impatiently.

"The one that made those holes."

"Well, but—!"

"It's as clear as daylight now," said Nelson. "There's only one person we know of who would deliberately stave holes in that boat."

"Who's that?" asked the others in chorus.

"Captain Sauder!"

CHAPTER XIII—WHEREIN DAN TELLS A STORY AND TOM IS INCREDULOUS

"By Jove!" murmured Bob.

"Then you think—?" began Dan.

"I think that the *Henry Nellis* happened along this morning, saw Spencer Floyd out there in the tender, took him aboard and knocked holes in our boat in the hope of sinking her."

"But—!" exclaimed Bob. Then he stopped and looked thoughtful. Finally he nodded his head. "Yes, that's just about what happened," he concluded.

"That's right," said Dan.

"And he got Spencer again after all," added Tom unhappily.

"Well, we did the best we could for him," said Nelson. "If we had kept him aboard the officer would have got him."

"But what I don't understand," said Bob, "is how Captain Sauder happened to be here. If he expected the officers to catch Spencer and return him to Sanstable why did he leave there?"

"We don't know that he did expect them to send Spencer back to Sanstable. Maybe he told them to hold him here until he came."

"That's it!" Tom cried. "And he was on his way here when he found Spencer in the tender. So instead of coming into the harbor he just went on."

"Right-O," said Dan. "You're a regular Sherlock W. Holmes, Tommy."

"That blamed old pirate was smarter than we were, after all," said Tom disgustedly. "Couldn't we follow him and—and—?"

"Take Spencer away by main force?" laughed Nelson. "I'm afraid not, Tommy. Especially as we don't know where the schooner has gone."

"Spencer said she was going to Newfoundland, didn't he?" asked Tom.

"And you propose that we follow it up there?"

"But we might catch her before she got there!"

"That would be a wild-goose chase for sure," said Dan. "No, I guess we've done our duty by Spencer. After all, I dare say he will be able to put up with the captain for another voyage, although I'd hate to have to do it myself, and that's a fact."

"Maybe Spencer will manage to slip away again," said Bob. "Let's hope so, anyway."

"You bet! Poor little cuss!" muttered Dan.

Spencer's fate continued the subject for discussion all the rest of the day, but, as Dan had said, their duty in the affair seemed to have ended and it was decided that the next day, as soon as they could do so, they would continue on to Newport for their mail and then to New York.

They went for a long walk before supper-time, visiting the lighthouse and a life-saving station, and returning at six o'clock very hungry, so hungry, in fact, that the possibilities of the *Vagabond's* larder seemed quite inadequate to the demands of the occasion. So they returned to the hotel in the village and fared very well indeed. After supper they adjourned to the writing room and levied on the hotel stationery. Everyone found plenty to write home about and for half an hour the pens scratched diligently. It was Tom whose ideas were exhausted first. After addressing and sealing his letter and thumping a stamp on to the corner of the envelope he picked up a newspaper and tilted himself back in his chair under the light. Two minutes later the front legs of the chair hit the floor with a crash.

"The *Sue* won!" cried Tom.

The others frowned but failed to look up from their letters.

"I say, you chaps!" called Tom more loudly. "The *Sue* won!"

"For gracious sake, Tommy," protested Bob, "shut up! How do you think we're going to write letters when—"

"Oh, go ahead and write your old letters," grumbled Tom. "I thought you'd want to know how it came out, that's all."

"What's he talking about, Bob?" Dan asked.

"I'm telling you that the *Sue* won," answered Tom with dignity.

"Won what?"

"The race, you idiot!"

"Sue who? What race?"

"Who's being sued, Tommy?" asked Nelson, looking up from his sixth sheet of paper. Tom looked about him despairingly.

"Say, you lunatics," he exclaimed after an eloquent silence, "stop gibbering a moment, will you? I'm trying to tell you that the *Sue*—"

"Oh, Sioux!" said Nelson, turning back to the letter. "I thought you were talking about some one suing some one. Anyone scalped yet? I'd like to live out your way and see some of these Indian uprisings, Tommy. Are there any Sioux in Chicago?"

"There are plenty of Indians there," laughed Dan, "but maybe they're not Sioux."

Tom passed the insult disdainfully and retired behind his paper with insulted dignity.

"Anyhow, she won," he muttered defiantly.

"Oh, hang!" exclaimed Bob, throwing down his pen, pushing back his chair, and making for Tom. "You're worse than Poe's raven, Tommy!" He pulled the paper out of Tom's hands and whacked him over the head with it. "Now you speak out plainly and say what you're trying to say, Tommy, and get it over with. Go ahead! Tell us all about it quite calmly."

"Tu-tu-tu-tell you!" stammered Tom crossly. "I've bu-bu-bu-been tu-tu-telling you for half an hour!"

"Well, tell us again," said Bob soothingly. "Listen attentively, fellows; Tommy's got a great secret to unfold."

"I tu-tu-tell you the Su-su-su-su-su—!"

"It's all off!" exclaimed Dan despairingly. "Tommy's missing sparks again!"

"—Su-su-su-*Sue* won the ru-ru-race!"

"Oh! What race is that, Tommy?" asked Nelson.

"Why, the ru-ru-race to New York."

"The launch race?" cried Nelson. "Is that so? The *Sue* won, eh?"

"Good for her!" said Bob. "She was the smallest one of the lot, wasn't she, Nel?"

"Yes. Is it in the paper, Tommy? Read it out to us."

So Tom, appeased by the flattering if tardy interest, read the account. The *Sue* had finished last in thirty-nine hours and five minutes, averaging an actual speed of 8.25 miles an hour. With her handicap of thirteen hours and four minutes she won the race from her nearest competitor, the *Sizz*, by about an hour and three-quarters. The *Gnome* had made the best actual speed, averaging just under ten miles an hour. Of the twelve starters nine had finished the race. They had found good weather all the way save while in the neighborhood of Martha's Vineyard, when the sou'wester had met them.

"Say," asked Nelson when Tom had finished, "when was that race?"

"Why," answered Tom, "it was the day before yesterday, wasn't it?"

"Day before yesterday!" exclaimed Dan. "What are you talking about, Tommy?"

"It was!"

"Tommy's right," said Bob, "but—"

"Well, if it doesn't seem like two weeks ago I'll eat my hat!" said Nelson.

"I should say so!" agreed Dan. "Then we left Boston only four days ago? That can't be right, fellows!"

"It is, though," answered Bob. "And to-morrow's Sunday. We haven't been cruising a week yet and enough has happened to fill a month."

"That's so," said Dan. "If the rest of the trip is like the last four days—!" He stopped and whistled expressively.

"It's been great fun," said Tom eagerly.

"It sure has," Dan agreed. "Why, if—"

But just then Barry, who had been curled up in the only upholstered chair in the writing room, jumped to the floor, yawning loudly.

"You're right, Barry," said Bob gravely. "It's time we went to bed. Let's finish our letters, fellows, and get back to the boat."

The following morning the *Vagabond*, with the tender once more in place on the cabin roof, chugged past Long Point at twenty minutes past eight. The weather was bright, but somewhat chill, with a bank of haze hiding the horizon toward the east and south. But the weather signals were fluttering a prediction of good weather. Off Race Point Dan, who was acting as navigator, turned the launch northeast and held her so until off the life-saving station. Then it was due east for some three miles, followed by a gradual turn southward along the gently curving coast. For some time almost the only objects of interest in sight, aside from the few vessels which they saw, were the life-saving stations which dotted the sandy coast at about four-mile intervals. Tom found their names on the chart and called them off; Race Point, Peaked Hill Bar, High Head, Highland, and so on. They passed Highland Light at about ten o'clock, or, as Dan, who had at length mastered the science of telling time by the ship's clock, would have had it, four bells. Then came more life-saving stations, and Tom, who was lolling in one of the chairs in the cockpit, with the chart spread out on his knees, said:

"This is almost as bad along here for life-saving stations as the south coast of Long Island. Remember how many we counted there that day we went over to Fire Island, Nel?"

"Yes, twenty-three, weren't there?"

"No, that's your number," said Dan unkindly. "I remember perfectly that we counted twenty-nine."

"Well, if they don't look out," said Tom, as he cast his eye down the chart, "they're going to run out of names pretty quick. Then what'll they do?"

"Number them, probably," Bob suggested.

"Well, I'd take mighty good care not to get wrecked off Number Thirteen if I was a captain," said Dan.

"Huh! Nobody would bother to rescue you, anyway," remarked Tom. "The lookout would come in to the station and say, 'There's a two-master going to pieces on the bar.' Then they'd get the telescope and look through it, and the—the captain would say, 'Oh, it's the *Mary Ann*, of Newark, Captain Dan Speede! Don't you know better than to wake me out of a sound sleep for nothing?' Then everybody would go back to bed."

When the laugh had subsided Dan said:

"They might name the stations the way the folks named the streets of the town out West."

"How's that?" Nelson asked.

"Well, it's a story dad used to tell. He said it happened in a place out in Illinois, I've forgotten the name of it."

"Huh!" grunted Tom.

"Some folks from the East went out there and settled," said Dan, "and after a while they decided that, as the town was growing fast, they'd plat it out."

"What's that?" asked Tom.

"Why, lay it out."

"Oh, was it dead? Thought you said it was growing?"

"Shut up, Tommy, and let's hear the worst," said Nelson.

"So they got the surveyors to work and pretty soon they had a nice map of the town with streets and avenues running all around into the prairies. Then the question of naming the streets came up and they decided they'd name them after the citizens of the place. So they started in and named the main street after the Mayor, Jones Street. And so on until they'd used all the names and hadn't begun to get through. So they thought again and decided to use their wives' names. So they had Mary Street and Matilda Street and Jane Street, and still there were lots of streets left. So they started then on their children's names and used those all up. Then——"

"It sounds like a blamed old lie to me," said Tom in a loud aside.

"So," continued Dan, missing Tom's shin with his foot by half an inch, "after they'd got through with their Tommy Streets and their Susie Streets they didn't know what to do, because there were still a lot of streets away out that hadn't been named. So some one suggested that they might use the names of the dogs. So they did that. There was Hover Street and Tige Street and Towser Avenue——"

"Towser Avenue!" giggled Tom.

"And so on. And still there weren't enough names. So they began on the cats. Well, most every family had at least one cat and some had two or three and the cats pretty nearly finished things up; they would have finished things up only lots of the folks just called their cats 'Kittie.' But they had Tabby Street and Maltie Street and—and lots more."

"Our cat's name is Ben Hur," said Tom helpfully.

"But there were about half a dozen streets still left and they were in a fix until some one remembered that there were several canary birds in the town. So they used up the canaries and had Dickie Street and Fluff Street and Lovey-Dovey Street——"

"Oh, get out!" scoffed Tom.

"You shut up! I'm telling this. And so then everything was all right until they got to looking the map over very carefully and found that they had missed one of the principal thoroughfares, a fine, wide boulevard running from one side of the town to the other. Well, they were in a fix then, for they had to have another name and they'd used all the names up, as far as they could see. The Mayor of the town was a widower and for a while it looked as though he'd have to get married again so they could name the boulevard after his wife. But he didn't like the idea of it; said he'd resign from office first; and about that time the City Treasurer remembered that his youngest boy had a guinea pig for a pet. They said that was fine, and they took a vote on it and decided to name the boulevard after the guinea pig. Well, the City Treasurer didn't remember what his boy called the pig and so they sent for the boy. And when he came the Mayor asked him what he called his guinea pig. 'Piggy,' said the boy. 'But that will never do,' said the Mayor, 'haven't you a better name than that?' 'His name's Piggy,' said the boy. Well, they argued with him and argued with him, and pleaded and pleaded, the Mayor and all the Council, but it didn't do any good. And the City Treasurer told the boy he'd take him home and give him a whipping if he didn't change the guinea pig's name. But it didn't do any good, for the boy said the guinea pig's name was 'Piggy,' always had been 'Piggy' and couldn't be anything else. So if you go out there now you'll find that the finest street in the city is called Piggy Boulevard."

"That's a likely yarn!" laughed Bob.

"Well, that's the way it was told to me," answered Dan gravely.

"Where did you say the place is?" asked Tom.

"Oh, out in Illinois somewhere; near Chicago, I think."

"More likely it was right in your own State," Tom retorted warmly.

"Now, don't you two get to scapping about your old villages," said Bob. "Neither one of them is

worth living in. Why don't you live in Portland? Then you won't feel ashamed of your town."

"Huh!" jeered Tom. "Portland! S'pose I did live there and some one asked me what place I was from. 'Portland,' I'd say. 'Oh! Maine or Oregon?' they'd ask. No, sir, I don't want a city I have to explain. There's only one Chicago."

"That's one good feature of it," said Dan.

"Is that su-su-so?" began Tom pugnaciously. But Nelson intervened.

"You're wrong about Portland, Tommy," he said. "They wouldn't ask you 'Maine or Oregon'; they'd say 'Cement or salmon?'"

"We don't make Portland cement in my town," said Bob disgustedly.

"Of course they don't," Dan agreed. "Portland is famous only as having been the birthplace of Henry Longworth Wadsworth and of Robert Wade Hethington."

"There's another life-saving station, Tommy," said Nelson. "What's its name?"

"Pamet River. Now, there's a fool name; Pamet. But I suppose they got crazy in the head like a fish when they got this far. I'll bet the rest of the names are terrors."

"I heard that years and years ago all this part of the Cape was thick forest," observed Bob.

"Oh, you hear funny things," said Dan.

"Fact, though," Bob asserted.

"Well, a few trees would help some now," said Nelson. "It's a lonely looking stretch, isn't it? They say the State pays out thousands of dollars every year planting beach grass along here."

"What for?" asked Tom suspiciously.

"To hold the sand," Nelson replied. "The wind and the ocean play hob with the coast along here."

"What's that ahead there on the shore?" asked Bob, pointing.

"Looks like—Oh, I know! It's the wireless-telegraph station," answered Tom. "That's Wellfleet."

"Let's get them to report us," suggested Dan. "'Passed South, launch *Vagabond*, Captain Tilford; all well except the cook who is suffering with stomach ache from too much candy.'"

"First thing I heard this morning," said Nelson, "was Tommy chewing that peanut taffy stuff he bought. I'll bet his bunk is full of it."

"I don't know about the bunk," said Bob dryly, "but I'll bet that Tommy is."

At a little after two they reached Pollock Rip, passed within two hundred yards of Shovelful Lightship and bore southwest around the lower corner of the Cape. Shoals were numerous and the water decidedly unquiet. The *Vagabond* plunged and kicked, rolled and tossed until Handkerchief Lightship had been left to port. Southward Nantucket lay stretched upon the water, and to the southwest the hills of Martha's Vineyard rose blue and hazy from the sea. There was much to see now, for Nantucket Sound was well dotted with sails, while here and there smoke streamers proclaimed the presence of steamboats. One of these, an excursion boat well loaded with passengers, passed close to starboard of them and they spent several moments in politely answering with the whistle the fluttering handkerchiefs and waving hats. It was nearly half-past five when the *Vagabond*, with over eighty-five miles to her credit since morning, swung around East Chop Light, chugged into Vineyard Haven Harbor and dropped her anchor off the steamship wharf.

"To-day's cruise," said Nelson, while they were sprucing up for an evening ashore, "goes to show the difference between poor gasoline and good gasoline. I'd like to fill a launch up with some of those Standard Oil people, put some of that Sanstable gasoline in her tank and set her fifty miles offshore; that's what I'd like to do!"

They walked over to Cottage City and had dinner—and oh, didn't it taste good!—at a big hotel, returning to the launch at nine o'clock through a sweet-scented summer night and tumbling into bed as soon as their sleepy bodies allowed.

CHAPTER XIV—IN WHICH TOM DISAPPEARS FROM SIGHT

When Bob awoke the next morning it was to a gray world. The open ports were rimmed with tiny drops of moisture and the mist swirled in like films of smoke. He got out of bed, traversed the cabin, thrust open the hatch and put his head out of doors. The morning was warm and still, so still that the voice of some one on the wharf hundreds of feet away sounded close at hand, so still that the lapping of the water against the hull, usually unnoted, seemed a veritable clamor. The deck, cockpit floor, cabin roof, all surfaces were covered with miniature pools, and Bob's hands, clasping the doorway, came away wringing wet.

There was nothing to be seen in any direction, save that now and then, as the mist momentarily lessened, the upper part of the mast and rigging of a sloop moored some thirty feet away from

the *Vagabond* became dimly visible. It was as though some mischievous giant had in the night, with a sweep of his hand, sponged everything out of existence, everything save the *Vagabond* and the little fog-rimmed pool of water in which she sat. It was wonderful and uncanny. It was also very damp, and Bob, standing at the cabin entrance, gazing blankly about him, felt the tiny particles of moisture, blown on a light southwest breath from the ocean, settling on his face and damping his pyjamas until they began to cling to him. He beat a retreat to the cabin, drawing the doors closed behind him, and proceeded to awaken his companions by the simple expedient of pulling the bedclothes off them.

"Get up and look at the fog," he commanded. "It's all over the shop and so thick you can cut it with a knife—any knife, even Dan's!"

"That's all right," muttered Tom, striving to keep warm by bringing his knees up to his chin, "you cut me a slice, Bob, and toast it lightly on both sides."

"Want any butter?" asked Bob solicitously.

"There isn't any," answered Tom sleepily.

"Isn't any?" cried Dan, waking up very suddenly. "What the dickens are we going to do for breakfast?"

"There's some lard," murmured Tom.

Dan leaped out of his berth and rolled Tom onto the floor.

"Here, you! Are you telling the truth? Isn't there really any butter for breakfast?"

"Not a bit," answered Tom cheerfully. "We ran out of it yesterday noon and I forgot to get any last night. Butter's very unhealthy, though, Dan; it gives a fellow boils. I read in a paper just the other day that we eat too much butter and grease. We really oughtn't, you know."

"I vote we make Tommy go and get some," said Nelson, yawning and sitting up on the edge of his berth.

"Oh, I'll go," replied Tom, climbing to his feet, "if you think you must have it. It is bad for you, though, honest! Look at Dan's complexion already! It's awful! For his sake, Nel, supposing we leave butter out for a few days."

"My complexion!" jeered Dan. "Look at your own, Tommy!"

"I have a perfect complexion," said Tom gravely. "It is like peaches and cream. Yours is like—like apple sauce." He bolted for the toilet room and got the door fastened behind him before Dan could reach him.

"Looks to me as though we were here for a while," observed Nelson, glancing through a port at the impenetrable grayness outside. "We can't go chugging around the place in this fog."

"Maybe it will burn off after a time," said Bob. "If we get to Newport before dark we can spend the night there. What's the good of hurrying, anyhow? We haven't got to get anywhere at any particular time."

"Well, there's Dan to think of. He's homesick and wants to get to New York, you know."

"The only thing I want to get is breakfast," answered Dan. "And I intend to have butter with it, too. Tommy's got to hike out and find some."

"I won't!" cried Tom from behind the partition. "I'm cook and don't have to run errands."

"We'll see about that," returned Dan grimly. Tom, who had begun to splash water in the basin again, ceased operations for a moment.

"I won't, I won't!" he called gleefully. "I've mutinied. Down with the captain! I'm going to scuttle the ship in a minute. Anyone seen the scuttle?"

"No, but several persons are going to see your finish when you come out," answered Dan. "We're going to string you to the yardarm."

"There isn't any!"

"Then we'll keel-haul you, whatever that is."

"I demand to be put in chains. Then I can't go for butter."

"We really ought to have a brig," said Nelson.

"What's that?" asked Tom anxiously. "Can you eat it?"

"It's a place where they confine sailors that don't behave themselves, a sort of prison cell."

"How would the ice box do?" Bob asked.

"Huh," answered Dan, "that would be a prison cell on us; Tommy would eat up everything in there and then we'd have to knock the box to pieces to get him out."

"Well," said Tom in an aggrieved voice, "if I can't be put in chains I refuse to mutiny."

So he went for butter instead. Bob volunteered to start breakfast and Tom got into the tender and paddled off into the fog on his errand.

"If I get lost," he called, "you must blow the whistle so I'll know where to find you."

"All right," Nelson answered. "Only you'll have to let us know."

"Sure; I'll send you a telegram." And Tom disappeared whistling gayly.

The others finished dressing, and then, while Bob started the fire, found the bacon and sliced bread, made the coffee and set the table, Dan and Nelson pulled the deck awning out of the locker and set about spreading it over the stanchions. It had not been used before on the present trip and it took them some time to solve the intricacies of it. But finally it was in place, Dan had wiped the chairs and seat until they were comparatively dry and Nelson had tended to the lanterns. By that time breakfast was ready and Tom had been gone a full half hour.

"How far is the store?" asked Dan impatiently.

"Oh, just a little ways," said Bob. "Maybe, though, it wasn't open when he got there."

"More likely he's gone and got lost in the fog," said Nelson anxiously. "If he doesn't show up pretty soon, let's eat. I'm starving."

So, when ten minutes more had passed without Tom's appearance, the three sat down to breakfast. By that time Dan was so hungry that he didn't care whether there was any butter or not. They finished the meal and returned to the deck.

"Maybe we'd better start the whistle," suggested Dan.

"If we call out it will do just as well," said Bob. "Come on, all together!"

"*O Tommy!*" they yelled. There was no answer. They tried again and still again.

"Oh, let him alone," said Dan disgustedly. "He'll find his way back when he gets ready. I dare say he's found a candy store."

"Well, we'll leave some breakfast for him," said Bob. "Come on down and let's get the things washed up. I vote we have luncheon on shore."

The fog held steadily. Now and then voices reached them or the creaking of a boom as some small craft tried to work her way out of the harbor. But for the most part the silence was as thick as the fog which rolled in across the island. The awning was some protection, but it didn't keep the cockpit dry by any manner of means, and so they got into their oilskins. When five bells had struck below Nelson got worried and tried the whistle. After the third or fourth blast a voice hailed them from off to starboard.

"Hello, there! What's the matter?" was the inquiry.

"One of our fellows has gone ashore and hasn't come back," answered Nelson. "We thought maybe he had got lost in the fog. Where are you?"

"On the steamboat wharf," was the reply.

"On the steamboat wharf!" muttered Nelson, looking perplexedly about him into the mist. "But the wharf ought to be in the opposite direction, Bob!"

"Pshaw!" answered Bob. "The tide's swung the boat around, that's what's happened."

"And Tommy's gone off across the harbor!" chuckled Dan, "looking for butter!"

"What's over there, I wonder?" asked Nelson.

"I don't know," Bob replied, "but it's a good mile across in a straight line."

"And Tommy was never able to row straight in his life," laughed Dan. "Oh, well, he'll get onto himself after a while and come back."

"He's been gone long enough already to have rowed over there and back two or three times," said Bob uneasily. "Toot your old whistle some more, Nel."

And Nelson obeyed, blowing the whistle at intervals for the next hour and only ceasing when the air pressure gave out. And Tom refused to show up.

At twelve they began to think of luncheon.

"Wherever he is," said Dan, "he's safe enough. Trust Tommy to look after himself! I dare say he's toasting himself in front of someone's stove and eating caramels. So I say we go ashore and find some luncheon. Something tells me that it is approaching the hour."

"Don't happen to know how we're going to get ashore, do you?" asked Nelson. Dan's face fell.

"Thunder! That's so; Tommy's got the boat. Can't we pull up anchor and chug over to the wharf?"

"I don't want to try it," was the reply. "We might make it all right and we might not. There are two or three small boats between here and there and I don't want any bills for damages. Let's see what there is in the larder."

They went down together and rummaged.

"Here's bacon," said Nelson, "and plenty of bread."

"And potatoes," added Dan. "And cereal, although I never tried it for luncheon."

"And jam and jelly," said Bob, "and a can of peaches."

"And cheese," continued Dan.

"And one egg," said Nelson.

"Saved!" cried Dan. "Here's three cans of corned-beef hash! Oh, yum, yum! Me for the corned beef!"

"Oh, we've got plenty of stuff here," said Nelson cheerfully. "We'll have some boiled potatoes and hash, tea, bread, cheese, and jam. What more could we want?"

"Well," answered Dan, "far be it from me to throw cold asparagus on your menu, Nel, but it does seem that a tiny pat of butter would help a little, now doesn't it?"

"Remember what Tom told you about your complexion," said Nelson severely.

"I wonder if he'll find any luncheon?" said Dan.

"Maybe he's more concerned just now with breakfast," said Bob. "As far as we know he hasn't had that yet!"

"Poor old Tommikin," muttered Dan. "And he so fond of eating, too! I really believe that if Tommy missed two meals in succession he'd die of starvation."

"Well, let's get busy," said Nelson. "We'll help you, Bob."

"All right; there's the potatoes and here's the knife. Peel them thin, now. By the way, how would they taste fried?"

"Oh, great!" cried Dan, smacking his lips. "Say, I believe this old fog makes a fellow hungrier than anything else!"

"Fried it is, then," answered Bob. "There's plenty of lard. Find the can opener, Dan, and yank the lid off of one of those cans of hash."

"We never got a can opener!" exclaimed Nelson. "I forgot all about it. Use the old potato knife, Dan."

"All right. Say, this is great fun, isn't it? *Wow!*"

"Cut yourself?" asked Nelson.

"Oh, not much. Next time I see a store I'm going to buy an opener if it costs ten cents! *Thunder!*"

The can slipped out of his hands and went skimming across the oilcloth floor. Luckily the top was only half off and very little of the contents was spilled. Dan rescued it, seated himself on the steps and, placing it firmly between his knees, sawed away at the tin.

"There you are!" he said triumphantly. "It smells mighty good, too! Hurry up, Nel, with those potatoes, or I'll perish before your very eyes."

"Where's the lard?" asked Bob. "Tommy said there was lots of it. Look in the ice box, Bob."

"Here it is: 'Leaf Lard,' whatever that is."

"Got any water on for tea, Bob?" asked Nelson.

"No, put some in the kettle, will you? I'll cut these potatoes up, what you've left of them; I rather think we'd get more if I fried the skins!"

"Oh, you run away and play," answered Nelson. "They're peeled to the Queen's taste."

"Perhaps the Queen had more potatoes than we have," was the answer. "You get out of here, Dan, you're in the way."

"Well, I'll go up and discover Tommy."

"You'll set the table," said Nelson, "that's what you'll do."

"Sure! How do you do it?"

"Put the cloth on and I'll come and help you," answered Nelson.

"Aye, aye, sir! A sailor's life for me!"

Twenty minutes later they were seated around the table on which steamed a dish of corned-beef hash, nicely browned about the edges, a dish of hashed brown potatoes, and three cups of very strong tea. There was bread, too, and cheese in a little crockery jar, and jam and crackers. Dan uttered a sigh of content as he piled his plate.

"Tommy doesn't know what he's missing," he said.

"I wish to goodness he'd show up," said Bob. "Is it clearing up any, Dan?"

"Not so you'd notice it," replied that youth who had been up on deck a moment before. "It's as thick as ever and maybe thicker."

"Well, Tommy'll turn up all right, I guess," said Nelson.

"When he does I'll bet he will be hungry enough to eat raw dog," said Dan. "Gee, but this hash is swell! Who's got the bread?"

"Have some butter, won't you, Dan?" begged Nelson.

"Well, I should say not! With my complexion? What are you thinking about? Say, how would a little lard taste on the bread, fellows?"

"You might try it," answered Bob. "I dare say it wouldn't be any worse than some butter I've met."

They were very hungry, very merry, and very noisy, and as a consequence of the latter fact they did not hear the sound of oars outside or of feet on the deck, nothing, in fact, until some one stumbled wearily down the steps and appeared at the stateroom door.

"Tommy!" cried Dan, and—

"Tommy!" echoed Bob and Nelson.

Tommy, very tired looking and extremely damp, dragged himself across the floor and sank onto the edge of a bunk, staring famishedly at the table.

"Haven't you got through breakfast yet?" he asked weakly.

"For goodness sake, Tommy," exclaimed Nelson, "where have you been?"

"Been!" answered Tom with a suggestion of returning spirit, as he drew from his pocket a misshapen object wrapped in brown paper and tossed it onto the table, "I've been after your blamed old bu-bu-bu-butter!"

CHAPTER XV—TELLS OF ADVENTURES IN THE FOG

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Five minutes later, having learned with bewilderment that the repast on the table was luncheon instead of a late breakfast, Tom was seated with a plate before him and doing noble work. His countenance looked much more cheerful. And as he ate he recounted the tale of his morning's adventures.

"I don't know where I was," said Tom. "I guess, though, I was about everywhere. I got started wrong when I left the boat. I rowed over that way, toward the wharf, and kept looking around for —"

"That's where you made your mistake," said Bob. "The tide turned the launch around and you started in just the opposite direction from what you thought. I'll bet you didn't find the wharf?"

"Gee! I thought for a while I was never going to find anything. I kept rowing and rowing, easy, you know, so as not to bump anything, and wondering why I didn't get to the shore. And then I was bothered about not finding any boats, because I knew there were two or three right between us and the steamboat wharf. Well, after about ten minutes I got sort of scared; thought perhaps I'd got turned around and was rowing out to sea. So I stopped and listened, but I couldn't hear anything except a wagon somewhere in one direction and an engine whistle away off in the opposite direction. I didn't know whether there was a railroad on the island or not. Is there?"

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"I don't think so," said Nelson. "There's one on Nantucket, though."

"What he probably heard," said Bob, "was the train across on the mainland. That would be only about six miles."

"Well," continued Tom, "I didn't know where it was and so I decided to make toward where the wagon seemed to be. So I turned half around and started off in a new direction. I guess I rowed a quarter of an hour and didn't see a thing or hear anything. Then I stopped and rested. I thought if I could only see which way the current was running I'd know where the mouth of the harbor was, because I was sure that the tide would be running out."

"That was right," said Nelson.

"Yes, but there wasn't any way to tell. I could only see for about four or five feet around the tender and the water was like a looking-glass. Then, while I was resting, I heard some one shout: 'Hi, Cap'n Joe!' It sounded almost behind me and it startled me so I pretty near dropped the oars. So I shouted back and turned the boat around again. But I didn't get any answer. So I began to row. Then I saw the shore ahead and when I got close I looked for a place to land. But all there was was a high wharf set on slippery spilings and no ladder anywhere. So I kept along the wharf for a long old ways, turned a corner and bumped into the stern of a coal barge. I edged the tender around that and found a fellow sitting on the gunwale fishing. So I asked him—Is there any more bread, Bob?"

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"You asked him what?" exclaimed Bob.

"Get out! Cut me another slice of bread, like a good fellow. I asked him where the steamboat wharf was. And what do you think he did? Pointed over his shoulder, mind you, and said it was two miles! Then, thinks I, I've rowed around the point and this is Cottage City where the cottages are. 'What place is this?' I asked him. 'Vineyard Haven,' says he. Well, I didn't know any more then, so I told him where I wanted to go and all about it. He was a nice chap, if his face was all over coal dust, and he told me that I was near a place called West Chop and that what I wanted was Eastville and that it was up the harbor and across. So I asked him then if there was a grocery store around there, and he said there was one about a quarter of a mile up the harbor. So I thanked him and started off again, keeping right up snug to the shore. And after I'd gone about a quarter of a mile, as I reckoned it, I made a landing at an old wharf and set out to find the

grocery.

"It was like walking in the dark, because I couldn't see more than a dozen feet ahead of me. Once I came pretty near going through a hole in the pier. But pretty soon I found a building of some sort and walked around it and found a road. But there wasn't a soul to be seen. So I kept on going for quite a ways, and then I remembered that if I didn't look out I'd never find the tender again. So I turned around and started back. And pretty soon I saw that I'd lost my way. But I found the grocery. There were two or three stores there and some houses. I went in and bought a pound of butter. I'd have got more but I didn't know how good it would be. I suppose it's pretty poor, isn't it?"

"No," answered Dan promptly, "it's great; nice and salty."

"Then I asked the old idiot in the store if he knew of a broken-down wharf around there; said I'd left my boat at it and couldn't find it. He looked at me as though he thought I was crazy and said most of the wharves around there were broken down, but maybe the one I meant was the second one to the north. So I tried again and found it right away. I didn't know what time it was, because I didn't have my watch and I'd forgotten to ask. I tried to remember the direction the fellow on the coal barge had pointed, but I guess I got it wrong, for after I'd rowed a long time without finding anything except a log of wood I wasn't near any land at all, as far as I could make out. I couldn't see anything and I couldn't hear anything except little sounds way off. I took a rest then, for I was dead tired and beastly hungry. I guess the tender floated out with the tide, for the first thing I knew I was looking up at three fellows leaning over the bow of a big sailing vessel.

"'Hello, kid,' says one of them. 'Hello,' says I, looking kind of surprised, I guess. 'Was you looking for any one?' he asked. I told him yes, I was looking for the *Vagabond*. 'Oh, he means you, Gus,' says the first fellow, and the three of them laughed and had a fine time about it. So I explained that the *Vagabond* was a launch and that she was lying off the steamboat wharf. 'Oh, that's it, eh?' says one of the sailors. 'Well, you want to strike right across there, kiddie,' and he pointed behind him. But I didn't like the grin on his face and suspected he was having fun with me. So I told him I hoped he'd choke and started off in the opposite direction. I think now," Tom went on to an accompaniment of laughter from the others, "that maybe he told the truth. Anyhow, the way I went didn't take me to any steamboat wharf!"

"I rowed for a long while; I don't know how long it was; it's mighty hard to tell out there in the fog. And pretty soon I saw something off to the left and made for it. It was a stone pier with a ladder down it. I thought then that I'd got across the harbor at last and I decided I'd tie the boat up and try to find you fellows on foot. Well, I walked a minute or two and came to a back door. I could see that it was the door of a little store of some sort, so I went in. And where do you suppose I was?"

"Wanamaker's?" asked Dan.

"Give it up," said Bob.

"I was in the same little old dive where I'd bought the butter. The old codger looked at me sort of suspicious and I made believe I'd come back on purpose. He wanted to know if I'd found my boat and I told him yes. Then I asked if he had any crackers and cheese. He had crackers but his cheese was all gone, he said. So I bought a nickel's worth of crackers—stale old things they were, too—and a box of sardines. I'll bet those sardines had been there ten years! But I ate them. Wish I hadn't. I asked the man how to get to the steamboat wharf and he tried to tell me. Said if I started out from where my boat was and kept a little north of east I'd get there. I asked a fellow outside a place where they sold oilskins and he said about the same thing. So I hunted up my boat, starting from the back door of the grocery, you know, and found it all right. Then——"

"Maybe you pull on one oar harder than the other, Tommy," suggested Dan. "Do you?"

"I don't know. Maybe I do. I suppose that would account for my getting back to that old grocery shop. Well, off I went again. And you can bet that by that time my arms were aching!" Tom rubbed and stretched them now as though in proof of the assertion. "I rowed about ten minutes, I guess, and came to a beach. Well, that was a new one to me. I didn't know where the dickens I was, and I don't yet."

"I do," said Bob, who had spread the chart out on the corner of the table. "You were here somewhere."

"That's right," said Tom, looking over his shoulder, "because I jumped out, pulled the boat up and looked around. And on the other side of the road was a marshy place and a lot more water all along. I didn't know which way the road would take me, so I went back and pushed off again. By that time those sardines had begun to swim around inside of me and I got kind of squirmy. After a minute I heard a whistle and I thought it was the *Vagabond's*. I listened and it sounded five times. Then, after a while, it sounded five again."

"Yes," said Nelson; "one, two—one, two, three; twenty-three for you, Tommy."

"Was that it? It sounded to me like T, o,—m, m, y! T, o,—m, m, y! Anyhow, I started out for it but it was hard to tell just where it was. And after I'd been pulling about ten minutes or so I had to quit. The—the sardines weren't satisfied where they were. I was as sick as a dog for a while, and afterward I laid down in the bottom of the boat and didn't care whether I ever found you fellows or not. Every now and then I'd hear the whistle. And then I went to sleep. When I woke up I was stiff and the water was just running off me. I was sure then that the tide had taken me out to sea and I was scared blue. So I turned the boat right around and rowed in the opposite direction.

After a bit I heard oars and shouted out. A man answered and I asked him where the steamboat wharf was. 'Over there about two or three hundred feet,' said he. But I couldn't see, him and I didn't know where 'over there' was. So I asked him to wait until I reached him. He was a young fellow in a fishing dory filled with lobster pots. I told him I was looking for the *Vagabond* and he said he'd just passed her and that if I'd follow him he'd show her to me. So I did. And we went about thirty or forty strokes, I guess, and found her. And here I am. And if any one wants to go for a row the boat's out there. I'm going to stay right here until the fog goes away. Is there any more tea, Bob?"

"No, but I'll make you some," was the answer. "It won't take a minute."

"Well, you certainly had the time of your life," said Dan with a grin. "You always were lucky, Tom. If it had been me I'd have been miles out in Nantucket Sound by this time."

"There ought to be a compass in that tender," said Nelson. "And I'm going to get one for it."

"Well, it won't do any harm," remarked Bob from the engine room, "but it's an easy bet that none of us is going to go out in her again in the fog."

"I'm plumb sure I'm not," sighed Tom. "After I get that cup of tea I'm going to hit my bunk and take a nap."

And he did, sleeping most of the afternoon, while Bob and Dan played cards and Nelson busied himself at the engine. The wiring hadn't satisfied him of late and so he put in new connections all over and had a nice, messy time of it. About half-past four the fog lifted somewhat and by six was almost gone. A cool breeze blew down from the north and in the west the sun set in a pool of orange and vermilion. The Four doffed oilskins and sweaters and got into respectable attire, and at half-past six went ashore for dinner.

In the evening they played Five Hundred until nearly ten o'clock, at which time Tom was seventeen hundred and something in the hole. Whereupon he said he was going to bed and in proof of the assertion tossed the cards into Dan's bunk, where they spread themselves out artistically from top to bottom. Dan was for forcing Tom to pick them up, and during the fracas following Nelson and Bob made things shipshape for the night. Then the riot was quelled and, after reciting the "Dirge of the Salt Codfish," Tom and Dan consented to retire.

Once, hours later, Bob awoke with the notion that some one had called him. But what he had heard was only Tom talking in his dreams.

"I have lost my ticket," said Tom very distinctly, "but I wish to go to Steamboat Wharf."

CHAPTER XVI—WITNESSES A DEFEAT FOR THE *VAGABOND*

Breakfast was over and the crew of the *Vagabond* were gathered around the chart which lay spread open on the cabin roof. It was foggy again this morning, but the sunlight filtered through the gray mist, lending warmth and color and promise of better things.

"She'll clear up before noon," Nelson had oracularly declared a moment before. "We'll clean up the launch this morning and go on to Newport after luncheon."

"There seems to be two ways of going," said Bob. "We can go through between the mainland and Nonamesset Island or we can run down and around the end of Cuttihunk. It looks like an even thing as far as distance is concerned."

"Well, if it clears up nicely," answered Nelson, "suppose we take the outside route. We don't have to go around Cuttihunk, though, Bob; if you'll look at the chart you'll find there's a fair passage for small boats between Naushon and Pasque, and between Pasque and Nashawena there's a good mile of clear water called Quicks Hole."

"Yes, I see," said Bob. "Let's go through Quicks Hole."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Dan, pushing Bob aside. "What we want to do is to make for Nonamesset, leaving Uncatena on the starboard bow, head so'so'west for Penikese, keeping Woepecket on the weather rail, whatever that is, bear south off the no'east corner of Nashawena, give Cuttihunk the cold shoulder, dip our colors to Naushon, run through Canapitset Cut and drop anchor in Quamquisset for five o'clock tea!"

"Help!" yelled Nelson.

"Great Scott, what names!" laughed Bob.

"Well, now you know your route," said Dan gravely. "I guess you fellows are pretty glad you've got me with you to show you the way. Talk about your Navigating Officers!"

"Tommy, do you think you could find the wharf?" asked Bob.

"Huh, I can see it," said Tom.

"Then suppose you drop lightly into the tender and row ashore and buy us some provisions. Dan's finished the butter, and we need some fresh meat and bread, don't we?"

"Yep, and eggs. You fellows needn't wait for me to get back before you start on the brass. Go ahead and enjoy yourselves."

"That's all right, Tommy," Dan answered. "We'll save your share for you."

"Well, let's get at it," said Nelson. "We want the launch looking her best when we reach Newport. It won't do to put into a swell place like that with dirty paint."

"No," said Dan. "I think we might even insist on Tommy's washing his face."

"It's as clean as yours," retorted Tom from the tender.

"Of course, we don't want to be fussy, Tommy, and if it was any place but Newport we wouldn't say a word. But as the Four Hundred will probably be down at the wharf to welcome us——"

Dan's further remarks were interrupted by a shower of water impelled toward him by an oar blade. When he had regained his eyesight Tommy was too far distant to allow of reprisals and Dan contented himself with threats of future revenge.

Then house cleaning began in earnest, and it was no small task that confronted them. The decks were to scrub, the hull to wash, the port lights to be cleaned and the brasswork to be shined. And the brass was the biggest part of the undertaking. There was, as Dan complained later, altogether too much of it; stern cleat and chocks, bow cleat and chocks, gasoline and water-tank caps, wheel, deck rail, whistle, search light, lanterns, flag-pole sockets, and numerous bits of hardware such as hatch fastening, door knobs, and locker buttons. Oh, yes, there was plenty of work, and Dan, assisted later by all the others, rubbed and rubbed until long past the usual luncheon hour. But when it was all done they had the satisfaction of knowing that no cleaner, brighter, smarter craft was afloat.

They ate luncheon at a quarter past one, by which time the sun was out in full strength and what little breeze came in through the open ports felt very grateful to four very warm mariners.

At two o'clock to the minute the *Vagabond's* anchor came up over the bow, and very dirty it was, to Dan's disgust, and the propeller began to revolve. Out around West Chop Lighthouse and the stone jetty went the *Vagabond*, white paint glistening in the sunlight and bright-work sparkling gayly, while from the flag poles the launch's bunting fluttered in the little westerly breeze. Then Dan, at the wheel, turned the boat's head southwest and they met the waters of the Sound on the quarter as they sped for Quicks Hole. It was a glorious afternoon and the Four, protected from the sun by the awning, found life very enjoyable. The engine was doing her very best, taking kindly to the last lot of gasoline. They had about forty miles ahead of them and meant to cover it by half-past five. At a little after three they were in Quicks Hole, bobbing about gayly in the wake of a steamer.

"Wonder why they called these the Elizabeth Islands?" said Tom.

"After Queen Elizabeth, maybe," hazarded Bob.

"And do you suppose Nonamesset, Uncatena, Naushon, and the rest of them were her children?" asked Tom.

"Well," laughed Bob, "I never heard that she had any children."

"Oh, that's so," murmured Tom sheepishly, "I forgot."

"I hope," remarked Nelson solicitously, "that English History wasn't among the subjects in which you were examined for admission to Erskine, Tommy."

"Say!" cried Tom. "I'd ought to hear pretty soon about that exam. Maybe the letter will be at Newport!"

"Want to turn back?" asked Bob.

"I—I'd almost like to," admitted Tom.

"Oh, you've made it all right, Tommy," Dan consoled. "The cheek of trying to get from third year at Hillton to Erskine so flabbergasted them that they passed you before they recovered."

"I hope so," said Tom anxiously. "If I've missed it I'll——"

But they were alongside the steamer by that time and Tom forgot the subject of admission to Erskine College in the excitement of passing the big boat. There were not many persons aboard her, but what there were flocked to the rail and waved their handkerchiefs or caps. Bob gave a blast on the whistle and Dan peered out from the edge of the awning and blew a kiss. Ten minutes later the steamer was far behind and the *Vagabond* was churning her way across the waters of Buzzard's Bay, with Sakonnet Point beckoning them ahead. Before five they were in Narragansett Bay and at twenty-two minutes past were tied up at the landing of the New York Yacht Club House.

They made hurriedly for the post office and were rewarded with a whole bundle of mail.

"Bear up bravely, Tommy," said Nelson, who was sorting it over. "Here's an epistle postmarked 'Centerport.'"

"Oh, gosh!" muttered Tom as he took it.

The others were too much interested in receiving and outwardly examining their own letters to think further of Tom for several minutes. Then, as they turned to leave the office, Dan remembered.

"What's the verdict, Tommy?" he asked.

Tommy shook his head silently.

"What? Missed it? Turned down?" cried Dan.

"I—I don't know," stammered Tom. "You—you read it."

He held out the letter to Dan.

"Why, you haven't opened it!" exclaimed the other. "What do you think of that, fellows? Tommy hasn't the nerve to read it!"

"Oh ... well...." murmured Tom, tearing the envelope. "I didn't expect to get through, anyway." The others watched anxiously as he unfolded the single sheet which the envelope contained. Tom's face flushed suddenly as he read. Then a wonderful, all-encompassing smile started at the corners of his mouth and grew and grew until it became an expansive grin. The others howled as they looked. There was no need to ask the verdict.

"Pu-pu-pu-pu-pu—" stuttered Tom.

"Good for you, Tommy!" cried Dan, whacking him on the back.

"—Pu-pu-passed!"

"Hurrah for Thomas Ferris, 1910!" cried Nelson.

"How many conditions, Tommy?" asked Bob. Tom chuckled.

"Only three," he answered. "How do you suppose I ever did it?"

"Can't imagine," laughed Bob, "unless you hypnotized 'em."

"I'm jealous," said Dan. "You've got one more condition than I have. I shall appeal to the Faculty."

"Oh, th-th-th-that's all right," said Tom eagerly, "you can have one of mine!"

They returned to the launch very joyfully.

There were many letters to be read and each fellow found a corner for himself and soon became immersed in his mail. Now and then one or another would break out with an ejaculatory announcement of news, as when Nelson exclaimed: "Of course! I never thought of it! Say, fellows, dad says if we'd strained that gasoline through chamois skin there wouldn't have been any water in it!" Or when Dan remarked: "The governor got a letter from Jerry Hinckley the other day, and Mr. Cozzens is going to coach him this summer himself and let him try for Hillton in the Fall!" Or when Tom announced impressively: "Ben Hur's got four kittens and they're all white."

Not very important news to us, of course, but of vital interest to them.

They went ashore at half-past six and had what Tom called "swell grub." Afterwards they explored the town and stayed up very late on deck, watching the lights and listening to the music of a far-off orchestra. There was a good moon and Dan wanted to weigh anchor and go on along the shore to the next harbor. But Nelson and Bob, mindful of Mr. Tilford's instructions, vetoed the plan. Just as they were preparing to turn in, the Fall River Line steamer came into sight down the harbor, a huge black hulk pricked out with thousands of lights, and they had to return to the deck to watch her float past on her way to the pier.

The next day dawned almost cloudless and very warm. The Four were out of their bunks early and into their bathing suits. Then followed a glorious plunge from the deck into the gleaming blue water of the harbor, a brisk rub-down in the engine room and some of Tom's good coffee and eggs and crisp bacon. By the time breakfast was over the heat had become intense and the awning, put away overnight, was rigged up again. Tom, who exhibited symptoms of an inclination to go to sleep in one of the chairs in the cockpit, was routed out and compelled to give assistance.

They had the water tank filled and then pulled up anchor and turned the *Vagabond* toward the Sound, where white sails moved slowly along and gave promise of a cooling breeze. Tom was allowed to take the wheel, but Bob kept beside him in case, as the latter explained, Tom should fall asleep. But in justice to Tom it should be said that he really didn't show any tendency toward sleepiness. On the contrary he stuck out his chest pompously, twirled the wheel in an important way and did his best to look like a master mariner. Halfway down the harbor they overtook a strange looking craft containing a single occupant, a young chap who was squatted uncomfortably in a diminutive cockpit surrounded by a veritable tangle of pipes and wires. The boat, a gasoline launch, was about eighteen feet long, very slender and was painted a vivid crimson. On the bow they read, as they drew abreast, the inscription *So Long*. The forward two thirds of the launch was covered by a crown cabin. Between that and the after deck was a four-foot space in which were crowded the engine and the crew. The crew was in his shirt sleeves and was smoking a pipe. The launch was ambling along at about six miles an hour and making a frightful noise about it; the reports from her exhaust pipe were deafening.

"Some one ought to make him a present of a muffler," said Nelson as they drew alongside.

The occupant of the *So Long* glanced up as they approached and studied the *Vagabond* idly and, as it seemed to Tom, somewhat superciliously. Tom leaned over the corner of the cabin roof.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Want to race?"

The crew of the little launch puffed at his pipe and looked calmly away, but made no answer. Bob

laughed.

"He doesn't know you, Tommy," he said. "Never's been introduced."

"Conceited ass!" growled Tom. Then, "Hey there, you in the red tub!" he called. "Do you want a race?"

The crew of the *So Long* turned and viewed Tom silently. And quite as silently, and without a change of expression, he nodded his head indifferently.

"Come on then!" cried Tom.

The man in the "red tub" removed the pipe from his mouth, knocked the ashes out on the edge of the washboard, dropped it into his pocket, and began leisurely to busy himself with valves and switches.

"Turn her on, Nel," said Tom. "Give her full speed."

"All right," laughed Nelson, "but I don't believe we'll need quite full speed to walk away from that boat." He disappeared into the cabin.

"He's a sport, anyhow," declared Dan. "I like a chap that's not afraid of being beaten."

The *Vagabond* began to move through the water at a faster pace and Tom allowed himself a final gibe at the rival boat.

"So long!" he shouted.

The smaller boat was already several lengths behind and her crew was still bending over the engine.

"It takes him long enough to get her started," said Bob. "I wonder——"

But what Bob wondered was never disclosed. For at that moment there came a series of pistol-like reports from the *So Long's* exhaust and the "red tub" suddenly dug her straight, sharp nose into the water, threw it away from her on each side in two long green waves and came alongside.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Bob.

They had a fleeting view of the placid countenance of the youth in shirt sleeves, a momentary impression of a brilliant crimson streak along the water and then they were gazing bewilderedly at each other. The *So Long* was lengths and lengths away and getting smaller every instant.

Nelson put his head out of the door, glanced toward where the other boat had been a minute before, looked puzzled, came out on deck and searched the neighborhood.

"Where is she?" he asked. "Sunk?"

For answer three hands pointed ahead. Nelson gazed a moment. Then he went silently below and slowed down the engine.

"How fu-fu-fast do you su-su-su-suppose she wu-wu-went?" asked Tom.

"About a mile a minute," answered Bob gravely.

"I don't believe she's a launch at all," said Dan. "I'll bet she's a blamed old automobile."

"What was that remark you addressed to him just before she walked away, Tommy?" asked Bob.

"Shut up," answered Tom sheepishly. "How did I know he had a streak of red lu-lu-lu-lightning? Where is she now?"

"Oh, about a mile ahead," answered Nelson sadly. "Next time let's pick out a chap our own size."

"Well, she's certainly a dandy!" said Bob. "She must do about thirty miles."

"Maybe twenty-five," said Nelson. "But that'll hold us for awhile. Isn't that her coming back?"

It was. They looked at each other inquiringly. Dan began to whistle. Tom glanced at Bob.

"You take the wheel," he said finally. "I—I want to get something out of my locker."

A shout of laughter went up.

"No, you'll stay right where you are, Tommy," said Bob, "and take your medicine. You're to blame for it, anyhow."

The *So Long* approached at full speed, cutting the water like a knife. The Four watched silently. When a little distance away the chap in shirt sleeves bent forward out of sight behind the arch of the cabin and the *So Long's* speed decreased. But even so when the two boats met it was like an express train passing a freight on a siding. The chap in shirt sleeves looked across the twenty feet of water that separated the two boats and viewed the Four as calmly as ever, but there was a twinkle in his eye. As the "red tub" dashed by he waved his hand.

"So long!" he called politely.

"Hope you ch-ch-ch-choke!" sputtered Tom.

The others laughed at Tom's discomfiture.

"Stung!" murmured Dan.

"He had you there, Tommy," said Bob.

"I'll bet Tommy won't challenge any one else in a hurry," Nelson laughed.

"Oh, well, what's the good of having a boat like that, anyway?" asked Tom disgustedly. "Even if it does go fast there isn't room to sit down in it comfortably. It's a fool thing!"

Shortly afterwards they were off Point Judith, and in spite of the fact that the weather was calm and the ocean smiling there was a sea there that made the *Vagabond* cut all sorts of capers. Barry, who had been asleep on the cabin roof since breakfast, now descended to more comfortable quarters. But even in Bob's lap he didn't seem wholly happy and after a while he jumped down and disappeared into the cabin. Ten minutes later Nelson, who had been below to look at the engine, came back smiling broadly.

"Have we any lemons, Tommy?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "In the cupboard. Want one?"

"Not for myself, but Barry needs one."

"Barry!" exclaimed Bob. "What's the matter with him?"

"Well, you might just go down and see for yourself," chuckled Nelson.

"Oh, get out! You can't make me believe that Barry's seasick! Who ever heard of a dog being seasick?"

"Well, you can't get up an argument with me," laughed Nelson. "But just the same, I'm glad it's not my berth!"

Then Bob hurried below.

Ten minutes later Bob's blanket was fluttering from the awning rod and Barry, curled up in a patch of sunlight and looking somewhat woe-begone, was striving to forget his recent discomfiture. They were past the point now and Block Island, which was their destination, was looming up clearly across the water some ten miles distant. They reached it at a little after eleven, found anchorage off the village and went ashore for what Bob called "an old-fashioned fish dinner." Tom said he guessed they'd got it all right, because his fish was just about as old-fashioned as he'd ever found. But the others declared that it was all right and so Tom, declaring feelingly that he didn't want to live without the others, ate his too. Later on Tom declared that he felt very uncomfortable and that he was certain he had ptomaine poisoning. But the others laughed at him and told him that any fellow who had eaten as much as he had ought to expect to feel uncomfortable. At two o'clock they were on their way again and making for New London, a matter of thirty-five miles distant.

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CHAPTER XVII—IN WHICH DAN PLAYS A JOKE

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Long before sunset the *Vagabond* was berthed for the night at the end of an otherwise empty pier scarcely a stone's throw from the railroad station at New London.

"I don't know who this wharf belongs to," said Nelson as he passed the bow line up to Dan, "but there isn't any notice to keep away and so we might as well use it." "I think it's an orphan pier," said Dan as he ran the line through a ring and made it fast. "Anyhow, that's the way it appears," he added. Nelson groaned.

"That'll do for you," he said. "Leave plenty of slack there to allow for the fall of the tide. If those trains make as much noise to-night as they're making now we'll wish we'd anchored across the river."

"Yes, I do hope the noise won't keep Tommy awake," said Dan concernedly.

"I think," replied Tom, who was trying to make Barry stand on his hind legs and beg for a strip of bark torn from a spiling, "that it's rather fun seeing trains again. I love engines, anyway. I used to think I'd be an engineer when I grew up."

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"Well, I think you'd make a success on the railroad," said Bob thoughtfully, "but not as engineer."

"What, then?" demanded Tom unsuspectingly.

"Why, you'd make a dandy sleeper, Tommy," was the reply.

Presently they landed, crossed the railroad tracks, and skirted the little open space with its monument, erected, as Tom declared, to commemorate the discovery of New London by Thomas Ferris, the famous explorer. And just then they made another discovery. It was the eve of the Fourth of July. That fact was extremely evident. Up and down the street the sound of exploding firecrackers was deafening. Dan started to sing "The Night before the Fourth," but Tommy darted into a store and when the others reached him he already had his arms full of crackers and Roman candles. Then they visited other shops and bought all sorts of things from news-papers to canvas shoes. Finally Dan was despatched to the launch with the purchases and the others went on up the hill to the big hotel. When Dan joined them he brought exciting news of a show which was announced for that evening at the local theater and during dinner they unanimously decided to attend.

"You ought to see the posters," said Dan. "Oh, great! There's one picture where the hero in a false yellow beard has got into the counterfeiter's den and is holding them all at bay with a pistol in each hand, saying '*The first to move is a dead man!*' Oh, it's swell!"

"What's it called?" asked Tom eagerly.

"The Counterfeiter's Bride."

"Did you see the bride?" asked Bob.

"Yes, she was there, too; in a corner, with her face over her hands and——"

"With what?" shouted the others.

"I mean with her hands over her face. She has beautiful golden hair and wears black; they always do. Then there's a terribly funny picture of the comic fellow jumping out of a second-story window with a life-preserver strapped around his waist."

"That doesn't *sound* terribly funny," remarked Bob.

"With a life-preserver on him?" demanded Dan. "It was a fire."

"You didn't say it was a fire. I thought he was jumping into a river or something."

"Well, he isn't; he's jumping into the street."

"Still," hazarded Nelson, "maybe he put the life-preserver on to save him from automobiles. You know it's a mighty dangerous thing, jumping into the street nowadays."

"Oh, you fade away!" growled Dan. "I'm going to see it, anyway."

"We all are," said Bob. "I haven't been to a theater since Christmas vacation."

So go they did, and had a fine time. After they got back to the launch and had been welcomed by Barry Tom and Dan reproduced the second act in the engine room, Dan playing the rôle of the Secret Service hero and Tom doing the distracted bride. Barry somewhat marred the effectiveness of the supreme situation by thinking the whole affair organized for his amusement and trying to shake Dan off his feet just when the latter had covered Nelson and Bob with a pair of "sneakers" and was in the act of declaiming in a blood-curdling voice: "*The first to move is a dead man!*"

Nelson's and Bob's laughter drowned the line, but Tom, who had his face covered with his hands, continued to emit his piercing shrieks long after and had to be forcibly persuaded to desist. Then they went up on deck and set off Roman candles and firecrackers, a proceeding which sent Barry into paroxysms of excitement.

The next day, instead of continuing westward along the shore, they headed the *Vagabond* up the Thames River and had a Fourth-of-July excursion up to Norwich between smiling green hills against which nestled comfortable white farmhouses. Nelson grew reminiscent and retold the story of the only Harvard and Yale boat race he had witnessed, pointing out the quarters of the rival crews as they passed along. They spent a couple of hours in Norwich and came back in the afternoon. After they had passed under the railroad bridge and left New London behind Dan had an idea.

"Say, fellows," he said, "instead of keeping on let's stop along the shore here somewhere and camp out for the night. We can cook dinner on the beach and rig up a tent with the awning. What do you say?"

They said yes, instantly and enthusiastically. And at five they found a place that suited them, ran the launch into a little shallow cove and set about disembarking. Three trips were made in the tender, and before the last was completed Bob had a stone fireplace set up and Tom had gathered enough fuel to last a week. By mutual consent Bob became chef *pro tem*.

The cove was skirted by a little pebbled beach and in one place a tumble-down stone wall ambled out of the woods nearby and fell to pieces in the water, affording a very handy landing place for the tender. There was only one mishap, and that occurred when Tom strove to relieve Dan of a load of frying pans and dishes, lost his footing on a slippery stone and went into two feet of water with his burden. Luckily nothing was broken and Tom, by standing in front of the fire and turning slowly around, was soon able to get dry again. They locked the cabin on the *Vagabond* and made everything shipshape for the night. Then, at a little after six they squatted around the fire and ate fried eggs and bacon, baked potatoes and smoky toast and washed the repast down with smoky tea. But they all declared that it was the best supper they had tasted for a long time.

"It's sort of a relief," said Nelson, "to have things seasoned with wood smoke for a change. I was getting a little tired of Tom's kerosene flavor."

"It isn't my fault," defended Tom. "Your old stove smokes like the dickens."

After supper they set to work with the deck awning and, not without several failures and many tribulations, at last rigged it up into the semblance of a tent. Then they discovered that they had left bedding entirely out of their scheme, and Bob and Tom rowed back to the launch for blankets. By that time it was twilight and the river and the Sound, just below them, were golden in the afterglow.

"Mighty pretty, isn't it?" asked Bob as he drew in his oars and got ready to lay hold of the launch.

"Yes," Tom answered without enthusiasm, "but I think it would be a heap more comfortable to

sleep on the boat where we have decent mattresses than to lie on the ground."

"Tommy, you're a sybarite," said Bob, as he climbed onto the launch.

"I don't know what that is," grumbled Tom as he followed, "but if it's something that likes a decent bed I'm it."

They kept the fire going until bedtime and watched its flames leap and writhe in the purple darkness. Then the moon came up and dimmed the firelight and showed them the *Vagabond* floating quietly at anchor a little way off. Tom looked toward it longingly.

"Wish I was there," he murmured. And, after a moment, "What's a sybilite, Dan?" he asked. Bob laughed.

"A 'sybilite,' Tommy," he said, "is a person who'd rather sleep on a launch than on the ground."

"That's me," sighed Tom. "I thought, though, it was a fellow who told fortunes, or something like that."

"Oh, no," said Dan, "that's a gypsyite."

"Hope you choke," muttered Tom. "I'm going to bed, although I don't suppose I'll be able to sleep any."

"Only about twelve hours," jeered Dan.

When they awoke in the morning it was to a gray, wet world. A fine mist was falling, everything outside the improvised tent was sopping and the other side of the river was shut from view.

"There's no use trying to make a fire with this wood," yawned Bob. "I vote we go on board."

Dan and Nelson agreed. Tom was silent, for after one disgusted look at the outside world he had turned over and promptly gone to sleep again.

"Let's leave him," whispered Dan.

"But we need the awning," Nelson demurred. Dan chuckled.

"Sure, and we'll take it. He'll never wake up."

So very quietly they gathered the things together and bore them to the landing. Two trips of the tender were sufficient, and on the second one they took the awning. Back at the edge of the woods, with the mist falling gently on his upturned face, slept Tom.

Barry seemed to appreciate the change of quarters as much as anyone and was soon curled up in a corner of Bob's bunk. The dampness had got into their bones and all were stiff and full of queer little aches when they stretched their muscles.

"What we need," said Nelson, "is some hot coffee and lots of it."

"And right away quick," added Dan.

So Bob got busy at the stove while the others put the awning back over the cockpit. While they were doing it they cast many amused glances across at the shore where Tom still slumbered under his gray blanket.

"I tell you what," said Dan presently. "Let's go on down the river around that point. Then when Tom wakes up he'll think we've gone off without him. What do you say?"

Nelson laughed and agreed. So they pulled up the anchor, started the engine, and went slowly downstream until a point of woods hid them from the cove. Here they let down the anchor again and had breakfast. They were intensely hungry and spent the better part of half an hour at table.

"We'll keep something hot for Tommy," said Bob. "I'd just like to see his face when he wakes up and finds us gone!"

"So would I!" said Dan with a chuckle. "Poor old Tommy! Won't he be fine and damp?"

"Don't suppose he will catch cold and have rheumatism, do you?" asked Nelson doubtfully.

"Tommy? Catch anything? He'd never move fast enough," laughed Dan. "I wonder what he will do, though, when he finds the launch gone."

"Hope he doesn't go hunting upstream instead of down," said Nelson.

"Thunder! That would be awkward," said Dan. "I say, maybe we'd better go back, eh? He ought to be awake by this time, and looking for us. And if he gets it into his silly head that we've gone up the river instead of down——!"

"I don't believe he's awake yet," said Bob. "If he was we'd have heard him yelling for us."

"I don't know about that," answered Nelson. "We must have come a good third of a mile downstream."

"Anyway," insisted Dan uneasily, "I think we'd ought to go back."

"All right," said Nelson. "Come on and we'll hoist anchor. It seems to me we don't do anything else nowadays; I'm getting a crick in my back over it."

They went across the engine room and stepped out into the cockpit. Then they stared about them in surprise. There was nothing to be seen. The fog had crept up since they had gone below and was now stealing silently past them, blown landward before a tiny southeast breeze. Nelson and

Dan looked at each other inquiringly.

"Isn't this the dickens?" asked Dan.

"It surely is," was the reply. "O Bob! Come out here!"

Bob appeared. After a moment of surprise he asked:

"Where's the shore?" Nelson pointed off to starboard.

"Sure?" asked Bob.

"Yes, pretty certain. The tide's still running in and so we can't have swung around."

"Hang these old fogs, anyhow!" growled Dan. "What are we going to do now?"

"Go back for Tommy," answered Nelson. Bob looked doubtful.

"Can we do it?" he asked. "Aren't you afraid of running into something?"

"No, I guess not. We'll keep the whistle going, you can take the wheel, I'll stand at the engine, and Dan can keep a lookout from the bow. We don't draw much water and there weren't any shallows as far as I could see coming down here. Besides, we ought to be able to see the shore at least ten feet away. If Dan keeps a good lookout and yells quickly, and you pass the word on down to me we'll manage all right, I guess. Let's get the mud-hook up."

That done, Bob took the wheel, Dan perched himself in the bow, and Nelson started the engine at the slowest speed. The *Vagabond*, with a shrill screech from her whistle that so surprised Dan that he nearly tumbled off the bow, pushed the fog aside and crept through the silence. All went well for a moment. Then came a quick warning from Dan.

"Back her!" he yelled. "Land dead ahead!"

"Back her!" called Bob, swirling the wheel around. There was a sudden commotion under the launch's stern as the propeller was reversed and, at the same instant, a tiny jar as her bow settled on to the sandy bottom. Dan ran back and seized the boat hook.

"Tell Nel to keep her backing," he called, "and I'll see if I can't shove her off."

But it was a five minutes' task, and had not the tide been coming in instead of running out it is likely that the *Vagabond* would have stayed where she was for a good twelve hours. But finally her bow was free once more and Dan shoved and panted over the boat hook until the launch was headed away and the dim line of shore was gone from sight again.

"All right now," he called, and Nelson again threw the clutch forward. In the excitement of getting afloat they had forgotten the whistle, but now Nelson made up for lost time, and the launch poked her way gingerly along to an accompaniment of distressful shrieks.

"How are we going to know when we get back to where we left Tommy?" asked Bob down the companion way.

"We'll just have to guess at it," was the answer. "If we get where Tommy can hear the whistle we'll be doing all right."

Several minutes passed. Then came another caution from the bow.

"Land on the port bow," called Dan. "Hold her off a bit more, Bob."

"All right," said Dan a moment later. "Can't see anything now. Seems to me, though, we ought to be far enough."

"I guess we are," answered Bob dryly. "We're out on the bar, I should say."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you feel the swells? If we aren't in the Sound we're pretty near it."

"But how can we be? We've been going up the river toward New London, haven't we?"

"I thought we had, but we haven't, I guess. Say, Nel, come up here a minute."

Nelson appeared and agreed with Bob.

"Either we are somewhere around the mouth of the river or else we're in a steamboat's wake; and we haven't heard any pass. Wait a bit." He went down and stopped the engine. "Now," he said as he came back, "let's have that boat hook a minute."

Dan passed it to him and he dropped it into the water, keeping hold of the end. The submerged portion floated back against the hull. Nelson pulled it up and tried again over the stern.

"We're just about broadside to the current," he announced. "And I'm blest if I know where we are. Best thing we can do is to drop anchor, I guess."

"Not if we're in the middle of the river," said Bob. "Let's keep on a bit farther. Dan saw land a moment ago over there. Suppose I head that way and we creep over until we find it again. Then we won't be in danger of being run down by somebody."

"That's so," answered Nelson. "Keep your eyes open, Dan."

So the *Vagabond* took up her travels again, groping her way through the gray mist, with Dan peering anxiously from the bow. It was rather exciting while it lasted and the monotonous screech of the whistle breaking the silence lent an uncanny touch to the adventure. Then—

"Stop her!" called Dan, and Bob repeated the injunction to Nelson at the engine. The propeller stopped and the launch floated softly through the mist. "Star-board a little," said Dan. Bob turned the wheel. "All right," said Dan. "How's this, Nel?"

Nelson had joined him and was peering perplexedly through the fog.

"I don't see any land," he said finally.

"Over there. I can't see it myself now, though. Wait a bit and the fog will thin. There it is," said Dan. "See that dark line?"

"Yes. Let's put the anchor down. Stand by the cable, will you? It's all snarled up." There was a splash which sounded momentarily loud in the stillness and the cable ran out for some ten feet. "We must be pretty well in toward shore," said Nelson.

"Now what?" asked Bob, working his way forward over the slippery deck. They looked from one to another. Finally—

"Stay here until the fog lifts and we can find Tommy, I guess," said Nelson.

"Hang Tommy, anyhow," said Bob disgustedly. "He's always getting lost in the fog."

"Yes, it's the easiest thing he does," agreed Dan. "He ought to write a book about it when he gets home. 'Fogs I Have Met,' by Thomas Courtenay Ferris."

"Supposing we shoot off that revolver of yours a few times?" Nelson suggested.

"All right," said Bob. "I'll get it."

"It was a dandy joke of yours, Dan," said Nelson. Dan shrugged his shoulders and wiped the drops from his face against his sleeve.

"How the dickens was I to know this fool fog was coming up?" he asked. "Here, let me shoot that, Bob."

"You run away," answered Bob, as he filled the chamber of his revolver.

"But I feel that I am to blame in the matter," said Dan earnestly, "and I ought to be allowed to do all I can to—er—remedy things."

"Well, you can't shoot my revolver," answered Bob dryly. "But you can hold the cartridges."

"Let me shoot once," Dan begged. Bob relented and between them they banged away into the air until there was a good-sized hole in the contents of the cartridge box and Bob called a halt. Then they listened attentively.

"There!" whispered Dan.

"Steamboat whistle," said Bob, and Nelson nodded concurrence.

"Let's shout," said Dan. They shouted. Then they stopped and listened again. There was not a sound to be heard save the faint lapping of the waves against the shore.

CHAPTER XVIII—IN WHICH TOM PUTS UP AT THE SEAMONT INN

Tom stirred uneasily and brushed his nose with his hand. A drop of moisture had formed on it and was tickling him. Dimly aware of a change in conditions since he had fallen asleep, he opened his eyes, blinked, and sat up. The tent had disappeared; Dan had disappeared; Nelson had disappeared; everyone had disappeared! There was nothing in sight save, a few feet away, the blackened remains of last night's fire and the pile of wood which he had collected. After the first expression of surprise had passed from his countenance a smile of amusement settled on it. Tom chuckled.

"I'll bu-bu-bet Dan did it," he said half aloud. He threw his blanket from him and stood up. The fog was so thick that he couldn't see the edge of the shore, but he remembered where the tender had been and, with blanket over his shoulders, he walked toward it. He found the landing but no tender.

"I suppose they're waiting for me to yell out to them. Well, they probably won't come until I do. So here goes: O Dan! O fellows!"

Silence.

"*Vagabond* ahoy!" shouted Tom. "Say, cut it out, will you? I want my breakfast!"

Silence.

"Oh, thunder!" muttered Tom, pulling the blanket up over his head to keep the fog from sifting down his neck. "Think you're smart, don't you?" At that moment the fog cleared for a tiny space and Tom stared in puzzled surprise. Then the mists shut down again as quickly as they had lifted, but not before Tom had seen that the *Vagabond* was no longer in sight. He sat down on the stone wall and tried to reason it out. Of course it had been Dan's idea; no one but Dan would think of such a trick. They had gone off to the boat and had managed to get the tent down without

disturbing him. But afterwards? Why had they gone off in the launch? Probably to make him think that they had left him for good. Very well, then he would follow. He recollected that below the cove the shore had jutted out into a wooded point; he had gathered wood along the edge of it yesterday afternoon. They had probably taken the launch around the point out of sight. So the best thing to do was to walk along the shore until he got to where they were. Then he'd tell them just what he thought of them!

So he set off through the fog, keeping the river's edge dimly in sight. He began to feel rather soggy and very, very hungry. Also, it was none too warm that morning, although after he had been walking for a time his chilliness passed off. When he reached the woods he hesitated. To turn to the left and follow the shore would mean much harder walking and a much longer trip. So he decided to go through the wood and come out on the other side of the point. After five minutes he began to think that he had made a mistake. For there was no sign of a break in the trees, nor, when he paused and listened, could he hear the lap of the little waves along the shore. Probably he had borne too far inland. He changed his course to the left and started on again. But the trees grew near together, there was a good deal of underbrush and keeping a straight course was out of the question. By this time his only thought was to reach the shore again, and he kept bearing farther and farther to the left. Some ten minutes passed. Tom's face began to grow anxious. He had visions of spending the day in those woods, breakfastless, luncheonless, dinnerless! He stopped and sat down on a fallen log to consider the situation calmly and to get some of his breath back.

"The next time I leave home in a fog you'll know it!" he muttered, apparently addressing the nearest tree. "What good's a fog, anyway?" Presently he realized that his thoughts had wandered away on the subject of fogs and that he hadn't solved his dilemma. By this time he had lost all sense of direction and didn't pretend to know where the river lay. The wood, he thought, couldn't be very large and so if he kept on walking in a straight line he was certain to get out of it before long. Once out of it—Well, maybe he could find a house or a road. As for the *Vagabond* and Dan and Nelson and Bob they could choke for all he cared; what he wanted was breakfast, and lots of it!

So presently, having recovered his wind, he got up, fixed a direction firmly in his mind and trudged on again. The fog was thinner here in the woods than it had been along the shore; possibly, he reasoned, the farther inland he got the less fog there would be. Although if he could only find something to eat he wouldn't bother about the weather. He had been walking for some five or six minutes when the trees suddenly disappeared and he found himself on the edge of a planted field. The fog seemed as thick as ever and it was impossible to see more than twenty or thirty feet away. But a planted field, especially one planted with vegetables, as this one was, argued a house near by. So he got between two rows of cauliflower and tramped on. Presently he found his way barred by a stone wall. On the other side of the wall was grass. Tom perched himself on top of the wall and speculated.

He cut a queer figure as he sat there with the red-bordered gray blanket over his head. One corner of the blanket had been dragging for the last ten minutes and was covered with mud. Here and there a wet leaf was pasted upon it. His shoes, the white canvas, rubber-soled "sneakers" worn on the launch, were sights to behold, and within them his feet were very wet and very cold. But what bothered him most of all was his stomach. That felt dreadfully empty, and now and then little "shooty" pains made themselves felt.

Probably he had mistaken the direction of the house belonging to the field, he told himself dispiritedly. He should have walked across the rows instead of along them. And the grass in front of him only meant a meadow with silly cows, and, maybe, a bull! He wondered what a bull would think of him if he saw him; nothing flattering, probably. On the whole, he decided that he would a little rather not run across a bull this morning. Then suddenly he heard, far away and indistinct, the *Vagabond's* whistle. He knew it too well to mistake it.

"Go on and blow it," he muttered. "Hope your arm gets tired. You won't see me until I've had some breakfast, I can tell you that. That's right, blow, blow! Who the dickens cares?"

From the direction of the sound it was evident to him that he had left the river almost directly behind him. But what bothered him at the present moment more than the location of the river and the *Vagabond* was the location of the house and something to satisfy the craving of his empty stomach. He strove to remember what he knew about farms. Usually, he thought, the vegetable fields were near the buildings and the meadows at a distance, although he didn't suppose there was any hard and fast rule about it. Then it dawned on him that for a meadow this one was unusually well kept. The grass was short and thick and the field quite level. He wondered if it could be a lawn. He would explore it.

So, rather stiff by this time, he slipped off the wall and started straight ahead across the turf. Presently he came to a ridge some three feet high, rounded and turfed. He stopped and wondered. It disappeared on either side of him into the surrounding grayness. He climbed to the top of it and looked down. On the other side was a six-foot ditch of coarse sand. He was on a golf links and the ridge was a silly old bunker!

He slid down on the other side of it and rested there with his wet shoes in the sand. It was all very nice, he told himself, to know that you were on a golf course, but it didn't help very much. A chap could be just as lost, just as wet and miserable and hungry on a golf course as anywhere else. Somewhere, of a certainty, there was a clubhouse, but if he knew where it stood and could find it it was more than probable that it would be closed up on a day like this. And, anyhow, they

wouldn't be serving breakfast there! The idea of sitting just where he was until some one came along suggested itself but didn't appeal to him. Once he thought he heard a noise of some sort, but he wasn't sure. However, he got up and headed in the direction from which it had seemed to come. After a minute or two he came to a green with a soggy red tin disk, numbered fourteen, sticking out of a hole.

"Glad it wasn't thirteen," said Tom to himself as he went on. "That might have been unlucky."

Presently it seemed that the fog had lessened and that his range of vision had enlarged; he was quite sure that he could discern objects at a greater distance than before. But as there wasn't at that moment anything particularly interesting to discern the discovery didn't bring much encouragement. He was going up a steep hill now and when he had gained the summit and seated himself for a moment on the edge of the sand box, which stood there at the edge of a tee, he saw that the fog was thinner because he was higher up. Behind him the ground sloped away again, but not so abruptly as in front. As he sat there, struggling for breath after his climb, it seemed that he was the only person in existence. On all sides of him the hill lost itself in the enveloping mists. He was alone in an empty gray space in which there was neither food nor fire. He got quite discouraged about it and a little watery at the eyes until he shook himself together and told himself that he was a baby.

"There are houses and people all around you," he said disgustedly, "only you can't see them. All you've got to do is to brace up and keep on walking until you find them."

But that was easier said than done, for he had been walking a long time, and for much of that time over hard ground, and his legs were tired out. But he went on presently, slowly and discouragedly, down a long slope and up another. He had begun to talk aloud to himself for very loneliness, and some of the things he said would have sounded quite ridiculous had there been anyone else to hear them.

At the summit of the slope he paused again to rest, and as he did so he suddenly lifted his head intently, straining his eyes before him into the fog. Of course it was all perfect tommyrot, but, just the same—well, it did sound like music! In fact, it *was* music, very faint and sometimes dying away altogether, but still music!

"Maybe," said Tom aloud, "I've starved to death and got to heaven. But I don't feel dead." Then, with returning animation, he strode forward again. "Me for the music," he said.

Less than a minute later a great dark bulk took shape and form ahead of him. At first it seemed like the edge of a woods, but as the music increased momentarily that was out of the question. No, plainly it was a building, and a big one! And in another minute Tom was standing in a gravel roadway in front of a big hotel which stretched away on either side of him. There were lights inside, and an orchestra was playing merrily. The windows of the lower floor were dimmed with the fog, but he could see the indistinct forms of persons inside and the dancing light of a fire. Directly in front of him was a covered porch and beyond it the wide glass doors.

Tom drew the blanket from over his head, folded it as neatly as he might, laid it across his arm and, bareheaded and bedraggled, crossed the porch, opened the door and went in.

He found himself in a great, luxuriously furnished hall. At the back a wide staircase ascended. In the center a huge fireplace held a pile of blazing logs. Beyond it, half obscured by palms in tubs, a scarlet-coated orchestra was playing. To his right was a long counter behind which two immaculate clerks moved. About the fireplace and spreading across the big exchange were seated many persons. They had been talking very industriously until the door opened. But for some reason at Tom's advent the conversation lessened and lessened until, as he walked across the shining oak floor, there was an impressive silence. The two clerks stopped their work and gazed at him in amused surprise. Tom, aware of the effect he was causing but caring not at all, stopped at the desk, stuck his hands in his pockets and addressed the nearest clerk in the calmest manner possible.

"I would like to see the manager, if you please," said Tom.



"I would like to see the manager, if you please."

CHAPTER XIX—NARRATES A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

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The fog held close until just before sunset, although there were times when the three on the *Vagabond* could make out the shore quite distinctly and thereby gained a very fair notion of where they lay. When the mist finally disappeared inland they found their notion to be correct. The launch lay some hundred yards from shore to the east of the river's mouth. Just how they had managed to reach the position it was hard to say, although Nelson's idea was that they had become both actually and metaphorically turned around when the launch had gone aground and had subsequently, instead of running upstream, crossed it diagonally and passed out toward the east.

It was a long day. The *Vagabond* rolled sleepily from side to side in the slow swells and seemed very bored and weary. The boys played cards for a while after luncheon, but, as Dan remarked, there wasn't a decent game that three could play. So they threw down the cards in disgust and went to writing letters. But, somehow, inspiration didn't come very well, and finally Nelson gave up the attempt in despair and went out to the engine room and "fiddled with the engine"; the expression is Dan's. Nelson could always manage to spend an hour or so quite contentedly with wrenches and pliers, oil cans and emery cloth and a nice big bunch of cotton waste. Just what he accomplished this afternoon I can't say; but he killed fully an hour.

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In the meanwhile both Bob and Dan had taken to their bunks and had succeeded in getting to sleep. And so it was Nelson who discovered that the fog was lifting when, his "fiddling" completed, he put his head out of the door to toss a bunch of very dirty waste overboard. As the easiest way to awaken the sleepers he gave a long blast on the whistle. The effect was almost magical. Dan jumped clear out of the bunk and landed very wide-awake in the middle of the floor. Bob managed to escape with a bump on the side of his head. After recovering themselves they descended wrathfully on Nelson, demanding explanations. Nelson, wedged in a corner between the engine and the ice box, explained and was permitted to adjust his rumbled attire. Whereupon all went out to the dripping cockpit and watched the land appear slowly before them out of the gray void. It was like watching the development of a negative in the dark-room. At first there was a blank expanse of gray. Then a shadow appeared, dark and formless. Then a bit of the low-lying shore stood out boldly, its colors still blurred by the dissolving mist. And presently the sun appeared in the west, a hazy orange disk at the end of a funnel of orange light. And then, in an instant, the fog was nowhere to be seen save that here and there on an inland hillside a wisp of gray, like a floating veil, hung entangled amidst trees or boulders. And with the returning sunlight came a brisk breeze from the south that stirred the oily surface of the water into tawny ripples that began to lap cheerfully against the hull of the *Vagabond*. Dan started to whistle

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blithely.

A few minutes later the launch was speeding back across the bar, bound for the little cove where they had left Tom. That young gentleman's fate had not greatly bothered his friends, although there had been throughout the day much idle speculation as to his probable whereabouts. Tom could look after himself, said Dan, and the others agreed. But when they reached the cove and the little beach with the blackened embers disfiguring the clean gravel and saw no Tommy they were at once surprised and disappointed. Bob was even inclined to be indignant.

"Where the dickens has he gone to?" he asked. "He might have known we'd be back for him as soon as the fog cleared away."

"Well, I suppose we could hardly expect him to spend the day here waiting for us," said Nelson. "Probably he found a house where he could get dry and have something to eat. As we can't see any from here maybe he had to go quite a ways. We'll wait a while and see if he doesn't turn up."

"Bet you he's asleep in the best bed in the house," laughed Dan. "We'll be lucky if he turns up before to-morrow noon. Tommy's just as likely as not to sleep the clock around if there's nobody there to wake him up!"

"I suppose," said Bob, "we might as well have something to eat while we wait." But Dan demurred.

"No, let's go back to New London and get a good feed. We'll wait until six-thirty and if he doesn't show up by that time—Say, maybe he's gone back to New London himself!"

"I'll bet he has," Nelson agreed. "Let's go and see."

So they returned up the broad twilight stream and made their former berth near the ferry slip. A hasty toilet followed and then they hurried up the street to the hotel. But no Tommy awaited them. The clerk assured them that no one answering to the description which they gave had been seen that day. Nor did the register show Tom's elegant handwriting. But after the first moment of disappointment they comforted themselves with the assurance that the missing member of the crew was quite safe somewhere, and went in to dinner. Nor did anxiety over Tom's fate interfere with their appetites.

Up until bedtime they expected at any moment to see Tom stumble down the steps, and when, at half-past nine, lights went out it was unanimously decided to leave the hatch unlocked in case he should turn up during the night. Once, along toward morning, Bob was dimly aware of some one moving about the cabin.

"That you, Tommy?" he asked sleepily.

But if there was any answer he didn't hear it, for he fell asleep again immediately. In the morning, in the act of yawning and stretching his arms over his head, he recollected the noise in the night and looked inquiringly at Tom's bunk. But it hadn't been slept in. Bob puzzled over this fact for a moment. Then—

"Where's Tom?" he asked.

"How the dickens do I know?" asked Dan, sitting up in his berth.

"Didn't he come back last night? I heard some one and I thought sure it was Tommy."

"That was me," said Nelson, opening his eyes. "You asked if it was Tommy and I said No. I was closing the ports. The wind and rain were just drowning me out."

"Rain!" exclaimed Bob and Dan simultaneously. Then—

"Gee, what a storm!" muttered Dan, as he subsided after a glance through the nearest port. "I see where we stay in New London for a day or two."

"Well," said Bob philosophically, "it's better to be here than tied up in some little old cove along the Sound. We can go ashore, at least."

"That's so," agreed Dan. "And maybe there'll be another show at the theater."

During the night a heavy gale from the southwest had sprung up and now the rain was beating fiercely against the cabin sides and playing a tattoo on the roof. There was a stiff wind behind it and the waves were running high. Under the double assault the *Vagabond* was heaving at her lines and grinding dismally against the pier. Nelson, pulled on his oilskins and hurried out to see that the fenders were in place. In a minute he was back, wet and glistening.

"It's a peach of a storm, all right," he said, shedding his oilskins. "The old sailors along the Cape used to tell us that a storm from the southeast was good for three days and one from the southwest was soon over. But it doesn't look like it now."

It was so dark in the cabin that when Bob brought the breakfast to the table it was necessary to light the lamps in order to distinguish the scrambled eggs from the hashed brown potatoes. But it was very jolly to sit there with the fragrant steam from the coffee cup curling up past their noses and hear the rain rattle and sweep against the boat and see it go trickling down the port lights. Barry sat on the edge of a bunk and stared solicitously at Dan every time the latter raised his fork to his mouth. Dan would never feed him at table, but all of the others did so whenever they thought they would be undetected. Bob believed he saw a chance to transfer a half a slice of bread and butter from his plate to Barry's mouth, but Dan interposed a quick hand and the bread went flying across the cabin to land face downward on Tom's pillow.

"If Tommy was here," laughed Nelson, "I know what he'd say."

"Hope you ch-ch-ch-choke!" mimicked Nelson. "Barry can have it now, can't he, Dan?" he continued, as he rescued the bread and wiped the worst of the grease from the pillowcase with his napkin.

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"After we're through," said Dan inexorably.

"Hard-hearted brute!" said Bob. "Why don't you change masters, Barry? I'd be dre'ful good to you!"

"Wonder if Tommy's getting any breakfast," observed Nelson thoughtfully.

"Of course he is," answered Dan, buttering another piece of bread. "Why, look at the time! He's had two or three breakfasts by this!"

"It's funny, though, that he doesn't turn up," said Bob. "If we don't find him to-day I think we ought to do something."

"What?" asked Dan disconcertingly.

"Advertise in the Lost and Found column of the local paper," suggested Nelson.

"We ought to go back and look for him," said Bob.

"But we did look," Nelson expostulated. "If he wasn't there last night it isn't likely he'd be there to-day."

"He might have gone somewhere and spent the day," said Bob. "Then maybe he'd expect us to come back to the cove for him this morning."

"Well, he isn't likely to wait for us long in this storm," commented Dan. "And we couldn't get down there very well, anyhow. I hope he's keeping dry and warm, wherever he is, but I do think he was a silly ass to get lost again. This is the third time since we got together."

"Second," said Bob.

"Third. Don't you remember how we lost him in Boston the day we bought things for the boat? And found him sitting in the cockpit eating caramels when we reached the wharf?"

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"That's so," laughed Nelson. "If we were detectives all we'd have to do would be to go to the candy stores and describe him."

"Wherever he is," said Bob, "I suppose he doesn't know whether we've returned to New London or gone on to New Haven or somewhere else."

"All he has to do is to go back to the place we left him," said Dan. "And if he ever does come back I vote we forbid him to leave the boat alone. We'll never get anywhere if we have to stop all along the way and look for him."

"Well," said Nelson, "we'll go up to the hotel again after a while and leave word for him in case he comes there to inquire."

"It would be just like him to jump a train and go home to Chicago," observed Dan.

"Don't believe he has money enough," Nelson replied.

"He probably didn't have any with him," said Bob. "He had his ducks on, didn't he?"

"No, he wore that old gray suit of his," Dan answered. "But I guess you're right about the money. I doubt if he had a cent."

"Well, he'll manage all right," said Nelson cheerfully. "He has plenty of cheek, you know. If he doesn't show up by afternoon we'd better go and have a look for him just as soon as the weather will let us. We'll run back to the cove and go ashore. He's probably in some farm-house around there."

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Just before noon they wandered up the wharf and across the tracks to the station, for want of anything more exciting to do, and stood on the platform for a while watching the trains come and go. Finally Bob said:

"Come on, fellows; if I stay here any longer I'll just have to get on a train and go somewhere!"

"That's what I'm going to do," said Dan resolutely. "I'm going to New York."

"What?" exclaimed the others.

"I might as well. We can't get out of here before to-morrow and I can be at home by three, spend the night and get back here by nine or ten to-morrow. Do you fellows mind?"

"Of course not," answered Nelson.

"You see, I haven't seen the folks since the Spring recess," said Dan. "And I'm only three hours from New York, and—"

"Guess I'll take a run up to Portland," said Bob with a smile.

"And I'll go with you as far as Boston," said Nelson.

"If you really rather I wouldn't go—" began Dan.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Nelson. "We don't mind. Go ahead. It's a good scheme. But mind you

don't forget to come back!"

"Not likely! I'll be here to-morrow forenoon. Come on over to the boat and help me put some things in a bag. There's a train in about twelve minutes."

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A quarter of an hour later only Bob and Barry and Nelson remained. They had seen Dan off on the Bay State Limited and were on their way to the hotel for luncheon, the skirts of their oilskins wrapping around their legs and impeding progress at every gust of the wind that tore up the street. They weren't particularly hungry, but the hotel promised more excitement than the launch on a day like this. After luncheon they went to the writing room and wrote letters to everyone they could think of, Bob supplementing the letters with a number of souvenir post cards. They killed three hours quite easily and went back to the *Vagabond* at four o'clock. The rain had slackened considerably, but the wind still blew hard and gustily. The dark, leaden clouds which closed down upon the world showed no signs of breaking. They spent the rest of the afternoon as best they might, each rather dispirited and decidedly bored. At half-past five Bob went out and bought supplies for the larder and cooked dinner aboard when he returned. Neither he nor Nelson was very hungry and the meal was rather a silent one. After the things were cleared up they tried to read, but even that didn't satisfy their restlessness, and when, at a little before nine, Bob wandered out to look at the weather and came back with the information that the moon was almost through the clouds and that the rain had ceased entirely and to the proposal that they take a walk Nelson assented eagerly. They got back into their oilskins and thick shoes, locked the door behind them and started out.

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"Gee," said Nelson, "I feel as though I could walk a hundred miles!"

"So do I," answered Bob. "My legs feel positively rusty. Let's have a good long tramp. I'm not the least bit sleepy."

"Nor am I. Which way shall we go?"

"It doesn't matter. Let's turn down here. It's no more muddy than any other street, I guess." So they left the main street behind, turning to the left onto a dimly lighted road which led southward. Overhead the moon gleamed fitfully from between masses of somber clouds. The rain had ceased and the air felt warmer than it had all day. They struck out lustily, splashing through unseen puddles and leaving the town behind them in a jiffy.

"This is something like," grunted Bob, as he recovered himself from a stumble over a tree root.

"Yes," Nelson laughed. "If you don't break your neck, there's nothing like walking, after all. Remember the dandy times we had last summer."

"Well, we've had pretty good times this summer, too, so far," replied Bob. "Only, I wish Tommy would show up. I'm beginning to get worried about him. If he doesn't come back to-morrow we ought to write to his folks, or telegraph, maybe, and see if he's with them."

"Oh, tommyrot!" said Nelson. "He wouldn't go home. Besides, he didn't have money enough. He's around somewhere having a good time. I dare say he thinks he'll get back at us for running away from him."

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"Maybe, but how does he know we won't go off without him?"

"Well, he knows that he wouldn't if he was in our place, and doesn't expect us to."

"I suppose that's it. Hello!"

"What?"

"Rain."

"That's so. And our friend the moon has retired again. Say, how far from town do you suppose we are?"

"Two miles and a half, maybe."

"More like three and a half, I'll bet! Shall we turn back?"

"I suppose so, but I'm not nearly walked out. Maybe it'll stop raining again in a minute. If there was some place we could go out of the drip for a while——"

"There's a light over there."

"Yes, but it's a half mile away," answered Bob. "And blest if I know how we'd get to it. Let's keep on for a bit. It isn't raining very hard. Besides, we can't get much wet."

So they went on, quickening their pace and watching each side of the road for shelter. A minute later the rain began in earnest.

"Aren't we a couple of idiots?" laughed Nelson.

"Oh, I don't know; this is more fun than being cooped up in that little old cabin back there. My, but it is coming down some, isn't it? What's that ahead there? A house?"

They broke into a run and headed for the dark object in question. It proved to be a tumble-down shed standing back from the road some five or six yards. It was unlighted and their groping hands encountered only a hasp and padlock.

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"Locked," grunted Bob.

"Not a bit of it," answered Nelson, lifting the padlock out of the staple. "They knew we were

coming." They pulled one of the folding doors open and slipped inside. "Who's got a match?" Nelson asked.

"I guess I've got some somewhere," answered Bob. "Yes, here we are."

In the tiny light they saw that the building had at one time been a blacksmith's shop. The forge and bellows stood in front of them and the floor was littered here and there with old iron. That the roof was not in the best of repair was evidenced by the numerous puddles on the floor.

"How many matches have you got?" asked Nelson as the light flickered out.

"Three or four. Why?"

"Don't light any more yet," was the reply. "I saw a piece of paper over in the corner there. If it's dry maybe we can have a fire and be comfortable." Nelson crossed the floor, stumbling over discarded wagon tires and old bits of iron, and finally found what he was after. The prize, several sheets of newspaper, was quite dry, and he found his way back to the forge with it. "Now let's have a light, Bob," he said. "And we'll see if we can find some splinters or something." Luck again favored them, for a piece of soft pine board was leaning against the side of the forge, and while the match held out Nelson whittled diligently with his knife. Afterwards, in the darkness, he gathered paper and whittlings together in the center of the old fire bed, found some likely feeling bits of charcoal and coke and demanded another match.

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Bob. Then, "*Thunder!*" he exclaimed.

He had scratched it on a damp place and the head had rubbed off without lighting.

"Was that the last?" Nelson asked anxiously.

"No, one more. You'd better do it, Nel." And Bob handed the precious match over to him.

"If this goes out, too—!" muttered Nelson.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob presently.

"The blamed thing hasn't any head on it," answered Nelson disgustedly. "I've scraped it and scraped it and—oh, pshaw, it's a toothpick!"

"Hang!" remarked Bob feelingly.

"And just when I had a fire all ready! Look through your pockets again, Bob. Maybe you'll find another." There was a minute of silence during which each searched from pocket to pocket, broken finally by an exultant exclamation from Bob.

"Here's a piece of one!" he cried. "And it's the business end, too. Who's going to scratch it?"

"Me," answered Nelson. "I know where the paper is. Hand it over. All right. Now here goes!"

The match lighted and Nelson quickly tucked it under the edge of the paper. There was a breathless moment and then success was assured. The paper was in flames and the splinters were crackling merrily. Nelson seized knife and wood again and frantically split off long pieces to feed the flames.

"See if you can't find some more wood, Bob," he said. "Here, light one of these pieces and look around."

Armed with the small torch Bob explored.

"Fine!" he exclaimed presently from a distant corner of the shed. "Here's a whole box. Part of it's kind of damp, but I guess the rest will burn."

He brought it over and knocked it to pieces and soon there was a generous fire flaring up from the old forge. Nelson seized the bellows and found that they still worked, though somewhat wheezily. "Sounds as though it had the asthma," he said. Presently the coke caught, too, and when they could leave the fire they rummaged the place from end to end, finding enough fuel of various sorts to last them all night if necessary. A gunny sack in a corner held a few quarts of charcoal, there was a loose beam which came away readily under Bob's persuasion, and a small box which had once held horse shoe nails was discovered under one of the windows where it had done duty as a cupboard. They took off their oilskins and wet shoes, placing the latter near the flames where they soon began to steam prodigiously.

"Wish we had something to sit on," lamented Nelson.

"That's easy," Bob answered. "Here's this old anvil over here. If we can get it to the fire it will do finely."

After several minutes of the hardest sort of work they managed to edge it over to the forge. Then they sat down on it, very close together of necessity, and puffed and blew like a couple of porpoises.

"How long are we going to stay here?" asked Nelson, tossing another piece of wood on the flames.

"I don't know. Until it holds up a bit, I suppose. Listen to it now, will you?"

The rain was pouring down on the roof like a hundred waterspouts.

"We could sleep here if we had to," said Nelson.

"I suppose so," Bob answered dubiously, "but I guess I'm a little bit like Tommy; I have a

weakness for mattresses and bedding. If——”

He broke off suddenly and together they turned toward the door which was squeaking back on its rusty hinges. In the opening there appeared a dark form which, while they stared blankly upon it, shuffled into the shed and closed the door behind it.

CHAPTER XX—WHEREIN TOM APPEARS AND THE LAUNCH DISAPPEARS

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It was a strange, uncanny form which stood for a moment in the heavy shadows beside the door ere, with slow and shuffling footsteps, it advanced toward them. Some dark covering fell straight from head to feet, and of the face nothing was visible save the eyes which seemed to gleam balefully from the depths of a hood. At the throat the dancing light fell upon the fingers of one hand which clasped the edges of the garment together.

Nelson and Bob found themselves on their feet behind the anvil, although they afterwards had no recollection of having risen. Nelson edged slowly toward the forge, one hand unconsciously reaching backward for a section of the soap box. Bob held his ground and tried to find his voice, but his mouth opened twice before any words issued. And all the while the mysterious, fearsome figure in the dark drapery moved slowly, inexorably toward them across the floor, its shadow gigantically grotesque and horrible, dancing behind it against the farther wall.

“Wh-wh-who—wh-wh-what—?” stammered Bob nervously.

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The figure paused, the eyes glittering menacingly in the light from the leaping flames.

“I come,” said a deep voice, “I come——!”

Nelson seized the stick of wood and held it above his head.

“You come any nearer and you’ll get this in the head!” he cried. The dark-robed figure seemed to pause, and Bob found his courage.

“Who in thunder are you?” he asked angrily. “What do you want here?”

“I come,” began the deep voice again, “I come in three-pound, five-pound, and ten-pound packages; also in glass jars. A rubber band——”

“Tommy!” cried Nelson.

“Tommy!” growled Bob.

The robe, which suddenly turned out to be a much-bedraggled gray blanket, dropped to the floor and Tom’s grinning face confronted them.

“Hello, you fellows,” said Tom. “What you scared of?”

“You, you little knock-kneed, bandy-legged, cross-eyed runt!” answered Bob angrily. “And for two cents I’d——!”

“Hold up, Bob,” interposed Nelson. “It’s only Tommy, and he isn’t accountable for what he does, you know. Where the dickens have you been, Tommy, and what are you doing here? How did you happen to find us?”

“I’ll tell you all about it in a minute,” answered Tom. “But I’ve got to get warm first. I’m wet through and beastly cold. If you think Bob isn’t dangerous I’d like to get to that fire.”

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“Oh, Bob won’t eat you,” answered Nelson. “Come on and get dry. Great Scott, Tommy, I should say you were wet! Give me that blanket and I’ll hang it up here over the bellows. You’d better take those shoes off, too; if they are shoes, that is; they look like gobs of mud.”

Tom backed up to the fire and beamed humorously at Bob.

“You’re an awful little ass, Tommy,” said Bob finally, suppressing a smile. “Where have you been?”

“Wait a bit,” Nelson interrupted. “Here’s my oilskin, Tommy. Take off your coat and trousers and slip this on. You’ll get dry a heap quicker.”

Tom followed instructions and then, with his back to the fire, which Nelson replenished with the remains of the soap box, and his hands in the pockets of the oilskin coat, he explained.

“I’ll tell you the story of my wanderings,” began Tom. “When I woke up on the beach—Say, where’s Dan?” he interrupted himself to ask wonderingly. Nelson told him of that youth’s sudden resolution and departure and Tom continued. “Well, I suppose it was Dan that thought up that joke on me. It was awfully smart—I don’t think!”

“I was afraid you wouldn’t appreciate it,” said Bob regretfully.

“You wait till I get him!” threatened Tom. “Well, when I woke up the launch was gone and the fog was so thick I could kick holes in it. I thought you fellows had gone around the point and so I started after you. But I got into the woods and lost my way; fooled around there pretty near half an hour, I guess. Finally I found my way out and trailed across a turnip patch, or cauliflower grove, or something, and came to a golf course. I had a lovely time there. Strolled all over it, I

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guess, and saw all the sights—which weren't very many, after all, on account of the fog. And I got very soppy and beastly hungry. If I'd met a caddy it would have been all up with him then and there; I'd have picked his little bones quite clean. But I didn't meet a soul—except the flag at the fourteenth hole, and that was made of tin and couldn't be eaten. After a while, I don't know how long, I heard music. Thought first I'd died and got to heaven; but I hadn't. I'd only got to the Seamont Inn."

"What's that?" asked Nelson.

"Shut up and I'll tell you. It's a dandy big old summer hotel with about three hundred swells stopping at it. And palms and orchestra chaps in red pyjamas and all sorts of frills. Well, I butted in out of the fog with my blanket nicely folded over my arm and my feet wringing wet and no cap nor anything and strolled up to the desk. All the old gentlemen around the fireplace were staring at me just as though I was President Roosevelt."

"I can fancy the resemblance," said Bob dryly.

"Well, I asked as big as life for the manager and they sent for him. He was a nice-looking young chap and I told him who I was and all about it. He seemed to think it awfully funny and asked me into his private office and made me tell him all over again about it. Then he wanted to know what I was after. I told him I was after something to eat, principally. So he sent me down to what they called the 'ordinary,' which is a young dining room where the nurses and kids eat, and pretty soon I was wallowing in coffee and rolls and beefsteak and Spanish omelet and——"

"Oh, hush!" begged Nelson.

"—and some sort of griddle cakes. It was fine. Afterwards I went back to the manager chap and thanked him. 'And now what are you going to do?' he asked. Well, I didn't know. I didn't feel like setting out to hunt you fellows again and I told him so. But, of course, I didn't have any money with me, not a red cent, and I told him that, too. So he said I could stay there if I wanted until the next day. But he sort of suggested that I'd better keep out of sight, seeing as I wasn't exactly dressed for a party. There was an eight-course dinner at one o'clock, although they called it luncheon, and I did pretty well, considering that I'd had my breakfast about two hours before. At the table there was a young fellow about my age and we got to talking. He was the head bell boy; 'Captain' he called himself; and he went to school at St. Something-or-other's in Connecticut. We had a long chin and I found that the bell boys were all schoolfellows, and after luncheon I went up with him and met some of them. They were dandy fellows and I said I wouldn't mind a job there myself. So the Captain—his name was Roberts—said if I meant it he'd take me on, because they had lost two boys and hadn't found any new ones yet. So I said 'Me for the ice-water pitchers!'"

"Well, if you're not the craziest dub, Tommy!" laughed Nelson.

"Roberts handed me out a nice little plum-colored uniform; long trousers, a monkey jacket with four thousand little round brass buttons down the front and a funny little round cap with a line of gilt braid chasing over the top of it. And a fellow named McCarthy lent me a pair of shoes, because mine weren't fit to be seen. So I was fixed. But the sad part of it was that as soon as I got to be a bell boy I didn't eat in the ordinary. And we didn't get any of the frills. But there was enough of it; you could have all you wanted, you know. I went on duty at six o'clock. There were seven of us and I tell you we were busy! Along about nine o'clock everything began to happen at once; ice water, find the chambermaid, bring sea water in a bucket, find out why the electric light didn't work, get a plate of oatmeal crackers, find lost kids and—oh, everything! And the bell in the office was thumping holes in itself. But it was pretty good fun. And when you got to the fourth floor you could slide nearly three flights on the banister rail—if no one saw you. But along about twelve or half-past I thought my legs were coming off. They wouldn't let us ride on the elevator unless we were showing some one to his room and the stairs were fierce. They let me off at one o'clock and I couldn't wait to get my clothes off. I guess I've lost ten pounds."

Nelson hooted.

"Where did you sleep?" asked Bob.

"In the Servants' Hall, as they called it; a building back of the hotel with a lot of little rooms with iron beds in them. I could have slept on the office floor or on top of the elevator cage that night! To-day I didn't have to go to work until twelve o'clock, and I was glad of it, I tell you, for my legs were stiff as anything! They're stiff yet," added Tom, stretching them carefully as though he was afraid they might break off, "but not so bad; they've got limbered up now."

"Did they let you off early?" asked Nelson.

Tom shook his head smilingly.

"No," he answered. "I severed my connection with the Seamont Inn at exactly half-past eight. It was this way. I got a call to Room 86. When I went up there an old codger with a white mustache and a red face lighted into me for not coming sooner; said he'd been ringing for ten minutes and I was the slowest boy he'd ever seen and needed to have some of the fat worked off me. I said I'd bet I could beat him to the end of the hall and back and he got waxy about it; said he was going to send for the manager and have me discharged. I told him to go ahead. So I went downstairs and resigned before the old codger could report me. The manager chap said he guessed I wasn't cut out for a bell boy. I asked him if I owed him anything and he said No, I'd worked it off. He was very decent about it. I told him I'd be glad to pay him, though, if he thought I owed him anything and he wanted to know how. 'Thought you said you didn't have any money?' said he. I

told him I didn't have any when I got there, but that I'd made four dollars and seventy-five cents in tips. He thought that was funny, too; he had a keen sense of humor for a hotel man. But he said we were square, and so I thanked him and shook hands with him and changed my clothes. Roberts was sorry I was going; said they all had trouble with the red-faced old idiot."

"He ought to have spanked you, just the same," said Bob.

Tom grinned.

"He'd have tried it, I guess, if he'd had any clothes on to speak of. Well, I called up the hotel in New London on the 'phone and asked if you fellows had been there and they said you had and had left word that I was to come to the wharf by the ferry slip. So when it stopped raining I started to walk it; they said it was only three and a half miles. But about the time I was half way it began to pour like anything. I got under a tree for a while, but that wasn't any good and so I came on. When I saw this light I thought it was a house. But while I was trying to find the doorbell I heard you fellows talking. I heard Bob say 'I guess I'm like Tommy.' Then I opened the door a bit and peeped in. That's all."

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"And you thought it would be a fine joke to scare the life out of us, eh?" asked Bob.

Tom nodded.

"Well, you came pretty near to doing it. I never saw a more outlandish object than you were when you came through the door!"

"Why didn't you go back to the cove yesterday afternoon?" asked Nelson.

"I was bell-boying," answered Tom calmly. "Besides, you fellows were having your joke and I thought you might as well enjoy it."

"It would have served you jolly well right," replied Bob severely, "if we'd gone on and left you."

"I wouldn't have cared."

"Oh, no, I suppose not," said Nelson sarcastically. "I'd like to know what you'd have done."

"Stayed right there until I'd made another dollar or two and gone on to New York to Dan's house."

"Huh! Dan's father would have thrown you off the doorsteps! Think he'd have taken in such a looking thing as you were?"

"I'd have risked it," laughed Tom. "When's Dan coming back?"

"To-morrow morning. And as soon as he does we're going to make trades for New Haven. I'm tired of loafing around here doing nothing but hunt for idiots," said Nelson.

"Meaning me, dearie?" asked Tom. "Hope you choke. Say, can we get back to the boat to-night? It's raining harder than ever."

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"What time is it?" asked Nelson. "Got your watch on, Bob?"

"Quarter to twelve," answered Bob. "I vote we stay here and be as comfortable as we can. Is there any more wood?"

"Plenty. There are two or three old gunny sacks around and we can spread those out, put our oilskins on top and sleep finely. We can spread Tommy's blanket over us."

So, after building the fire up high, they followed Nelson's plan and, lying close together for warmth, were soon asleep, with the rain pelting a lullaby on the leaky roof.

They awoke shivering at seven o'clock and started back to town. The sun was out bright and a mile of the muddy road warmed them up. They reached the hotel at half-past eight and went through the entire bill of fare. But it took time and consequently it was almost ten when they crossed the railroad tracks at the station and walked down the wharf. They had left Barry on board the evening before and Bob was calling himself names for deserting him for so long when Nelson, who was a few yards ahead, uttered a cry of astonishment and stopped dead in his tracks.

"What's the row?" asked Bob, hurrying to his side.

Nelson looked dazedly at Bob and then at the water below them. And Bob and Tom, following his eyes with their own, understood. The *Vagabond* had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXI—TELLS OF THE SEARCH FOR THE *VAGABOND*

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"Are you sure you left her here?" asked Tom. "Don't be a fool, Tommy, if you can help it," answered Bob shortly. "Of course we're sure."

"Then—where is she?"

"Well, if we knew we wouldn't be standing here answering your idiotic questions," replied Nelson. After which he and Bob, each having sat on Tom, regained some of their equanimity.

"You don't suppose anyone has swiped her, do you. Nel?" Bob asked anxiously.

"Looks like it," was the answer. "Only—how could they get in to start the engine?"

"Are you sure you locked the door?"

"Positive. And here's the key. And the only other one is in the cabin, unless Dan has it; he had it a couple of days ago."

"They might have burst the locks, I suppose," said Bob. But Nelson looked doubtful.

"They might break the padlock on the hatch, but the door lock is a pretty stiff one to get at. I suppose they might have picked it, though."

"Maybe they didn't start the engine," said Tom. "Maybe they just towed her away as she was."

"That's right, Tommy!" exclaimed Bob. "That's just about it. If she's been stolen that's the way they've done it. Besides, even if anyone could get the door open Barry wouldn't let them stay in the engine room long enough to turn the wheel over. He'd scare 'em out in no time. He wouldn't let anyone but you or Tommy or me go down those stairs."

"Or Dan," suggested Tom thoughtfully.

"Dan, of course," answered Bob.

"And Dan had the other key, maybe," continued Tom.

"Yes, I think so," said Nelson. "By Jove, Tommy, you're right! Perhaps Dan has gone off with her!"

"Nonsense!" said Bob. "He wouldn't know how to start her, to say nothing of running her after she was started!"

"I'm not so sure," answered Nelson. "He's watched things pretty carefully lots of times, come to think of it. Besides, it wouldn't make much difference to him whether he knew how or not. If he wanted to do it he would, and he's a lucky beggar."

"But could he have got back as early as this?" asked Bob.

"Let's go over to the station and find out," suggested Tom.

"You and Bob go," Nelson said, "and I'll see if I can find anyone around here who saw the *Vagabond* go out." At the station Bob consulted the ticket agent.

"First train leaves New York at 4.54," said the agent, "and arrives here at 9.45."

"He wouldn't take that," said Bob to Tom. "He'd have to get up at four o'clock. Besides, we were at the wharf at a quarter to ten. What's the next one?"

"Eight o'clock from New York, arriving here 10.45," answered the agent. "Another at 10.00, arriving 12.45, another at 10.02, arriving—"

"Thanks," interrupted Bob. "Those would be too late. There's no train, then, except the 4.54 which gets here before 9.45?"

Their informant shook his head impatiently and they moved aside.

"That disposes of Dan," said Bob. "It isn't the least bit likely that he'd get up at four o'clock to take a slow train when he could wait until eight and get one reaching here only an hour later. And if he has taken the eight o'clock he won't be here for nearly three quarters of an hour. So it looks as though some one had deliberately run off with the boat."

"Gee!" said Tom. "Won't we be in a fix? Do you suppose we'll ever find it and get it back?"

"I don't know," replied Bob. "I should think, though, that a thirty-six-foot launch would be a pretty hard thing to hide."

"But the fellow who took it could paint out the name and fix her up a little differently and no one could tell she was stolen."

"Yes, if we gave him time. But what we've got to do now is to get busy. There's Nel over there."

Nelson's report was not comforting. No one had seen the launch that morning, and one old fellow who had rowed across the river at seven o'clock and whose skiff was now tied at the end of the wharf declared that the launch had not been there when he arrived.

"That means," said Nelson, "that she's been stolen some time in the night. The man over at the ferry slip says I ought to tell the police and the harbor master at once and telephone up to Norwich and to New Haven and Stonington. So I guess we'd better get busy. Of course they could tow the launch over to some place on Long Island just as easily as they could take her to New Haven, and we can't very well telephone there, I suppose."

"Of course you can," said Bob. "They'll give you connection at New York. But I think you might as well save your money. If she's been stolen there's just one place the thief will take her to, and that's New York or somewhere around there."

"Maybe," replied Nelson dolefully. "Thunder! If we don't find her I'll hate to go back home and face the pater!"

"We'll find her," said Bob earnestly. "Do you know where the police hang out?"

"Yes, the man told me where to go," answered Nelson as they left the wharf.

"If she was towed away," said Tom, "they must have used a launch, I suppose."

"Probably," Bob agreed. "They wouldn't be likely to use a rowboat and a sailboat wouldn't be much better. If the wind died out they'd be caught."

"Unless they started early last night and got over to Long Island or down the shore somewhere while it was dark," said Nelson. "They might put in at some little out-of-the-way place and no one would think of looking for them."

"Well, if it was a launch," said Tom, "wouldn't it be a good plan for the police to find out whether any launch is missing?"

"I should think it would," said Bob, and Nelson agreed. "We'll suggest it to them. Have you any more of those clever ideas, Tommy?"

"Well; I think we ought to hire a boat of some sort, a launch if we can find one, and hunt around ourselves. It wouldn't be much of a trick to run up to Norwich, and it wouldn't take long to search the shore around here."

"That's a scheme!" cried Nelson. "Tommy, you're a brick! It will keep us busy, besides, and I'd go crazy if I had to sit around the hotel here and wait for the police to do things!"

"How about money?" asked Bob.

"Thunder! That's so! They've got our money, too! How much have you got, Bob?"

"Two or three dollars."

"And I've got four-seventy-five," said Tom.

"That's about seven," said Nelson, "and I've got about a dollar in change. Eight dollars won't go very far, though, when it comes to telephoning all around the country and renting a launch!"

"You forget Dan," said Bob. "He's sure to have a lot of tin on him."

"That's right. And look here!" Nelson stopped and looked back toward the railroad station. "What time is it, Bob?"

"Almost half-past ten."

"Then one of us ought to go back to the station and meet Dan. If he goes down there and finds the launch gone there's no knowing where he will wander to. Will you go down and wait for him, Tommy? Tell him what's up and hold him at the station until we get back."

"All right," answered Tom. "And we might be making inquiries about a launch, eh?"

"Yes, but be back on the platform by eleven."

Tom retraced his steps to the station, leaving the others to go on in search of the police officials. He passed a fruit and candy store on the way and was sorely tempted to buy some of the latter, but he told himself resolutely that what money he had ought to be expended toward recovering the *Vagabond* and so fought off the temptation. The *Mayflower Limited* rolled in on time to the minute and Tom watched the steps of the long line of parlor cars in expectation of seeing Dan descend. But no Dan appeared. After making certain of this fact Tom went into the station and studied the time-table.

"Now he can't get here until a quarter to one," he said disgustedly. "And we need his money like anything! I dare say he didn't want to pay the extra fare on the Limited, the stingy beggar!"

He went down to the wharf to make sure that Dan had not somehow managed to get off of the train on the other side and gone to look for the *Vagabond*. But the wharf was empty, and so Tom set out on the search for a launch to rent.

Twenty minutes later the three met again on the station platform, all more cheerful for having accomplished something. Bob reported smilingly that the wheels of justice were in motion and that already the local sleuths were on the trail. Nelson had sent telephone messages up and down the Sound and over to Long Island. Tom had found the very thing they wanted in the way of a launch.

"She's a little bit of a thing, only eighteen feet long," he explained, "but she can go like anything. And we can hire her for six dollars a day. I tried to make him take five, but he wouldn't. She's right up here at a wharf. Come on and look at her."

The *Sylph* proved to be a very smart-looking little craft, built of white cedar and mahogany. Her engine took up a good deal of space, but there remained room for four passengers. The owner had built her himself and was very proud of her, so proud that when Bob and Nelson became enthusiastic over her lines and finish, and when he had learned why they wanted her, he voluntarily knocked off a dollar of the renting price.

"Call it five dollars for to-day and the same for to-morrow if you need her again," he said. "I guess you can run the engine all right, but I'll show you one or two things about it that you probably aren't used to."

The one or two things proved to be small improvements of his own devising and it took some time for Nelson to understand them. But at a quarter to twelve they had paid their five dollars and were in possession of the *Sylph*. They ran her down to the wharf where they had left the

Vagabond and found that she went finely.

"Shall we wait for the 12.45 train and get Dan?" asked Nelson. "Or shall we leave word for him somewhere and start out now?"

"Let's get at it as soon as we can," answered Bob. "Dan can look out for himself."

So Nelson was left in charge of the launch while Bob went to the station to telephone a message to the hotel in case Dan turned up there looking for them, and Tom hurried to the nearest store after crackers and cheese and cookies. For with only sixty cents left between them there was no use thinking about an elaborate luncheon. When they returned in the evening they would go to the hotel and live on credit until Nelson's father sent them some money. Bob and Tom were soon back and the *Sylph* headed up the river.

Bob had been in favor of searching downstream and along the shore east and west of the river mouth first, but Nelson said he had a feeling that the *Vagabond* had been taken toward Norwich, and Tom threw his vote with Nelson's. It wasn't likely that the thief would leave the launch anywhere around the town, but they searched the waterfront thoroughly to be on the safe side and then ran across the river to the Groton shore. After a search there the *Sylph* was again headed upstream. Twice in the ensuing half hour they approached the east shore to examine boats which, seen from the middle of the river, seemed to bear some resemblance to the *Vagabond*. But in each case they were doomed to disappointment, the craft proving on closer acquaintance to be very little like their missing launch. They went slowly in order that they might search each bank of the stream carefully and at half-past one they had only reached the second bend in the river. For some time past they had seen no launches either in the stream or moored along the banks and Bob suggested that Nelson send the *Sylph* at a faster pace so that they would have more time to look around and make inquiries at Norwich before it was necessary to turn homeward.

"All right," Nelson answered. "I guess she isn't hidden around here anywhere."

It didn't seem likely, for the banks were devoid of coves, and field and forest came straight down to the water's edge. Nelson was just reaching forward to advance the spark, and the *Sylph* was just swinging around the turn in the river, when Tom began to sputter.

"Lu-lu-lu-lu-look!" he cried.

"Where?" asked Nelson and Bob with one voice, turning their heads excitedly from side to side. Tom pointed across the stream toward the west bank.

"Th-th-there! Su-su-su-see that bu-bu-bu-boat under the tu-tu-tu-trees?"

"Jove!" exclaimed Bob.

"The *Vagabond*!" cried Nelson, turning the wheel over fast.

"Looks like it," said Bob excitedly, "but what's she doing there? I don't believe it is her after all, Nel."

"I know it is," was the reply as the *Sylph*, headed obliquely across the river, chugged her fastest. "I'd know her anywhere!"

"Wu-wu-wu-well," stuttered Tom, "I du-du-du-don't pr-pretend to knu-knu-know the bu-bu-boat, bu-bu-but I knu-knu-know the du-du-du-dog!"

"He's right," exclaimed Bob. "That's Barry on the cabin roof!"

"Then they did get into the engine room," said Nelson, his eyes fixed intently on the distant craft, "and they didn't tow her. I wish," he added, "that we had that revolver of yours, Bob."

"So do I," answered Bob gravely.

The little *Sylph*, as though comprehending the impatience of those she carried, dashed across the river.

CHAPTER XXII—WHEREIN THE *VAGABOND* IS RECOVERED AND THE THIEF IS CAPTURED

The *Vagabond* lay anchored close to shore, her nose pointing upstream and shaded by the drooping branch of a willow tree. Beside her, tugging gently at the painter, was the tender. On the cabin roof, stretched out at full length in a patch of hot sunshine, lay Barry. No other life was visible, and had it not been that the tender was tied to an awning stanchion and that the cabin door and hatch were wide open those on the *Sylph* would have concluded that the person who had run away with the *Vagabond* had rifled her of money and other valuables and abandoned her here. But at least a dozen yards separated her from the land and it was not likely that the thief would have swam ashore while there was a tender handy. "No, it was evident to the party on the *Sylph* that whoever had taken the *Vagabond* from the wharf at New London was still on board, and when they had approached to within a hundred yards Nelson slowed down the engine, resolved to get as near as possible to the *Vagabond* without detection. Bob and Tom silently peeled off their coats, and Nelson followed suit, cinching in his leather belt in a businesslike way.

"It's funny about Barry," said Nelson softly. "You'd think they'd have got rid of him."

"Oh, he probably made friends," answered Bob. "I'm glad he did. They might have thrown him overboard."

"How many do you suppose there are?" asked Nelson as he opened the switch, shut off the gasoline and allowed the *Sylph* to glide silently toward the enemy. Bob shook his head. Tom wanted to talk but realized that in his present excited state it would be idle to make the attempt. "I don't believe there are more than two," continued Nelson. "If there were, one of them would be sure to be up on deck."

"Suppose they'll show fight?" asked Bob.

"I hope they do," answered Nelson earnestly, "I just hope they do!"

"Well, but I don't want any pistols flashed on me," muttered Bob. "Get ready, Tommy. I'll go forward and make fast. If we can sneak on board quietly and shut the doors and lock them maybe we can make terms."

"Good scheme," whispered Nelson. "You and Tom keep her from bumping and I'll make a stab at it."

The *Sylph* was scarcely more than moving now and for a moment or two it looked as though she would not reach the other boat without having her engine started again. All three kept very still, their eyes fixed intently on the nine oval port lights. They were all open and every moment Tom expected to see a revolver spring into glittering view through one of them. But they all remained empty and the two boats were less than three yards apart when their plan to maintain silence was frustrated by Barry.

Once as they approached he had raised his head lazily and viewed them with calm indifference, promptly returning to his slumber or day-dreaming. But now he suddenly sprang to his feet and gave the alarm in the form of a challenging bark that was half a growl. Bob raised a warning hand.

"Barry!" he whispered hoarsely. "Shut up, sir!"

The terrier recognized them then, but he didn't shut up. Instead he went quite crazy with delight and ran barking joyously along the edge of the cabin roof, Nelson, Bob, and Tom entreating and threatening him with bated breath. Then Bob and Tom brought the two boats softly together and Nelson made a flying jump on to the *Vagabond* and scrambled noiselessly down to the cockpit, Barry leaping ecstatically at him.

It was the work of an instant to close the doors, and then, in the act of drawing the hatch shut, Nelson peered quickly into the engine room. It was empty and the door into the stateroom beyond was closed. Nelson hesitated a moment. There was a bolt on each side of this door and if he could reach the door without alarming the occupants of the stateroom and slip the bolt on his side he would not only make them prisoners but be able to run the engine and so get back quickly to New London. Opening the doors again, he stepped softly down into the engine room and across the floor. There was no sound from beyond the door. Noiselessly he slipped the bolt into place and hurried back to the deck.

Bob and Tom had pulled the *Sylph* toward the stern of the larger boat out of range of the port lights and were making her fast. Nelson explained what he had done.

"That's good," said Bob. "Although, of course, we could have towed her back with the *Sylph*."

"And been plugged full of holes, maybe, from one of the forward ports," added Nelson. "No, thank you! I don't see, though, why they haven't heard us if there's really anyone down there!"

"Let's find out if there is anyone on board," said Bob. "I'll creep up and look."

So very softly he made his way along the side until he reached the first port in the stateroom. Then he stooped and peered down into the dim cabin. The opposite bunks were both empty. It was impossible to see the ones below him from where he was, so he silently crept back and around to the corresponding port on the other side of the boat, Nelson and Tom watching anxiously from the stern.

In a moment he was crawling back, one finger up-raised.

"There's only one there," he said softly, "and he's fast asleep in Dan's berth. It's too dark to make out anything about him, and he's got his face toward the wall, but he looks like a pretty husky chap. Now what shall we do?"

"Get the anchor up, take the tender back of the *Sylph* and make her fast there and go home."

"Can we tow the *Sylph* and the tender too?" questioned Bob.

"Sure. We'll keep as quiet as we can about it, but I don't think it matters whether the chap down there wakes up or not. He won't be a match for the three of us, I guess. I'll stay below and if he tries to break through the door I'll lay him out with a wrench. You and Tom get the anchor up and the other boats fixed. Don't give the *Sylph* much rope; about four feet will do; we don't want to get it wound around the propeller. For the love of Mike, Barry, get out from under my feet! Yes, I'm awfully glad to see you, of course, but I'll tell you about it later." And Nelson crept back to the engine room.

Presently Bob put his head down and whispered that all was ready. Nelson, listening for sounds

from beyond the door and hearing none, prepared to start the engine. Bob took the wheel and Tom was stationed at the stern to keep the *Sylph* from bumping as they turned. Bob waited. So did Tom. Then Nelson's head appeared at the door.

"No wonder he stayed here," he said angrily. "The blamed idiot went and balled the vaporizer all up! Had it screwed around so she wasn't getting any gasoline! I'd like to break his head!"

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"Can't you fix it?" asked Bob anxiously.

"I have fixed it," was the reply, "but I'm going to tell him what I think of him before he gets away. It's bad enough to swipe the boat, I should think, without trying to queer the engine!" And Nelson went back still muttering vengefully. Bob and Tom exchanged grins. Then the *Vagabond*, which had been slipping downstream for several minutes, turned her nose toward the middle of the Thames and swung about to the tune of her chugging engine, the *Sylph* and the tender following behind in single file. Presently Nelson wiped his hands on a bunch of waste and seated himself on the middle step where he could at once keep his eye on the engine, watch the stateroom door, and converse with Bob and Tom.

"Don't see why he don't wake up now," said Bob, when they were making for New London. "Maybe he's dead."

"Ku-ku-killed by ru-ru-remorse," suggested Tom.

"Steal around and have a peep at him, Tommy," said Nelson. Tommy looked doubtful.

"Du-du-do you think he's got a gu-gu-gu-gun?" he asked.

"No, and, anyway, he's asleep, isn't he?" answered Nelson.

"That's what I du-du-don't know," replied Tom.

"Well, go and see," laughed Bob. "You don't have to climb through the port; just take a peek."

So Tom obeyed, not overanxiously, and displayed splendid caution in the matter of approach. For fully half a minute he leaned over the port. Then he came back, looking excited.

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"He's still asleep! And wh-wh-wh-what do you th-th-think?"

"I don't think," answered Bob. "Out with it, and don't drop too many stitches or he will wake up and murder us all before you've unburdened yourself of your fearful secret."

"He was all ready to su-su-skip out," said Tom. "There's a suit case on the floor by the du-du-door and I'll bet it's all packed with our things. And he's got on a pu-pu-pu-pair of Dan's trousers!"

"How do you know?" asked Nelson.

"Saw them; those woolly, grayish, checked ones."

"Sorry to queer your little yarn, Tommy," said Bob, "but you're letting your imagination run away with you. Dan wore those trousers to New York yesterday."

"Du-du-du-did he, Nel?" appealed Tom. Nelson nodded.

"Well, they look like those. Anyway, I'll bet he's got all our money and things in that su-su-su-su-su—"

"Suit case, Tommy," said Nelson. "You're welcome."

"Well, it won't do him any good now," said Bob. "He won't get it off this boat except over my dead body."

"What became of that cheese and the crackers and things?" asked Tom suddenly.

"By Jove, that's so!" exclaimed Bob. "We haven't fed!"

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"Well, we don't need to eat crackers and cheese unless we want to," said Nelson. "There's real grub in the ice box. What do you say, *Chef*? Do we get anything cooked?"

"I don't mind cooking if you'll stay there and see that he doesn't jump out and scalp me," answered Tom.

Nelson promised faithfully and presently there was a subdued bustle in the "galley." Beyond the bolted door all remained as silent as a tomb. The *Vagabond* and her tows were by this time within sight of the bridge.

"Coffee or tea?" asked Tom softly.

The verdict was coffee and Tom's fork got busy in the bottom of a cup with half an egg.

"Don't make such a silly lot of noise," whispered Nelson.

"It isn't me," replied Tom, "it's the egg cackling."

"Where are we, Bob?" asked Nelson.

"Just passed the Navy Yard," was the answer. "Hadn't you better slow her down a bit?" Nelson followed the suggestion.

"We'll be at the wharf before you get that luncheon ready, Tommy, if you don't hurry," said Nelson. Whereupon Tom flew around quite fast for him and the cheering aroma of coffee began to pervade the launch. And with it presently mingled the agreeable odor of corned-beef hash.

Suddenly from the other side of the door came the sound of a loud yawn and Tom dropped the spoon from his hand. Nelson got up from the step and stood ready. They listened intently. For a moment silence held. Then came the thud of boots on the floor and the creak of the berth as its occupant sat up. Nelson pointed over his shoulder and Tom streaked to the stairs and warned Bob, returning to take his place at Nelson's side. Another yawn followed. Then the door was tried. There was a muttered word from beyond it and it creaked as the person in the stateroom put his shoulder against it. Nelson reached down and possessed himself of the biggest wrench in the tool kit. Then——

"That door's bolted," he called. "You stay where you are. If you make trouble it'll be bad for you. We're three to one and you'd better give up!" There was a long silence. Evidently the fellow in the stateroom was pondering the advice. At last, however——

"What yer goin' ter do with me?" asked a deep, gruff voice in which Nelson thought he caught a tremor.

"We're almost at New London and when we get there we're going to give you up to the police and let you explain, if you can, why you ran off with our boat."

"Did yer say there was three of yer?" asked the other.

"Yes."

"I give up then. Lemme out."

"No, you'll stay where you are," answered Nelson.

"I give yer my word I won't do nothin' if yer'll lemme out," pleaded the prisoner. "Hope ter die!"

"Will you hand over your revolver?"

There was just a moment of hesitation.

"Yes," was the answer.

"Very well," said Nelson. "Reach it through the nearest port and lay it on the deck. Understand?"

"Yes."

"You go and fetch it, Tommy." Nelson whispered. In a moment Tom was back with the revolver in his hand.

"It isn't loaded," he whispered, "and it lu-lu-lu-looks like Bob's."

"It is Bob's," said Nelson, examining it.

"Bob su-su-says to stop the engine so as he cu-cu-can leave the wheel."

Nelson obeyed and Bob tumbled impatiently down into the engine room.

"Are you going to let him out?" he asked.

"I don't know. Would you?"

"Yes, we can manage him. And he can't get away unless he swims. First, though, tell him to hand out the cartridges."

Nelson followed the suggestion and Tom brought down Bob's box of cartridges. Bob grimly loaded the revolver. When he was through he nodded to Nelson. The latter went to the door.

"I'm going to let you out on the understanding that you give yourself up and make no attempt to escape. Understand that?"

"Yes," growled the prisoner.

"All right," said Nelson. "Get out of the way, Barry." The terrier for several minutes had been sniffing at the door and wagging his stump of a tail. Nelson shot back the bolt and stepped aside.

"Come out," he commanded sternly.

Slowly the door opened, and then three jaws dropped simultaneously and three faces were overspread with amazement.

Out walked Dan!

CHAPTER XXIII—TELLS HOW THE FOUR ENCOUNTERED OLD ACQUAINTANCES

Have you ever, dear Reader, sat down in a chair when it wasn't there? Or skated to skim ice supposing it to be two inches thick? Have you ever stood at the net, with the eyes of the "gallery" upon you, and smiled grimly and yet pityingly as you swung your racket up for the overhead smash that was to "kill" the ball, and then hit only air? If you have ever done any of these things you can have a dim idea, at least, of how Nelson and Bob and Tom looked and felt when Dan, alternately scowling like a desperado and grinning like a Chinese idol, opened the stateroom door and walked out upon them!

I would tell you just what each one said when he found his voice, only Barry kept up such a barking and Tommy such a stuttering that the remarks were anything but intelligible. And the same may be said of the conversation which followed for the next ten minutes. Dan explained and defended and the others questioned and accused; and Barry barked hilariously and enjoyed it all immensely. But in the course of time order evolved from chaos, and with returning calmness came returning hunger. Tom stopped "dropping stitches" and hurriedly put luncheon on the table. And by the time it was ready the *Vagabond* was tied up at the wharf where the *Sylph* belonged. At table Dan gave the first clear, orderly narration of events.

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"You see," he said, "when I got home I found that dad was getting ready to take a late train to Meriden on some business or other. But that wouldn't give us much time with each other, so he said that if I'd come along he'd take the Norwich boat at six and go on from here this morning at 7.40. So that's what we did."

"We never thought about the boat," said Nelson sadly.

"We got in about five this morning and had breakfast aboard. Then I showed dad the boat and he thought she was swell. Luckily I had the key with me and could get inside. Of course I was surprised to find you fellows weren't aboard, but I thought maybe you'd gone to the hotel for dinner last night and that it had rained so hard you'd decided to spend the night there. But Barry was here and maybe he wasn't glad to see me! Well, about half-past seven I saw dad off on the train. Then I came back and didn't have anything to do. So I thought I'd like to see if I could run her myself. I'd watched Nel lots of times and was pretty sure I could do it. So I tried and there wasn't any trouble at all. I thought you fellows would come along about eight and find the boat gone and have a fit. Then I was going to come back in time for the last spasm. But she went so well and it was such fun that I went farther than I meant to, and all of a sudden she got peeved and began to cut up."

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"How?" asked Nelson.

"She lost sparks and pretty near stopped. 'Me to the rescue,' thinks I. I'd seen you do stunts with the vaporizer thing, you know, so I tried my hand. Well, first thing I knew she wouldn't go a foot! Just spit and sighed and sulked. I turned that wheel over about a thousand times, I'll bet! Took my coat off and then my vest, and wilted my collar, but there was nothing doing. 'Then,' thinks I, 'it's up to little Dannie to do some towing.' So I put the tender over and came down to change my clothes. That's where I fell down."

"I should think so," said Bob disgustedly.

"You see," continued Dan, with a grin, "I hadn't slept very well on the boat coming from New York and I'd got up early. So I was awfully sleepy and tired. 'So,' says I to myself, 'I'll just lie down here on the bunk a minute and rest up'; I knew I had a hard job ahead of me. Well, that's about all I remember until I woke up a while ago and smelled coffee; I guess it was the coffee that woke me. At first, when Nelson sung out and told me you were three to one, I thought I was still dreaming. Then I did some thinking and guessed that somehow or other you'd taken me for some one else. I didn't know what the gag was, but I thought I'd see it through. When you told me to hand over my revolver I remembered Bob's and got that out. I did what I could for you, you see. But I came near spoiling it by laughing. When I heard Nel's stern voice I thought I'd have to stuff a pillow in my mouth!"

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"It's good you didn't get gay and come through the door," said Nelson grimly. "If you had you'd been laid out with a monkey wrench on the side of your head."

"That would have been a wrench," laughed Dan. "Give me some more of the hash, Tommy; it's the best ever."

After luncheon was over they decided to go on and try to make New Haven that evening. It was not yet three o'clock and they would have four hours and a half of daylight in which to cover about forty-five miles. So the tender was hoisted aboard and the *Vagabond* was cast loose from the wharf, and twenty minutes later they left the river water and turned westward. Bob gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Well," he said, "I'm glad to see the last of that place. I'd begun to think that we were going to spend the rest of the summer there!"

A moment later Tom pointed out the Seamont Inn where it stood on a hill a short distance back from the shore. And for the next half hour he regaled Dan with a history of his brief connection with that hostelry.

It was an ideal afternoon, with the hot sunshine tempered by a cool breeze from the southwest. On the starboard the picturesque Connecticut shore lay near at hand, jutting out into little promontories and retreating to form charming bays and inlets. On their other side, the distant shore of Long Island showed blue and hazy across the smooth waters of the Sound.

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They made New Haven at a little after seven, found anchorage and rowed ashore in the tender. They had dinner ashore, idled away an hour about town afterwards and turned in early. The next morning they paid a visit to the post office and were rewarded with a good-sized bunch of mail. Then Dan telegraphed his folks to expect them for dinner that evening, and at nine o'clock they were on their way again. There followed an enjoyable but uneventful day. There was plenty to look at, since the Sound was alive with boats of all sorts and descriptions. They passed Stamford at one o'clock, the *Vagabond* taking up the miles and tossing them astern in a very businesslike manner. Once in the East River it was necessary to slow down on account of the traffic. Ferry

boats and excursion steamers persisted in getting in the way, and sailing yachts and launches were everywhere. At a few minutes before six the *Vagabond* sidled up to a wharf near the end of Fifty-first Street and was made fast for the night. Dan's father knew the owner of the property—Dan had often gone in bathing from that very spot when a few years younger—and the watchman promised to keep an eye on the launch. They made very swell toilets and then piled out for a walk across town to Dan's house.

That evening was a merry one. It was good to sit down once more at a table a-glimmer with cut glass and radiant with white napery and flowers; in fact, it was good to be at home again, even if the home didn't happen to belong to them all. Mr. and Mrs. Speede, who were old friends since the Four had spent several days there the preceding summer before their walking trip, made Bob and Nelson and Tom feel quite as much at home there as Dan himself; although I don't believe much compulsion was necessary in Tom's case; Tom would have made himself at home anywhere. Mr. Speede was much interested in the story of their trip, and especially in the adventure with Captain Sauder and Spencer Floyd.

"Well," he said, "it's too bad the captain got him again, for that's just what happened, I guess, but you boys did all you could and I wouldn't have had you do any less."

"I suppose the poor kid's halfway up North by this time," observed Bob.

"And getting his lickings regular," added Nelson.

"Maybe not, though," said Tom hopefully. "Maybe he found another chance to run away and made a go of it."

"Well, let's hope so," said Mr. Speede. "Now, how do you boys feel about a visit to one of the roof gardens? It's late, but I guess we can see something of the show. At least we can keep cool."

What they said was quite flattering to their host and to roof gardens. Bedtime came very late that night and breakfast time very late the next morning. It was an insufferably hot day in the city and that fact made them less regretful over leaving the comforts of Dan's home. But the Speedes were busy getting ready to go to the country and even Tom felt that their presence wasn't exactly necessary to Mrs. Speede's happiness. Besides, their cruise was nearing its end, since the last letter that Nelson had received from his father made it plain that the *Vagabond* was expected back at Boston in a few days. So the Four said good-by at eleven and returned to the launch. They were to head for Boston, but as they had four or five days in which to get there, they proposed to stop once or twice along the Long Island shore on the way. But first it was necessary to put in gasoline, and to that end they dropped down the river to a wharf near the Brooklyn Bridge where that necessity was sold.

The fogs which made that summer well remembered along the coast had not yet taken their departure, and on the river distant objects were veiled in gray haze. So the *Vagabond* made the trip very cautiously, keeping a sharp watch for ferry boats, which, as every experienced launch knows, are blundering, awkward things which would just as lief run you down as not. But the wharf was made without misadventure and the *Vagabond* snuggled up to its side under the counter of a small schooner. While Nelson and Dan went ashore to order the gasoline Bob and Tom busied themselves cleaning up about the deck. It was while engaged at this task that Tom heard voices almost overhead. One of the voices sounded familiar in a dim sort of way and he began to wonder who was talking. From where he was he could not see the persons, for they were on the deck of the schooner and hidden by her rail. But presently Tom climbed to the cabin roof and craned his head. The next moment he was down again and out of sight in the cockpit. He had glimpsed only the heads and shoulders of two men. One was a well-dressed man, evidently a landsman, and Tom had never seen him before. But the other, and Tom had needed but the briefest glance to satisfy himself of the fact, was Captain Sauder!

Excitedly he dragged Bob into the engine room and told him. Bob laughed.

"Nonsense, Tommy!" he said. "Captain Sauder's up North somewhere by this time."

"Look yourself!" answered Tom. "But du-du-du-don't let him su-su-see you!"

"I will," answered Bob. But it wasn't necessary, for as he returned to the cockpit his eyes traveled upward over the schooner's stern and there in gold letters was the name:

HENRY NELLIS
NEW YORK

Impatiently they awaited the return of Nelson and Dan, keeping well out of sight the while. Presently the voices ceased, but whether the captain and the other man had left the schooner or merely moved away from the stern there was no telling. Nelson and Dan were back a moment later and listened eagerly to the news.

"What's to be done?" asked Bob.

"Keep out of sight," answered Nelson promptly, "until we've got our gasoline in and then move away as quietly as we can."

"And leave Spencer?" asked Dan incredulously.

"No, but if the captain sees us here we'll never have a show to see the boy. What we want to do is to keep out of sight. One of us, though, ought to stay around here and find out how long the schooner's going to be here and whether Spencer is aboard of her. And Bob's a good chap to do that."

"Let me do it!" begged Dan.

"You! He'd recognize you first time he set eyes on you! You don't think, do you, that he's likely to forget a fellow that's looked at him along a revolver barrel?"

Dan gave in.

"I'll get into shore clothes," said Bob, "and try to look as little as possible as I did when he saw me last. You tell me where you'll be so that I can find you." And he hurried down to the stateroom. When he returned Dan pretended not to know him, declaring finally that the "disgust" was perfect. Then, very carelessly, Bob climbed to the wharf and sauntered out of sight. During the operation of filling the gasoline tank the remaining three kept as much as possible out of sight, although they neither heard nor saw anything more of Captain Sauder. Finally, casting loose from the wharf, they pushed the *Vagabond* quietly away along the side of the *Henry Nellis* until they had rounded the end of the pier and were out of sight from the schooner. Then they dropped down the river until there were three wharves between them and the *Nellis* and found a new berth.

CHAPTER XXIV—WHEREIN SPENCER FLOYD LEAVES THE *HENRY NELLIS*

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"Now what?" asked Dan when the *Vagabond* had been made fast in her new quarters at the end of a file of disreputable canal boats. "How are we going to get hold of Spencer?"

"It's a heap easier to ask questions than to answer them," replied Nelson. "Anyone got any suggestions?"

Of course every one had, but none of them were practical and they were still discussing the problem when Bob arrived on the scene.

"What did you find out?" asked Nelson and Dan as one. Bob looked surprisedly about the circle to the accompaniment of Barry's tapping tail.

"Isn't there going to be any luncheon?" he asked.

"Thunder!" cried Tom. "What time is it? I forgot all about it!"

"We all did," said Dan. "Get a move on, Tommy; Mr. Hawkshaw is in a hurry."

"Well, but I want to hear about it," objected Tom. "You fellows come on down."

So they all adjourned to the engine room and while Tom set about the preparation of luncheon Bob made his report.

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"I found out two or three things," said Bob. "In the first place, Spencer Floyd is still there, because I saw him and he saw me. In the second place the *Henry Nellis* sails to-morrow morning for St. Johns, Newfoundland."

"Then we've got to get busy to-day," said Dan resolutely.

"She'd have been gone several days," Bob continued, "if it hadn't been for some row between her owners."

"Then Captain Chowder doesn't own her?" asked Nelson.

"He owns a fourth," answered Bob. "After I got on the wharf I went across to a schooner lying on the other side, the *Two Brothers*. I told one of the men on deck that I'd like to come aboard and look around and he said all right. We got quite chummy and he told me about the *Henry Nellis*. He had been talking to one of her crew. I asked him what he knew about Captain Sander, only I didn't let on that I'd ever heard of him before. He said he didn't know anything about him except what the other chap had told him, which was only that the captain was a tartar when he got mad. I kept my eye on the *Nellis* all the time. I could see over her rail from where I sat on the deck of the other boat, but I wasn't in plain sight in case the captain had happened along. But I didn't see anything of him and the chap I was talking to didn't know whether he was on board or ashore. The only men I saw on the *Nellis* were a couple of deck hands, one of them that Dago with the earrings. I guess most of the crew were ashore. But presently somebody walked out of the galley and tossed a panful of potato parings over the farther side and I saw that it was Spencer. When he came back toward the galley I stood up. At first he didn't see me, but just as he was going through the doorway he glanced across and stopped. He didn't recognize me at all until I made a motion with my hand. Then he looked forward where the two men were sitting, back to him, and walked over to the rail and pretended to scrape the tin pan clean. But he was looking me over and I saw that he remembered my face but couldn't place me. So I climbed back to the wharf and moved over toward him. When I got about ten feet away I turned my back to him and pretended to be looking at the *Two Brothers*."

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"You're a born detective, Bob," said Dan admiringly.

"Shut up, Dan!" said Tom impatiently.

"I called to him softly," Bob went on, "and he answered. 'I'm one of the fellows from the *Vagabond*,' said I. 'Is the captain on board?' 'No,' said Spencer, 'he's at the head of the wharf, in

the office.' 'Can you get by without his seeing you?' I asked, and Spencer said No. Then I asked him if he still wanted to get away and he said he did, and from the way he said it I guess he meant it! So I said: 'We'll come alongside to-night in the launch and get you if you think you can get away.' 'What time?' he asked. 'Any time,' said I. 'Whenever you think best.' 'About half-past nine, then,' said he. 'I'll watch for you.' 'All right,' said I. 'But don't let them suspect anything.' He was just starting to say something else when one of the sailors yelled at him to keep away from the rail or he'd knock his head off. I didn't turn around, but I walked back and forth a couple of times as though I was admiring the *Two Brothers*. Then I sauntered away along the wharf toward the street. I thought I was pretty well through with it when a man came out of a building ahead of me and walked toward me. I saw at once that he was Captain Sander. At first I thought I'd turn around and go back to the *Two Brothers* until he was out of the way. Then I thought that that would be too raw; he'd think I was trying to avoid him. So I put my hands in my pockets and passed him, kicking at the boards and looking at my feet. I only glanced at him once. He saw me but I don't think he paid any attention to me. So there you are. That's how matters stand."

"Bully for you!" cried Dan. "Talk about your Sherlock Holmeses and your—your—!"

"Yes, indeed, Dan," said Nelson soothingly. "But what we want to do now is to—"

"Eat luncheon," interrupted Tom.

Before that meal was over their campaign was fully planned out. It was simple enough and depended for success on their ability to reach the *Henry Nellis* undetected and Spencer Floyd's ability to reach the *Vagabond* in the same way.

"If we get him," said Nelson, "we'll make a bee-line for Mullen's Cove."

"How far is it?" asked Bob.

"About eighty miles. We won't try to get there to-night, I guess, but we'll go far enough to throw the captain off the scent; maybe to Hempstead; we can do that in two hours."

"It isn't likely the old pirate will try to chase us this time," said Dan. "He won't have a tug handy as he did at Sanstable."

"Well, we won't run any risks," said Nelson. "As soon as Spencer's aboard we'll make tracks."

And so it was settled. But the plan was discussed and rediscussed many times during the afternoon. Time went very slowly. At four they took a run around the Battery and up the North River for a ways, as Nelson said, to see that the engine worked all right, but in reality, I think, to relieve the suspense of waiting. They had dinner ashore at a funny little *café*, on South Street, frequented principally by the better class of officers and sailors from the ships and steamboats along the adjacent waterfront. What they had was good, if plain, and they did full justice to it. Bob settled the bill at the little desk near the door when they had finished and the others went on out to the sidewalk. When Bob rejoined them his face showed that something had disturbed him.

"What's up?" asked Nelson. For answer Bob seized him by the arm and hurried him away from in front of the restaurant, the others following.

"Captain Sander," said Bob, when they were some distance away. "He was sitting at the table between the desk and the window!"

Dan whistled.

"Do you think he saw us?" asked Nelson.

Bob shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't believe so. He had a paper propped up in front of him and he never looked up after I noticed him. I wish, though, we'd gone somewhere else for supper."

"Yes," agreed Dan, "it would have been better even to have eaten Tommy's cooking!"

At half-past seven the *Vagabond* chugged up to the end of the next pier to that at which the *Henry Nellis* lay. The launch showed no lights. Seated in the cockpit the four waited silently and impatiently for the hands of the clock in the cabin to approach the half hour after nine. After two bells had struck Dan went down every five minutes or so, struck a match and looked at the clock. Finally he came back and whispered: "Nine-twenty-five, Nel!"

Bob went to the wheel and Nelson disappeared into the engine room. The single line which had held them to the side of a big lighter came away and the propeller churned the water. Out into the stream went the *Vagabond*. Then, when she was opposite the *Henry Nellis*, Bob swung the wheel over and she headed for the darkness of the dock. While still some distance out the engine was shut off and the launch slid quietly into the gloom, headed for the side of the schooner which lay dimly outlined in the darkness.

Slower and slower went the launch. Bob, at the wheel, peered intently forward. At the bow Dan stood ready to thrust her nose away or draw her in toward the schooner. From the *Henry Nellis* came no sound and only one light showed from her deck. The *Vagabond* lost all headway and lay rocking gently in the black water. But Dan could reach the side of the schooner, and in another moment the launch was being pulled slowly along past the dark, tarry hull. Then came the most difficult task of all. They had decided that it would be wisest to have the *Vagabond* turned around with her head to the stream, and now they set about it. But it was the hardest sort of work, and more than once sounds resulted which would have been sufficient to warn those on the schooner had they been expecting visitors. As no alarm was given the boys hopefully decided that they had

escaped detection by the captain in the restaurant. Finally the launch lay straight alongside the schooner, amidships, and there was nothing left to do but wait for Spencer. Suddenly the clock in the cabin struck three bells so loudly that the four held their breath. They had forgotten to muffle it. They listened but heard no sound from the schooner. The minutes passed. Dan crept down and looked at the clock, returning to the cockpit to whisper that it was almost a quarter to ten. Then from somewhere on the schooner came the faint sound of a sliding door or hatch.

Nelson groped his way to the cabin door so that he could reach the engine promptly. A moment passed. Then something fell at Dan's feet with a soft thud and a dim figure appeared above at the rail. At the same moment a door crashed open on deck and heavy footsteps sounded. The figure scrambled over the rail and came half-falling to the deck of the *Vagabond*. Dan seized Spencer and dragged him into the cockpit just as the irate voice of Captain Sauder broke the silence.

"Spencer!" he bellowed. "Where are you? Go below or I'll shoot a hole in you! I see you there! Come out, you sneakin' fool!"

"Hurry, Nel!" whispered Bob hoarsely into the gloom of the engine room. Then the throb of the *Vagabond's* propeller sounded startlingly loud and the launch slid forward in the darkness. Back against the lighter background of the cloudy sky appeared the form of the captain. A red flare lighted the darkness where he stood and a bullet whistled over Dan's head.

"Duck!" cried Dan, forgetting caution. All save Bob threw themselves on to the floor of the cockpit. Again the revolver spoke and a bullet crashed into the cabin roof a foot from Bob's arm. Then the *Vagabond* was free of the slip and had swung upstream, her propeller churning the water into white froth at the stern. Once more the captain fired, but the bullet was lost far astern. As they passed the head of the next pier they could hear the captain raging and swearing back there in the night.

CHAPTER XXV—WHEREIN THE *VAGABOND* STARTS FOR HOME AND THE STORY ENDS

The *Vagabond* lay peacefully at anchor at the mouth of Hempstead Harbor. It was almost midnight and a ragged-looking moon was tingeing the quiet water with silver light. In the cabin the crew were preparing for bed. Spencer had finished his narrative of events and was sitting on the edge of Bob's berth looking almost happy.

"Then we guessed right about the empty boat," said Nelson.

"Yes," answered Spencer. "They seen me from the *Henry* the first thing. And when they had me aboard the captain told Joe—that's the feller with the rings in his ears—to stave a hole in the bottom of your boat. So he did, with a boat hook."

"And he didn't lick you for running away?" asked Bob incredulously. Spencer shook his head.

"No, he was too glad to get me back. He kept askin' me if I thought I was smart as he was. He'd lost his cook the night before—ran off, he did—and so he said I was to cook. I've been cooking ever since."

"Hasn't he licked you since then?" Tom inquired.

"Oh, yes, once or twice," replied Spencer cheerfully. "But not to hurt much. But if he'd got me to-night I guess he'd just about have walloped the skin off'n me!"

"You think he suspected something was up this evening, do you?" asked Bob.

"Yes, 'cause he was watchin' me all the time till I turned in, just like he was a cat. There was only him and Joe aboard, 'cause he'd let the others go off. When I sneaked out I guess he heard me—the captain, I mean; Joe was asleep. But I guess he thought I would try to make for the street, 'cause he went over to the wharf after me. If he hadn't I wouldn't have made it, I guess."

"Lucky he did," said Bob. "I'll bet he saw us at supper. Well, all's well that ends well, Spencer. We'll have you at home in the morning, and if you'll take my advice you'll stay there!"

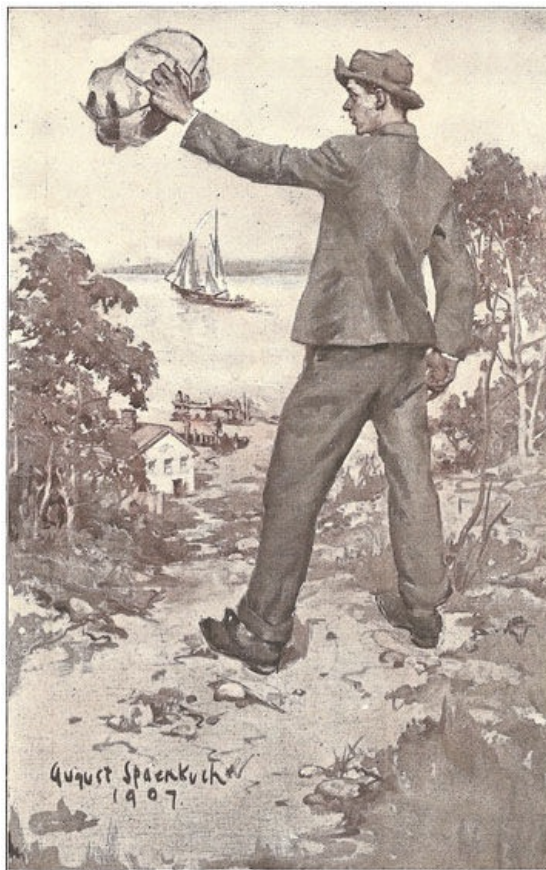
"I'm a-goin' to," was the answer. "Ma, she won't let him take me away again."

"Good," said Bob. "Let's turn in. Did you fix Spencer's bunk, Dan?"

"Yes, it's all ready," was the answer. "As for me, I'll bet I can sleep a few lines to-night. This thing of kidnaping folks is interesting, but wearin'."

"Yes," yawned Tom. "It makes you sleepy to be shot at."

The next morning the *Vagabond* took up her journey for Mullen's Cove. It was a sixty-mile trip, but the launch made it in record time, something under five hours and a half, turning into Mattituck Inlet at a little before two in the afternoon. Spencer begged them to go home with him.



"At the top of the sandy road he turned and waved them farewell."

"Ma," he said earnestly, "she'd like to thank you fellers for bein' so good to me."

But the four were shy of gratitude and so Spencer was set ashore a mile from his home, his belongings knotted up in a blue cotton shirt under his arm. They watched him out of sight. At the top of the sandy road he turned and waved them farewell with the bundle. Then he passed from sight.

"All aboard!" cried Dan. "Swing her around, Mr. Navigating Officer. Ho, for the deep blue sea!"

"We'll make Shelter Island," said Nelson, "and have a civilized dinner once more. Does that suit you chaps?"

"Sounds good to me," answered Tom.

"Me, too," said Bob.

"Any old place will suit me," cried Dan as he seized Barry and tried to waltz him about the cockpit. "Any old place so long as it's on the water. A sailor's life for us, eh, Barry?"

And Barry barked wildly, possibly in assent.

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